AFRICAN SACRED SPACES

Culture, History, and Change

EDITED BY
'BioDun J. Ogundayo
AND Julius O. Adekunle

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Introduction

'BioDun J. Ogundayo
and Julius O. Adekunle

African Sacred Spaces: Culture, History, and Change is an interdisciplinary approach to the discussion of the nexus between space, physical and imagined, and African spirituality in its multifaceted iterations. The African experience transcends geographical space and this collection of essays also includes expressions of Black spirituality in the Americas, as they relate to how space is perceived and given symbolic value. The spread of Africans to other parts of the world, especially the Caribbean, through slavery, makes relevant and pertinent the emergence (and study) of African sacred places outside the continent of Africa. Where space has been the subject of intellectual/academic scrutiny, it has often been through sociopolitical prisms. The purpose of this collection of essays is to expand the conversation, through rigorous interdisciplinary scholarly discourse; to cover the centrality of space as fundamental to Black/African culture, identity, personhood, and spiritualities.

Contributors' essays discuss or examine African and African diasporic sacred spaces. The essays assess and re-assess the very notion of the sacred as integral to individual and collective cultural, historical, and social identity. Essays also attempt to cover the gamut of anthropological and historical perspectives on ethnic sacred spaces. Comparative, analytical, and polemical essays are also included. Contributors are published scholars in Africanist history, literary studies, postcoloniality, anthropology, language, linguistics, as well as cultural studies.

The rationale for this book is twofold: The first is to present comprehensive, well-researched, scholarly essays on sacred places within Africa and the African Diaspora. The trans-Atlantic slave trade, part of a new global economy, resulted in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the forcible, disruptive, mass migrations of Africans to the New World. These Africans,

beyond being exploited for the enrichment of their masters brought with them a diversity of rich and complex cultural practices. These practices and worldviews engendered lasting transcultural impact in the Americas through the transfer of African languages and religious practices. The very physical spaces inhabited were, and continue to be, imbued with varying forms of sacralization. This purpose of this book is to foster scholarly and general discussion(s) by focusing on a topic and that has received scant attention in current literature. The second rationale is to contribute to, or educate, and inform the general public on the diversity, richness, and complexity of African peoples' history and culture. This book also attempts to contribute uniquely Africanist perspectives to current understandings on global environmental issues of climate change and sustainability. The essays in this book explore unfamiliar aspects of African history and culture, and to foster broader research on the connection between spatiality and spirituality in the African/Black experience.

Some of the books on sacred places have been too limited in scope, which prompted the desire to expand the discussion in this book. Afolabi Kayode's *Osun Osogbo: Sacred Places and Sacred People* is an exposition of the sacredness of the shrine of Orisa Osun at Osogbo in Nigeria. The book is focused on a particular river goddess. *Osun across the Waters: A Yoruba Goddess in Africa and the Americas*, edited by Joseph M. Murphy and Mei-Mei Sanford, deals with the emergence and growth of Yoruba traditional religion in the Caribbean. Jacob Olupona's *Òrìsà Devotion as World Religion: The Globalization of Yorùbá Religious Culture*, examines the spread of Yoruba religion to other parts of the world. The book is limited in scope and does not have the exposition and purview that our book, *African Sacred Spaces: Culture, History, and Change* intends to cover. In addition, Wande Abimbola and Fategbe Fatunmbi have variously published widely on Ifá, the Yoruba sacred oral tradition. Like others, their focus is limited. The dearth of books on sacred places in and outside Africa relevant to the Black/African experience gives this book an added uniqueness.

CHAPTER DESCRIPTION

From a historical perspective, Kevin Young, in chapter 1, examines the Spanish conquest of the Americas. He discusses this historical event as an African story with a succession of soldiers, sailors, domestic servants, agriculturalists, miners, and spiritual leaders—both enslaved and free, as well as animist, Muslim, or Christian—who facilitated imperial expansion for centuries. Unfortunately, almost no personal biographical details of these subalterns

survive in the archival record of the early colonial period. The epic collision of cultures and the mediation of contested physical and spiritual spaces, from sub-Saharan Africa to the Zuñi pueblos and all points in-between, may be reconstructed in the last decade of one man's life: Esteban the Black. The fact that a black slave figures prominently, by name, in period narratives and correspondence is itself significant; even more noteworthy was his fame at all levels of sixteenth-century Spanish society, enduring into present-day Native American legend as a powerful spiritual messenger. Beginning with his captivity among indigenes of the present-day Texas coast in 1528, Esteban served as the first contact and intermediary between African, Spanish, and indigenous spaces, both physical/territorial as well as cultural/ideological, in the sacred role of a hybrid shamanic healer, by which he exercised authority and power. In this capacity, he was at times an equal among Spanish Christians and Native Americans and was the *de facto* leader of portions of two historical expeditions. Until his reported death in 1539, Esteban's self-originated and institutional spiritual authority allowed him to negotiate power struggles among Spanish secular and ecclesiastical regimes and the sacred worlds of various Native American groups. In Esteban's story we may discern unconscious testimony in conflicting Spanish colonial narratives regarding the importance of spirituality and its heterodox interpretations, as well as the complex social relationships by which empires were formed along their peripheries—in this case by a man who may be fittingly described as the first known African shaman in North America, or as an evangelizing warrior-priest who was martyred for his Catholic faith.

In chapter 2, Julius Adekunle undertakes a powerful historical analysis of how royal burial grounds, found all over Yorubaland, are considered sacred spaces. Yoruba culture attaches sacredness to kingship. Thus, when kings die, their burial grounds are similarly considered sacred. There are sacred forests based on the religious beliefs and practices of the Yoruba people. With specific reference to the royal burial ground (Igbo Oba) at Igboho in Oyo State of Nigeria, Adekunle's essay focuses on the aura of sacrosanctity that attends Yoruba kings, even at death.

Donald Omagu in chapter 3 argues that African rituals and rites of passage like birth, initiation, marriage, and death are customary, symbolic, social communications, which, when performed according to specific normative processes, fulfill the African need for the sacred. These norms and practices effectively reinforce the continuum between life and death. In his discussion of the cultural and sacred practices of specific funerary rites linked to specific physical spaces, Omagu makes the case that for Africans, funeral rituals, generally considered the "final rite of passage" not only generate heightened emotions. The space within which they are expressed or practiced also guarantees a

transition to the world of ancestors, honor to the dead. The space also comforts those who grieve and fosters closer-knit social ties for extended families and communities. The author applies the Bekwarra people's concept of death and funeral rites in his essay.

According to Emmanuel Mbah and Atom Ntui in chapter 4, traditional African religions have always involved ritual sacrifices and performances in sacred spaces using sociocultural appurtenances. Sacrifices and performances of this nature have continued despite the growing influence of Christianity, which accompanied European colonial rule. This essay examines the reason for the persistence of ritual sacrifices and performances, even as Christianity and modernity continue to undermine African traditions. The author argues that answers may be found in how Africans perceive and continue to conceptualize the tripartite issues of health (wellness/wellbeing in time and in specific spaces), progress and peace.

In chapter 5 Mustapha Gwadabe and Muhammad Kyari discuss *Masjid: Muslim Sacred Space in Nigerian Islam*. They emphasize that one of the most important rituals in Islam is the practice of saying the five daily prayers. More significant also is the exhortation that these prayers be said in congregation, and in a dedicated, sacred space, or the *Masjid* (mosque) for this purpose. This makes the mosque a very important place and unifying for all Muslims. The *masjid* therefore transcends ethnicity or culture, becoming an expression of the divine. The *masjid* is simultaneously a universal sacred space and a culturally specific sacred space. It serves as a meeting point where common understanding and unity for community development are shared. Beyond its role in daily prayers, the mosque also functions as a space for the teaching and learning of the basic texts and doctrine of Islam. Thus, it is both a sacred and ideological space, connecting the material and the immaterial—because it is filled with the presence of *Allah*. The challenge in this chapter is the discussion of the multiple functions of the Mosque as enshrined in Islam, with specific focus on the Nigerian masjid. The essay is anchored in the history and origins of Islam itself. The architecture of the mosque and its structural outlook are part of this discussion. Also, aspects of Islamic practices and changes created by modernity are quite relevant, considering the many mystifications about the religion in the today's world. Emphasis is placed on the sacredness of the mosque as institution in Islam and as important place where one of the pillars of Islam is put into practice.

The Metaphysics of Space in Yoruba Traditional Religion is the subject of chapter 6, in which 'BioDun J. Ogundayo focuses on Ifa geomancy and the accompanying paraphernalia in its practice. Specifically, the geomantic tray, *opon Ifa*, offers an exciting opportunity to reconceptualize African space as a metaphysical and spiritual concept. Ifa divination is earth-, or land-based.

But it also connects the human and the divine. Even the constituting elements of the divinatory process are all derived, in their various iterations, from the earth. Also, the spaces—shrines and groves in which the divination tray and related paraphernalia are presented as quintessentially African sacred spaces comparable to altars and spaces of worship in the Abrahamic religions. Land, the physical manifestation of space, is (re)presented in the *opon Ifa* as an inherently metaphysical (spiritual) concept because it transcends the various sociologies of identity and history. In effect Ogundayo the ultimate sacred African space because of its centrality and role in the construction, maintenance, and sustenance of African/Yoruba identity and spirituality connecting the indigenous Yoruba practice with its counterparts in the Black Diaspora, especially in the Americas. By its ability to survive in new physical and cultural spaces, the Ifa tray becomes and symbolizes immortality (of the soul) for the Yoruba everywhere in the world. Also, we are reminded that the multiple references to the earth, land, the heavens, and space in Ifa literary corpus, during the divinatory process, and in Yoruba traditional religion and culture point to a profoundly ecological attitude among the Yoruba about the world we live in. In other words, Ifa as a practice compels a more wholistic vision of the environment and nature.

In chapter 7, Olujide Gbadegesin uses phenomenological and indigenous hermeneutics to critically and comparatively analyze the motivation behind the Aládúrà churches and Indigenous religious traditions going to the mountains for prayers. He examines the effects of going to the mountains on the lives of both the leaders and members of these religious groups; their conceptions about performing religious rituals on the mountains and how that is changing in this era of modernity. Gbadegesin explains why the Aláàdúrà and the Yorùbá indigenous religious worshippers consider mountains as sacred places. He concludes by indicating that the Aládúrà groups of Churches and the Indigenous Yoruba religious traditions take mountains seriously as one of those sacred spaces where physical and spiritual transformation could take place, where healing and deliverance could be received and where "negotiation" and "conflict" between humans and the divine could take place.

Saheed Amusa discusses in chapter 8 the interaction of tradition and modernity in relation to Yoruba sacred groves. With specific reference to the Osun Sacred Grove in Osogbo, Nigeria, Amusa points out that one of the basic features of African groves is their sacredness and inviolability. In the pre-colonial period, and for a greater part of the colonial era, the sacredness of African groves was maintained and jealously guarded by the traditional custodians of these places. However, in modern times, most of these African sacred spaces are fast losing their spiritual importance and relevance to modernity in its various forms such as tourism, commercialism, and urbanization. Thus, crassly

materialistic activities are supplanting traditional African ecological practices and spirituality in the management of these spaces. There is an increasing sense of environmental and spiritual distress that parallels what other indigenous populations of the world have recognized and are fighting to resolve. Yet African states and societies still endeavor to maintain the sacredness of their traditional groves. It is against this background, that this paper discusses and examines specific sacred places associated with Osun worship, both at the Osun main grove and other shrines in Osogbo. Critical analysis, including oral evidence, of extant primary and secondary sources of information is deployed in the essay on sacred places associated with Osun worship both at the Osun main grove and other shrines in Osogbo, in Yorubaland of southwestern Nigeria. The impact of modernity on the nature and management of these sacred places and the evolution of Osun worship and festival in contemporary Osogbo are also incorporated. The chapter concludes that conscious efforts must be made to maintain the sacredness and inviolability of the spaces (and people) associated with Osun worship in Osogbo.

In chapter 9, Fortune Sibanda focuses on sustainability and natural resource conservation, which is one of the most critical challenges facing humanity today. This essay is pertinent to the ongoing global concerns about climate change and global warming. He examines the vitality of African sacred groves through his case study of the enduring sacred nature of Chirinda forest in Zimbabwe. The chapter discusses the relationship between spatiality and spirituality in Ndau cosmology and experience. It posits that from precolonial through postcolonial eras, the Ndau people of Mapungwana Chieftaincy resiliently utilized traditional religion and other Indigenous Ways of Knowing (IWK) to sustain the ecological balance of Chirinda forest. Sibanda concludes that IWK are useful in creating ecologically friendly strategies that enhance biodiversity conservation and development out of Chirinda forest.

In chapter 10, Haakayoo N. Zoggyie, intends to trace the importance of the African heritage in the works of two Latin-American writers, the Colombian Manuel Zapata Olivella and the Panamanian Carlos Guillermo Wilson. Titled *In Search of the Fathers: The Poetics of Disalienation in the Narrative of Two Contemporary Afro-Hispanic Writers*, Zoggyie's essay discusses the problematic issue of space and identity construction in the Afro-Hispanic diaspora. Using the works of the Afro-Hispanic writers in his essay, the author addresses the rewriting of history, linguistic barriers, and the creation of a sacred African space, a *locus amoenus*, in the New World in order to recreate the African world that preceded the trans-Atlantic slave trade. He marshals evidence from the fiction of these writers to show that their narratives present an environment that is undeniably African thanks to the profusion of black characters in their fictions. This substantially ren-

ders the Afro-Hispanic space sacred. A paradisiacal depiction of Africa in the Americas is possible through a project of "self-rehumanization" and it becomes the primary goal of creating an African sacred space in Hispanic America. This project is achieved through the invocation and endorsement of traditional African religious lore (*Ogun*, *Shango/Chango*, for example) and cultural practices outside of Africa. Thus, African slaves and their Afro-Hispanic descendants regain their sense of dignity and pride in their African legacy in their new home. Through exhaustive analysis of thematic and formal devices, and the manifold ways in which both authors purposely "endarken" their texts, the essay succeeds in confirming an African sacred space in Latin and Hispanic America. In his essay, Zoggyie, while admitting its limitations, also examines the writers' total commitment to African traditional worldview as superior to its Western counterpart.

In ancient times, there were several sacred places in present day northern Nigeria. One of such places is Kwatarkwashi, which is one of the present seventeenth Emirates of Zamfara State in Nigeria. According to historical records, Kwatarkwashi, had been a sacred place since the fifteenth century because of the presence of massive mountains and spiritual importance attached to them. The ancient settlement and the sacredness of the mountains are discussed in chapter 11. Mukhtar Bunza and Adamu Kotorkoshi argue that the mountains at Kwatarkwashi were crucial to the ancient indigenous religious practices in Hausaland. Sacred places in African sociocultural practices are associated with natural features such as rivers, mountains, and groves because of their spiritual significance. A series of ritual practices performed in some notable shrines of the mountains in the region include *Bakangama*, *Wuliga*, and *Dungai* while the rites are: *Magiro*, *Kurjenu*, *Kamun Maiki*, and *Kunkurutu*. The authors conclude that with the penetration of Islam, most of those practices have been drastically reduced.

Section 1

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Chapter 1

Ambiguous Conquest in the Sixteenth-Century Spanish Atlantic World

The Personal Journey of Esteban de Dorantes

Kevin Young

Estebanico, the Moroccan black slave of conquistador Andrés de Dorantes, has garnered sporadic scholarly attention throughout the twentieth century and in arecent years. As one of the four surviving members of the ill-starred 1528 Pánfilo de Narváez expedition, the only references to him are contained in narratives and records of Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, Fray Marcos de Niza, and the Coronado expedition, as well as colonial administrative correspondence of the viceroy and archbishop of New Spain. Esteban's journey is an African story that defies historiographic stereotypes of Spanish imperial conquest and colonization in the Atlantic world. Although his personal life can only be factually reconstructed through subjective Spanish political lenses, it is possible to form a portrait of the man by examining the cultural spheres through which he passed, from sub-Saharan Africa to Morocco, from Iberia to the Caribbean, from Florida to the Rio Grande Valley, and from Mexico City to his death in the Zuñi pueblos of modern New Mexico and Arizona. This shaman of syncretic belief systems appropriated a highly unusual degree of power, both institutional and self-authorized. This essay will map the spheres of his journey across time and cultures as a means of assessing themes of conquest, colonization, race and identity formation, religion, and gender on the frontiers of empire in the native ground.

AN EXTRAORDINARY JOURNEY

Greg Grandin made a pertinent statement: "That's the thing about American slavery: it never was just about slavery."[1] Spanish conquest of the Americas was in every sense also a story of African conquest, in which Africans, both

enslaved and free, whether animist, Muslim, or Christian, facilitated European imperial expansion for centuries. The epic collision of cultures and the mediation of contested physical and spiritual spaces, from sub-Saharan Africa to the Zuñi pueblos and all points in-between, may be reconstructed in the last decade of one man's life: Esteban the Black, or *Estevanico el negro*, as he was most often referred to in primary sources.[2] Following his captivity among indigenes of the present-day Texas coast in 1528, Esteban, as a slave of Spaniards and Native Americans, served as the first contact and intermediary between African, Spanish, and indigenous sacred spaces in the role of a hybrid shamanic healer and was revered by Indians and Spaniards alike, although for different reasons. He was at times an equal among Spanish Christians and Native Americans, and was the de facto leader of portions of two historical expeditions. Until his reported death in 1539, Esteban's use of both self-originated and institutional power made him a pivotal figure in power struggles among Spanish secular and ecclesiastical regimes and the sacred worlds of various Native American groups. Esteban's story exposes unconscious testimony in conflicting Spanish colonial narratives regarding the role of spirituality and its heterogeneous interpretations, and the complex social relationships by which empires were formed along their peripheries. In this discussion we examine a man who may be fittingly described as the first known African shaman in North America, or as an evangelizing warrior-priest who was martyred for his Catholic faith.

Esteban's story resonates powerfully with scholars and armchair historians across multiple genres, including global comparative, Atlantic world, early modern African, Iberian, American, colonial, imperial, diaspora, Amerindian, and gender histories. Although we may never read any words written by Esteban, he ranks among the most important figures of colonial New Spain in the 1530s. His fame exceeds even that of free black conquistadors like Juan Garrido, who participated in the conquest of Tenochtitlán with Cortés.[3] No other slave figured as prominently in the correspondence of the Viceroy or first Archbishop and Inquisitor of New Spain, including mention in letters to the king and court of Castile.[4] Esteban enjoyed the special trust and confidence not only of the Spanish nobility and clergy, but also of Native American groups along the frontiers of empire. Across multiple cultural spheres in distinct geographic and political settings, Esteban epitomizes the complexity of experiences and identities, highly charged with rich layers of symbol and meaning, of the men who conquered and colonized the Americas. Whether the life of Esteban was typical of African slaves or was an anomaly exemplifies what a recent scholar has called "the relative paucity of work on the earliest years of slavery in colonial Spanish America."[5] Typical or not, Esteban and thousands like him were key players in Spanish colonial proj-

ects: without Africans, the Atlantic empires of early modern Europe could not have come to fruition.

