Preface: Blurring Intersections among Racial, Cultural, and Religious Reproduction

My fieldwork memory that best characterizes the interplay among race, difference, and the politics of authorizing knowledge occurred in an airport in Lagos in 1995. I had just arrived there with representatives from Ọ̀yọ́túnjí among whom I had spent fifteen months collecting fieldwork data. The arrival was a joyous occasion for them; despite their claims of a homecoming, however, their difference led to their precarious outsider status. A young Nigerian girl decided to openly express inquisitiveness: assuming that one of the men in our group was a visitor, she asked him if he was from America. In a celebratory tone he responded, "I'm from here," and pointed to the ground in front of him. When she responded with a look of puzzlement, he added, "But a long time ago, my people were taken away by white men and brought far away from here."

The little girl's mother pulled the girl toward her and instructed her to behave and stop questioning the visitors, but soon the girl broke away and again walked up to the man, responding to his answer as if they had never been interrupted. Pointing to his light brown face and glancing at his clothing, she declared, "But you are not black like me. *Màmá* says you are a visitor, *òyìnbó* [white man/outsider], and I am Ẹ̀gbá." With an emphatic insistence on her distinctiveness she pointed boastfully toward her chest, claiming membership in a particular Yorùbá ethnic group.

He playfully responded with further insistence, "No, we are the same," making circles of his arms, laying claim to no specific ethnicity but suggesting a commonality among us North Americans, the Ẹ̀gbá girl, her mother, and everyone in the line behind us. Pouting, she shook her head and crossed her arms as if she were un-

happy. Pointing to his traditional dress, she asked, "Then why do you have those clothes on if you are really Yorùbá?"

Having undergone the requisite divinatory rituals with which priests in his community consult the oracle to determine the nature of their African roots, and thus confident about the generalities of his ancestry, he chuckled and nodded his head, as if suddenly understanding her confusion. "Ahh," he said. "But look at my black face, then look at my African clothes. These show you that I am African—I dress like an Ọba!"

"No," she retorted. "Poor people and òyìnbó wear those, and you're not poor. You can fly whenever you want."

Despite the apparent disjunctures in the politics of African American reclamation of an African homeland and African Yorùbá rejection of the legitimacy of those claims, the conjunctures of national belonging blur the vocabulary of national distinctions with that of the symbolic unity of blackness. The man's references to a shared racial identity with the young girl reflected his belief in race as the basis of shared national culture. But the young girl and her mother were not convinced that this Ọ̀yọ́túnjí chief was a direct descendant of an enslaved Yorùbá captive, for he could identify neither his ethnicity nor his kinship lineage, determinants that are important qualifiers of membership. Instead, laying claim to a generalized and temporally distant period long ago, the chief communicated the existence of a social rupture facilitated by transatlantic slavery. He invoked an alternative chronology of belonging that inverted her lineage-specific basis for membership to include a temporally cyclical link between Africans before their captivity into transatlantic slavery and African Americans today.

The man's insistence on black racial unity calls on a recognition of sameness. It requires that we relegate heterogeneity to homogeneity (Williams 1991). To the young Ẹ̀gbá girl his declaration was comical, a playful trick in which he misrepresented his identity. Unlike what seemed to be familiar to her, his statement referenced neither his place of birth nor his parents' or grandparents' region of descent. For her and the majority of Yorùbá in Southwest Nigeria, notions of ancestral hometown remain important determinants for understanding Yorùbá belonging. His narrative of exile separated him from her, from them. Rejecting his reclassification of citizenship and, instead, deriving symbolic distinctions from his light brown face and his apparent practices, she classified him as fundamentally "Other."

When the research for this project began in the Yorùbá Ọ̀yọ́túnjí Village in South Carolina, I was interested in understanding the lure of the racial imagination as it related to the production of notions of ancestral belonging, especially in relation to the idea of "Africa" as a diasporic homeland for black Americans born and raised in the United States. I became intrigued by how the history of dispersals

of slave captives around the world shaped black membership in African imaginaries in geographically distinctive ways and how one writes an ethnography about mobile subjects whose subjectivities are complex and whose social histories are sometimes unknown—in light of that history of capture and movement and its related regulation of racial difference. I wondered what such an ethnography would say about the limitations of single-site fieldwork and its ability to capture contemporary movements that may not be linked to empirically derived dispersals, but instead to social memories and imaginaries.

Research on today's communities of black and brown people around the world presents both classificatory and methodological challenges. Where anthropologists once embarked on sojourns around the world to study non-Western community settlements—the Other—today many from non-Western societies have claimed the rights to study "themselves." Yet, of late, even this we-they binary is no longer useful because those who claim the right to study "their" groups are far from representative of the communities they claim to represent. To make matters worse, the analytic conflation of racial sameness as a replacement for shared ethnic or cultural ancestry is equally fraught with classificatory problems.

The racial conflation that this ethnography addresses is that of blackness and the cultural politics of difference, though the focus is on the uses of religious, legal, and historical institutional strategies of power. In the context of the ways of seeing difference outlined in my first example, it is not simply that a similar ideology for classifying racial sameness, such as Pan-African blackness, was not a part of the Yorùbá girl's consciousness.[1] Rather, the event of contact between strangers is a disjunctural moment of articulation in which varied meanings are shaped by historically influenced ways of knowing. For even as identities are relational and social circumstances change over time, the authority on which knowledge is shaped is what contributes to particular logics of recognition in larger spheres of interaction. The young girl's recognition of ethnic difference underscored her need to preclude sameness from difference and distinguish herself with different boundaries of recognition. And though the man pointed to particular elements that for him were distinctive markers of racial membership, at the root of his authority of African membership was divination as an authorial form of knowing the past; at the root of hers was the sanctity of modern ethnic kinship.

Understanding when, how, and why people invoke sameness in the midst of difference is not always an easy task. It requires understanding the ways people legitimize membership in divinatory fields of power. The chapters that follow locate me, the ethnographer, as a non-Yorùbá, nonreligious practitioner, an academic—a cultural outsider whose family narrates its ancestral roots not from Africa at all, but from Canada by way of the Caribbean from a line of Jewish diamond traders

from then-Palestine. These distinctions immediately set me apart from members of the Ọ̀yọ́túnjí Village community, and these conundrums of naming, origins, and cultural membership continue to present critical sites of difference from which I entered this work. Although I shared my interlocutors' desires for black solidarity, at the time, as a recent immigrant from Canada to the United States, I was neither comfortable claiming cultural solidarity nor satisfied with the unqualified description of me as either African or African American. Yet, despite my hesitation with those sites of difference, my informants accepted me as one of them; to them I was "black" and therefore implicated by transatlantic slavery and, as they often described it, "a victim of racist America, thus in need of redemption." Whereas I recognized that the disregard for my claims of difference was understandable, the claims of my interlocutors—black cultural nationalists—were fundamentally cultural and driven by a new movement in black American history, a post–Black Power movement, that was critically distinct from black Canadian politics of immigration and integration. At the heart of our differences was the problematic of the conflation of race with culture and an extended tradition in African American scholarship that accepted an a priori relationship between blackness and cultural sameness. As I contemplated that conflation, my interest in exploring the politics of desire that compelled some black Americans to use religious and legal-historical institutions as a means to look to Africa as their homeland increased and deepened.

In my experiences of blackness in eastern Canada from the early 1970s to the early 1980s, Africa was distant and unrelated to our lives. It was a place far away that had no relationship to our daily practices. Our African descent was taken for granted, but we were also of Caribbean descent, though we had as little contact with the Caribbean as we did with Africa. Yet, the prominent presence of increasing numbers of immigrants from English-speaking islands such as Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad, and Guyana and the growing cultural and economic networks with those regions that led to the formation of black Caribbean identities as a dominant sign of blackness, as a heritage category, were central. Similarly, "black Americanness" had the same relationship to us: it was as distant as Africanness, yet culturally accessible. I remember watching American nightly television programs from Buffalo, New York, and various sit-coms' story lines that generalized a black American experience. Weekly prime-time shows such as *The Jeffersons* and *Good Times* highlighted not only how representations of race and class were conflated but also how foreign the characters seemed from my own experiences of blackness. Yet, despite my distance from what I often classified as U.S. workings of race, it was the institutionalized formations of global antiapartheid movements that swept through university campuses worldwide that offered young people of my generation—toddlers in the 1960s—a thematic basis by which we could form alliances with larger

struggles around racial and economic oppression. This development of a transnational movement toward blackness as Africanness was central to the formation of conscientious movements of black Western students who formed coalitions with groups working toward African independence, in antiracism struggles, and in the antiapartheid movement in South Africa.

With the mainstreaming of computers and transnational expansion of television and radio programming things seemed to change. Information about Americans and black people became easier to access independently. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Canada and the United States made the interconnections increasingly porous. And with the movement of various types of information technologies we saw reflections of who we were in the images being exported from the United States. They were models for conceptualizing our own experiences of racial marginalization, models that we attempted to incorporate as our own but that were not always relevant to our experiences, nor always useful. Nevertheless, these new knowledge technologies provided us with increasing leverage in narrativizing our experiences, ironically using American-based histories of slavery, categories for classifying race, and approaches for redemption.

It is no surprise that, despite being Canadian, as a graduate student and on moving to the United States, I, too, joined a camp of starry-eyed black middle-class students in their early twenties whose experiences of being the marginalized Other motivated self-conscious claims of Africanness as a form of empowerment and unity. Many of us often collapsed our allegiances to political organizing around political and contemporary issues related to Africa, for which the promise of black solidarity served as the symbolic basis from which we worked. Back then, some of us third-wave feminists, as well as latecomers to the Black Power movements of the 1960s, felt that, as much as we had benefited from the gains of earlier political movements, they had failed because participants lacked commitment to personal change. This, we argued then, led only to the further reproduction of new forms of institutional oppression.

Catching the end of the revival of Marxist intellectualism, I came of academic age long after the experience of the U.S. Civil Rights movement and at the beginning of the institutionalization of academic ethnic and racial heritage programs and centers of higher learning—very much corrective responses to a history of racial exclusion and curricular denigration of black people and cultural practices. The significant moment for my generation of black scholars, beneficiaries of the gains of antiracism struggles of the 1960s, was the eventual co-optation of blackness as a sign of struggle to blackness as a heritage category that was to be aligned with a corpus of "History" and a language for resignifying ancestral membership. As a result of coming of age during a time when there existed a popular shift in

the black middle-class imaginary from Africa as the place of "distant primitives" to Africa as a metaphor for black noble roots, many of us were willing, albeit temporarily, to lay claim to such unproblematized attempts to claim social race and not actual complex cultural lineage as the basis for our formations of subjectivity. Instead, using language of enfranchisement, we integrated the symbolic language of social change. We borrowed from the earlier feminist refrain *The personal is political*, creating the possibilities for what would become the cultural revolution of the 1980s. We employed the constructs of blackness from the post–U.S. Civil Rights movement in an attempt to form alliances with what we thought, then, was a commitment to political uplift. For some, this meant "reclaiming their heritage"—perhaps Southern, perhaps Caribbean, perhaps Native American, as long as some form of ancestry was claimed. And, despite our cultural distance from African cultural worlds, returning to *roots* almost always invoked Africa as the foundational site of black roots: the place of "authentic" blackness, yet clearly a highly problematic conflation.

This period in the United States, the 1980s, was a time when deconstructions of anthropological imperial notions of culture began taking root with the institutionalization of cultural studies, ethnic studies, and African American, Africana, and African studies throughout U.S. universities. Yet, although these new programs recast the production of legitimate studies about the Third World Other, taking hold of their cultural traditions in their own terms, the faculty, including some of the "native" anthropologists, also engaged in further reproducing the very practices of racial and gender-based generalizations that they were trying to alter. By asking who should and could speak for whom, scholars tended to chart strictures of authenticity by which certain types of representations were narrowly tailored. Yet, despite the participation of increasing numbers of people of color and feminist interventions into the politics of cultural interpretation, studies of identity could maintain neither the weight of privileging experience nor classificatory generalizations.

Following these conundrums of origins, influence, and representational politics, my own self-understanding and therefore intellectual analysis came to reflect the ways that, despite their shared origins or seemingly similar subject positions, people participate in producing cultural norms in a way that creates sameness in the midst of difference. The obvious gaps in identity categories and cultural and personal experiences are relevant to the roles of culture and power in changing and producing new norms of linkage. A principal finding is that the production of black American descent narratives from the West African "homeland" is made real by historical, legal, and religious production, as well as other institutional mechanisms for charting legitimacy. Through the production of these formal insti-

tutional mechanisms, people in deterritorialized (or diasporic) communities map community, and in so doing make global issues locally relevant. As such, it is the creation of new norms that take on meanings across new boundaries that is relevant here. For in spite of the legitimizing rules of the nation-state, people mobilize particular conceptualizations of the self, the village, region, ethnic and racial group, and nation, even while they move beyond them. These processes of subject making produce increasingly autonomous mechanisms for local consumption. What we see with many black American claims to African cultural identity is a classic form of assimilation into American social life, yet the exaggeration of their cultural heritage is an attempt to establish claims to an ethnically relevant category.

Accordingly, as I demonstrate in the first part of this book, social theory today is increasingly rendering relevant the ways identity and culture are becoming dislodged from place and globalization is leading to new forms of regional autonomy through which socially relevant claims can be made. People from disparate communities can import information about other people and regions and adapt it to their own context, eventually using their own hegemonic position to reshape these "packages" and export them as more authorial than the original. The first part of the book sets the framework for understanding the context in which the political economy of "traditional" Yorùbá revivalism has emerged globally. Scholars articulate national identity as connected to given territorial origins and state designations of citizenship; they must explore the relevance of these categories in relation to people's reclassification of cultural belonging in time and place, how increases in the distance between sites of cultural origins and sites of cultural production are leading to changes in autonomy, and, in some cases, how these shifts in institutional power are enforcing new standards. We need to articulate how power shapes meaning and why, historically, this is so, as well as the mechanisms by which people produce and legitimatize transnational reclassifications of citizenship outside the parameters of traditional requisites of territorial contact. The focus of the second part of the book, therefore, is to demonstrate not just how these relations and meanings circulate and are transformed, but how they gain legitimacy in deeply historical realms of modern subjectivity. To reveal and analyze these processes of making, interpreting, and transforming social categories, I examine what I have identified as the institutionalization of a deterritorialized network of Yorùbá communities in which I chart how social institutions that exist in deterritorialized contexts play out in informal transnational contexts. These Yorùbá practitioners are not located in West Africa, nor were their parents born there. In most cases, the òrìṣà practitioners in this book are sixth- or seventh-generation black Americans, most of whom have never visited an African country, but who use deterritorial practices to transform social meanings in time and space. Through the reconcep-

tualization of constitutional principles of national membership they use religious ritual, texts, and legal and racial discourses to participate in the production of a Yorùbá community outside of the African continent.

The critical goal of this project is to integrate useful but problematic assumptions endemic in highly localized studies that shape anthropological theory, race and diaspora theory, and the anthropology of religion in order to recast the ways we understand social relations as increasingly multisited, deeply historical, transnationally fragmented, and yet recognizable. Despite globalization and deterritorialized social change, the modernity of racial and spatial boundaries, central to the development of the modern state, has been unproblematically reinforced in twentieth-century protest movements. My modest hope is to clarify that this happens not because people simply exercise the freedom to express their ancestral heritage and do so at will, but because alongside these acts of agency are forms of historical domination that are both ideological and cultural and serve to negate the exercise of power seen as such. The making of subjectivity and communities involves the making and unmaking in particular hierarchies of value and distinction in the modern world. This argument explains how acts of agency are shaped by a priori values. Theories of agency thus need to be understood in conditions of possibility in particular fields of power, for power is a site of freedom and a space for the enactment of power as well as a site within which acts of agency are regulated. My argument highlights the role of institutions in the shaping of ideologies of seeing and belonging in particular temporal terms and, as such, highlights the importance of understanding social change in relation to identifying sites of variability, contingency, and sites for the reproduction of hegemonic forms.

Evolution of the Project

The research for this book emerged from my Ph.D. dissertation written at the University of California, Santa Cruz, but was inspired by an earlier project that I began in 1990 as a graduate student at the New School for Social Research in New York City. I collected data on Yorùbá religious revivalist networks throughout the United States, focusing on one community in the Bronx, some years before beginning research in Ọ̀yọ́túnjí Village in South Carolina. At the time, studies of African villages tended to focus on small settlements; studies of black Americans tended to focus on urban populations or patterns of change in rural and urban areas of the South. Although ethnographic approaches were responding to the crisis in ethnographic authority, there was an overwhelming interest in the role of the state and national discourses in shaping cultural practices in specific places, as well as the role of the individual in shaping cultural interpretations. Much of this

work consisted largely of descriptive Third World ethnographies as well as texts that demonstrated the specificities of those local sites, without regard to how new modes of production and techniques of communication were changing the very mechanisms by which local sites were influenced by global sites and vice versa.

Over the course of this writing, there has been a proliferation of anthropological interest in legal, scientific, and political institutions and the interplay between the local and the global. Forced to rethink the social in the context of both its fragments and the orders within which they are embedded, I began this research because of my interest in what the study of communities of people who were laying claim to other nontraditional origins and practices necessarily entailed. I started by exploring the relationship of blackness, practice, and place to the production of practices said to be performed in the name of African traditions. The proliferation of Yorùbá drumming circles throughout New York communities served this purpose, and I charted how male and female drummers "performed Africa" through these practices.

My findings demonstrated that in these deterritorialized contexts, the dominant criteria for legitimacy surrounding questions of who had the right to play the African rhythms using conga and *bàtá* drums were organized along racial (read: black/Third World) and gender lines. Female drummers and nonblack drummers were often marginalized outside of the hegemonic boundaries of acceptable traditional practices. "Men drum and women dance" was the popular refrain used to explain the division of labor and ritual practice. Citing African traditions as the referential source of such taboos, many justified their ban on female drumming, for example, by referring to late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century anthropological village studies that outlined the lifeworld of the people studied. Sometimes new consequences accompanied these sources of traditionalist knowledge, such as warnings of biological reproductive consequences if premenopausal women transgressed these social rules. Although they knew they would be excluded from ritual and public events or dismissed as homosexuals and therefore not worthy of membership in a cultural organization, many women still pursued their drumming profession.

At the time, and to my surprise, the data also revealed that though some men certainly played a role in reinforcing these gendered taboos, many of the strongest enforcers of the exclusion of women from drumming were other women. They were invested in maintaining the gender division prescribed by what they felt was authentically African. Comparing data with West African drumming networks, however, it was evident to me that such rigid gender differentiation did not exist there in the same way as it was interpreted in the United States, which led me to ask why my American interlocutors were more intent on strict gender differentiation

than were many in the African villages in which I traveled and visited. I became interested in not only the culturally constructed character of these male and female roles, but also in how they were allied in particular modern racial articulations, therefore serving to regulate daily social practices for those in the diaspora. This led me to examine the rhetorical or ideological process by which this traditionalism was both performed and legitimated, how these interpretations had been authorized and authored. Analyses of these factors made it clear to me that, despite the appearance of inflexible roles, even in the Americas, the rules were far from fixed. Instead, gender roles were variable and contested, as were other forms of interpretation. Various factors were embedded in the potential of ritual to change the referential meanings of signs, an understanding of which drew me to an investigation of the transformative power of African ritual for black Americans. I wanted to understand then, as I explore in this book, why and when traditional practices were transformed and what reasons were given, as well as what contingencies, such as timing and charisma, tell us about what components of sociohegemonic orders need to be present for some forms of variability to be seen as legitimate. In thinking through how we understand the features of deterritorialized communities that claim belonging to a home elsewhere, I continue to ask what signs need to be invoked for meanings to be resignified and accepted as authoritative, and why. By observing the making of traditions, I also documented the contestations of these acts. For whether one articulates the existence of tradition as the basis for an authoritative act depends on whether certain practices are seen as legitimately customary and, if so, embedded in the prestige of past practices. Therefore, the production of norms takes place through the referencing of contemporary social orders as well as through the formation of particular nontraditional institutions that are already in ideological alliance with preexisting social orders. Though the use of race, like the articulation of gender, may be intended to counter discrimination, it also invokes the articulation of a particular scientific or geographic order and so has the effect of reproducing the very practices that it was meant to alter. As a site of difference, race is necessarily present even in the rethinking of itself. Given the workings in these contexts of race as simultaneously reinscribing the modern and the postmodern, the sign of blackness draws its prestige from the moral authority of the trauma of separation or exile, dislocation and displacement, and the nobility of a preslavery African past. If this conceptualization of the African diasporic imagination is coupled with the will to claim or the impossibility of a return to Africa, the next questions are What are the features of transnational networks of Yorùbá religious institutions through which these narratives of connection are framed? and What types of ethnographic methods must we employ to capture the complexities of these transnational networks?

Methods

The data that resulted in this book were developed and collected over a ten year, four-phase period of participant observation in three countries, supplemented by my inspection of two and a half centuries of documents by missionaries, historians, anthropologists, sociologists, practitioners, and tourist eyewitnesses. My methods principally centered on participant observation in a multisited procedure in accordance with which I assumed that tradition, conceptions of Yorùbá, and race were locally and historically contingent. Upon describing my ethnographic interests in the workings of òrìṣà practices outside of Nigeria, I gained permission to live in Ọ̀yọ́túnjí Village and participate in community life.

As the ethnographer living with and among my informants, conducting a local ethnography, I also traveled with them and some of the members of their network as they moved within their national and transnational networks: to Ọ̀yọ́, New York, Ọ̀yọ́túnjí, Houston, San Francisco, Milwaukee, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and elsewhere. I accompanied them from village to village, diviner to diviner, from one home to another, from one World Òrìṣà Conference to another, and it became clear that the "pure" religious practices they were in search of were themselves hybrid reinterpretations of traditional practices. One such research encounter included following Ọ̀yọ́túnjí revivalists on a pilgrimage to Ọ̀yọ́, Nigeria, a region they see as their African homeland. Having been required to undergo necessary Ifá divination rituals to make the trip, I adhered to both their own local rules of participation as well as those of the anthropological tradition of local studies, thereby documenting localized ritual and decision-making processes that influenced social norms and formal lawmaking by their decision-making polity, the Ògbóni society. However, describing my compliance with both sets of rules may be misleading, as my adherence to Yorùbá traditionalism was through ritual participation without full belief in the cosmology. Nevertheless, I suspended my questions about the efficacy of ritual as I submerged myself into their complex worlds. In the case of anthropological methods, my characterization of Yorùbá cultural practices in the village in which I did the majority of this work was based in the United States. My overarching concern was with the conceptually transnational and morally racial religious movements through which I detailed the routes of connection that transcended local sites and national boundaries, crosscutting regions and trade routes.

While in the United States I documented social life in two communities through which I charted the transnational forms of revivalism that emerged out of Ọ̀yọ́túnjí's òrìṣà voodoo focus. One was Ọ̀yọ́túnjí African Village in South Carolina; the other was an Ọ̀yọ́túnjí satellite community in the Bronx. The founders of Ọ̀yọ́túnjí Village established it as a means of finding their way back to Africa,

back to a "homeland." Although the community is viewed as "strange" and "odd" by some other African Americans as well as a range of Americans, it would be a mistake to assume that in deterritorialized contexts, territorialized approaches to modern nationhood and racial membership are divested of territorial contexts. Rather, Ọ̀yọ́túnjí residents use reconfigured temporal and spatial notions of ancestral continuities to recast their conceptions of homeland as Africa in America. The challenge, therefore, in such transnational studies is to establish the geographic and temporal scales in which the globalization of such African-heritage practices play out.

Field Methods: Locating Racial Alliances in Ritual and Legal Institutions

The drama of calendrical and seasonal rituals and formal and informal regulations of daily life is the bread and butter of a long methodological tradition in anthropology as a practice intended to capture meaning in small places writ large. Just as conceptions of blackness as Africanness play a critical role in framing the parameters of black Atlantic membership to which Yorùbá revivalists in the United States lay claim, the ritualization of transnational religious practice and multisited legal and historical authority also provide the central forms of legitimacy on which Yorùbá belonging is established.

The first phase of my research began in September 1990 to September 1991 in the Bronx and resumed in February 1995 to spring 1996. During these two periods I documented the archival history of Yorùbá revivalism as well as daily social practices, recording the rhythms and rituals of everyday life in rural as well as urban contexts. During some of this time I lived with, observed, and recorded aspects of daily life among Yorùbá traditionalists on both sides of the Atlantic. As I documented their religious practices and examined these in relation to institutions relevant to American audiences, it became clearer that where race was the modality through which Yorùbá revivalism was lived, it was the invocation of spatial and temporal (chronotopic) reconceptualizations of their ancestors living alongside them that served as the modality with which deterritorialized Yorùbá revivalists claimed membership. Recognizing their beliefs that ancestral simultaneity is possible in the modern present, and in an attempt to understand the workings of ritual, I underwent a range of Yorùbá ritual initiations to fully engage in the transformative authority that religious ritual provides. By observing the power of the transformative sacred to enable the chronotopic reclassification of secular domains such as nationality and citizenship, I charted how "reality"—local, regional, national, transnational—was made and remade. This enabled me to explore the

roles of power and interpretation in shaping how agents produced the ideological frameworks by which they interpreted their world.[2]

To understand the religious network of Yorùbá communities throughout the United States, I also traveled with Ọ̀yọ́túnjí villagers to affiliated communities in a range of other U.S. cities. By traveling with them in and out of communities in their network, I came to see how various cities were integral nodes in the larger network of Yorùbá practitioners in the United States. After spending phase 1 collecting ethnographic data about the daily enactments of Yorùbá traditions in and outside of Ọ̀yọ́túnjí, the next phase of my research involved understanding the Ọ̀yọ́túnjí network in relation to its transnational linkages in Nigeria and Cuba. Both Nigeria and Cuba are critical components of any study of Yorùbá transnational networks in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Phase 2 began with a voyage to Nigeria with an entourage from Ọ̀yọ́túnjí Village and a few members from the larger Ọ̀yọ́túnjí network and concluded in winter 1998 to spring 1999 with a return to the village.

The connections between Cuba and Nigeria, as points in the Yorùbá network, are symbolically powerful because the large majority of Yorùbá captives who arrived in Cuba were from the Benin region of the Ọ̀yọ́ Empire, forcibly enslaved and transported to the Caribbean and South America between 1760 and 1886. This period is characterized by the collapse of the Ọ̀yọ́ Kingdom, the civil wars in the Bight of Benin, and the interventions of the British, who eventually succeeded in overthrowing traditional governance and establishing a British colony in the New Nigeria. These conditions set the stage for the conditions of slave raids and slave trading along the West African coast and, eventually, the influx of captives to Cuba.

The historical development of networks of social and religious organizations led to the spread of òrìṣà worship in Cuba where there existed strong networks for religious practice. In Cuba today, òrìṣà worship exists as part of a larger continuum of religious change in the Americas in which religious practices, now known as Santería but also referred to as Lukumi and *regla de ocha*, have transformed the shape of òrìṣà worship outside of West Africa. Given the historical circulation of òrìṣà practices from West Africa to the the Americas, I realized that it was critical to understand how Cuban òrìṣà practices and practices in the United States are related. For the relationship between Cuban slavery and Santería as overtly Christianized continues to be a critical motivator for Yorùbá revivalism as a form of social protest. Thus, even as Santería has developed into a distinctive practice that combines the syncretization of òrìṣà and Catholic religious practices, there remain critical tensions between its genealogies of Ọ̀yọ́-Nigerian roots and the legitimacy of changing contexts and practices in the Americas.

My work related to Cuba and its place in the larger network of Yorùbá transnationalism was archival and relational; however, I spent six months in Nigeria in Ọ̀yọ́ and Abẹ́òkúta, two small communities of Yorùbá traditionalists, where I collected ethnographic data on Yorùbá legal and religious practices.

Ọ̀yọ́ is a popular site of Yorùbá traditionalist practices and a location in which a range of Nigerian ethnic groups interact. It is a city that was rebuilt and relocated many hundreds of miles south of the demolished city of Old Ọ̀yọ́, which was the site of the capital of the Old Ọ̀yọ́ Empire. The demise of this empire in the late 1700s led to one stage of dispersals of Yorùbá-speaking people to other regions of southwestern Nigeria and to the Americas; thus, New Ọ̀yọ́ is considered to be the relocation of the ancestral Ọ̀yọ́ Empire and the reclaimed homeland of my informants in Ọ̀yọ́túnjí. In Ọ̀yọ́, I observed the interactions between Ọ̀yọ́túnjí villagers and their hosts, which allowed me to explore the convergences and divergences of transnational identities through which to chart the ways that Yorùbá tradition was interpreted, regulated, and authorized.

In Abẹ́òkúta, Nigeria, I interviewed diviners, observed traditional court hearings, and participated in òrìṣàs thought to be traditional. This experience of extended fieldwork highlighted the postcolonial conditions of Nigerian poverty and widespread struggles for democracy and the ways religious ritual was called on to transform hardship. It became clear to me that most American revivalist practitioners were not that inclined to incorporate into their own struggles the contemporary postcolonial conditions of Yorùbás in Nigeria, such as the Ilé-Ifẹ̀ conflict of the late 1990s or the politics of democratic transition in the postdictatorship nation. The Ọ̀yọ́ past, not the present, was their focus. Disappointed with the residual impact that colonialism and Christianization had on Nigerian institutions and Nigerians themselves, most revivalists disregarded current problems of power and governance as a surviving condition of colonialism that will be eradicated only with the eventual overturn of European cultural imperialism, starting with Christianity, the central religious ideology against which their struggle for redemption is waged. Instead, they spoke in broad generalities about the richness of Yorùbá history and practices and reserved for private conversations their disappointment with the centrality of Christianity and Islam in people's lives.[3]

In the third phase of my research, I returned to Ọ̀yọ́túnjí Village. Here I realized that the pilgrimage home left my interlocutors with the resolve that the future of retaining Yorùbá cultural and religious traditions was no longer in the hands of Yorùbá in West Africa but in the future of black people in the African diaspora. "Ọ̀yọ́túnjí and black people of the Americas," they would say, "need to step up and take our rightful place." Otherwise interpreted, the future of Africa was in the hands of blacks in the Americas.

Having charted connections between òrìṣà practices in southwestern Nigeria and their contemporary connections to and differences from parts of the Americas (such as Brazil, Cuba, and the United States), in 1998 I began phase 4 of my research as a postdoctoral fellow. I went to London to conduct archival work, looking at historical evidence of the early building of religious and legal institutions and identities. Then in Nigeria again, at the National Archives housed in the University of Ìbàdàn, I focused on investigating Ọ̀yọ́túnjí claims that colonialism and the historical oppression of traditionalists by the Nigerian state led to the production of particular types of Western desires consistent with those that led to the earlier demise of the Ọ̀yọ́ Empire. In the British Library I also gathered data on the expulsion of slaves from Ọ̀yọ́ and the development of modern institutions that emerged out of traditionalist formations. Data from secondary sources on transatlantic slavery documented the "truth-seeking" practices of historians and missionaries, which, in combination with the primary archival records, provided a living statement of a complex past.

With the goal of completing the fourth phase of fieldwork almost ten years from my initial work in New York City, I returned to California to inspect data at the University of California, Berkeley's Bancroft Library, the site of one of the most important twentieth-century collections on the Yorùbá people of southwestern Nigeria, that of the renowned Dr. William Bascom. The holding consisted of meticulous fieldnotes, interview transcripts, letters, divinatory field recordings, traditional clothing, and art objects.[4] I explored the relevance and influence of such scholarly literature by examining the role of religious divinatory practitioners and teachers in shaping what has come to constitute Yorùbá history, religion, and cultural practice. This phase of research shaped my understanding of the centrality of Ọ̀yọ́ in Yorùbá revivalism and its reformulations in the United States as the symbolic site of Yorùbá slavery, prestigious governance, and hegemonic power.

Despite anthropology's single-site tradition, all locations in these four phases of exploration were ideal for studying the institutional production of African American reinventions of Yorùbá traditional practices and Nigerian Yorùbá contestations of those practices. To maintain and advance the role of ongoing movement as a hallmark of anthropological method, my method draws out the theoretical implications of data gathered in one site as the means by which to determine when and why a shift in sites is warranted as the means to highlight the importance of intersite dependencies and the recognition of fragmentation as holistic in anthropological studies. This processual and structural interdependence and the integrity of the symbolic and its relation to material conditions as both "real" and "imagined" are fragmented and complex. They point to how and why attention must be given to rethinking training and the expected length and forms of fieldwork

necessary to cover the various scales of transnational interaction through which to produce holistic interconnections across time and space, fine-grained accounts that advance rather than undermine the centrality of holism as one of the long-standing goals of the discipline.

The complexity and time involved in carrying out such a study also raises important questions regarding the production of able students and the expectation of the timing of production for ethnographic accounts, mentoring, and training. The model of single fieldworkers at a single field site, as established in the early nineteenth century, still largely informs views of the time (typically twelve to eighteen months) thought to be necessary to develop skills for carrying out mixed qualitative and quantitative forms of collection, to build adequate rapport with a spatially hierarchically arrayed informant population, and to select the ways and means to integrate archival and other forms of secondary material and make use of new technologies. This model is also part of the problem with current dilemmas in ethnographic production and is itself embedded in the limitations set for us with the increasing professionalization of the American academy, which continues to be driven by consumer capitalism, or what David Harvey (1989a) has referred to as the "condition of postmodernity." Methodologically, therefore, we need to raise questions about and address issues concerning underlying expectations of expertise in area studies within which scholars are expected to locate themselves. For the reality is that now, more than ever before, globalization is leading to complex relationships between the local and the global, and therefore, what constitutes the field within particular units of analysis is changing also.

Classificatory Conundrums

The process of naming and classifying fields, national groups, concepts, and so on is a process of holding in time a moment that is constantly in flux. Any act of naming always participates in the act of fixing that object in time and space. And though there is no object that represents the totality of an absolute or the totality of that which it fixes, the task of naming is the challenge of identifying the ultimate values of a thing. Thus, the problem with discourse of all types is the problem of standardizing signs and meanings with which we necessarily communicate.

The act of writing is no different. Through the process of writing and documentation we analyze processes that are in flux and interpret them within historically legible norms. Similarly, I also engage in the necessary act of articulation, and in so doing employ classificatory distinctions that are relevant to the daily negotiations of the people with whom I work. However, because the limits of discursive fixity are not sufficient to undermine the necessity of articulation, I necessarily en-

gage in translation, interpretation, and reinforcements of categories that describe processes that are in motion. Though I argue that the production of meanings in time and space is reflective of the production of particular ideologies of seeing, in naming and distinguishing between things I, too, make classificatory distinctions. Some of my distinctions may appear inconsistent; however, they are always strategic. At times, I use "African American" and at other times "black." Sometimes I define citizenship as a legal status governed by a social contract between the individual and the state, and sometimes I refer to citizenship in social terms, as cultural citizenship that indexes forms of social membership legitimized by social collectivities. I refer to American converts to Yorùbá traditional practices as "Yorùbá revivalists" or "òrìṣà practitioners." Reading this manuscript, my Ọ̀yọ́túnjí interlocutors disagreed with my classificatory interpretation of black Americans as ultimately "American." As in my interchange with forms of citizenship, sometimes, for ease of comprehension, I am forced to use traditional categories, the very categories of state power that Ọ̀yọ́túnjí practitioners work hard to contest. At other times, to distinguish between particular groupings of black cultural nationalists—ritual practitioners and social activists, and African practitioners who are engaged in similar practices but whose members do so under very different sociohistorical conditions—I use categories that reflect the spirit of revivalist protest. For analytic purposes I must insist on the relevance of the difference of place, yet to miss the opportunity to distinguish between the production of an African imaginary and the rule of the state in the legitimation and classification of personhood is to miss the politics of power and difference in daily lives. These people, who were born and raised in Nigeria, and those who, more often than not, speak "native" Yorùbá are clearly culturally different from those who converted to Yorùbá practices, were born outside of Nigeria (particularly in the United States), and approach òrìṣà traditions with the fever of reclamation rather than the banality of the everyday.

I use "African American" and "black American" interchangeably to refer to people who are often represented by the practitioners themselves as being of African origins or of African descent but who were born in the United States, live or have lived in the United States, or can claim belonging to generations of black American former slaves. Nevertheless, I often use "black American" instead of "African American" to refer to those persons in the United States who claim blackness as their identity but who, more often than not, claim neither African nor American as a primary overriding descent category. As a black Canadian living in America I would fit into this category. In general, I use the term "black" to mark the range of geopolitical, economic, and sociocultural routes of interaction that have constituted a black subjectivity within the expansion of the modern world. Yet, despite these constraints of representation and articulation, I demonstrate

that, even in the articulation of distinctions, race is not something that one possesses, nor is it something that has remained the same over time. Blackness, for example, is not just a category that came to reference the "brown body." Rather, it is an index of particular hierarchies of meanings and a set of social distinctions that have changed over time. Like other categories, blackness is many things, including the cultural politics of seeing and the cultural politics of how race is seen. It is about the mutable alliances between distinctive hegemonic pronouncements of phenotypic features in space, as well as shifting designations of membership according to performative articulations and interpretations of sameness in relation to difference. It is about the ways people construct fundamental categories from which signs are shaped, boundaries are patrolled, and membership is secured and enforced.

What does it mean when the very classificatory acts that may have been designed to counter marginalization, as Reva Siegal (2002) has suggested, also participate in the "very practices [they seek] to alter and regulate"? To discover how this notion of the racially "real" is constructed in relation to the national is to recognize the tension between the ontological forces of its production and how its production is framed in institutions of power. Therefore, I also refer to territorialized communities to describe those who, like Nigerian Yorùbá practitioners, more often than not claim the national or ethnic identity of the region in which they live. My use of deterritorialized communities describes those who live in one place but claim origins and national/prenational belonging to another place, and therefore either live or see themselves as living outside of particular national boundaries. Reality is made and remade in a range of ways, and the imagination, a larger category, is regulated by the very ideologies of modernity that have come to constitute its bases for the intelligibility of subjects. Through explorations into the institutional influences that produce the imaginary, I demonstrate how people see themselves in relation to who they are legally and politically and in relation to how they reclassify group national identity in transnational terms. For even if race is easily constructed and imagined, it is not easily unimagined. Entering this terrain necessarily forces scholars to ask how the terrain of classification implicates us in lives that are not entirely defined in our own terms.

Taking up the challenge of understanding how Yorùbá practitioners participate in the necessary regulation of classificatory boundaries, I examine how we can employ the tools of multisited research to understand the processes of local interconnection by which people classify themselves along historically constituted conceptualizations. My only consolation for the violence of interpretation and the demarcation of distinctions that might be different from that of my interlocutors

is to paint a description of the aesthetic landscape in each of the encounters that I describe. This act of description leaves room for the reader to see my role in providing both the analytic and classificatory lenses that have filtered all my encounters and the way my classifications are also a function of the historical shaping of concepts and relations over time.