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**Making the gods in New York: The Yoruba Religion in the
Black Community**

Curry, Mary Elaine, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1991

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**Making The Gods In New York
The Yoruba Religion in
The Black Community**

by

Mary Curry

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1991

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This manuscript has been read and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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*Abstract***Making The Gods In New York
The Yoruba Religion in The Black Community**

By
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This dissertation is a study in the changes in the meaning of Afro-Cuban Santeria in the Black Community in New York (this transformation is indicated by alteration of the Religion's name to "The Yoruba Religion.") Using David Laitin's concept of "the practical religion", this study traces the way in which the concerns of the Black Community are changing the complex of meanings of the Yoruba Religion.

This study is based on participant observation in one of the largest groups of adherents of the Yoruba Religion in New York. It is also based on an extensive review of the relevant theoretical literature and of the writing produced by members of the group itself. The major concerns in this community were found to be identity, community building and effectiveness in the world which shape the re-interpretation of the religion on a practical level rather than in ritual changes.

This work makes a contribution to the understanding of the people's and cultures of New York.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

As you walk through New York City, you will occasionally see a man, woman or child dressed all in white. This person will also be wearing numerous beaded necklaces in different patterns and a beaded bracelet on his or her left wrist. You have seen an initiate in the *Santeria* or the Yoruba Religion. If you pass through certain neighborhoods, you will see stores called *botanicas*. These stores have a bewildering selection of merchandise in their windows: statues of saints, American Indians or perhaps even Hindu deities; candles, covered bowls, clothing made of gingham and burlap, books in Spanish and English, beads, etc. These stores sell the materials used in *The Santeria* and in the Latin version of spiritualism, *Espiritismo*.

The dress of initiates and *botanicas* are the only two visible manifestations of the Yoruba Religion that a casual observer will see. The Religion has neither churches - nor even store fronts to be seen by the casual passersby. Rituals take place in the homes of its practitioners or occasionally in halls rented especially for the occasion.

But beneath the visible surface of New York, behind the facades of brownstones and hidden by apartment walls, you will find (if you know where to look) a quietly thriving religion that is growing in its influence over the cultural life of New York - finding expression in music in the dance, in painting and sculpture.

How did this come to be so? How did the Religion become part of New York.

Historical Background

The Yoruba Religion (also called *Santeria* and *Ocha* but most commonly *The Religion*) is a modified African underground religion which has survived despite enslavement and persecution of its adherents.

It originated in Western Africa where it was the society-wide religion of Yoruba Kingdoms. During the slave trade, it was introduced into the Caribbean and Latin America, especially Haiti, Cuba Trinidad and Brazil.

When slavery ended, the followers of the religion were persecuted as criminal in Catholic countries. Indeed, the very first studies of the Religion were written by a physician of forensic medicine (the work of Nina Rodrigues - *L'Animisme Fetichiste des Negres de Bahia* - 1900) and as criminology in the theoretical perspective of Lombroso, the work of Fernando Ortiz (*La Hampa Afro-Cubana - Los Negros Brujos* - 1906). Houses of worship were raided and religious objects confiscated. In Brazil, this continued until the 1950's. In her book *The Divine Horsemen*, Maya Deren

describes the sounds of a voodoo ceremony masked by the music of a popular band in order to better evade the police.

As the noise within the hut increased, the "petit jazz", the little three-piece orchestra stationed just outside the door, played and sang its meringues and rhumbas louder and louder to cover and disguise the sounds of the ceremony within. The door had to be left open to provide some ventilation, and sitting at the entrance, one was aware of a fugue in which the suggestive, frivolous, sometimes vulgar rhumbas which were officially approved made astonishing counterpoint to the splendid songs and divine invocations which were "illegal". (Deren 1953:174)

In Protestant countries, with the exception of Trinidad, the Religion ceased to exist during slavery or had never existed at all.

Yoruba Traditional Religion quietly entered the United States during a period of political, social and religious ferment - the time of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. Despite the existence of the Yoruba Temple in Harlem the Religion was overshadowed by other religious groups, such as The Nation of Islam and the followers of Malcolm X and the major political events of the decade. For many Afro-Americans conversion to the Yoruba Religion meant a rejection of Christianity and a searching for a religious perspective that would foster Black identity.

Continuously over the last three decades, concurrent with large-scale Cuban immigration, the Yoruba Religion has been steadily growing in Black and Latin Communities in the United States. This, in addition to attracting a smaller number of white adherents (Marks, 1974) places the Yoruba Religion in the novel situation of a "traditional religion" gaining ground in a "modern" society.

In the United States, outside of the Cuban Community, the Yoruba Religion is spread by conversion yet it does not proselytize, i.e. it does not actively seek converts. Indeed, due to the Religion's history of persecution in Cuba, Cubans are secretive about its practice. Still, it has become an important cultural element in the life of New York City finding expression in painting, sculpture and the performing arts. This happened with little recognition or fanfare.

Yet, in recent years, scholarly and popular treatments of the religion have begun to appear and a picture of its penetration into U.S. society is developing. (Brandon, 1983; Friedman, 1982; Hunt, 1979 and Murphy, 1981 and 1988).

The Beginnings of The Yoruba Religion In The Black Community

Cubans have been immigrating to the United States since about 1840 (Office of Pastoral Research, 1982) but my interviewees date the beginning of the influence of Cubans on the Black Community from the 1940's. (Interviews 1/9/85, 1/12/85 and 11/14/84). That influence was initially felt in the performing arts, i.e. Afro-Cuban Jazz and the Dance.

I think one of the greatest contributing factors to it was Afro-American dance ... It goes way back, but I think it started in terms of people's interest in dance. The dance folklore thing seems to be one of the biggest contributing factors to it. And then, once they get involved, everyone wants the art dance school thing -- even as a child my mother had me involved in all that and I hit early entrance with Dunham - 1945. So you come in that way, no matter what your consciousness is and then you find yourself involved in the philosophy of dance or the

meaning of dance or whatever. Then it becomes what are we interpreting in the dance. When you get to that level of consciousness it pushes it further. (Interview 1/20/86)

It is clear, however, that major ceremonies in the Religion were not practiced in the United States until the 1960's. (Weaver 1986, Brandon, 1983).

You see we didn't have that much on Santeria until the initiations in 1959 and 1960 and then the subsequent migrations here. Prior to that back in the fifties, forties, etc. there were a lot of Afrocubans here but they kept it in the closet. They would work and then in the summer time they would run down to Miami and take the ferry over to Havana and would work their initiations. As such, they did it in Cuba and kept it in the closet in New York and any other large cities in terms of what they were doing. And then they had the syncretism of Catholicism over it. You know, you'd go into their homes. You know, I went into a lot of Cuban homes -- in the Bronx when I was a child. And you would see all the Catholic saints all over the place and you didn't see the Ocha. See, but they'd be down in Havana on their vacations in the summer doing their thing. You just didn't hear about it until it surfaced in the sixties. (Interview 1/9/85)

The Cuban Revolution (because Cubans - unlike voluntary migrants - conceived of their stay as permanent) made initiations in this country necessary and the arrival of Cuban ritual specialists in the United States

made them possible. My informants mention two particular Cubans, one *Babalawo*¹, Pancho Mora (Gonzalez-Whippler, 1983) and one *Oriate*².

The most significant of these ritual specialists was an Afro-Cuban Babalawo named Pancho Mora, who was also known as Ifa Morote, who came to the U.S. in 1946. Ifa Morote began to assert the same kind of authority that caused the strict adherence to African ritual that is to account for the survival of our religion in the Caribbean Islands. An Oriate named Polo also known as Oosawede also arrived and due to his eldership and knowledge, contributed tremendously to the genesis of Orisha tradition in North America.

Both of these great priests of Orisha have since joined their ancestors - but it is more than appropriate that their names be mentioned with honor at this gathering in the sacred city of Ile-Ife." (Weaver, 1986: 11)

The first Afro-American priest was Nana Osejeman Adefunmi (born Walter Eugene King) who went in search for an African religious expression for Black Americans. This search took him from Detroit, where he was born in 1928 to Cuba's Matanzas Province where on August 28, 1959 he was initiated as a priest of *Obatala*.³ Accompanying him, and initiated as a priest

-
- 1 Priest of *Orunmila*, the *Orisha* of Divination. A *Babalawo* is considered a high priest and specializes in divination.
 - 2 an especially knowledgeable elder priest whose function is to insure the correctness of rituals
 - 3 The most senior deity in the Yoruba pantheon

of Aganju⁴ on the same day was Christopher Oliana, a Black American of half Cuban ancestry.

Nana Osejeman was made a priest of Obatala and was given the name Efuntola. Mr. Oliana was made a priest of Aganju, his new priestly name, Oba'ilu'mi. These two, who must be seen as the beginners and makers of the Lucumi tradition among Black Americans, had an impact largely because of the timing of their initiation and also because of their dynamic personalities ... Incidentally, Baba Adefunmi is the same priest who in 1970 formed the village Oyotunji in the state of South Carolina and who at the first International Orisha Conference was given the staff of an Oba. " (Weaver, 1986: 12)

Along the way, Adefunmi had performed with the Katherine Dunham Dance troop and founded a study group on Afro-American Religions which was called *Damballah Wedo*.⁵

In 1970 Adefunmi left Harlem and established the village of *Oyotunji* (*Oyo rises again.*)⁶ in Sheldon, S.C.

Hunt, 1979 gives a detailed history of Adefunmi's quest and the subsequent history of *Oyotunji*. Hunt's account notes that Adefunmi's father was a former Garveyite and involved in the Moorish Science Temple of

4 The deity of Volcanos. The Cubans syncretize him with St. Christopher

5 *Damballah Wedo* is the Haitian Loa (Deity) that is most closely associated with the ancestors. He represents all the unknown ancestors (Herskovits, 1967, Deren, 1959)

6 *Oyo* was a Yoruba Empire which held political sway over much of Yorubaland and Dahomey - now the Republic of Benin.

Noble Ali Drew. Hunt lists the books Adefunmi read. One book, especially - Mbono Ojike's *My Africa*, influenced him greatly. (Hunt 1979, p.22) Hunt's portrait shows a picture of a person deeply influenced by a Black Nationalist tradition in both its religious and political dimensions.

Adefunmi's story is important because he was the first Black priest initiated and because he was the founder of the Yoruba Temple which was a well-known part of the Harlem scene from 1960 to 1970. Clapp, 1966 gives a journalist's account of the Yoruba Temple in which he sketches its history, development and closing. Many members of the Black Community first became aware of the Yoruba Religion through the Yoruba Temple and participated in its activities. A number of Black Americans received their African names from Adefunmi and some of these began to wear African dress whether they converted to the Yoruba Religion or not.

When he left New York in 1970, Adefunmi took only a small number of his followers with him. Some joined him after the founding of *Oyotunji* Village. Many of the Adefunmi's former followers and casual visitors to the Temple became members of Cuban or multi-ethnic Houses. Many of them were referred to these Houses by Adefunmi himself since at that time, he was prohibited from initiating people into the Religion. Out of these Houses, Black Houses developed. (Clapp, 1966, Brandon, 1983)

Up until 1960, the date of the Cuban Revolution, initiations into the priesthood were conducted in Cuba, after that date they were conducted in Puerto Rico.

Ultimately, by 1962 the Cubans in New York had begun to do initiations and ultimately a young Black American woman named

Marjorie Baynes Quinones was made a priest of Shango - to become the very first Black American to receive a full Yoruba initiation in the United States. This lady, who was known as Shango Gumi, went on to build a house of some twenty-one priests. She also became a great teacher of Yoruba theology. This lady, who was responsible for my own initiation and learning, joined her ancestors on April 18th of this year and will forever be a part of the history of the Yoruba people. (Weaver, 1986, p.14)

According to George Brandon

Mercedes Noble has been credited with initiating the first Santeria priestess to be created in North America, one Julia Franco in August of 1962... (Noble) was born in Cuba of American parents and initiated as a Santeria priestess in 1958 in Cuba. Lenore Dolme, a Cuban Santera who came to the United States right after the Cuban Revolution seems to have initiated the first Black American priestess on U.S. soil in Queens, N.Y. in 1961. This was Margie Baynes Quinones... (If this date is correct Quinones would predate Julia Franco by a year and would be the first Santera initiated in the U.S.). (Brandon, 1983: 97)

It was Adefunmi, himself, who referred Quinones to the Cuban priest who was to initiate her. (L. Weaver, personal communication 8/20/88). At present, the priests Quinones initiated have initiated, in turn, a second generation of Black American priests who, have now begun to initiate a third generation. Quinones, thus became the ancestress of one of the largest and most influential Black Houses in the city.

Asunta Seranno, a Puerto Rican priest of *Obatala* who founded a large multi-ethnic house initiated a number of Black American priests.

Asunta Seranno, recently deceased, initiated priests in the Yoruba Temple when Adefunmi functioned under a ban that forbade him to do so. She (was) initiated into the priesthood in Puerto Rico in 1960

and she initiated Judith Gleason who appears to be one of the earliest, if not the earliest, Anglo-American priestesses initiated here in the U.S. (Brandon, 1983, p.98)

Adefunmi also referred a number of Afro-Americans to Seranno.

Since the closing of the Yoruba Temple, the Religion in the Black Community has grown. It is a small but distinct presence in the Black Community in the United States, yet questions of its precise scope and size are perplexing.

The Scope of The Yoruba Religion in The United States

The two largest concentrations of practitioners of The Yoruba Religion in the United State are in Miami and New York. This is based on the distribution of the Cuban Population in the United States.

"While Cuban immigrants have tended to concentrate in a few major settlements, the 1970 census found Cubans living in every state except Wyoming and Vermont. More than 40 percent of all Cubans in the United States resided in Metropolitan Miami in 1970. Most of the rest lived in New York City, Northern New Jersey, Los Angeles or Chicago." (Office of Pastoral Research Vol. 2, page 104).

There are smaller concentrations of worshipers in Philadelphia, Gary, Indiana (Bascom, 1972), Boston, Cleveland, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles (Brandon, 1983). It is probable that there are practitioners of the Religion in all major cities of the country. However, there is no adequate count or estimate of the total number of practitioners for the entire country. The literature gives estimates for New York City and Dade County, Florida

only. Since the Religion does not have a centralized hierarchy and membership rolls are not kept, it is extremely difficult to estimate how many people are involved in The Religion. In 1984, Mercedes Sandoval estimated 50,000 practitioners of the Religion in Dade County Florida (*Miami Herald*, December 7, 1984, *New York Times*, December 9, 1984) and in 1970 C. Robbins estimated 6,000 in New York City. (Quoted in Marks, 1974: 82) It is not clear how these numbers were determined.

In a recent survey (Office of Pastoral Research, 1982), the Archdiocese of New York (which includes the boroughs of Manhattan, Staten Island the Bronx and Westchester County - but not the boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens) surveyed the religious, cultural and social experiences of Latins in New York. According to the survey 7.2% of the Latins in the Archdiocese (about 70,000 to 80,000 people) report patronizing *botanicas*⁷ and 3.1% (about 30,000 - 35,000 people) report sacrificing animals.

Patronizing *botanicas* is an indication of practicing *Espiritismo*⁸ and/or *Santeria*. However, an unknown number of persons practice both and therefore, patronizing *botanicas* is not a firm indicator of being involved in the Religion. The ritual of animal sacrifice is nonetheless a firm indication of practicing *Santeria*.

7 Stores that sell religious goods, herbs, candles, statues of saints and other materials used in the practice of *Espiritismo* and *Santeria*

8 The Latin American form of spiritualism - it had its origin in 19th Century France and has spread through Latin America - especially Puerto Rico and Brazil

Also the survey notes:

... that although the number of respondents who follow the superstitious folk practices is small, the incidence of these practices may be higher among the Latin population than the responses to the survey indicate. In some cases the interviewers saw evidence of animal sacrifice where the respondent had answered no to this question. The proliferation of botanicas in the neighborhoods that are predominantly Latin also appear to indicate that this practice is more popular than is recorded in the survey. Thus, although the respondents are not directly involved in these superstition practices, there is evidence of a wider cultural exposure to these practices than the study shows." (Office of Pastoral Research, Vol. 1, page 55)

Moreover, since respondents were informed that the survey was being conducted by the Catholic Church, the factor of interviewer bias may have operated to lower the number of subjects who reported these practices.

The Survey includes no data for the two most populous boroughs of New York City, Brooklyn and Queens. These factors suggest that the report's figure of 30,000 - 35,000 can be regarded as a large underestimate of the number of Latins involved in the Religion in New York City.

Gregory (1986) reports that his respondents' estimates vary widely from 250,000 to 1,000,000 practioners of The Religion in the country. Most agree that there are 5,000 to 10,000 American-born Blacks involved in The Yoruba Religion in New York. He does not say how these estimates were made. Unfortunately, I have not come across any other assessments of the number of Blacks involved in the Religion.

If Robbins' figure of 6,000 adherents of The Religion is accurate for 1970 then the Archdiocese's estimate for 1982 reflects a five-fold increase

in the number of members of the Religion in New York since 1970. For the reasons stated above, the increase is probably larger.

In conclusion, adequate answers to the questions of precise size and scope have to await further investigation. However, even with this caveat in mind, it is reasonable to assume that although reliable figures are unavailable, both the literature and reports from practitioners indicate that Yoruba Religion is widespread in the United States and that its two primary areas of concentration are Dade County, Florida and the greater New York Metropolitan Area. It is also clear that the number of Black adherents is much smaller than the number of Latin ones.

In recent years, scholarly and popular treatments of the religion have begun to appear and a picture of the penetration of The Yoruba Religion into U.S. society is developing. (Brandon, 1983; Friedman, 1982; Hunt, 1979 and Murphy, 1981 and 1988).

Review Of The Literature

This study is based on three sets of literature, (1) studies in the sociology, anthropology and political science of religion (Bastide, 1971; Durkheim, 1965; Herskovits, 1941; Laitin, 1986; Lawson and McCauley, 1990; and Weber, 1963) (2) the writings produced by practitioners of the Yoruba Religion in the United States some of which can be viewed as a species of theology (Caribbean Cultural Center nd, Mason 1981a, 1981b, 1981c 1981d and 1985, Gonzalez-Whippler 1973 and 1982 Weaver 1986) and (3) existing scholarly studies of the Yoruba Religion in the United States (Sandoval

1975, Hunt 1979, Murphy 1981 and 1986, Sosa 1981, and Friedman 1982) and in New York (Brandon 1983 and Gregory 1986).

The Study of Religion

Anthropological Theories of Religion

In the anthropology of religion, there are three major theoretical orientations: Intellectualism, Symbolism and Structuralism.

Intellectualism

Perhaps the most influential theory is that of Intellectualism. It is the oldest theory of "primitive religion" and is still authoritative. According to Lawson and McCauley, Intellectualism claims that **religion is a kind of explanatory thinking** which has the same structure and function as scientific thinking: the structure is theoretical and the function is explanatory. (1990 p. 33). A basic assumption of this approach is that there is an essential difference in religion that can be characterized as the difference between the "traditional" and the "modern".

For John Skorupski, "tradition" and "modernity" are polar concepts that delineate a systematic and profound difference between forms of religion.

"...traditional religion pre-eminently takes the form of a cosmology whose basic explanatory category is that of **agency**: its pantheon of gods and spirits, whose actions have consequences in the perceptible world, can be invoked to explain why this rather than that event occurred; and it affords a means by which men, though influencing the will of the gods can themself-

ves hope to influence the course of events. Modern religion, on the other hand, has relinquished the explanation and control of nature to science, and restricts itself to other functions ... which religion has either always had or has gradually acquired." (Skorupski, 1983: 2). In other words, traditional religion is science and modern religion is not.

Such a systematic difference then requires explanation and is the origin of the Intellectualist research program which actually goes back to E. B. Tylor (1866) but seems to be current today. Skorupski sees it as consisting of four stages. "Each stage tackles a clearly defined problem and offers a theoretical answer." (Lawson and McCauley, 1990, p.34)

Stage 1

Question: Why do people perform such bizarre and irrational actions (i.e. rituals, divination, sacrifices, etc.)?

Answer: They do so because of their beliefs.

Stage 2

Question: How do people acquire these beliefs?

Answer: They acquire them through socialization into their culture(s).

Stage 3

Question: Why do these beliefs resist change in the face of contrary evidence?

Answer: Psychological mechanisms block falsification.

Stage 4

Question: What is the origin of these beliefs?

Answer: Beliefs originate in a need to explain and control the environment. (Lawson and McCauley, 1990; Skorupski, 1976)

According to Lawson and McCauley, there is actually a fifth stage which Skorupski does not include, which he takes from the work of Robin Horton.

...intellectualism includes a semantics for the apparently bizarre beliefs and practices of religious systems. This semantic position holds that religion is a theoretical system of meanings differing only in form from that which science advances. In other words, both scientific terms such as "molecule" and religious terms such as "ancestor" each belong to a semantic system the function of which is to describe and explain theoretically both the world's structure and its processes. (p. 35)

This approach focuses on belief and theory. Put simply, the beliefs and theories of "traditional" religion are seen to be wrong. They are based on an inaccurate understanding of the world - a false ontology.

As a research program, however, by seeing religion as a kind of thought (perhaps the only kind in some societies), Intellectualism may conceal important aspects of religion. Religions do not consist only of beliefs. Neither do the adherents of a religion necessarily take religious beliefs as literally as Intellectualists think they do. Nor may religion simply be purely instrumental. Religions do more than try to control nature or the world. Although this framework is systematically worked out, identifying religion with science works against developing a comprehensive theory of religion.

Another theoretical framework takes its origins from these considerations and produces an alternate model of religion.

Symbolism

If the primary focus of Intellectualism is on belief, that of Symbolism is on ritual.

According to Skorupski, there are three major differences between Intellectualism and Symbolism: (1) Symbolism makes a sharp distinction between religion and science - seeing them as different entities with different concerns and even logic (2) it views the combination of religious beliefs and rituals as a **symbolic system** that encodes the pattern(s) of social relationships in the society in which they exist (3) the focus is not on explanation but rather on interpretation of the social and psychological meanings in the symbolic system.

Skorupski states that it is not possible to outline a Symbolist program as easily as it is to outline the intellectualist one. Lawson and McCauley concur but point out that two theses characterize a wide range of Symbolist theories: (1) human beings represent their most cherished values, commitments and feelings in encoded form and (2) symbolic systems are not explanations of the world but metaphorical **representations** of either psychological or social systems which many understand to have expressive and controlling functions. (1990, pp. 37-38).

A major problem with this position is methodological. There seems to be little agreement about how symbols in a given system are to be decoded, nor is there an overall procedure for decoding. I am not aware of any author who spells out her or his principles of interpretation. This lack of specifica-

tion produces an opaque research program which does not address the criteria of reliability and verifiability.

Structuralism

For the Intellectualist, religion is proto-science, for symbolists, religion is encoded information about social or psychological relationships. Structuralists, while disagreeing with Intellectualist or Symbolist frameworks on a number of accounts, have some commonalities with both of them.

Levi-Strauss, for example, sees religion as a kind of thinking, but using a "logic of the concrete" rather than theoretical categories. Even so, Structuralists do not view religion as a kind of science. For Structuralists, religious myths do not depict the world, natural or social, but delineate categories of the mind.

Structuralists see religious systems as representing categorical relationships and their resulting structures and being equivalent to languages.

According to Lawson and McCauley:

While structuralism includes many of the themes central to the intellectualist and symbolist approaches, it is distinctive in virtue of both a methodological and a substantive position. It is unique methodologically for its enthusiastic embrace of Saussrean theories of language as a major resource for theorizing about the human mind - especially as it is manifested in symbolic - cultural systems. It can be distinguished from intellectualist and symbolist approaches substantively because of its view of what the human mind is like, namely, that binary principles suffice to describe its operations." (p. 42)

The appropriate methodology of Structuralism then, is to be drawn from linguistics. However, it is unclear how precisely this should be done. The approach also has major methodological problems since there is no clearly articulated research program.

Summary. These three approaches then have different models of religion. The Intellectualist sees religion as proto-science with a theoretical structure and an explanatory function. With such a model, it is clear why beliefs are emphasized and myths are taken as primary data. The symbolist sees religion as a symbolic structure which illustrates social and psychological structures within a society. Ritual, then is the appropriate part of religion to analyze. Structuralism's model of religion is that of a reflection of categories of the human mind.

All three approaches are relatively static. Interestingly, enough they take their data from "traditional" societies; societies which are seen to be unchanging or societies soon to have change imposed on them from the outside. I know of no analysis of mainstream religion in modern Western societies, that use either of these frameworks.

Sociological Theories of Religion

Sociological theories of religion, by and large, are restricted to the "World" religions. They are derived from the work of the classical theorists Marx, Durkheim and Weber. Marx never developed a systematic theory of religion although Saul Padover was able to assemble a book of his writings (*Marx on Religion*). Durkheim, and more so Weber, wrote extensively on religion but with different foci.

So influential do their works still remain that Glock and Hammond in their book *Beyond The Classics* could convincingly argue that the Sociology of Religion has not developed significantly, if at all, beyond their work. In this section, I will consider the works of Durkheim, Weber and the work of Gramsci an Italian Marxist.

Emile Durkheim

Emile Durkheim's work has been seminal in both Sociology and Anthropology. Anthropologists emphasize his work on symbolism and structuralism (because he saw religion as developing categories of thought such as time, space and causality) while sociologists stress his work on the functions of religion.

Durkheim's life-interest in social solidarity led him to investigate religion as the basis of social solidarity in his classic work *The Elementary Forms of The Religious Life*. In this book, he investigated the religion of the Arunta as the most "primitive" form of religion. He saw "primitive" religion as less complex than "modern" religion. Nonetheless, he believed that "primitive" religion and "modern" religion stand in an evolutionary relationship to each other. Much as a biologist would study amoeba to understand the life processes in human beings, a sociologist of religion, Durkheim thought, should study "simple" religions to understand "complex" ones.

Religion, for him is a set of collective representations which reflect the underlying social reality. Its basic characteristic is the division of all social

and natural phenomena into the "sacred" and the "profane". Hence his definition of religion:

A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them. (Durkheim, 1965: 62)

For him, the sacred is above all the communal, and because it is communal, the fundamental unit of a religion is not the individual, but the "cult". In fact, he defines, magic (as opposed to religion) as the use of the sacred for individualistic ends. Parenthetically, Weber, whose emphasis was on rationality in terms of a systematic life plan defined magic as the lack of system in religious phenomenon. (True religion was systematic, magic was ad hoc). Both theorists defined religion in terms of their major theoretical and substantive interests and magic as the opposite of these interests.

Robert Jones (1986) following Steven Lukes argues that Durkheim's theoretical claim that the basic categories of thought have a social origin is valuable in some respects but unfalsifiable (and therefore of little use empirically) in others. Jones also points out that Durkheim's reading of the ethnographic literature (he did no ethnographic research of his own) was selective. A fuller reading of the work on Australian aborigines calls into question the basic distinctions between the sacred and profane thus weakening Durkheim's definition of religion.

Durkheim's work can be faulted on empirical and theoretical grounds, but it remains seminal in both the anthropology and sociology of religion.

Max Weber

Weber's work is extremely important because it emphasized the relationships between religion and other social institutions and cultural systems.

Indeed, his most famous work, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism* has such a relationship as its thesis, i.e. the spirit of capitalism was the unintended consequence of the Calvinist Doctrine of Predestination and the idea of the Calling. This thesis was an outcome of his interest in the progressive rationalization of all spheres of western life. He was especially interested in how religion could foster or block this rationalization.

His voluminous work on the sociology of religion sought to investigate this relationship in historical detail throughout the world religions.

Yet with the exception of *The Protestant Ethic*, which he published during his lifetime, very little of it was in final form for publication when he died.

Stephen Kalberg (1990) re-reads Weber in order to present a consistent analytical presentation of Weber's main focus. He cites Weber's concern with a **methodical rational way of life** as Weber's main focus in his work.

This way of life

"implies either a formal or a substantive rationalization of action in reference to a comprehensive constellation of ethical values." (1990:60).

A methodical rational way of life, according to Weber, opposes magic in all its forms as it does traditional or affectual action.

The preconditions for the manifestation of this way of life, according to Kahlberg, are the existence of particular religious worldviews which include the existence of an ethical God (monotheism is requisite) and a separate realm of "the world" inferior to "the kingdom of heaven". Also necessary, given the precondition of a dichotomous cosmology, is the existence of **psychological premiums** (the search for certainty of salvation) found in salvation religions oriented to action in "the world and particular **salvation paths** (seeking salvation through ethically-sanctioned religious action in the world, i.e. inner-worldly asceticism.) These preconditions and necessary requirements were found in their full development only in Calvinism.

The magnitude of Weber's erudition and volume of work is overwhelming yet some questions remain. It is clear that the religious sphere can interact with other spheres to produce change in the world. Undoubtedly certain religious beliefs rather than others can foster or hinder specific types of change. But is his devaluation of ritual as magic justifiable? Is there a "rationality" in ritual action? The anthropological symbolists and Lawson and McCauley indicate that there is. Is his portrayal of traditional action as irrational justifiable? Alfred Schutz in his *Phenomenology of The Social World* argues that given a clear-enough framework of interpretation, every action is rational.

Action is behavior based on an antecedent project. Since every project has an "in-order-to" or "for-the-sake-of-which" structure, it follows that every action is rational. (1967:239)

As Schutz states, action characterized as irrational is action whose means or ends are confused or uncertain. I would add that lack of understanding of the relationship between means and ends would cause an action to be characterized as irrational even though, it would be objectively possible for someone with a different knowledge base to show such an objective relationship.

In sum, as valuable as Weber's work is, his characterization of action and his attributions of irrationality to specific actions and types of action need to be re-examined.

Antonio Gramsci

According to John Fulton (1987) Gramsci's main intellectual project was to understand the mechanisms of power in society in order to realize his political project - a socialist, intellectual and moral reformation of society. To realize his intellectual project, he wrote a great deal about religion and its relation to cultural domination (hegemony). He also studied history for its interplay between religion and social structure in order to illustrate the values of his theoretical analysis and because he saw religion as a major hegemonic form in Western Society.

Fulton presents an outline of Gramsci's theory of the relationship between religion and social structure which consists of six concepts: *folklore*, *the religion of the people*, *the common sense*, *religion of the intellectuals*, *philosophy* and *hegemony*. Fulton divides these concepts into two groups with *folklore* appearing in both - a **religious set** (consisting of *folklore*,

religion of the people, and religion of the intellectuals) and a **cultural/secular** set (consisting of *folklore, the common sense, and philosophy*).

The religion of the people refers to the beliefs, morals, and practices which express in a religious way the needs and experiences of various groups of people. (p. 203)

It is, therefore, the natural and social life of the group expressed in a religious idiom. This implies that each group or stratum will have its own religion. The total religious field of a society may then consist of a number of distinct and perhaps even contradictory religions.

The common sense is a group or stratum's immediate perception of the world, natural and social. It may or may not have a religious dimension.

It indicates a sense in common, common consciousness or commonality of experience, one which is shared by persons having a similar relationship to nature and other persons. (p. 204)

The common sense as well as *the religion of the people* are fragmentary and unsystematic. Frequently, they can be contradictory.

Although Gramsci defines intellectuals by the complexity of the relationships in which they are involved rather than the particularity of their kind of work (Gramsci, 1971:8), he perceives the task of developing consistency and coherency as belonging to intellectuals. According to Fulton, "there is a direct connection in Gramsci between social control and intellectual elaboration." Intellectuals are produced by each stratum, but Gramsci seems to argue that historically, intellectuals produced by peasants cease to be an "organic" part of their class and serve the interests of other classes. Organic intellectuals, according to Fulton, are those persons or groups who develop and systematize the hegemonic values or those who organize and administer the coercive apparatus of the state. Gramsci envisioned a group of intellectuals "who

would be well educated in philosophy and the political economy but who would be in contact with the masses." (Bocock, 1986:96)

Organic intellectuals have either a *philosophy* or *religion of intellectuals*. The *philosophy* and *religion of intellectuals* differ from *the religion of the people* and *the common sense* by their internal consistency and scholarly elaboration.

The religion of the intellectuals is both the theology and dogma of the world religions in their elaborated and unified form - the religion of priests and theologians - as well as the same worked-out system as a source of political power: or, put differently, it is religion in its organizational modes, with its clerical and lay functionaries...a hegemonic form in society, a means of social control at the level of the mind and heart. (Fulton, 1987:205)

According to Fulton, Gramsci used the term *philosophy* in a particular sense, "as a worked-out, detailed, and above all *organic* view of the nature of society as a whole, both abstractly and in the concrete." (p.206)

Folklore is the term common to both Gramsci's religious and cultural sets of terms. Its meaning seems to range from remnants of former cultures to the totality of popular culture. It originates from sources other than the elaborated systems of the intellectuals. Folklore usually comes from past popular religions and local cultures. It is fragmented, and inherently contradictory, nonetheless it is very often resistant to change. Gramsci did not view this resistance as necessarily negative. It could be a positive force for his own political project of producing a socialist, intellectual and moral reformation of society.

Gramsci envisioned a revolutionary vanguard of organic intellectuals who would work to bring about a socialist intellectual and moral transformation of society by being part of the experience of the masses.

Hegemonic leadership involves developing intellectual, moral and philosophical consent from all major groups in a nation. It involves an emotional dimension too, in those political leaders who seek hegemonic leadership must address the sentiments of the nation-people and must not appear as strange or alien beings who are cut off from the masses. (Bocock 1986:37)

The value of Gramsci's work is his recognition of the need to remain close to the needs and experiences of the masses. Any progress toward a socialist society would not only have to produce a new *common sense* that adequately addressed the needs and experiences of all groups but which was also systematic and coherent.

This, Gramsci, felt could be achieved by organic intellectuals trained in the philosophy of praxis and who stayed close to the experience of the people.

Gramsci's work, then emphasizes the necessity for understanding the needs and experiences that produce popular religion.

David Laitin considers hegemony in another aspect, asking the question of which cultural system could gain precedence in a given situation and which groups could produce that hegemony.

David Laitin

David Laitin writes (what for a better name can be called a Political Science of Religion). In his book: *Hegemony and Culture: Politics and*

Religious Change Among The Yoruba, he focuses on the question of why there wasn't any religious conflict between the Yoruba Christians and Muslims over a Nigerian constitutional issue - the proposed establishment of an Islamic Court of Appeals or Sharia for Muslims, given that conflicts between Christians and Muslims exist elsewhere in the world. This led him to the theoretical issue of which cultural divisions would be given more weight in an ethnic group.

To do this he considered the advantages of Systems Theory and Rational Choice Theory for answering his question. Neither seemed adequate for his purposes. He then turned to the work of Gramsci and drew on Gramsci's concept of Hegemony in his quest for an explanation of lack of religious conflict among the Yoruba.

He defined hegemony as:

the political forging - whether through coercion or elite bargaining - and institutionalization of a pattern of group activity in a state and the concurrent idealization of that schema into a dominant symbolic framework that reigns as common sense. (Laitin, 1986 p 19 and p.183)

The result was a new framework which combines systems theory and rational choice theory with the revised concept of Hegemony.

The Practical Religion. Laitin extends the concept of religion by developing the notion of "practical religion" and drawing out the implications of Weber's work and Thomas Metzger's idea of culture. According to Laitin:

...Although Weber shied away from an explicit definition of religion...his work suggests that its impact can be understood in terms

of the confluence of three different levels: theological doctrine, practical religion, and the practical religion of the converted...

1. Theological Doctrine. *The substantive or theological approach toward religion focuses attention on the doctrine, in its purest and most consistent forms, of the charismatic founder of the religion...*

2. Practical Religion. *The essence of Weber's contribution was to see religion itself as a product of its times, and often of a particular class with its own social needs.⁹ The interaction between the founding doctrine and the social, political and economic conditions of the time yields what might be called "the practical religion."...*

3. The Practical Religion of The Converted. *As the religion spreads, both in form of original doctrine and in its practical form it must interact with the cultural life of the new community ... These counterpressures will create a new sociological fact, a new practical religion different from the one from which the original doctrine emanated, and different again from the wishes of the converted peoples who try to shape the new message in their own image. One might call this new social fact "the practical religion of the converted"; it is constantly being influenced by contemporary social conditions. (pp. 24-27)*

Laitin, though, thought that Weber's work needed two modifications, integration with a theory concerning strategic molding of religious meaning and conceptualization of this molding in a dialectical fashion.

The problem with comparative statics is that it cannot comprehend the dialectical aspect of symbolic production. Within each religious tradition, there are inevitable pressures and cross-pressures on a variety of concerns. Religious virtuosos who have decided to "reform" the religion will be at odds with the "accommodators." Each will define the

⁹ Note the similarity to Gramsci's concept of *The Religion of The People*.

religion with different emphases. Religious elites will often attempt to differentiate themselves from the "immoral" nonbelievers, thereby implying that whatever is bad about society forms no part of their religion. (p.28)

Borrowing from the work of Thomas Metzger, he sees the source of the *practical religion of the converted* as

"... not as values which are upheld but rather as points of concern which are debated." (p. 29)

Metzger demonstrates this by examining

...the questions generally considered worth asking and the cliches implicitly accepted. (In Laitin 1986: 29)

This concentrating on points of concern enables the investigator to see the dialectical character of symbolic systems more clearly.

The practical religion of the converted then is the result of a process of social construction of reality in which the first encounters of the practical religion and the social, economic and political realities of the receiving group transform the practical religion into a new phenomenon through a process of debate and negotiation either implicitly or explicitly.