In constructing an archival trail to explore who this extraordinary man was or was not, no standard economic empiricism of class or anthropological apothecary of race will suffice. Esteban inverts the master-slave relationship: beyond the dependency of Europeans on Africans for labor, Esteban's Spanish masters were at times completely dependent on him for survival, owing to his skills in cultural mediation and ritual healing.[6] His syncretic spiritual practice, employing animist, Christian, and probably Muslim components, was the source of his self-authorized power as a shaman among Native Americans: from Pernambuco to Providence and all points in between, African spirituality was a hallmark of politics in American slave communities, in which "the sacred and secular remained intertwined."[7] Esteban's equality with his masters during their fugue in captivity, as well as his later institutionally-bestowed power at the head of an expedition, are evidence of the tipping point of dominance relationships at which recognition of parity occurs, and freedom—whether legal or notional—is achieved.[8]

Although to sixteenth-century Spanish readers accounts of Esteban could never purport to suggest that a black slave might have been seen as an equal, the fact that he is discussed in the first person *we* among Spaniards suggests strongly that he shared their new hybrid identity and exalted social status while in the native ground, a space as yet unaltered by European colonization. Upon his reintegration in Spanish society, his roles as explorer, cultural emissary, and evangelist conferred on him extraordinary authority that redefines traditional concepts of servitude.[9] For the modern reader, the story of this man provides a window onto the early African diaspora mere decades after its inception in the Americas, and allows us to explore the formulation of racial thought, creolization, and what Paul Lovejoy tantalizingly refers to as the "hidden dimensions" of slavery; these include but are not limited to self-perception, self-identification, and adaptation of cultural practices. As will become evident below, Esteban was very much an agent of his own identity and "autonomy from white society."[10]

Over the course of the last century, Esteban was usually mentioned only in passing in connection with the Cabeza de Vaca party; he was the subject of a few journal articles, most of which engendered controversy, including claims that he was not actually black, but a moor. By far the liveliest discussion was a series of articles in *New Mexico Historical Review* between 1937 and 1941 that disputed who actually *discovered* the modern state of New Mexico. The official 1939–1940 celebrations of the state's 400-year anniversary credited Coronado; some scholars claimed the credit belonged to Fray Marcos de Niza, or to the Cabeza de Vaca party. One article which mentioned "the

Negro slave" claimed that failure to credit his involvement was "a deliberate suppression."[11] From hapless enslaved bit-player to heroic subaltern, the fascinating historiographic trajectory of Esteban has culminated most recently in a quasi-historical biography that includes liberal doses of speculation and "conjecture,"[12] and a romantic historical novel published earlier this year.[13] Fortunately, two groups of scholars have recently compiled every primary source document known to exist that contains any reference to Esteban, including the latest translations and related research;[14] these collections are used in the following paragraphs, together with selected scholarly articles, in order to map Esteban's extraordinary journey in the contemporary context of the spheres he inhabited nearly five hundred years ago.

THE TWO SHORES: MOROCCAN AND IBERIAN ORIGINS

The first appearance of Esteban in the historical record is in the well-known 1542 *Relación*, or *Narrative*, of Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca. He is described simply as "an Arabic-speaking black man, a native of Azamor,"[15] a town in Morocco. Esteban, his owner Andrés Dorantes, Cabeza de Vaca, and Alonso del Castillo were to become the sole known survivors of a three hundred-man expedition that went ashore near modern Tampa, Florida in 1527, only to wind up as castaways on or near modern Galveston Island, Texas a year later, when Esteban is first mentioned in the *Narrative*. No information is currently available as to his age when the four men began their eight-year odyssey. Likewise, no information is available as to where or when he was acquired by Dorantes. Azemmour was a Muslim center of trade on the Atlantic coast of what is today Morocco, which in turn was "among the principal destinations of black slaves exported north across the Sahara."[16] The use of the term *native* may be interpreted to mean that he was either born in Azemmour, or that it was his home before he arrived in the Iberian Peninsula and became a *ladino*, or hispanicized African. In either event, before he was christened Esteban, he may have been a Muslim by birth or acculturation. He and/or his parents may have arrived in Morocco as chattel *bozales* by means of the trans-Saharan slave route, a trade with roots in pre-history. Alternatively, he may have arrived in Iberia from virtually any region of the Mediterranean, where he would have been a member of a society in which not all blacks were slaves, and not all slaves were black.

The northern African littoral was the southern shore of the ancient Mediterranean world, with commercial and cultural linkages to the Baltic and Black Seas, the Levant, the African continent, the Indian Ocean, and beyond.

Of equal importance, it must be remembered that from the eighth until the thirteenth century, both North Africa and much of what is today considered Europe were part of the Muslim world, from Iberia to southern Italy and Sicily and the Balkans. One scholar recently suggested that the rise of Islamic empires "probably accounted for the uprooting of as many black Africans from their societies as did the trans-Atlantic trade."[17] When King Alfonso VIII of Castile began the reconquest [*reconquista*] of southern Iberia in 1212, Sevilla and Marrakech were still the "twinned Almohad capitals" of a western Islamic empire that included both shores of the Straits of Gibraltar, encompassing "today's Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia as well as southern Spain and Portugal."[18] When Fernando and Isabela finalized the *reconquista* in 1492 after two hundred years of cultural cross-pollination, many Muslim institutional forms and practices—including African slavery—were already in place in the regions that were to become Spain and Portugal. It is based on this hybridization that Avner Greif and others assert that the Hispanic Atlantic empire was built upon adaptations and extensions of borrowed Muslim culture.[19]

Thanks largely to late twentieth century scholars of the African diaspora, research relating to the African presence in Europe continues to expose the textural complexity of Esteban's world. From generals and wealthy merchants to Medici dukes and diplomats, Muslim warriors, and Catholic saints, free and enslaved African men and women and their offspring were diffused throughout Europe in all social strata in primarily urban settings long before Columbus set sail.[20] Throughout the Iberian Peninsula, societies with slaves showed marked differences in their demography and treatment, but as a rule "there were typically only a few slaves per owner, serving as domestic servants, artisan helpers, and additional agricultural workers,"[21] a fact the most recent historiographer of the subject cites as a "major interpretive change." Additional changes include the preponderance of female African slaves in Iberia;[22] the virtual absence of agricultural "large-scale or gang slavery" in the peninsula; and the fact that blacks—both free and enslaved—"accompanied the Europeans from the beginning" on their Atlantic voyages.[23]

In Iberia, enslaved Africans were often joined by Muslims, as is well known, and whites in various gradations of bond servitude. Among all three groups, the most onerous duties, such as mercury and silver mining, naval galleys, or confinement at presidio construction, were reserved for convicts and prisoners of war; the latter were commonly referred to as *forzados* [forced]. There was also self-sale and debt-slavery for the destitute *comunero* [commoner][24] who became *mozos* or *criados*, vague descriptors for virtually any form of servitude—including slavery—at the bottom of the social ladder. There has been no attempt by Spanish historians to disguise bond servitude as something other than what it was in most cases: slavery, even if temporary.[25]

There is as yet no way to determine where Esteban fit in to this broad spectrum, but it is reasonable to assume that he was the single domestic servant of Dorantes.[26]

The shared social and spiritual space of slaves from such multiethnic backgrounds and under diverse living and working conditions must have made for interesting social dynamics and personal relationships. One of Spain's most distinguished historians, while not acknowledging the existence of racism, nonetheless pointed out that slave society in sixteenth century Castile consisted of "very distinct groups in religion and custom," with "blacks on one side, and Muslims of diverse races and colors on the other."[27] Even after the 1508 Iberian victory over Morocco and Tunis, when the peninsula was flooded with captive slaves, Africans were in the minority of the servant population; by 1565, when Sevilla and Lisbon had the greatest concentration of slaves "in all of Christian Europe," Africans numbered only one out of thirty of the population, and were regarded as "urban luxury items."[28] If the majority of that number were women, Esteban was a rare commodity indeed, and at the going rate of thirty seven ducats in 1528, an expensive one, too. As for his religion, although all blacks supposedly "arrived in Spain baptized or were baptized in Sevilla," in practice it was "impossible to be certain whether they had in fact been baptized." Finally, although many Africans "of the first generation accepted their baptism with indifference," later generations reportedly formed Christian guilds known as *cofradías* in segregated communities that included all Africans, regardless of origins.[29]

The image of vibrant African communities shared by animist West Africans of multiple ethnicities stretching from the Kingdom of Kongo, as far south as Angola, to the Bight of Benin's Yoruba, Fulani and others, and westward to the Senegambia region, conveys a sense of the magnitude and richness of cultural and spiritual influences that embodied the early Afro-Iberian diaspora. Added to this group of *bozales* were the *ladino* converts and natives of Arab Islamic cultures of the Maghreb, and the converts and natives of European Christianity, both free and enslaved, and mixed-race mulattos, all forcibly immersed in distinct Iberian micro-cultures, each with its own "deeply rooted prejudices" and laws, institutions, and traditions, about which there was little agreement either inter- or intra-regionally. Seen from this perspective, the notion that there was any rational, coherent sense of a homogeneous Spanish or African identity or spirituality borders on the absurd.[30]

The reality is far more complex. In a landmark study of slavery in sixteenth-century Granada, Aurelia Martín suggests that Afro-Iberians formed "amalgamated belief systems, adopting elements of the different religions that they had known throughout their lives."[31] The outer display of religious practice, whether Islamic or Christian, was a matter of political survival for Africans;

however, the cultural ties that bound African communities together, such as folkloric traditions, music, and rituals, were the true measure of their collective consciousness. Since Islam was the "great enemy" of the Catholic faith, Muslim culture was policed rigorously and with negative effects. By contrast, animist beliefs and practices of sub-Saharan groups were not "perceived as a threat [and] were never understood as expressions of another religion, since it was widely held that blacks did not have culture."[32] The resulting syncretic belief systems and practices included elements of multiple faiths, including prayer, singing, dancing, healing, prophecy, necromancy and the casting of spells and preparation of potions for good and bad outcomes. The canon of saints took on attributes of animist deities. Healers had recourse to herbs, oils, alcohol, animals, and the regimens of their parent and transient cultures, combined with European Renaissance techniques such as herbal remedies, alchemy, and astrology; the state of the European healing arts in 1576 emphasized holistic integration of the soul, spirit, and flesh, using "gifts of the animate world and the living stars."[33] The Renaissance traditions were themselves borrowed from Islamic medical manuscripts that synthesized centuries of Greco-Roman, Egyptian, Asian, and African knowledge.[34]

Martín's study describes healers in Esteban's southern Iberia as predominantly women: "widows, married, or single, mulatto, black African, or *moriscas* [Muslim converts to Christianity], enslaved and free, as well as Christians. The Spanish *moriscas* were especially well known for their traditional medical knowledge."[35] These traditional healers formed a profitable trade that required apprenticeship. They were sought out not only by the poor, but also by the wealthy whose needs were not satisfied by mainstream medical practitioners. The healers were certainly well known not only to Esteban, but also to some of the expedition members who left Spain, including Cabeza de Vaca: in the conclusion to the *Narrative*, the author recounts that the expedition had turned out precisely as had been foretold by "a Moorish woman" in Castile, a fortuneteller, who had predicted that "if one of them were to come out, God would perform great miracles through him, but that she believed that those who escaped would be few or none at all."[36]

CASTAWAYS, CHILDREN OF THE SUN, AND SPIRITUAL CONQUEST

Although we are concerned primarily with the overland odyssey of the four survivors, it is useful to provide a few contextual details for readers who may not be familiar with the *Narrative* of Cabeza de Vaca. The cosmopolitan make-up of the Narváez expedition illustrates the web of cultural

connections and trade networks that Spanish explorers brought with them across the Atlantic basin, each with complex power relationships of their own. The original expedition left Spain with African freemen and slaves,[37] as well as crewmembers from Portugal, Spain, and Greece. Some of the soldiers had accompanied Cortés to Tenochtitlán, while a Native American chieftain from Texcoco in Mexico accompanied Franciscan friars in the group. Women were included, about whom no details were given other than the fact that they were married to crewmembers. The object of the expedition was the conquest and settlement of *La Florida*, the inland area of the Gulf of Mexico littoral. The expedition was a disaster. In September 1528, a year and a half after leaving Spain, two hundred and forty two men, eighty of whom were dying or too sick to move, were forced by hostile Indians to abandon the region of modern Appalachicola, Florida. Packed into five makeshift rafts, the men drifted for two months, finally being cast ashore on the coastline of what is today Texas. The last recorded words of Narváez, the expedition's leader, set the stage for the epic journey of Esteban and his companions: "it was no longer time for one man to rule another . . . each one should do whatever seemed best to him in order to save his own life."[38] The men were scattered, taken captive and enslaved by various coastal indigenous groups of hunter-gatherers. Esteban was separated from his owner Dorantes, possibly for years, before he was reunited with him, Castillo, and Cabeza de Vaca in 1533–1534, when the four men began to plan their escape and return to Spanish-controlled territory to the south. While their trail is still a source of academic controversy, their course took them westward along the Rio Grande, possibly into areas of modern New Mexico, before turning south into the Sonora and Yaqui River valleys where they were reunited with rampaging Spaniards in full conquest mode. The indigenous inhabitants who accompanied the castaways refused to believe that they could come from the same society as the conquistadors.

By the time Esteban was cast ashore aboard one of the rafts, he was already creolized, having evolved adaptive new identities in a series of colliding and overlapping cultural contexts. We cannot yet know how he may have identified himself, so for our identity mapping we must resort to anachronistic labels with multiple imprecise meanings such as African, Afro-Moroccan, Afro-Iberian, Afro-Indian, and Afro-Mexican to describe his path. Had Esteban used any of them, they would all become memories of the past, but would profoundly influence the new man he was to become in a series of new cultural encounters, a process referred to by some scholars as ethnogenesis.[39] At each stage of his journey, he became something new. Esteban may be regarded as a classic case in the discussion of identity as a fluid concept: he was, to borrow Restall's example, no longer what he had been or might have

been; rather, he was "something else, something unique to the encounter in the Americas between natives, Europeans, and Africans."[40]

For Cabeza de Vaca and readers of his *Narrative* over the course of four centuries, Esteban would always be the enslaved black Arabic-speaking native of Azemmour, which in a sense a part of him always was. Yet, Cabeza de Vaca occasionally let slip bits of unconscious testimony when he referred to Esteban in the first person plural *we* as . . . what? A Spaniard? A Christian? An expedition member? A fellow slave at times subordinate to Indians, at times in power over them? A friend? Esteban was all of those things, and more, much more. In his descriptions of multiple, constantly shifting identities, Cabeza de Vaca unwittingly referred to what modern historical anthropologists would call the incoherence of his group, and the mutable quality of identities and relationships along different trajectories of power. Rather than interpreting the "ambiguous and fragmented"[41] characteristics of Esteban's relationships with his fellow castaways as psychological convolutions and machinations of subversive agency—which they may well have been—an alternate meaning is proposed for Cabeza de Vaca and Esteban as *we*: when the castaways were reduced to common circumstances and stripped of all hierarchic power relationships, they shared a common identity, and were at such times equals.

While it is possible to construe *we* as a reference to the three white Spaniards only, rendering Esteban as of no consequence, it is extremely unlikely by virtue of their dependence upon him. He was never invisible, but was an indispensable member of a team. A perfect example is provided by a passage in which Esteban is sent ahead to establish contact with a new group of indigenes:

> *we* saw an Indian who, as he saw that *we* were coming toward him, fled without wanting to wait for us. *We* sent the black man after him. And since he saw that he was coming alone, he waited for him. The black man told him that *we* were going to look for those people who were making those spires of smoke. . . . And they showed that they were pleased with *our* company, and thus they took *us* to their houses.[42]

Owing to Esteban's success, this method of establishing contact became the standard *modus operandi* of the group. Cabeza de Vaca adds that later in the journey:

> *We* had a great deal of authority and influence over them. And in order to conserve this we spoke to them but few times. The black man always spoke to them and informed himself about the roads *we* wished to travel and the villages that there were and about other things that *we* wanted to know . . . *we* knew six languages . . . *we* told them by signs.[43]

The standard reading of this passage is that the Spaniards accentuated their authority by distancing themselves from the Indians, using master/slave inequality to have Esteban mediate. Lewis interprets the event as a colonizing process by which Indians were subordinated to Spanishness using blacks "who extended Spanish authority."[44] This may well have become retroactive policy in Cabeza de Vaca's reflections years after the event, simply because *it worked*. But this was almost certainly not the reason the Spaniards first sent Esteban on ahead. From a purely commonsensical approach, it appears likely that the Spaniards did not hesitate to expose Esteban to any potential risk in such encounters. Only in later encounters did individual Spaniards accompany Esteban to make contact with new groups, but they never went anywhere without him, and during his absences they stayed put.

Reading more deeply into the text, Esteban, once accepted by the natives, could easily have abandoned his three companions to their own devices, or turned the Indians against them. But he did not. Having received deliberated with the Indians, Esteban determined the direction the Spaniards were to take, and they followed willingly. He did not need them, while they not only needed him, but depended upon him for survival. Esteban was the de facto leader of the group. The question remains as to why he helped the Spaniards at all. One possible answer is that the four were *united* by a common bond that transcended both primate survival instinct and master/slave relationships, since at such times the Spaniards, completely at the mercy of natives and the environment, had no power over Esteban. This situation poses two questions to the modern reader: first, is it possible that the Spaniards could have been unaware that they were completely dependent on Esteban? Second, what was the nature of the bond that united them? Since the Spaniards could offer him no material reward or incentive, and had no coercive power over him, Esteban was free for all intents and purposes. Although it does not make for convincing secular analysis, the possibility of an emotional or spiritual bond such as love or compassion cannot be discounted.

Most historical analysis of the *Narrative* has examined the text from strictly secular perspectives, virtually ignoring the fact that the central theme of the work is a story of spiritual redemption through physical suffering, miracles, evangelization, and ultimately, spiritual conquest through non-violent means.[45] This topic was no less controversial at the time of its publication in 1542 than it is today, although for different reasons. In Esteban's time, conversion and conquest advanced in tandem, not separately. By converting thousands of Indians to Christianity without the use of coercive dominance, what the castaways had achieved was extraordinary. Their achievements provided support for reformists in the Court of Castile such as Bartolomé de las

Casas, who was instrumental in passing the New Laws of 1542 that outlawed the enslavement of Indians—but not of Africans.

What was even more unusual about the castaways' exploits was the rather unorthodox means by which they had risen from feminized slaves to wandering shamanic warrior priests in masculine positions of authority freely conferred upon them by countless indigenous groups: by becoming healers. The *Narrative* is contradictory as to precisely how and when the men began healing, but not why: they were expected to contribute to their host communities. The text suggests that at least Cabeza de Vaca may have undergone an apprenticeship. Esteban clearly played a significant role in the mediation with native healers, and was, with Dorantes, housed with native shamans in some settlements, a clear mark of prestige. Although the *Narrative* only recounts specific, detailed accounts of healing episodes by Castillo and Cabeza de Vaca such as an apparent seizure and a surgical procedure, numerous other events are characterized by the use of *we.* In all cases, the author was scrupulously careful to emphasize the men's use of Christian symbols and rituals, such as the laying on of hands, making the sign of the cross, recitation of prayers such as the *Our Father* and *Hail Mary*, and blessing of food and water, with occasional comparisons to Castilian medical procedures such as cauterization of wounds. Descriptions of native healing were deliberately couched in ethnographic terms as events performed by Indians. This was, as many scholars have suggested, a political necessity, since pagan practices would not have been appreciated by Archbishop Zumárraga, the first Inquisitor of Mexico City, who undoubtedly debriefed the men on their return to the capital.

When the natives smoked or consumed medicinal herbs or preparations, or spent the night dancing or in ritual trances, the events were described in the third person *they*. Yet, the Spaniards were given ceremonial gourds, the symbol of shamanic office and power, with which they performed a "ceremony, which to them is very great." Although Cabeza de Vaca did not elaborate on the ceremony, by the time the four of them had been elevated to shamans, they were referred to as "children of the sun."[46] The gourd and associated ceremony is a reference to peyote, a small cactus native to the areas through which the castaways passed. The sacred communal healing ceremony lasts all night, and includes ritual smoking of tobacco, drumming and singing, and the use of rattles—traditionally stone-filled gourds of the type carried by Estebanico and the others. The use of peyote in religious ritual has been traced to pre-historic archaeological sites.[47] Other psychotropic substances mentioned by Cabeza de Vaca include a small bean, possibly morning glory seeds[48] or the mescal bean (or both),[49] and a leaf resembling oak that was smoked, possibly jimson weed (datura).

It is worth noting that Estebanico faded from the *Narrative* when the castaways were reunited with Spaniards. Yet there is no reason to believe that he was not feted with his companions upon their return to Mexico City, where they were welcomed by none other than Hernán Cortés, as well as the viceroy and the archbishop.[50] Esteban the black, the enslaved Arabic-speaking native of Azemmour, had become a role model for future Christian evangelization and peaceful Spanish conquest. Nothing is known of Esteban's stay in the capital of New Spain from 1537 to 1538, except that he was purchased from Dorantes by Viceroy Mendoza, who described him as "a man of reason and ability."[51]

BLACK KATSINA

In 1539, Esteban may have been the most famous African in the Atlantic world. His fame was such that he was mentioned by name—now as Esteban, not Estevanico—in official letters to Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor and King of Spain, Germany, and Italy, and Lord of the Netherlands. When Andrés de Dorantes backed out of Viceroy Mendoza's plan to lead an expedition "to learn the secret of those regions," Esteban was sent with Fray Marcos de Niza, a Franciscan friend of the archibishop who had recently arrived in the capital from Peru and Guatemala, together with Vázquez de Coronado, to make preparations for the journey in November 1538.[52] Coronado referred to Esteban as the "black whom the viceroy bought for this purpose."[53] The reason for the king's personal interest was to put to the test Cabeza de Vaca's stratagem for peaceful conversion and conquest, a bold experiment on the part of the Spaniards, a sort of compromise between ecclesiastical and secular imperial powers, the twin pillars of Spanish colonial rule. Coronado and Fray Marcos would represent the viceroy and archbishop, respectively. Esteban was to be Fray Marcos's guide, and had been ordered by the viceroy to obey him completely. In less than a year, Esteban would reportedly be dead. However, for over four hundred years, people have debated how, where and when he died.

The initial reports of the expedition were contained in Fray Marcos' summary account, which reported confirmation of the vast wealth of the legendary seven cities of Cíbola. The exploratory mission was followed in quick succession by what can only be described as a mobile settlement colony, with a military escort to provide security led by Coronado himself, from 1540 to 1542. The expedition consisted of "300-odd Europeans, an unknown number of Africans, and over 1000 Indian allies from central and west Mexico."[54] The long story can be summarized as follows: Fray Marcos had lied, or had merely heard what he wanted to hear. There was no gold, no fertile lands or

commodities, no docile Indians, all waiting to be divided up in *repartimientos* among prospective Spanish *encomenderos*. What must have appeared as fabulous wealth to small bands of Native Americans did not correspond to Spanish standards. There were, however, highly organized indigenous societies that were prepared to fight to resist conversion and conquest. The colonists, Indians, and blacks who survived the trek were freezing to death and starving. Coronado had sustained a head injury in the siege of one settlement, after which he was only technically in command, and lost a personal fortune invested in the venture; he would later face criminal charges and be stripped of his governorship and encomiendas and fined. When the military members of the expedition realized they had been deceived, they embarked on a rape-and-pillage mission "from what is today western Mexico to modern Kansas" that was, even by sixteenth century standards, "unacceptably brutal."[55] True to form, the Spanish *entrada* [entrance] into the area was bound to follow one of three courses: attack, peaceful negotiation, or retreat. Retreat was not an option; the colonists and warriors on the expedition needed food and shelter. Peaceful negotiation had failed; both Esteban and Fray Marcos were gone. The outcome was inevitable.

The last accounts of Esteban's life are contained in the discredited narrative of Fray Marcos, and in the hearsay testimony of the survivors of the Coronado expedition. Perhaps none of them are true, or perhaps they are all true to some degree. Fray Marcos had apparently arranged for a relay reporting system, by which Esteban and a vanguard of some three hundred Indians would reconnoiter ahead and send word to Fray Marcos. Some of what Fray Marcos recounted has been substantiated, such as the existence in the native ground of agricultural migratory contract or wage labor, paid for with turquoises and animal hides. According to Fray Marcos, the few wounded survivors of Esteban's expedition reported that, upon reaching the city of Cíbola, Esteban had sent his gourd to the elders to announce his arrival; it had "some rows of bells and two feathers on it . . . one was white and one red."[56] The feathers are an important detail, since among the native groups in the area they had religious and political significance. According to the modern Zuñi in the area where Esteban reportedly died, a dyed red feather attached to a gourd was a symbol of priesthood, while a white feather was symbol of "breath [as] the symbol of life." The feathers also signify the "position and the particular office" of the priest, who in his ceremonial function represents—or is possessed by—a katsina, or supernatural spirit-being.[57] Marcos reported two separate accounts by Indians; in both Esteban and his party were rejected and attacked by the people of Cíbola. Esteban was presumed dead. Fray Marcos's version was subsequently endorsed by Viceroy Mendoza and reported to the king in April 1540.

A second account of the death of Esteban was contained in the "Narrative of Hernando Alarcón's Voyage" of 1540, in which an Indian reported that Esteban was cut into pieces "so he could not provide information to these brothers of his about where [the lords of Cíbola] were [and] so they could know for certain he was dead." His dog was also killed.[58]

The third account was provided in Coronado's letter to the viceroy dated August, 1540, in which Coronado confirmed Esteban's death based on the presence of his belongings. In this account, the Indians claimed to have killed Esteban because "he was a wicked man and not like the Christians . . . because the Christians did not kill anyone's women, but he did kill them . . . they decided to kill him, but they did not do it in the way that was reported."[59] Coronado did not explain the actual means by which Esteban was killed.

The fourth and final historical account, by far the most literate, was contained in the memoir of a member of the expedition published over twenty years after the fact. It was not an eyewitness account. In it, Esteban had told the elders of Cíbola that "behind were coming two white men, sent by a great lord, who were well versed in the things of heaven, and that they were coming to instruct them about things divine." The Indians felt that he was "a spy or guide for some people who were trying to come to conquer them." Esteban apparently also caused them offense by asking them for "turquoises and women," which he was reportedly in the habit of amassing.[60] For these reasons, they decided to kill him.

Over five hundred years later, British historian Robert Goodwin, conducting research for his biography of Esteban, visited the Zuñi Pueblo, in what is today west-central New Mexico, where he was shown the ruins of Kiakima and a site believed by some to be the final resting place of Esteban. His guide told him about "'a beautiful black kachina' with a sexual magnetism that cast a spell over the women who saw the dance. He implied that he thought the Zunis might have killed Esteban out of straightforward sexual jealousy and not because he mistreated their women."[61]

Esteban may have been killed at Kiakima or Hawikku, or he may have escaped to live among Native Americans. Like his life, his death remains shrouded in ambiguity. The last image of Esteban in the historical record was that of a black child of the sun, in full Indian regalia and displaying his symbols of shamanic power, at the head of some three hundred foreign Indians, who had come to deliver a message of salvation, and the news that the representatives of a great lord were coming. At that moment, Esteban was himself a collision of cultures: African animist, Maghrebi Muslim, Iberian Christian, Indian shaman, a humble personal servant and an agent of conflicting imperial and colonial secular military and ecclesiastical powers, slave and free, a follower and a leader, a human and a powerful spirit being. In the Indian worldview, as a mediator he was feminine, but as a shaman he was masculine.

Esteban has for centuries eluded every naming convention in any category, and cannot be reduced to a statistic. He was, in the end, an African man of his time whose example would challenge future generations to find meaning in our own lives and define our own identities in this sacred life journey. He was, in that sense, all men.

"A Stranger in the West for whom pulpit and throne will weep!"[62]
You have suffered exhaustion, you have suffered fatigue,
my youngest one, my precious noble child,
precious necklace, precious feather, precious one.
You have arrived.
Rest, find repose . . .
Truly you will endure.
—Ancient Nahuatl Prayer, Florentine Codex.[63]

Like a biblical parable, a humble servant and stranger in the West became the spearhead of a movement against cruelty and injustice that culminated in the New Laws of 1542, which prohibited the enslavement of Indians. The mere fact that the Holy Roman Emperor and King of Spain was still trying to ascertain the circumstances of Esteban's death years after the fact are a testament to his importance. Esteban's death and the tragedy wrought by the Coronado expedition signaled the temporary failure of a much hoped for transition to peaceful conquest, and had to have been the cause of profound disappointment, but Esteban's legacy lived on. By whatever standards his religious beliefs and practices have been judged across the centuries, Esteban lived his faith. He labored in a frontier wilderness, a true renaissance man who blazed a path to enlightenment, like a voice crying out in the desert.

As a slave, Esteban did not experience a social death, but a remarkable life. He proved to be a master of his environment and his destiny against impossible odds. He formed his own faith community, and not in exile, but within supporting yet often exclusive power structures. Constantly accommodating, adapting, assimilating, he was not a passive victim, but an active agent, inhabiting multiple power fields simultaneously, negotiating contested boundaries, empowered by his faith. Although the existing sources point repeatedly to the ambiguity of the man, one must consider the likelihood that the true ambiguity lay not in the man, but in the sources themselves. His identity was not fragmented, scattered in pieces along a trail, but an integrated whole, a linear trajectory of unknown origin extending into an unknown of infinite potentiality. He was feared and rejected by those who could not move forward, but sought only to cling to and recreate the past. Esteban's example of courage to move forward guided by faith is his enduring legacy.

NOTES

1. Greg Grandin, *The Empire of Necessity: Slavery, Freedom, and Deception in the New World* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014), 10.

2. Esteban [Steven/Stephen] was the Christian name given to him in baptism. The use of a diminutive form such as Estevanico, literally "Stevie," was common practice in slave societies. El Negro, literally "the black man/one" needs no explanation.

3. Matthew Restall, "Black Conquistadors: Armed Africans in Early Spanish America." *The Americas* 57, no. 2 (2000): 171–205. Restall describes ten black conquistadors and the campaigns in which they participated, from the Caribbean to Chile. He says that "Esteban appears to have been the first non-native to reach the region that would become New Mexico, although his death there prevented him from taking full credit for the discovery," 182.

4. According to Mark A. Burkholder and Lyman L. Johnson, *Colonial Latin America*, 8th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 76, "The participation of black free men and slaves in Spanish military expeditions in the sixteenth century was so common that many contemporaries took no note of their presence." Castile is used, as it appeared in contemporary correspondence, since as the authors point out, "The name Spain . . . erroneously implied a nonexistent unity" during the early sixteenth century, 25.

5. Evelyn P. Jennings, "In 'The Language of the Criminal': Slavery and Colonialism in Ibero-America." *Latin American Research Review* 49, no. 2 (2014): 284.

6. Judith A. Carney and Richard Nicholas Rosomoff, *In the Shadow of Slavery: Africa's Botanical Legacy in the Atlantic World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 77, 153.

7. According to Brown, "The emphasis on secularization accounts better for certain types of elite discourse than for the actual trajectory of social and political change in world history." Brown provides details of ritual healing and shamanic sociopolitical roles in African-American slave communities. Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 258.

8. Grandin, 89: Citing David Brion Davis and Hegel, Grandin describes the moment of freedom as the point at which both slave and master recognize the master's total dependence on the slave. The same theme is developed in recent scholarship of empire in nineteenth-century Africa; see George Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), and Johannes Fabian, *Out of Our Minds: Reason and Madness in the Exploration of Central Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

9. Sylvia Molloy, "Alteridad y reconocimiento en los naugragios de Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca," *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica* Tomo 35, no. 2 (1987): 425–449. "Cohesive native peoples preferred to maintain their own sovereign identities and make independent decisions regarding the ways they ran their societies and the uses to which they put their land and resources." For a description of the native

ground, see Kathleen DuVal, *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 5.

10. Paul E. Lovejoy, "The African Diaspora: Revisionist Interpretations of Ethnicity, Culture and Religion under Slavery," *Studies in the World History of Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation* II, no. 1 (1997). Lovejoy defines a diaspora as "the recognition of a boundary [beyond which] individuals maintain their social identity by living in communities which trace their origins to the homeland." The text is available online at http://www.yorku.ca/nhp/publications/Lovejoy. (Accessed Nov. 26, 2014).

11. See Lansing Bloom, "Was Fray Marcos a Liar?" and Carl O. Sauer, "The Credibility of the Fray Marcos Account," *New Mexico Historical Review* 16, no. 2 (April 1941). The quotes above are Sauer's; he is best known for his landmark *The Early Spanish Main* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966, re-issued by Cambridge University Press, 2008). For an early summary of other controversies surrounding Esteban, see Rayford W. Logan, "Estevanico, Negro Discoverer of the Southwest: A Critical Reexamination," *Phylon* 1, no. 4 (4th Quarter, 1940): 305–314.

12. Robert Goodwin, *Crossing the Continent, 1527–1540: The Story of the First African-American Explorer of the American South* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 2, 12, 88, 373.

13. Laila Lalami, *The Moor's Account* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2014).

14. Rolena Adorno and Patrick Charles Pautz, *Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca: His Account, His Life, and the Expedition of Pánfilo de Narváez*, Volumes 1–3 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999); Richard Flint, *Great Cruelties Have Been Reported: The 1544 Investigation of the Coronado Investigation* (Dallas, TX: SMU Press, 2002); and Richard Flint and Shirley Cushing Flint, *Documents of the Coronado Expedition, 1539–1542* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005).

15. Adorno and Pautz, Vol. 1, 279. Azemmour, the modern spelling, is used hereafter.

16. David J. Schroeter, "Slave Markets and Slavery in Moroccan Urban Society," *Slavery and Abolition* 13, no. 1 (1992): 185–213.

17. John O. Hunwick, "Black Slaves in the Mediterranean World: Introduction to a Neglected Aspect of the African Diaspora," *Slavery and Abolition* 13, No.1 (1992): 5–38.

18. Fabio López Lázaro, "The Rise and Global Significance of the First 'West': The Medieval Islamic Magrib." *Journal of World History* 24, no. 2 (2013): 259–307.

19. Avner Greif, *Institutions and the Path to Modernity: Lessons from Medieval Trade* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

20. Alexander de Medici, duke of Florence at the time of Esteban's sojourn, was reputedly the mulatto son of a future pope and an African domestic servant. For his portrait by Bronzino and an outstanding collection of related art, see Joaneath Spicer, ed., *Revealing the African Presence in Renaissance Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Walters Art Museum, 2012).

21. William D. Phillips, Jr., *Slavery in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 155.

22. Ibid., 4.

23. Ibid., 155.

24. Ibid., 31–32. See also Gillian Weiss, *Captives and Corsairs: France and Slavery in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

25. Ruth Pike, *Penal Servitude in Early Modern Spain* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983).

26. After May 1526, by royal decree [*real cédula*] ladino slaves from Iberia could no longer be imported to the Americas for gang labor, but only as personal servants. According to the decree, ladinos were a bad influence on unacculturated bozales, inciting them to insubordination. Dorantes would have had to obtain a license to take Esteban with him. A reading of the decrees is essential to an understanding of the development of Hispanic colonial society. See Richard Konetzke, *Colección de Documentos para la Historia de la Formación Social de Hispanoamérica, 1493–1810*, *Vol. I (1493–1592)* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas, 1953), 80.

27. Antonio Domínguez Ortíz, *La esclavitud en Castilla en la Edad Moderna y otros estudios de marginados* (Granada: Editorial Comares, 2003), 4.

28. Ibid., 9, 17.

29. Ibid., 25–33.

30. Ibid., 167–68.

31. Aurelia Martín Casares, *La esclavitud en la Granada del Siglo XVI: Género, raza y religión* (Granada: Imprenta Comercial Motril, 2000), 413.

32. Ibid., 414–15.

33. Marsilio Ficino, *The Book of Life (1576)*, trans. Charles Boer (Woodstock, CT: Spring Publications, 1996, 1980), 87.

34. For detailed examples, reproductions of images, and an extensive corpus of Persian and Arabic manuscripts with translations and author bios, see U.S. National Institutes of Health National Library of Medicine, *Islamic Medical Manuscripts*. http://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/arabic/welcome.html. (Accessed December 6, 2014).

35. Casares, 431.

36. Adorno and Pautz, Vol. 1, 275.

37. See R. T. C. Goodwin, "'De lo que sucedió a los demás que entraron en las Indias': Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and the Other Survivors of Pánfilo Narváez's Expedition." *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 84, no. 2 (2007): 147–173, 149.

38. Adorno and Pautz, Vol. 1, 91.

39. James Sidbury and Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, "Mapping Ethnogenesis in the Early Modern Atlantic," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (Apr. 2011): 181–208.

40. Restall, 205.

41. Laura A. Lewis, *Hall of Mirrors: Power, Witchcraft, and Caste in Colonial Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 9–10.

42. Adorno and Pautz, Vol. 1, 153. Emphasis added.

43. Ibid., 233. Emphasis added. Cabeza de Vaca both includes and excludes Esteban in simultaneously operating threads of power.

44. Lewis, 5; also Molloy, 446.

45. Adorno and Pautz claim the "actual content" is "extended, involuntary sojourn" and escape attempts (Vol. 2, 163).

46. Adorno and Pautz, Vol. 1, 203–205.

47. Phillip M. White, *Peyotism and the Native American Church* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000).

48. James Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth Through Eighteenth Centuries* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 258–259.

49. Lewis provides additional accounts of syncretic rituals of African and Indian spiritual healers using peyote and other psychotropic substances. Her description of Lucas Olola in 1620s Panuco mirrors the Cabeza de Vaca account. See also Joan Cameron Bristol, *Christians, Blasphemers, and Witches: Afro-Mexican Ritual Practice in the Seventeenth Century* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007).

50. Adorno and Pautz, Vol. 2, 391–392.

51. Ibid., 421.

52. "Letter of the Viceroy to the King, 1539," in Ibid., 47–48.

53. "Letter of Vázquez de Coronado to the King, July 15, 1539," in Ibid., 40.

54. Richard Flint, *Great Cruelties Have Been Reported: The 1544 Investigation of the Coronado Expedition* (Dallas, TX: St. Mary's University Press, 2002), 2.

55. Ibid., xvii.

56. Flint and Cushing Flint, 73.

57. Virginia More Roediger, *Ceremonial Costumes of the Pueblo Indians: Their Evolution, Fabrication, and Significance in the Prayer Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), 76–78.

58. Flint and Cushing Flint, 199.

59. Ibid., 262.

60. "The Relacion de la Jornada de Cibola, Pedro de Castañeda de Nájera's Narrative, 1560s (copy, 1596)," in Ibid., 390–392. A synthesized version of this and the Fray Marcos account is contained in Ramón A. Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500–1846* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 39–40.

61. Robert Goodwin, 368.

62. López Lázaro, 271. The quote refers to Sevilla's last pre-Almoravid Arab king, al-Mu'tamid (1040–1095).

63. Camilla Townsend, ed., *American Indian History: A Documentary Reader* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 13.

Chapter 2

History and the Sacred

The Royal Tombs of Igboho

Julius O. Adekunle

All human cultures have traditions and rituals that are performed in specific spaces and at specific times. Thus, space and time have become sacralized through repetitive iterations of age-old ceremonies and rituals that have the effect of connecting each generation to the previous, and to the next; and all of these to the divine. The rituals and ceremonies may mark the different phases of life as well as the finality of death. Examples of the sacred practices include funerals, priestly initiations, and rituals that are specific and individual; or social and communal. Humans, being *homo religiosus*, it is natural to confer power—both historical and spiritual—to the locations and places where the ritualized performances take place. This power usually transcends the physical and ceremonial purposes for which the spaces are intended. Indeed, imbued with such power, spaces take on an identity and character, and the capacity to elicit from humans overwhelming fear, terror and awe. Eventually they become mythical and are mythologized within specific cultures. Global examples abound. Early cultures had sacred places of worship where rituals and sacrifices were performed. In ancient Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Chinese, and Indian societies, temples were constructed and held sacred.[1] Jerusalem is as sacred to Jews and Christians as Mecca and Medina are to Muslims. So are the sacred spaces of East Asian spiritual traditions. All these are also historical spaces in terms of the origins of their religions.

African royal tombs and mausoleums fit into the category of spaces that have both historical and spiritual (or numinous), significance for their peoples. The creation of royal tombs and mausoleums in ancient civilizations was not only cultural, but also spiritual. They were meant to preserve the bodies of rulers, who were considered human embodiment of the divine. In ancient Egypt, death was conceived as an extension of life. As a result of this belief,

elaborate preparations were made for the construction of tombs, which were referred to as "house of eternity."[2] In modern day Uganda, there are the Kasubi tombs, which are the royal burial ground for four Kabakas, or kings. The massive and impressive mausoleums are located in a sacred forest (*Kibira*) and inside them are the four tombs. In view of the political and spiritual aura that the Baganda people accorded their past rulers, the Kasubi tombs are not accessible to the public.[3]

Among the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria, there is an interlocking relationship of religion, politics, culture, and nature. The Yoruba people place a great deal of emphasis on the sacredness of life, which underscores the importance of the afterlife, nature, as well as their cultural and political institutions. For example, kingship, marriage, naming, death, places of worship, and religious rituals are all held sacred. They have traditions of reserving tombs for royalty. Like the Egyptian concept of house of eternity, the tomb (a hallowed space), is known as *Baara*, or royal mausoleum. The key attitude that informs the creation of royal tombs is that in Yoruba culture, life and death are viewed as a continuum where earthly and mortal death is not seen as the end of life. The idea is that a dead king—just like a mere mortal—simply goes to join their ancestors in the great beyond. The royal tombs of Igboho, in Oyo State, Nigeria, popularly referred to as *Igbo Oba* (the Forest of Kings), is regarded as a sacred space because of its historical and spiritual significance for the Oyo people of Yorubaland. It enjoys cultural cachet because four *alaafins*, or emperors, were interred there centuries ago.

THE OYO EMPIRE AND ROYAL TOMBS

The Oyo Empire was one of the largest, strongest, and wealthiest empires in West Africa. It was the most politically and militarily powerful of the Yoruba kingdoms.[4] The founding of the empire by Oranmiyan (one of the sons of Oduduwa), has been associated with the dispersal of princes from Ife to various parts of Yorubaland. According to Robert Smith, the empire "was firmly established as a power in northern Yorubaland, at a period which can be provisionally and tentatively assigned to the fourteenth century."[5] Its formidable military machine, particularly the cavalry, was effective and able to defeat, on different occasions, the Nupe and Borgu neighboring kingdoms. The strongly walled Katunga (or Oyo Ile, the capital), and strategically located for commercial purposes, became a great divide and a link between peoples. The empire reached the zenith of its power in the fifteenth century. As it expanded its territory, the bureaucracy similarly became enlarged. The palace was the political headquarters where palace officials and subordinate

chiefs met with the Alaafin. The economy thrived as a result of taxes and foreign trade, especially the slave trade. The slaves were of divergent origin.

As will be discussed below, the Oyo Empire later became engulfed in military turmoil, culminating in the empire's collapse in the first half of the nineteenth century. Subsequently, the seat of power was relocated in 1837 to the current city of Oyo—known as Oyo Alaafin. Igboho, where the royal burial ground is located, is referred to as Oyo-Igboho. Historical facts indicate that the Oyo Empire was engaged in several frontier wars, particularly with its powerful neighbors such as the Borgu and Nupe kingdoms. At one point or the other, Oyo fell to both of them. While Oyo was later able to regain and maintain its autonomy, the empire finally succumbed to the superior force of the Muslim jihadists at Ilorin, in present-day Kwara State in approximately 1837.

During the early part of the sixteenth century the Oyo Empire was on the defensive of its territory with the Nupe eventually sacking the Oyo capital (Oyo-Ile or Katunga). The destruction of Oyo Ile was possible because of its close proximity to the Nupe; not being auspiciously located to guarantee Oyo's victory. This defeat became a milestone in Oyo history; the Alaafin (or emperor), went into exile in the kingdom of Borgu, north of the Oyo Empire. The period of Alaafin's exile led to extensive Borgu-Yoruba interethnic relations, which can be examined from three perspectives: traditions of origin; the role the Borgu rulers played in the establishment of the Oyo Empire; and the period of Alaafin's sojourn in Borgu in the sixteenth century. These events were interconnected and help in attaining a deeper understanding of the establishment of the royal burial grounds as a sacred space in Oyo history.

The oral traditions of the origins of the Borgu people emphasize the migration of Kisra from either Saudi Arabia or Persia. Nimrod (*Lamurudu* in Yoruba folklore), and the ancestor of the Yoruba people were among the immigrants. Both Kisra and Nimrod, according to the legend, migrated from Mecca because of their opposition to Islam. This was one of the reasons why anti-Islamic ideology pervaded both Borgu and Yoruba pre-colonial history. Who Kisra was and the authenticity of the legend has been examined elsewhere.[6] Yoruba oral history, however, does not focus on Nimrod or Kisra, but on Oduduwa who is referred to as the eponymous ancestor of the Yoruba people.

IGBOHO IN OYO HISTORY

Yoruba traditions mention that the Borgu people played an important role in the establishment of the old Oyo Empire. A Borgu king (probably the king of Nikki) purportedly gave Oranmiyan, an Oyo avatar and Alaafin, a charm in

the form of a python.[7] Oranmiyan was instructed to follow the python until it reached a place where it would stop for seven days and then disappear. It was at this place that Oranmiyan was to establish his new capital. Oranmiyan named the place Oyo Ajaka.[8] The reference to a python is significant because pythons were one of the sacred (totemic) reptiles in Borgu. Thus, H. U. Beier concluded that, "Old Oyo seems to have been founded on land belonging to the king of Ibariba or Borgu."[9] The conclusion is premised on the fact that the land Oranmiyan occupied was vacant. If there had been human occupation on the land, there might have been military encounter in order to acquire it. The tradition also suggests that the Yoruba people did not directly migrate out of Ile-Ife, otherwise, the Borgu people would not have claimed ownership of the land. Furthermore, the concept of *ebi* (clan interrelationships) among the Yoruba forbade the acquisition of members' land. This indicates that the site Oranmiyan occupied, controlled, and established as a kingdom was a "no-man's" land. Later developments proved the location of the Oyo capital to be a hot spot, especially because of its closeness to the militarily powerful Borgu and Nupe kingdoms.

The third perspective relates to the location of the Oyo capital and the consequent military encounters with the warrior Nupe people. The repeated warfare against the Nupe weakened Oyo Empire's military force. Hence, Alaafin Onigbogi was forced to abandon Oyo-Ile and flee to Borgu.[10] To explain a relationship with the Borgu people, Oyo history asserts that Onigbogi married a Borgu king's daughter. When the marriage actually took place remains nebulous and the name of the woman unmentioned. Thus, when the Alaafin was forced to abandon Oyo-Ile, he and his entourage sought refuge with his father-in-law.[11] Since marriage, in African culture is sacred and respected, the Borgu king allowed Onigbogi and his people to settle at "Gbere."[12] How long Onigbogi stayed at Gbere is not known, but Samuel Johnson, the doyen of Yoruba history, states that Onigbogi died at Gbere. And Ofinran, whose mother was a Borgu princess, became the next Alaafin.[13] Thus, through royal connections Yoruba-Borgu relations became strengthened, as proven by later developments.

Ofinran was described as a fearless warrior, hence his appellation, *Ofinran ko ko'ja, ko k'are* ("Ofinran fears neither fight, nor play"). In his quest to re-establish his political power and prestige, Ofinran embarked on the reconstruction of the Oyo Empire with its temporary capital now at Kusu.[14] Given the sacredness accorded the king, wherever he resided was regarded as the capital. Kusu therefore became not only a temporary capital, but also a sacred place. Hugh Clapperton, a nineteenth century Scottish explorer, recorded that Kusu was a large double-walled town.[15] The Yoruba often constructed city-walls as fortifications against invaders and intruders. The walls

around Kusu may have been constructed during the Alaafin Ofinran's reign to provide security, given the frequent military encounters of the period. There was also a religious dimension to the Borgu-Oyo relations because traditions assert that the Yoruba were initiated into the Ifa (divination) and Egungun (ancestor worship) mysteries while at Kusu. The practice of Ifa and Egungun supposedly came from Nupe, which suggests that the Nupe had populated some Borgu towns where they freely practiced their culture and religion. The construction of safety walls implies that the Yoruba occupied Kusu for a long time to enable them adapt to and practice new forms of religion.[16]

There were conflicting reasons about Ofinran's decision to evacuate Kusu.[17] Borgu accounts asserted that the Yoruba were forced to leave because of their social misbehavior, especially marrying and maltreating Borgu women.[18] On the contrary, Johnson contended that it was the Borgu people who mistreated the Yoruba.[19] Another Yoruba historian, M. C. Adeyemi, suggested that the Yoruba withdrew from Borgu for problems of communication because of language differences.[20] However, the desire of the Alaafin to reoccupy the capital and regain his political power may have been a strong impetus behind the evacuation. According to the Yoruba spiritual belief, the king was sacred and therefore not supposed to live outside his domain for a long period of time. This tradition prompted the Alaafin to leave Borgu and return to the Oyo Empire. Whatever the cause of the Yoruba departure from Borgu, history records that there was relative peaceful co-existence between the two ethnic groups. This was evident in so far that they cooperated in raiding Shabe (Sabe, in northwestern Yorubaland).[21] The Oyo Yoruba fighting the Shabe was an unholy act that was incongruous with the *ebi* (family) system in Oyo, but the episode shows the desperation of the Yoruba to maintain a peaceful and amiable relationship with the Borgu people.

CULTURE, POLITICS, AND THE FOUR ALAAFINS AT IGBOHO

The historical narrative above is intended to provide the context to the founding of Igboho, the historical site of the Alaafin royal tombs. According to Robert Smith in the *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, "Igboho offered security to the Court [of the Oyo Empire] after its long wanderings and its natural defences were presumably soon strengthened."[22] Before leaving Borgu, Alaafin Eguguoju chose Sede, a prominent and powerful hunter along with five other hunters, to lead him and his entourage.[23] The hunters served as guides, provided security, and led the Alaafin to an unidentified location called Ebiti.[24] They eventually arrived at Igboho, where the Alaafin asked the hunters to

stay with him. Eguguoju chose to stay at Igboho because it was a safe and suitable place for him to re-establish his authority. It was outside the immediate military reach of Borgu. Within a short time, Igboho became populated by Yoruba and Borgu people, all under the suzerainty of the Alaafin. Contrary to Eguguoju's expectation the site of Igboho and the presence of the Borgu hunters did not stop the Borgu people from organizing sporadic military expeditions and raids against the Yoruba. Several wars were fought because Borgu followed an aggressive policy of imperialism, and, at this juncture, the Oyo Empire was unstable and vulnerable.

Orompoto, a female ruler who reigned between ca. 1560 and 1580, succeeded Eguguoju. Her long reign was one of the most eventful in Oyo history because she had an excellent control of the empire, particularly the military. Igboho was surrounded by triple security walls, but that did not prevent external military attack. Thus, faced with constant raids and attacks, Orompoto's immediate concern was the reorganization and restoration of Oyo's military power. To address this, she introduced a number of new strategic ideas. First, she introduced the cavalry, which consisted of approximately 1,000 infantry and 1,000 cavalry soldiers.[25] With her formidable military machine and new strategies, Oyo was able to record significant victory over the Borgu at the battle of Ilayi for the first time since the evacuation of the capital.[26] Where the horses were procured is uncertain, but the Ilayi war proved the effectiveness of Oyo military power at Igboho and it stopped Borgu attacks and raids.

Second, Orompoto embarked on unifying some of the pre-existing settlements in the neighborhood in the hopes of placing them under the aegis of Igboho, providing them protection from Borgu and Nupe attacks.[27] With the development, Oromopoto secured and consolidated her control over the entire region. Third, Orompoto led the Oyo people in constructing three extensive defensive walls, which incorporated Igboho and all the neighboring settlements.[28] Fourth, Orompoto introduced some major military and political innovations and made constitutional changes that contributed to the political growth of Igboho in particular and brought significant improvement to Oyo political culture.

As discussed below, Alaafin Abipa moved that capital back to Oyo Ile in 1610, in spite of vocal opposition from his nobles and advisors. Igboho, however, remained a sacred city of the Alaafin and the hub of Oyo politics. Many historical and political developments took place there.[29] Its importance and recognition lasted until the nineteenth century when European travellers (Hugh Clapperton and John and Richard Lander) described it as "a place of great importance and the second town in the [Oyo] kingdom."[30] During his travels and explorations in Yorubaland in the second half of the nineteenth century, W. H. Clarke (an American Baptist missionary) visited Igboho

and described it thus: "one of the first cities in the flourishing kingdom of Yorubaland, could boast of its thousand inhabitants, its vast extent, its flourishing agriculture and commerce, and its three walls successively built to accommodate the enlarging population."[31] Clarke referred to Igboho as a city because in ancient times any walled town was regarded as a "city" and the ruler called "king." The formidable walls (the ruins of which are still visible) were constructed during the reign of Alaafin Orompoto to forestall the incessant incursions of the Borgu.[32]

By the turn of the nineteenth century, the Alaafin of Oyo had gradually begun to lose grip over his political dominance of subordinate chiefs. Important provincial chiefs such as Onikoyi and Solagberu were ambitious for political power, therefore they allied with the Muslims who were stationed in Ilorin. In addition, Alaafin Oluewu could not control Afonja (the Are-Ona-Kakanfo or Generalissimo), who collaborated with certain dissatisfied Oyo chiefs.[33] The weakness of Oyo's central administration prompted internal revolts and external attacks from its neighbors. One of the external attacks occurred between 1830 and 1835[34] when the Fulani Muslim forces struck at Ilorin, partly at the invitation of Afonja who wanted to carve out an empire for himself, and partly to force the Alaafin to accept Islam. The result was the Ilorin War.

The Ilorin or Eleduwe War took place between 1820 and1837. The war was caused by political and religious factors. First, the political ambitions of Afonja, the military leader of the Oyo Empire, to carve out an empire for himself, and his intrigues against Alaafin Atiba prompted Afonja to invite Muslims under his banner for military assistance. Second, with their strong base at Ilorin, the Muslims planned to spread Islam to the Oyo Empire where traditionalism was ubiquitous. Afonja's invitation merely became a stimulus and an opportunity for the Muslims to achieve their goal. During the war, the Muslim jihadists recorded a significant victory over the Yoruba by destroying the Oyo capital.[35]

With no success in sight, the Oyo Mesi (Royal Council) counseled Alaafin Atiba to return to Igboho, a relatively safe and peaceful town, where some survivors of the war had taken refuge. The attempt was to reinstate Igboho as the Oyo capital. After all, it was a sacred city; the final resting place of four Alaafins. Igboho's population had grown through demographic movements, its agricultural and mercantile economy was thriving, and it maintained relatively amicable political relations with its neighbors. Not all the members of the Oyo Mesi accompanied the Alaafin Abipa back to Oyo-Ile when it was reoccupied in the seventeenth century. Hence, those who remained at Igboho persuaded the Alaafin to come back. However, Alaafin Atiba preferred a more southerly location in order to move completely away from the militant Muslims, as well as from the imperialistic Borgu and Nupe peoples.

THE IGBOHO ROYAL TOMBS AND THEIR SACREDNESS

Among the Yoruba, many forests and sacred groves have historical importance and are considered marks of sociocultural identity. For example, the Osun Osogbo (located at the outskirt of Osogbo, Osun State) is a sacred grove where rituals are performed and an annual festival is observed.[36] Osun, a warrior-queen and wife of Alaafin Sango, along with Oya, is celebrated during this annual festival. The Yoruba revere Osun and Oya as river goddesses of fertility. In Yoruba traditions, Osun was a symbol of beauty, love, and prosperity. During the annual Osun Festival, many foreigners and traditional worshippers often visit the grove. In 2005, UNESCO declared Osun Osogbo Grove as one of two World Heritage sites in Nigeria. Another sacred symbol and the expression of cultural identity of the Yoruba is the Oranmiyan staff, an obelisk located in a grove at Arubidi in Ile Ife. The staff represented the political authority of Oranmiyan. It has become a tradition for any new Ooni of Ife to receive a similar staff of office.[37] As a political symbol, the staff and the place where it was erected are sacred and greatly revered by the Yoruba people.

Based upon the existence of sacred places in Yorubland, the royal tombs at Igboho do not offer any exception. The royal tombs constitute an integral part of Oyo and Yoruba history and culture. The royal tombs at Igboho (in Oorelope Local Government of Oyo State) cover an area of about one square mile and is located in the heart of town. The four Alaafins buried in the sacred space are Ofinran, Egugunoju, Orompoto, and Ajiboyede. Because these Alaafins were regarded as semi-divine, as they occupied powerful political positions while alive, their burial ground is similarly considered a sacred place. Although the royal burial ground was formerly a dense forest that people were forbidden to inhabit, it has since been accorded appropriate reverence. The first most important royal burial ground in Oyo history is located at Oyo-Ile or Katunga while the second one is at Igboho. The royal burial ground at Igboho is called *Igbo Oba*, but in modern day Oyo town, it is called the *Baara*.[38]

The origin of the royal tombs is closely linked with the foundation of Igboho in the middle of the sixteenth century. Shortly after evacuating Kusu (Koosoo), Ofinran, the ninth Alaafin in Johnson's list died at Oke Iroju, but Egugunoju (son and successor) brought his remains to Igboho for burial. According to the Yoruba saying, *ori ade kii sun ita* ("no king is buried outside, or just anywhere"). Thus, Egugunoju has been credited not only for the founding of Igboho, but also for the establishment of the royal tombs. Igboho was a fine choice as a temporary capital of the Oyo Empire because it:

> Offered security to the court after its long wanderings and its natural defences were presumably soon strengthened (it became famous for its triple walls), so that the Oyo were enabled to resist the continued menace from the Nupe and also from the Borgu, dangers which, it may be assumed, made hazardous the reoccupation of the ruined and more exposed former capital.[39]

Judging from Robert Smith's suggested date of the founding of Igboho (ca. 1555), the establishment of the royal burial ground can be placed coterminously. How the burial was organized, how elaborate the funeral rites were, how many people died with Ofinran, and the extent of pomp and pageantry that accompanied the ceremony cannot be described with any measure of accuracy for lack of adequate written records, witness accounts, and archaeological information. Historical accounts, however, indicate that Ofinran was the first Alaafin to be buried at the royal burial ground. Between 1550 and 1604, four Alaafins had been buried at Igboho, which suggests that the rulers had relatively short lives, therefore, short reigns.

THE FOUR ALAAFINS BURIED AT IGBOHO

As indicated above, Ofinran died before reaching Igboho but his remains were preserved in an ass's skin in preparation for a royal burial usually reserved for a ruler. Borgu people, especially the hunters, were present at the burial ceremony because Ofinran's mother was a Borgu princess. As it was the tradition, Ofinran was accorded full and sacred burial rites that a king of high status deserved. Given the Yoruba believe in afterlife, some materials were buried with Ofinran.

Ajiboyede came to power in about 1580, and was the most successful of the Igboho Alaafins in terms of providing political peace and economic prosperity. One of the most important events was the victory of the Oyo people over the Nupe when Lajomo was the army general.[40] Ajiboyede embarked on a process of integration of the several communities that made up Igboho. To the people, his concepts and policies were extreme. Ajiboyede was known to be a slave driver. It would seem that his political and economic philosophies were very hard for his people to follow and therefore he was given the appellation, *So-ipasan–se o ri pasan* ("Do you see a whip?").[41]

Ajiboyede was acknowledged as making important contributions to the institutional growth of the Oyo Empire. For instance, in his choice of chiefs and personal assistants, he placed high preference on merit rather than hereditary rights. This is exemplified in his choice of an *Osi Efa* chieftaincy title, which was given to Ajanlapa's son.[42] Ajanlapa was an intrepid warrior who chose

to save the king and his people by dressing like the king during the Nupe war. The Nupe soldiers concentrated on and killed Ajanlapa, believing that they killed the king and the Oyo people had been conquered. They later realized that the king was not killed.[43] As compensation for his father's physical courage, bravery and saving act, Ajiboyede decided to honor Ajanlapa's son with a title.

Ajiboyede inaugurated the celebration of the *Bebe* festival, which lasted three years. Two reasons have been put forth for the celebration of the festival. First, the victory of the Yoruba over the Nupe ushered in a long period of political peace and stability. Because the Borgu people had been pacified, it meant that there was no fear of external attack. The borders had been secured and subordinate towns did not revolt. The political structure was stable and institutions were both transformed and preserved. Ritual practices were observed without hindrance.

Second, the festival was meant to celebrate the longevity of Ajiboyede's reign.[44] Because Ajiboyede's predecessors ruled for relatively short periods, the Bebe was sometimes referred to as funeral rites for the king. Robert Smith suggests that Ajiboyede ruled between ca. 1850–1590. It is more logical to credit the long reign to Orompoto and for the Bebe festival to be celebrated during her rule rather than Ajiboyede's. However, considering that previous rulers from the period of Kori (the tenth Alaafin in Johnson's list), excepting Orompoto ruled for less than ten years, Ajiboyede thought that his reign of ten years was long enough and deserved to be feted, given the military engagements he survived. More importantly, Ajiboyede initiated the Bebe festival. Ajiboyede's son died not long after the celebration of Bebe festival and a Muslim cleric sent a condolence message, which suggests that Islam had possibly penetrated the Oyo Empire when Igboho was the temporary capital and during Ajiboyede's reign.

There was one negative aspect of the Bebe festival. As Johnson indicated, the festival "is always accompanied with human sacrifices offered in the memory of all preceding Kings from Oduduwa downwards; two to each, and their blood mingled with those of animals slaughtered without number is poured out for the King and this part of the ceremony is regarded as the highest act of worship and of thanksgiving."[45] Another festival that was celebrated after Bebe was the Owara festival. Not much is known about Owara other than that it was a minor festival often celebrated by the Basorun and lasting only three months.[46]

The nature of the Bebe festival suggests that in spite of all his highhandedness, Ajiboyede's reign was not wholly distasteful to the people. His period was also marked by economic prosperity. Agriculture thrived, commerce flourished, and trade routes were safe for merchants. The growth of Igboho

as a commercial, agricultural, and industrial center excelled that of any other part of the empire. This situation was attributable to population concentration, a favorable geographical location, and the industrious attitude of the people. Like the great commercial centers of West Africa, Igboho became a great divide and paradoxically, a link between peoples. Of all the commodities moving south from the north, the most important were horses, which had become very important in the military history of the empire since the period of Orompoto. Horses were obtained from Hausaland through Borgu. No other ruler celebrated the festival until the second half of the eighteenth century during Agboluaje's reign.[47]

In Yoruba culture and spirituality, the market is a sacred place. It was a place of religious rituals that included sacrifices designed to propitiate the gods to ensure the peace and prosperity of the town. Two important markets were established during Ajiboyede's period at Igboho. The first market was Akesan, located in front of the Alaafin's palace. The market was organized on the model of that of Oyo-Ile. The second market was called Apá, located at the Molaba ward, west of the town. The Okere and Igiisubu were in charge of these markets. At various times, other small markets such as Obada, Kosofe, and Yara were established to cope with the expanding commerce of Igboho.[48] Articles for sale in these markets were mainly foodstuffs such as yams, vegetables, maize, beans, guinea corn, pepper, and shea butter. Others were indigo, salt, old shells, snuff, red clay, cotton, and woven cloth. The variety of the products at Igboho markets indicated the advanced indigenous industries based on local resources. There is no historical evidence that slaves were bought and sold in these markets.

Alaafin Tella Abipa succeeded Ajiboyede in ca. 1590. On accession to the throne, Abipa increased the number of personal assistants that were recruited into royal services. It was during this period that the post of *Ilari* (Alaafin's representative) emerged.[49] Otun Efa, Osi Efa, and Ona Efa were among the prominent chiefs who gave strong political support to Abipa. Shortly after assuming power, Abipa devised inchoate plans for reoccupying Oyo-Ile. These plans were opposed by many of the chiefs and nobles on the basis that Igboho was more peaceful than Oyo-Ile. However, with the assistance of chiefs of non-Oyo extraction such as the Alepata, Bonni, Igiisubu, Loko, Gbandan, and Alomo, the opposition was defeated and Abipa was able to reoccupy the old capital ca. 1604 in the twentieth year of his reign.[50] The period of Alaafin brought about significant developments in the political organization of Igboho. The integration of the neighboring settlements enhanced the expansion of the town and augmented its military strength. The economic status and prosperity, which Igboho enjoyed during the period of the Alaafin, continued for centuries after the reoccupation of Oyo-Ile.

AARE: THE CUSTODIAN OF THE SACRED PLACE

With the reoccupation of Oyo-Ile under Alaafin Abipa (*Oba t'Oro*—"the one who captured ghosts"), Igboho ceased to be the capital of the Oyo Empire. This episode led to some significant political reconstruction, especially the headship of the town. Sede was the Borgu hunter who led Alaafin Egugunoju to Igboho. He was given the cognomen, Alepata, that is, the hunter of a speckled beast (leopard).[51] Consequently, Alepata Sede became a chief in Igboho and indeed one of the trusted assistants of the Alaafin. Sede's descendants maintained the chieftaincy title until the time Abipa came to the throne.

Alepata Kulajolu played a prominent role in resisting all opposition to the re-occupation of Oyo-Ile. Before leaving Igboho, the Abipa reportedly handed the political control of the town Kulajolu, the leading Borgu hunter.[52] The junior hunters such as Boni, Igiisubu, Alomo, Gbandan, and Loko became ward chiefs at Igboho. The Alaafin chose Kulajolu to rule on his behalf presumably because high ranking chiefs were either unwilling to accept the challenges of headship of Igboho in fear of Borgu menace or did not want to lose their political status and prestige if they stayed away from the Oyo metropolis. It is possible that Abipa honored the Kulajolu in realization of his contribution towards the reoccupation of Oyo-Ile.

With the exit from Igboho, Alaafin Abipa initiated a system in which two of his *ilaris (*representatives) resided permanently at Igboho to carry out specific functions. One of the *ilaris* was the Aare, who is now recognized as a ward chief. The Aare was charged with the responsibility of taking care of the royal burial ground, given its importance to the Oyo people and to the history of this epoch. One of the spiritual characteristics of a sacred place is the presence of an individual knowledgeable and competent in the history of the place, and who will function as a steward of the site. This person has a dialogue with the spirits and serves as a mediator between the spirit world and the people. Thus the Aare of Igboho, the steward of the sacred space, fulfils both historical and sacerdotal functions. The Aare is charged with the general maintenance of the royal tombs and offers propitiations to the four departed Alaafins. These sacrifices have become ritual and are evidence of ancestral worship whereby the living communicate with the dead with the Aare serving as the human intermediary. The annual sacrifices are made in the month of March. If necessary, they could be performed any time during the year. The sacrifices are performed in March because it was in that month that Egugunoju brought the remains of Ofinran to Igboho for burial and designated a section of the town as royal burial ground.

The sacrifices were meant to appease the spirits of the dead Alaafins in the hopes that they would aid Igboho citizens in dealing with existential crises, epidemics, and natural disasters. The people of Igboho believed that they

could incur the wrath of the Alaafins if the Aare failed to make the regular propitiations and sacrifices. Until the nineteenth century, the sacrifices were regarded as a Yoruba national event since it involved the Alaafins of the Oyo-Yoruba people in general. People from Saki, Kisi, Igbeti, Sepeteri, Ogbooro, and Oje (Aha) usually attended the ceremony. They had become part of the continuum of rituals that affirmed the spirituality of the Oyo-Yoruba. It was a way of paying homage and tribute to the Alaafins. Among the materials used for the sacrifice were bean cakes, cold corn meal, fried corn, kola nut, and some other edibles. The spirits of the Alaafins were invoked, propitiation made, and people were treated to delicacies, specially prepared for the occasion. All of these took place at the grove that was located in the heart of the royal burial ground.

The Aare was not a priest but assumed a priestly role and performed the sacrifices apropos of his responsibility to take care of the Igbo Oba. He was, however, assisted by his lieutenant, the Agoro of Oke-afin. The ceremony was usually celebrated with pomp and pageantry in a similar fashion as the Bere festival was conducted in Oyo-Ile.[53] The Alepata himself performed some rites in recognition of the Alaafin's suzerainty over his authority. There is, however, no convincing evidence that a living Alaafin had ever participated in the sacrifices. This was borne out of the fact that Yoruba chiefs were not, by tradition, permitted to attend funeral ceremonies or see dead bodies.

The Aare claimed that the spirits of the Alaafins often came out at night from the royal burial ground whenever they desired something or to learn about the welfare of the people. The visit might also be conducted to warn the people of an imminent danger, or to demonstrate their displeasure for misbehavior, especially when regular sacrifices were not performed. Their arrival at night was often announced by the *ko-ko-ko* sound, which only the Aare could hear and understand. The Aare in consultation with the *babalawos* would approach the visiting Alaafins and inquire regarding their desires. Immediate action had to be taken not to incur the wrath of the Alaafins and to avert calamities over the population. After granting their requests, the Alaafins would retire to their different graves. The Aare further claimed that the visit has almost become an annual event. The whole concept of the dead visiting the living is a by-product of the people's belief in ancestor worship. The living could sacrifice to the dead for particular reasons while the dead too could visit the living for specific reasons.

The Aare performed other functions. He was the co-ordinator of the installation ceremony of the Alepata.[54] It was mandatory that the installation of these chiefs be performed at the sacred place with the belief that their legitimacy derived from the ancestral Alaafins. As part of the installation ritual at the royal tombs, the name of the new king would be called three times. He was expected to answer at the third time, signifying that his ancestors

had permitted him to rule. This practice is similar to the religious belief that when an ancestor dies his people would go to the forest to call the name of the deceased three times. At the third call, somebody would emerge, covering his face with a mask, representing the deceased, to bestow blessings on the people.[55] In 1960, when Solomon Oyediran was installed as the Alepata of Igboho, his name was called three times. His answer at the third time indicated that the gods and ancestors had approved and legitimized his authority to rule the town.

The practice in the Old Oyo was that coronation of a new king took place at the Baara (royal tombs). Religious rites were performed and the king was given the *Igba Iwa* (calabashes of divination). The Igbo Oba at Igboho also served as a cultural and ritual grove for a new king because the coronation of a new king is often performed there. For example, Solomon Oyediran (1960–1998) was installed at the sacred space and the Aare, Mustapha Oladoja Oyebimpe, performed the ceremony in 1960. The installation of Elijah Oladokun Ajayi, as the Alepata of Igboho (1999–2002), was held at the royal burial ground. Among the rites was the visit to the four tombs to pay obeisance and to offer prayers for success, peace, prosperity, and longevity.

An important function of the Aare is to conduct visitors and researchers round the sacred place. Renowned Yoruba historians such as Robert Smith, J. A. Atanda, S. O. Babayemi, Biodun Adediran, and archaeologists such as Babatunde Agbaje-Williams have visited the royal tombs at one time or another. The Aare is keen on supplying useful information and assistance regarding the history of the royal tombs and of Igboho in general. None of these historians has directly mentioned the importance of the royal sacred space at Igboho in their numerous writings on the Oyo people. In addition, archaeological excavations have not been carried out on the sites.

SACRED SPACE AND ARCHAEOLOGY

Babatunde Agbaje-Williams has carried out archaeological excavations on the three defensive walls that surrounded Igboho in the sixteenth century, constructed during the reign of the female ruler, Orompoto. Agbaje-Williams proved that the system used to construct the walls was connected culturally and historically with those of Old Oyo, Ipapo Ile, and Koso, which indicates the continuity of Oyo tradition in technology. In military encounters, the Oyo-Yoruba made the construction of defensive walls imperative. Artefacts from the walls include pottery, which was a symbol of an advanced culture.[56]

Archaeological excavation has not been carried out on the royal tombs. Due to the Yoruba tradition of the sacredness of the tombs and the importance of historical preservation, archaeological excavation has not been

permitted. The study of the skeletons would certainly enrich and enhance the understanding of the stature, health, and personality of the Alaafins. Elaborate offerings or materials buried in the graves could have provided more facts on the cultural or religious status of the sixteenth century Yorubaland. In addition, archaeology would have provided more reliable dates that could help in situating the history of the Alaafins and the Oyo Empire in an appropriate perspective.

The Significance of the Royal Tombs

It was the tradition in Yorubaland that rulers were highly esteemed. In this respect, the Oyo-Yoruba people accorded the Alaafin great fear and respect. The Alaafin is highly respected by the Oyo-Yoruba in contemporary times. Fear often gripped any one came into contact with the Alaafin. An explanation for this is found in the Oyo-Yoruba people who regarded the Alaafin as *Iku-Baba yeye, alase, ekeji orisa* ("Frightful as death, all-powerful, and second in command to the gods"). Because of the people's belief in life after death, the respect that was given to a living Alaafin continued even after his demise. Until the middle of this century, people always feared passing through the major road near the royal tombs. It was almost impossible for any one except the Aare to enter the forest. The fear stemmed from the belief that the Alaafins were too great to be disturbed in their rest and to be encountered on their annual visits.

The royal sacred space is significant in Igboho because it is an historical place and indeed a tourist attraction. Although no specific or attractive monuments have been erected on the graves, nonetheless, the curiosity of wanting to know where the Alaafins were buried has aroused the interest of historians, anthropologists, and archaeologists regarding Igboho. This fact is important considering that, apart for Oranmiyan who was buried at Ile-Ife, and an obelisk has erected on the spot he was buried, it is difficult to identify the Alaafin who was buried at the special royal burial ground at Oyo-Ile. Borgu people also have a royal burial ground called *Sinasika* (in Batonu language).

The Ighobo royal ground has been reserved only for departed Alaafins. No Alepata has ever been buried there. The past Alepata were buried inside the palace yard, which represents a mini royal burial ground. Similarly, it is important to note that archaeological excavations have not determined the date of the death of the Alaafins. Such an exercise would have provided information on cultural links, especially links with the Borgu people. The period of sojourn of the Alaafin in Borgu may have brought about some cultural links, exchanges, and borrowing. The materials buried with the Alaafins would have supplied useful information needed for the reconstruction of the history of Igboho.

The Baara at Oyo: A Historical Sacred Space

The Baara at new Oyo was established in the first half of the nineteenth century with the death of Alaafin Atiba. The etymological meaning of the word "Baara" is shrouded in obscurity. Several Yoruba words have the same spelling but different meanings. For instance, *baara* is a plant that creeps and produces the melon oil seed; *baara* means to beg as a pauper; *baara* is a god of mischief, the devil, Ifa. *Baara*, in some Yoruba towns such as Ogbomoso and Ifon (near Osogbo), is a chieftaincy title. The *baara* at Oyo might have been closely connected with religion and royalty in Yorubaland. Because the Alaafins were buried in the place called Baara, the word may be interpreted as *Ibi Oba maa n re* ("The place where the king finally goes").

To bestow honor and dignity on the *baara*, a high priestess, named Iyalode, was designated to take care of it, unlike the Aare (a male chief) at Igboho. The appointment of a priestess is reflective of the important religious role of women in Oyo history. Women held vital political positions and contributed to the economic growth of the Oyo Empire. Their spirituality also earned them prominent and powerful responsibilities in the court of the Alaafins. Outside the court of the Alaafin, male and female worshipers of various *orisas* (divinities) organized themselves into associations or sacerdotal guilds, which were led by priestess and priests. On behalf of their communities and associations, the priests and priestesses offered propitiatory sacrifices for the general welfare of the people and followers. They also exercised their ritual powers during critical periods such as drought, famine, and outbreak of diseases. Since the establishment of the Baara at New Oyo, seven Alaafins have been buried there. At the Baara in Oyo-Ile (Katunga), there were twenty-nine Alaafins. One Alaafin was buried at Kobai (located between Igbeti and Ilorin but now extinct).

The death of an Alaafin was often marked with elaborate funeral rites and sacrifices. In Yoruba tradition and in accordance to the sacred position he occupied, it takes some days before the death of a ruler is announced to the public. As a demi-god, the Yoruba people would not say that the Alaafin died. Instead, they claim that he has transposed to a new world. Thus, the announcement would be made to the public with the words *oba wa'ja* ("The King has transposed to the attic") and with the beating of the *koso* drum. Carried by the Alawo, the corpse would leave the palace at night for the Baara (which was approximately one mile away from the palace), to show the continuity of the sacredness attached to the position and person of the Alaafin. During the procession, ivory trumpet would be blown, drums would be beaten, dirges would be sung, and intermittent sacrifices would be performed.

Human sacrifices were performed in three places. The first one was in front of the Aremo's house (heir apparent), the second at the Okiti Jenju (in Apinni quarters), and the third at the Olosa quarters. On getting to the Baara,

the public would remain at the Kobi (large open space) while only selected people of Baara quarters would go into the sacred place for the final sacrifices and burial.

The Yoruba religious belief in life after death led to the practice of some people dying with the Alaafin. Among the people that were often chosen to die with the Alaafin were the Olokun Esin (Alaafin's horse bearer), Kudefu (head guard), and Iyalagbon.[57] Formerly, the Aremo and some male and female slaves died too, but towards the end of the nineteenth century the killing of the Aremo was repudiated.[58] This action was a sequel to the ambition of the Alaafin Atiba to change the Oyo tradition and constitution by appointing the Aremo Adelu (Crown Prince) to succeed him. Ibadan, a powerful military town, supported that Alaafin but Ijaye (another military town) under Kurumi opposed the Alaafin's unconstitutional action. The conflict led to the Ijaye War of 1860 to 1865.[59]

In recognition of Baara's historical significance, an impressive wall has now been constructed round the royal tombs and a great measure of sanctity accorded the deceased rulers. Because both the past and incumbent Alaafins are important in Oyo history, their burial places are similarly accorded a great deal of veneration and interest.

Other Royal Burial Grounds

The establishment of a royal burial grounds outside the palace was not a commonplace practice in Yorubaland. In some towns, the rulers were buried in their palaces, although their burial was in the customary fashion accompanied by funeral rites. The situation at Iseyin was similar to that of Oyo. The Aseyin was buried in *Igbo Oro* at Itan quarters. Ogbolu was the first while Osuolale was the last in 1996. A block of buildings has been constructed to conveniently house the deceased rulers. Abaatan, a priest, takes care of the Igbo Oro. His roles are similar to the ones performed either by the Aare of Igboho or the Iyalode of modern Oyo. Unlike the Aare, the Abaatan, however, has to perform sacrifices not only at the death of a king but also during the annual Oro ("Bull-roarer") festival.

There is no extant evidence of human sacrifice either during the burial of the Aseyin or at the observance of the annual Oro festival. Instead of the Koso drum at Oyo, the Agere or Aran drum was used to announce the death of an Aseyin. Similar to Oyo, the public could follow the corpse to Itan, amidst songs, drumming, and dancing. They were, however, not permitted to go into the Igbo Oro where the kingmakers and the Oro priests performed the final rites. While the Alaafin could visit the Baara only at installation, the incumbent Aseyin was not by tradition allowed to visit the Igbo Oro, particularly during the Oro festival.

Some similarities exist between the *Igbo Oba* at Igboho and the *Baara* at Oyo. First, as the installation of the Alepata took place at the *Igbo Oba* the coronation of the Alaafin likewise took place at the *Baara*. While the Alepata went into the *Igbo Oba* to pray for prosperity, peace, and long reign, the Alaafin went to the *Baara* to receive authority to wear the crown from his ancestors. Second, the Alepata and the Alaafin were allowed to enter the *Igbo Oba* and Baara respectively, only once in their lifetime, during installation or coronation. Human sacrifices are no longer offered in modern times either at the installation or death of the Alaafin or Alepata. The human sacrifices, which used to accompany the burial of the Alaafin at *Baara* led to the saying: *Baara o se b'oba re; ile'koso ni'se b'oba lo* ("One cannot enter the Baara with the king, it is easy to accompany him to his subordinate villages of Koso").[60] That a person was designated to look after the *Igbo Oba* and *Baara* demonstrate their historical significance. This tradition persists in modern times because the Alaafins continue to enjoy the respect and loyalty of their people.

CONCLUSION

According to Mircea Eliade, "Every sacred space implies a hierophany, an irruption of the sacred that results in detaching a territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different."[61] Clearly, the royal burial ground at Igboho manifests itself as a sacred place in cultural, historical, and religious contexts. Establishing a royal burial ground may not be unique in Oyo history or in Yorubaland, but it is special to the people of Igboho who pride themselves as guardians of the sacred space where their ancestors lie. It is a memorial ground; a central reference point in the history of the town. It is considered a place of honor and respect, not only to the people of Igboho, but also to the Oyo-Yoruba people who know the history of the place. Given its cultural and historical significance, the royal tombs at Igboho should be accorded the sacredness that they deserve and given more attention by both the local and state governments. The current state of the royal tombs deserves attention because it has much neglect. It has gone from royal to ruined sacred place. Historical preservation is important and empowering, and to recover this sacred space, the local and state governments need to take immediate action. The sacredness of the rulers and the accompanied historical and cultural importance must not be lost to neglect. In the reconstruction of the history of the Yoruba people, the four alaafins cannot be forgotten, their burial grounds should not be neglected, and the sacredness of the place cannot be ignored. The sacred place is a conservation of culture, history, and pride of the Oyo-Yoruba in particular, and, by extension, of African spiritual heritage.

Figure 2.1. Entrance to the Igboho Royal Tombs
Photo taken by author

Figure 2.2. Ofinran: Burial Ground
Photo taken by author

Figure 2.3. Egungun Oju: Burial Ground
Photo taken by author

Figure 2.4. Orompoto: Burial Ground
Photo taken by author

Figure 2.5. Ajiboyede: Burial Ground
Photo taken by author

NOTES

1. For example, Ziggurats in Mesopotamia were sacred places of worship. Mahaboh Temple in Bihar, India is sacred because of its importance to Buddha and Buddhism.
2. Lionel Casson, *Life in Ancient Egypt* (New Word City, 2015).
3. The site of the Kasubi Tombs "is a major spiritual centre for the Baganda and is the most active religious place in the kingdom." The architecture is spectacular and the place represents the continuity of history and culture. See "Tombs of Buganda Kings at Kasubi," *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*, 2000. Retrieved from http://whc.unescof.org/uploads/nominations/1022.pdf. (September 8, 2017).
4. S. Adebanji Akintoye, *A History of the Yoruba People* (Dakar, Senegal: Amalion Publishing, 2010), 229.
5. For more information, see Robert Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1969).
6. Julius O. Adekunle, *Politics and Society in Nigeria's Middle Belt: Borgu and the Emergence of a Political Identity* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2004).

7. Oranmiyan, one of Oduduwa's sons, was the founder of the Oyo Empire. The circumstances that led to the founding of the empire were elaborate and do not deserve discussion in this paper. S. O. Biobaku, ed. *Sources of Yoruba History*, 27–28. The fact was corroborated during an oral interview with Alhaji Musa Muhammed, Kigera III, Emir of Borgu, 1985.

8. Biobaku, *Sources of Yoruba History*, 28.

9. H. U. Beier, "Before Oduduwa," *ODU: Journal of African Studies* No. 3 (n.d.): 28.

10. The Nupe-Oyo war that became a turning point in Oyo history possibly took place in 1550. See C. R. Niven, *A Short History of Nigeria* (London: Longmans, 1957), 69.

11. R. C. C. Law, *The Oyo Empire c.1600–c.1837: A West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 39.

12. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas* (Lagos: CSS Bookshop, 1921), 159. Gbere was a village that Robert Smith identified as Gberegburu or Gbereguru. Robert Smith, "The Alafin in Exile: A Study of the Igboho Period in Oyo History," *Journal of African History* Vol. 6, No. 1 (1965): 62. See also John Thabiti Willis, *Masquerading Politics: Kinship, Gender, and Ethnicity in a Yoruba Town* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), 35. In Borgu history, the Dandawa Muslim community lived in Gberegburu from where they spread the Islamic religion and Oriental culture to the rest of Borgu.

13. The burial ground for Onigbogi at Gbere has not been located. Johnson, *History*, 160; R. C. C. Law, "The Heritage of Oduduwa: Traditional History and Political Propaganda among the Yoruba," *Journal of African History* (hereafter *JAH*) No. 14 (1973): 207–222.

14. Kusu was a town of about nineteen kilometres east of Saki in present day Oyo State.

15. Hugh Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa, from the Bight of Benin to Saccattoo* (London: Frank Cass, 1928), 58. See also, Smith, "The Alafin in Exile," 64.

16. Johnson, 160.

17. Law, *The Oyo*, 40.

18. Given the time of relationship, inter-ethnic marriage could not be prevented. Alhaji Musa Muhammed, Kigera III, Emir of Borgu, 1985.

19. Ibid.

20. M. C. Adeyemi, *Iwe Itan Oyo-Ile ati Oyo Isisiyi* (Ibadan, n.d.), 1–2.

21. This was the submission of Solomon Oyediran the current ruler of Igboho whose ancestry has been traced to Borgu. The information corresponds with that of Smith, "The Alafin," 63.

22. Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, 37.

23. The junior hunters were Bonni, Loko, Igisubu, Gbandan, and Alomo.

24. Solomon Oyediran, the Alepata of Igboho, 1982.

25. Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, 37. The sources of the horses is uncertain, but their use provided a huge military advantage for the Yoruba people over the Borgu people.

26. Johnson, *History*, 161–62; Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, 32.

27. Such settlements included Iya, Molete, Olofin, Obeku, and Ibara. Igboho traditions also claim that Erinjakun was an autochthonous community before the founding of Igboho. The Alaafin used his military power to subjugate the weaker communities to establish his rule.

28. The outer and largest wall was variously known as Odi Nla ("Large Wall") or Odi Amola ("Wall of Safety"). The wall was approximately ten feet high and six feet broad. To prevent easy access into the town by external invaders, a large trench was dug around the wall. There were five gates, each under the supervision of a chief. Smith, "The Alafin in Exile," 66. European explorers who saw the walls at the last stages of dilapidation in the nineteenth century marveled at their extent and size. Robin Hallet, ed., *The Niger Journal of Richard and John Lander* (London: Routledge, 1965), 78–79.

29. According to C.R. Niven, Abipa "placed Igboho under a governor." See Niven, 69.

30. Hallet, *The Niger Journal*, 78–79.

31. W. H. Clarke, *Travels and Explorations in Yorubaland (1854–1858)*, edited by J. A. Atanda (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1972), 68.

32. Several ancient civilizations such as the Greeks and Romans adopted the philosophy of wall construction for safety. In Africa, it was also very common to construct city walls. The walls of Igboho were spectacular because they were massive and there were three of them.

33. Hermon-Hodge, *Gazetteer*, 64.

34. I. A. Akinjogbin puts the date at 1831 in "Chronology of Yoruba History," *ODU: Journal of African Studies* Vol. 2, No. 2 (1966): 86; R. C. C. Law puts it at 1831–1833 in "The Chronology of the Yoruba Wars in the Early Nineteenth Century: A Reconsideration," *JHSN* Vol. 5, No. 2 (1970): 218; Robert Smith puts it at 1835 in Smith, *Kingdoms*, 174–175.

35. The Yoruba people eventually raised a large army to forestall the incursion of the Fulani jihadists. Military leaders included Kurumi of Ijaye, Oluyole of Ibadan, and Timi Bamibaiye of Ede. The combined forces defeated the jihadists in 1840.

36. To maintain its sacredness, hunting, fishing, and farming are prohibited in the grove.

37. Samuel Johnson maintains that the obelisk was erected on the spot where Oranmiyan was buried. For the description of the obelisk, see Johnson, 144–146.

38. Robert Smith has written on the royal mausoleum at Oyo in Robert Smith, "The Bara, or Royal Mausoleum, at New Oyo," *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria* (hereafter *JHSN*) Vol. III, No. 2 (1965).

39. Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, 32.

40. Lajomo seems to be a Yoruba name. That suggests he had Nupe-Yoruba parentage. The war with the Nupe on this occasion was won through diplomacy and not through the military superiority of the Yoruba. Detailed information is found in Johnson, 162–163.

41. The nickname arose out of the constant use of his whip. For this reason, Ajiboyede was described as a tyrant.

42. Johnson, *History*, 163.

43. Robert Smith states that the dead body of Ajanlapa, "fixed by arrows, remained upright, his teeth set as in a grin. The Nupe supposing themselves to be opposed by a supernatural being, fled in terror from the field, leaving their king a prisoner of the Oyo." Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, 32.

44. Ibid.; see also Smith, "The Alafin in Exile," 67.

45. Johnson, 163–164.

46. Ibid., 164.

47. Agboluaje did not celebrate the Bebe festival because of his long reign, but because there was peace and prosperity throughout the empire. He did not experience the politically tumultuous time on the throne like many of his predecessors. By the turn of the eighteenth century, the Nupe, Borgu, Dahomey, and Asante had been conquered by the Yoruba and they all paid tribute of various kinds to Oyo. Thus politically and economically, the Oyo Empire was stable and flourishing. This period of peace was thus celebrated. The last time the Bebe festival was celebrated was in 1858 after Alaafin Atiba had moved the capital to the south at Ago d'Oyo (new Oyo). In addition by 1840, Ibadan had been instrumental in halting the military progress of the Muslim jihadists who intended to dip the Qur'an into the sea. Their defeat at Osogbo brought a period of peace.

48. Oral interview with Alhaji Mustafa Oyebimpe Oladoja, the Aare of Igboho, 1982.

49. Adeniyi Oroge, "The Institution of Slavery in Yorubaland with particular reference to the Nineteenth Century," Doctoral Dissertation, University of Birmingham, 1971, 68.

50. Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, 83.

51. The animal was possibly a leopard.

52. The cognomen is now adopted as the official title of the King of Igboho.

53. The Bebe festival should not be confused with the Bere festival. There were two different and distinct celebrations. While Bebe was meant for the celebration of a long reign, peace, and the prosperity of the Oyo Empire, Bere festival marked the annual renovation of the king's palace, especially the rethatching of the palace roof. Bere was the common grass in the savanna that was used primarily for roofing. Because the Alaafin was the supreme king, all subordinate chiefs and all Yoruba-speaking people were expected to participate in this elaborate annual festival. For more information on this subject, see S. O. Babayemi, "Bere Festival in Oyo," *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria* Vol. VII, No. 1 (1973): 121–124.

54. He also coordinated the installation of the following chiefs: Onibode (Modeke ward), Baale of Igbope (Igbope ward), Agoro of Oke-afin (Oke-afin ward), Otun, Balogun, Ikolaba, Osi Ikolaba, and Egbe Omo. There are nineteen wards in Igboho. Among these are: *Obaago*, *Erinjakun*, *Iya*, *Ebedi*, *Oke-afin*, *Igiisubu*, *Ago Okere*, *Jakuta*, *Oke-Igboho*, *Isale Atemo*, *Isale Bonni*, *Waala*, *Oke Loko*, *Gbedegun*, *Oke Akasa*, *Modeke*, *Ayetoro*, *Molete*, and *Gbope*.

55. Oral interview, Samuel Adekunle Agoro, the Agoro of Oke-afin, Igboho, 1983.

56. Babatunde Agbaje-Williams, "Oyo Ruins of NW Yorubaland, Nigeria," *Journal of Field Archaeology* No. 17: 367–373.

57. Oral interview, Sanusi Aremu Ajeigbe, the Arokin of Oyo, 1988.

58. An informant claims that eight women and eight men would be killed and buried along with the king to serve him in the new world.

59. J. F. Ade Ajayi and Robert Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the 19th Century* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1971), 85–86.

60. Ibid.

61. The term *hierophany* implies something sacred that manifests itself. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: A Harvest Book, 1957), 11, 26.

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Chapter 3

Rituals and African Space

Funerals Rites and Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty

Donald O. Omagu

In human history and worldview, life and death are considered sacred. With a particular reference to the Bekwarra community of Cross River State of Nigeria, this chapter provides an overview of the concept of death and funeral rites. The chapter analyzes the economic burden of funerals on families and how they cope and recover after the death of a loved one. It argues that elaborate rites are retrogressive, both socially and economically. An attempt is also made to provide an insight to how family members cope and recover after the loss of a loved one. Every ethnic group possesses its own distinct understanding of the life cycle and the elaborate set of rituals performed according to prescribed social roles and customs to mark life's stages. The rituals and associated ceremonies constitute what Van Gennep describes as the Rites of Passage.[1] Generally, Africans have heightened emotions during times of major life transitions. Scholars have identified the rites and traditions that African societies conduct in relation to the transitions to include: the rituals of birth, initiation, marriage, and death.[2] The rituals link families and villages in traditional Africa and provide the necessary structure for individual growth and development.[3] A study of African cultures indicate that rites play a central role in socialization, demarcating the different stages in an individual's development, as well as that person's relationship with and responsibilities to the broader community. The rites are critical to individual and community development and it should not to be taken for granted that people automatically grow and develop into responsible, community-oriented adults.[4]

Rites of passage thus serve a double purpose; preserving the ongoing community as a symbol of collective immortality and permanence as well as providing a clear and guided means for transition from one life stage and sphere of responsibility to another. They confirm the hierarchies of values of

the community and project an ideal sequence of personal development the individual can look forward to and upon reaching each stage, evaluate his or her maturation against a collective standard.[5] While the least complicated of these rituals are associated with birth (more than any other rite of passage in African life), funeral rites are the most complicated. They emphasize the changing of the status of the dead person, who was temporarily excluded from the society through death. Rites do away with the negative consequences of death and make it possible for the deceased to pass from the living to the community of the dead.

Modern funeral practices in contrast with traditional practices are great public events, where families compete for prestige and respect by flaunting their wealth, and by publicly conforming to norms of solidarity and respect for the dead.[6] In terms of cost, rituals, time utilization, involvement of the family and the community, corpse preparation and disposal modalities or styles, modern practices have brought with them high funeral expenses. The result is thereby causing the communities to engage in practices, which utilize resources that otherwise could have been saved or invested to bring about economic prosperity. Families that are unable to raise the required money are sometimes compelled to engage in fundraising strategies such as selling valuables or belongings, borrow from friends, age grade or thrift associations, or spend other family members' savings. Thus, funeral rituals and ceremonies may lead to difficult financial situations as mourners are required to contribute to making provisions for caskets, funeral common clothes, souvenirs, food, and drinks.

BEKWARRA: AN OVERVIEW

Located within the present day Cross River State of Nigeria, Bekwarra occupies a contiguous expanse of land approximately 345 square kilometers and lies between latitude 6°37' and 6°47' and longitude 8°48' and 9° East. Bekwarra is bounded on the North by the Tiv of Benue State and on the South by *Ulu* River and *Afrike* sub-clan. The Ulu River demarcates her from the *Ishibori* of *Nkim* clan. It is bounded by the *Aya* River that forms a boundary between her and *Mbube* and *Utugwang* people (in present day Obudu Local Government Area). On the West, Bekwarra is bounded by Yala Local Government.

Pre-colonial Bekwarra sociocultural institutions gave order and meaning to their political, economic, and religious norms and modes of organization. By the mid-nineteenth century, Bekwarra presented a picture of a highly developed social and cultural traditions and institutions that were capable of sustaining the society. The cultural elements are manifested in both oral and written literature. Some of the main institutions include the family (*Irifen*),

marriage (*Iribia*), new yam festival (*Ipem-Ihihe*), education (*Utuo*), circumcision (*Iriten*), age grade (*Aten*), burial rites (*Irifo*), and religion (unyim). These indigenous sociocultural practices not only created the fabric on which the political and economic institutions hinged but also play a key role in shaping human behavior in the society. Indeed, Western values facilitated through modernity have gained control over these institutions with multiple interacting attributes of traditional norms like funeral rites, which enveloped Bekwarra women until very recently.

Death and Funeral Rites: Continuity and Change

To the Bekwarra people, "A man's life from birth to death is a series of transition rites, which brings him nearer and nearer to his ancestors."[7] While death is mysterious and inescapable, individual and societal responses to it differ. Africans perceive death as the beginning of a person's deeper relationship with all of creation and the beginning of the communication between the visible and the invisible worlds.[8] African scholars share that basic perspective, although they do so in their orientation of worldviews.[9] The concept of the living-after-death explains the varying burial rites accorded to dead people in Africa and elsewhere.[10] In African worldview, the death of an individual and journey to the ancestral world is facilitated by rituals performed by the surviving family members of the dead person. Indeed, the symbolic and ritualistic meaning that these practices hold to memorialize the dead explains why family members spend so much on funerals.

In Bekwarra, there exists the belief that dreams, the hooting of an owl, or the crying of a dog are death signals. Bekwarra sometimes do not consider death as a natural event but as "caused" by some supernatural forces such as witches, spirits, or curse.[11] The premature death of a young person is interpreted as the handiwork of evil forces. Thus before the burial of the young person, a delegation comprising family, friends, or age grade members could consult a sorcerer to determine the cause of death. This practice still prevails despite the influences of Christianity and western modernity.

When a person dies, immediate family members and friends are promptly alerted while the corpse is preserved in a temporary hut, especially if the family could not employ professional embalmers. The surviving family members would meet to fix burial date. In very recent times families preserve their corpses in mortuaries for a few weeks or possibly much longer than that. Preservation of corpses in mortuaries is a common practice among other ethnic groups in sub-Saharan Africa. This practice allows maximum preparation time for all family members to attend the elaborate funeral rites and ceremonies.

Some people believe the period between death and burial is an opportunity to send messages to their ancestors through the dead person. In Bekwarra, a dead person closes his/her eyes but ears are open to receive messages from the living. This explains why K. A. Busia asserts that "whenever there is a death in this world, there is a welcome in the spirit world."[12] The close relatives of the deceased stay within the compound of the deceased until after the interment.[13]

Mourning is an essential part of paying respect for the dead and lamentation for the loss. As relatives arrive to mourn, they greet other people and sit quietly outside the hut. Usually African mats or makeshift seats are provided.[14] During mourning, men and women comport themselves somewhat inversely from ordinary life in that women remain indoors while men remain outside.[15] African mourning rituals are not simply a private activity; they are a community affair.[16] Proper performance of funeral rites is associated with kinship.[17] The establishment of connections with other bereaved members of the community is valuable.[18] According to D. E. Balk bereaved families share pleasant memories, and discuss death openly as part of healing process. Rituals also represent a coping method. The community shares in the grief and also provides financial support. Fulfilling social obligations and expectations to ensure the success of funeral rites is therefore an important motive. Thus funerals are opportunities for creating, maintaining, and strengthening relationships.[19]

Unlike puberty, which marks the transition from childhood to adulthood, funerals are an individual's most important rite of passage from life to death. As a result, they are more elaborate and expensive than other rituals, especially with the desire to give the dead a befitting burial.[20] This makes funeral rituals important in African societies than in the Western culture.[21] However, the Bekwarra people spend more on adult funerals than they do for teenagers or young adults and the burial rituals also differ. Funeral celebrations are meant to honor the dead and comfort the family. First, the funeral rituals and ceremonies facilitate the social support for the bereaved family members. Second, they assist the bereaved to establish a deep spiritual connection with the deceased and have a meaningful contextualization of the reality.[22] Third, funeral rites strengthen ties between immediate and extended family members as well as neighbors.[23]

Events leading to the burial are carefully orchestrated, beginning with a wake in either the traditional or Christian ways, and directed by family members or the pastor of the deceased. In Bekwarra, different market days are assigned to bury "free born" and slaves. Age, gender, religion or status of the deceased determine the type of funeral to be performed. If a woman died during labor and the baby did not survive, both the child and mother are buried separately. Suicide or murder are considered abomination, hence, funeral rites may not be performed. Such corpses are buried at a designated com-

munity burying ground (*Ayaa Ifo*) in order to avoid misfortune on the family. Victims of accidental deaths are not accorded the same elaborate funeral rites as those who died of natural causes and under normal circumstances. A young widow without a child is not expected to mourn her husband's death and may choose to return to her parents. The death of a chief is concealed for some time and his body is secretly buried at an undisclosed place. Usually, a dummy corpse is interred when his death is announced.

Generally among Africans, "there is a belief that death is a journey and one must be equipped for that journey."[24] In precolonial times, Bekwarra burial arrangements reflected this belief through provisions made for the comfort of the dead person during this journey. Such provisions included various objects such as clay plates, cloths, mats, and money—copper; cowries were buried with the deceased. These objects were meant for the use of the deceased on his journey to the world beyond, so that he would not appear before his ancestors empty handed. The inclusion of personal effects was also motivated by the belief in the afterlife.

There are different ideas about the "place" the departed go to, a "land," which in most cases seems to be a replica of this world. For some, the sacred place of abode is under the earth, in groves, near or in the home of the living, or on the other side of a deep river. In most cases, it is an extension of what is known at present, although it is a much better place without pain or hunger.[25] R. J. Gehman describes these similarities thus:

> Wherever the living dead are, their abode is modeled after the pattern of the living. The herd-boy herds the goats and sheep, the women hoe their gardens and reap the crops, the men delight in their cattle, the villagers gather for discussion in the evenings. . . . There is no division of the dead on the basis of character. Apart from witches and outcasts, all the living-dead, good and bad, live together in the world of spirits. Their character is much the same as in this life, partaking of jealousies and offended feelings like the living. Although the ancestral spirits partake of increased power and knowledge, the state of the ancestors is nothing to be desire.[26]

John Mbiti opines that a belief in the continuation of life after death for African peoples "does not constitute a hope for a future and better life. To live here and now is the most important concern of African religious activities and beliefs. . . . Even life in the hereafter is conceived in materialistic and physical terms.[27]

All societies have sought ways to make death acceptable and to provide opportunities for expressing grief and showing respect to the dead person. Rituals are used to exalt the position of the dead man and his widow is expected to grieve openly and demonstrate the intensity of her feelings in formalized

ways. These rituals aim at exalting the status of the deceased husband, and they often incorporate the most humiliating, degrading, and life-threatening practices, which effectively punish her for her husband's death.[28]

Bekwarra customs permit certain widowhood practices which violate the rights of women married according to customary rather than statutory law. Traditional etiquette dictates that during the mourning days, the spouse and other bereaved family members have their hair shaved off, wear mourning attire, and suspend farm work and other activities they engage in until all the funeral rites have been performed.[29] When a man dies, his wife or wives, grieving the deaths of their husbands are confined to a mourning house for a period varying from six months to one year during which she is deprived of her basic comfort like laying in a bed, or engaging in any social activity. In most cases, the husband's kin do not provide the widow with any economic support and because of gendered asset inheritance they are exposed to different risks in an attempt to fend for themselves or cater for their children. This is the point of vulnerability for the widow who is blinded by grief and often makes decisions based on poor judgment. The trauma that follows the death of a spouse seems to be greater on women than men when either of them loses their spouse.[30]

A Bekwarra widow is expected to be clad in black attire (*ifom akpin*) throughout the one-year mourning period. After mourning time, the widow is required to provide expensive sacrificial items, which may include a white goat and jars of palm wine for purification purpose to the female members of their husband's lineage who made and implemented decision on every matter concerning widows.[31] The similarities are indeed so striking with rituals for widowhood among the Igbos. The mourning period among the Igbo takes between one week and one year with specific activities. Most Igbo communities recommend that a widow wear the "mud cloth" ("*ogodo upa*"). The time of wearing this varies from seven days to one year depending on community's emphasis.[32]

When viewed from a cross-cultural perspective, color has been used almost universally to symbolize both the grief and trauma related to death as well as the notion of "eternal life" and "vitality." Black, with its traditional association with gloom and darkness, has been the customary color of mourning in Britain since the fourteenth century. However, there is a widespread use of black to symbolize mourning, it is not the universal color of mourning; neither has it always provided the funeral hue even in Western societies.[33]

In some African cultures, death does not end a marriage, and a widow is expected to move into a "levirate" arrangement with her brother-in-law ("the levir") or other male relative or heir nominated by his family. While in earlier times such traditional practices effectively guaranteed the widow and her children protection, in recent decades, because of increasing poverty and the

breakup of the extended family, widows discover that there is little protection or support.[34] The death of a spouse seems to affect the degree of social support and strain that characterize relationships with friends and surviving family members.[35] There are instances where some women were accused of killing their husbands in order to inherit their properties. To prove their innocence, they are required to swear before the local deity or corpse. Thus widowhood presents a myriad of problems.[36]

Traditional funeral rituals reflect the African perspective in life after death. It is most probable that this belief explains why bereaved families honor their dead with expensive and extensive funeral rites. This belief is embedded in traditional religion and culture. The women have to prepare food and keep it on a tripod stand (*Ityang*) for the dead to eat.[37] After death, the human person continues to live on as a spirit while the network of relationships that characterize human existence is not interrupted. Gehman summarizes it by saying that "death is a necessary door through which the living passes in order to take up the inevitable role as the living dead."[38]

A second burial ceremony is accorded to people aged thirty years and above but it is more elaborate for old people who had many children, grandchildren, large relatives. Bekwarra tradition stipulates that the relatives of the deceased must celebrate the second burial not only to honor the dead, but also to show appreciation to sympathizers. It is believed that not observing the second burial ceremony could cause trouble for the family. Turner maintains that without the second burial "the corpse can no longer be classified as living but cannot yet be classified as dead as the final ceremonies which will transform it into an ancestor have not been performed."[39]

Death is sacred and is perceived as the beginning of a person's deeper relationship with all of creation. It complements life and is the beginning of the communication between the visible and the invisible worlds. To become an ancestor and be remembered for long after death, the dead must be given a "correct" funeral with religious ceremonies otherwise the dead would become a wandering ghost. "Proper" death rites are more of a guarantee of protection for the living than to secure a safe passage for the dead.[40] David Mandelbaum is of the view that "rites performed for the dead generally have important effects for the living. A funeral ceremony is personal in its focus and is societal in its consequences."[41]

Economic Burden of Funerals

Funerals have become egalitarian as many people invest in them to have expensive and flamboyant rites and ceremonies to honor the dead. As part of the preparation, the family would renovate the compound to provide shelter for

visitors. In some cases, the family could embark on the construction of a new family house, or complete an abandoned project to create the impression of affluence. The dimension which contemporary funerals have assumed entails expensive obituary announcements in the print and electronic media.

Before the advent of mortuaries, communication, and transport facilities, the dead were buried almost immediately death occurred.[42] Nowadays, families may keep a corpse in the mortuary for several months to allow them make proper arrangements to have an elegant celebration befitting the status of the deceased. As the family prepares for the funeral, sympathizers come to commiserate with the bereaved. When the date of the funeral is agreed upon, it is announced in print and electronic media.[43]

Choosing a burial date is carefully considered. While the wake takes place on Friday, the actual burial is performed on Saturday. The wake or "laying-in-state" is held in the family house. On Saturday, Christian service is conducted in church after which the body is brought to the family compound for burial. A thanksgiving service in church is held on Sunday. Then, there was the entertainment of the guests.[44] In the week following the funeral, the family would thank sympathizers for their support in the print or electronic media.

Over the past decade, funerals have assumed an entirely different dimension. Mourners used to attend funerals dressed in black ceremonial clothes, but today, people wear clothes with a combination of unique colors and specific designs. Also new is the distribution of souvenirs and treating guest to sumptuous meals with goat meat and chicken. Music and dance play important roles during funerals. There may be a combination of traditional drumming, songs, popular highlife, or gospel music, depending on the choice of the family. Another variety of music featured among the young urbanites is associated with the DJs, who are hired for a fee to play at funerals from sunset to the wee hours of the morning. Contemporary western or African pop music, reggae, calypso, and highlife constitute his choice of song for his audience that comprise of the young and old. To buttress the impact of contemporary music Van der Geest observed at funerals in Kwahu that:

> Funerals, which have always been the preeminent occasion for the elders to "shine," are being taken over by the younger generation. At present, enormous amplifiers spew out the sounds of highlife music, which have drowned the native or traditional drums and dances of elders at the funeral ground. The traditional tasks of addressing the mourners and announcing their gifts are now carried out by a "jamboree," a kind of disc jockey or entertainer, who mourns at funerals and makes jokes at weddings for a fee. During funerals, the elders and their culture are literally blasted away by the technological and commercial advances of the new age. One may find them sitting quietly, watching the eclipse of their world.[45]

Dance groups are hired for a fee. Prominent among traditional Bekwarra dances (*Anya*) are *Igle*, *Ikuma*, *ukwom Ojugujugu*, *ukwom Odere*, *Ayita*, *Iwaali*, and *Ijo*, others are *Iriben*, *Ijaga* and *Anya Ebekkan* (*Ugrinya*). Masqueraders used to feature in the entertainment ceremony. Guests may join in the music and dance.[46]

Music is vital to funeral rituals. It allows a community of mourners to convey feelings that words cannot express. Music uplifts, encourages, and consoles grieving people. It provides comfort, evokes deep feelings, and causes tears, thus helping in the healing process.[47] Music and dance are also means of saying the final good bye to the deceased.[48] Warrior dance (*Ugrinya*) used to be performed exclusively to celebrate the heroic feat of the deceased, for example, killing an enemy at war or lion (*Ukpang*), Buffalo (*Ufuo*) or elephant (*Utuo*). The warrior dance is a fusion of warfare actions such as stabbing with the artistic movement of the body, following drum beats. However,with modernization, the traditional Bekwarra warrior dance (*Ugirnya* dance) is rarely performed. Christianity has taken a firm root in Bekwarra. This makes Christian services an integral part of funeral ceremonies. Sermons, prayers, poems, eulogies, and songs of comfort, hope, resurrection, and eternal life constitute part of the service.[49] Christian bands or choirs also perform.[50]

Women and Bekwarra Funeral Rites

The trauma that follow the death of a spouse seems to be greater on the women than on the men. This is a consequence of the African cultural setting that is mainly patriarchal and male dominated.[51] Women undergo intense trauma when their husbands die because they may be accused of being responsible for their husband's death either through adultery or witchcraft. As a result, they are made to go through painful ordeal to prove their innocence. Unlike the women, a bereaved man is immediately advised to marry another woman.[52]

Given the patrilineal system of inheritance in most African societies, women are not able to inherit the property neither from their parents nor from their husband.[53] The "property-grabbing" culture of family members makes it hard for widows to survive. Widows are reluctant to discuss the issue of inheritance for fear of repression. Without inheritance rights, widows often find themselves dependent on their husband's relatives or friends. The poverty of widows is further exacerbated by rigid and long drawn-out mourning and burial rites that restrict widows from working for a long period of time. Any attempt by the widow to contest this is met with stiff resistance and name-calling. As E. Nwezi noted, the dehumanizing and humiliating widowhood rites that Igbo women are made to undergo at the death of their husbands thus: "the widow's ordeal starts immediately after the husband's death. The

relatives demand documents pertaining to their husband's property, including land, investments and bank accounts."[54]

Widowhood has a brutal impact on a widow's children, especially the female child. Poverty may force widows to withdraw children from school, exposing them to exploitation in child labor, prostitution, early forced child marriage, trafficking, and sale. Often illiterate, ill-equipped for gainful employment, without access to land for food security or adequate shelter, widows and their children suffer ill health and malnutrition, without the means to obtain appropriate health care or other forms of support. Yet the issues of widowhood cut across every one of the twelve critical areas of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, covering poverty, violence to women, the girl child, health, education, employment, women and armed conflict, institutional mechanisms, and human rights.[55]

CONCLUSION

This chapter has focused on funeral rites and the Bekwarra ethnic group of Nigeria. Generally in Africa, funerals are considered an individual's most important rite of passage. As a result, they are more elaborate and expensive than other rituals. Traditional funeral rituals reflect the African perspective in afterlife. The dimension that contemporary funerals have assumed, in contrast to traditional practices, is competitive and more egalitarian thus leaving bereaved families financially vulnerable. Funeral and celebration of life is a long process, which sometimes lasts a year, with several ceremonies and events.[56]

Elaborate funerals are sometimes the choice of family members. They are in some cases subject of social pressure.[57] As a result of the huge funeral expenses, the Catholic Church has not only called for "appropriate and affordable" funerals, but also has made rules stipulating that deceased members can only be left in the mortuary for two weeks except otherwise permitted by the Bishop. The deceased family members who exceed the period would be denied a befitting Christian burial.

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events, another list of names mentions the widow(er), children, brothers and sisters, cousins, nephews and nieces, (great-)grandchildren, in-laws, and "chief mourners." This list also states occupations, companies and places of sojourn of the relatives, with emphasis on those who stay abroad or have high positions with big companies. All this enhances the social status of the deceased. Ibid., 543.

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Chapter 4

Sacred Spaces and Ritual Performances in Ejaghamland of Cameroon

Emmanuel M. Mbah and Atom Victor Ntui

Rituals and sacred spaces are the means and places, respectively, used to commune with ancestors, semi-gods, and the supreme God, either for appeasement or help on issues of birth, deaths, harvest, military fortification, and prevention/eradication of epidemics.[1] In particular, rituals have also been used to regulate societies in many African ethnic groups. The Ejagham, a Bantu ethnic group located along the southern border of Cameroon and Nigeria, is one of many ethnic groups in Africa that has retained and continue to maintain a strong culture of rituals and sacred practices, as witnessed by the abundance of such cultural appurtenances in many of its villages. And despite the negative colonial impact on African sociocultural traditions, the Ejagham ethnic group has retained a strong culture of ritual performances performed on sacred spaces that are unique and have influenced attitudes and behaviors of the people until this day.

In African traditional/religious societies, sacrifices and rituals are performed to connect the living with ancestors, semi-gods and the Supreme Being.[2] Accordingly, the living could only interface with the Supreme Being through ancestors or other semi-gods who are perceived to inhabit sacred and dignified dwelling places that were, and continue to be respected and feared by the community at large. It is in these sacred spaces that rituals were, and continue to be, performed.[3] Among the Ejagham, who inhabit parts of the lower portion of the southern border between Cameroon and Nigeria, villages are littered with sacred spaces inhabited by many different sub gods and where rituals, backed by the intimation of sincere and passionate beliefs carried forward from the past, are performed.[4] Sub gods in Ejagham land include the gods of fertility and good luck (*Arem*), war (*Eja*), good health (*Ebhro-kpabi*), good luck (*Igumi*), protection (*Asunka*), (*Obasinjom*)

and (*Mfam*), ancestors (*Obasi nsi*), and the God Almighty (*obasi osoh*).[5] Belief in these gods is such that the inhabitants of Ejagham village-communities accorded much reverence and awe to them. Laws purporting to emanate from such gods are sacrosanct. Despite the advent of colonialism, coupled with the introduction of Christianity, sacred spaces and rituals among the Ejagham continue to play important roles in the socio-cultural life of the people.[6]

In the case of individual families, ritual performances are directed by the eldest family member. For the village, the chief—the most important personality, privileged with interceding with the gods—was in charge. In his observation of the chief's role in Ejagham villages, Sandy Ojang Onor notes:

> He was conceived of [as] an intermediary between the people and the ancestors and the gods whom they believed were capable of influencing the course of occurrences in their various communities. Thus, he was largely responsible for performing rites that propitiated the wrath and invited the benevolence of the gods and ancestors whenever the occasion arose.[7]

The chief (*ntuịfam or ntuifa*) was, therefore, perceived as the direct link between the gods and the people and no village rituals are performed without his presence and approval.

To be clear, rituals are practical manifestations on sacred spots believed to have been chosen by ancestors or the gods themselves. While most performances are carried out during specific periods of the year, others were conducted whenever the need arose,[8] such as when epidemics and precipitous deaths in the village required immediate action. In performing the rituals, special items with ritualistic significance in Ejagham culture, such as kola nuts, palm wine, and tobacco snuff, were used.[9]

There are different types of sacred spaces in Ejagham tradition. A notable one is the evil forest, known in Ejagham language as *ebhuni njom*, and situated at the entrance of every Ejagham village.[10] This space is considered dangerous and mysterious, and both inhabitants and foreigners are advised to thread on it with the utmost caution. It is also regarded as the meeting place for all gods and sacred societies of the village, and part of the space is reserved as a burial ground for children aged zero to five years; the Ejaghams believe that the spirits of these children are innocent and harmless and can only bring good luck, happiness, and fortune. The people also believe that because these children are not aligned with evil—in view of their innocence—and have nowhere to go after death, their spirits remain in this space to protect and guard the sacred shrines.[11]

Other sacred spaces in Ejagham tradition are the dwelling places of sub gods, ancestral burial sites, streams/rivers, special trees, and shrines. As part

of accepted culture/tradition, rituals are inextricably linked to daily life and activities and contributed significantly in shaping societal behaviors. For example, the belief in reincarnation is very strong among the Ejagham people such that if a child is an incarnate of an ancestor, he or she must bear the name of that ancestor, else the departed one may become angry and inflict illness on the community; such illnesses can only be cured after rituals have been performed to appease the ancestor and the name formally given to the child.[12] In this case the rituals are performed on the grave of the ancestor by the eldest family member.[13] Other cases requiring ritual performances include, but are not limited to, poor harvest, widespread deaths, low birth rate, epidemics, and sacrileges like rape, adultery, making love in the forest, wars, and witchcraft.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part examines, briefly, the background history of the Ejagham ethnic group; the second part discusses the respective sacred spaces and the ritual performances associated with these.

BACKGROUND HISTORY OF THE EJAGHAM

The people known today as the Ejaghams were previously referred to as the Ekoi,[14] a name coined during the precolonial period by Calabar middle men and traders of present-day Cross River State of Nigeria. The people of Calabar, in South Eastern Nigeria, lived contiguously and traded with the Ejaghams during the pre-colonial period.[15] Ekoi derives from the Ejagham word *ekuri*, which means, let's go home.[16] It is alleged that at the conclusion of commercial transactions between Calabar traders and those of Ejagham, the latter always used this term on their fellow countrymen, telling them lets go home. Misunderstanding and wrong pronunciation of the word by Calabar traders accounts for the main reason why *ekuri* became ekoi.[17] Others, however, contend that Ekoi is a corruption/mispronunciation of the word *ekui* in the Ejagham dialect; *ekui* is the name the Ejaghams referred to cam wood, which was their main trade commodity during this period. Accordingly, Calabar and other traders referred to the Ejaghams as Ekoi in identifying the source of their cam wood.[18]

The above notwithstanding, it is obvious, as mentioned earlier, that the name *ekoi* must have been coined from an Ejagham word by coastal traders. Ekoi must have been frequently used during trade negotiations and contacts between Ejagham and neighboring Calabar traders. With the passage of time, the Ejaghams rejected the name Ekoi in preference to their original name. The move in preference of their original name—Ejagham—started from the beginning of the European occupation of Africa, when their group faced threats of colonial divisions during the course of bilateral territorial negotiations and

agreements between the colonial powers.[19] They felt, rightly, that the division of their nation between the Germans and the British would weaken their power and destroy their nation by forcing them to live in separate colonial polities.[20] This feeling was confirmed when the group was split into two between Germany and Britain during the Partition of Africa, and explains why the Ejaghams supported the British at the Battle of Nsanakang during the First World War, as an opportunity to reunite and be liberated from German cruelty.[21]

Onor, on his part, notes that according to Ejagham oral tradition, the name Ejagham derived from a sacred lake called *ijagham*, "believed to be the cradle of Ejagham people," and situated inside the small section of Ejagham territory that comprised former German Cameroon, and is part of present-day Cameroon.[22] This view is supported by scholars such as Ita Ayuk who argues that "many oral traditions [point] to the fact that the name Ejagham was derived from the lake ijagham. The name must have been coined from ejak which means let's clap. This was probably said by the first ancestors of Ejagham land when they first saw this extra ordinary piece of water."[23]

By the 1930s, the name Ejagham was generally acknowledged and commonly used to refer to Ejagham-speaking communities living contiguously on both sides of the southern border between Cameroon and Nigeria, comprising the villages from Ekwe (Njemaya), Keaka and Obang in present day Cameroon to Akamkpa, Etung, Qua and parts of the Ogoja Municipality in the Cross River Region of present day Nigeria. Significantly affected by the infamous partition of Africa,[24] the Anglo/German boundary—which remain the international boundary between Cameroon and Nigeria—cut through the Ejagham community and leaving the villages of Nsanakang, Agborkim, Nsanarakati, Ekok, Mfum, Ajasor, Ekugatai, Otu, Ekang, Okuri, Nkame, and Mbinda on the Cameroon side of the border.[25]

Archeological artifacts point to the unquestionable evidence that humans have inhabited Ejagham land for at least fifty thousand years.[26] Although made up of decentralized mini-states, there is evidence of the existence of important Ejagham kingdoms in recent times. These include the Achan and Etung kingdoms in Nigeria and the *Abhon Ete Egemine*, *Abhon Ata Ekongen*, *Abhon Ntui Enofon*, and *Abhon Nyoaya* kingdoms in Cameroon.[27] These kingdoms may have been the most organized among the various Ejagham clusters along the Cameroon Nigeria frontier.

As noted earlier, the Ejagham ethnic villages of Cameroon make up only a small part of the entire Ejagham Nation; the greater part was left in Nigeria, the result of bilateral boundary demarcations during the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century colonial share-out of Africa.[28] During the partition, the Ejaghams were split into two by the Anglo-German Agreement of 1913 that delineated the colonial boundary between Germany and Great Britain.[29]

The partition left Ejagham villages on the Cameroon side (German colony) under three cluster-groups namely Ekwe, Keaka, and Obang. These three clusters are perceived to have migrated—during the precolonial era—from areas around the frontiers of present day Cameroon/Nigeria, into their current sites in present-day Manyu Division in Cameroon.[30] The migrations were precipitated by slave raids, intermittent attacks from previous neighbors, and the quest for productive fishing waters. While some of the early migrants settled along the banks of the River Manyu, others moved inland.[31]

On arrival in Cameroon, the Germans met settled and established Ejagham villages, and opened a trading station at Agborkem in what was then called Ossidinge Division (present-day Manyu Division). Opened in 1904, Agborkem became the first German administrative headquarter in the area.[32] The German official—Count Puckler Limburg—was the first recorded European to set foot on present day Ejagham land in 1898; in 1904 he became the first civil administrator of the area.[33] German rule in Ejagham land was cruel and disrespectful of the customs/tradition of the people,[34] a factor that was responsible for the killing of Puckler Limburg in1904, on his way to the Anyang community. His death sparked off the *Mpaw-manku* war in 1904. German suppression of the uprising resulted in many casualties, the desertion of some Ejagham villages and the flight of many Ejaghams into the neighboring Nigerian villages of Itu, Emat, and others.[35] It was only after World War I, when Germany had been defeated and the British took over Southern Cameroons, that many displaced Ejaghams returned to Cameroon. Following Germany's defeat in the war, Cameroon was provisionally split between Britain and France. But after a failed joint administration of the territory under a condominium arrangement, Kamerun was then divided between Britain and France; France took 4/5 of the territory, Britain took 1/5.[36] Britain ruled her parts of Cameroon as integral parts of Nigeria; Northern Cameroon was administered as part of Northern Nigeria while Southern Cameroon—comprising the Ejagham ethnic group on the Cameroon side of the new Anglo-French boundary—was administered as part of Eastern Nigeria.[37]

In the 1940s, when the British began the construction of the Ikom-Mamfe-Bamenda road[38] for purposes of business and easy administration, many Ejagham villages were compelled to relocate to the road side. This resulted in the return of some Ejagham people who had fled into the interior and to neighboring Nigeria.[39] These secondary migrations would result in a reorganization of Ejagham villages. Thus, the present-day Ejagham of Cameroon are bounded in the north by the Cross River, which is currently the international boundary separating Cameroon from Nigeria. They are bounded in the south by Ndian Division in Cameroon, in the west by the Ejagham of Nigeria and in the east by Mamfe Central Sub Division in the

Manyu Division of Cameroon. The Ejagham are situated in Eyumojock Sub Division in Manyu Division.[40]

As mentioned earlier, there are three different Ejagham clusters in Cameroon with a total of sixty four villages, differentiated by their geographical location and nuances in the Ejagham language. The first Ejagham group that still maintains originality in language, customs, and tradition is Ekwe or Njemaya.[41] This group comprises of Eyumojock, Otu, Ekoneman Awa, Ekoneman Ojong-arrey, Ekok, Ayaoke, Nsanakang, Nsanarakati, Agborkim Jamam, Ndebaya, Akwen, Mbeyan, Mbakem, Taboh, Inokun, Babong, Okuri, Mbinda, Ajaman, Akwa, Abhakpa, Araru, Okurikang, Esagem, and Agborkim Ossidinge.[42]

The second group, the Obang, are closely related to Ekwe in its originality in language and culture.[43] It is the smallest in terms of size and population and the most under-developed cluster. This is because they are settled deep inside the forest with no major road network, with the exception of a single farm to market road used by timber trucks that haul timber through Nguti in Manyu Division to Douala. Obang villages include Bayip-Asibong, Akak, Oselle, Mgbakati, Okoroba, and Bakut.[44]

The last group, the Keaka speak the same Ejagham language, but there are differences in their use of words as well as in pronunciations and spellings, the result of their close affinity with the Kenyang people in Mamfe Central Sub Division. Villages in the Keaka cluster include, Kembong, Ossing, Ntenako, Bakwelle, Ebinsi, Ajayukndip, Ogomoko, Nkoko, Bakoko, Ewelle, Nkimechi, Ayukaba, Mbakang, Afap, Njege, Mkpot, Ebam, Mfuni, and Bessem.[45]

Despite slight variations, these three main Ejagham cluster-groups have the same culture and traditional beliefs and practices. Among the prioritized traditional cultural cults that run through the Ejagham of Cameroon are *Ekpe* or *Ngbe*, *Ekpa*, *Obasinjom*, *Okongho* (also known as *Etokobhi-Atu* amongst the Keaka, *Angbu* and *Obhon*).[46] A majority of these secret societies were membered by men, with the exception of Ekpa that was distinctively reserved for women. Some societies like *Okongho* (*Etokobhi-Atu*) were reserved only for true sons of the land—people who have assumed the responsibility of family heads and were able to reproduce the history of their families from inception.[47] This implies that, no one born of a slave family or non Ejagham indigene can become a member, because Ejagham people believed that slaves who were bought or captured could not really trace their genealogies.[48] Through these sub cultures, the Ejaghams have maintained an outstanding and proud social order.

Religiosity in Ejagham land was founded in rituals, ceremonies and festivals that celebrated people, shrines, religious objects, arts and symbols, myth and legend, and sacred places. Moreover, music and dance, beliefs and customs, proverbs and riddles are a plethora of vehicles used in the

acknowledgment of a supreme being.[49]Among these, rituals and sacrificial performances appear to be the most used and common means through which the living speak with their ancestors and gods.

EJAGHAM SACRED SPACES AND RITUAL PERFORMANCES

The Mfam Sacred Space (Ebhuni Mfam)

This is the resting place of *mfam*, the god of protection. According to Ejagham tradition, the *Mfam* god protects good and innocent people against witchcraft; it also combats evil spirits in the community.[50] The *mfam* sacred space is located at the entrance of every Ejagham village, close to a small stream. Because the *mfam* is composed of seven people, its space is decorated with seven special stones—representing the seven members of the cult—positioned around a sacred tree called *iseen*.[51] *Mfam's* space is cleaned every week by one of the seven members, designated unanimously by the other members. The *Mfam* god is also represented inside the traditional halls of some Ejagham villages.[52]

According to Ejagham oral tradition, while the *mfam* god is apparently the oldest god of protection that still exists in Ejagham land, its sacred society—the *Mfam* sacred society—is only common among the Ekwe and Obang groups where the rites are religiously performed in the Njemaya villages of Babong, Eyumojock, Ekok, Ayoke, and especially in Otu where affinity with *mfam* is arguably the strongest.[53] Oral tradition from Otu elders claim Otu is one of the last Ejagham settlements, established only in the 1890s by people of different Ejagham villages—led by Tata Agbor—who fled German invasions in the surrounding areas in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.[54] Those who fled to Otu, a heavily forested enclave at the southern border with present-day Nigeria, came with the appurtenances of their respective traditional sacred societies that they regrouped, making Otu village the most recognizable in terms of tradition, relative to other Ejagham groups.[55] In Otu, *mfam* is believed to reside close to *Akafung* stream, on a special tree situated between two rocks.[56] In Eyumojock, *mfam* was transferred—in 2010—from its original dwelling place to a new sacred space behind the traditional hall,[57] as a result of the construction of the Trans African Highway that connects Mamfe to Ekok, through Eyumojock village.[58]

Mfam Ritual Performances

Mfam is only consulted in case a person in the community has been attacked by the *mfam* sacred society and that person is ready to confess his or her

bad deeds publicly in order to be pardoned. According to Ejagham tradition, *Mfam* attacks are noticed by stomach inflammation. When this is noticed, the victim is taken to the *mfam* sacred place by the eldest person in the family.[59] Information is then communicated to members of the *mfam* sacred cult, informing them of the victim's willingness to confess. In order to consult *mfam*, the victim's family members are required to bring items such as goats, fowls, palm wine, pepper, red oil, kola nuts, tobacco snuff, and a bottle of locally made hot drink called *Abhiati*.[60] The seven members then sit on the seven stones placed around the *mfam* tree. Each member knows his position and no member makes the mistake of sitting on another man's stone, the consequence of which could be—according to Ejagham tradition—death or an incurable illness.[61] The chief priest then recites some incantations in the dialect shouting words like *mfam ebhiri*, *osowo* (this is your child, hear him out); he then slaughters the goat or chicken and pours the blood into a bowl. This blood is used in an oath-taking ceremony during which the victim drinks it and swears to speak the truth before the god.[62] After the oath, the chief priest then places all the items beside the *mfam* tree and invokes *mfam*. He then inserts a leave of *mfam* into the small stream beside the *mfam* sacred place, takes it out and sprinkles the water from the leave on the victim. As he sprinkles the water he recites the following incantations: *nta obasi, osowo nse, mfam ebhiri*—(this is your child who has done you wrong and has come to plead for mercy; here him out and decide on what to do). It is alleged that as soon as the incantations are recited, the victim will begin to confess.[63]

This ritual is performed in the presence of *mfam* cult members, family members of the victim, village elders, and many other witnesses from the village as well as from neighboring villages. The confession by the victim is closely monitored by *mfam* members to avoid ramblings, omissions, and falsifications. After the confession, an orator then collects a black round bangle that is part of the appurtenances of the sacred chambers of the traditional village hall,[64] which he uses to invoke *mfam*; he then speaks to the bangle and throws it on the floor to the viewing of all present.[65] The bangle is specially decorated to portray a positive and negative side differentiated by their shapes. The positive side is flat while the negative side is sharp; this ensures that it falls and sits firm on any of these sides when thrown on a flat surface. When the orator throws this bangle on the floor, people watch carefully to see on what side the bangle falls; if the positive side is up, it means the *mfam* god has accepted the plea of the victim—which is a reflection of an honest confession—and the victim will be pardoned and restored to life. Following this positive result, *mfam* members will then prepare some herbal concoctions that will be administered to the victim for seven days.[66] On the other hand, if the negative side of the bangle is up, after being thrown on the floor, this

signifies ill luck and it is also interpreted to mean that *mfam* has rejected the confession either because the victim was dishonest or lied.[67] In this case a second chance is given to the victim to confess and if after the second confession the bangle repeats the position the victim would not survive. Members of *mfam* will officially stop the performance and everyone will be requested to retire to their homes to wait for the death of the victim. Family members and the entire village would be warned not to cry after the victim dies.[68]

It is important to note that these *mfam* rituals were common in Ejagham villages during the pre-colonial period, up until the 1890s with the advent of European colonial rule and the Christianization of the people.[69] Despite the negative impact of the European penetration on Ejagham traditions and beliefs, some rituals—including that of *mfam*—survived. The same holds throughout the entire African continent where many ethnic groups maintained their sacred societies, albeit with slight modifications.[70]

The *mfam* sacred society continued to exist in Ejagham communities in its original form until the mid-1980s. But with the introduction of Pentecostal churches such as The Full Gospel Mission in the 1980s, confessions were increasingly being directed to God rather than to *mfam*.[71] The Roman Catholic Church—despite its long tenure in the region that dates back to the 1940s—never really affected the position of *mfam*, except when force was used by European priests.[72] Today, *mfam* in Ejagham land is only noticed by the sacred space on which the tree stands with the seven stones surrounding it. Some elders now allege that *mfam* was a sacred society owned by witches and wizards.[73] