

3. Spiritual Ethnicity: Our Collective Ancestors in Ifá and Orisha Devotion across the Americas

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“Wole wa! Eriwo” rang out, asking for our attention and beckoning us forward. In response, we abandoned our seats to gather on the stage deep in Trinidad’s Santa Cruz Valley. “Thwap, thwap, boom, boom, thwap, thwap” rang out as the drummers echoed the call, the skin of their hands hitting the skin of the drumhead. Soon the rhythms were supporting and energizing our own call-and-response as we sang, “Egun Alagba, Egun Alagba.” The ancestors were calling, and we had gathered in response. Or was it that we were calling the ancestors and they were responding? Yes, indeed, the ancestors were coming! *Egun wa o!* As the energy built, the drums and song demanded a physical response. It became harder and harder for me to hold my hand steady (I was recording video for my research) as my hips went one way and my head moved another. I tried to direct all movement to my foot, tapping with the drums, though the visible sways and dips on the video attest to my ultimate failure.

Emerging from this interplay of movement and rhythms were the voices of the elders as they invoked the spiritual energies of the ancestors. This impromptu ritual found us deep in Trinidad’s Santa Cruz Valley at the Orisha Shrine (Ile Eko Sango/Osun Mil’osa; IESOM) and their Ifá temple, Irentengbe.¹ A diverse group of devotees had gathered from across the Americas in 2012 for a multiday conference on Ifá called Alásùwadà.² As we paid homage to the Egun-gun (Yorùbá masquerade of the collective ancestors), what became visible was the construction of a shared affect between Spirit and participants.³ The ancestral ritual created community through a combination of dialogic reflections on

African diasporic belonging and embodied ritual greetings. The boundaries and borders of nationality, language, race, and color bridged in this ritual moment created subjectivities I characterize under the term *spiritual ethnicity*.

Performatives of Spiritual Ethnicity

In a previous work I introduced the term *spiritual citizenship* to apply to how members of African diasporic religions in Trinidad access Yorùbá cosmology and spiritual practices to inform their belonging (including rights and responsibilities) in community, the nation, and, at the broader level, in transnational formations (Castor 2017).⁴ In doing so, I postulated the idea of spiritual ethnicity as “the religious ethnic identities of ‘Yoruba’ priests and devotees throughout Latin America who situate themselves within the framework of the African diaspora, though ethnically and racially they are marked as Hispanic and largely not marked as ‘black’ or African descended socially, politically, or phenotypically” (2017, 68). I did not elaborate on this concept in the book, as my argument and narrative flowed in a different direction. Here I explore some of the possibilities of spiritual ethnicity in the context of the Ifá and Orisha religions in the African diaspora, which are closely associated with the Yorùbá people, culture, and religion of West Africa.⁵

The conference that brought people from Los Angeles, United States; Caracas, Venezuela; Toronto, Canada; and Medellín, Colombia, together in a valley of Trinidad’s northern mountain range explored how Ifá could guide communities to face “global political, economic, and environmental challenges.” The goal of the conference was to use Ifá “to suggest more harmonious ways to live in balance with each other and the earth.” People crossed not only large geographic distances but separations of language, culture, race, and ethnicity to gather under the banner of Alásùwadà, “an obscure divinity . . . whose responsibilities include bringing balance into human societies.”⁶ I explore this journey across both place and space through the lens of diaspora while grounding my analysis on embodied ritual and the resultant shared affect (which I reference as spiritual affect). This chapter’s focus on Egungun (our collective ancestors) calls attention to the entanglements of race, ethnicity, language, nation, and culture through a pivotal ritual moment of spiritual unity. I argue that during the multiday international Ifá conference, this ancestral ritual laid the groundwork for a shared identity or spiritual ethnicity that in the moment privileged a shared imagined Yorùbá identity over other markers of difference. I take into account how my own body was implicated in this bringing together of community and how this informs my ethnographic analysis of this 2012 ritual.⁷

My autoethnographic recollections, video recordings, photos, and notes (that is, my ethnographic archive) form my primary sources of data. Additionally, in my analysis I draw from a range of literature (by no means exhaustive) focusing on African and African diasporic religions (Beliso-De Jesús 2013, 2014; Clarke 2004, 2007; Hucks 2012; Matory 1994, 2005, 2009; Tweed 1997); embodiment, affect, and performance (Csordas 1990, Daniel 2005, 2011, 2018; E. P. Johnson 2006; Mazzarella 2009; Stewart 2017); and race and ethnicity (Hall 1996, 1999, 2003; Yelvington 2001), as well as some pieces on historical memory (Routon 2008; Scott 1991; Trouillot 1995). My critical ethnographic background in African diasporic religions, race and identity, and performance informs this analysis while pushing me in new directions on the body and the interpolation of affect, ritual, and ethnicity. Questions of temporality are particularly salient—from the historical memory evident in evocations of the African diaspora (and the subject’s placement therein) to the fleeting nature of embodied motions in ritual (do they have a lasting impact?) and the *communitas* (à la Turner 1969) created through the gathering’s shared (e)motions and reflections.

Deep in the Santa Cruz Valley, among devotees of varying backgrounds I witnessed an expression of embodiment that I identify as both performing and informing spiritual ethnicity. On that day of ancestor ritual, I felt a shift of energies as alternative ritual temporalities and historical memories were invoked, embodied, and performed. Elders spoke one by one, calling on ancestral spirits and conjuring memories of the past. Chief Alagba Baba Erinfolami, a Trinidadian elder and the chief Egungun priest of the shrine, spoke on the power of the ancestors and the need to protect and care for those closest to the spiritual realm—that is, our children.⁸ The shrine’s leader, an Egungun initiate, Iyalode Loogun Osun Sangodasawande Iya Sangowunmi (also Trinidadian; referred throughout the text as Iya Sangowunmi), spoke on the power of gathering and called on us both to be open to new perspectives and to ask questions. Oba Adejuyigbe Adefunmi II, the African American spiritual and political leader of Oyotunji Village, located in South Carolina, United States, spoke on the deep connection between “the Village” and the *IESOM* shrine in Santa Cruz, Trinidad.⁹ This was his first visit to Trinidad, and he marveled at finding himself onstage there with an Egungun masquerade that shared the same initiatory lineage as the one in Oyotunji Village.¹⁰