Laitin then uses this framework to understand which cultural system became dominant in Yoruba Society. He discusses, Islam, Christianity and Yoruba Traditional religion as religious systems among the Yoruba.

Substantively, his discussion of Yoruba Traditional Religion is inadequate for several reasons. Yorubas had to be converted from Yoruba Traditional Religion to either Islam or Christianity and therefore, a more in-depth examination seems to be called for. Secondly, the cultural focus

on the ancestral city that he deems to be so important in his analysis had its origin in traditional religion.

As a political scientist, Laitin's focus was on the state and the relationships among colonizing states (in this case the British Empire) and local elites (Yoruba Kings). One of his main arguments is that the British policy of indirect rule fostered the primacy of the Yoruba adherence to one's ancestral city and made that adherence superordinate to religion.

This approach focuses on the state and excludes a consideration of civil society.

Laitin's unit of analysis is the Yoruba ethnic group. The Yorubas do not constitute a state either historically or presently. Historically, the Yoruba inhabited a number of independent city-states. The city of Ile-Ife exerted a religious but not political hegemony over them. Currently, the Yorubas inhabit parts of three countries, Nigeria, the Republic of Benin and Togo. The Republic of Benin, it should be noted, was never under British rule.

Since the British and the French had different colonial policies, it would be interesting to see if the Yoruba of the Southwest states of Nigeria and of the Republic of Benin have similar or identical values of the ancestral city a subject on which Laitin is silent.

In addition, although a very large group, the Yoruba is only one of a number of ethnic groups in Nigeria. Laitin considers the different cultural focus of the Hausa of the Islamic former northern region, but he does not consider how religion may or may not unite peoples over ethnic differences.

Moreover, the major factors in Laitin's account are Christianity and trade. The Church of England, through its major agency the CMS (The Church Missionary Society), often had different objectives than the British State and British merchants. These are not adequately discussed. Since one of the major activities of the CMS was the development of schools, its influence is unlikely to have been insignificant.

Laitin does consider the differential impact of Christianity on Yoruba Traditional Religion in two different settings even if he considers the Western Hemisphere only in passing.

The Interaction of Christianity and Traditional Yoruba Religion.

The Yoruba Religion has interacted with Christianity in two different ways. These ways can be characterized as the mode of colonialization and how the practitioners of the traditional religion perceived the impact of Christianity on their lives. In Yorubaland,¹⁰ Yorubas perceived Christianity as liberating, granting prestige and power. Literacy was the key to jobs and status and was itself seen as a form of power.

"Missionaries came to be seen as resources for a town's development: cities competed against cities; within towns, quarters competed against quarters; those who had access to missionaries had access to literacy. While the advantages of literacy were not entirely clear to most people, there was justifiable fear that a competing group might get more

10 Those sections of modern day Nigeria (The Southwestern States), The Republic of Benin, Togo and parts of Ghana which is the ancestral home of the Yoruba

of it and thus get ahead. The construction of the railroad had created an enormous and an increasing demand for clerks, inspectors, guards, station masters, and others with a good knowledge of English and accounting. Those who had exposure to CMS education were eligible for fancy salaries in their new jobs. The relationship between Christianity and economic resources under colonial rule could be even more direct. In the Lagos colony, the government gave outright grants of land to Christian repatriates from Sierra Leone; and these grants were parlayed into fortunes." (Laitin p. 47)

Add to these considerations the fact that the British were seen as deliverers from the century of civil war and protectors from previous oppressors.

"...In the Middle Belt of Nigeria (north of Yorubaland) the jihad of the early nineteenth century was particularly oppressive. When Christian missionaries appeared there in the early twentieth century, they were widely seen as potential protectors against the (Muslim) Fulani overlords. Local elites were perfectly willing to drop their support for the traditional pantheon as the price to be paid for missionary protection. (Laitin p. 48)

In the Western Hemisphere, on the other hand, conversion to Christianity did not bring increase in status, power nor did it involve economic advantages.

In the Catholic colonies, conversion was involuntary. There were mass baptisms on the African shore without any religious instruction. Nor was there any significant religious instruction in the colonies, themselves. The Catholicism of the slaves could only be the folk Catholicism of the Hispanic or Lusitanian variety.

In Protestant colonies, conversion of the slave was feared. At first because the first justification for slavery was the non-Christianity of the slaves. Later when this justification had been legally nullified, the revolutionary potential of Christianity was feared. As a result, religious instruction was carefully (although often unsuccessfully) controlled. For example, planters preferred religious instruction that emphasized the teachings of St. Paul: "Servants, obey your masters.", while slaves in their own clandestine gatherings much preferred the story of Moses delivering the children of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. The revolutionary potential of this message is obvious.

Despite the fact that in early colonial America, conversion to Christianity could be the means of freedom from slavery, this was soon changed. (Bennett, 1965:24).

In neither Catholic or Protestant lands did conversion to Christianity offer the material or political advantages that it did in Nigeria. Christianity for the slave meant one of two things: a means of resistance to slavery or a mask for the continuing of traditional religious practices.

Laitin's work is important because it provides a conceptual framework for understanding different levels of religion, the theological, the practical religion and the practical religion of the converted but also because it supplies us with a method for understanding the dynamics of symbolic production.

Summary of The Theories of The Sociology of Religion

Durkheim and Weber, atheists though they were (or as Weber put it, religiously unmusical) remained convinced of the centrality of religion for understanding Western Society. Weber considered it an important factor in the development of Capitalism whereas Durkheim believed it important in producing the categories of thought. Durkheim sought the essence of Religion while Weber's approach was broadly comparative and historical. Gramsci's interest in Religion was as a form of power in society. He studied it in order to understand how best to realize his political project.

Underlying all these projects was a concern with social change in Western Society. Attached to this concern was the idea of the superiority of Western Society and dissatisfaction with it. As such, the primary focus was how religion could either explain some other cultural system or consideration of it could further projects - such as education or reformation.

Religion was not adequately conceptualized in its totality. This troubling lack of definition still plagues the sociology of Religion today. Although there are many definitions, there is no single authoritative one. The concept of "religion" is originally a societal category rather than a sociological one - and a category that derives from an essentially Christian matrix. (Robertson, 1970: 43). Because of this, sociologists tended to regard one type of relationship to the divine (the supplicative) as religious, while other relations to the divine were defined as "magical".

Gramsci's interest in religion as a historical force in society finds reflection in the work of David Laitin who was interested in the production of hegemony. Laitin, although, he unwarrantedly eliminates Gramsci's concern with civil society gives us both theoretical and methodological frameworks for understanding the interaction of religion and other social and cultural systems.

A Bridging Framework: Lawson and McCauley

There is a curious disciplinary bifurcation between the Sociology of Religion and the Anthropology of Religion. Sociologists study the "World Religions" with an overwhelming emphasis on Christianity, while anthropologists study "primitive" or "traditional" religions. Only one framework purports to deal with the entire realm of religion - traditional and modern. Lawson and McCauley pose a theory of action based on Chomsky's generative grammar, a subcategory of which is religious action. They argue that their theory can be applied to any religion - traditional or modern. As such, it can bridge the gap between theories of the Anthropology of Religion and The Sociology of Religion. It also avoids the basic assumption of two different species of religion. Lawson and McCauley's general theory is a kind of generative grammar which can be depicted so as to emphasize the structure or the function of an action system. It consists of the following major parts: an action representation system, a conceptual scheme (only one of which may be religious) and universal principles of ritual structure (and function). Lawson and McCauley hold that the religious conceptual scheme, the action representation system and the

universal principles of religious ritual structure are the major components of an adequate theory of religious ritual systems.

They conceive of these universal principles as being of three kinds: **substantive** universals, **formal** universals, and **functional** universals. Substantive universals are categorical (e.g., the categories of the religious conceptual system), formal universals pertain to rules and functional universals are principles that govern the scope of rules and their results.

Lawson and McCauley postulate two **formal** universal principles (1) the object agency filter and (2) the possibility in any representation of the structure of an action of an implicit temporal sequence of **enabling actions** (i.e. actions that allow another action to occur). Functionally, subsequent actions can only be legitimate if enabling actions have previously been executed prior to their occurrence.

For Lawson and McCauley, **functional universals** yield the largest empirical rewards. They discuss two: (1) *The Principle of Superhuman Agency* and (2) *The Principle of Superhuman Immediacy*. The Principle of Superhuman Agency states that all religious rituals either directly or indirectly involve the participation of the gods and suggests that the more directly a god is seen to participate in a ritual the more integral that ritual will prove to be to the overall religious system. The Principle of Superhuman Immediacy states that the fewer enabling actions needed to involve superhuman agents, the more fundamental the ritual is to the religious system in question.

Lawson and McCauley develop the following principles concerning the "centrality" of rituals. (1) The more pivotal a ritual is to a religious system, the greater possibility it will function as an enabling ritual for other rituals. (2) Those rituals which occur earliest in a religion's history or an individual's life are more central than others. (3) A ritual is central to a religious system if it plays a determining role in the perpetuation of that religion. Indeed, this is a significant proposition. Lawson and McCauley state:

Schisms in religious systems seem inevitable when such systems extend beyond a single culture. These schisms result from the interplay of the religious system with the other symbolic-cultural systems (legal, economic, political, etc.) that are characteristic of the various cultures in question. If a ritual is added, altered or deleted, then, if it is a central ritual, it will lead to a fundamental rupture in the identity of the religious system.... The converse is true as well. If a religious systems undergoes a schism, it is virtually impossible for the most central rituals in the accompanying ritual systems not to reflect this fact. (1990: 127)

This theory offers a tool for understanding religious action that combines explanation (the goal of the Intellectualist approach) and interpretation (the goal of the Symbolist approach). Lawson and McCauley also suggest that explanations and interpretations of the interaction between religious and other cultural and social systems are possible using this framework. This allows for a study of process as well as of structure and function. The interactions of the different cultural processes offer explanations for social and cultural change.

In summary, there are three major types of theories in the Anthropology of religion - all are addressed to "traditional" religion. They are Intellec-

tualism, Symbolism and Structuralism. Each takes a different theoretical object as its focus; beliefs, rituals and categories of the mind respectively. Each emphasizes either explanation or interpretation - being unable to handle both simultaneously. Consequently, none make a complete understanding of religion possible.

Lawson and McCauley have proposed a new theory of action which, although not being concerned with religion exclusively, focuses on the ritual system. They maintain that their theory can be applied to any religion "traditional" or "modern". Indeed, they offer examples from both "traditional" and "modern" religions. The application of their theory to various studies of religion could lead to a unified social science of religion. In this sense, not only does it link, anthropological theories of religion, it also offers a bridge between anthropological theories of religion and sociological theories of religion.

Theories of Syncretism

Herskovits and Bastide have done studies of African and Indian derived religions in the Western Hemisphere. Students such as Simpson have also studied African derived religions and predicted that such religions are declining and will soon die out. To paraphrase Mark Twain, "The reports of [their] death are premature."

Melville Herskovits

In his book, *The Myth of The Negro Past*, Melville Herskovits argued against the idea that Afro-Americans had no significant history. He

proposed and developed the ideas of cultural retentions (africanisms) syncretism and re-interpretation to explain the existence and the persistence of african cultural traits in the Western Hemisphere.

Reinterpretation is Herskovits' term for

"the process by which old meanings are ascribed to new elements or by which new values change the cultural significance of old forms...It is a process where some of the old and new cultural elements are merged into a functioning unified entity of a clear bi-cultural derivation. (Murphy 1981 p.318)

Re-interpretation is the mechanism by which syncretism is produced. Cultural traits (conceived atomistically) are re-interpreted to produce a new cultural entity.

Herskovits' main evidence for this syncretism is the equation of Yoruba Orisha with Catholic Saints. The fact that these equivalences differ widely is less important than the fact they are not integrated into one indivisible whole. Murphy notes that what is formed is much more of a mosaic with spatial and temporal juxtaposition.

There is a prominent display of Catholic images (in the dancing rooms) while in the back rooms of the temple rest the African pegis, altars for the Orisha in their African manifestation as stones...In general, the santero worships before the Catholic images in the Catholic manner, reciting prayers in Spanish, and before the African images in the African manner where he or she must use Lucumi.

In addition to the spatial juxtaposition ...there are juxtapositions of African and European ritual features in time.

...Because the slaves were forced to adapt themselves to European societies they were also forced to adapt to European time-reckoning.

...The christian and African celebrations never take place simultaneously and one never suffices for the other. (Murphy, 1989 p.329-330)

The European and the African then do not form one integrated whole but at most exist in spatial and temporal separation.

Herskovits does not analyze the implications of mosaic syncretism or inquire into its significance.

Herskovits' unit of analysis was the *cultural trait*. He did not consider whole systems, either European or African. His empirical work consisted of identifying an *africanism* in a western setting and tracing its history to Africa. This had the value of negating the proposition that Afro-Americans had no history but it left his theory unfinished.

Roger Bastide

Roger Bastide, especially in his book *The African Religions of Brazil: Towards A Sociology of The Interpenetrations of Civilizations*, developed a theory of the separability of culture from society and the ability to develop new social institutions based on cultural values

...slavery effected a break between the superstructure and the infrastructure (using these terms without any Marxist connotation) the African social structures were shattered, the values preserved. But these values could live only by creating for themselves new social frameworks, new institutions to incarnate themselves and make them viable institutions capable of perpetuating themselves and of being transmitted from one generation to the next. In brief, the superstructure had to secrete a society. This movement is not an upward one from the morphological base toward the world of symbols and collective representations but the

opposite; a downward movement of those values and collective representations towards institutions and groups.

His proposition that individuals as carriers of culture can develop new social institutions that can perpetuate these values in the interstices of a hostile society offers a beginning in understanding the change in Yoruba Traditional Religion in its involuntary immigration to the Western Hemisphere. Religious resistance to domination and the conversion of religion to an ideology of domination are other themes of *The African Religions of Brazil*.

Religions in Brazil exist in a myriad of forms from Orthodox Catholicism to Ecclesiastical Base Communities (CEB's), from folk Catholicism to Traditional African and Indian religions, from European Spiritualism to mixtures of the above in varying combinations. Attempting to contemplate giving any coherent account of them and their interrelationships is intimidating. Yet Bastide tried to do this for Afro-Brazilian religions. He also sought to understand how the social structures "secreted" by African values and individuals embedded in them related to the rest of Brazilian society.

Bastide's empirical discussion serves to document concerns of different ethnic groups and social strata in Brazilian society. His theoretical idea of the separability of base and superstructure offer a way to more clearly understand historical developments in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Summary of Theories of Syncretism

Studies of Syncretism focus on the subordinate group. They do not theorize resistance or domination. Consequently, they do not show the dominant group in clear focus.

This is true for the theorists considered here. Herskovits has a more atomistic approach than Bastide focusing as he does on cultural traits.

The economic, political and social conditions of domination - the predicates of the acculturation process - receded from the analytic framework into the psyche of the individual.

This neglect of the problem of domination and resistance was facilitated in part by the dislocation of culture into a configuration of "culture traits." Culture obtained coherence only through the concept of "cultural focus," which served to reassemble culture traits in accordance with their perceived importance in a given society. (Gregory, 1986 p. 13)

Bastide's analysis emphasized social relationship both historically and in specific periods of time. While

...History for Herskovits was the history of tacit complexes and not the history of the social forms within which these complexes were embedded and elaborated.

As the title of Bastide's book indicated, his was a work toward the interpenetration of civilizations rather than a complete theory. The issues he raised and the phenomena he illustrated are important components of a yet to be completed theory of civilizational interpenetration. The foundation he laid is a strong one.

Yoruba Writers

There is a developing literature in *Santeria* and the Yoruba Religion. Writing on *Santeria* tends to be in Spanish and to be of a very uneven quality, some of it is quite scholarly, the works of Lydia Cabrera, for example, while some is less so.

Most of it tends to be explanations of *Santeria* such as stories of the Orisha, song books or explanations of the progression of initiations.

The Caribbean Cultural Center

The Caribbean Cultural Center is an institution that is a subsidiary of the Phelps Stokes Fund and founded by Marta Vega. The center is the source of *The International Orisha Conferences*. It regularly presents music and dance concerts by Afro-caribbean artists in Aaron Davis Hall and hosts a street festival in August. Also it regularly exhibits the painting and sculpture of Yoruba artists and holds lecture series on the *Santeria* and The Yoruba Religion.

The Caribbean Cultural Center published a comparison of the various Yoruba Derived religions *African Religion in the Caribbean: Santeria and Voudon*. The perspective is one of syncretism. On a column by column basis, names, areas of jurisdiction, numbers, colors, days and associated Catholic Saints in both the *Santeria* and *Voudon* are listed. It also contains introductory and explanatory essays by Caribbean scholars such as Roy Bryce LaPorte and religious leaders. The Center also publishes a quarterly

magazine *Caribe* which features popular articles on the religion and on Afro-Caribbean and Afro-American art.

Migene Gonzalez-Wippler

Migene Gonzalez-Whippler writes on *The Santeria* in English. She is not a theologian, popular or otherwise. Her works could best be described as autobiographical ethnography. She has self-published a number of books only her last book: *Santeria The Religion: A Legacy of Faiths, Rites, and Magic* was published by Harmony Books. She was also editor of *Latin New York* and wrote a regular column on *The Santeria*. For those who are not deeply involved in the Religion, she is an initial source of knowledge. Priests of the Religion, though, are deeply critical of her work. This critical attitude takes two paths. Most importantly, she is not initiated into the Religion (Gonzalez-Wippler 1982: 171) and has never observed the rituals she reports. Secondly, much of what she writes is inaccurate.

Aside from the fact that Gonzalez-Whipler is not initiated into the priesthood and therefore is not regarded to have the *right* to discuss it in print or otherwise, her attitude toward the Religion is regarded as lacking respect. Her language is one of magic and has a condescending tone. For example, in her first book *Santeria: African Magic in Latin America* (1973), she says:

For, in spite of the influence of the Catholic church Santeria is mostly primitive magic, and its roots are deeply buried in the heart of Africa, the ancestral home of the Yoruba (p.4)

...It is simply magic, both black and white. (p.6)

...The modern santero practices very nearly the same type of primitive magic as the old Yoruba priests. (p.13)

...Santeria is simply jungle magic adapted to city living. (p.14).

Numerous examples exist. They appear on almost every page.

Also four of the eight chapters of the book have names which embody this perspective: *Chapter 4 Magical Practices*; *Chapter 5 Natural Magic* and *Chapter 7 Black Magic - Brujeria* and *Chapter 8 Other Aspects of Santeria and African Magic*. She ends the book with an appendix entitled *Magic Spells of Santeria*.

Her last book *Santeria the Religion: A Legacy of Faith, Rites, and Magic* (1989) does not show evidence of a change in this perspective.

The basic difference between the Yoruba priest and the Santero is that the latter practices his magic in the asphalt jungles of the big cities instead of the African wilderness. In many ways Santeria is jungle magic adapted to city living.

It is childlike and often naive...there are no sophisticated tenets in Santeria. (1989:19)

According to one of my interviewees:

Oh! It's unfortunate that many, many people who have written about the religion are not well versed in it. Gleason became initiated. She has Oya -- Judith Gleason. OK. But there have been a lot of people -- there's a woman who's put out two books and She's not even a Santera - Gonzalez-Wippler. That's the worse garage in the world! It's unfortunate because this Gonzalez-Wippler is not really a well versed educated person. She writes and to back her up she'll say padrino Pancho told her. I mean, come on! I don't think Pancho would say things like that. But she has quoted him in her works. And its just

horrendous that this woman who has not been even in a room of Ocha would write so much about it. It's like she fell upon ...somebody was negligent or careless and left their notebook out someplace and she got a copy of their notebook and read and she began to publish. This is the bad part about the publishing game. Everyone wants to write books and be published. (Interview 1/9/85)

Despite the negative attitude of the priests, it remains true that for many people, the contents of Gonzalez-Wippler's books are the Religion.

Lloyd Weaver

Lloyd Weaver can best be described as a historian of the Religion. He is an initiated Priest and presently heads one of the largest Black Houses in New York. In his paper "Notes on Orisha Worship in an Urban Setting: The New York Example", he outlines a history of The Religion in the Black Community in New York. In it he gives the details of reflections on the roles of the Orisha in the New York setting by senior priests and also summarizes some of the concerns of the first generation of priests.

Indeed the first Orisha priests in New York City had a job to do and it could not have happened unless they were both unusually resolute in faith and also divinely inspired. I partially witnessed, but more so heard, fascinating stories of how the first Black American priests of Shango, and Aganju and Obatala and Yemonja would gather before one another's apartments and shrines in the Black ghettos in New York to discuss various Odu and their interpretation in principle for the present time and place. It was to them that fell the task of redefining a religious system in terms that ultimately enabled Orisha priests to be among the finest of social counselors and philosophers in the country today. It was they who made sense of Orisha in the New York context... (p. 17-18)

An example of such a re-reading of Orisha would be Olokun:

It was these same...priests...who also thought about Olokun...the great Orisha of the sea. They reasoned that Olokun was the Orisha of the dark and unknowable bottom of the sea, that mysterious harbinger of the secrets of creation and in whose murky, but stabilizing wetness is the actual support of all of life. They saw the bottom of the sea as being in principle the same as the layer of fluid that supports the human brain at its bottom..."Ancestral memory", as we have since come to call it, is a ability that refers back to the Middle Passage itself and recalls the many millions of Africans who in defiance of the thought of 'slavery, dove or rebelled and were thrown into the sea-ultimately to form a spiritual collective that would forever be sympathetic to children of their comrades who did survive the journey. The assumption is that that body of souls forms a kind of collective unconsciousness in the psyches of Black Americans in general and is totally essential to Orisha worship in the New World. That collective unconscious is seen as a manifestation of Olokun. (p.20)

One of Weaver's concerns is with practical counseling. In his paper, he also discusses what he sees as the role of the Yoruba priest.

As suggested earlier, Olorisha in the Lucumi tradition are required to act as social workers or counselors in every phase of human life. We are called upon to provide advice and direction in the areas of marriage, employment, and for any number of psychological and social interaction problems. (p. 23)

Presently, residing in Nigeria, Weaver is collaborating on a book about Yemonja¹¹ with Olukumi Elegbede, the Oni Yemonja.¹²

11 The *Orisha* of Motherhood

12 The Chief Priest of *Yemonja* of Ibadan.

Weaver is an example of the beginning of popular, rather than academic treatments of the history, concerns and theology of the Religion by the practitioners themselves.

John Mason

John Mason who speaks regularly at The Caribbean Cultural Center has a self-defined project of producing a Yoruba theology. To date, he has delivered a number of papers at various conferences and written four books on various ritual topics: *Onje Fun Orisha (Food For The Gods)*, a cookbook of ritual recipes - this book has gone through two printings; *Ebo Eje (Blood Sacrifice)*, *Sin Egun (Ancestor Worship)* and *Didi Obi (Kolanut Divination)*. A fifth book, *Four New World Yoruba Rituals* is a new edition that combines the previous four. His sixth book *Black Gods - Orisha Studies In The New World* is an essay on sixteen of the most well-known *Orishas*.

Presently, he is working on his seventh - an ambitious project in which he collected five hundred Orisha chants. His plan is to translate them, indicate their musical notation and to have his book accompanied by a cassette recording of these songs. (John Mason, personal communication, 3/31/89).

Mason's work is the beginning of a Yoruba theology in English. He undoubtedly will be followed by other writers who will build on his foundational work.

Judith Gleason

Judith Gleason has written two books specifically on the Yoruba Tradition. *Santeria Bronx* is a fictionalized account of a young white boy's intro-

duction to and initiation into the Yoruba Religion. This book is very famous among practitioners of the Yoruba Religion. It is regarded as a thinly disguised autobiography of Gleason, herself and a masked history of some prominent figures in the Yoruba Community in New York.

Oya: In Praise of the Goddess is a book difficult to characterize. It is perhaps a meditation in print on the nature of the *Orisha Oya*. Gleason examines symbols and customs associated with her in Africa, Brazil and the United States in addition to her meteorological manifestations.

Gleason's books are widely read and discussed by practitioners of the Yoruba Religion in the United States.

Summary. As can be seen above, there is a developing literature written by practitioners of the Religion themselves in both Spanish and English. Although, space will not permit me to investigate this phenomenon in this dissertation, an investigation of the changes from an oral to a written tradition should prove interesting, if indeed a written tradition develops.

What is happening here, however, is the development of a group of intellectuals who use the written word instead of (or in addition to) an oral tradition, intellectuals, I might add who are *organic* to the Yoruba tradition in the United States.

Scholarly Studies of The Religion in The United States

Murphy, 1981 and 1988, and Brandon, 1983 did encyclopedic studies of *Santeria* in the United States. Friedman, 1982 wrote a dissertation on *Bata* Drummers and their performances in Bembes^{13, 14} With the exception of Murphy 1988, the above mentioned studies are dissertations. Murphy's book (1988) is a revision of his dissertation geared to a popular rather than academic audience. Both Murphy and Brandon wrote ethnohistories of the Yoruba Religion in the tradition of Melville Herskovits. Because of the numerical predominance of Latin practitioners, their studies emphasized that community and only mentioned Black Americans in passing.

Gregory, 1986 did a more focused study of a multi-ethnic house in the Bronx. Having a smaller unit of analysis, he gave more attention to Afro-Americans but did not focus on them.

Brandon, however did indicate a difference of cultural interpretation of the Religion between Black Americans and other practitioners of *Santeria*. (1983:167)

The dissertations have different theoretical perspectives which can be broadly described as anthropological and ethnohistorical. Brandon and

¹³ Possession dance held at irregular intervals. Musicians drum and chant in Lucumi.

¹⁴ The dialect of Yoruba spoken in Cuba. Lucumi differs from Standard Yoruba in that it has lost its tones and is influenced phonetically by Spanish.

Murphy utilize both these approaches while Friedman focuses on ethnomusicology.

Though Friedman focuses on one ritual (the Bembe) and its performers in depth and the others survey the Religion more broadly substantively, they are essentially in agreement.

Murphy considers the history of slavery in Cuba in greater detail than Brandon who is more complete in his discussion of ritual practices.

Murphy does not question the existence of syncretism and seeks to explain its persistence. He argues that Catholicism provides the rites for the dead that Santeria lost during slavery. I find his argument unconvincing since it simply overlooks the existence *Esperitismo* among Latins and its focus on the dead; but more importantly, he does not discuss or consider the ritual surrounding *Egun*, the *Orisha* of the dead.

Brandon argues that Syncretism and Nativism (or Revitalization Movements) should be studied as two poles of a continuum in cultural contact. Unfortunately, he suggests this as a future research project and does not address it in his dissertation. Gregory considers *Santeria* as a movement of cultural resistance or counter-hegemony.

Scholarly treatments of the Religion are ground breaking and tentative. However these initial statements of theoretical applications seem promising for understanding the dynamics of contact and negotiation in multi-cultural societies.

Summary

On the theoretical level, the study of religion in the social sciences is vitiated by an evolutionary perspective that dichotomizes religions. Sandra Barnes notes that:

One of the stumbling blocks in the study of contemporary religious processes comes from the fact that religious systems are still typologized. By now this is an implicit act. Perhaps the best known explicit typology was brought to life by Weber (Weber, 1963:1-) and elaborated by his followers as the great and little religious traditions (e.g. Marriott 1955:171-72). Because these categories were grounded in an evolutionary perspective, the tendency when the two types of system were studied in the same frame of reference was - and here is where the legacy persists - to give the great traditions such as Islam and Christianity, a central position and the little traditions a peripheral one. The rationale for the dominance of the great traditions is that they have highly developed bureaucratic organizations, standardized and written doctrines, institutionalized methods for promulgating beliefs, and highly developed systems of ethics. In comparison, little traditions are characterized as fragmented, localized, and largely associated with illiteracy. When these attributes are compared, global ideologies are seen to influence: little ideologies to respond. Given the evolutionary bias, the very act of typing religious systems has the effect of predetermining the direction of change; participants of small systems are converted to, or their ideologies are merged with, or replaced by world systems. As Weber puts it, the stronger systems vanquish the weaker. (1963:17)(Barnes, 1989:21)

As can be seen above this perspective is the basic assumption in much of the study of religion. From this perspective, the growth of the Yoruba Religion in the United States among the populations in which it is growing

simply should not be happening. Yet it is. Its very existence and growth then call for a re-examination of this perspective.

Methodology

I am interested in the process by which social conditions shape a religion introduced into a new setting. It is clear that the Yoruba Religion has different meanings in the Black and Latin communities.

*Still there are devotees in these cult house for whom these issues do matter.¹⁵ This (is) particularly the case for Black Americans affiliated with Cuban and Puerto Rican Santeria Houses. The majority of them have come from Protestant rather than Catholic backgrounds. For them Catholicism was almost as exotic as Santeria. Many of them joined the religion in search of an African cultural identity and remain uneasy with Catholic imagery, and with calling the Orisha by saint's names despite long association with the cult. The fact that most devotees use the term Orisha and saint interchangeably allows these people to call the deities by their African names all the time and still be understood which ever way the hearer wishes. Even when the person makes a distinction in his own mind between the saint and the Orisha the language in which he expresses it betrays him unless he goes to great efforts to reveal the significance of this difference in social and political terms and in relationship to history. **This almost never occurs publicly so the Black American devotees continue in the cult despite the fact that they may interpret its central symbols differently than other***

15 the issues of identifying Catholic saints with Orisha and the attendant justifications for doing so

cult members. *Talking to them privately revealed that most of them rejected the equation of the Orisha with the Catholic saints¹⁶ and were basically cultural nationalists in orientation. (Brandon, 1983 p. 167)*

Although, the ritual remains unchanged, social interpretation differs from group to group. The social interpretations reflect the names that different groups of practitioners give to the *Religion*. Latins call it "*La Santeria*" and Black Americans call it "*The Yoruba Religion*". This dissertation is a study of the change from *The Santeria* to *The Yoruba Religion*.

David Laitin's work offers a useful framework for understanding this difference. What are the concerns of Afro-Americans that produce this difference in vocabulary and emphasis? To observe the development of the practical religion I did participant observation in a House of Ocha in the Black Community in New York. I choose this approach rather than a more global one because I wanted to see this process in action rather than infer it from more abstract categories. Moreover broad ethnographies have already been written (Brandon, 1983; Murphy, 1981, Sandoval, 1975 and Sosa, 1981). Friedman, 1982 conducted a focused study of performance among Bata drummers and Gregory, 1986 did a participant observation study of a multi-ethnic house in the Bronx.

Because there are very few or no written records and little, if any research literature that speaks directly to my questions, I interviewed

16 Another difference is that it is Latins who call the Religion *Santeria* and Black Americans who call it *The Yoruba Religion*. Both are equally likely to call it *Ocha*.

practitioners of the religion who have been involved in The Religion over a considerable period. The longest anyone has been involved is thirty-one years (the date of initiation of the first two Afro-American priests).

To observe the development of the practical religion I did participant observation in a House of Ocha in the Black Community in New York.

Since I am interested in the re-interpretation of the Yoruba Religion into the Black Community, I confined myself to investigating a Black House while focusing on the process by which the religion is made an Afro-American religion by recasting its perceptions in the light of Afro-American concerns.

I used an exploratory approach based upon a combination of methods, including interviews, field observation, and examination of the relevant theoretical, research and indigenous literatures.

Since October, 1984, I have done participant observation of a House of Ocha. This particular house was chosen because it is one of the largest houses in New York (approximately 200 people with an active core of about 50; it is one of the most active houses and it provides easy access. This allows more observation in a shorter period to time than would a house that holds ceremonies less frequently.

I identified myself as a student sociologist and have participated in various ways in preparing for ceremonies, observing ceremonies, taking part in classes for Alejos¹⁷ and in casual conversations. I also attended *The Third International Orisha Conference in New York* in 1986¹⁸ which was sponsored by The Caribbean Cultural Center. The New York Conference, as was the one in Ile Ife, was a coming together of people from the Black Diaspora. Over the years, I also attended lectures at The Caribbean Cultural Center.

Over the course of my observation, my focus changed to the process of how concerns are articulated. It became clear that due to the hierarchical structure of the religion that this definition of concerns would be made by priests. This produced a problem of access to situations in which these concerns would be articulated because this would most likely occur during occasions of priestly counseling. Access to such sessions was minimal or not allowed - most usually, the latter. Priestly counseling was done for the most part in sessions of divination. Observing or attempting to observe such sessions would constitute an invasion of privacy analogous to recording a session between a therapist and a patient. To learn about divination, I had

17 These classes occurred irregularly when a particular godparent wanted to teach her godchildren more efficiently.

18 More appropriately Conference 3B since a Third International Orisha Conference was held in Ile Ife Nigeria in July of 1986 and the New York Conference was held in October.

my own readings.¹⁹ From these I learned how such sessions were conducted in private. However this did not tell me what common concerns or problems in the House were. Consequently, I interviewed priests concerning the types of problems and concerns that their clients and godchildren brought to them.

Fortunately, I became aware of two situations in which divination was public: the Naming Ceremony and The Reading of the year. Naming ceremonies occur very irregularly since they await the birth of a child. The Reading of the year occurs once a year and is recorded. I was able to obtain transcripts of fourteen readings of the year. Content analysis of these provide a record of concerns in one house of *Ocha* over a fourteen year period.

In Chapter 2, I outline the Conceptual System and the Ritual System of The Yoruba Religion. In Chapter 3, I describe the social structure of the Religion in New York. In Chapter 4, I discuss the concerns of Black Practitioners of the Yoruba Community. Basically these concerns are Identity and Community Building and Effectiveness in the World. Chapter 5 is my conclusion.

In addition I have added a glossary since many terms would be unfamiliar to most readers.

¹⁹ Divination sessions

Chapter 2

The Religious System

The Yoruba Religion consists of a conceptual system with (1) ideas of destiny, reincarnation and a cosmology, that places human beings at the center of a nexus of forces and (2) a complex ritual system that consists of divination, sacrifice and a rich system of ceremonies.

In this section, I rely heavily on available literature on the Yoruba Religion in Nigeria and the United States. I do this for several reasons. The literature is available and the group itself reads and discusses it. When I asked questions about the cosmology or the nature of the religion, I was referred to books, particularly those of Idowu, Abimbola, Gleason, Mason and Awolalu.

Some priests, in particular, have become scholarly in the knowledge of the social science literature and the unwritten scripture of the Religion. The Yoruba Theological Archministry has put out a series of booklets which explain and interpret the Religion for practitioners. This group is engaging in a Theology indigenous to the itself. Accurate translations are hard to

come by and their existence in the literature on Nigeria was greatly welcomed.

I also am relying on the material presented in classes for Alejos.

The Conceptual System

The conceptual system is difficult to delineate. It operates with analogic rather than Aristotelian logic. According to Edward James:

In essence the Yoruba Religions as it is practiced in Cuba is based on an understanding that there is no distinction between the natural world of trees, rivers, mountains, and the human world of feelings and ideas. There is a natural and obvious relationship between human sleep and the quiet countryside in the hours just before dawn, a natural affinity between the brooding, furrowed brow of an angry man and the churning rain clouds prior to a storm. To a worshiper of the Orisha, the universe is alive. To exist is to have life; nothing is truly dead - although the level of life, of course, varies between a stone land a tiger, a snail and a one-celled plant. the worshiper of the Orisha develops a respect for all living things and through this respect, a compassion and concern for the well-being of all men. Man is a part of nature. It is his duty to extend and enhance the harmony of his world. In order to do this, he must understand the harmony, how it functions and how he, as an individual can best blend into the grand scheme. His freedom lies in the continual broadening of his horizons and the extension of his sphere of understanding. (James, 1970:40)

Despite the difficulty of outlining this system of ideas, it seems that the concepts of destiny and re-incarnation are its basic components. The *Orisha* serve as organizing principles for understanding the world. Yorubas use their characteristics as premises in a system of analogies. Consequently, I regard the pantheon as part of the conceptual system.

Destiny

Ori, the Yoruba word for destiny is an complex multivalent term. It connotes simultaneously, the physical head, destiny, potentiality, the quality of a person's character, the ancestral guardian spirit and the individual's personal deity or *Orisha*. It is connected to ideas of predestination, reincarnation and struggle in the world and it is the focal concept of Yoruba Religious life. I hope to delineate its dimensions and demonstrate that it is central to any understanding of the Yoruba Religion.

The Physical Head

Ori is the Yoruba word for head, or the top of anything. To the Yoruba, the physical head is sacred because it is the seat of divinity. It is the symbol of the link between the divine and human and between the ancestors and the living. The outer physical head is the manifestation of the inner person. The Yoruba believe the person to be a composite of several spiritual and physical elements. The spiritual elements are the heart, *Okan*, which in some circumstances can leave the body and act on its own and *emi*, or breath, the essence of a person or the seat of living. The physical elements are the body (*ara*), shadow (*ojiji*), which is thought to be an embodiment of a person's inner self, *eye*, part of the mind resident in the brain. The head coordinates these different elements into a composite being.

Predestination

Yoruba religious life is centered around destiny - the self-chosen pattern of a person's life. The Yoruba concept of predestination contains a preponderant element of choice. According to the oral tradition, a person kneels in heaven before Olodumare to choose her lot in life. The person is believed to be allowed to make any choice - and within reason - the choice is granted. Destiny involves the individual's personality, her occupation, her luck and the date of her death. Yet even this choice is not determinate, for destiny is conceived only as potentiality. The person through her own efforts must bring it into manifestation. Human beings or opposing spiritual forces may seek to work against a person achieving all that is destined for her.

The *Ifa* Oral Literature contains countless stories to explain and illustrate the ramifications and permutations of destiny. It is recognized that choices may be unwise. At birth, the choice is forgotten.

Divination is performed to ascertain that pattern which the person chose in Heaven, in order to remedy it through sacrifice or to ensure that those who work against it will not succeed.

This potentiality can be achieved only with struggle, the aid of supernatural forces and the failure of those, human or other, who would work to oppose its actualization. There are active negative forces, supernatural and human that actively work against the achievement of one's destiny. These negative forces are called *ajogun* or enemies against man.

The Yoruba concept of destiny or predestination contrasts strongly with the Calvinist doctrine of predestination where destiny is the inscrutable and

unchangeable choice of God. In the Yoruba religion, the choice of destiny - it must be emphasized - is of the person herself. *Ori* is then conceived of one level as a *choice/potentiality/to-be-realized-through-struggle*. This conception of predestination emphasizes the persons own self-creation.

Struggle in the World

Although one's destiny may contain honor, wealth and long life, it does not automatically come to one. The good things in life will only come through unceasing effort. Divination is done to ascertain what one's destiny is. Sacrifices are made to repair an unfortunate destiny, to ensure the maintenance of a fortunate destiny or to placate or oppose those who would obstruct its manifestation. Additionally, the person has to pay attention to other areas of life. Purely secular¹ activities must also be carried out. Food must be cooked, houses built, crafts and professions practiced. The "logical" activities to achieve one's goals must also be engaged in. If one has chosen a good destiny, has struggled and has overcome opposition, then one will have a good life in this world.

Reincarnation

The Yoruba Religion is a life-affirming religion. In Kahlberg's terms, it is not a salvation religion. There is no dichotomy between an "evil world" and a "good Heaven". Heaven is a holy place but so is the Earth.

1 If there is such thing in this context

It is also a Religion that models itself on the family as a corporate group. The living, the dead and the unborn are all part of the family group. They interchange states, but stay in the same group. Life and death then are cycles within the family group.

A person kneels in heaven before Olodumare and chooses her destiny. That person is born as the youngest and least senior of the group. As she grows, others are born or married into the family and she gains a measure of seniority. As the person grows older, she gains in seniority so that by the time she is old, she will be the most senior person and therefore the person closest to the ancestors) in the family group or lineage.

The person dies and becomes an ancestor. In some way the spirit of that ancestor can be reborn in a number of descendants.

A family then can be conceived of as a set of constantly circulating spirits.

The Yoruba see the world as a good place. Only those who have lived their lives in such a way that they are sent to the Heaven of potsherds,² will not be re-incarnated again in their families. Unlike Hindus, the Yoruba do not seek release from the chain of rebirth, indeed the ultimate tragedy is to be barred from it. Life on earth is good and life in Heaven is good. The person experiences and re-experiences both. There is no eternal salvation or eternal damnation. A person who is unworthy is not damned. She is discarded from the cycle of life.

2 The heavenly rubbish heap

The Ancestral Guardian Spirit

Ori is also the word for ancestral guardian spirit. The Yoruba believe that one component of that composite which a person is considered to be is the soul of one of her ancestors. This ancestral guardian spirit has chosen to come back to earth and guard the person.

The Personal *Orisha*

Ori is also the name given to one's personal *Orisha*. It is said that of all the gods, only one's *Ori* will go with one throughout all one's difficulties. What a person's *Ori* ordains, no one can prevent and what one's *Ori* denies, no other *Orisha* can cause to happen. Thus, for any person, the most powerful of the gods is that person's own personal *Orisha*.

Character

Destiny is also connected to the idea of character. A person's individual traits or proclivities will affect/determine what happens to her. It is in the concept of character that Yoruba morality is delineated. It is in the idea of character that you find the conception of Yoruba ethics.

Robert Farris Thompson sums it up this way in his discussion of what he considers to be the three cardinal values of the Yoruba Religion; *Ashe* - the power-to-make-things-happen, *iwa* - character and *itutu* - coolness or grace under pressure:

"Coolness, then, is a part of character, and character objectifies proper custom. To the degree that we live generously and discreetly, exhibiting grace under pressure, our appearance and our acts gradually

assume virtual royal power. As we become noble, fulling realizing of creative goodness God endowed us with -- the shining ororo bird of thought and aspiration -- we find the confidence to cope with all kinds of situations. This is Ashe. This is character. This is mystic coolness. All one. Paradise is regained, for Yoruba art returns the idea of heaven to mankind wherever the ancient ideal attitudes are genuinely manifested. (Thompson, 1983:79-80)

In the Western Hemisphere, the idea of respect is that aspect of good character that is most emphasized: respect for authority; respect for one's self and indeed respect for everything and everybody. An important consideration in this regard is context. As Thompson pointed out in an earlier book:

"These issues were on the mind of the leaders of the past and...the problems were dealt with intelligently, involving among other decisions, differential meanings of the values of command, composure, and character..."

"It is good to be cool, but it is also necessary to be manly and dynamic. Here the role of the warrior is introduced...Warriors, dressed in hot colors, were exceptions to the cool. These men especially expressed power and command..."(Thompson, 1976:6\1)

The situations of life require flexibility. Different emphases on particular values may be more appropriate in one situation than another.

Steven Gregory describes another prime Yoruba component of character.

Each encounter with nature and society is thought to be meaningful, revealing both the interrelations among phenomena and the potential with which these relations are impregnated. The ability to realize, in the double sense of this word, the meanings immanent within these relations constitutes spiritual power, or Ashe. Comprehending these inter-relations is dialectically linked to the act of making them real. In

the realm of human social relations, this realization entails the maintenance of a multi-dimensional reciprocity. (1986:99)

Ori is consequently a densely packed concept with implications for many areas of Yoruba belief and practice. It is a fundamental one in Yoruba religion. Almost any major practice can be traced to it. Divination and sacrifice are centered around the concept of destiny. The belief in Destiny gives these practices their reason for being.

The Ritual Systems

Divination

The Yoruba believe that although one chooses her destiny in Heaven that this choice is forgotten when the person is born into this world. However, there are means of communication between the human and divine. Those means are the various forms of divination. Orunmila, the deity of divination was present at each person's choice and therefore knows what is allotted to each person. Consequently, if one needs such information, one goes to a priest to obtain it through divination.

The priest divines to determine the pattern of life the person chose in Heaven so that the person can remedy her life pattern through sacrifice or she can placate or successfully oppose those who work against the desired flowering of her destiny. Divination, it should be pointed out, is usually an individual affair. A person seeks divination because she has an individual difficulty and it is the duty of the diviner to help solve that person's problems

when he is consulted. However, there are times when divination is communal, most commonly at The Reading Of The Year or when divination is performed for a group.

There are three major forms of divination in common use among the Yoruba: *Ifa*, *merindilogun* and *Obi*.

Ifa

Of the three, *Ifa* is the most prestigious. Priests of *Ifa* (*Babalawo* - Father-of-Secrets or Father-Knows-the-Secret) specialize in divination. They are philosophers, experts on religious life and custodians of Yoruba Oral Culture.

Ifa is much more culturally prominent in Nigeria than it is in the Western Hemisphere. Slavery did not allow the leisure to memorize and reflect on the tremendous amount of material in the *Ifa* corpus. Nor did slavery encourage the traveling from expert to expert to learn, that is such a pronounced feature of the training of a *Babalawo* in Nigerian culture. It was especially impossible for *Babalawos* to congregate and chant the verses of *Ifa*. (Weaver, 1986; Gleason, 1973)

A *Babalawo* can really have no other occupation. Additionally, *Ifa* is considered to be a man's cult, although such a rule is not absolute in Nigeria. There are women *Babalawos* according to E. McClelland

Great surprise was caused by the appearance of a woman babalawo in this seeming inviolate men's preserve but inquiry yielded the information that she had only reached the first stage and would not go further. However, she was competent, set out her little statue of Eshu,

laid down her equipment on a mat and proceeded to divine with her chain. (McClelland, 1982:88)

In the Western Hemisphere, the rule is followed absolutely - no woman may be a *Babalawo*. This difference may be a result of change. The older (pre-slave-trade rule) may be that no woman is permitted to be a *Babalawo* and in this the practitioners in the West may be more traditional.

Ifa is a kind of geomancy³ that depends on the generation of certain signs⁴ and the interpretation of their meaning. There are two methods of generating oduns or letters. The *Babalawo* shifts them rapidly from hand to hand. If one is left in one hand, he makes two marks in a tray which contains a powder. If two are left in one hand, he makes one mark on the tray. If more are left the procedure is repeated until one or two are left. This entire process is repeated four times until an odun is generated. The second much faster method is by use of an opele. An opele is a chain which has eight seeds which when spread open have naturally concave and convex surfaces. One toss of the opele will produce a sign. Both maneuvers have the potentiality of producing 256 different signs. Each sign, called an odun, has verses⁵

3 Divination by figures or lines, usually drawn on the earth's surface or a substitute therefor

4 Called Oduns or letters

5 Poetry facilitates memory. The character of Yoruba as a tone language allows the verses to be chanted. Spanish does not permit patterns of Yoruba versification based on tones (which Spanish lacks). Consequently, in the move from Yoruba to Spanish, stories in verse became stories in prose.

(Nigeria) and stories (The Western Hemisphere) attached to it. These stories sketch a predicament faced by its protagonists and they are assumed to contain the answer to the questioner's difficulties. The solution almost always takes the form of a sacrifice.

J. Omosade Awolalu illustrates this. Following is an example of a problem faced, action taken and goal achieved. Awolalu also shows the advice given a client for whom this odun falls.

Ebiti-jawo-faya-lule⁶
Cast Ifa for Oyeniran⁷
Who was weeping for being barren
And who was fasting for having no child to carry on her back.
She was asked to offer sacrifice
For she would have a child
His fame would spread throughout the world;
She heeded the oracle and offered
200 needles, one sheep and a pot of palm-oil;
When Oyeniran was to have a child, she gave birth to Ojo⁸

...If such an odu appears on the divining board, the diviner will tell the client: "Ifa says someone is bemoaning her having no child and that if the person can make the necessary sacrifice as will be prescribed by the diviner, all will be well with her as it was well with Oyeniran. the child that she will have will be very famous." (Awolalu, 1979:127-28)

6 Praise-name of the diviner

7 Name of the protagonist

8 The Sun

Ifa, then, is a repository of human problems and their solutions. Although *Ifa* exists in the United States. (*Babalawos* are consulted everyday in New York, for example), *merindilogun*, a system closely related to *Ifa* but which can be used by the priest of any *Orisha*, is much more culturally prominent in the Western Hemisphere.

Merindilogun

In the second form of divination, *merindilogun*, the diviner uses 16 cowries to generate the signs. Priests file the backs of the cowries off to reveal the inside. The front of cowries resemble female genitalia while the sides with the filed off backs resemble male genitalia. The cowries are thrown on a basket tray or a mat and the number face up are counted. An *odun* is attached to each number. According to William Bascom, the *oduns* of *Ifa* and *merindilogun* are similar. To each *odun*, a story is attached, as in *Ifa*. Also, solutions to problems are deemed to be sacrifices.

Any priest, male or female may use the *merindilogun*. *Merindilogun* is much more culturally prominent in the Western Hemisphere than is *Ifa*, where there are many more women priests than there are men. Moreover, *merindilogun* is much easier to learn than is *Ifa*. A more important factor in its prominence may be that in the Western Hemisphere - perhaps because of literacy - a priest is not expected to memorize all the stories of the corpus. Instead, priests have notebooks in which they record the teachings of their elders - a change from a pre-literate to a literate tradition.

Obi

The third type of divination which is available to both priests of Ocha and *Babalawos* is *obi*. In Nigeria, *obi* is the kola nut which breaks into four lobes. In the United States and Cuba, since kola nuts do not grow in these places, the coconut is substituted for it. In the Western Hemisphere, the coconut is called *Obi*. The diviner breaks a coconut and divides the meat into four pieces. The inside of the coconut is white and its outside is brown; this allows five patterns to be perceived when four pieces of coconut are thrown simultaneously and allowed to fall.

Obi has no stories attached to it. It is used to obtain answers to yes/no questions. The various combinations of *obi* give $n + 1$, that is five combinations. There seemingly are various nuances of yes and no.

If manifestation of a favorable destiny is the main concern of the practitioners in the Yoruba religion, than divination is its principal means of diagnosis and sacrifice is the paramount means of setting things right.

Sacrifice

As *Ori* is the predominant belief in the Yoruba religion, then sacrifice is the foremost practice. The Yoruba say that: "*It is sacrifice that benefits one, not offering sacrifice does not benefit anyone.*"

The oral tradition constantly emphasize the theme of sacrifice. The basic pattern is So-and-so had such-and-such a problem. She was told to perform such-and-such a sacrifice. At this point, either the person performed the sacrifice and her problem was solved or the person did not perform the

sacrifice and the problem remained unsolved or the person performed part of the sacrifice and the problem was partially solved.

The oral tradition give all kinds of reasons that a person might not comply with the directive to sacrifice: "He took *Ifa* for a liar and *Eshu* for a thief;" "She sacrificed for children but did not sacrifice so that her children should not be enemies", etc. Awolalu gives the following example of the story of two friends who refuse to sacrifice from the *Ifa* Corpus:

*Death steps on the garden egg,
And the garden-egg drops suddenly;
Alakunrin neither bathes nor rubs his body with oil
Yet he shines like the son of adin⁹
Cast Ifa for Alapa-ile¹⁰
And beat ikin for Alapa-oko¹¹
Ifa asks both of them to make sacrifice.
That they might not die simultaneously.
They are to offer a big goat
12,000 cowries and the red cloth which they had in common
Both of them heard the prescribed sacrifice, but refused to
offer it.
Eshu caused them to misbehave,
And they fell ill the same day.
When Alapa-ile saw that the illness was serious
He told his people that*

9 These first four lines actually constitutes the *praise-name* of the diviner. (A praise name can consist of a number of verses.) Praise names often carry on implicit commentary. (Awolalu, 1979; Bascom, 1980; Gleason, 1980)

10 The Tortoise of the city

11 The Tortoise of the country

*If he died,
They should convey his corpse to Alapa-oko
Who along knew the funeral rites to perform
And when Alapa-oko saw that his illness was serious,
He told his people that when he died,
They should convey his corpse to Alapa-ile
Who alone knew what rites to perform.
Soon after this,
Both of them died;
It was on the same day they died. (Awolalu, 1979:130-131)*

Wande Abimbola emphasizes the importance of sacrifice in the Yoruba Religion. He finds it to be central.

Sacrifice is...central...to Yoruba Religions as a whole. Sacrifice keeps the belief system going and links the client, the diviner, the divinities and the ancestors together, through a system of service and reward. When the client refuses to perform sacrifice, he makes it impossible for this system of action and reaction to be completed. Such a client therefore commits a rape of the belief system since he has exploited the divinities by inviting them to identify and solve her problem for him without providing them with their stipulated reward. Hence, not only will the divinities cease to support him, they may also punish him for her shameless exploitation. (Abimbola, 1973:11)

Although sacrifice is usually made as a result of divination, its purposes are varied. However, its meta-purpose is to achieve or restore a state of balance between the individual and supernatural forces.

Or as Evan M. Zuesse argues:

The pervasive ideology of both possession and wisdom divination, in short is sacrificial. One of the most pervasive features and accompaniments to divination of any sort is explicit sacrifice...All of these rituals (of divination) enact spiritual transformations in which one offers one's existence up to the essential structures or powers governing

one's life, to order to receive it back renewed and conformed to the divine orders. (Zuesse, 1979:218)

Sacrifice can be done for propitiation (to appease the anger of divinities). It can be done to avert a predicted calamity, to achieve some goal, to remove evil influences, as thanksgiving or to fulfill vows. An additional type of sacrifice is the sacrifice to the head. This may well be the most frequent type of sacrifice. Offerings are made to a person's head (Ori), since that *Orisha* is responsible for a person's actualizing her fate. Sacrifice is one means by which a people can repair the inherent defects in their ori and it is a way for people to make up for their mistakes as they go along in life. Sacrifice is seen as food for the *Orisha* and the ancestors. It is a reward for the *Orisha* for their constant watch over the community. Finally, sacrifice is also regarded as food for one's own friends, neighbors and kinsmen.

The materials and victims of sacrifice vary from one circumstance to another and from one divinity to another. They are the articles in use in daily life in Africa or the tropics. That is to say that it is easier to get some articles of sacrifice in the tropics than it is in the United States. Examples of articles used for sacrifice are: **food crops:** yams, plantains, corn, coconuts and sugar-cane; **birds:** hens, chickens, roosters, ducks, pigeons and guinea hens; **animals:** goats, sheep and turtles; **others:** garments, money, etc.

Each *Orisha* has her own preferences and taboos (their favorite foods and things they must not eat at all). There seems to be a language of sacrifice. Articles used for sacrifice have symbolic meanings. Following are a few examples.

The **snail** is the primary offering to Obatala. It is connected with gentleness, calmness and peace; all characteristics imputed to Obatala. According to Awolalu:

...the slow, cautious and steady movement of snails which enables them to avoid readily getting into trouble, fascinates man. And so, when igbin is offered, the supplicant is praying that her life may be smooth and free of all types of danger. (Awolalu, 1979:166)

When **fowl** are offered, the implied prayer is that a person's blemishes and secrets may be hidden, just as a hen's defects are hidden under her feathers.

Pigeons are associated with good luck and longevity as well as the ability to fly over dangers.

According to Awolalu, sacrifice has a structure which consists of paying homage, presentation of the person and her petition to the *Orisha*, immolation of the victim and disposal of the sacrifice. Sacrifice is like divination because it is usually an individual matter. Because one can only be present at her own sacrifice, I will quote Awolalu's example of a typical sacrifice on the following page.

Preparation

Sacrifice is essential to the Yoruba Religion, and to offer a sacrifice requires a great deal from both the priest who offers the sacrifice as well as the supplicant. The supplicant must gather the materials and articles for sacrifice which can take considerable time, effort and money. This effort is

considered to be part of the sacrifice. The priest must be morally and ceremonially clean. She should be in a calm state of mind and be able to bring full concentration to the sacrifice.

Invocation

The Invocation is a prayer to the *Orisha* to be present and listen to the petition. Awolalu cites the following example of a prayer which he calls Ijuba:¹²

*The Owner of this day, I pay my homage to you,
The East, I pay my homage
The West, I pay my homage
The North, I pay my homage
The South, I pay my homage
The first to be created, I pay my homage to you
The Creator of mankind, I pay my homage to you
The Earth, I pay my homage
Eshu Odara, I pay my homage
X, Y, Z (names of ancestors and predecessors, my homage
If the earth-worm pays homage to the Earth,
The Earth will give it access.
A Little child never pays homage
and be found destroyed in consequence of it. (Awolalu, 1979:173)*

I find the implications of this prayer interesting. The priest is identifying herself and the *Orisha* addressed with the whole of the universe and a particular ancestral line. It is an act of humility and subordination to the

¹² Literally, the act of paying homage

totality. Mo Juba (The words used in Yoruba literally mean I bow down. The Ijuba ends with a justification of the practice of paying homage.

Presentation

After the invocation, the priests states the purpose of the offering and asks the deity to grant the request. Awolalu gives the following typical example:

*Malomo,¹³ your child comes to you;
She offers white kola-nuts
She offers a calabash of cold water
She offers a hen,
She offers snails
She offers a goat
She offers one yard of white calico.
She is in tears for she has no child,
She is fasting for she has no baby to carry on her back;
Orisha, please let Malomo have a child
Male children that will live long
Female children that will live long.
By this time next year,
Let Malomo bear a child on her back
To come to this shrine rejoicing. (Awolalu, 1979:173)*

The priests divines by means of kola nuts.¹⁴ If the answer is yes, as indicated by the pattern of the way the kola nut falls, then the sacrifice is

¹³ One who is barren, literally: I-do-not-have-a-child

¹⁴ In the United States and Cuba, the priest uses four pieces of coconut since kola nuts do not grow in these places.

carried out. Animals are killed in a ritual way and other materials are presented to the *Orisha*.

Disposal of The Sacrifice

The sacrifice consists of giving the blood of animals to *the Orisha* - that is pouring it on or before the symbol of the divinity. Depending on the purpose of the sacrifice, the supplicant disposes of the animals in different ways. For example, if the sacrifice were intended to remove evil, the supplicant throws the bodies of the animals away at a place determined by divination. Examples of such places are the garbage, the crossroads, the railroad tracks and abandoned house, etc. However, if the purpose of the sacrifice were more pleasant, for instance thanksgiving, the animals are treated differently. They are skinned (birds are plucked), disemboweled and butchered. The heads of the animals are given to the *Orisha*. Certain of the entrails, are cleaned and cooked with the blood and given to the *Orisha*. The flesh is cooked and eaten by the person making the sacrifice and others who are present and wish to join in the meal.

Performing sacrifices is the function of priests, however, non-priests clean and cook the animals and birds after sacrifice. Men usually clean and butcher the animals while women usually pluck and clean chickens and do the cooking.

Summary of The Ritual System

Divination and sacrifice are numerically the two most common rituals of the Yoruba religion. The stories of *Ifa* and *merindilogun* are the literature of divination from which the diviner determines the necessary sacrifice. Together divination and sacrifice present an indivisible whole.

Throughout the Oral traditions, stories are told of God and the *Orisha*. In the next section, I will discuss the Yoruba conception of the cosmos. The cosmos contains God, The Earth, The Ancestors and The *Orisha*. Human beings stand at the intersection of the forces and are affected by them.

Cosmology

The Yoruba conceive of the universe with the metaphor of a closed calabash. The calabash can be seen as a container for the interaction of forces. According to John Mbiti:

In the African view, the universe is both visible and invisible, unending and without limits. Since it was created by God, it is subsequently dependent on Him for its continuity. God is the sustainer, the keeper and the upholder of the universe. Man, on the other hand, is at the very center of the universe; the focus of a nexus of forces. (Mbiti, 1975:3-4)

According to Edward James, the Yoruba Religion is:

*...one of the oldest living religions in the Western Hemisphere and yet one of the religions about which the least is known. The Yoruba religion has assumed many guises in the areas in which it is practiced. In Cuba . . . it is known as **Santeria**, from the Spanish word **Santero**, meaning one who makes saints. In Spain the maker of saints was a*

carver who carved the traditional images of various Christian saints into wood. In Cuba the santero is literally a "maker of saints", a creator of the path through which the deities could come to earth to instruct and save mankind. More than a mere maker of images, the santero is the creator of the way for the gods to reach man and man to reach God... (James, 1970:39-40)

As mentioned above, the Yoruba cosmos is dynamic, consisting of God, The earth, The *Orisha* and the ancestors with human beings standing at the intersection of these forces. Ritually qualified people, i.e. priests make pathways for the communication of the divine and the invisible with human beings.

Pantheon

The Yoruba Pantheon consists of God, the Earth, the Ancestors and the *Orisha*.

I consider the cosmology to be a part of the conceptual system because the *Orisha* operate as a framework for understanding humanity and nature.

God

Above all other deities, on another plane altogether, is God. He is everything there is - the totality of all. Yoruba authors begin to discuss God by naming (Idowu, 1962; Abimbola, 1973; Awolalu, 1979). Naming, in Yoruba society is a much more complicated procedure than it is in American society. The Yorubas believe that the head of the person named must consent to the name.

Things are named according to their affinities. They are the results of events that produced them, similar forces producing similar manifes-

tations. The naming of a Yoruba person is a three fold, or perhaps a four-fold process. There is the name one comes into the world with, a name linking each in fact to a class of beings so on: "feet-first", "on a journey", "the second of twins", and so on. Then there is the name given seven, eight or nine days after birth (depending upon whether one is female, a twin, or a male child). This designation, which involves consultation of Ifa may express the impact of the child's birth on the family (like Ladipo, "increase of honor"), gratitude for the intercession of a certain Orisha (like Ogundipe, "the god of iron consoles me with this") or recognition of the ancestral guardian (like Babatunde, "father comes again"). The third name is a praise (oriki) meant to inspire one to valor, etc. A string of these titles may be acquired during a life-time, but usually only one of them, revelatory of character sticks. The fourth name, nowadays seldom remembered, is an orile, (totem-place name), which links the new member of a family to an animal, a natural phenomenon, or an object associated with a tutelary Orisha that once "belonged to the family. Thus is a person defined as an intersection of various divisions. (Gleason, 1980: xvii-xviii)

Yoruba authors argue from folk etymology. God's name is unique; no one can have His characteristics. Therefore His names are unique. He has many names but the most usual are *Olorun* (The Owner of Heaven), *Olodumare* or in the United States and Cuba, *Olofin*.

The Yorubas have many names for God, the most usual of which is *Olodumare* whose meaning is obscure. Idowu devotes a chapter of his book to different meanings of the name *Olodumare*. Other names are *Olorun* (the owner of heaven and *Olofin* - the name most usually used in the United States and Cuba) which according to E. Bolaji Idowu means the Supreme Ruler.

He is supreme. Yet there is no cult attached to Him, He receives no direct organized worship and He has no shrines. The Yoruba say: "*Who*

would dare offer sacrifice to Olodumare." Olodumare is considered to be the creator of heaven and earth. He is the source of all destinies and the ultimate source of good and evil, yet he is above the human distinctions of good and evil. He is a combination of opposite polarities, the ultimate balance of all contradictory powers. Robert Farris Thompson conceives of Him as the totality of all the forces of the universe. (Thompson, 1983:) According to Ulli Bier:

..the Orisha are part representations of Olodumare. Each Orisha is the universe looked at from another angle. Olodumare is the sum total of all the complexities, he is the universe concentrated into one intelligence...one could conceive of God as the one force from which everything emerges - or else one could see him as the coexistence of all the complexities. (Bier, 1975:34)

God then is a perfect dynamic balance of forces of the totality, which makes him ultimately neutral. He is the ultimate balance and the ultimate coolness. "Coolness" is an extremely important concept. It includes notions of balance, proper behavior, respect for the authority of the elders and grace under pressure. It will be discussed more fully in the sections on morality. The universe is the *dance of interacting forces*. Here an image taken from a praise-poem to Obatala is apropos. "*He Sits In The Sky Like A Swarm of Bees.*" A swarm of bees appears to be stationary, yet every bee is in motion and there is an immense amount of complex activity. This can be taken as a synecdoche for the Yoruba conception of God. The totality is beyond comprehension but individual parts can be grasped.

God, then is the creator, the source of destiny, greater than the heavens. He is omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient.

God is not remote but the *Orisha* are more approachable; both in requests for help and in the grappling of understanding.

The Earth

In Nigeria, *Onile* (The-Owner-of-the-Earth) has her own particular cult, the *Ogboni* or Society of Elders. *Onile* sanctions covenant breaking and the shedding of blood. In Yoruba society, the *Ogboni* served as a counter-balance to the power of the king and conducted a court in which to try offenses against the earth. They had the power to ask the king to go to sleep (commit suicide) if they felt he was in some way unsuitable. Since the period of colonization, the *Ogboni* have lost considerable political power, but remain a powerful moral force.

The cult of the *Earth*, as such, did not translate to Cuban and American culture (although it did to the Brazilian culture) but the religious valuation of the Earth did. Sacrifices are made to the Earth and She is held in reverence.

The Ancestors

For the Yoruba, life does not really end; the person changes from one state of existence to another. Their belief in reincarnation and life continuing in heaven, much as it does on earth, means that for them there is a cycle of existence in which the living become the ancestors = the unborn who

are born again in their descendants. Death does not break relationships. According to J. Omosade Awolalu:

...when the Yoruba speak of the ancestors, they think of the departed spirits of their forebears with whom the living maintain filial and affectionate relationship ...The ancestors constitute the closest link between the world of men and the spirit-world and they are believed to be keenly interested in the welfare of their living descendants. They exercise protective and disciplinary influences on their children. They are the guardians of family affairs, traditions, ethics and activities. Offenses against these matters are ultimately an offense against the forefathers who, in that capacity, act as the invisible police of the family and communities. (Awolalu, 1979:54)

The ancestors hold the power, for the lineage members and their wives, of giving children health and prosperity if they are served properly. Since they are concerned with behavior between kin and in the community and with the good reputation of their descendants they are the upholders of morality .

The Orisha

Orisha are difficult to define. In this section, I will examine the complex of meanings attached to eight of the most common *Orisha*. It would be easy to discuss twice or three times that number, but space does not permit. Each *Orisha* is considered to have a particular domain, physical manifestations, psychological correlatives in the human mind and other symbolic extensions.

According to Steven Gregory:

In Santeria, every aspect of nature (including humanity) is thought to "belong" to a particular Orisha. This notion of belonging has less to do with a sense of ownership, as is the case with property, than with the idea of bearing a meaningful relation. It is through the process of comprehending the multiple and dialectically elaborated relations existing among phenomena in nature and society that one begins to understand the Orisha. (Gregory, 1986:90)

The divinities or *Orisha* are complex multivalent beings.

An Orisha is a divine being who exists simultaneously on many levels...the Orisha is...a historical figure, an ancestor, war leader, hunter or city founder, an animal, a tree or a rock; a Jungian archetype. (Beier, 1975:34)

Orisha are considered to be aspects of God, forces of nature or the universe viewed from different angles. According to John Mason, the *Orisha* are specialized forms of the Supreme God.

They are analogous to the saints of the Catholic Church, hence the Spanish term "Santo", in that they are conceived to be intermediaries between human beings and God. Yet the parallel ends here. The saint is separate from God, not a part of Him. Moreover, the Yoruba insist that the *Orisha* be responsible to mankind in a way that no European would. Wole Soyinka in his essay, "*Morality and Aesthetics in the Ritual Archetype*" outlines what he conceives to be the major moral difference between European and Yoruba worldviews:

But the essential differences in the actual autochthonous myths of the gods themselves provide clues to differences in the moral bias of the two world-views. The penalties which societies exact from their deities in reparation for real or symbolic injuries are an extent to which the

principles of natural restitution for social disharmony may be said to govern the moral structure of that society and influence its social laws...

By making the gods responsible to judgments so based, a passive reliance on the whims of external forces is eschewed, their regenerative aspects are catalyzed into operation through a ritual recourse to the gods' error-ridden rites of passage. Even in the corpus of Ifa curative verse we encounter constant references to such antecedents in divine and moral history. Divine memory is not permitted to rest and prayers are uttered as reminders of natural responsibilities. (Soyinka 1977:14-15)

Orisha are also thought of as psychological forces in the human mind. It is also believed that each person has an *Orisha* assigned to her at birth and this *Orisha* and the person (called her child) share the same character. There is a proverb which says: "*The character of the person is the character of the Orisha.*" This proverb is also found in Haiti "*Temperament mun, ce temperament loa-li.*" (Deren, 1970) Shango¹⁵, for example is described as the wrath of God, or *Yemonja*¹⁶ as his mercy. A person described as a child of *Shango* could very well be characterized as one with an explosive temper or a child of *Yemonja* as unusually tolerant. None of these portrayals of *Orisha* are inaccurate or exhaustive. Rather, they are all simultaneously accurate and incomplete.

As Edward James sums it up:

15 The *Orisha* of Truth, Justice, Thunder and Lightning, to be discussed below

16 The *Orisha* of Motherhood, Mercy and Continuity to be discussed below

An Orisha is personal, universal, and transcendental, and each individual may have her own Orisha whom he worships as a manifestation of Olofi. (James, 1979:42)

On a moral plane, no *Orisha* is totally good or totally evil. Each force has positive and negative manifestations. Some show more of their positive face, some more of the negative.

The Yoruba believe that everything should be allowed its proper expression and that nothing should be repressed. The repressed is believed to be a source of disorder. To clarify and make visible what is hidden restores individual and social balance.

Elegba

Elegba is paradox incarnate. He is called either *Elegba*¹⁷ or *Eshu Odara*.¹⁸ *Elegba* is always the first of the *Orisha* to be attended to in any ceremony and - at bembes, he is the first and the last.

Elegba's primary role is that of intermediary. He is the messenger between God and humanity; between the *Orisha* and God and between human beings and the *Orisha*. He is the keeper of *Ashe* (*Elegba* means The-Owner-of-Power). The Yoruba consider *Ashe* to be the essence of God. Its various meanings include ability, skill, power and aptitude. Perhaps

17 The Powerful One

18 *Eshu* is not good.

Robert Farris Thompson's portrayal of it as the-power-to-make-things-happen is the most useful. (Thompson, 1983, p.5)

Elegba is also thought of as a gatekeeper. He sits before all doors, gates and entrances for they are all symbols of potentiality, chance, and transition.

Elegba lays down the foundation for human being's perceptions of nature and reality and negates these understandings and forces the establishment of new ones. He is also revealer of the truth and a destroyer of illusions. *Elegba's* mischief wakes a person up. It makes him/her realize the flaws in a particular action or situation, or her own personal flaws.

Elegba is also a linguist. He knows all the languages; of the *Orisha* and of human beings (not to mention the artificial languages of the compute). He is communication itself.

Elegba is the enforcer of sacrifice. It is he who investigates whether or not a person has made sacrifice. If the person has, *Elegba* will help her but if not, he will not help and may even arrange punishment. In this duty, he is absolutely predictable. If the sacrifice is not made, no benefits will result.

His most prominent role is his role in all types of divination.

Each *Orisha* is thought to rule certain domains on the physical and symbolic levels and in the human psychological makeup. *Elegba's* are as follows:

Physical Manifestations. *Elegba's* principal domain is the crossroads. Indeed *Elegba's* symbol is the cross because he governs the intersection

between the human and the divine. He governs the crossing of paths of all sorts and the new directions or false turns such intersections could bring.

Other of his physical domains include barriers of all sorts such as doors and gates which are blocking the paths and also places where transitions can occur. He is to be found at every threshold, the intersections between domains. He rules boundaries of all sorts.

Another favorite haunt of his are markets which bring all sorts of people together and contain the potential for all sorts of transactions, meetings and conflicts.

He is to be found at every sort of transition and transaction, for they both are beginnings and endings.

In the American context, his particular domain is the streets and all that they represent: a particular disorderly order; a certain savoir faire, excitement, danger and opportunity.

Elegba's place is the center and the boundary. He is everywhere. His is a particular dialectic of order and disorder; destruction and creativity. In fact, his action is thought to be the very stuff of social life in its constant creation and destruction. *Elegba* is often spoken of as a trickster or an *enfant terrible*, Christian missionaries have indeed equated him with Satan or Muslims with *Shaitan*. This could only be true if the Satan of *The Book of Job* is meant - a Satan who is a tester of reality. *Elegba* is not evil - the Yoruba do not recognize any principle of absolute evil (or absolute good) but he is mischievous, a prankster and a satirist. He allows human beings to

have many options and he deceives them into making unfortunate mistakes, then he sits back and watches.

Elegba has many manifestations or roads. The roads of an *Orisha* can be thought of as a theme (the main *Orisha*) and variations (the roads of the *Orisha*). Chance and potentiality can take many forms. At times, *Elegba* is a very young child and at other times, he may be a man so old as to be decrepit.

According to Joan Wescott:

"...tales of his birth seem to contradict each other, and he is described both as first born and as last born; as old man and as child. Built in both the old man and the child there is privileged freedom from some of the demands of the social code. These extremes have, therefore, a binding principle. His age is reflected in his cunning and the wisdom concealed in his trickery; his extreme youth in his wantonness and caprice and in his impulsive behavior. Whether old man or child there is a disregard for the normal code; he enjoys the natural license of the innocent and the privileged license of the aged. As a child he is the experimenter who breaks rules: as an old man he enjoys the wisdom that takes him beyond the rules. Thus when the Yoruba say he is the youngest of the Orisha, but the father of them all, they are aware that he contains this paradox. (Wescott, 1962:336)

Elegba is both constructive and destructive. His creativity is endless. He is the never ending birth of ideas and the destruction of established ones so that new ones can be created.

Symbolic Extensions. Symbolic extensions of such physical paths and intersections are choices of all kinds and especially fateful decisions. For example, a decision tree is a representation of *Elegba's* action. (Edwards

and Mason, 1985, p. 8) Every decision produces repercussions - choices of career, marriage or moving are examples of such decisions. For everything gained there is an opportunity cost. Because a person did not follow a particular path, she did not make the gains or suffer the losses that could have come from following it. Yet that person makes gains or suffers losses that couldn't have been made without that choice. *Elegba* is the *Orisha* of boundless possibility who rules the twists and turns of fate. He is there at all beginnings and changes of direction, for he oversees all potentialities.

Human Manifestations. *Elegba* is patron of hobos, beggars, tramps, beatniks and the insane; all those who do not fit smoothly into or are on the boundaries, in one way or another, of social life.

Ogun

Ogun is another *Orisha* of paradox but paradox of different nuances. He is the embodiment of violence and creativity and yet the soul of complete integrity. He is a hero, an artist and a poet.

...He is known as protector of orphans, roof over the homeless, terrible guardian of the sacred oath. He stands for a transcendental, human, but rigidly restorable justice...

Ogun is also the master craftsman and artist, farmer and warrior, essence of destruction and creativity, a recluse and a gregarious imbibitor, a reluctant leader of men and deities. He is "Lord of the road" of Ifa"; that is, he opens the way to the heart of Ifa's wisdom, thus representing the knowledge-seeking instinct, an attribute which sets him apart as the only deity who "sought the way", and harnessed the resources of science

to hack a passage through primordial chaos for the gods' reunion with man. (Soyinka, 1976:26-27)

The Yoruba see violence as necessary to the maintenance of life; the procurement of food necessitates violence to animals and plants. They recognize that life daily requires death.

Farming and mining are seen as doing violence to the earth. War, whose violence is never questioned, is seen as, at times, necessary.

Ogun is the *Orisha* of Iron and War. With different tone changes his name translates as Inheritance, Medicine, and Perspiration. (Edwards and Mason, 1986:16) He is energy incarnate, the warrior who fights in hand to hand combat, not the officer who plans from the sidelines. He is also the blacksmith who is constantly engrossed in his work; the archetypical workaholic. He is technology of all kinds, the fascination of solving problems and creating new things.

He creates the tools by which heretofore unsolvable difficulties can be overcome. Father of metamorphosis, he deals with the extraction of potential from the earth and from human beings and imposing new forms on them.

With his energy, he animates. He also takes life. In fact, he is the only one with the right to take life. He controls life and death because he rules the heart, an organ that never ceases its work as long as there is life. He is the final contraction that pushes the baby into the world. (Edwards and Mason, 1985:17)

Physical Manifestations. *Ogun's* physical manifestations are the magnetic stone which attracts and is attracted by other bodies; iron and things made of iron, railroads and roads and tools of all kinds. These symbols show directness and firmness of purpose. Indeed if there were no roads, *Ogun* would make them.

Ogun is in many ways a tragic figure, essentially heroic, he dwells outside of society, lonely and without companionship. Engrossed in his work, companionship constantly eluded him.

Even though social life depends on the force he represents, his presence is not desired in social life.

Symbolic Extensions. *Ogun* manifests himself as strength (both physical and psychological) and firmness. He does not deviate. His qualities are tenacity, conviction, stubbornness, doggedness and raw courage - the iron will.

Ogun's symbols are the knife, his pre-eminent symbol, iron, the cauldron containing his tools which is emblematic of potential in a person and is a symbol of the womb, the mine and the primordial abyss.

His tools and their symbolism are: the anvil which is the earth's ability to transform man; the shovel which symbolizes digging into one's potential; the machete which is used to clear paths and to protect; the rake which is used to gather and smooth rough areas of the self; the hoe which is used to cultivate one's potential; the hammer which bends or shapes one's faculties and the pick with which to pierce or penetrate the hardened areas of the self. (Edwards and Mason, 1985:17)

Human Manifestations. *Ogun* is patron of hunters, forest rangers, tanners, woodcarvers, leather workers, barbers, locomotive and automobile drivers, blacksmiths who forge the tools of the living, laborers, farmers, mines, excavators, and surgeons (who save life by use of the knife), that is all those who work and use iron or steel in their work and of brotherhood guild and all those who swear oaths and covenants.

Osshosi

According to Edwards and Mason, *Osshosi's* name can mean "He is a Wizard (Edwards and Mason, 1985:23) *Osshosi* has all the qualities symbolized by the bow and arrow (his main physical manifestations) lightning speed; directness; the ability to fly and the ability to produce instant death. He is the hunter with those characteristics associated with hunters, observation, ability to track, knowing the habits of his prey, and being able to make use of them to achieve his purpose.

Osshosi has a certain purity of character that associates him with Obatala, the *Orisha* of purity. He is the upholder of the norms of social institutions. His demand is to follow the rules of whatever institution in which people find themselves.

Osshosi is appealed to if a person needs direction in life. His pre-eminent symbol is the iron bow and arrow. This is a physical symbol of directness in seeking a goal.

Physical Manifestations. In the Western Hemisphere, *Osshosi* is associated with hospitals, prisons, asylums and all places of incarceration. His domain is the forest and his pre-eminent activity is hunting.

Symbolic Extensions. He is justice in the technical sense of the imposition of limitations and rules and their enforcement. With *Osshosi*, there are no extenuating circumstances; you did it or you didn't. If you did, don't appeal to him, he himself will punish you. But if you are innocent, he will defend you. He is instant retributive justice.

Human Manifestations. His human manifestations are seekers, judges and those in charge of institutions.

Osun

Osun means "Don't Sleep" He is the *Orisha* of constant vigilance and of perfect balance. Although he has only one foot, he is always found standing upright.

Osun guards against all forces of imbalance, the envy of others and against personal insanity. He is the *Orisha* most closely connected with a person's *Ori*, allowing the person to maintain her balance in life.

The Warriors

Elegba, Ogun, Osshosi and *Osun* are collectively termed the Warriors. They are seen as traveling with each other and eating together. These *Orisha*

as a group must be received by a person before she is initiated into the priesthood.

Collectively, the warriors live outside of society but are its support.

On the psychological level, they represent the tasks a person must accomplish in getting him/herself together.

Elegba establishes and disestablishes social and personal boundaries preventing ossification. On the psychological level, *Elegba* provides knowledge of one's self that one would rather not face (one's Shadow aspect), but which one needs to face and assimilate for future personal integration. *Elegba* is a thief, robbing one of one's most valuable possession, one's pretensions.

Ogun defends society and provides the will for the individual or group to overcome obstacles and increase knowledge. He also provides the creativity to master life's obstacles.

Osshosi gives society and the individual direction and enforces the norms and boundaries and *Osun* provides balance between these (sometimes) contending forces which nevertheless work together.

Obatala

Obatala,¹⁹ also called *Baba*,²⁰ is the most senior of the *Orisha*. His white cloth is a metaphor for purity and a spotless reputation. In Yoruba society,

19 The King of the White Cloth

20 Father

seniority is a principle built into the very language. Because he is the most senior *Orisha*, he is the most important.

Obatala is the *Orisha* of ethical rightness and demands high morality.

He himself, is characterized by humility, calmness, ethics, clearness of thought, purity and acceptance of responsibility for his mistakes. *Obatala* forms the child in the womb and is responsible for birth defects.

He is the *Orisha* that owns all heads. All heads belong to him because he is the head (king) *Orisha*. He is also the judge because he owns coolness of thought and rational deliberation.

Obatala is also known as *Orishanla*. (The suffix "nla" in Yoruba always indicates greatness) or the great *Orisha*.

Physical Manifestations. *Obatala's* physical manifestation is the top of the mountain. His animal avatars are essays on his nature. They are the land snail, the elephant, the gorilla and the boa constrictor. The snail is an exemplar because of its slowness and deliberateness of movement. The others are reminiscent of him because they are all peaceful and known for their strength and wisdom.

Symbolic Extensions. *Obatala's* symbolic extensions are all situations that require calm, rational judgement e.g. the court room, medical diagnosis, etc. and the creation of form from the formless, e.g. pottery.

Yemonja

Yemonja (Iye-omo-eja, Mother of the Children of Fish) is the *Orisha* of motherhood. She is the mother of many of the *Orisha* and human beings.

On the level of the Jungian archetype, she is the Great Mother. On the level of psychological forces, *Yemonja* is the subconscious mind, itself.

In Nigeria, *Yemonja* is the *Orisha* of the *Ogun* river, but in the Western Hemisphere, she is the *Orisha* of the top part of the ocean and all waters generally. *Olokun* (to be discussed later) is the *Orisha* of the bottom of the sea. *Yemonja* is associated with the amniotic fluid, which maintains the environment of the primordial ocean (from which all life arose) in the womb.

On this side of the Atlantic, *Yemonja* has increased in importance due to her role in delivering the surviving Africans alive from her realm. They were enormously grateful to The-Mother-Of-The-Waters for delivering them alive from that realm where so many of them had died voluntarily or involuntarily.

Not only is she the *Orisha* of motherhood, she is the *Orisha* of Continuity. She links generation to generation, and by so doing, she is the *Orisha* of time.

Yemonja is the *Orisha* of mercy. The Yoruba believe that she never turns her back on her children. She is supposed to always have the mother's prejudice of their behalf. However, she can be extremely stern and requires a great deal from them. She is like the Spartan mother who sends her son to war with his shield but tells him to come back with it or on it; or the animal mother who destroys her defective offspring.

Physical Manifestations. The ocean is her physical manifestation. Like the ocean, she is never at rest, even when things are calm on the surface, there are currents and undercurrents beneath the surface.

Symbolic Extensions. *Yemonja's* symbols are nautical: boats and ships (symbolic wombs) represent safety on the water; an anchor which symbolizes stability when one is being buffeted by forces seeking to carry one away; a ship's wheel or oars, which allow one to move on the water and fish which are representations of life in the ocean.

Human Manifestations. Her manifestations are mothers of all kinds. She can be the nurturing mother, or the stern parent who makes many demands on her children.

Shango

Shango is believed to be the fourth Alafin (Owner of the Palace) or king of Old Oyo. Perhaps because of the Fulani jihad (Muslim holy war) against the Yoruba in the 19th Century, a very large number of Oyo Yoruba found themselves in the Western Hemisphere.

Of all the *Orisha*, *Shango* is the most widely known *Orisha* in the Western Hemisphere. His name is given to two African-derived religions, the *Shango* cult of Trinidad and the Xango cult of Recife in Brazil. In addition to that, he is worshipped in at least three others, The Santeria of Cuba, Voudun of Haiti and the Condombles and Macumba of Brazil.

Shango is the *Orisha* that demands involvement in life and living life to its fullest potential. Living life to the fullest might involve mistakes and disasters but that is all part of the game and the game is worth the candle.

In the human body, he rules the testicles and he wants his children to have balls (even his daughters). *Shango* finds challenges the breath of life. Even, if there are ups and downs. According to Edwards and Mason:

Shango realizes that is though the success or failure of overcoming these challenges that he achieves perfection of consciousness. Shango deals with the day-to-day fight for existence. He understands the tragic nature of existence and can use it to his advantage. He is deeply involved in the affairs of men. Nevertheless, Shango finds the absurdity of existence extremely hilarious, but he approaches it with a deadly serious attitude and conviction...He similarly wants his devotees to have two things: courage and intelligence. (Edwards and Mason, 1985, p. 45)

Physical Manifestations. *Shango* is the epitome of masculinity and justice. Lightening, his primary physical manifestation is believed to strike liars, covenant breakers and the stupid. He is considered to be the wrath of God. Another of his physical manifestations is a tall tree.

Symbolic Extensions. According to Edwards and Mason (1985), lightening is a physical metaphor for instant illumination. Just as quickly as lightening strikes, the truth can be known and when lightening strikes, once is sufficient. Lightening is felt by only the one it strikes, but it can be seen by everyone.

Another prominent symbol of *Shango* is the tongue.

The following story considers this aspect of *Shango*:

One time, Shango was the servant of Obatala and Obatala decided to test him. He sent him out to find the very best of foods. Shango returned with a tongue. When asked why the tongue was the best of foods, Shango replied that with the tongue, one can recite the praises of the king, that one could sing beautiful music and recite poetry; that without the tongue no truth could be told and with the tongue one could less.

Obatala then sent him out to bring back the very worst of foods and he returned with a tongue. When asked how the tongue could be the worst of foods, Shango said that with the tongue one could slander one's friend, that lies could be told that would cause wars and people could be cursed.

Impressed, Obatala, made Shango a king.

Human Manifestations. *Shango* is the patron of politicians, lawyers, pimps and con artists; all occupations that require "the gift of gab." He is also the patron of stutterers, or those with zig-zag speech. (Edwards and Mason, 1985, p. 42).

Oshun

Oshun is the *Orisha* of love and beauty. Her most severe punishment is her absence. She is famous for her beauty and her charm. She is the *Orisha* of connection, only one of whose manifestations is love. She is the coming together of the sperm and egg. She is the link between generations.

She rules the blood that flows in the veins and the blood that flows from generation to generation. She is the *Orisha* of rivers that connect settlements; rivers being analogous to the blood vessels of the earth.

Oshun is also the *Orisha* of civilizations and culture. She is associated with the fine arts and the "finer things of life"; parties, plays, social intercourse of all kinds, haute cuisine and designer clothes.

Oshun is the mistress of illusion and magic. Interestingly, the word **glamour** originally meant magic. But as such she demands a clear-sight of reality. A mirror shows you what is there. She is the female master of strategy, using the weapons of charm and diplomacy.

She has the capacity to see desired things before their manifestation and to try and bring them into being.

She is the most generous of the *Orisha*, giving freely of her wealth and herself.

Physical Manifestations. Her primary physical manifestation is the river. Analogous to the rivers of the earth are the arteries and veins of the human body.

Symbolic Extensions. She is the owner of gold and is therefore extremely wealthy. She is the *Orisha* who holds her mirror (one of her major symbols) up to a person and demands that there be love for what is seen. She wants a person to love him/herself as she does herself.

Her other major symbols have to do with connection. She has needles with which it is said she sews society together. More recently she has taken to sewing machines.

Her most famous symbol is honey which is almost an essay on her nature. Honey is sweet, yet it is the product of the society of bees which produced

it by unceasing labor. Honey is sticky and holds things together and last but not least it is golden yellow, *Oshun's* color.

Human Manifestations. *Oshun* is said to be the strictest of the *Orisha*. She is the patron of courtesans and geisha. She knows that beauty and pleasant sociality require strict discipline.

Olokun

Imagined as immensely wealthy, *Olokun* (The Owner of The Sea) is the *Orisha* of the **bottom of the sea**. His, her, or its (*Olokun* is variously considered to be male, female or hermaphrodite) domain is the realm of perpetual twilight. The sun doesn't reach there but there is light there in the form of bio-luminescence.

Olokun is envisioned as theriomorphic, the only *Orisha*, to my knowledge, to be so conceived. He is represented in Africa as having legs in the form of mudfish²¹ with the heads where a person's feet would be. He holds lizards in his hands and has snakes leaving his nostrils. He wears a garment made completely of coral.'

21 The mudskipper - *P. papilio* is an amphibious fish which burrows into the mud during Africa's dry seasons. The fish lives in water, hops along dry land, and some species even climb the bottom branches of trees and build nests. According to Edwards and Mason, the mudfish is symbolic of the ascent of man from the mud clay in the ocean, to dry land, into the trees. In Benin, the mudfish is symbolic of royalty.

Olokun is associated with the collective unconscious mind. Both in his physical impression and its symbolic extensions, *Olokun* shows a merging (indistinctness) of form that speaks of preconscious matters.

According to Edwards and Mason:

As Keeper of Secrets, Olokun holds the key to the mysteries about the history of the cross-Atlantic passage, in which lies the ancestral links between Black people in the diaspora and the continent of Africa. In this sense, one has only to think about the millions of captive Africans who were lost during that passage, and who entered the kingdom of Olokun carrying cultural and ancestral links with them...

The relationship between *Olokun* and the spirit world of the ancestral dead points to the reason why he is so honored by Blacks in the Americas. *Olokun's* realm of secrets holds the link that connects Blacks with their ancestral past. (Edwards and Mason, 1985 pp. 61, 82)

Olokun is also the *Orisha* of wealth. It is said that all things find their way to the bottom of the sea. *Olokun* may occasionally share his wealth but since he is also the *Orisha* of mental stability, it is wisest not to force the issue.

He is also the giver of children. In a traditional society like Yorubaland, children are a major form of wealth.

Olokun's indistinctness then is the statement that from the unknown blessing may be derived but there are things that may not be known and that to continue to insist may cost one one's sanity.

Symbolic Extensions *Olokun's* realm is considered to be the home of spirits, human and otherwise. Being privy to the ancestral dead and spirits

and ruling a realm that no one else knows, *Olokun* is the preserver of knowledge.

According to Edwards and Mason, "*Olokun* holds the secrets of the past, the present and the future and allows us to know some of them. However, his/her/its secrets cannot be stolen without the penalty of insanity. *Olokun* is also the *Orisha* of mental stability and his/her/its major punishment is insanity.

Ceremonies

The Yoruba Religion is rich in ceremonies and ritual. With the exception of the *Reading of The Year* which occurs on January 1, *Orisha Feast Days* as shown in Appendix 1 and *Ocha Birthdays* which are the anniversaries of the initiation of priests, they occur at irregular and unpredictable intervals. Knowing when ceremonies will occur requires people being in touch with each other.

In this section, my information comes from my own participant observation, classes for Alejos and conversations with members of the religion. This material could not otherwise be obtained.

The practitioners of the Yoruba Religion do not have a typology of ceremonies. However, I find that classifying them as Life-passage ceremonies (Naming Ceremonies, Marriages and Funerals); Priesthood Career Ceremonies (Receiving *ilekis*, Receiving Warriors, Initiation into the Priesthood, the Three-month Ebo, Receiving the drums, and Funeral of a priest) and Cyclical Religious Ceremonies (The Reading of the Year,

Orisha Feast Days, Ocha Birthdays and The Bembe) to be a useful way to obtain a grasp on them.

Life-passage Ceremonies

Life-passage ceremonies are ceremonies that occur at transitional points in a person's life. They are considered to be in the province of Egun²².

In a Yoruba Home, in the kitchen or the bathroom, usually behind a door, you will find the shrine of Egun. The shrine consists of a stick, cut from the branch of a tree or a walking cane. Usually, there will also be a glass of water and a cigar. Those who have received their warriors or have had more initiations have an Egun shrine.

Daily worship consists of sharing meals with the ancestors. That is every time the family eats, the same food that the family eats is placed at Egun's shrine with black coffee with sugar and a small glass of rum. The worshipper lights a candle. Every time a ceremony is performed the officiant asks the permission of Egun first by means of divination with *obi* and every time a major life-passage ceremony occurs, it begins in front of Egun's shrine.

Ceremonies for Egun do not require initiations - since "everyone has ancestors". Therefore, everyone may participate in a ceremony before Egun.

The Naming Ceremony

When a child is born, its name is announced on the seventh day after its birth by its father at its naming ceremony. I will outline below a typical naming ceremony based on the four that I have observed. A child is born. Its naming ceremony is set for the seventh day after its birth. (If the child or its mother has to remain in the hospital past this point, the ceremony is simply postponed until they can both be home). Also, there is a proclivity for holding ceremonies on the weekend because most people work and attending ceremonies on the weekend causes fewer problems. This means, of course, that the seventh day is an ideal. I don't know of any naming ceremony that was not held on the weekend but, of course, children may be born on any day of the week.

The ceremony occurs as early in the morning as possible. (This being New York, as early in the morning as possible, usually translates to 8 or 9 o'clock). It may even mean the afternoon.

Previous to the ceremony, a godfather and godmother are chosen by the parents. These need not be priests. Godparents for the naming ceremony are not necessarily godparents in Ocha.

The ceremony begins with a sacrifice to Egun - usually two chickens (roosters for a male child and a hen for a female). The sacrifice announces the birth to the ancestors and is in thanksgiving for the child and the safe delivery of the mother.

Then, the child is taken outside, its head uncovered and is lifted up toward the sky - showing the child to *Olodumare*.

The following is the transcript of one of the naming ceremonies that I attended.

*Naming Ceremony
December 28, 1984
Scheduled for 9:00*

I got to Rose and Dan's house a few minutes early. The baby was born December, 22 so the naming ceremony is being held on the 7th day of its life (by inclusive counting). Rose answered the door. Michael, and Dan were there. Rose introduced me to Dan. We shook hands. Dan took my coat and put it in the closet.

Rose offered me coffee, or tea and something to eat. But I told her that I couldn't wait to see the baby. I went to the bedroom with Rose to look at the baby. I left Michael and Dan drinking coffee, eating danishes and talking in the living room. The baby was sleeping so I didn't pick him up. Told Rose how beautiful he was.

I asked if she needed any help. She asked me to help her get the saucers set up for the ceremony. She pulled out a list that Katherine (her godmother) had given her. So we went into the kitchen and I helped Rose with the preparation. Took the new saucers out of their newspaper and put the ingredients for the ceremony in them.

- 1. water*
- 2. gin*
- 3. honey*
- 4. guinea pepper*
- 5. coconut*
- 6. salt*
- 7. sugar*
- 8. cayenne pepper*
- 9. palm oil.*

The door bell rang and Peter and Katherine came in. Dan took their things. Rose saluted Katherine and then Peter. Michael saluted Peter and then Katherine. (Peter is Michael's godfather.) Dan did not

salute anyone. He is not in the religion. He shook hands with Peter and Katherine. Peter sat down in the living room with Dan and Michael.

Katherine went to see the baby and hugged Rose. Told her how happy she was for her. (Rose and Dan's first baby was stillborn.) Katherine told her that she must be sure to give special thanks to Oshun for protecting her through this pregnancy and giving her such a wonderful baby.

She asked Rose what needed to be done and Rose told her the saucers were ready and she would be happy if Katherine could check to make sure that everything was prepared properly. Katherine did and said that it was. She asked Rose about food and Rose said that Dorothy and her sisters were doing the cooking for her and would bring the food with them when they came.

We went back to the living room and sat down, drank coffee and ate danishes.

The baby woke up and Rose brought it in for everyone to see. Everyone praised it and remarked how big and healthy it was. The baby began to cry and Rose breast fed it. (She put a receiving blanket over her shoulder and the baby's head so she could still sit in the living room.

The bell rang and Marion and Susan came in. They saluted Peter, Katherine and Michael and they shook hands with Dan. Spencer came in and saluted all the priests. He seemed to jump up in the air, fall face down with a bang and leap up. Peter laughed and Michael said that we knew an Aganyu had come in. They always make your foundation shake when they salute.

Peter asked Rose how she thought her mother would react to the sacrifice and Rose said that she was worried that her mother would be upset. Katherine asked Peter whether or not they could do the sacrifice before Rose's mother came. Peter said that she was an elder of the child and she really should be there but that this was a happy day and no one should be unhappy. So they decided to do the ebo to Egun right away.

Katherine asked Rose for efun a white chalk made from powered egg shells and drew a vertical line on the forehead of everyone present. Dan was told to take the baby from Rose.

We all went to the door of the bathroom. In the bathroom was the shrine to Egun, i.e. the ancestors A stick (looked like the branch from a tree with nine different colored ribbons tied around it.) On the floor there was a plate with danishes, a cup of black coffee, a glass of water. There was also a plate with a jikora (a small calabash) of water, obi (four pieces of coconut) and a small brown envelope.

Peter handed the stick to Dan and showed him how to pound it on the floor. He told him to keep it up. Peter then took the water and spilled a small amount on the floor and started to pray in Yoruba. I couldn't understand the prayer - I think Peter deliberately says it as fast as possible so that those who don't know it will not learn it.

Peter asked Dan to name as many of his ancestors as he could remember. Peter threw obi. He said that Egun wanted the chickens to be plucked and cooked and fed to the people who came.

Katherine told Susan to ask Rose where her pots were and to put a pot of water to boil on the stove. Peter asked for a knife. Michael took the birds one by one and holding them by their feet and neck he sacrificed them. Spencer took the birds to the kitchen. Katherine told Susan to get a mop and clean the floor.

She asked me if I would help her and Rose pluck the chickens. Marion and Susan asked if they could help but she said that there were only two and too many hands get in the way.

After the ebo, Katherine asked Rose for a blanket to wrap the baby in. After the baby was bundled up and everybody grabbed his coat the baby, still in Dan's arms was taken outside with Peter, going before and sprinkling water to cool the child's path, Dan with the baby and then everyone else. As he went Peter sang the lead in Yoruba and everyone else was the chorus.

*Ocha wa ni che
Ocha wa ni che
Ache Olodumare
Ocha wa ni che*

and

*L'aiye, L'aiye
omo le wa
L'aiye, L'aiye*

When we got outside, the baby's head was uncovered outdoors and his father was told to say: "Behold the only thing greater than thou." I asked about this and Michael told me that Kunta Kinte was a powerful ancestor who wanted to be acknowledged and Peter's house had added it their naming ceremony.

Then the baby was brought back in. We all took off our coats and put them in the closet. The rest of the people went back into the living room and Katherine, Rose and I went into the kitchen. Katherine asked Rose if she had any old newspapers and garbage bags. Rose said yes and got them.

While the water was coming to a boil, there was a discussion about how to cook the chickens. Since Rose's mother was from the south, Katherine asked me if I would make chicken and dumplings and I agreed.

While all of this was going on, I had heard the doorbell ring several times. Once it was Rose's sister who brought in a pan of food. I was introduced to her and we put the food in the oven.

By this time, it was about 11:00. The phone rang. It was for Rose. She came back to say that her other sister's car had broken down and she and her mother were stuck. Katherine called Michael and asked him if he would go and pick them up. He said OK. Katherine said that

we could all go back into the living room and she would keep an eye on the food.

In the living room, Spencer was telling everybody about his life in the navy. Marie laughed and asked him how an Aganyu could survive surrounded by all that water. Spencer said he was definitely cooled out but it was a mind-blowing experience and anyway Yemonja was his mother even though Aganyu was his father.

The door bell rang again and it was Michael with Rose's mother and sister. Rose's mother walked with a cane and weighed about 250 pounds. Peter told two people to get off the sofa so the elder could sit. Mrs. Johnson was introduced to everyone and offered something to eat and drink. When she had finished, Katherine asked Rose for an estera (a grass mat) and spread it on the floor against a wall. Peter and Michael who was acting as godfather sat on it. Rose gave the baby to Michael to hold. Katherine asked us to bring the saucers and a jikora of water from the kitchen and line them up in front of the mat. She asked Rose for her notebook and asked Susan to write down the oduns and what was said.

Peter took a small bag from his pocket which held his cowries (called dilogun) and his Elegba from a bag. He drew a circle with efun on the mat and put his dilogun in it. Rose then took some money which she had folded into a square and told Dan to give it to Michael. Michael touched the money to the baby's head and put it on the dilogun. Peter covered his palms with the efun. Then he spilled a small amount of water on the floor in front of the Elegba while praying in Yoruba. He then moved the dilogun and money around in a circle on the mat, still praying. Then he picked up the dilogun and the money and touched the baby on the head. He put the dilogun back in the circle and the money in the clay dish with the Elegba.

He picked up the dilogun and said something in Yoruba and the priests there answered him.

1. He knocked on the mat once and opened hands, letting the dilogun fall. He named the pattern that was on the mat. He repeated

this action. Susan wrote down the names of the pattern. 2. Then Michael was given a piece of efun and a stone in his right hand. He was told to shake and separate (holding one each in either hand without telling Peter which was which.) When the name of the pattern was identified, the Michael was asked to show either what was in his left or right hand. 3. This happened two more times.

Then Peter began to explain what the reading meant. The child was a blessing to the family. The child would be very family-oriented and he would bring others to join him. (That is, Rose and Dan would have more children.) During the reading, although there was one priest (Peter) officiating, any priest who wanted to could speak and many did so.

Spencer said that Rose and Dan should teach the child to be himself and not insist on imitating others.

Elaine said that the child should be taught to be truthful, and to have integrity.

At various times during the reading Peter threw the dilogun on the mat to ask certain questions. These questions were not always apparent to me. But he would throw the dilogun and ask Michael to shake and separate and then say yes, or say no, or nothing at all out loud.

He did tell Rose that she should go to Katherine's Oshun with adimu to thank Oshun for the safe delivery of her child and when and if the child needed ilekis, the ilekis should be put on for Oshun.

He threw the dilogun twice more and said the reading was closed.

After the reading, Peter asked Dan what name he had chosen for his son. Dan said the child's name was Akinjorin and the meaning of the name was Valor-Comes-Dancing.

After the reading came the foodtasting ceremony. The food consisted of nine items:

1. jikora of water

2. *bottle of gin*
3. *saucer of honey*
4. *saucer of guinea pepper*
5. *saucer of coconut*
6. *saucer of salt*
7. *saucer of sugar*
8. *saucer of cayenne pepper*
9. *saucer of palm oil.*

Peter explained that this was to represent the community's first teaching of the child; that the godfather was to choose each of the saucers at random and to put a small amount in the child's mouth and then pass the saucer around while everyone present tasted a small amount.

Michael chose the saucers in the order shown below and Peter explained the symbolism of the item in the saucer as it was passed around and everyone present tasted the contents. This continued until the last person tasted the 9th item.

Honey represents love, unity and togetherness. *May Akinjorin always have sweetness in his life.*

Water represents flexibility, fertility, abundance and growth. *Yet water can also turn to ice. Water has no enemies, because everyone needs water. May Akinjorin have flexibility when it is appropriate and be inflexible when its is appropriate.*

Salt represents civilization and stability, because salt allows food to be preserved. *May Akinjorin always have stability in his life.*

Cayenne pepper represents enemies. *It is hot. May Akinjorin always be able to overcome his enemies.*

Sugar is a substitute for cotton in this ceremony. *In this country when we were slaves, we grew cotton but in the Caribbean slaves grew sugar. Sugar represents our history of slavery. May Akinjorin never be a slave!*

Palm Oil represents the blending of different ingredients, smoothing of the path. It is used to blend the flavor of stews in Africa. May Akinjorin always be able to blend in with those around him.

Guinea Pepper is a catalyst to one's power of speech. May Akinjorin always speak powerfully. May his words be effective.

Coconut represents wisdom. May Akinjorin always have wisdom.

Gin is a substitute for bitter kola. A man plants bitter kola and his grandson reaps the first fruit. Likewise, gin lasts forever. Both are symbols of longevity. May Akinjorin have a long life and see his grandchildren and the children of his grandchildren."

After the tasting was finished. Peter explained the custom of dancing with the baby. "We sing a song to Kore the Orisha of newborn children and each person takes turns dancing with the baby. When you are dancing whisper a good wish in the baby's ear. This is your blessing for the baby. We dance with the baby in this order: 1. the two grandmothers, 2. the mother and 3. the father."

Emory began to sing and everyone else answered him in a call and response fashion.

*Kore O!
Kore O!, fun mi lo mon bejo
Fun mi lo mon bejo
Kore, fun mi lo mon bejo*

*Kore O!
Kore, give me a child to play with.
Give me a child to play with.
Kore, give me a child to play with.*

Everybody took turns dancing with the baby, starting with Michael. After each person had danced a little while with the baby, he or she gave the baby to another person, until Dan's turn came.

After the dancing was over a Katherine asked someone to get a jikora of water and put it in the room. People put money in the jikora for the child. Most people did this. No one seemed to give less than a dollar. Some gave five and I saw one ten-dollar bill. Other people had brought gifts with them. They gave these to Dan and Rose. Rose and Dan opened the gifts - appropriate ones for a baby.

Dorothy went around to the priests and asked what they could not eat. Katherine told me that priests have individual food tabus. Rose's sister, Susan and Dorothy went into the kitchen and began to prepare plates. Dan's and Rose's mothers were served first. Then Peter, then Katherine, then Michael, then Elaine, then Marion, then Dorothy, then Susan. Then all other adults were served and lastly the children. At every occasion, people are fed according to the principles of seniority. I said that I really should go home and Peter said that I simply could not leave without eating.

I asked for a little bit and was served a heaping plate. After I ate, I told Rose how happy I was for her but that I really had to go because I had been away from home much longer than I had planned.

Katherine told me that the Reading of the year was going to be held on January 1 at nine o'clock and that I should bring something to eat with me. She said the Reading of the year was a potluck affair to share the burden of cooking. She said people brought things for breakfast and lunch and she cooked dinner. She told me to check with Susan who was keeping a list of things that people were going to bring so that there would not be too much duplication.

I went to talk to Susan who asked me if I would make hot rolls for breakfast and I said yes.

Then I went home.²³

²³ At 3:00.

Marriages

During the time of my participant observation, I witnessed two weddings. In conversation, I have heard about others. The following is based on my observations and conversations I have heard.

When two people decide to marry, their respective parents and they themselves, along with the priest who will officiate conduct a negotiating session in order to develop a marriage contract. Each person present airs her concerns about the proposed marriage: parents are most usually interested that their children's education continue. When a member of a New York House of Ocha was marrying a Nigerian, her mother specified that she wanted her daughter to be able to visit her once a year with any children she might have. She also specified that she wanted the marriage to remain monogamous. The man's family (or rather his brothers) objected to this, but their wives agreed with the mother of the bride-to-be. Finally, a monogamous marriage was agreed to and the wedding proceeded.

The wedding itself consists of a sacrifice before Egun to announce the marriage and pray for happiness. This is a simple ceremony. However, there are usual and unusual concomitants. The usual concomitants are the procession to the place of the wedding and the partying after it. Unusual concomitants will be those practices or actions due to unusual features of the marriage.

Since, very few priests have minister's licenses, a civil marriage ceremony is performed by a judge to take care of the legalities, that is a valid marriage license.

The women of the house come together to prepare the bride for marriage. This consists of giving her a perfumed bath, dressing her and giving her any advice they may deem necessary.

They and the bride then go to the place where the marriage is to be held. They leave their cars a short distance away and in a procession they go to the building singing songs in Yoruba to *Oshun*

Oshun Oshogbo gba mi che o!
Oshun Oshogbo gba mi che!
Oshun of Oshogbo, help me do this O!
Oshun of Oshogbo, help me do this.

and to Kore, the *Orisha* of children:

Kore O!
Kore O!, fun mi lo mon bejo
Fun mi lo mon bejo
Kore, fun mi lo mon bejo
Kore O!
Kore O
Kore, give me a child to play with.
Give me a child to play with.
Kore, give me a child to play with

The groom and his party meet them at the building. Depending upon the sensitivities of the parents, the sacrifice to Egun may or may not be performed there. After the sacrifice, the marriage is complete and there is general eating and drinking. After the festivities the bride and groom leave. In the two weddings I have seen there was no honeymoon. The bride and groom were married on Saturdays and returned to work the following Monday.

Funerals

During the period of my observation, I attended no funerals. However, according to my informants, before the funeral of an Alejo, the godparent will go to the funeral home and break the Alejo's ilekis. The funeral would proceed according to the wishes of the family.

If the deceased were a priest, there would be an additional ceremony called an itutu before the funeral. This will be discussed below.

Priesthood Career Ceremonies

I have given the name priesthood career ceremonies to this group of ceremonies because if each were followed in the prescribed order, the person would be initiated as a priest and after initiation undergo further ceremonies that only priests can participate in. However, the this need not necessarily occur. Pre-initiation ceremonies need not (and numerically speaking usually do not) lead to initiation. Post-initiation ceremonies may be postponed indefinitely.

Priesthood career ceremonies are performed away from public view, including the view of a student sociologist. Although anyone may be present in the house or apartment where the ceremony will take place, one room (called the Ocha Room) and has its door covered with a white sheet. Only the priests and the person to undergo a specific ceremony may enter.

Receiving Ilekis

Ilekis are bead necklaces made in color schemes appropriate to the various *Orishas*. The color scheme and numerical pattern varies from house to house. For example, *Shango's* ileki is red and white, one red bead alternating with one white bead. *Yemonja's* colors are blue and crystal. In one house her ileki would be one blue bead alternating with one crystal bead or seven crystal beads alternating with seven crystal beads.

The meaning of ilekis are a substitution for tribal marks. To a knowledgeable person, one's ilekis will mark the person's house and the roads of the *Orishas* for whom the ilekis are made. Secondly, they are deemed to be an extension of the protection of the godparent's *Orisha* to the person. Many people interpret receiving ilekis as joining a house, although this is open to varying interpretations.

On the day of the ceremony, the person to be initiated is to come wearing old clothes and bringing a change of new white clothes. A number of priests will be there. At some point, the person will be taken into the Ocha room and the sheet lowered. Songs can be heard and later a laundry tub is pushed out of the room with the remnants of the person's clothes. After a while the sheet is lifted, the *Iyawo* is seated on an *estera* wearing a set of all new white clothes and a new set of ilekis.

One must not touch a *Iyawo*, but people come to greet the *Iyawo*. The *Ojunona* brings the *Iyawo* food. It is placed on the mat and the *Iyawo* is given a soup spoon to eat with. People gather around and talk. Everyone is

fed, at the Iyawo's expense. The Iyawo is expected to sleep on the floor that night in the Ocha room. The next day the Iyawo is a full-fledged Alejo.

Receiving the Warriors

After people have received ilekis, they may be told in a reading that they need to receive warriors. If they decide to do so, they are told the cost. After they bring the money, they are given a date on which to come and get them. They are taken into the Ocha room and a while later they emerge with their warriors in hand. They take them home. At a later date (at least seven days later) but often later, they will have an ebo entrada²⁴ performed for them. After this is done, they are taught to divine by using obi though they are still called Alejo. It seems to me that this is an additional status.

Initiation Into The Priesthood

While some, but not all people, are told that they need to make ocha²⁵. others are told that they do not or should not make ocha. This distinction is made on the basis of divination. If a person decides to make ocha, (some people resist this decision for years, some perhaps indefinitely) then they have an expensive proposition ahead of them.

At minimum, the ceremony will cost a few thousand dollars. This money is to cover animals for sacrifices, food for anyone who may show up for seven days (breakfast, lunch and dinner), fees for the priests who attend the

24 literally sacrifice of entry

25 Be initiated into the priesthood

ceremony and possibly fees for drummers for a *Bembe*. In addition to this, the initiate must provide eight changes of white clothes including one suitable for street wear, (in the winter this would mean a coat and or boots or shoes). Moreover, the person will need enough new white clothes to be worn over the course of a year.

An initiation ceremony is a seven-day event, beginning actually the night before the actual initiation. The Iyawo goes to the *Babalawo* (in some houses) for the *ebo entrada*²⁶. After that the Iyawo takes a bath in a river.

While the Iyawo is away from the place where the initiation is to take place, various preparations are made. The Throne - a temporary structure made of cloth with a floor of two esterass (grass mats) is constructed in the corner of the Ocha room where a person is being initiated into the priesthood. A white canopy is hung from the ceiling and cloth, the color of the *Orisha* being made is attached to the wall. Cloths in the color of other *Orisha* are put on the underlying cloth as decorations. That is for *Oshun*, the cloth would be yellow; red for *Shango*, Blue for *Yemonja*, etc. After the throne is completed it is covered with a white sheet.

Meanwhile in the kitchen, food is being cooked for the people who are there that night and preliminary cooking of the food to accompany the sacrifices to be given the *Orishas*.

²⁶ The *ebo entrada* for warriors is a different ceremony than the *ebo entrada* for initiation. The *ebo entrada* for the warriors is held in the home of the person who receives them. The *ebo entrada* for initiation is held at the home of the *Babalawo*.

When the Iyawo returns, she is put to sleep in another room other than the Ocha room.

The next day is the ceremony proper. The sheet is put down over the Ocha room door. The Iyawo is brought there and enters.

For several hours one can hear singing.

When the sheet is raised, the throne is uncovered and the Iyawo is on the throne dressed all in white with her head covered. The Iyawo will stay on the throne for seven days, leaving it only to go to the bathroom. When the Iyawo leaves the throne, she will be covered with a white sheet and led by the hand by a priest. At some point during the ceremony, the Iyawo's head had been shaved. People present salute the throne. This can be a lengthy procedure.

After the saluting is done, the Iyawo is fed a bowl of pigeon soup while others present have a more substantial meal.

Then, sacrifices are made to the Iyawos Ocha. This produces an immense amount of work for the kitchen. Men, skin, clean and cut up four-legged animals. Women pluck and eviscerate chickens, pigeons and guinea hens. Certain parts of the sacrifices are cooked to be given to the *Orisha*. (Each *Orisha* has her favorite foods, taboos and recipes). Other parts are cooked for people to eat the next day. This is a gargantuan task.

When the sacrifices and cooking are over, the sheet is raised and people sit around and talk.

The next day is known as throne day. This is the day when the Iyawo is dressed in the colors of the *Orisha* being made, it is the only day in a year

and a week, when the Iyawo may wear a color other than white. During the early part of the day, the Iyawo wears "morning clothes", a simple set of clothes in the color of the *Orisha*. During the afternoon, the Iyawo is changed to her "Throne Clothes". These are more elaborate, being made of rich clothes, like satin, silk or brocades (in the color of the *Orisha* being made, of course). The Iyawo also wears a crown.

There may be a bembe. It is not an required part of throne day but has become customary.

People come in and salute the throne. On the edge of the throne, there is a plate covered with a colored cloth. People leave a small contribution (usually \$1.05)²⁷. Priests are expected to contribute more.

If there is no Bembe, then people sit around and talk. If there is a Bembe, people sit around and talk after it is over. Of course, there is a meal since people are fed at every major ceremony. This meal partially consists of meat from the animals sacrificed on the previous day.

Before the meal, the Iyawo has been changed to a set of white clothes.

²⁷ \$1.05 is a ritual amount considered to be equivalent to 20,000 cowries, the original Yoruba money. Fees are multiples of \$1.05

The third day is known as the day of the Ita.²⁸ There are fewer people present on this day. Only priests may attend an Ita. Moreover, the Ita is usually held on a Monday.²⁹ There will be a small kitchen crew to feed the priests but even so, most people will be at work.

The fourth day is usually quiet. People rest. Days four, five and six, people will come to visit the Iyawo, usually in the evening. Although the Iyawo is never left alone, these days are quieter than the first three days.

The seventh day is called Market Day. The Iyawo is dressed in street clothes and taken to a market by her Ojubona. When they return from the Market, the throne will have been taken down. While at the market, they will buy fruit for the *Orisha*. This *Orisha* are put on an estera and surrounded by fruit. People come by to salute and are given some of the fruit to take home with them. When this is over, the Ojubona takes the Iyawo home.

The Three Month Ebo

The three month ebo is a sacrifice to the Iyawo's ocha. I consider it a priesthood career ceremony because, the priest who hasn't done it does not have certain priesthood privileges. For example, they may not enter the ocha room when the sheet is down. They cannot be saluted nor may they

28 An Ita is an unusually through reading given to a Iyawo to guide her in life.

29 There is no prescribed day for an initiation but they usually happen on Saturdays since most people work during the week and are free on the weekends. Sunday would be the Throne Day and Monday would be Ita day. Most people will be at work on Monday.

may not divine for people. So for all practical purposes, it seems that performing the three-month ebo gives the priest the right to practice as a priest.

I suppose the three month ebo is called that because it is supposed to be done at three months after making ocha, but I have not seen one done so soon. Some priests who have ended their year of initiation have not done the three month ebo. Some have postponed it for several years.

The three month ebo consists of the sacrifice of a four-legged animal to *Elegba* and birds to the other *Orisha*. The Iyawo may give small gifts to all the people, priests and non-priests who help with performing the ceremony itself, or help make it possible in some way, i.e. go get the animals or help in the kitchen.

Receiving the Drums

This is a ceremony which I have not observed. However, I am told that this is one of the three occasions when a priest wears her throne clothes; throne day, receiving the drums and burial. I have not been able to get clear information about this ceremony.

The Itutu

This is a ceremony performed before the funeral of a priest. Only priests attend. The priest's Ocha is disposed of. Divination is done and the *Orisha* may decide to accompany the priest or stay in the world. If they decide to accompany the priest they are broken and disposed of. If they decide to stay

in the world, they are asked with whom they wish to stay and are given to that person.

The godchildren of the priest observe a period of mourning of three months. During this period of mourning, if they are priests, they do not function as such. Priests, likewise observe a period of mourning of three months for their godchildren.

Cyclical Religious Ceremonies

This category of ceremonies occurs each year in a House's calendar. With the exception of the Bembe, they are sure to occur at least once a year. In some years, there may be no Bembe in a house and in others, there may be several.

The Reading of The Year

The Reading of the Year occurs each year on January 1 (or as near to that date as possible). On January 1, the whole house comes together and the year is read. Each *Orisha* in turn is asked to prognosticate for the coming year. The signs that fall are interpreted. Stories are told to illustrate the points made. Priests other than the one doing the reading may be asked to contribute their interpretations of the oduns. During this reading, any sacrifices that should be made are indicated.

After the last *Orisha* is read, the *Orisha* to rule the coming year is determined. There are usually two, the *Orisha* ruling the year and the backup.

Then the color and the design of the flag to be put up for the year is determined.

Each individual is expected to arrange for an individual reading of the year to give her guidance for the year. The timing of these, of course, varies, but they should be done as soon as the schedule of the individual's god-parent allows.

Of course, as soon as the reading is over people eat. The food this time is usually pot luck.

Orisha Feast Days

Each of the *Orisha* has a day in the year known as her feast day. These days can be correlated to the Catholic saint with they are syncretized. A list of such days is provided in the appendix.

On these days, priests of the particular *Orisha* will provide that *Orisha* with her favorite sweets, appropriate fruit, a cloth in the appropriate color and two candles.

The *Orisha* is put on the estera, on a seat, covered with the cloth and surrounded with the fruit and sweets.

People come by to salute the *Orisha*. As they salute they leave a contribution. While they are saluting they can either talk to the *Orisha* or the Priest of the *Orisha* may talk to the *Orisha* for them. *Orisha* feast days may (but usually do not) include a Bembe.

People come to salute, stay for the meal and talk to one another.

Ocha Birthdays

On the anniversary of her date of initiation, a priest celebrates her Ocha Birthday. It is a larger occasion than an *Orisha* Feast day which it closely resembles because instead of one *Orisha*, all the *Orisha*, the priest has must be provided with cloths, sweets and fruits.

The pattern of an *Orisha* feast day is followed but there are additional practices. The priest must do a sacrifice to her head. Moreover, on this day, her Ojubona, throws *obi* to each of the priest's *Orisha* and asks them if they are pleased with the offerings and with the priest.

Ocha birthdays may include a Bembe, but usually do not.

And, of course, there is food for all present.

The Bembe

The Bembe is a ceremony whose express purpose is to call down the *Orisha* so that they can interact with the worshippers and give them advice on their problems.

Bembes are performed when a particular *Orisha* calls for one as a sacrifice or when someone is initiated into the priesthood, although as I indicated above Bembes are not required at Ochas.

The *Orisha* for whom the Bembe is setup on the night before the Bembe.

Professional drummers are hired to play. The costs of a Bembe depend on the instruments played. The most traditional Bembe is played with a set of three bata drums. A bata drum looks like a truncated cone with rope wrappings. They are played in sets of three. Intermediate in cost is one conga

drum. Least expensive is a set of shekere. A shekere is a bottle-shaped calabash with a netting of beads on the outside. It is played by hitting it on the bottom. Along with the drummers comes a singer.

The drummers must be supplied with a bottle of rum and a jar of honey. This is usually for the singer's throat. A singer may sing for four or five hours or even longer.

Bembes are divided into two parts. In the first part, called the oro, the rhythms of the *Orisha* are played or songs to the *Orisha* are sung in a particular order. No one dances. The drummers face the *Orisha* while they are playing the *Oro*. Then there is a small break. After the break, the second part of the Bembe is played. Aside from the second part beginning with songs to the warriors, there is no decipherable order to the songs played.

There is a plate in front of the drums. When the drummers play to the *Orisha* of a person's head, that person puts a dollar in the plate. Priests of that *Orisha* come forward and dance before the drums. Alejo usually dance behind the priests.

During the Bembe, some priests are possessed. After the possession is complete, the *Orisha* is led away and comes back dressed in her appropriate colors. The *Orisha* salutes all the priests present who have more seniority than her omo *Orisha*. After the *Orisha* salutes all the priests senior to her omo *Orisha*, those junior to the omo *Orisha* and Alejo salute the *Orisha*. During this time, the *Orisha* may give advice to those present or answer questions that they have.

After a while, the *Orisha* indicates that she wants to leave and is taken away. Shortly thereafter, the priest reappears in an unpossessed state.

Meanwhile, the drummer still play and other priests may be possessed. The same practices are followed. This continues throughout the course of the Bembe.

When the person who gives the Bembe or someone senior to that person decides that it is time for the Bembe to end, a bucket of water is brought and placed in front of the drums. A song is played to *Elegba*. A priest, usually a priest of *Yemonja*, but it could be a priest of *Oshun*, picks up the bucket, sprinkles some of the water in the air and takes the bucket out of the house. The water is thrown into the street. Meanwhile the drummers are playing to *Olokun* (the only time during the Bembe that this *Orisha* is played to).

When the priest who took the bucket out comes back in, she turns it upside down and puts it on the floor. At the moment it hits the floor, the last note on the drums is played.

Everyone presents turns around three times to the right and then three times to the left and the Bembe is over.

Everyone is then served food. The order of serving food is drummers first, priests second and then Alejo.

Summary

The Yoruba Religious System is a rich and complex one. It has a conceptual system that is based on analogous logic rather than Aristotelian logic.

The model of the cosmos is that of a closed calabash divided into four parts, upper and lower parts being heaven and earth and right and left parts being the visible and the invisible. Human beings stand at the intersection of these divisions and are themselves of composite character.

The conceptual system consists of the doctrines of destiny and predestination; and the pantheon. The ritual system consists of the practices of divination, sacrifice and a number of ceremonies.

Such a religion and the obligations it requires necessitates a social structure to carry them out. In Chapter 3, I will discuss the social structure of the Religion in New York.

CHAPTER 3

The Social Structure Of The Religion In New York

The House of Ocha¹

The Religion is organized into structures of ritual kinship called *Houses*. The word *House* describes a group of people, the relationship between them and lines of descent of Orisha.² A *House* of Ocha is called by the name of the priest who is its head, i.e. Peter's *House*. Members of the house are the *godchildren* of the priest who heads it. *Godchildren* are *godbrothers* and *godsisters* to each other. Other terms modeled on kin

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- 1 Shortened form of Orisha. Name given to the physical symbols of the Orisha, that is the covered dishes in which they are kept. Also a synonym for the Religion.
 - 2 Orisha are deities of the Yoruba Religion who are analogous to the saints of the Catholic Church.

relationships are also employed. There are *grandparents in ocha*; *aunts and uncles in ocha*; and *nieces and nephews in ocha*, etc.

Of these relationships, the most important is that between godparent and godchild. It is the key relationship in the *House of Ocha*. (See the section on seniority below.)

This accords with Gregory's observations:

The relationship between godparent and godchild lies at the core of the social organization of Santeria. Symbolically, it connotes the bonds existing between parents and children, the living and their ancestors, and the Orisha and mankind. Practitioners of Santeria conceive this relationship to be reciprocal. (Gregory, 1986:67)

Godparents and godchildren have complementary responsibilities. The godparent is responsible for the godchild's growth in the religion. S/he oversees all necessary divinations, sacrifices and initiations for the godchild. S/he has the duty to instruct the godchild in religious knowledge, ritual and duties. S/he must give the godchild aid up to and including taking her into her home and providing a funeral and burial if the blood family is not capable of doing so. Reciprocally, the godchild is expected to assist the godparent in rituals or do work in the godparent's home that is connected with religious activities. This would include cooking and cleaning in preparation for a religious ceremony. Moreover if the godparent is per-

forming an important ritual, the godchild is expected to attend. Twice a year, on the Orisha day of the godparent and on the anniversary of the godparent's initiation into the religion, the godchild is expected to bring a ritual gift called an ashadi. This consists of two candles, a coconut³ and \$1.05.⁴

It must be emphasized that the term *House* refers to a group of people and not a physical location. A *House* of Ocha does not have physical space separate from the homes of the priests. Each home of a priest is a shrine, but there may be many priests in a *House*. The houses or apartments of priests contain shrines of the Orisha but do not appear to be religious centers upon casual observation. This characteristic makes unobtrusive methods such as mapping from the street or looking up houses of worship in the telephone book impossible.

The home of a priest is also a ceremonial center in which religious rituals and/or ceremonies are held. Although a *House* may have many possible places of worship the main one will be the home of the head of the *House*.

3 Two coconuts if the godchild has been initiated into the priesthood

4 An amount equal to the number associated with one's Orisha multiplied by \$1.05 - for example, a priest of Obatala would bring \$8.40).

The Internal Structure of A House.

There are different categories of membership in a *House* based on criteria of the Religion's system of initiation and seniority within two crucial stages of initiation. Cross-cutting these categories of membership is the factor of intensity of involvement. In this section I will discuss the principle of seniority, the system of initiation and of intensity of involvement.

The System of Initiations

In Peter's house, before a person has undergone any initiation at all, s/he may still be considered a godchild of the head of the *House*, yet the Religion has no special name for this category of member. I call this category of person a *client*.⁵ Brandon asserts that a person does not become a godchild until he or she receives *ilekis*.⁶ Those who have undergone the first initiation of receiving *ilekis* are called *alejo*.⁷ Receiving *ilekis* is viewed as extending the protection of the godparent's Ocha to the *alejo*.

5 Brandon 1983 and Gonzalez-Whippler 1973, 1982 and 1989 use the term Abirinkulu which I have never heard used.

6 Bead necklaces made in the color schemes appropriate to the various Orisha

7 Stranger-resident-in-the *House* (Yoruba)

At the alejo stage, the person acquires a second godparent called an *Ojubona*.⁸

The next stage in the initiation career is **receiving warriors**. Little change besides the possession of warriors can be marked at this stage. The person does not cease to be an alejo and has no special title.

The crucial stage is **initiation into the priesthood** which marks the final category of membership in a *House*. Before emerging as a full-fledged priest, the initiate (who is called a *Iyawo*⁹) must undergo an initiation period of a year and a week. During this period the *Iyawo* occupies a special liminal status - not yet a priest but no longer an alejo. After the *Iyawo* year is over, the *Iyawo* becomes a priest - the youngest one in the seniority hierarchy of the *House*. The initiate also acquires an *Ojubona*, different from the *Ojubona* at the ileki stage. This person may or may not belong to the *House* of the godparent. The *Ojubona* assumes the responsibilities of the godparent if the godparent dies or is incapacitated in some way.

The role of *Ojubona* is a means of forming bonds within a *House* or between *Houses*.

As time goes on a priest may or may not acquire godchildren and found a *House* of his or her own.

8 Literally Eyes of the Road (witness).

9 Junior wife (Yoruba) - Initiation is seen as marriage to the Orisha.

Seniority

The principle of ranking in the *Ocha Community* depends upon whether one has received ilekis or has *made Ocha*.¹⁰ The group of alejos and the group of priests are ranked by seniority. An alejo may have been in the *House* longer than a priest but the rank of priest supersedes that of alejo. An alejo who makes ocha becomes the youngest in the priestly hierarchy no matter how long s/he has been associated with the *House*.

This is illustrated by the practice of saluting.¹¹ Saluting is an involved procedure with an etiquette all its own. It differs according to whether the person has a male or female Orisha. If the Orisha of the person is male, the person prostrates him or herself before the elder priest. If the Orisha of the person is female, the person lies down on one side and switches to the other. The priest says: "May the cult of (the name of the Orisha of the person saluting) continue. Arise" in Lukumi. The two then cross their arms over their chests and touch opposite shoulders. (That is right shoulder to left shoulder and then left shoulder to right shoulder.) The younger salutes, the elder raises.

All alejo salute priests, junior priests salute senior priests. The rules of saluting are that one salutes one's godparent first, the relative age of one's godparent does not matter. If a person's godparent is the youngest priest in

10 Been initiated into the priesthood

11 The act of greeting a priest senior by the person who initiates the salute.

the *House*, s/he is still saluted before the head of the *House*, one's Ojubona is second and then the rest of the priests in order of seniority.

An alejo or junior priest salutes a senior priest when entering or leaving the senior priest's home or when s/he is encountered in a ritual setting. No one salutes out of doors.

The act of saluting keeps the hierarchy of seniority constantly before the attention of the practitioners of the religion and constantly reinforces it.

Intensity of Involvement

As a rule of thumb, priests tend to be more intensely involved in the activities of a *House* than non-priests. However, this need not be true. Even those without *ilekis* may be more intensely involved, as measured by participating in *House* activities, than some priests. In any *House*, there will be a core of those who are intensely involved and a fringe of those less intensely involved. This fringe can melt into the networks of the members of the *House* and into the general community.

There are several reasons for different degrees of intensity of involvement.

Members of a *House* may be widely scattered geographically. Members of Peter's house live in such varied places as Las Vegas, Boston, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia and Miami. Geographical distance is sufficient to lower involvement in *House* activities.

Another factor would be the reason for which one received *ilekis*. Often, when a priest is initiated, it is divined that members of his or her blood family should receive *ilekis* for their protection. Such people may assent to

the ceremony without anyone expecting any involvement or commitment to the *House* from them. Although they may be counted among a priest's godchildren, their involvement is minimal.

A third factor in intensity of involvement would be a person's interest in the Religion, itself. Some people have a fascination with the ritual of the religion and seek to learn it for its own sake.

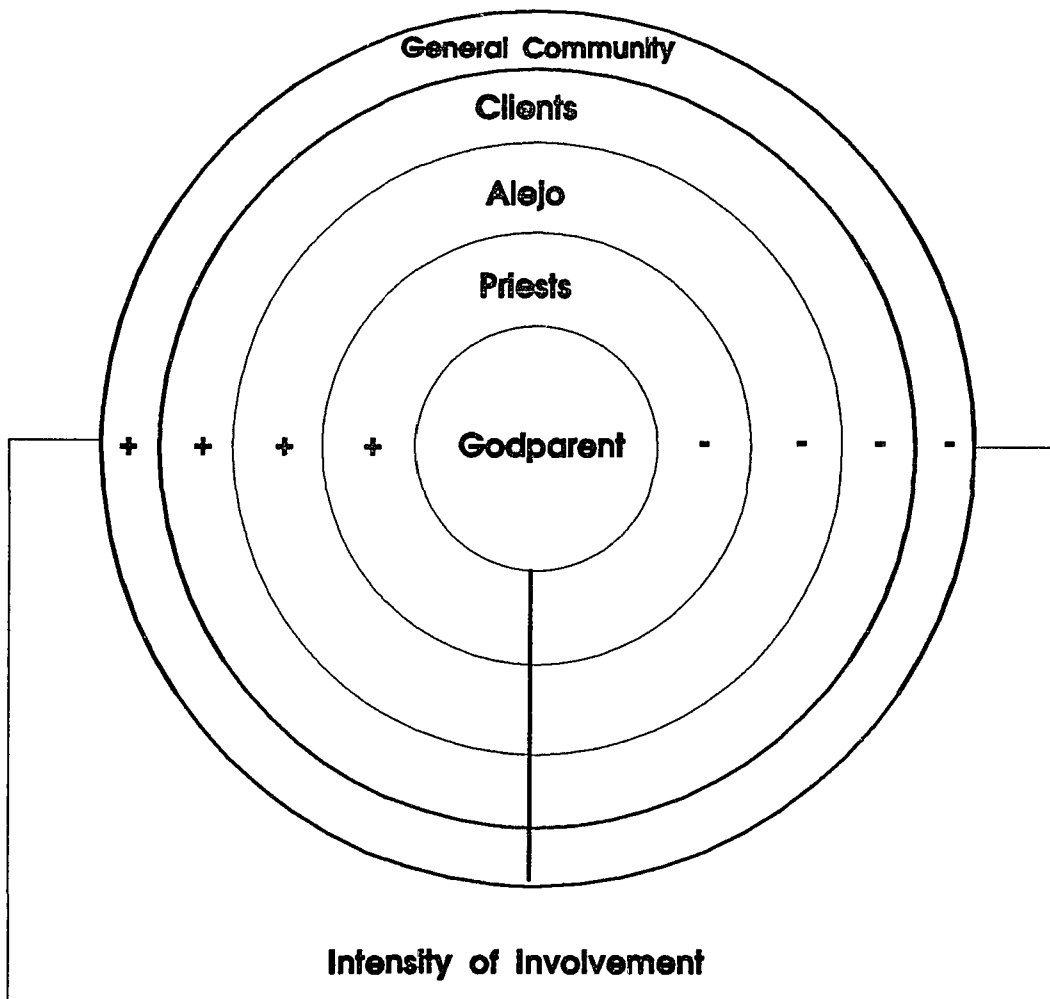
The factor of personal closeness to the head of the *House* will also affect intensity of involvement. Closeness can be caused by previous friendship or interest in the religion. Godparents value those of their godchildren who are most willing to help them since performing the rituals of the Religion requires many hands to help with the myriad details and the work that exceeds the capabilities of any one person. Moreover, they often express anger at those godchildren who they deem to shirk their responsibilities. Such godchildren often find that their rituals needs receive low priority from their godparents.

The core of a *House* will be those who for any reason have the greatest intensity of involvement.

A *House* then is a group of people who see themselves bound by kinship ties at different stages of initiation and with different intensities of involvement.

The above mentioned relationships are shown schematically in the diagram on the following page. A *House* can be seen as rings of different levels of membership and different degrees of intensity of involvement. Membership is only clearly defined at the level of the *Alejo*, however there

Categories of Membership



may be some people without *ilekis* who participate more than do some priests who theoretically are closer to the center of the *House*.

Peter's and Katherine's House

The House that I chose to study is *Peter and Katherine's House*. It is a central *House* in New York's Black Community, both historically and in influence. It is a large one which has initiated forty-five priests and has attached to it, well over three hundred people - alejo and clients.

As Gregory points out:

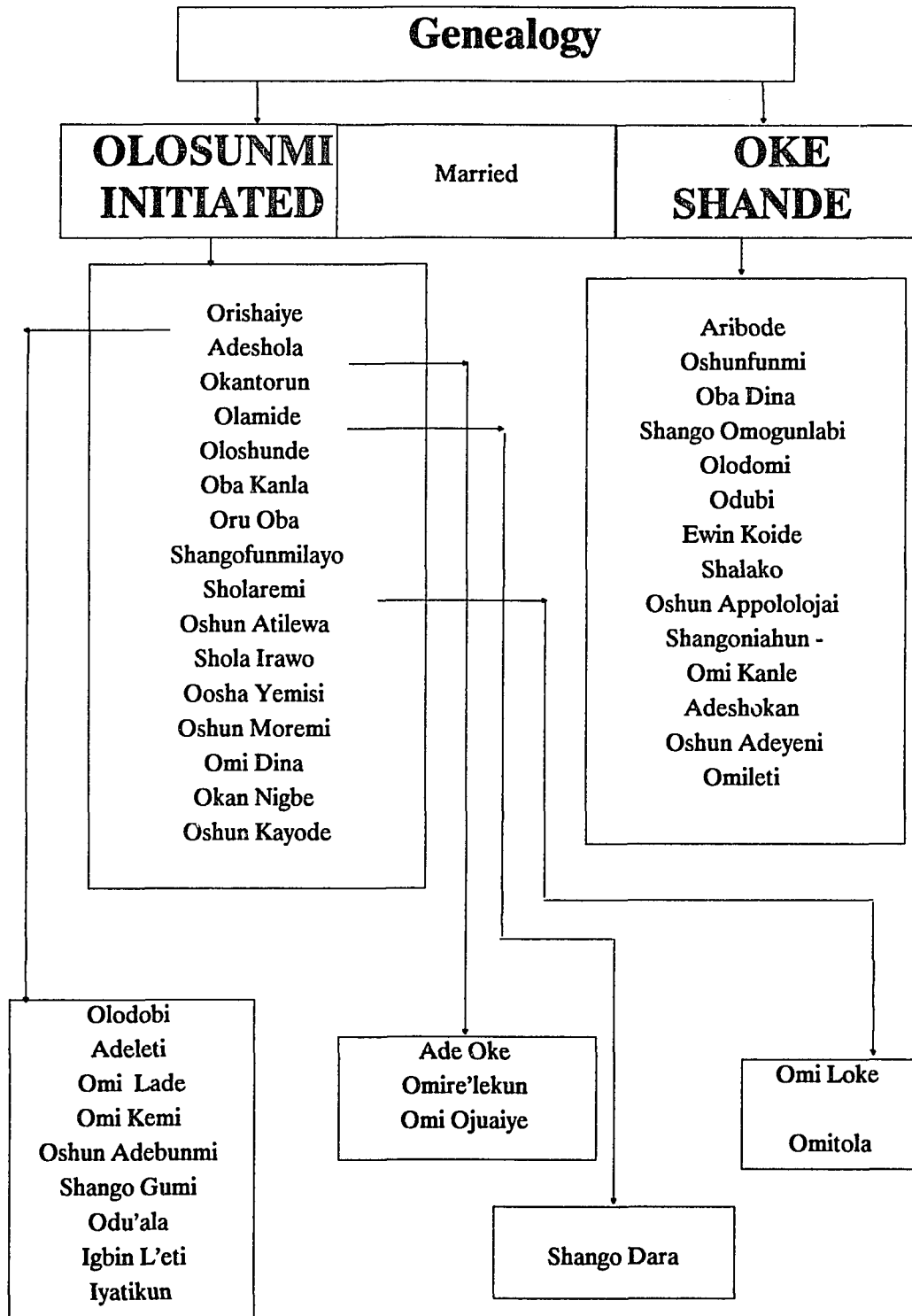
Over time the multi-generational structure of a House of Ocha begins to resemble a segmentary lineage system which includes all practitioners, both living and dead who can be traced back to the babalocha or iyalocha who founded the House. (Gregory 1986:67)

On the following page is a diagram of the relationships among priests in the *House* in which I did participant observation.

As can be seen from the diagram, this House has a number of internal divisions. From the outside, this *House* is perceived as a single entity, from the inside both as a double *House* (*Peter and Katherine's House*) and since each priest who has initiated others can be seen as a head of a *House*, it can also be viewed as six *Houses*.

To avoid unnecessary complexity, the diagram does not show those members who have undergone the *ileki* ceremony. Peter estimates that he has over two hundred godchildren with *ilekis*.¹² Nineteen of the priests

¹² That is undergone the *ileki* ceremony



shown in the diagram have godchildren who have *ilekis*. Thirteen of that nineteen have not yet initiated a godchild into the priesthood, yet those who have received *ilekis* may undergo the further initiation into the priesthood. There is then the potential for thirteen more *Houses* in this group. This potential will more than likely manifest itself over the course of the years. Moreover, those priests who do not have godchildren who have undergone the *ileki* ceremony are likely to acquire some in the future - for some the very near future since people without *ilekis* are associated with them.

The term *House* then is used ambiguously. Brandon gives an example of this ambiguity in his dissertation:

I once heard a santero¹³ claim that he had one hundred and forty houses but priests outside his fundamento¹⁴ spoke of all one hundred and forty of them as being that santero's casa.¹⁵ Viewed from the inside as a line of descent from himself as special ancestor through a series of links marked by initiation into the priesthood this entire grouping of priests, priestesses and aleyos comprised one hundred and forty different houses. Viewed from the outside, but still in relationship to the same priest, these one hundred and forty casas were considered to constitute a single one. What is more, the larger casa is still different from the fundamento since it does not include the casas of the priest's religious brothers and sisters.

13 Literally Saint Maker, priest of the Religion - used in the Latin communities

14 A relationship among priests and priestesses that categorizes them among kinship lines and also a group of houses which can be traced to a specific founding priest or priestess - Latin usage. Black Americans speak of this relationship as a line or sometimes as a fundamental *House*.

15 *House* (Spanish)

The term casa then is structurally relative and denotes different groups of people depending on whether one is viewing it from within or outside a particular line of descent and according to how far back in that line of descent one goes. (Brandon 1983:501-2)

Peter is part of the second generation of priests that descend from Omi Duro, the founding Cuban (and still living) ancestor of his *House*. From the inside, the *House of Omi Duro* consists of well over two hundred *Houses* but the links between the separate *Houses* are tenuous since it is widely spread geographically. Omi Duro started her career as a godparent in New York, moved to Las Vegas and now resides in California. In each place, she initiated a number of priests.

Omi Duro initiated Shango Gumi in July of 1961 in New York. Shango Gumi was the first Black American to be initiated in the United States. Subsequently, she initiated twenty-one priests, five of whom initiated other priests and one of whom died. Of the five who initiated other priests, two initiated one each, two initiated three each and Peter initiated sixteen.

Rate of Growth

Peter was initiated in 1973 and initiated his first godchild in 1976. Katherine was initiated in 1974 and initiated her first godchild in 1977. Peter's *House* is fourteen years old at this date¹⁶ and Katherine's is thirteen.

Peter's goddaughter, Dawn initiated her first godchild in 1978 when she had been initiated two years while his godsister Omi Funke, initiated her

first godchild in 1989 when she had been initiated for sixteen years. The time of first initiation in a priest's career can be seen to vary greatly on the other hand, some priests never initiate others.

Houses of Ocha then grow at various rates - some slowly and some rapidly. In comparison with other kinds of religious organizations, however, the rate of growth is very slow. Since no effort is made to evangelize, growth comes only through the personal networks of priests and their godchildren. The larger, the initial network of a priest, the more quickly (and earlier) his or her *House* is likely to grow.

Relationships Between Houses

Relationships between *Houses* can be formed in a number of ways. *Subhouses* of a line have built-in relationships. For examples, *Houses* whose heads are godsiblings will interact closely with each other. Indeed, seen from the outside, they actually constitute **one House**. Marriages between priests of different *Houses* provide another vehicle by which *Houses* generate relationships with each other. A major form of linkage is the role of the *Ojubona* (the second godparent). A newly emerging phenomenon is the existence of Orisha Societies. In this section, I will discuss the factors of marriage between priests, the role of the *Ojubona* and the Orisha Societies as components in the relationships between *Houses*.

Marriage Between Priests

A person's spouse can hinder or foster the development of a *House*. Peter and Katherine who are heads of two different *Houses* are married to

each other. Since both are deeply involved in the practice of the religion their marriage fosters the development of their respective *Houses*. Most Black Americans work in addition to engaging in the activities of their priesthood. This means that their families can get less of their time which has the likely effect of causing conflict between spouses and within the blood family. Indeed some priests who have spouses who are not involved in the religion may avoid the godparent role for this reason.

To my knowledge, there are at least four "double" *Houses* in which the heads are married to each other. Two of them are fairly large. Other large houses are headed by unmarried people.

Although I lack the space to discuss it here, the cross-cutting ties of *Ocha family* and *blood family* bears investigation in its role in the *Ocha Community* in New York.

The Ojubona Role

The *Ojubona* role can be used to combine *Houses* into one functioning whole. The *Ojubona* role also serves to tie *Houses* together. For example, prior to being initiated himself, Peter married Katherine. He was initiated in 1973 by Shango Gumi and Katherine was initiated in 1974 by Alabumi. Alabumi is Cuban so that Katherine is among the first generation of Black American priests descended from him.

Peter and Katherine then belong to separate *Houses*. However, since she serves as *Ojubona* for five of his godchildren, this ties their *Houses* closely together. This bond is strengthened by the fact that Orishaiye, Peter's oldest goddaughter serves as *Ojubona* for four of Katherine's god-

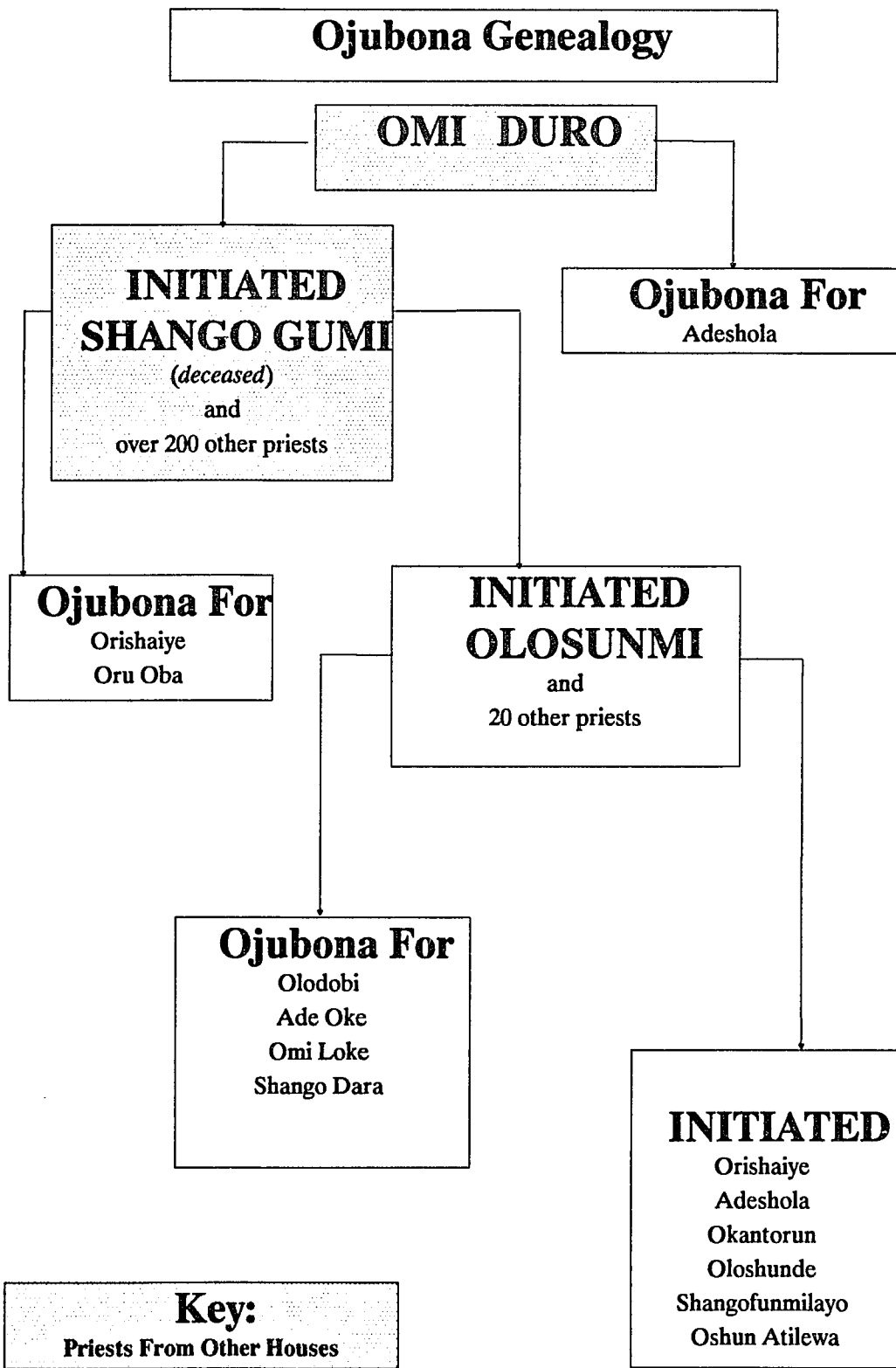
children. Another of Peter's goddaughters serves as *Ojubona* for two of Katherine's godchildren. Another two of Peter's goddaughters each serves as *Ojubona* for one of Katherine's godchildren, while one of his godsons serves as *Ojubona* for one of Katherine's godsons. Seven of Katherine's godchildren then have *Ojubonas* who are Peter's godchildren.

Peter and Katherine, and two of Peter's godchildren have *Ojuboned* for people in five other Houses. Peter's godmother has *Ojuboned* for two of his godchildren and his *grandmother in Ocha* for one. Katherine's godfather *Ojuboned* for her eldest godchild and her godsister for another godchild.

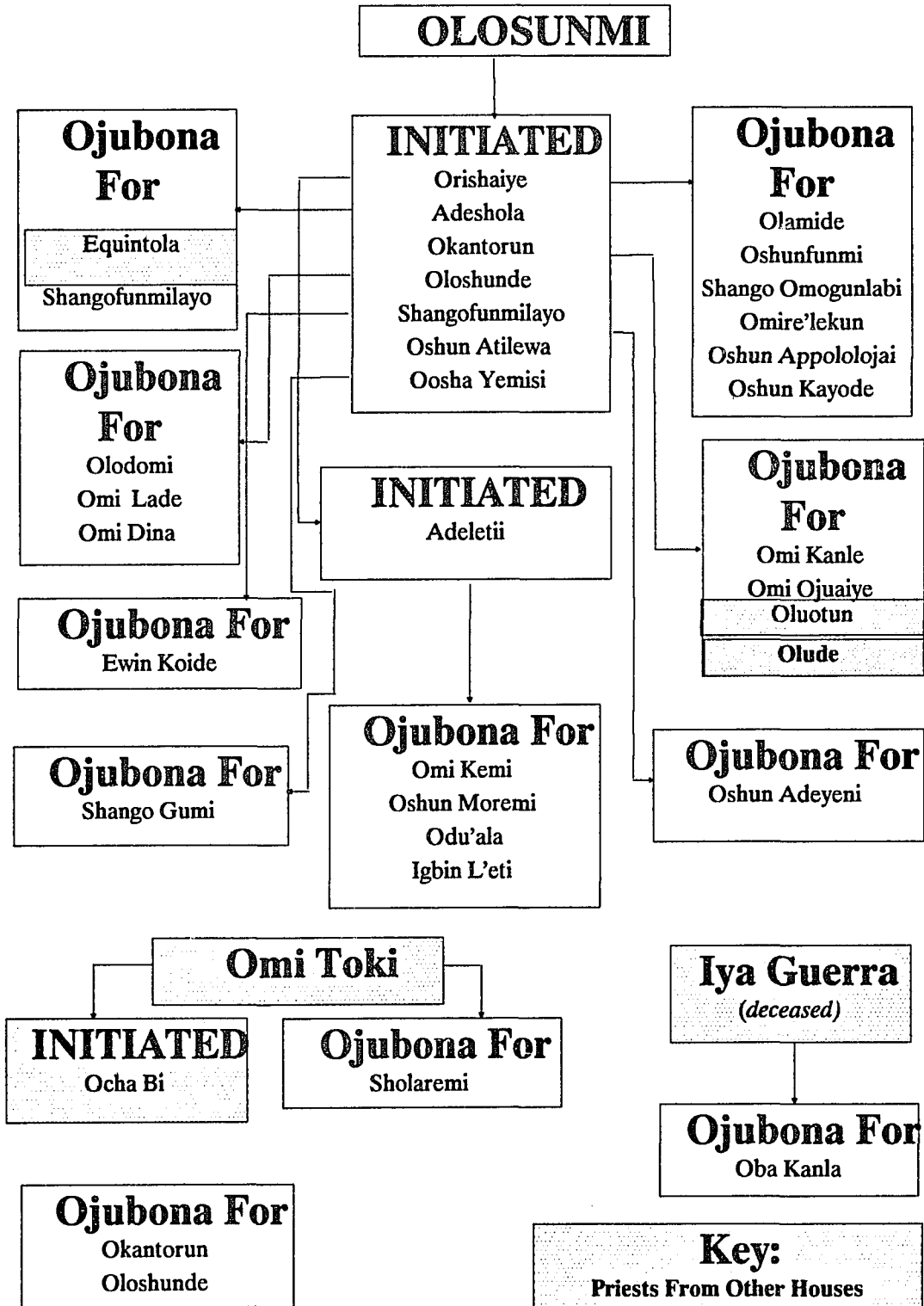
Godparents usually serve as *Ojubona* for a godchild's first priest initiated and the *Ojubona* of that godchild serves as *Ojubona* for the second priest initiated unless other circumstances prohibit. In Peter's House, his second godchild had as Orisha of the Head¹⁷ a child of whom his own *Ojubona* was prohibited from initiating. For that reason, he also could not serve as *Ojubona* to Peter's second godchild. Peter's *Ojubona's* godmother who was Peter's *grandmother in Ocha* then performed the function he could not.¹⁸ By the time Katherine initiated her second godchild, her own *Ojubona* had died.

17 A person is considered to have a main Orisha called the Orisha of the Head

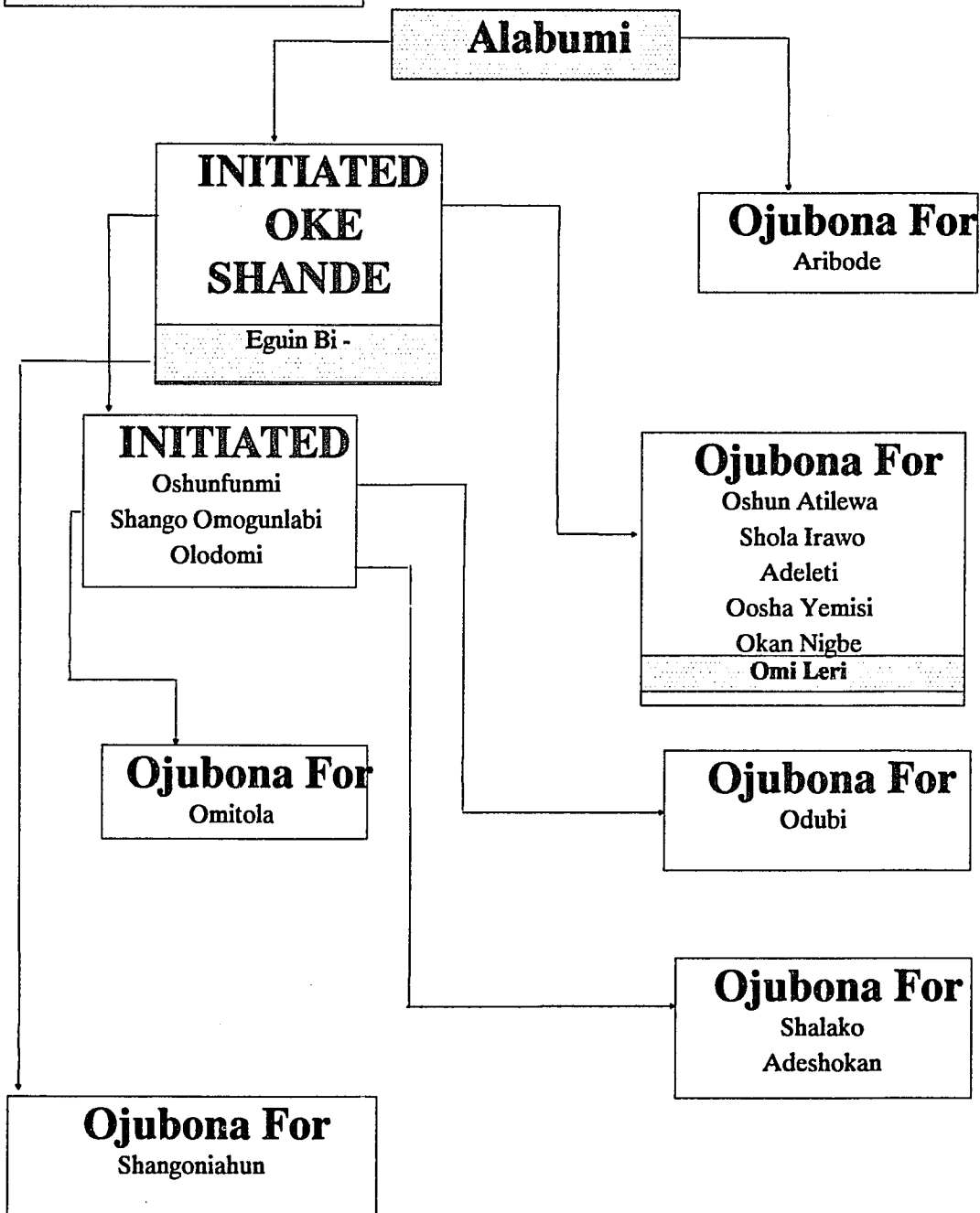
18 If a godchild cannot perform a function that by ritual rules, s/he is prohibited from performing, a godparent is expected to perform it. N.B. Note that in this case, ritual rules conflicted.



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Key:
Priests From Other Houses

As can also be noted from the diagram, three people who do not come from either Peter's or Katherine's line have ojuboned for four of Peter's godchildren. Two of these Ojubonas come from one line and the third comes from another line.

Orisha Societies

A phenomenon that is less than four years old is the *Orisha Societies* or *Egbe Orisha*. Although not all members of the *Orisha Societies* are Black, some few are white; the *Orisha Societies* are primarily a phenomenon of the Black Ocha Community.

To my knowledge there are five *Orisha Societies*; *Egbe Omo Obatala*, *Egbe Omo Yemonja*, *Egbe Omo Oshun* and *Egbe Omo Oya*.¹⁹ The membership of the *Orisha Societies* are drawn from the fully initiated priests from the various *Houses*. Not all of the membership, however, is drawn from the Black *Houses*. Some of the members have been initiated into primarily Cuban or multi-ethnic *Houses*. The *Egbes* then form another means by which members of different *Houses* can interact.

¹⁹ The Society of the Children Of Obatala, The Society of the Children of Yemonja, The Society of The Children of Oshun and The Society of The Children of Oya.

Since membership and meetings are closed to all but fully initiated priests of a particular *Orisha* little is known about their internal functioning. However, they do have functions to which the entire *Ocha* Community is invited. Since 1988, *The Egbe Omo Yemonja* has held an annual festival at the beach on the Sunday after Yemonja's Day.²⁰ It consists of a Bembe²¹ in honor of Yemonja.²² *The Egbe Omo Yemonja* has also given a Bembe for Oshun. *The Egbe Omo Obatala* has had two Bembes, one for *Obatala* and one for *Elegba*. Also the *Egbe Omo Oshun* has held a picnic and a dance.

These occasions provide a means by which all the members of the *Ocha* Community can come into contact.

Casa Branca

Because the focus of my investigation is Peter's and Katherine's *House*, I have not investigated other *Houses* except as members of those *Houses* interacted with Peter's and Katherine's *House*. However the range of interaction between different *Houses* is actually international in scope.

Dawn, Peter's eldest godchild has formed a relationship with Casa Branca, the Terreiro considered to be the oldest in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil. (See appendix). She and several other priests, some from different

20 September 7th

21 Drumming and chanting to the *Orisha* in a fixed order

22 The *Orisha* of Motherhood whose physical manifestation is the ocean

houses or from the *Egbe Omo Obatala* visit Casa Branca for the ceremony that opens their liturgical year, The *Aguas de Oxala*²³ each August beginning in 1987.

Casa Branca, of course, does not come out of a Cuban formulation of the Religion. However this is another example of relationships between *Houses*.

Ethnic Variations In Ocha Houses

All *Houses* in the United States have Cuban roots. Therefore if one were to trace each line back far enough, you would eventually come to a small number of *Houses* in Cuba - possibly even one. According to Brandon:

In fact one Black priest claimed that...all the casas in Cuba are descended from only three original Santeria casas. In pursuing this line of questioning I have been able to find what appears to be one of these original houses. This is Casa Funche in Marianhao in Cuba. (Brandon, 1983:502)

In my own investigations, I have been able to determine that the lines from which most Black American priests come is Ofun Che in Regla, across from Havana. (Richard Jordan, personal communication 2/17/91). Most Black priests are descended either from Omi Duro or Osa Unko - both of which can be traced back to Ofun Che.

Ocha *Houses* in New York can be multi-ethnic, Cuban, Puerto Rican or Black (Gregory, 1986 and Brandon, 1983). According to Gregory:

23 The Waters of Obatala

Houses of Ocha in New York City vary considerably with respect to their ethnic composition, ritual practices and social organization. Some houses are composed entirely of Black Americans or Puerto Ricans, while others remain exclusively Cuban. Still others are multi-ethnic. Some Puerto Rican Houses have a reputation of being heavily involved in European Spiritism and "revisionist" with regard to orthodox Afro-cuban beliefs and practices. Black American houses, in contrast eschew both spiritist and Christian influences such as the identification of the Orisha with Catholic Saints and stress the "pure" Yoruba tradition. (p. 70).

As mentioned above, all *Houses of Ocha* in the United States have Cuban roots, yet at the same time, growth comes from the personal networks of priests. The factor of personal networks is undoubtedly one factor that generates diverse groupings in an area as heterogenous as New York. However, as time goes by, and such networks implode, concerns indigenous to them come to the fore.

These concerns have caused conflict between diverse groups.

By all accounts (Cabrera, Sandoval, Murphy, Brandon), the number of Cubans involved in the Religion in the United States is larger than in Cuba. Santeria serves as a mark of Cuban social identity.

Cubanismo is unlikely to appeal to other ethnic and racial groups. The Spanish language may be an obstacle to many African Americans.

Because of the history of religious persecution in Cuba, Cubans tend to be secretive about their religious practices. This causes conflict with Black Americans, many of whom sought the religion for an enhanced sense of *African* identity, and wish to proclaim it. Black Americans have known racial discrimination but not religious persecution.

Moreover, Catholicism is a key component of Cuban ethnic identity. Not only are Black Americans not Catholic, the very appearance of statues of saints (mostly white) is a negation of the meaning of the Religion as fostering an African identity for them.

Conversely, Cubans view the Black American desire to go back to the African Roots of the Religion as a denial of their role in transmitting it.

In summary, the social structure of the Religion in New York is one in which groups of people who describe themselves in terms fictive kinship are grouped into *Houses*. Even though all *Houses* are Cuban in origin, they may now be Cuban, Multi-ethnic, Puerto-Rican or Black. Since *Houses* grow out of the networks of priests, their concerns will be focused by the concerns of the particular network from which they grew.

Even though *Houses* are relatively autonomous, there are means by which they interact, such as being *subhouses* of the same *House*, marriage between priests, the role of the *Ojubona* and the *Orisha*. This interaction is even international in scope.

As mentioned above concerns indigenous to the networks which impede into *Houses* come to the fore. In the next chapter I shall discuss the concerns that are peculiar to Black Americans.

CHAPTER 4

The Practical Religion

The Yoruba Religion has become a growing part of the Black Community of New York and other urban centers. Over the last three decades, it has gained enough adherents to have an effect on the cultural, intellectual and artistic life of the Black Community. It has gained enough of an identity in the minds of its practitioners to differentiate it from *Santeria*. This difference is one of re-interpretations of meanings rather than a ritual difference. From my reading of the literature on *Santeria* and observation of the Yoruba Religion, I could detect no ritual difference between them. However, there is a difference in the *practical religion*. I hope to show that this difference lies in the concerns expressed by this segment of the Black Community. These concerns are Black Identity, Community Building and Effectiveness in The World.

David Laitin in his book *Hegemony and Culture: Politics and Religious Change Among The Yoruba* develops the notion of *practical religion* through his interpretation of Weber's work and Thomas Metzger's idea of culture.

According to Laitin:

...Although Weber shied away from an explicit definition of religion...his work suggests that its impact can be understood in terms of the confluence of three different levels: theological doctrine, practical religion, and the practical religion of the converted...

1. Theological Doctrine. *The substantive or theological approach toward religion focuses attention on the doctrine, in its purest and most consistent forms, of the charismatic founder of the religion...*

2. Practical Religion. *The essence of Weber's contribution was to see religion itself as a product of its times, and often of a particular class with its own social needs. The interaction between the founding doctrine and the social, political and economic conditions of the time yields what might be called "the practical religion."...*

3. the practical religion of the converted...*As the religion spreads, both in form of original doctrine and in its practical form it must interact with the cultural life of the new community ... These counterpressures will create a new sociological fact, a new practical religion different from the one from which the original doctrine emanated, and different again from the wishes of the converted peoples who try to shape the new message in their own image. One might call this new social fact the practical religion of the converted...(and) is constantly being influenced by contemporary social conditions. (pp. 24-27)*

Borrowing from the work of Thomas Metzger, Laitin sees the source of the *practical religion of the converted* as

"... not as values which are upheld but rather as points of concern which are debated." (p. 29)

Metzger demonstrates this by examining:

...the questions generally considered worth asking and the cliches implicitly accepted. (In Laitin 1986: 29)

Concentrating on points of concern enables the investigator to see the dialectical character of symbolic systems more clearly.

The practical religion of the converted is then is the result of a process social construction of reality in which the first encounters of the practical religion and the social, economic and political realities of the receiving group transform the practical religion into a new phenomenon through a process of debate and negotiation either implicitly or explicitly.

Clifford Geertz considered changes in the same religion in his book *Islam Observed* in which he discussed the differences in Islam as it is practiced in Morocco and Indonesia. He sees the changes in Islam as practiced in both these societies as resulting from their respective social structures and cultures, conceptualizing change as macro-historical at the level of the state. He focuses on the move to secularism in both societies which he suggests is a change in "how one believes rather than a development of lack of belief. Nor does he predict that secularism will progress in either society to the extent that it has done in the West. Change in Religion, then, according to Geertz produces variant secularisms.

Because of his unit of analysis, he does not pay attention to the process by which this change is produced at the micro-level. Rather he looks at significant charismatic religious leaders and heads of state.

Using categories of logic and cognition, Hajime Nakamura considered changes in Buddhism in its travels from India to Tibet to China to Japan in his book, *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India-China-Tibet-Japan*. For

each of the countries he considers, he develops a picture of its characteristic way of thinking through a linguistic and logical analysis.

He argues that:

One people does not generally adopt the ways or patterns of thinking of another culture straightaway, but rather criticizes the "alien" ways, selects from them, and modifies them in the very course of adoption....

I shall bring out the characteristics of their ways of thinking as discernible in the forms of expression of the simplest judgments and inferences... (and) examine the ways in which such characteristic ways of thinking operate in connection with actual cultural phenomena (especially the mode of acceptance of Buddhism). (Nakamura, 1964:10-11)

Nakamura does show that a single religion can be profoundly changed by its receiving society. Unfortunately, his major concept *Ways of Thinking* is an ideal type of a people's worldview producing what David Laitin would call "comparative statics". As with Geertz, his unit of analysis precludes investigation of process on the micro-level. Additionally his analysis using typifications of logic and cognition is at a higher level of abstraction that make the process rather than the outcome invisible.

The Yoruba Religion offers another instance of a religion being changed in its move from one society or social group to another. However, it is possible to observe the change in a shorter time frame and with a smaller and more concrete unit of analysis.

It is clear from observation and reading that the Yoruba Religion has different meanings in the Black and Latin communities. It is also clear that such different meanings have to be of a recent vintage since the first Black

American was not initiated until 1959. The religion has existed in the United States in the Black Community for only three decades.

One of the earliest indications that such differences exist was the different vocabulary employed by Latin and Black American practitioners. Books and dissertations use a Latin vocabulary¹ while Black Americans prefer English or Yoruba nomenclature.

Brandon notes this difference of vocabulary in his dissertation:

Still there are devotees in these cult house for whom these issues do matter.² This (is) particularly the case for Black Americans affiliated with Cuban and Puerto Rican Santeria Houses. The majority of them have come from Protestant rather than Catholic backgrounds. For them Catholicism was almost as exotic as Santeria Many of them joined the religion in search of an African cultural identity and remain uneasy with Catholic imagery, and with calling the Orisha by saint's names despite long association with the cult. The fact that most devotees use the term Orisha and saint interchangeably allows these people to call the deities by their African names all the time and still be understood which ever way the hearer wishes. Even when the person makes a distinction in his own mind between the saint and the Orisha

- 1 There is no study that deals with the Black Community only with the exception of Carl Hunt's *Oyotunji Village: The Yoruba Movement in America*. This study, however, is a historical study of what has become an offshoot of the Yoruba Religion. All published studies and dissertations discuss *Santeria* i.e., The Religion as it is practiced in the Latin Community.
- 2 The issues of identifying Catholic saints with *Orisha* and the attendant justifications for doing so

the language in which he expresses it betrays him unless he goes to great efforts to reveal the significance of this difference in social and political terms and in relationship to history. This almost never occurs publicly so the Black American devotees continue in the cult despite the fact that they may interpret its central symbols differently than other cult members. Talking to them privately revealed that most of them rejected the equation of the Orisha with the Catholic saints and were basically cultural nationalists in orientation. (Brandon, 1983 p. 186-7)

Another terminological difference is that it is Latins who call the Religion *Santeria*³ and Black Americans who call it The Yoruba Religion.⁴ Both are equally likely to call it *Ocha*. For all Orisha and most rituals, there are alternative Spanish or Lukumi names.⁵ This terminological difference does not indicate a ritual difference, however - only a dual lexicon.

Although, the ritual remains unchanged, social interpretation differs from group to group.

Weaver discusses the concerns of Black Americans and their differences from the Cuban experience in his paper: "Notes on Orisha Worship in an Urban Setting: The New York Example"

3 Emphasizing the system of initiation. *Santeria* means "the making of saints".

4 Emphasizing its African origins.

5 For a considerable number, there are English variants. These indicate different ways of conceptualization of the same thing or different emphases. For example the Spanish word *registro* is equated in usage with the English *reading*. *Registro* means to search but *reading* signifies perceiving what is there.

Black Americans further had to find ways to make Orisha worship relative to them in ways that were not real concerns for their Cuban elders. We were interested in the religion as an alternative to western christianity. Many of us had turned to Islam in this search-but others of us, wanted something that was more specifically ancestral. And having found it we were not as inclined, as had been the Cubans, to hide our religion. We staunchly refused to keep christian artifacts in our shrines as disguises and could never begin to refer to Orishas as "saints" even though we totally respected and appreciated the fact that if the Cubans had not done these things, instructed by Orisha itself we would not have authentic ashe of Orisha that is in our heads today. Our respect for those Cuban priests of the Caribbean will never cease, nor will our gratitude. (Weaver, 1986:23)

What are the concerns of Afro-Americans that produce this difference in vocabulary and emphasis? Unquestionably this difference does not occur in theological doctrine since practitioners of the Yoruba Religion emphasize ritual rather than belief.⁶

Theological Doctrine of The Yoruba Religion

There is no systematic doctrine or dogma in the Yoruba Religion. Although John Mason in his book *Black Gods - Orisha Studies in the New World* includes a section on *What Yorubas Believe*, it is his formulation alone. There is nothing in the Yoruba Religion that corresponds to an *Apostle's Creed*, for example. Nor is there a standard canon.

⁶ Indeed among African Yoruba, *Igbabo* or believer is the word for Christian. It is a pejorative. (Beier, 1975:44)

Yoruba tradition is primarily an oral tradition and it has begun to be written only recently. Consequently, systematic theology in the Yoruba Religion is in its infancy since such a theology is a product of literacy.

Indigenous theology is a recent development in the Black Ocha Community. What writing that exists in Spanish appears to be either ethnography (Cabrera 1970, 1975; Ortiz, 1973) or ritual manuals (Angarica, nd; Lachatanere, 1942 and Rogers, 1973).

The Yoruba oral tradition is embodied in its divination literature. In *Merindilogun* and *Ifa the Apatakis*⁷ present precedents that demonstrate prototypical difficulties. The process of divination allows room for individual interpretation. How exactly the *Apatakis* should be applied to different circumstances is a matter of judgement which is expected to, and in fact does, differ from priest to priest.

Determining what the *original* Yoruba Religion was like (indeed, if any such thing existed)⁸ involves the difficulties of lack of written historical sources. Each Yoruba city has its own oral history. However, it is very difficult to apply the usual historiographic methods of verification of sources to these histories. The written data that exist comes from the

7 The stories attached to each sign or odun. *Apataki* means important matter in Yoruba and Lukumi.

8 It is probable that a number of separate traditions were amalgamated during slavery to produce what is now called *The Yoruba Religion*.

anthropological literature. If you assume that the descriptions that date from the 1930's (Bascom, 1969) is a reasonable description of what Yoruba society was like before Western contact⁹ then certain systematic changes can be outlined. The very term Yoruba is a species of social projection. There was no overall society or political unit to which the term Yoruba could be applied indicating groups of peoples who had a unity in the European mind, but not in their own. The reality was a number of independent city-states and one empire, *Oyo*. The very word *Yoruba* is a Hausa word that means "cunning" which was applied only to the *Oyo* by the Hausa. The *Yorubas* identified themselves as *Ifes*, *Oyos*, *Ijeshas*, etc. If they thought of themselves collectively, they called themselves *Omo Oduduwa* or the descendants of *Oduduwa*. Slavery itself produced the first amalgam of these children of *Oduduwa* called *Anago*, *Lukumi* or *Yoruba*. Even so, some authors still question the validity of the overall term.

Lydia Cabrera for example says:

...Otros que se decian descendientes de egbas, yesa, ketu, iyebu, takua, sabalú, etc. me dictaron gran número de voces.

9 A dubious assumption but probably as close as we can come to the original

*«¿Y los Yoruba, quiénes eran? Nunca se los olmentar a mis viejos.»
Muy interesante que la misma pregunta e idéntica repuesta aparecen
repitas veces en mis fichas. Los viejos de Cuba no conocian ese
denominación.¹⁰*

Cuban elders remember their ancestral cities but not the overall term *Yoruba* which did not come into common parlance until after the end of the slave trade. Cabrera's source of data would not know this term.

However, since the groups that came to be known as Yoruba share some cultural elements and a common myth of origin,¹¹ they have a common cultural substratum which conditions of slavery emphasized.

In the Yoruba Religion an original *systematic* theology does not exist. The Corpus of *Ifa* and of *Merindilogun* is an Oral literature but to my knowledge, there is no standard canon.

According to Judith Gleason in her book *A Recitation of Ifa*:

Ifa can only be revealed through its initiates, who themselves have acquired the secret teaching bit by bit, who alone may manipulate the sacred counters. Years of study imply visiting apprenticeships with experienced Babalawo wherever these "elders who have insight into

10 ...Others are said to be descendants of Egbas, Ijesa, Ketu, Ijebu, Takua, Sabalu, etc., a large number of voices dictated to me. "And the Yoruba, who were they? Never have I heard my old ones mention them." It is very interesting that the same question and identical answer appears repeatedly in my note cards. The Cuban elders do not know this term. (Cabrera, 1980:2)

11 That is they all have myths tracing their descent to *Oduduwa*.

hidden meanings" may be found. Learning must be as continual as Ifa's wisdom is collective; only give and take can ensure its perpetuity. Each Babalawo knows some Ifa, no one can ever know enough; and the only way Ifa can total express itself is y going the rounds - here today, over there tomorrow, like the movable market. (Gleason, 1973:9)

The oral tradition, then, is contained in the collective memories of its priests. If there was an original charismatic leader, the name of such a person is lost in antiquity. In this light (in Laitin's terms) only a practical religion existed.¹²

The Original Yoruba Practical Religion

African Religion, in general and the Yoruba Religion in particular has as its major concern the maintaining of harmony between the divine, the human and the natural. As Judith Gleason puts it:

The metaphysical assumptions out of which Ifa evolved its transcendental ethical system are shared by all traditionally education Black Africans whose forefathers perceived themselves to e part of a continuum of forces both seen and unseen, of all beings including have-beens and will-again. Man is born related to certain things, to various people including the dead whose concerns become his conscience. When cracks occur along the seams of this continuum, since they affect the entire human community, they must be mended by ritual means. Medicine, based on elective affinities between plants, physiological and psychological processes, and patterns of speech, is one way of restitution. Sacrifice, particularly the ritual slaughter of animals, releases pent-up energies (carried in blood like the juice of leaves), activates beneficial vibrations in the unseen world, and heals

¹² Laitin's definition of religion is too narrow since it is tied to (1) religions with a literate tradition and (2) the idea that religions can be traced to a known charismatic leader. His definition only really fits the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition.

the gap between heaven and earth (as does rain) or between the individual sufferer and the outraged divinity or spirit that is eating him. (Gleason, 1973:16)

Since, if all divinities were not given their proper due, the order of the cosmos would be damaged, a derivative concern was that all the deities be worshipped for the good of the entire community. This goal was the material and spiritual well-being of the entire community. (Mbiti, 1970 and 1975) The conditions of slavery were to alter this concern.

The Practical Religion of Slavery

In pre-colonial Yorubaland,¹³ the *Orisha* belonged to certain lineages. At the same time, people outside the lineages might be called to worship a lineage deity so that were also *Orisha* societies. The lineages were destroyed under the condition of slavery and only the societies survived.¹⁴

An additional problem was that too few members of any cult existed in any one place to practice the full cult of any *Orisha*. Consequently throughout the Western Hemisphere, the same solution was adopted, i.e. priests of one cult were initiated into cults of other *Orisha*. (Bastide, 1971; Marks, 1974; Weaver, 1986).

At this junction, the concern of the slaves was survival of the totality of cults. This concern produced structural changes in the practice of the religion and a redefinition of community. Slave masters were outside of the community concerned.

¹³ A term coined to conveniently discuss the citizens of the various city-states which today span three countries, Southwestern Nigeria, The Republic of Benin and Togo.

¹⁴ But only by being drastically changed. The societies became systems of ritual kinship. See Chapter 3.

Traditionally in Yorubaland, a person worshipped one *Orisha*. However, it was possible for important people to worship more than one. Consequently although the practice of worshipping multiple *Orishas* was not the usual one, precedent for it existed and especially so in the role of the Yoruba king. According to Beier:

The power acquired by various cult groups or priests, could, theoretically, also be used merely for their own advancement and to the detriment of others. To prevent all these different Orisha groups and secret societies from being states with a state, the institution of the Oba¹⁵ links them all together and he must form a focal point for their activities.

Thus, the oba must be a member of every cult group in the town - even though he will have his own, personal Orisha. This traditional attitude explains why conscientious Obas in modern times attend the church and mosque services as well as traditional rituals. (Beier, 1982:15-16).

Priests in the Western Hemisphere took on the role of Yoruba kings in worshipping multiple *Orisha*, thereby assuring that all the divinities would receive their due. It is appropriate to identify priests with kings since according to Weaver:

Perhaps the most important adaptation of all was the institutionalization of an office which had been common among the Ekiti people known as Omo Ori Ite. Those who hold the title Omo Ori Ite in Ekiti tradition are the princes or sons of the royal families who are

also the kingmakers. They are the holders of other ultimate tradition of initiation. Yoruba priesthood is considered in many ways to in fact be a state of enstoolment. (Weaver, 1986:8)

...This myth,¹⁶ hotly disputed in Ife itself, is in keeping with the Yoruba practice of always acknowledging the original owner of the land after conquest. The original king is stripped of political functions, but is respected as owner of the land and high priest of land, rocks, rivers or other important local divinities. (Beier, 1982:9-10)

The concern for survival was necessary well into the 1950's and perhaps beyond since the Religion was opposed by religious and civil authorities and (in Cuba) was considered to be part of the underground. Because of the opposition of religious and political authorities, police raided the homes of priests and seized religious objects. (Ortiz, 1973).

After the Cuban Revolution, this same concern for survival provided the motive for beginning initiations in the United States. Prior too this time, Cubans who resided in the United States returned to Cuba to undergo initiation. However, with Castro's ascent to power, many Cuban *Santeros* fled Cuba, many immigrating to the United States, especially to the Greater New York Metropolitan area and Dade County, Florida.

The Practical Religion of The Converted

The Black American community was a fertile ground for the growth of the Religion. Yet it had potent concerns of its own that did not coincide

¹⁶ The myth that the Alafin (or King - literally *Alafin* means owner of the palace) of *Oyo* is the true descendant of *Oduduwa* while the *Oni* (or King) of *Ife* is merely the descendent of a priest

with those of the immigrant Cubans. Moreover the Cuban culture in its totality did not fit these Black American concerns. A prominent concern was Black Identity which was (and is) a major consideration in the Black Community.

Black Identity

In his *Sociology of Religion*, Max Weber argued that there was an elective affinity between different social strata and different types of religion. As he amply demonstrated the social strata that had the highest social prestige could determine the religious justification for social arrangements and developed a theodicy of privilege. **A theodicy could become a sociodicy.**¹⁷

I would like to suggest that a theodicy of the privileged correlates with ideas of personal worth and social identity. The monopolization of honor by one social stratum (if deemed legitimate by the others) necessarily denies it to other social strata.

A theodicy of privilege indicates a politics of identity attribution (a favorable identity for the upper stratum and a negative one for the lower strata.) For social arrangements to remain stable, all parties must accept the evaluations of the upper social stratum. When these evaluations are not acceptable there is an incipient or actual social instability.

Weber's writings consider both possibilities. When writing about India, he indicated that the Untouchables shared the negative Brahmin evaluation

¹⁷ A justification of God (theodicy) becomes a justification of privilege.

of them but he also pointed out in his essay "*Class, Status and Party*" that pariah peoples did not necessarily share the upper stratum's evaluation and developed their own variety of theodicy that emphasized their conception of their own future honor. The implications of a theodicy of disprivilege is a positive identity for the lower stratum and a negative one for the upper stratum.

The denial of the legitimacy of domination and the *moral worth* of upper strata suggest fundamental differences in the values attributed to selves of and by different strata.

Geertz notes in his discussion of the impact of colonialism upon Morocco and Indonesia that:

Beyond the economic and political the colonial confrontation was spiritual: a clash of selves. And in this part of the struggle, the colonized, not without cost and not without exception, triumphed: they remain, somewhat made over, themselves.

In this determined maintenance of social personality religion played, as might be expected a pivotal role...In a curiously ironical way, intense involvement with the West moved religious faith closer to the center of our peoples' self-definition than it had been before. (Geertz, 1968:64-65)

From being taken-for-granted, Islamic identity becomes consciously oppositional to those who claim the prestige of higher status - in these cases the French and Dutch colonizers.

Oppositional re-definitions, of social identity in the Black Community have been an urban phenomenon since large-scale Black migration to the north began. (Frazier, 1975)

During the first half of the twentieth century, among the massive changes that took place in American society was the large-scale immigration of Blacks to Northern cities. Combined with this event was the development of sects and cults outside the mainstream of the Black church. The Black church had been the Black institution par excellence. According to E. Franklin Frazier:

As the result of the elimination of Negroes from the political life of the American community, the Negro church became the arena of their political activities...For the Negro masses, in their social and moral isolation in American society, the Negro Church has been a nation within a nation. (Frazier 1974:47)

The development of cults in the urban north put into question not only mainstream Christianity but the Christianity of the Black Church. The Garvey movement had a religious component in which it attempted to redefine Christianity in Blacker terms but the cults that followed the Garvey movement were even more radical. As Frazier pointed out:

...in the new cults which flourish in the cities, Negroes have abandoned their traditional notions about God and the World and, what is of crucial importance their conceptions of themselves. (Frazier, 1974:60)

The common characteristic of all these cults was the redefinition of Black identity. A positive identity was sought outside the American stereotype.

In Father Divine's Peace Mission any form of racial discrimination was not tolerated and words relating to color were forbidden. Color blindness became a religious precept. (Harris, 1953)

The Black Jews of Harlem went further than a demand for color-blindness. They attempted to attain a sense of worth by defining God, Jesus and Jacob as Black. According to them, Black people were the original inhabitants of the earth.

The Moorish Science Temple was the most nationalistic of the cults that dated from the first half of the twentieth century.

The founder of the Moorish Science Temple, Timothy Drew (Noble Ali Drew)...became obsessed with the idea that Negroes could find salvation by discovering their national origin and refuse henceforth 'to be called Negroes, Black folk, colored people, or Ethiopians' and call themselves Asiatics or specifically Moors or Moorish Americans. (Frazier 1974)

The sixties saw also a change in Black non-mainstream religions. While earlier redefinitions of Blacks had denied the American stereotype, they had also denied the African ancestry of American Blacks. Malcolm X in the North and Martin Luther King, Jr. in the South seriously questioned the veracity of American social morality. Later in the decade, the slogan *Black is Beautiful* began to be heard. This slogan was a de-legitimation of the theodicy of the American mainstream and a legitimation of Black social identity.

African nations were gaining independence. New religious groups appeared on the scene that positively valued African origin and completely identified Blacks as of African origin. Blacks were Africans and this was something to be proud of. The two most prominent of these were the Yoruba Religion and the Akan Religion.

The Search For A Positive Black Identity

In their comparative analysis of patterns of conversion in the literature, Lofland and Sknov, 1983, following Travisano (1960) and Heirich (1977) define conversion as "a radical reorganization of identity, meaning, life and "the process of changing a sense of root reality or a conscious shift in one's sense of grounding."

Their task as they saw it was analyzing six model types of conversion so as to construct "a more precise dependent variable."¹⁸

Drawing on subjective accounts of conversion and objective analyses of these accounts, they delineate six types of conversion, intellectual, mystical, experimental, affectional, revivalist and coercive. These are differentiated by degree of social pressure, temporal duration, level of affective arousal, affective context and belief/participation sequence. Having done this, the task they set themselves is finished.

Different empirical historical and social circumstances would fit one or another of these ideal types more closely. Two of the Lofland's and Sknov's dependent variables, intellectual conversion and experimental conversion fit the data I have gathered. Intellectual conversion is a type of pre-conversion activity which occurs before social contact with the group concerned. The potential convert reads books, attends lectures or watches television shows or engages in other information gathering without social contact.

¹⁸ My interpretation of their activity is that they are engaging in *conceptual clarification*.

Intellectual conversion has minimal to non-existent social pressure, varying temporal duration, and low affectivity. Belief is prior to participation or even contact.

Experimental conversion occurs through contact with the members of a group. There is little social pressure to convert, usually a long temporal duration, a low level of affective arousal or content. The sequence is participation and then belief.

I will argue that intellectual conversion was the original mode of conversion to the Yoruba Religion and remains one of the primary processes of contemporary conversion to this group. Once the Yoruba Religion was established in the Black community, however, experimental conversion became another major avenue of conversion.

I will show that the original motive for embarking on a course that led to intellectual conversion was a search for a religious underpinning of Black identity.

In his paper, "Notes On Orisha Worship In An Urban Setting: The New York Example", Weaver speaks of a Western environment that is hostile to non-Western values and practices and systematically distorts them and the search for Afro-Americans for an alternative.

One must always be aware that all of those who grow up in America are exposed to a carefully laid out system by which the image of Black people and Africans are disparaged. The cinema houses as well as television show us nearly naked Africans playing tom toms in the jungle, and dancing around fires in the night celebrating the possibility of having a white man or woman for our dinner. And of course, our only hope of salvation is that some white man or woman will come and live

with us, to keep us out of trouble and to teach us how to survive the terrible and wild African jungle.

This is our education as regards African culture. It is no wonder then that both Black and white Americans, who usually never question the images of Africa that are normally projected, should respond with utter shock and repulsion at the idea of African religious practices in the middle of New York City! But nonetheless, inside the souls of a few of us, there remained a burning need for something we had never even seen. Some of us had gone in search of it."(Weaver, 1986, p.13)

"Going in search of it" is an empirical example of Lofland's and Sknov's intellectual conversion.

"The intellectual mode of conversion commences with individual, private investigation of possible "new grounds of being", alternative theodicies, personal fulfillment, and so forth, by reading books, watching television, attending lectures, and other impersonal or "disembodied" ways in which it is increasingly possible sans social involvement to become acquainted with alternative ideologies and ways of life."

The first initiated Black priest in the United States Nana Oseijeman Adefunmi (born Walter Eugene King) was one of those who had gone in search of an African religious expression for Black Americans. This search had taken him from Detroit, where he was born in 1928 to Cuba's Matanzas Province where on August 28, 1959 he was initiated a priest of Obatala. Accompanying him, and initiated on the same day was Christopher Oliana, a Black American of half Cuban ancestry who was initiated a priest of Aganju. (Hunt, 1970, Weaver, 1986)

Adefunmi's story is important because he was the first Black priest initiated and because he was the founder of the Yoruba Temple which was a well-known part of the Harlem scene from 1960 to 1970 and through which

many members of the Black Community first became aware of the Yoruba Religion. (Clapp, 1966, Hunt, 1970).

Adefunmi's quest for an adequate religious expression of Black identity is the first one known in the history of the Religion in the Black Community, but it is not the only case of such a search. The first initiated priest in Cleveland had come to New York after reading about the religion in the popular press and was initiated. (Interview 11/14/84).

Two members of Peter's *House* had read Gonzalez-Whippler's books (*Santeria: African Magic in Latin America* and *The Santeria Experience*), were impressed by them and found Lloyd's House by word-of-mouth and joined it. The Yoruba Theological Archministry which publishes books on the Religion constantly receives letters of inquiry about the Religion. (John Mason, personal communication 3/12/85).

An article about the 1986 trip of a priest of a Brooklyn House to Brazil was published in the July, 1987 issue of *Black Enterprise*. That priest reported receiving 60 letters, 35 of which requested information on the Religion. (Orisaiye, personal communication 4/10/88)

Adefunmi's story is a story of a search for African Identity. It is not a unique story. Only its outcome, the establishment of the Yoruba Religion in the Black Community, is unique. Intellectual conversion to the Yoruba Religion, then, seems to be an ongoing phenomena in the Black Community.

Afro-Americans have always been interested in their roots, even with the Garvey movement -- late 20's-30's. There has always been a quest for the relationship with Africa and our past. It has sort of surfaced in spiritual areas in '59-60 when Serge came back, had that

group there which preceded the temple -- the Yoruba temple." (Interview 1/9/85)

Many of my informants in describing the meaning the Yoruba Religion has for them speak of it as "their true heritage as an African people."

The Black Americans tore the sheets off the shit. It was like. "Hey, what are you talking about? I'm Black and I'm proud." But not only were they Black and proud but they were religious and proud...It was a different frame of mind. We're more informed. We know more, we're learning more. We know about Africa. And for us, in this religion that's imperative that we know that.

You know, 'cause I don't have blonde hair and fair skin I can't play that I'm not African but its a nice culture. There's no way I can play that. So I have to know about Africa. I have to know not only about Africa, I have to know Who my people are. I mean we start playing roots games. All of this is part and parcel of our involvement and what makes it possible for us to say that is that we can link ourselves to a definite past -- and that past is definitely African but now its defined very clearly to ourselves -- something that's outside of the cultural context of that country called America. We're no longer Americans in that sense. We're Americans in the sense that we are born and bred and we want all the goodies, just like everybody else. But Sunday I step away from that bullshit.

I don't have to go to Church. No, no I don't have to deal with that. (Interview 3/12/85)

In the case of the Yoruba Religion, then, the impetus for the initial and subsequent intellectual conversions as can be seen by the accounts of the quests is the search for a Black identity.

Experimental Conversions

The Yoruba Religion does not actively seek converts. There are no

missionary efforts at all. Currently most conversions occur through the personal networks of earlier converts. The members of Peter's House to whom I talked report that they first learned of him through a friend or relative.

Observation of the *House* reveals that there are four clusters of relatives; one consisting of a mother, her four children and their spouses and children (totalling 14 people); another of a group of 3 cousins, the spouse of one and the children of another (totalling 6 people); a mother and her two children and another group of two cousins. Additionally there are four groups of friends and a group who belonged to a cultural nationalist group before they joined Peter's House.

These people have been involved with the House for varying amounts of time. They are at different stages of initiation but all have a great degree of intensity of involvement. Among those who are initiated into the priesthood, the length of involvement in the Religion varied between two and fifteen years before their initiation.

No one reports any pressure to make them any more intensely involved or to obtain a higher stage of initiation. Indeed, some have reported that Peter has asked them not to refer any more people to him due to his workload as a priest and consequent inability to deal with more people.

The members of Peter's House discussed above are involved in a mode of conversion that Lofland and Sknov's call experimental conversion, where conversion takes place over long periods of time - "months or even years"

in situations of intense situational commitments. Some of them have been involved as long as fifteen years, but report no concerted or obvious pressure to made them become more involved. The second primary mode of conversion in the Yoruba Religion was thus experimental conversion.

In sum, the Yoruba Religion became established in the Black Community in the 1960's (a period of intense turbulence) through the search of some American Blacks for a religious underpinning of Black Identity. This search took the form of what Lofland and Sknov describe as intellectual conversion. The quest for an acceptable Black identity by means of intellectual conversion still brings converts to the Religion today.

The Religion spreads in the Black Community through networks of friends and relatives. New members participate in the activities of a House for long periods of time without making a commitment. Little or no pressure in put on them to do so. This is a description of Lofland and Sknov's experimental conversion.

Redefinition of The Cosmos

I have traced a change in the American Black's conception of his or her social identity. Yet this was not only a change in a group's social identity. It is a change in the conception of the nature of God. The early cults defined God or Allah as Black, thereby making a statement about their social situation.

The existence of the Religion¹⁹ provided an acceptable Black Identity, yet *Santeria* (as opposed to The Yoruba Religion) was formed within the matrix of Cuban society. Black Americans had a very different history and different interests. *Santeria*, as taught jarred Black sensitivities.

A process of redefinition was begun. One arena of this re-definition was the early discussions among the earliest Black priests. This re-definition had theoretical as well as therapeutic purposes. Lloyd Weaver recounts:

I partially witnessed, but more so heard, fascinating stories of how the first Black American priests of Shango, and Aganju and Obatala and Yemonja would gather in one another apartments and before one another's shrines in the Black ghettos in New York to discuss various Odu and their interpretation in principle for the present time and place. It was to them that fell the task of redefining a religious system in terms that ultimately enabled Orisha priests to be among the finest of social counselors and philosophers in the country today.

It was they who made sense of Orisha in the New York context, recognized for instance that the categorization of Orisha Oko as representing the farm was a mere metaphor for "potential" and that that potential was a factor of the human soul as much as the Earth. That ebo to or worship of Orisha Oko might very well be appropriate to those who needed to handle well the energy of their own minds. (Weaver, 1986:10)

Priests As Counselors

A major role of priests is to counsel people who consult them as well as their godchildren on "all the problems of life," e.g. economic, social,

19 There are others notably the Akan Religion and The Oracle of Maat.

personal and religious. For many people, priests play a therapeutic role when other help is not available or not acceptable.

Olorisha in the Lucumi tradition are required to act as social workers or counselors in every phase of human life. They are called upon to provide advice and direction in the areas of marriage, employment, and for any number of psychological and social interaction problems. (Weaver, 1986:19)

Since the priest is the center of his or her house and s/he may be the only person who knows the entire membership of the house, during the course of my interviews, I asked priests about the major kinds of problems their godchildren and clients brought them.

The Problems of Life

According to my interviewees, a common major problem is lack of self-esteem. This presents the question of identity in a therapeutic light.

The pride thing never...At least for the sisters I deal with, most of whom are over 25 ...they still don't believe they're beautiful. OK, so we tell ourselves we are not dealing with the blond hair/blue eyes thing anymore. But there are Black sisters whose skin is a little better than yours. Their legs are a bit skinnier, or they're petite. You know, so the ones that are tall, and statuesque, and beautiful think that they are too masculine! That kind of mentality still pervades. (Interview 4/28/87)

And it wasn't even a push to become initiated, it was a wish to belong to something that looked as if it was going to help Black people ...that looked like it could make changes in people's lives, people who had mental problems, people whose lives would not come together, especially sisters with babies and no men. Their lives have been torn apart by the relationships they had. They became very disillusioned and couldn't see where they were going from that point." (Interview 4/28/87)

Priestly counseling involves encouraging clients and godchildren to feel more positively about themselves and providing models of more realistic and varied roles drawn from the major *Orisha*.

Imitation of The Gods

Orisha are considered to be aspects of God, forces of nature, the universe viewed from different angles or specialized forms of the Supreme God or as psychological forces in the human mind. Yorubas believe that each person has an *Orisha assigned to him or her at birth and this Orisha and the person (called his or her child) share the same character. A Yoruba proverb says: The character of the person is the character of the Orisha. Personal characteristics are explained by a person being the child of a particular Orisha. This idea is part of a system of folk psychology that focuses on the well being of the group. However, in order for the group to function well, the individual must function well.*

Given this focus, the interpretation of the *Orisha* are also interpretations of human psychology. Differing conceptions of the same *Orisha* become different conceptions of human psychology.

What is at issue here is the extent to which the worshipper of an Orisha has been able to integrate the archetypical force into her total personality structure. The Orisha mirrors the hidden self. In the European process of psychoanalysis it is up to the client to find words to tell who she really is. Dreams, imaginings, drawings may hint at or provide forums for this gradual self-disclosure within the facilitating space provided by the analyst. In the Jungian mode, various configurations of the unconscious become identified and "owned" so that in becoming a centered whole, the analysand humbly finds herself to be a system of energies over which the wilful ego's control is illusory. It is

a transpersonal Self that binds the whole; and it is to this Self that the Orisha corresponds.

In the African system it is the oracle with the diviner as intermediary who tells the person who s/he really is. the Self speaks through the cowries, interpreted by the spiritual counsellor.

...In time, an Orisha-based personality replaces the old depressed or hyperactive or hypochondriacal social mask that used to face the light of day with apprehension. (Gleason, 1986:261).

Interpretations of the Orisha are used to provide the individual with a sense of self-esteem and an altered identity.

As Weaver points out:

To cite other examples of adaptation by additional definition, Yemonja worship had always been very important for Lucumis of Cuba and other islands of the Caribbean and even more dramatically, in Brazil. Since these were the sources of our tradition, Yemonja, the mother of Orisha was also important to Black America. But perhaps expectedly, Yemonja was to be seen in a somewhat different light. At the time, the late 1950's many Black Americans were involved in political revolution that called on any cultural revolution to be supportive. Being the mother principle, the instinct to attack anything that attacks her children was the response to be expected from an Orisha such as Yemonja.

Our war was against violent and subtle oppression that was our legacy from slavery. That we should have a dynamic and uncompromising Orisha of war was our legacy from Africa and the elders of our tradition saw it and taught it that way. Further, since like the sea

Yemonja, represents time and continuity, she is the patron of the Lucumi presence in the United States. (Weaver, 1986:12)

This conception of the *Orisha of Motherhood* provides an alternative female role model for women.²⁰

Priestly re-definition among themselves provides one means of reconstructing the Yoruba Religion to fit the concerns of Black Americans. Another ongoing arena of interpretation is the *Reading Of The Year*.²¹

The Reading Of The Year

The Reading Of The Year occurs once a year on January 1 (or as near to that date as possible)²² and is recorded by the participants themselves.

²⁰ And men, since gender of an *Orisha* and the gender of a person have no inherent connection. Male children of Yemonja would be counselled to seek masculine means of nurturing.

²¹ See Chapter One.

²² One *Reading Of The Year* occurred in March since the *House* was in mourning for the godmother of its head.

On January 1, the whole house comes together and the potentialities of the year are forecast.

Two forms of divination are used *Obi*²³ and *Merindilogun*.²⁴ Before the main gathering of the entire House, priests assemble in the *Ocha Room* and throw *Obi* to each *Orisha*.

Each *Orisha* in turn is asked if s\he will participate in prognostication for the coming year. After the *Orisha* have given their consent, all the people present gather and each *Orisha* who agreed is asked to forecast for the year.

The priests present interpret the oduns.²⁵ Priests use *Apatakis* to illustrate the points or their interpretation. Priests other than the priest doing the reading are asked to contribute their interpretations of the oduns. Any sacrifices that should be made are indicated during the course of this reading.²⁶

After the last *Orisha* is read, the *Orisha* to rule the coming year is determined. This *Orisha*'s influence is thought to be the most important

23 The simplest and most flexible form of divination which yields only yes/no answers. See Chapter 2.

24 Divination by means of 16 cowrie shells. This system has *Apatakis* attached to each of its possibilities. See Chapter 2.

25 The signs that fall. In *Merindilogun*, cowries are thrown on the mat 16 at a time. The number that fall face up produce signs that are called oduns. *Apatakis* are attached to each odun.

26 Divination almost always calls for sacrifices or ebos to be made.

during the year and the events of the year will be in areas under this *Orisha's* domain. There are usually two, the *Orisha* ruling the year and the backup.

Then the color(s) and the design of the flag to be put up for the year is determined. The color of the flag will depend on the color associated with the *Orisha* of The Year. This flag will go over the door of each member of the *House* as a mnemonic for what was said in *The Reading of The Year*.

Each individual is expected to arrange for an individual reading of the year to give her guidance for the year. The timing of these, of course, varies, but they should be done as soon as the schedule of the individual's god-parent permits.

This ceremony provides a forum for the definition and re-definition of the concerns of the group that conducts it. Its importance to the group is indicated by the fact that everyone takes notes but also that an official version is produced - one of the extremely few documents produced by this group and the only one produced on a regular basis. Members of the group who know shorthand take down an exact transcript. Peter does not like cassette recorders and will not allow them. It is then typed, xeroxed and distributed to all members of the *House*.

I was able to obtain transcripts of fourteen readings of the year. Content analysis of these provide a record of concerns in one house of *Ocha* over a fourteen year period.

In order to show the type of interaction involved in the *Reading Of The Year*, I include a condensed version of one such event that I attended.²⁷

Reading Of The Year - January 1, 1986

Got to Peter's house about 9:00 o'clock. Brought unbaked rolls with me. The door was open. I went into the kitchen to put down my package and spoke to the people there - Katherine, Peter, Michael, Dawn, Ursula, Dorothy, Ruth and wished them a happy New Year. I went back into the hall to hang up my coat. Put rolls into oven to bake. Poured myself a cup of coffee and picked up a piece of coffee cake from the table. People kept arriving and bringing food and/or drinks - soda, juice, etc. As they came in, Dorothy and Tiffany took their offerings, decided whether or not they were more appropriate for breakfast or lunch. Either, it was stored in the refrigerator, on the counter - or if it was appropriate for breakfast, it was put on the table for people to help themselves. This caused a general bustle and confusion in the kitchen.

Peter called for the priests to go into the ocha room. The door remained open and the sheet stayed up. Peter was throwing obi to the Orisha and asking if they would speak in the reading of the year. As he threw obi to each orisha, some priests - but not all - knelt on the floor with their foreheads on the floor between their hands (with their palms flat on the floor). (When I asked Ursula about this, she told me that a priest knelt like this when ever, obi was thrown to his/her mother or father (orisha) or to the Orisha of their godparent or ojubona.

When the obi throwing was ended, three mats were spread on the floor in the living room and chairs were brought in. Peter sat on one mat and as many priests who could fit sat on the other mats. Other

²⁷ Since Peter, does not allow a cassette recorder, the following is a summary of my notes. I shortened the transcript by eliminating repetitions and most *Apatakis*.

priests and aleyo sat on chairs until they ran out and then Katherine put floor cushions down for the rest.

A stool was brought and put on one end of the mat on which Peter sat. He asked who was the youngest there. Cheryl was the latest person to have received her ilekis so she sat on the stool. He said "owo" (money). Some people, but not all, handed Cheryl a dollar.

Peter took his dilogun from a bag which was in his Elegba's dish. He drew a circle with efun²⁸ on the mat and put his dilogun in it. He instructed Cheryl to put the money on the dilogun, Peter covered his palms with the efun. Then he spilled a small amount of water on the floor in front of the Elegba while praying in Yoruba.²⁹ He then moved the dilogun and money around in a circle on the mat, still praying. Then he picked up the dilogun and the money and touched the Cheryl on the head. He put the dilogun back in the circle and the money on the mat beside his Elegba.

He picked up the dilogun and said something in Yoruba and the priests there answered him.

1. He knocked on the mat once and opened hands, letting the dilogun fall. He named the pattern that was on the mat. He repeated this action. Dawn recorded the pattern.

2. Peter gave Cheryl a piece of efun and a stone in her right hand. He told her to shake and separate (holding one each in either hand without telling Peter which was which.) When he identified the name of the pattern Peter asked Cheryl to show either what was in her left or right hand.

3. This happened two more times.

²⁸ White chalk made from egg shell

²⁹ Too low and fast to try to write down.

Dawn handed Peter a slip of paper. He looked at it a moment and then he began to explain what the reading meant.

Peter

Elegba says that everyone should really ask themselves what is really important. We do not conduct our lives wisely. Our preoccupations should be the things we are told and the wisdom we have does not really play an important part in the way we live our lives. The first TV ad turns us around and we do not gain the benefit of the blessing.

This has made us ridiculous in the past, but in the future, it could be tragic.

Elegba is announcing blessings from the world of the spirits. In the coming year, a lot of satisfaction will take place around things we know nothing about -- around the karma of the world itself.

We are disoriented because of our history. We are searching for tradition when we already have one but it was not our original tradition. The spiritual world suffers from the same confusion.

Get your spiritual affairs in order now.

We have to pay attention to what it means to be a natural human being again...

Katherine

Anything that has to be done, get it done to reinforce your strength. This is a year where we need the support of Orisha to accomplish goals.

Watch out for treachery and insurrection and confusion. Take care of your own business yourself. Insurrection and war. Choose your

loyalties carefully. Be very careful who influences your thoughts. Be loyal to your side...

Peter asked if Michael knew an apataki for this odun.³⁰

Michael

Ogun was working with such a lack of success that he had to go to Orunmila to get a reading. He was told to make ebo with a goat, bellows and rope so that he could get what he wanted. Ogun made the ebo.

In a few days, Bellows went to see Ogun and found him so worried that he promised to help him. He told Ogun to tie him so that he could help him with his work.

Ogun was stunned by the amount of work that Bellows had done in less than an hour. When lunchtime came, Ogun loosened Bellows so he could eat.

When Bellows was at lunch, Ogun started to think about how he could protect himself, so that he could grab Bellows and make him his slave.

Ogun tied him again. At quitting time, the Bellows told Ogun to loose him. Ogun said he couldn't because Bellows was his slave.

Peter

There are a lot of fallacies in our heads. We have to be as intelligent as we think we are. There is a logic as to what side you are own.

Promises, promises, promises, but its work, work, work. This is where Ogun met Oya. Oya was a good worker. She had made a big meal and she wanted to eat with Ogun. Ogun promised to stop to eat,

³⁰ Peter frequently calls on priests by name either for an interpretation or to tell an apataki. Teaching?, Test? Both?

but continued to work. This continued for a while. Oya got angry and left Ogun.

This is an odun of incompatibility. It talks about the relationship between Oya and Ogun and understanding who's who and what's what.

It talks about working with people who are compatible with you.

Be very careful about doing favors, because you tend to deflect away from the people you are responsible for...

Katherine

This odun talks about children judging parents and finding the parents wanting. Children have been confused for the past two years.

Be very careful of emotions. You will find yourself being very warlike. Do not allow yourself to build up the kind of fire within yourself that this odun is talking about. It is talking about that kind of violence.

Peter

Ebo - 9-colored cloth (handkerchief). Sew nine different colors together. Cut a piece and carry with you. When you feel pressure, clear with it and when you feel its dirty, throw it away. (If you do not have the cloth on you, you can use garbage.)

Every should have a chain in Ogun. Ask if he wants a bellows.

Elegba says he is in your corner. Give him a lot of palm oil. Stay out of crowds...

Ogun is talking as much about people's families and their direction as Elegba. Adults can not treat other adults as children. Say what you mean clearly. Ogun is talking about thinking twice because the first time we are lying to ourselves. Ogun is talking about competitiveness and willingness to lie to be on top. You will not find victory in these kinds of situations.

It is an OK year for business. Make ebo. Make sure you are psychologically prepared to do business. Things are not going to happen on time...

Dawn

Orunmila was walking to a party. A man, on a horse, saw him and offered him a ride. But Orunmila refused. A little while later, he came to the man dead on the road because his horse had thrown him.

Be on the case you are on. Be very careful of documents. Check everything twice...

Gloria

Do everything deliberately. Be judgmental about anybody that affects your life in any kind of way...

Katherine

Talks about a lot of fallacy which can come in the guise of truth. If you get any information check with Shango. Shango is truth.

This year do not go to Elegba and not give him something.

Don't loose your way...

Peter

Obatala is speaking to the priests of the house. We are going to have to see ourselves as bothers and sisters and we are going to have to recognize the elders of other houses as our elders. There needs to be a sharing among priests of different houses. Maybe organize conferences, pamphlets or booklets...

Katherine

Obatala says wake up, you're alive. Be responsible to the things you're responsible for. Be careful of your own personal safety. Be careful of whom you allow to be in charge of your property and children...

Peter

Ebo - Clean eyes with two eggs and put with Olokun. Ask where they go. They may get broken in front of the house.

Put one foot in front of the other...

Be honorable. Do not give one person something that belongs to someone else. Do not manipulate with children. Do not manipulate your position to give the rights of one person to another...

Be protective of the secrets of your religion.

In this odun, you can often be rewarded for your honesty. Keep adimu with Olokun. (Eggs, Palm Oil, Fish, Jutia).

Katherine

When obi was thrown to Oya, this year, she did not want to speak. Maybe we can't contain what she has to say.

She was asked for ebo with Obi. Priests who have Oya, Obi meji and ebo shere and frequent adimu. Oya asked everyone to take a complete meal and beans and place on the road to the cemetery as an offering. Pray that you do not come to the cemetery. Priests that have Oya move her around occasionally. Pray to Oya all year long....

Peter

In the year to come, we should really keep trying to do the things we have been trying to do all along. We have to find it inside ourselves to be excited about life and explore. Oshun does not want to catch us tired. She asks us not to bore her. Be poetic about life...

Watch your doctors. Don't have unnecessary operations. Be careful of female problems. This is talking about women denying the Oshunness of themselves... You do not have a proper role model.

In times of crisis, remember, we are a family and extend the needed help and aid...

Emotional imbalance. Group goals need to be clearly defined. Shango is talking to the elders of the house and he is telling us the potential of the attention of those who come to us.

When a hunter goes out to hunt, he goes so he can feed the entire town. It is dangerous when one or two people do the ebos and the others do not.

Do not try to find out what happens in the ritual of an Orisha that you do not have.

Peter asked Ralph if he knew an apatiki.

Ralph

There was a famine in the land. Oshossi was not having much luck hunting. Olofi asked Oshossi to hunt for him. He caught twenty-one animals and asked his mother not to touch them. But due to poverty and hunger, she took one.

Oshossi took the game to Olofi who counted them and finding only twenty, accused Oshossi of cheating him. In anger and swearing his innocence, Oshossi took an arrow and fired it into the air so that it may do justice to the thief.

His mother who was standing outside the house to see who Oshossi was talking to received the arrow in her heart.

Katherine

Women should be careful with their cycles.

Restrictions that women have with Egun have to be understood so they will be followed well.

This odun talks about jealousy.

What you can do, you do! Whatever you go looking for, you will get. Children of Shango should be careful of their hearts.

Be careful in judgement of other people. Be careful of alienating people who are in your corner because you think they are your enemies. You can turn them against you and they will defeat you...

Peter

We need Oshossi in the house.

Be careful of tendency within the family to make issues exist or to make them more important than they are. Talks about conflicts of understanding.

There is a child of Oshossi in the house

Take a trip if you want to. Visit relatives in the country.

Talks about inheritances (very disputed ones).

Respect Shango. Don't be out in thunderstorms³¹...

31 Yorubas consider thunderstorms to be a manifestation of Shango. To be struck by lightning is his punishment.

We have to make the most out of what we have got. To be alone is not the worst thing that can happen to you. We are all only children and we are all primarily dependent on ourselves. Because of this, we should not assume that our life is a life of suffering.

Aganyu says that the times dictate that we have to be more like him.

Our religion was taken from us and made to appear wild and crazy. The attitudes that enable the American public to be so negative started in the last century and they are wrong.

When you find problems coming from undefined sources. Check with a reading and go to Aganyu.

Katherine

Children do not need to know all of your business. Your children are not your buddies. Don't put things off on them.

Talks about situations that are not social but you take as social, e.g. your job. You can not be loose socially with co-workers. You do not want people you are working with to be your godchildren.

Ebo Feed Aganyu 2 pigeons.

Dawn

Be careful of your expectations this year. If something is not working out, get out of it. Try to work yourself out of depressions with your own head.

Katherine

Rampant infections. Be clean. If the clinic is dirty, leave...

Marian

You can bolster your immune system by:

A. diet:

1. Vitamin C

2. Zinc

3. Iron

4. Selenium

and

B. Positive thoughts (this does not mean be a Pollyanna.)

There may be a child of Babalwaiye in the house

Katherine

Be careful of envy, and fantasizing...

Peter

You are your own salvation. Self respect should be predominant in all our minds. Make ebo and you will see results. This year Orisha are speaking about Orisha.

This odun talks about a lot of fertility that won't necessarily come to fruition.

Learn to evaluate things properly.

Katherine

You get what you pay for.

Things are changing in nature and human life. Things are getting harder.

There is value in prayer.

An ebo in which you do not pay attention to what you are doing, is no ebo at all.

The Orisha and nature are not separate. The visit to the place where you take the ebo is just as much a part of the ebo as the ebo itself...

Peter

There isn't anything in nature that is not sacred. If you do not recognize yourself as sacred, you can dry up.

Yemonja wants us all to go to the ocean together.

Alertness. Your home should be sacred and safe.

Those of us who do not do ebo and have adimu in front of the Orisha will not receive ire.

Check out job.

Aleyo who are told that they should make Ocha should do something that shows they are on the road.

Work at what you are doing.

Plant a garden.

Do something for your mothers.

Feed Osun a pigeon. If you do not have Osun, you should get Osun.

Ebos to Yemonja for Priests - 7 ears of corn

Be careful of the ocean. Be careful of being overwhelmed. Don't drown in anything...

Elegba leading the year.

Flag 1/2 red and 1/2 black.

Oya is backing up, but do not put up anything for her.

Everyone needs their own reading.

*End of Reading*³² *At the very end, Peter divided the money with Cheryl.*³³

People went into the kitchen, warmed and served the food.

I will discuss the concerns of Black Practitioners of the Yoruba Community as illustrated in fourteen transcripts of *The Readings Of The Year* that I have obtained and the six I personally attended. Basically these concerns are the restoration of community and effectiveness in the world.

Community Building

From perusal of the transcripts of the readings of the year, it appears that another major concern is what I call community building. The concern for community shows itself primarily at the level of the *Ocha House* and the blood family.

During the year, priests become aware of problems of and between individuals. Priests also have problems connected with their roles as god-parents. It is plausible that these problems provide a context for the reading.

32 At each change of *Orisha*, Peter asked for money, threw the dilogun and made an interpretation.

33 Everytime, someone performs a function, s/he is paid. Cheryl, even though an *alejo* was deemed to be representing the *House* in *The Reading Of The Year*.

The reading of the year is a major occasion in which priests express desired relationships both personal and communal to the group as a whole.

One of the ways this is done is by re-definition of the *Orisha*. A principle of Yoruba living is that the forces that the *Orisha* represent must be expressed in a person's life. If this does not happen then the person's life or the group's life is out of balance. In order to described desired relationships, Black American priests re-conceptualized the *Orisha Oshun* in the light of Black American concerns - an *Orisha* of love and marriage who gives children to barren women (Awolalu, 1979; Bascom, 1980; Idowu, 1962) has been re-conceptualized as an *Orisha* of the social.

Weaver in his discussion of the priestly re-definition of the *Orisha* cites the new understanding of *Oshun*.

Our appreciation of Oshun goes far beyond being the Orisha that brings children to barren women.³⁴ In a place like New York where there is no stigma attached to childlessness, she is seen as the motivator of human societies who come together largely because of love for one another to form nations and to nurture languages and culture. Oshun is seen as the owner of all rivers-highways that symbolically relate towns to each other-ultimately to spread culture and other ideas. Oshun in the human body is the blood that flows in the veins, ancestry, our physical link with our great past. (Weaver, 1986:18)

³⁴ In Africa, a woman's identity is bound up with motherhood, actual or potential. When a woman marries, she is no longer, addressed by name by her husband's family but is called *Iyawo* (i.e. Junior Wife.) When her first child is born, she becomes *Mother-of-so-and-so* (the name of her first born child, e.g., Iya Akinshola.) Among Black Americans, childlessness would not be marked by stigma nor would a woman's mother hood be indicated by the way she is addressed.

In addition to re-defining the sacred component of community, for example, *Oshun* as an *Orisha* of the social, priests define structural requirements and moral stances.

We need institutions in which conflicts are resolved. We should be sincere and committed to Black People so it will not be destructive. (Reading Of The Year for 1977)

More sincerity. Visibility should not be a motive. People are going to have to look for the best in each other. There is an inclination to totally put people down. Nothing counts but results. If this is going to be a hindrance, you do not really need friends or love to be happy. We can really do it ourselves and it is not hard to do. We accuse the wrong people sometimes ourselves. (Reading of The Year For 1977)

Another desired characteristic is unity.

Unity among people and families this is what Elegba is talking about and we can grow as a group, as a family and as an organization. (Reading of The Year For 1979)

The diviners also point out deficiencies that obstruct community building. A primary one is lack of direction. When I did a concordance,³⁵ the word direction and its synonyms appeared over 60 times, making it one of the most frequently mentioned topics in the collection of transcripts.

Black people have reached a very high level of spiritual consciousness but we have not developed it. What is your understanding? What are we (black people) about? A lot of us have lost a sense of purpose,

³⁵ A frequency count of the number of times a given word appears in a text. I used YI3000 Plus to develop my concordance.

we have become materially and spiritually better off, but we are doing things contrary to other people and ourselves. (Reading Of The Year for 1978)

Loss of direction - maybe as a house we need to do more things together. We are a group of people and we are being told how to deal with each other and understand common causes. We are a unit but we are going in all different directions. All of us who are in this house are working out our Karma and we are not here by chance! (Reading Of The Year for 1977)

Priests give positive prescriptions about what is to be done. Doing things together and giving advice is considered a way to improve family relations.

Its talking about how to hold your family together. Think about how and what you need to do to hold the family together. This year try to make an effort to do something with your relatives wherever, get together with your family. You might be able to help them or pass some information to them. Stress being calm to people before they put themselves in any action. (Reading of The Year For 1982)

Priests present not only doing things together but working together as a major way of strengthening family relationships and effectiveness.

If you want your house or your group to be maintained then you are going to have to work together. Staying together in terms of the head and intent, and your strength as a group will pull you together. (Reading of The Year For 1983)

Another area of concern is marriage and relationships between men and women. Priests stress the need for institutions and structure.

Shango is speaking of women and men in relationships and challenging each other. What is coming is a redefinition of relationships that exist. There is a type of anger at us for the definitions we put on marriage. We make children and we have no commitments, no mar-

riage. We never went to a Priest or City Hall to get married. We are not laying down rules and adhering to any rules. No commitments. The war is always on, if you do not have compromise between men and women we better get right on this. (Reading of The Year For 1983)

The quality of relationships is important in community building. Institutions and family building require clarity and honesty.

Recognize our problems and see that we do have problems and do not lie to ourselves. That is the trap, and not solving your problem or admitting that you have one will make you sick. (Reading of The Year For 1985)

In the Readings of the Year, priests weave together the sacred and the practical to strengthen the Blood family and the *Ocha family*. They teach their godchildren about the *Orisha Oshun* to express the sacred component of community building. They also stress the necessity of working at relationships and the values they believe would produce a healthy community.

Ogun is talking as much about people's families and their direction as Elegba. Adults can not treat other adults as children. Say what you mean clearly. (Reading of The Year For 1986)

Year after year, priests have discussed community building in the *Reading of The Year*. They discuss family, family relationships (both blood and ocha), and parental roles along with marital ones in each transcript.

The other major concern is Effectiveness in the world. This involves clarity of the person's head which entails not clouding it by chemical means e.g. alcohol or drugs, and maintaining a sense of direction (i.e. a focus on goals) and study.

Effectiveness in the world

The Ocha House is considered a place where the individual can come to gain strength and understanding but practitioners are cautioned against using it as a crutch. The world is defined as an area of struggles but struggles are not to be avoided. The House and the Orisha are nurturers but only to the extent that they equip the individual to struggle in the world.

As in the discussions about community building, priests prescribe positive actions and moral stances, in addition to cautioning against obstacles.

Be careful of your image in the world. We are being watched in the world and being judged accordingly. (Reading of The Year For 1985)

Inside us and among us, we are to look for a year of struggles in many ways. We are to look for who we are in and among ourselves in a number of ways. Each of us should take the strength we gain from this house out into the world. He is describing it as a kind of war. We are a house of warriors, but not in the Shango way but in the way which people in the house involve themselves in the world. (Reading of The Year For 1976)

We have to get our political thing together as Black people. Yoruba should be a back-up for your life but not the same thing. (Reading of The Year For 1976)

Ocha does not guarantee. It is about learning the laws of nature and living according to them. (Reading of The Year For 1977)

Know how to fight. You heard it so you know. Women have to be more willing to solve problems. (Reading of The Year For 1978)

The major way to be effective in the world is to work. There is a constant emphasis on work in all the transcripts. Priests frequently caution that

"Ocha is not magic. If you don't work for what you want or need, you won't get it. The Orisha Ogun represents the sacred force of work as well as war.

Ogun is a worker, blacksmith, he says put forth some effort to get what you want. Work! If you work hard you can have what you want. There is no easy way. Your working hard, sweating, striving makes you a force, which brings that which we call prosperity. Manifest yourselves in your sacred aspect. Ire is there but you will not get it unless you work. Ire will draw things to you, help to keep you alive. For your sanity, work! You also have to work your minds for solutions to why you exist. (Reading of The Year For 1978)

Effective work necessitates using judgement and discipline. Priests maintain that a fear of failure is an obstacle to effectiveness.

We should be more scientific in our thinking and have some personal kind of discipline. We need not be so afraid of failure our ups and downs with our jobs that is life, the act should be respected itself even when you are in the thick of it. (Reading of The Year For 1978)

To be effective in the world, the practitioner needs a source of income - a job. Working effectively in a disciplined way is necessary to keep the job but so is a certain moral stance.

Pay the same attention to what you do on your job. Elegba is saying be discreet on your job, don't take advantage, i.e. making lot of phone calls, doing Ocha things on your job. Learn some humility. (Reading of The Year For 1981)

Understand that so far the reading is coming with blessing and grace and authority to pursue our lives, but, at the same time the Orishas are saying that we do live in the world. We cannot escape the conditions of the world. (Reading of The Year For 1982)

Effectiveness in the world also means to be aware of opposition. A person's goals will most likely not coincide with those with whom she works.

Also, in as far as strategy, teachers, bosses that you work with, you must think strategy. Sometimes people will be on your back all the time and you must still give them all the respect in the world. Orisha is telling us to be strategic. Go for the long range, take aim. Since we tend to be the underdog, we must always have strategy. Obatala is saying strategy. (Reading of The Year For 1983)

Even in struggle, there is a moral responsibility. Struggle is not only pragmatic, it is a responsibility - a personal responsibility and a communal one.

We as Black people find ourselves struggling very hard to stay in one position, and in that struggling is Ire.³⁶ With things in the world being crazy, as a group we are not so crazy. We have a responsibility to each other and the world. And since it will be part of your responsibility, we must help. You have to share your Ire. You have a responsibility to your family and to the world to keep an eye and an ear out. (Reading of The Year For 1984)

The key word this year is work. We are still waiting to hit the lottery or waiting for a hand out. The emphasis is on work. We can get the money and lose it, or you will receive the Orisha and not get anything out of it. Do the work and you will get the help. The odun says that if you work, you will get the help. The odun says that if you work you will get the rewards of the work. (Reading of The Year For 1985)

WORK. Do it yourself. Do not depend on others to do it all for you, be they literal or figurative godfathers, godmothers, brothers, or sisters, etc.

You have the blessings and the backing to achieve the goals you set this year as long as you are willing to put out the effort needed to reap the reward you are seeking.

You can benefit from your own skills this year so you must not give them away, without remuneration, those skills for which you are customarily paid--not even to friends. Don't do favors for others that put you at a disadvantage; the ultimate outcome of such favors will be negative repercussions for you.

Conversely, don't look to or ask others to do for you when you are being told not to do for others. Do it yourself. (Reading of The Year For 1987)

In sum, Yorubas see the world as an arena of struggle. However, struggle is sacred as well as practical and necessary. Priests tell their godchildren not to depend on magic, that is not to expect anything without effort.

I have attempted to show that the major concerns of the Black Ocha Community are identity, community building and effectiveness in the world. These concerns shaped and are shaping *Santeria* into *The Yoruba Religion*.

The concern with identity, I would suggest has decoupled the identification of *Orisha* with Catholic saints. This identification has never been a strong one. The particular saint identified with a particular *Orisha* varies from place to place (Bastide, 1971; Caribbean Cultural Center, nd). The dual lexicon of *Santeria* has facilitated this happening without fanfare.

As can be seen from Chapter 3, the *Ocha House* itself is a community. Although the primary relationship is that of godchild and godparent, the

Ojubona role provides ties within and between *Ocha Houses*. The *House* is conceived of and functions as a large extended family.

The *Yoruba Religion* is a world-affirming religion. Its emphasis on work and the world as an area of struggle fosters an involvement in the world (however without the psychological impetus of uncertainty about salvation.³⁷ The practitioners of the *Yoruba Religion* regard the world as an arena of struggle but the world is not conceived as profane³⁸ but sacred. The Orisha who are aspects of God have manifestations in the world and the human mind.

The traditional African concern with living in balance with all the forces and giving them all their due is still a part of the practical religion of Black Americans but the social contexts of American society has shaped that concern in a unique way.

³⁷ If salvation is an issue (and it was mentioned only seven times in the fourteen transcripts), it is an issue of this-worldly salvation, rather than eternal salvation - salvation from the conditions of life of Black people in American society.

³⁸ Actually, Yorubas think of nothing of as profane.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Summary

This study of the Yoruba Religion has been largely exploratory in nature since so little is known about *Ocha* in the Black Community and no study has been specifically addressed to it.

However this investigation serves to bring into focus a number of empirical and theoretical issues that deserve further analysis.

Empirical Issues

Scope

The issue of the number of practitioners of the Yoruba Religion in the United States is one that will require a great deal of ingenuity to explore.

The Yoruba religion is an African traditional religion. Although small in number¹ it is steadily growing in the United States. The primary areas of growth are the non-Cuban Latin and Black communities.

Empirically, The Yoruba Religion appears to be a significant deviant case for the Sociology of Religion. It is not a world religion in the usual sense of the word, yet it has spread internationally, first to the Caribbean and Latin America and now to the United States.

The religion of Santeria... (has) passed through the centuries from a tribally-based religion of the cabildo and the plantation to a national one, embracing all colors, races and classes. It was by no means a women's or poor person's deprivation cult, nor one limited solely to Cuban Blacks. (Marks, 1974, p. 78)

The spread of the Yoruba Religion to the United States is the result of a twofold process neither of which was dependent upon the other: the Black Search for an acceptable identity and the large-scale Cuban migration as a result of the Cuban Revolution. It is likely that without the Cuban migration, The Yoruba Religion would have taken root in the Black Community without the Cuban Migration although it is likely that it would not have entered the non-Cuban Latin Community to the extent that it did.

1 The question of the exact number would prove an interesting problem for constructing a census. Latins report themselves to be Catholic. Indeed, they probably possess Baptismal certificates and would be recorded on the rolls of the Catholic Church. Black Americans would more likely answer the question truthfully or refuse to answer.

Concerns

I have addressed the attraction of the Yoruba Religion for members of the Black Community. Primarily, it serves as a means of expressing a positive Black communal identity. In addition, identification with the *Orisha* provides a means of expressing a positive individual identity.

Its attraction for other communities remains unaddressed. Yet the very presence of the religion in large urban centers begs for an investigation of its attraction and its effects on American cities.

Identity

The Yoruba Religion became established in the Black Community as the result of the search of some American Blacks for a religious underpinning of Black Identity. This search can be documented to have begun in the 1960's but it still continues today.

The Religion spreads in the Black Community through networks of friends and relatives. New members participate in the activities of a House for long periods of time without making a commitment. Little or no pressure is put on them to do so.

The identity provided by the Yoruba Religion has both communal and individual components. That it is African-derived provides communal identity. The conception of every person as a child of the *Orisha* provides individual identity. Both communal and individual identity has therapeutic dimensions in a system of folk psychology.

I have traced a change in the American Black's conception of his or her social identity. Yet this was not only a change in a group's social identity. It is a change in the conception of the nature of God and the cosmos - a re-definition that produces self-esteem.

Community Building

As can be seen from Chapter 3, the *Ocha House* itself is a community and from Chapter 4, practitioners have a concern for community building. Although the primary relationship is that of godchild and godparent, the *Ojubona* role provides ties within and between *Ocha Houses*. The *House* is conceived of and functions as a large extended family.

The primary roles in a *House* are those of godparent and godchild. A *House* can be conceptualized as a group with the godparent at the center surrounded by his or her godchildren. The godchildren regard themselves as bound together in kinship ties to the head of the *House* and to the *Ocha* of the Head of the *House*. A godparent (madrina/padrino - see glossary) is second only to blood parents in closeness. The tie is a closer one than would be possible between a minister and his flock or a priest of the Catholic Church and his congregation. It is not, however, a guru-disciple relationship.² Godparents are not dispensers of divine knowledge in that sense nor does the godchild turn his or her life over to the godparent. Peter and Katharine emphasize the responsibility of the godchild for his or her life.

² In fact there is an apocryphal character *Swami Mohami* who embodies all the negative connotations for members of Peter's *House*.

A priest of *Ocha* spends considerable time with each of his or her godchildren. Each godchild (should) get(s) regular readings from his godparent. This makes the godparent aware of the personal problems and aspirations of each of his or her godchildren. Divination builds in more face-to-face interaction between godparent and godchildren than would be possible in a congregational religion. Each session ideally should produce at least two meetings between godparent and godchild on a one-to-one, face-to-face basis; one for the reading and one for the sacrifice.

Norms require godparents and godchildren to keep in close contact. These norms produce a flow of information to central sources. Priests know (because they are consulted about them) the problems and concerns of their godchildren and clients.

Most ceremonies require more preparation than is feasible for one person to accomplish. This means that the help of one's godchildren is mandatory if the ceremony in question is to be performed. Preparation for the ceremony usually involves a number of people accomplishing varying tasks, sometimes weeks before the date of the ceremonies, although the activity intensifies just before it. On the day of the ceremony, a great deal of effort must be made to carry it off.

All of this intensifies social interaction among those who have a large intensity of involvement. People also visit their godparents often (sometimes weekly). This further and increases the amount of interaction between members of a *House*.

In Peter's *House* there were other forms of interaction besides the religions. People participated in each other's fund-raising activities, whether they were for personal goals or to accumulate funds for religious purposes. Babysitters can often be found in the ranks of one's godsisters, godbrothers and godparents. Often, children spent the weekend in the home of one of these.³

These activities increase the amount of time, members of the *House* spend together and consequently the social bonds between them.

The Role of A Priest

The primary role of the priest is mediator between human beings and the divine. However, throughout the Americas, the priest is a counsellor, physician, psychologist, father confessor and advisor on practical problems all rolled into one.

The social setting of that role differs among the African-derived religions of the Western Hemisphere. The primary difference is whether the Religion is practiced mainly in rural areas or in urban areas. In the United States and Brazil, unlike Haiti, the priest is to be found in large urban settings. A secondary difference is whether the Religion is organized in central places of worship or whether in shrines in the homes of priests. Centralized places of worship like the terreiro (Brazil) and the Hounfour (Haiti) also have specialized functions among priests. This is less true in the

3 I was pressed into such service on several occasions.

United States where there are no centralized places of worship. Priests are less specialized.

Urban life and rural life require different types of skills among the priesthood, yet there are commonalities. Even where there are centralized places of worship there is no overarching hierarchy - no equivalent of a diocese. Priests are judged by their *Houses*. If a priest is disagreeable, unknowledgeable or is judged to lack integrity, people no longer come to her. The priest retains her priesthood but is left alone.

Maya Deren expresses the major commonality most clearly in her discussion of the social limitations of the *houngan's*⁴ role.

...The houngan, then is the pivotal figure in a hierarchical structure, yet is subject to democratic controls....The houngan is a man on a tightrope...He is intelligent, perceptive and efficient beyond the average man, for the requirements of his position are such that the natural process of selection eliminates the merely average....And his position is finally complicated by the fact that although he can never enjoy the absolute security of a father --in the heart and loyalty of his children --his entire hounfor is structured around the family principle of the education of the young. It is he who instructs his sons and daughters and elevates them, eventually, to a spiritual adulthood, where they stand in equal and competitive relation to himself. (Deren, 1953:176-177)

In Haiti, Brazil and Cuba one of the functions of a priest is that of herbalist. In the United States, this aspect of the priest's role has lost most of its prominence. Instead, if the diviner suspects medical problems, she advises the person to see a doctor.

4 Name given to a male priest in Haiti. The female equivalent is *mambo*.

In Cuba and the United States, there are no temples. The Hounfor and the Terreiro with their associated hierarchy of priests do not exist. The only hierarchy is that of seniority. This makes the Religion in the United States less complexly structured and shrines more numerous.

The urban setting makes it more possible to practice the Religion yet places more strain on its practice. It is more possible to practice the Religion because of the city's anonymity. Indeed, in places like Brazil, because of the closer rural supervision of slaves, it never truly took root in the countryside. Its flowering was an urban phenomenon. Yet at the same time, the rules of the Religion are often modified because of the necessity for its practitioners to earn a living. It is not possible to spend months away from a job, for example for Religious teaching. The health code is an obstacle in sacrifice.

In the city, much more of a priest's time will go to counseling with interpersonal difficulties than to practical survival problems. Although, his or her resources in an urban setting will be more varied.

The rural setting of the Religion in Haiti is a function of the unique Haitian history. It is the only country in which the Religion is practiced that gained its independence by means of a slave revolt. Indeed, the Religion itself played a part in the initial revolt.

Certain priests may specialize in certain functions. Some become scholarly in the religious tradition. They read the books available to them on the religion elsewhere. Some go so far as to learn Spanish to read the much greater volume of religious literature produced by Cuban authors.

Others specialize in performing ceremonies, becoming ritual experts. Some women specialize in running a kitchen during the course of ceremonies.

Some have an emotional attachment to the Religion and center their lives around it. Still others make the religion a very small part of their lives.

Priest As Therapists

In the United States, it seems that the major function of the priest is to counsel people on "all the problems of life." This requires knowledge of the typical problems of their godchildren and the solutions to those problems. As a matter of fact, many people first come to a priest when they have major problems in their lives -- problems that seem recalcitrant.

Writers on West African Religion see divination as socio-therapy (Turner, 1968; 1969; 1975 and Pelton, 1980), but priests in the United States define it in terms of psycho-therapy. The focus of American priests is on the healthy functioning of the individual which will in turn produce the healthy functioning of the community. The focus on the individual rather than the group may be a result of the fact that the religion is no longer the religion of the entire society as a whole.

Economic Cooperation

In Peter's *House* there are two principal methods of economic cooperation. (a) the fundraiser and (b) the Esusu. These were methods by which a person attempted to raise money for his or her own needs.

Fundraisers most often take the form of selling dinners; second to selling dinners in frequency are game nights and third trips to Atlantic City. There was one theatre party.

The Esusu follows the usual form for such activity in the Black community. It involves a set number of people (perhaps 20 or less) who would agree to put up a certain amount of money for a number of weeks equal to the number of people in the group. For example, a group of twenty people would put up \$25 for twenty weeks. Each week one person would collect \$500 ($\25×20 people).

Although no one got any more than he or she put in, this would allow each person to have the use of a lump sum when his or her turn came. A person's turn was determined by drawing lots with the usual exception of the manager of the Esusu who would take the last turn or the twentieth week in this example.

Then there were instances where a *House* as a whole or a part of it decided to help someone financially. I observed several instances of financial aid which included paying for the godparent to receive an *Orisha*. (One, incidentally that several members of the *House* also needed to receive. Yet, until the godparent had received it, they could not.) Two instances involved the *House* paying for the initiation into the priesthood of two of its members. In this regard, another person needed to make *Ocha* quickly and did not have all the money. Donations were requested and given. A final instance involved Elaine (a priest of Yemonja) who needed to feed her *Ocha* for her seventh *Ocha* Birthday but she was unemployed at the time. She had only

enough money for the feeding and not enough to celebrate the Birthday. The *House* contributed the fruit and cloth.

These financial involvements are not religious requirements, yet people do engage in them. This allows for greater flexibility in individual goal-setting and providing other ways to tie the *House* together.

The House of Ocha, then, is primarily a religious body, yet at the same time non-religious relationships among its members does answer the concerns of community building.

Effectiveness in the World

The Yoruba Religion is a world-affirming religion. Its emphasis on work and the world as an area of struggle fosters an involvement in the world. Yet at the same time, this involvement lacks the psychological impetus of the Calvinist. The world is not evil but sacred.

To date, involvement in the world has meant involvement in economic activities. Yet I would suggest that involvement in political activities is not precluded. Priests are potentially power brokers because of their influence on their communities. In Haiti and Brazil, they have been courted by politicians (Deren, 1950 and Brown 1986). Although this remains potential, there is nothing in the Yoruba Religion that would prohibit it.

Theoretical Issues

On the theoretical level, the study of religion in the social sciences is vitiated by an evolutionary perspective that dichotomizes religions. Sandra Barnes notes that:

One of the stumbling blocks in the study of contemporary religious processes comes from the fact that religious systems are still typologized. By now this is an implicit act. Perhaps the best known explicit typology was brought to life by Weber (1946:292-97; 1963:1-19) and elaborated by his followers as the great and little religious traditions (e.g. Marriott 1955:171-72). Because these categories were grounded in an evolutionary perspective, the tendency when the two types of system were studied in the same frame of reference was - and here is where the legacy persists - to give the great traditions such as Islam and Christianity, a central position and the little traditions a peripheral one. The rationale for the dominance of the great traditions is that they have highly developed bureaucratic organizations, standardized and written doctrines, institutionalized methods for promulgating beliefs, and highly developed systems of ethics. In comparison, little traditions are characterized as fragmented, localized, and largely associated with illiteracy. When these attributes are compared, global ideologies are seen to influence: little ideologies to respond. Given the evolutionary bias, the very act of typing religious systems has the effect of predetermining the direction of change; participants of small systems are converted to, or their ideologies are merged with, or replaced by world systems. As Weber puts it, the stronger systems vanquish the weaker. (1963:17)(Barnes, 1989:21)

This perspective is the basic assumption in much of the study of religion. From this point of view, the growth of the Yoruba Religion in the United States among the populations in which it is growing simply should not be happening. Yet it is. Its very existence and growth then call for a re-examination of this perspective.

Another theoretical issue that calls for re-examination is syncretism. Syncretism is both a theoretical framework and part of Latin conventional wisdom.

Latins emphasize the *syncretism* of the Religion, frequently citing the identification of Saints and *Orisha*. I would suggest that this is partially a strategy to increase the Religion's acceptance in a Western and especially Catholic milieu. Partially this is because of the social and political power of the Catholic Church in Latin countries and partially because Catholicism is a mark of various Latin ethnic identities. To be sure, existing scholarly writing, i.e. Herskovits, Bastide, Murphy originated this perspective which has been adopted by popular writers.

When one asks about the structure of this syncretism, however, several questions arise:

1. What besides the identification of *Orisha* with Saints indicates this syncretism?
2. How far does Catholic ritual penetrate Santeria?
3. Do the lives of the Saints appear in Santeria mythology?

The answers to these questions bring the depth or breath of this syncretism into doubt. In answer to the first question, very little indeed. The identification of *Orisha* with Saints in Santeria is both limited and

on-uniform just as it is in Brazilian Condoble.⁵ I have not seen, nor have I read about any penetration of Catholic ritual into the rituals of Santeria. Nor do stories of the lives of the Saints appear (even in disguised form) in the mythology of Santeria.

It is precisely because the penetration of Catholicism is so limited that it is so separable from Santeria. Yet Latins insist on its importance. (Cabrera, 1980)

At the same time, Black Americans can participate fully in the ritual of the Yoruba Religion⁶ without internalizing such identifications.

The major conclusion to be drawn is that Catholicism is in the mind of Santeros *separate from* Santeria. Latins differentiate between Catholicism and Santeria in two ways: (1) Catholicism is "*el camino de los blancos*"⁷ and

5 In a religion like Brazilian Umbanda, the belief system has equated the Saints with the *Orisha* and developed a mythology in which the *Orisha* are structurally integrated into a system of deities and spirits. Moreover, the syncretism is much more with Western occultism such as theosophy and Rosicrucianism - not to mention *Western bureaucracy*. The Umbanda phalanxes remind you of nothing so much as a complicated organization chart of a major corporation. (Brown, 1986:62)

6 Terminology that indicates cultural differences. One Black American informant differentiates between Santeria and the Yoruba Religion solely on the basis of the identification (or non-identification) of the *Orisha* with the Saints.

7 The way of the whites

Santeria is *el camino de los negros*"⁸ and (2) "*Los Santos no comen*"⁹ (Cabrera, 1980, Murphy, 1983).

What this indicates is a cultural (and racial) bifurcation and a fundamental difference in ritual. (That is between Catholic ritual and that of *Santeria*.)

Unlike, Catholicism or Christianity generally, Santeria does not insist that to be a member is necessary for Salvation. In fact, in the sense of the "World Religions", it is not a salvation religion at all. Moreover, in terms of its basic structure, it is a collection of "cults". In this sense, Catholicism is simply another cult that can be added to the system without altering it.

Nor does every member of Santeria practice every cult that is connected with it.¹⁰ For this reason, Black Americans can simply not practice Catholicism or identify the *Orisha* with the saints and still be bona fide *Babalorisha* or *Iyalorisha*. Catholicism can fit into Santeria without altering it but Santeria can not fit into Catholicism. The Catholic insistence on being *the one true church* would not allow this to happen.

8 The way of the Blacks

9 Literally, the saints do not eat. In other words, no sacrifices are offered to the saints.

10 Each *Orisha* is considered to have a cult of his or her own. "Having" an *Orisha* allows you to practice the cult of that *Orisha* while "not having it" prevents you from practicing the cult (or rituals) associated with that *Orisha*.

Nor is Catholicism necessary to *Santeria* as the Black American experience shows. Murphy's argument that Catholicism provides a cult of the dead to replace the lost cult of the ancestors proves unconvincing. *Santeria* does, in fact, have rituals for the dead that are non-Catholic in origin. The ancestors receive sacrifices at all important life events, birth, marriage and death and on other occasions. The blessed dead like the saints do not eat.

Black Americans in adopting *Santeria* and re-defining it into the Yoruba Religion have de-Hispanicized it; de-syncretizing it was hardly necessary.

The second major conclusion to be drawn is that syncretism is much more of a theoretical construct than an empirical reality. Herskovits' concept of "mosaic" syncretism or Bastide's of a syncretism of juxtaposition obscures the fact that neither Catholic ritual nor mythology has made any impact on the African religion. Syncretism has become a popular explanation for the educated but in fact is not a reality for the practitioner.

Summary

The Yoruba Religion is an important component of the culture of New York City as well as other major urban areas in the United States. Its attraction for Latins and Black Americans may indicate a fundamental questioning of the legitimacy of American society.

I have attempted to investigate the concerns of the practical religion of the converted that redefined *Santeria* into *The Yoruba Religion*. The concerns of identity, community building and effectiveness in this community

speaking to protesting the conditions of life of Black Americans in American society.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 House Calendar

January 1	The Reading of The Year Oduduwa's Day	July 24	Ursula's Ocha Birthday
January 5	Imani's Ocha Birthday	July 30	Michael's Ocha Birthday
January 9	Edna's Ocha Birthday	August 5	John's Ocha Birthday
January 24	Foster's Ocha Birthday Marie's Ocha Birthday	August 8	Susan's Ocha Birthday
January 27	Celia's Ocha Birthday	August 16	Elegba's (Eshu Anaki) Day
February 2	Oya's Day Esther's Ocha Birthday	August 18	Rita's Ocha Birthday
February 6	Jasmine's Ocha Birthday	August 25	Donella's Ocha Birthday
February 10	Jose's Ocha Birthday	August 26	Martha's Ocha Birthday
February 13	Viola's Ocha Birthday	September 7	Lillian's Ocha Birthday
February 16	Emory' Ocha Birthday	September 8	Yemonja's Day
February 21	Dorothy's Ocha Birthday	September 19	Oshun's Day
March 6	Virginia's Ocha Birthday	September 24	June's Ocha Birthday
March 24	Alison's Ocha Birthday	September 26	Obatala's Day
March 31	Peter's Ocha Birthday	September 29	Ibeji's Day
April 7	Daisy's Ocha Birthday Melanie's Ocha Birthday	October 4	Erinle's Day
April 23	Oshosi's Day	October 6	Orumila's Day
May 20	Gloria's Ocha Birthday	October 15	Ruth's Ocha Birthday
May 25	Orisha Oko's Day	October 28	Andrew's Ocha Birthday
May 26	Spencer's Ocha Birthday	November 1	Deborah's Ocha Birthday
June 2	Bianca's Ocha Birthday	November 8	Egun's Day
June 4	Hortense's Ocha Birthday	November 9	Daniel's Ocha Birthday
June 13	Elegba's Day	November 11	Ruby's Ocha Birthday
June 16	Marion's Ocha Birthday	November 16	Sarah's Ocha Birthday
June 24	Celia's Ocha Birthday	November 25	Aganju's Day
June 29	Ogun's Day	December 4	Rosemary's Ocha Birthday
July 2	Katherine's Ocha Birthday	December 6	Shango's Day
July 9	Erica's Ocha Birthday	December 8	Sophia's Ocha Birthday
July 13	Pauline's Ocha Birthday	December 15	Olokun's Day
July 20	Ralph's Ocha Birthday	December 17	Leon's Ocha Birthday
July 24	Dawn's Ocha Birthday	December 21	Sylvia's Ocha Birthday
		December 31	Joy's Ocha Birthday
			Babaluaiye's Day
			Elaine's Ocha Birthday
			Osanyin's Day

Appendix 2 Order of Initiation

2/25/66	Jose	6/4/88	Hortense
3/31/73	Peter	7/9/88	Erica
7/2/74	Katherine	8/26/89	Lillian
7/24/76	Dawn	8/26/89	Martha
7/24/76	Ursula	10/28/89	Deborah
7/30/77	Michael	11/11/89	Sarah
10/15/77	Andrew	11/25/89	Rosemary
12/21/77	Elaine	3/24/90	Alison
6/24/78	Celia	4/7/90	Daisy
8/5/78	John	4/7/90	Melanie
1/27/79	Tiffany	12/8/90	Leon
5/26/79	Spencer.	12/15/90	Sylvia
6/16/79	Marian	12/15/90	Joy
8/25/79	Donella	2/2/91	Esther
1/5/80	Imani		
2/16/80	Emory		
12/6/80	Sophia		
1/24/81	Foster		
1/24/81	Marie		
8/8/81	Susan		
1/9/82	Edna		
2/6/82	Jasmine		
2/12/82	Viola		
3/6/82	Virginia		
5/20/83	Gloria		
6/2/84	Bianca		
8/18/84	Susan		
10/6/84	Ruth		
1/19/85	Virginia		
7/13/85	Pauline		
7/20/85	Ralph		
11/9/85	Ruby		
11/8/86	Daniel		

Appendix 3 - Proposal For Casa Branca and The Yoruba Society of Brooklyn To Become Sister Houses

The following statement was delivered in Portuguese by Oseye Mchawi at Ile Funfun (Casa Branca), in Salvador Da Bahia, Brasil, on August 30, 1987. It was composed in English by Oseye Mchawi and translated into Portuguese by Frances Moirera.

Text of Statement

In the name of my godfather, Lloyd Weaver, I say, Alafia.

How wonderful it is to be here in beautiful Bahia, amongst friends and fellow Orisha devotees.

I am Iyalorisha Oseye Mchawi, an initiate of Obatala, from New York City. With me are several other Afro-American Iyalorishas and Babalorishas and Aleyos. We are all practioners of the Yoruba religion.

We are very happy to be here. We are grateful to Olofi and all the Orishas for granting us good health and we thank them for clearing our paths that permitted us to journey here. Our purpose in coming to Bahia is to strengthen the tie between Afro-American and Afro-Brazilian Orisha worshippers. We seek to understand and share in the rich legacy of our forefathers who landed upon the shores of Bahia. We seek to exchange ideas and experiences and to teach each other about the ways in which we can keep alive the traditions of the Yoruba faith. We pray for peace and harmony, prosperity and a blending together as one family of Orisha worshippers.

Modupe

Appendix 4 Adoption Proposal

The Yoruba Society of Brooklyn in New York and friends, propose the adoption of Ile FunFun as a sister terreiro, in order to continue our religious and cultural exchanges.

WE PLEDGE:

1. To donate to Ile Funfun, quarterly, the amount of \$100.00 (\$400.00 anually).
 2. To conduct a bi-annual clothing drive. We will send these collections to Ile Funfun and they can distribute them as they see fit.
 3. To send educational materials such as pens, pencils, notebooks and writing pads. This to will be done bi-annually.
 4. To permit, where possible, members of Ile Funfun to stay in our homes when they visit New York.
 5. To expose designated visits from Ile Funfun to our shines, our ceremonies, and our customs.
- And,
6. To continuously exchange ideas and information with each other.

THIS PROPOSAL WAS ACCEPTED AND DULY RECORDED IN THE HISTORY LEDGER AT ILE FUNFUN (CASA BRANCA.)

GLOSSARY

Adimu

Offerings to Orisha. These do not include blood sacrifices.

Aganju

The Orisha of the Volcano and the river. He ferries the souls of the dead to heaven.

Alafin

Literally "owner of the palace". Title of the King of Oyo.

Ashe

Power-to-make-things-happen. Spiritual Energy. The basic force emanating from God that pervades the universe.

Ashe-di

Ritual gift taken to godparents on certain ritual occasions. It consists of one or two coconuts, two candles and a ritually determined sum of money-usually \$1.05 (for priests a multiple of \$1.05).

Asson

Rattle covered with a beaded mesh. The symbol of authority of a Haitian priest

Awo

(1) Secret (2) Priest

Awo l'Orisha

Priest of Orisha (as distinct from Babalawo)

Babalawo

Priest of Ifa

Babalarisha

Literally, Father of the Orisha, male priest, santero

Babalosha

Shortened form of Babalorisha.

Babaluaiye

The Orisha of Smallpox, infections and epidemics. The physician of the poor.

Bata

A set of three sacred drums used in bembes. Bata are unique to the Cuban (and hence U.S. forms of the religion).

Bembe

Possession dance held at irregular intervals. Requires the presence of drummers. It is a two part ceremony consisting of the oro and the ?. There is drumming and chanting in Lucumi in a particular order called the oro. The oro ends with chanting to the Orisha for whom the Bembe is held.

Botanica

Stores that sell religious goods, herbs, candles, statues of saints and materials in the practice of Espiritismo and Santeria.

CMS

Church Missionary Society. The vehicle of Christian proselytization in Nigeria. CMS operated schools, churches and printing presses.

Derecho

Literally right (Spanish), the fee that is part of every ebo.

Divination

The practice of trying to ascertain the unknown by means of signs.

Ebo

Sacrifice

Ebo Entrada

Sacrifice of entry.

Egun

The ancestors named collectively

Elegba

The Orisha of the Crossroads, potentialities and all beginnings.

Espiritismo

The Latin American form of spiritualism - it had its origin in 19th Century France and has spread through Latin America. It is especially prominent in Puerto Rico and Brazil.)

Estera

Grass mat¹ used in a number of ways. It is used during readings, as a foundation for a throne, to setup Ocha.

Esusu

Cooperative economic endeavor in which a group of people put up a certain amount of money periodically, e.g. once a week. Each member of the group takes turns in receiving the entire amount put up for that period

Filha de Santo

Literally daughter of the saint. A person initiated but not yet a full priest in the Brazilian system of the Religion.

Filho de Santo

Literally son of the saint. A person initiated but not yet a full priest in the Brazilian system of the Religion.

Fruita

An occasion when the Ocha is set up and surrounded by fruits and sweets.

Gelede

Festival held in Yorubaland, Brazil and Cuba. Its purpose is to reconcile witches and human beings and to heal social ills.

Hounfor

Temple, place of worship, separate from a residence. (Haitian)

Houngan

Male priest (Haitian)

Ibeji

The Orisha of Twins

1 Usually made in Japan

Ide

Multi-strand beaded bracelet in the color particular to the Orisha for whom it is worn. It can be only beworn those initiated into the priesthood.

Ifa

The most prestigious form of divination among the Yoruba. A type of geomancy² that depends on the generation of certain signs (oduns) and the interpretation of their meaning by means of a corpus of stories. Ifa has 256 oduns and it is said that there are at least 16 stories attached to each.

Ikin

Nut of the oil palm, used in Ifa divination.

Ilekis

Bead necklaces made in the color schemes appropriate to the various Orisha.

Ita

A type of reading given to the Iyawo on the third day of her initiation.

Italero

Reader of an Ita (Spanish Usage)

Itutu

1. Coolness (Nigerian usage). Composure, grace under pressure 2. Pre-funeral ceremony for a priest.

Iyalorisha

Literally Mother of the Orisha, Female priest, Santera

Iyalosha

Shortened form of Iyalorisha

Iwa

Character. It is thought that one's character determines one's destiny.

2 Literally Earth Divination. The Oduns of Ifa are marked on a tray which represents the Earth.

Iwori

Priest

Iyawo

Literally junior wife. Name given to a person for a year and a week after his or her initiation into the priesthood or during any ceremony done for his or her benefit. Initiate.

Jihad

Muslim Holy War. The Fulani under the religious leadership of Ussaman Dan Fodio initiated a revitalization movement to purge African Islam of "pagan" elements during the last part of the 18th Century and early part of the 19th Century. This movement escalated into a jihad which spread to the Muslim Hausa's the immediate northern neighbors of the Yorubas of the Empire of Old Oyo. Eventually Old Oyo was destroyed scattering its people, many of whom were sold into slavery in the Western Hemisphere.

Loa

Name given to Orisha in Haiti

Lukumi

The dialect of Yoruba spoken in Cuba. It differs from Standard Yoruba in that it has lost its tones and is influenced phonetically by Spanish. It is the name given to the Yoruba of Cuba. It is used in Cuba and the United States. Its etymology is uncertain.

Madrina

Godmother

Mae de Santo

Literally Mother of the Saint. Female priest (Brazil)

Making Ocha

Initiation into the priesthood.

Mambo Female priest (Haiti)

Merindilogun

Literally Sixteen. A type of divination using 16 cowrie shells. Patterns of the shells generate oduns to which stories are attached.

Nago

The name given to the Yoruba outside of Cuba. It is a Dahomean Word which means Yoruba.

Oba

Literally King. Senior priest who is knowledgeable. In charge of major ceremonies. Master of ceremonies.

Obatala The chief Orisha. The Orisha of purity. He is the Orisha who forms the child in the womb.

Obi

1. Divination by means of kola nuts (in Nigeria). 2. Divination by means of 4 pieces of coconut (in Cuba and the United States). Obi is a simpler form of divination than Ifa or Merindilogun, yielding only yes and no answers.

Ocha

Shortened form of Orisha. Name given to the physical symbols of the Orisha, that is the covered dishes in which they are kept. Also a synonym for the Religion

Ocha Room

Shrine in the home of a priest where the Orisha are kept. It may be a whole room or a closet or cabinet.

Oduduwa

The ancestor of the Yoruba.

Ojubona

Literally witness. A person's second godparent.

Ogun

The Orisha of Iron, War and creativity. Ogun is also a poet and artist.

Olodumare

God. One of God's principal names in Yorubaland. Other names of God are:

Eleda - The Creator or Maker

Elemi - The Owner of the Spirit or The Owner of Life

Olojo-oni - The Owner of the Day Oba-Orun - The King of The Heavens

Oga-Ogo - The Master in Resplendence

Olorun-nikan l'ogbon - Only Olorun is Wise

Oyigiyigi, Ota Aiku - The Mighty Immovable Rock that Never Dies

Oba Airi - The King Invisible Oba

A-Se-Kan-Ma-Ku - The King Whose Works are done to perfection

Oba Awamaridi - The King Who Can Not Be Found By Searching

Oba Mimo - The Pure King Oba-ti-ko-l'eri - The King Who is Without Blemish

Olofi

One of the most common names of God in the Western Hemisphere

Olokun

The Owner-of-the-Sea. The Orisha of the bottom part of the sea. The Orisha of wealth and mental stability.

Olorun

Owner-of-Heaven, one of the principal names of God.

Onile

The Goddess of the earth. The name literally means the Owner-of-the-Earth.

Opele

A chain to which eight seeds of the opele plant are attached. Used in Ifa divination.

Ori

Literally head. 1. A person's destiny and luck in life. 2. A person's ancestral guardian spirit. 3. An individual's personal Orisha.

Oriate

Senior priest who is knowledgeable. In charge of major ceremonies. Master of ceremonies.

Orisha

Divinities of the Yoruba Religion. They are considered to be aspects of God. In the Western Hemisphere, they have been syncretized with the saints of the Roman Catholic Church, although the particular saint syncretized with a particular Orisha varies from one area to another.

Orisha Birthday

Anniversary of the date on which a priest was initiated into the priesthood. For a period of seven days beginning with the Ocha birthday itself, people come to visit the Orisha of the priest and to salute him or her.

Orisha Day

Day set aside for the saluting of a particular Orisha. The Orisha is setup and for a period of seven days beginning with the Ocha birthday itself, people come to visit the Orisha of the priest and to salute him or her.

Orisha Oko

The Orisha of Agriculture

Orumila

The Orisha of Divination.

Oshosi

The Orisha of Hunting, Jails and Hospitals.

Osun

The Orisha most closely connected with a person's own head (Ori).

Osanyin

The Orisha of herbalism. The owner of all the herbs of the world.

Oshun

Orisha of Love, harmony and culture

Oya

Orisha of the Wind, Storms, Hurricanes and Tornadoes. She is also the Orisha of the entrance to the cemetery.

Padrino

Godfather

Pae de Santo

Literally Father of the Saint. Male Priest (Brazil)

Possession

The result of the of a spirit or god/Orisha displacing one of a person's souls and taking over his or her body.

Raising

The act of a priest in blessing a person who has saluted him or her. The junior salutes, the elder raises. (See Saluting)

Reading

A session of divination

Reading of the Year

A Divination session held once a year on January First to prognosticate the coming year.

Rogation

Sacrifice to a person's head.

Saluting

The act of greeting a priest senior to the person who initiates the salute. Saluting is an involved procedure with an etiquette all its own. Saluting differs according to whether the person has a male or female Orisha. If the Orisha of the person is male, the person prostrates him or herself before the priest, ocha or throne. If the Orisha of the person is female, the person lies down on one side and switches to the other. The priest says: "May the cult of (the name of the Orisha of the person saluting) continue. Arise." The two then cross their arms over their chests and touch opposite shoulders. (That is right shoulder to left shoulder and then left shoulder to right shoulder.) The younger salutes, the elder raises. (See Raising)

Santeria

The name for the Yoruba Religion in Cuba and the Latin Community in the United States. It literally translates as the making of saints.

Santera/Santero

Priest of the Yoruba Religion. Cuban usage.

Set-up

Placing the Ocha on an estera, covering with cloths of the appropriate color and surrounded with different kinds of fruit and sweets.

Shango

The Orisha of Justice, Thunder and Lightening.

Susu

Short for Esusu

Terreiro

Temple, place of worship. (Brazilian)

Throne

A temporary structure made in the corner of the Ocha room when a person is being initiated into the priesthood. It is made of cloth and esteras.

Warriors, The

A group of four Orisha, Elegba, Ogun, Oshosi, and Osun who are received together. This initiation may be a final one, but it must always occur before the initiation into the priesthood.

Yemonja

The Orisha of Motherhood, mercy and the ocean.

Yoruba

An ethnic group of West Africa who traditionally lived in a series of kingdoms and City-States. (See Yorubaland). " Yoruba" is a Hausa word (which means the Cunning). The Yoruba when they use a collective name for themselves call themselves Omo Oduduwa.

Yorubaland

Those sections of modern day Nigeria (The Southwestern States), The Republic of Benin, Togo and parts of Ghana which is the ancestral home of the Yoruba.

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