This theme of ancestral connection resonated with the energies being raised and served as a diasporic palimpsest as, one by one, representatives from countries on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean (the United States, Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Cuba, Guyana, Nigeria, and Haiti) spoke to the power and importance of the ancestors in their lives and their communities. The devotees spoke

on the need for more knowledge to bring back to their communities. And they declared their shared connections—across divisions and distances—through the ancestors, through the African diaspora, back to Africa.¹¹ As Ivor Miller points out, “Participating in African-derived religions is a method of maintaining historical counter-narratives in which the present generation has direct links to an African past” (2004, 215). And these counternarratives not only extend backward into the past but also pertain to the present; they inform the construction of subjectivities and mobilize agency into our futures and beyond (where perhaps we will one day be ancestors).¹²

In coming together to propitiate Egungun, all those gathered laid claim to shared African ancestry, one not of blood but of Spirit. On that morning the most important marker of identity was not people’s nationality, language, or phenotype but their relationship to the spirits of Yorùbá religion, specifically the collective ancestors. Befitting this, our ritual salutations of the ancestors were preempted by an important message from Spirit. Through Iya Sangowunmi, Spirit spoke forcefully to all there of the need to listen to the messages they received from the ancestors and the need to write them down. She emphasized, with her outstretched arm sweeping over us in an embodied gesture of inclusion, that the ancestors speak to everyone. In that moment the ancestors spoke, and we all listened to the different messages that came through (indeed, this piece is an extension of my reflection on those messages).

Our gathering’s growing connections were in no small part because the issue of identity and belonging has particular salience among African-descended populations in the Americas (Gomez 1998; Mintz and Price 1976; Scott 1991). The violence of being captured, forcibly transported, sold as goods and labor, and subsequently enslaved attempted to dehumanize the people captured from various African polities. Europeans designed the machineries of colonialism and plantation slavery for control. To that end, they disciplined the cultural and religious expressions of African peoples to eliminate any source of personal or collective power, to varying degrees, across the different empires’ colonial projects.¹³ This project of dehumanization and control by the slaveholding society and colonial governance aimed to erase the identities of the African people and thus remove the basis for any social solidarity and sources of power (Fanon 1963, 1967; Gomez 1998; Mintz and Price 1976). Nonetheless, despite the centuries-old project of slavery, designed to produce African people in the Americas as *tabula rasa*, their ingenuity, creativity, and perseverance ensured not only their survival but that of future generations.

These controlling practices went beyond the policing of people’s movements to attempt to control their language use, religious beliefs, and cultural expressions.

From the banning of drumming to the deliberate disruption of language communities, the basis for ethnic identity was under assault in the Americas. The extent to which this campaign was successful has been hotly debated over the past century (from E. Franklin Frazier to Melville J. Herskovits) with debates continuing into the contemporary moment (Apter 2017; Yelvington 2001). Many have called our attention to the historical processes and strategies that have resisted and persisted, as well as those that have fallen away (Price 1985; Trouillot 1995). And all the while, as academics debate, “African” people have continued to live their lives, building community and striving for freedom (Robinson 1983; Sharpe 2016; West, Martin, and Wilkins 2009).

Spiritual Ethnicity, Spiritual Affect

The religious subjectivities under examination here are embedded in shared histories of resistance and connected to Black radical traditions integral to the historical fabric of the African diaspora. Here I am referencing resistance to the dehumanizing and exploitative socioeconomic and political systems making up Western “modernity,” from slavery and colonialism through to postcolonialism, neoliberalism, and late capitalism. Specific movements include Quilombo dos Palmares and marronage communities throughout the Americas, the Haitian Revolution, Pan-Africanism, *négritude*, and Black Lives Matter, to name just a few (see Robinson [1983] and West, Martin, and Wilkins [2009] for a framing of the Black radical tradition in the context of Black internationalism). Perhaps more important are all the unnamed ancestors and acts that contributed to the survival of Africans in the Americas and are so central to much of the spiritual work in African diasporic religions.

Further, they exist in a diasporic framework and networks of ritual lineage, initiation, and knowledge transmission crossing borders and boundaries, from *Ilé-Ifè* to Los Angeles to Bahia, creating transnational spiritual networks (Beliso-De Jesús 2015; Castor 2017; Clarke 2004; Matory 2005). From the ritual practices and spiritual praxis circulating along these networks arise “African-derived mythic histories and identities [that require] their members to assume a transnational identity” (Miller 2004, 199).¹⁴ However, many barriers to unity create obstacles to the institutionalization of the religion and to organizing for collective action. Differences in language, race, ethnicity, class, and in some instances gender and sexual orientation complicate the divisions within branches of the Yorùbá religion and between factions and lineages competing over ritual knowledge and authority. Attempts to unify people across these divisions in recent years have ranged from online organizing for social justice (Castor 2018)

to international conferences and symposia.¹⁵ And while there have been visible moments of success, the divisions marking the history of the religions continue to challenge the creation of community.

In this chapter my reflections and explorations of a ritual moment during the Alásùwadà conference raise questions about the impact of spiritual affect, here theorized as the feeling of *communitas* raised through the ritual circulation of spiritual energy, or in this context *àṣẹ*.¹⁶ In the coming together and engaging in embodied spiritual praxis coupled with diasporic assertions of belonging, I locate an identity cutting across other forms of organizing difference. In considering this as spiritual ethnicity, I ask: Are there forms of belonging rooted in shared ritual lineages and historical consciousness that challenge (or offer an alternative to) existing forms of belonging such as the nation and ethnicity? In a way that resonates with Youssef Carter's exploration of the African American *fuqara* (in this volume), combinations of historical memory and embodied performance inform forms of belonging in many rituals that recognize and renew spiritual community and its relation to the divine.

Entanglements became visible in the ancestral ritual of the Alásùwadà conference in diasporic testimonies conjoined with a circuit of embodied ritual movements.¹⁷ "These communal practices, sustained by ritualized ties to mythic Africa, lead us to perceive that concepts of 'nation,' history, and identity that differ vastly from those developed in the West are being upheld in communities across the Americas" (Miller 2004, 211). In addition, ties to communities in a contemporary Africa inform the transnational spiritual networks of African diasporic religion devotees. The embodied performances of belonging that are so evident in many African diasporic rituals (and reflected secularly in African American greetings, such as *dap*) inform subjectivities grounded in ties to both an imagined African past and an informed African present.¹⁸ Navigating both Western conceptualizations of the subject (often disembodied) and those rooted in non-Western Indigenous systems (often grounded in the body) has contributed to the resilience, adaptability, innovation, and, yes, brilliance of followers of African diasporic religions (among others) in places like Trinidad and Venezuela and throughout the Americas (Fanon 1967; Gilroy 1993; Hall 2003).¹⁹

Historical Entanglements

Trinidad and Venezuela are separated geographically by only ten miles at their closest point, yet they are very different historically, politically, and socially. These differences stem from separate colonial histories (British Empire vs. Spanish

Empire) with the resultant legacies of language and political affiliations. The two countries also have commonalities, chief among them the oil and gas reserves fueling their economies. Both countries have strong Roman Catholic communities, an inheritance of a shared Spanish colonial past (Trinidad was under Spanish colonial rule until the early nineteenth century, before it was ceded to the British as part of a treaty negotiation). And they both have strong African diasporic religious communities, including Yorùbá-based religions of Ifá/Orisha. I established in previous research (Castor 2009) that their Ifá/Orisha initiation lineages have separate histories. In Venezuela the Orisha community of the twentieth century was tied to Cuban lineages, with priests (known by the title Babalawo or Babaloricha) coming from Cuba to perform initiations when people did not make the journey to Cuba. This is very different from the Trinidad Orisha religion, which was mostly endogamous in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Even though Trinidad was largely an indirect slave port, the British colony received a large influx of people, relative to its population, from the then Bight of Benin. In the early 1800s, ten thousand or more people were transported as liberated captives during the British naval blockade of West Africa (Adderley 2006). Upon their arrival in Trinidad, they made up a significant portion of the “free colored” population in the British colony, where through a quirk of Spanish law that was on the books, they could own land. This became very important for a religion that is closely tied to the land and that embeds sacred ritual items in the ground. The religion that arose in Trinidad was creolized (at least) twice over, as the people from West Africa represented many communities with distinct, though related, languages, cultures, and histories. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, large numbers of French planters fleeing African freedom fighters in Haiti and other French Caribbean colonies resettled in Trinidad and brought with them a significant African-descended enslaved population in exchange for land grants from the colonial government. While some of the slaves had been born in Africa, many others were generations removed. Those creolized slaves had developed their own religious expressions, similar to what is now associated with Haitian Vodou. When they settled in Trinidad, this complex of spiritual practices was brought into conversation with both the religious expressions of the existing enslaved African communities and those of the newly arrived indentured and freed West Africans. From this complex history of intermixture and dialogue, Trinidad Orisha emerged in the mid-1800s with a spiritual lineage that continues into the present.

In the new millennium, there have been major changes in Trinidad Orisha, as a new Yorùbá-based lineage of Ifá (an oral literature holding the collected history, wisdom, and knowledge of the Yorùbá people, accessed through a sys-

tem of divination, all under the same name) has emerged locally (Castor 2017, esp. ch. 5). Ifá also served as the impetus for increased levels of communication between Yorùbá devotees in Venezuela and Trinidad. In the early 2000s, an Ifá initiatory lineage and teachings from the Nigerian part of Yorubaland were being established in both countries. This was driven in part by local religious leaders traveling to West Africa for initiations, trainings, and pilgrimages to holy sites and festivals. In doing so, they strove to connect to the historical “source” of diasporic religions and to bring what they learned and experienced back home with them. This religious exchange included a series of festivals and conferences in Trinidad and Venezuela with attendees not only from both countries but also from nations throughout the Americas and West Africa. Within these circulations, Nigerian priests of Ifá and Orisha (male priests—Babalawo or Babalorisa—and female priests, who hold the title Iyanifa or Iyalorisa) have also traveled in both communities, fostering connections between the two countries. For the purposes of this chapter, I focus on one such conference, convened in 2012 under the auspices of Olóyè Sọlágbadé Pópólá (a well-known Nigerian Ifá priest who has over a thousand godchildren throughout the Americas). Though the original impetus for the Alásùwadà conference came from Yorubaland, it was held in Trinidad, hosted and organized by IESOM under the leadership of Iya Sangowunmi.

Appeasing the Ancestors: Embodied Memories, Diasporic Time

“Everyone must greet, go and meet every person. First, greet the elders and Egungun. Then greet everyone.” This injunction to physically greet all the participants in this conference on the Ifá religion and its application to community building and public policy struck me for its lack of efficiency. My body, keyed into a secular conference with its linear time expectations, was anxious since I was scheduled to present a paper that day from my own research on Ifá.²⁰ And in this distinctly nonsecular conference, it looked as if my presentation was going to be seriously delayed, if it happened at all. On Saturday morning, instead of hearing people present their papers and then having the scheduled panel discussions, we were all gathered together on the stage, with some people overflowing onto the steps and down the sides. Who were we? This important question informs this chapter: How were identities being constructed through ritual movements and practices of spiritual affect? How were divisions being crossed, *communitas* being generated, and a feeling of unity being achieved? And if indeed all this happened, how did it then inform the spiritual ethnicity

of the participants? What tied the Venezuelan Latina to the Puerto Rican Latino to the African American man from Los Angeles to the Afro-Caribbean woman (me) from Texas to the “Africans” (the local term for African descendants) from Trinidad? This chapter claims that indeed all of these varied gendered bodies, marked by phenotype, geography, nationality, and language into diverse racial and ethnic groups, were brought together in that moment through the ritual movements of their bodies (at the direction of spiritual forces) under the umbrella of a diasporic Yorùbá ethnicity (a spiritual ethnicity).²¹

Ancestor reverence works through a different (alternative, if you will) temporality from the dominant Western capitalistic time form. In calling on these elevated Spirits of those who have gone before—a calling that invokes “direct” hereditary lineages (or blood kinship), ritual lineages, and cultural lineages—the past (that which was) comes into the present moment (that which is) to have an impact on the future (that which is yet to be). In addition to this fairly straightforward linear temporality, in which the past and present impact the future, there are other constructions, such as where our actions in the present moment affect the past. As Deborah Thomas (2016, 183) argues, people have “an experience of time neither as linear nor cyclical, but as simultaneous, where the future, past, and present are mutually constitutive and have the potential to be coincidentally influential,” in conditions of exceptional violence (such as slavery, colonialism, and their aftermath). This collapsing of a temporal telos provides a powerful space for spiritual praxis. In this ancestral time, knowledge can be transmitted, skills learned, and vital heritages passed on (see Alexander 2006). In this liminal space, social identities are reimaged as people experience the freedom to reenter their personal narratives—past, present, and future. This movement of subjectivity does not occur solely in an individualistic frame. Rather, it exists in a web of spiritual kinship extending into the multiple temporal registers named above. And in this recentering, communities have the potential to be formed not only across time and space but also across perceived divisions of social identity, be they race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, or language community. For many, this center is conceptualized as an imagined “home,” often located as the ancestral *Ilé-Ifẹ̀* of Yorubaland. This was evoked in a reflection on Egungun from the Oba Adefunmi II of Oyotunji Village, a guest of honor at the conference.

Oba Adefunmi II spoke of his first time in Trinidad during the Egungun ritual: “I don’t feel as if I left home yet. . . . And that is what culture—Yorùbá culture—does for us. Wherever you find it, you are home.” (Over the weekend other devotees would echo this sentiment.) Reflecting on this association of shared space with home, I found a grounding in the cosmic realm accessible

from many different places. One such pathway is in connecting to the ancestral matrix (others are through engagements with Ifá and Orisha). And in this ancestral connection is an example of a spiritual praxis building community through a collective experience of spiritual ethnicity. As I listened to people from across the Americas situate themselves within the history of the African diaspora and as I experienced the accompanying embodied ritual, questions rose in my mind around the potential of collective Egungun ritual. What were the possibilities for transcending existing socioeconomic, racial, and national divisions? What were the responsibilities to community that came with this subject formation?

This ancestral time/space—or ancestral matrix—exists in the Yorùbá religion within the cosmic realm. And it is through ritual, especially collective ritual, that people in Ilé Aiyé (the Earth) interface with the cosmic realm. The directives of Ifá, under whose guidance we were gathered for the Alásùwadà conference, conveyed the importance of working together, of collectivity, and of unity. In many different manners, these messages had been (and were) delivered throughout the conference in rituals both before and during the conference. On that day, within the Egungun ritual, the hour of testimonials invoked historical and genealogical memories of the diaspora, creating palpable feelings for the possibilities and tenuousness of connection across differences of language, nationality, ethnicity, and race.

As one Ifá initiate from Venezuela testified, “We’re calling the ancestors of all those who are present here today to unite.” This is notable because it calls on ancestors who may have been enslaved to join together with those who may have enslaved them and their kin. It calls for spiritual reconciliation of historical rifts that in our present moment we have yet to fully face as societies (and as individuals). In thinking through the possibilities and responsibilities of spiritual ethnicity for reconciliation and healing, I am reminded of one moment of the Egungun ritual. Iya Regla Diago-Pinillos, an Afro-Cuban professor who was the most visibly (by phenotype) Afro-Latinx person there, spoke on the issue of skin privilege. Directing her comments toward devotees who had traveled from Mexico, Venezuela, and Colombia, she called out the names of communities of African descendants in each country. Then she spoke of those who are not able to travel internationally for such a conference. She pointed to her outstretched arm, indicating the deep brown hue of her skin. From this she called attention to the reality that many with similar skin tones as her own in Latin America would not have the resources to travel. Iya Regla then said it was the responsibility of the conference’s Latinx presenters (largely light-skinned), who had the privilege of travel, to go and share the knowledge they had gained of diasporic

history with those communities of Afro-descendants. In recognizing shared positionalities with others from Venezuela, Colombia, and Mexico (Latinx Yorùbá devotees), she also assigned responsibility cutting across racial difference. Thus, the spiritual ethnicity carried with it responsibilities to Blackness tied to a shared African diasporic spirituality.

Crossing the Divide: Spiritual Ethnicity and Latinx Devotees

The call for the Latinx devotees to connect with their Afro-Latinx countrymates drew on a shared connection (spiritual ethnicity) and responsibility to community (spiritual citizenship), raising questions of privilege, access, and belonging. One such question to consider is, Do Latinx who present as Anglo (or light-skinned) have more access to African religious traditions and networks than Afro-Latinx? Drawing on my previous research in Venezuela, I would say that this is so.²² When looking for a link between Trinidadian and Venezuelan Orisha communities, I had found that working-class and immigrant West Indians in Venezuela were largely involved in Indigenous religions, such as María Lionza. The Orisha community that hosted me in Caracas was largely middle-class (though economically this class distinction may have broken down as the Venezuelan economy has destabilized since 2013 in the post-Chavez era). Throughout Latin America, Afro-Latinx largely live in marginalized communities with lower socioeconomic opportunities. And those communities are largely Christian, with some exceptions (see P. Johnson 2007). These issues of class and color intersect with privilege and access, adding layers of complexity to considerations of spiritual ethnicity and ancestral connections. Honoring the Yorùbá cosmology that has all people originating in old Ilé-Ifè (located now in Nigeria) assists in avoiding a racialized essentialism. Yet the cultural construction of the African diasporic experience is clearly enmeshed in the construction of historical and contemporary racialized systems and subjectivities. These were among the many complexities that swirled through our ritual, informing both narrative and our embodied movements.

On that day we were all gathered there to honor the ancestors, which as constructed created a shared link to the ancestral home of Yorubaland (and more specifically Ilé-Ifè). In part, this draws on the diasporic logics of a shared origin in Mother Africa. This construction of a root with a myriad of branches is certainly not novel, but here the verbal affirmations of a shared source and a shared spiritual heritage set the stage for what was to come. The performative engagements orchestrated by the intervention of Spirit would build on this energy and move it to another level. As aptly put by Yolanda Covington-Ward, “Re-

ligious power also comes from conduct, gestures, and other forms of embodiment” (2016, 27). My analysis here focuses on one such raising of power through the ritual movements of the gathered bodies. As if concretizing the tenuous social and ritual relations, the next injunction came from the Spirits of the ancestors, through an Egungun elder who told us, “Everyone is to greet everyone.”

Embedded in this simple directive was a series of embodied ritual praxes. First, there was the negotiation of different knowledge levels associated with the embodied protocols of greetings, from casual hugs to more elaborate movements (akin to the African American movement vocabulary codified as dap as previously mentioned; see note 18). These negotiations would have involved translation given the different African diasporic religious spiritual lineages, which have their own distinct greetings, as well as the differing levels of expertise and knowledge among those gathered. In many African diasporic religious branches, notably in Cuban Lucumí or Regla de Ocha (aka Santería), when you greet another practitioner, it is proper to cross one’s arms on one’s chest and then touch opposite shoulders—shoulder to shoulder on each side.²³ These salutations in Lucumí take place at the start and end of ritual gatherings, often conducted in a specific order of initiatory seniority.

Michael Mason’s ethnography of Lucumí rituals in Cuba and the Washington, D.C., area describes how a new initiate named Carter “learns to be a part of the community by using his body in specific ways” (1994, 25). Mason found the movements reflective of the embodied knowledge ingrained during initiations. With regard to the movement of bowing down and extending the right arm to touch the earth, or *dobale* (or in Yorùbá *dòbálẹ̀*), and its specific ritual form of full-length prostration, the *moforibale* (or in Yorùbá *iforibalẹ̀*), Mason reminds us that “all initiations include this bodily action of submission and reception of blessings” (29). Through the repetitive motions of the body, meaning and subject making are created and re-created, ordered and reordered. As Mason puts forth, “The moforibale reiterates social order as it exists” (2002, 40). In bringing together people across differences of lineage and spiritual background (layered alongside race, ethnicity, gender, nationalism, and language, to name just a few social categories), ritual greetings became a site of connection and negotiation. One such site of negotiation was navigating the different styles of greeting represented in the gathering.

In Trinidad Orisha the greeting involves first touching alternate shoulders with open arms (though some may cross their arms), followed by placing one’s forehead against the forehead of the other person. This last part, the touching of heads, is particular to Trinidad, while the touching of shoulders has a wider circulation through Orisha lineages across the African diaspora. Thus, when

Chief Alagba Baba Erinfolami instructed us all to greet, it was understood this would be the formal ritual greeting of one Orisha practitioner to another. As was to be expected with almost four dozen people, this process of each person greeting every single person took some time. As we each turned to greet the person next to us additional levels of embodiment and àṣẹ (spiritual energy) were added. According to Covington-Ward, in “performative encounters,” “the body is used strategically in everyday life to transform interpersonal social relationships in meaningful ways, impacting the social and political positions of the people interacting” (2016, 9). In this instance, as we used our bodies to greet each other, we were recognizing both the àṣẹ held by the other person and our shared positions as holders of àṣẹ, as Yorùbá devotees. The ritual greetings lasted for well over an hour, accompanied by call-and-response singing and drumming. The focused activity of seeing each other, recognizing the other person as spiritual kin, and using our bodies to affirm these relations transformed the social relations from those of strangers and visitors to those of community and family, with the possibility of creating an Ifá community. This latter point had social and political implications if we were, as directed by Alásùwadà, to use our collectivity to make an impact in our societies.

As we greeted each other and prostrated (dobale or moforibale) ourselves to the elders and Egungun, our bodies accessed memories that conflated the present moment with previous ritual actions. The repetitive movement of performing dobale was, as Yvonne Daniel recounts of her own experience in Brazil, a “bending in humility and honouring [of] the knowledge and higher-consciousness of ritual elders” (2005, 32). In doing so, our ritual greetings also created an embodied memory embedding access to the cosmic realm in shared recognition of the divine in ourselves (in the Orí or divine consciousness that each person possesses).²⁴ These movements also connected us with the Spirit of the Earth (Ilé Aiyé) as we repeatedly touched the ground. In an exchange with me on this topic, a Lucumí priest I will call Baba A. said, “It reinforces my connection to the earth and my respect for the earth. How do I show respect for a deified force of nature on this planet? By trying to put my body as close to it as possible, right?” In our conversation he went on to link the humility of prostration with an expression of love and caring for spiritual forces, elders, and lineage. “How do I show my respect, my love, and my care, even for another person? I put myself as low on the ground as possible. I put myself in contact with the ground as much as possible. I am reinforcing constantly on the level of muscle memory my willingness to humble myself—to the forces of nature, to my elder.” This humility is equalizing even as it recognizes hierarchy—equalizing in that there is recognition of the divine in all things, from the Earth to the elder.²⁵ The

prostration also reinforces the connection of lineage and pays tribute to those who go directly before you, the elders.

In speaking on this reinforcement of lineage, Baba A. invoked the temporal: “I also think that it reinforces constantly, and it gets stronger over time, it reinforces our connection to our lineage, right?” This raises an interesting consideration. What are the differences in temporality when people who come together do so for a singular event (as in the Alásùwadà conference described here) versus when they meet regularly in a ritual community? Is there a tension between the ephemeral interactions of a onetime event and the regular repeated motions of prayer (for example, as discussed in chapter 2 in this volume)? I offer that instead of attempting to resolve this tension as part of a binary framework, we should consider a shift in perspective. From this new point of view, the ephemeral and the repetitive are not at odds, vying for the power of transformation. Rather, these different modalities in a cumulative embodiment both hold the potential for significant transformation. Consider that in presenting oneself before the manifestation of an Orisha, say, *moforibale* in the presence of Oshun, healing is received (with the exchange of *àṣẹ* being the primary marker of difference, not phenotype, national origin, or even race). Perhaps that healing resolves a potentially dangerous health condition. And that healing was facilitated by the embodied practice over time, with its muscle memory and energy alignments, which allowed for that one *moforibale* in front of Oshun to be effective. After this, the person may look back and understand their previous *dobale* and *moforibale* in a new light, as iterative alignments of body and spirit.²⁶ If we take the disruption of ritual temporality seriously, then we must consider that a future practice may have an impact on a current or past moment. In fact, that future moment may transform that which has already occurred.

With repetition, the gestures of greeting, prostration, and blessings become ingrained in the body and attached to feelings of connection with both Spirit and community.²⁷ Thus, they hold resonances with prior moments of ritual fellowship that are accessed anew in new ritual moments. This is reflected throughout African diasporic religions. Mason’s observation that “social life, relationships, and ritual knowledge are performed by people as they bow their heads to the ground” (1994, 36) is equally true in Trinidad as in the Cuban Lucumí context. He then gives a description that could have been talking about the Egungun ritual at IESOM in Trinidad, as he called the reader to view *dobale* or “*moforibale* as ‘a bodily performance’ of the relationship between the student and the god-parent, of the uninitiated *ori* to the *ori* with *ase* (or crowned with the Orisha, *Ifá* or Egungun among other spirits)” (36). In the context

described here, relationships were being performed and reinforced among the conference attendees (ranging from newcomers to students to initiates) and then also between the attendees and the elders. This was evident in the next direction we received: “Before greeting, make your way to Iya and Oba, *dobale*, and receive their blessings.”

As is often the case in ritual practice, the instructions continued to come at different times (in local Trini parlance: *piece, piece* or in Yorùbá: *dià dià*) as they were filtered from the spiritual realms to us by the Egungun elders. We were to prostrate ourselves in front of two elders, Iya Sangowunmi (see figure 3.1) and Oba Adefunmi II (see figures 3.2 and 3.3), who were sitting next to each other. First one person and then the next prostrated themselves, head on the ground and hands at their sides, to wait for the blessings not only of the elders but also of the spiritual energies they carried, the blessings of the collective ancestors, and their *àṣẹ* (see figures 3.1 and 3.2). Mason calls attention to this critical moment where “being raised by the elder completes the ‘reciprocal relationship’” (1994, 34) in the act of giving blessings provided through both verbal and bodily expressions. After Iya gave her blessings (and a message from Spirit if there was one), she used her staff to touch the person on the back of one shoulder and then the other. Using two hands (touching the prostrating person’s shoulders to indicate that they should rise) and also verbal commands (“*dide*” in Yorùbá, meaning “stand up”), she would ritually “raise” the supplicant, who then greeted her again—shoulder to shoulder and head to head—before moving on to do the same process again with the Oba Adefunmi II of Oyotunji Village (see figures 3.2 and 3.3). After these ritual supplications and blessings were complete, we started the process of greeting each other.

Wait! Yet another step was being added—a vital one in the sacred geography being traversed by body and spirit. We were to greet Egungun—in the form of a cloth masquerade that had been fed *orogbo* (bitter kola), *epo* (palm oil), *oti* (clear alcohol), and *obi* (kola nut) at the opening of the ritual—with a *moforibale* (see figure 3.4). Afterward, we were to *dobale* (or touch the ground) to greet the elders, Chief Alagba Baba Erinfolami and Awo Ifakolade, who were standing on either side of the Egungun. After this important first step we were directed to move on to greet each other. This circuit from seated elders to Egungun to standing elders created a web of *àṣẹ* that then moved from person to person as they greeted, raising the spiritual energy. This spiritual affect powered by our motions performed several things, including creating a sense of community and informing our embodied spiritual praxis. Emerging from these two performatives was ultimately a shared identity in the moment, which I have labeled *spiritual ethnicity*. Together, the ritual moments, diasporic declaratives,



FIGURE 3.1. In response to instructions, a devotee makes *moforibale*, a prostrated greeting, before Iyalode Loogun Osun Sangodasawande Iya Sangowunmi and receives her blessing at the Alásùwadà Ifá and Orisha International Conference, hosted by Ile Eko Sango/Osun Mil'osa in Santa Cruz, Trinidad (2012). Photograph by author.

and embodied praxis were strong enough to lay the groundwork for not only a remarkable conference but also a shift of our individual subjectivities toward the collective.²⁸

Conclusion

This chapter is a partial answer to Miller's call for scholars to explore "the broader social ramifications of ethnically-based initiation societies involving nonmembers of that ethnic group as found in Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, and other



FIGURE 3.2. A devotee receives the blessings of Oba Adejuyigbe Adefunmi II of Oyotunji Village, Sheldon, South Carolina, at the Alásuwadà Ifá and Orisha International Conference, hosted by Ile Eko Sango/Osun Mil'osa in Santa Cruz, Trinidad (2012). Photograph by author.



FIGURE 3.3. As part of the blessing, a message is conveyed to the devotee. Alásuwadà Ifá and Orisha International Conference, hosted by Ile Eko Sango/Osun Mil'osa in Santa Cruz, Trinidad (2012). Photograph by author.



FIGURE 3.4. The devotee (in white) ritually performs *moforibale* in front of Egungun at the Alásùwadà Ifá and Orisha International Conference, hosted by Ile Eko Sango/Osun Mil'osa in Santa Cruz, Trinidad (2012). Photograph by author.

regions” (2004, 211) by looking at the affective means by which ritual can construct a shared belonging, a spiritual ethnicity. Spiritual ethnicity was visible in the Alásùwadà Egungun ritual over the weekend. However, as devotees returned to their homes, one could ask whether the unity created in rituals like the one described here continues to inform people’s lives and, as Miller (2004, 196) proposes, assist “them to live better.” After the conference, plans to create a working group (utilizing the internet and social media platforms to cross the geographic distances) or to hold an additional conference to continue the dialogue and community building never materialized. This could indicate a fragility in the construction of spiritual ethnicity. As potent as the spiritual affect was in the moment, it seemingly soon dissipated as people returned to their respective homes and everyday lives (often embedded in the linear temporalities of neoliberal labor practices). And yet this should be balanced against the fact that people successfully came together in the moment and formed community, raising the possibility of this happening again. For there exists in the ancestral matrix a temporal fold where pathways continue to inspire visions of community that overcome difference. And from this space, inspiring visions of new subjectivities become available that have the potential to transcend the divisive legacies of slavery and colonialism.

In the unfolding of the Egungun ritual, something was shifted in that moment where together we (each participant, including myself) built community that felt simultaneously ephemeral and transformative. How is it possible for the experience of spiritual ethnicity to be ephemeral yet transformative? As I reflect back on the repetitive motions in the ritual that created an embodied memory, what has become visible to me is the embodiment of spiritual praxis as a link to the spiritual affect and spiritual ethnicity from that day. Every time a devotee performs a *dobale*, this link could then bring a memory of the past into the future, an evocation that reawakens that energy and affect. This then ties together with the reflections on temporality to create an embodied affective connection with meaning(s) that may shift over time. A future interaction may be shaped by a memory brought forth through a ritual *dobale*. Alternatively, a future interaction could also reframe the held meaning of the experiences at the 2012 *Alásùwadà* conference, providing new meanings and relevancies. In this way the embodied practices and spiritual affect that informed spiritual ethnicity exist in potentiality as transformative, ready to be actualized. One experience of shared collectivity, such as that during the *Alásùwadà* conference, can remain linked to a series of movements available to be actualized.

For example, years after the conference, I entered a new ritual space marked by a diversity of lineages, ethnicities, and phenotypes. I was tense and apprehensive about using the correct ritual protocols for that space. But when I lowered myself to *moforibale* to the shrine and the elders, my energy shifted. I physically and emotionally relaxed as my body recalled the spiritual affect from previous ritual spaces such as the *Alásùwadà* conference and the possibility of the collective experience discussed here as spiritual ethnicity. In the space of performing that ritual movement, I accessed both embodied memory and a stored *àṣẹ* that shifted my positionality in the new space. I was able to navigate that ritual space successfully and make new connections to people and Spirit. In reflecting on this recent ritual moment, perhaps what appears ephemeral from one point of view may upon further reflection be both/and: both ephemeral and lasting, shifting bodies, temporalities, and energies across horizons of possibility.

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especially Iyalode Sangodasawande Sangowunmi. I appreciate the support and information provided by my elder Olóyè Sọlágbadé Pópọ́lá. For gathering us together and shepherding us faithfully with both patience and firmness I thank coeditors Yolanda Covington-Ward and Jeanette Jouili. Many thanks to the anonymous readers for their constructive insights and to all of my coauthors in this collection for their engagements during this process, especially Bertin Louis for his fellowship and support. I extend my deep appreciation to Awo Ifásẹ̀yítán Taiwo Thompson for his assistance with the Yorùbá tonal markings (all mistakes are my own). I also give thanks to Spirit in its many forms, including Orisha, Egbe, and Egungun. This chapter is dedicated to Chief Alagba Baba Erinfolami; may I continue to listen to the ancestors' messages and, as they ask, "do the work."

NOTES

1. Throughout this chapter I use Orisha as the name for both the priesthood and the sacred forces of nature and deified ancestors that originated in Yorubaland over a thousand years ago. These spiritual forces, be it Oya as an embodiment of the force of the wind and storm or Oshun as fresh water and fertility, were brought across the Atlantic with Africans over hundreds of years of enforced travels during the African slave trade. Ifá is the name associated with the divine word from a high deity, Olódùmarè, and the priesthood and divination system used to access that divine word and wisdom. A shrine is a physical area set aside and consecrated to a specific sacred energy (Orisha, Egbe, or Ifá), often containing vessels and accessories associated with that energy (e.g., brass bells and fans for Oshun).

2. Alásùwadà is a divine energy named and described in an Ifá verse, Òsá Ògúndá, that watches over both people and things coming together in groups, and groups coming together in collectivities for support, strength, and the collective good (e.g., multiple blades of grass are stronger than a single blade of grass).

3. Trinidad's Egungun should be distinguished from the Egungun rituals of Yorubaland (to which they owe their provenance, via spiritual lineages and communities in Texas and South Carolina), which involve a collectivity of ritual specialists performing specialized roles, as described by John Thabiti Willis: "Egungun may refer to a single Egungun masquerade or to a specific Egungun organization or society, which includes all of the masquerade chiefs and initiated members who may or may not don the mask in a town. An Egungun masquerade named Oya, for instance, includes the person wearing the Oya mask, as well as the drummers, singers, and other ritual specialists who accompany Oya during outings or performances" (2018, 10). While ancestors have been individually venerated in Trinidad's Orisha faith going back to the nineteenth century, the introduction of Egungun masquerade there can be linked to Oloye Aina Olomo, an African American priest, at the end of the twentieth century (Henry 2003; McNeal 2011).

4. Ivor Miller's use of the term *spiritual ethnicity* in the title of his 2004 essay, "The Formation of African Identities in the Americas: Spiritual 'Ethnicity,'" came to my attention after my own independent formulation. Throughout his essay Miller maps out

his conception while never directly introducing the term in the text. In my essay here, I draw from his argument to complement my own thinking and raise some questions about the differences in our conceptualizations. My exploration differs in part by assessing the applicability of spiritual ethnicity to a transnational grouping of people rather than those grounded in a single geographically bounded place or nation.

5. In the Americas, the African diasporic religions of Trinidad Orisha, Cuban Lucumí, and Brazilian Candomblé (to name a few of many) are clearly and recognizably informed by cosmologies, beliefs, and rituals from many groups across West and West Central Africa, as well as drawing (to a lesser extent) from Indigenous and immigrant traditions across the Americas.

6. The quotations are from an Alásùwadà conference invitation.

7. As a Black feminist ethnographer, performances studies scholar, and Ifá/Orisha initiate, I cannot vacate my own body from this analysis. “Ethnography is an *embodied* practice, it is an intensely sensuous way of knowing” (Conquergood 1991, 180). Central to my embodiment is the positionality that my “redness” (a racial attribution local to Trinidad; see Segal 1993), dual nationality (United States and Trinidad), size (on the plus side), gender (cis female, with special connotations in Trinidad of being a red woman), and even hair (“natural”) all convey meanings, including varied levels of status, in the ritual space that I explore here. While the calculus of intersectional factors is complex, I exist as both marginal and privileged, both insider and outsider.

8. In 2018 during the writing of this piece, Chief Alagba Baba Erinfolami made his transition to the ancestral realm. This adds a dimension of immediacy to my claims here that there is an ancestral matrix that we can connect to that has a ritual temporality where we can coexist with what has gone, what is, and what will be. And in doing so we can connect with those who have passed from Ilé Aiyé (the Earth). I dedicate this essay to Baba Erinfolami and hope that its energy reaches him in the ancestral realm.

9. For more on Oyotunji Village, see Hucks (2012) and Clarke (2004, 2007).

10. It is important to distinguish the collective Egungun from the more personal or familial ancestors (*egun*) that are individually propitiated (though collective Egungun are often embedded in familial and community lineages). For more on Yorùbá Egungun, see Drewal (1992) and Willis (2017).

11. There is a vast literature on African diasporic circulations, and the mentions in this chapter are not meant as a comprehensive list. Indeed, they merely scratch the surface. Instead, I would call attention to some texts that have informed my own approach to the African diaspora (including Edwards 2009; Gilroy 1991, 1993; Hall 1996, 1999, 2003).

12. Adding another facet to these counternarratives are the direct experiences of devotees from the diaspora as they visit priests and other devotees in West Africa, as well as the experiences of Yorùbá indigenes as they encounter these spiritual visitors in Yorubaland and then become visitors themselves as they travel to places like Trinidad.

13. Many thanks to an anonymous reader for reminding me of the collective gatherings that occurred, largely by ethnicity, in societies, associations, and organizations in Cuba and Brazil. This history is also reflected across the Caribbean, from the Nation Dance of Carriacou to the ethnic groupings in Trinidad’s neighborhoods. These col-

lectivities further underscore my point that identity and belonging were important to Africans and their descendants in the Americas, across empires.

14. *Spiritual praxis* is a term that I have adapted from M. Jacqui Alexander's *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory and the Sacred*, where she speaks of "the cycle of action, reflection and practice as Sacred practice embodied" (2006, 307).

15. These gatherings range in scale from large, open international conferences, such as the International Orisha World Congress (with meetings held in Cuba, Trinidad, Brazil, and Nigeria), to smaller lineage-based gatherings, such as the annual Egbe Obatala symposium in New York in the United States. A series of Ifá conferences in Miami gather more Cuban Lucumí practitioners (though they are open to other lineages). And the newer African and Diasporic Religious Studies Association, founded by Dr. Funlayo Wood, strives to bring together scholars and practitioners from the wide variety of African diasporic religions and communities. This is a larger version of a conference held on Ifá divination in 2008 that resulted in the edited volume *Ifá Divination, Knowledge, Power, and Performance* (Olupona and Abiodun 2016).

16. For more on *àṣẹ*, see Abiodun (1994) and Boyce Davies (2013, 72–75).

17. I am calling on cultural anthropologist and Caribbean studies scholar Deborah Thomas's definition—"entanglement, for quantum physicists, refers to the notion that two sub-atomic particles, having been initially entangled, will affect each other even when far apart in space and time" (2016, 185)—to speak of the complex and dynamic interplay of embodied ritual practices with forms of belonging (ethnicity, nationality, etc.). In this instance, I am pointing to how expertise in ritual movements becomes an index of belonging to not only the African diasporic religious community but also the larger imagined Yorùbá ethnic community.

18. *Dap* refers to the embodied greetings between two people involving the exchange of bumps between fists, hands, arms, and/or chests, often in a complex combination. While commonly believed to have originated with Black soldiers in the Vietnam War era, the practice has spread throughout the African American community and beyond.

19. My thanks to the anonymous reviewer who questioned (rightly) the use of "the West" as a conceptual construct, especially in the context of largely Global South geographies (Trinidad, Venezuela, Nigeria). While I take this point and embrace visions of decolonial futures where the West as an imperial philosophical and disciplining project no longer occupies significant space politically or philosophically, I feel that projecting this not-yet time onto the contemporary moment would do violence to lived realities that are structured in no small part by negotiating power dynamics with the West, whether through trade agreements, immigration challenges to freedom of movement, Central Intelligence Agency interventions in nearby national and regional spaces, or shared media markets. As Arjun Appadurai (1990) noted (and as is still relevant today), the shape and speed of global forces have created various -scapes (mediascapes, technoscapes, and, of particular relevance here, ethnoscapes) that we are all imbricated in. For more on the project of the West (and the rest), see especially Trouillot (2003).

20. My gratitude to the editors of this volume for calling my attention to the dissonance and tension in my body being located, both literally and metaphorically, in the often-unmarked category of the so-called secular.

21. This differs from the constructions of Yorùbá ethnicity rooted in Black nationalism centered exclusively in an African genealogy (imagined or otherwise) by members of Oyotunji Village, as explored by Kamari Clarke (2004) and Tracey Hucks (2012).

22. David Guss's important work *The Festive State: Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism as Cultural Performance* (2000)—on the performance of community, ethnicity, and history in an Afro-Venezuelan community—locates this largely in San Juan celebrations, reflective of syncretic Christian and African practices. However, Guss dismisses any relation to Yorùbá religion. Instead, he focuses on a less specific creolized African performative and ritual influence (30).

23. This movement in the Americas, especially throughout the African diaspora, goes back over a century before Wakanda entered the collective consciousness through the Marvel movie *Black Panther*. (Of course, the provenance of this move goes back to at least ancient Egypt, where it is prominently displayed in statue representations of deities and royalty.) The copious images that circulated on social media of people (individuals, families, and large groups) standing with their arms crossed, often dressed in cloth(ing) from various African cultures, evoked a resonance of familiarity among members of African diasporic religions. It is as if everyday people around the world were signaling a secret sign. In addition, social media sites suggest that at least one cast member of the movie (and possibly two or three) is an Ifá/Orisha initiate.

24. The sacred text of Ifá that manifests Alásùwadà, the Odu Ọ̀sá Ọ̀gúndá, ends with the following lines: “If one Ori is blessed / it will extend to two hundred others / My Ori that is blessed / Has affected you positively / Your Ori that is blessed / Has affected me positively / If one Ori is blessed / It will affect two hundred others.” This verse, provided by Olóyè Sọlágbadé Pópólá, conveys Ifá's teachings that if one person's life is elevated and improved in alignment with the divine, so the lives of community members (“two hundred others”) will also get better (see appendix I, Castor 2017: 169–174).

25. In Yorùbá cosmology the Earth is sacred and divine, referred to as Ilé Aiyé or Onilé.

26. The embodied practices leading to healing and a shift in temporalities (and the relationship between body and spirit) resonate with many of the energy modalities active in the wellness communities of the Americas, with links to practices from yoga to qigong to acupuncture (each of which has its own complicated history with its Asian heritage community). Perhaps the ritualized movements of Yorùbá Ifá/Orisha could be viewed through a lens of energy work and in that way linked to other global practices. This could add a level of understanding of Yorùbá spiritual praxis as a healing/wellness practice, a modality which many in the Americas are more familiar with. This would raise provocative questions with regard to the entanglements of healing and devotion, which depend on shifts from a discrete individualism (an inheritance of European Enlightenment philosophies) to a more collective subject position.

27. This is especially salient when one considers that greetings involve recognizing the divinity of the other person's Ori (spiritual head) and any àṣẹ they have accumulated through initiations. In greeting elders, what is being honored is the divine essence of the Orisha or Ifá that they carry from their initiation.

28. As evidenced here, the “conference” with its ritual components and the active presence of Spirit was beyond the everyday academic understanding of the term. In that moment we felt free and emboldened to dream of new social imaginaries of liberation. Reflecting on this shift I was able to write about the conference’s closing ritual, “By late Sunday night, the feeling of unity was palpable. Many hours past the planned end of the conference, people sang and danced together in joyous celebration of that unity. . . . [T]he conference closed with music, dancing, and fellowship as all who were gathered felt the truth of Oshun’s message: ‘Unity is strength, strength is power’” (Castor 2017, 165–166).

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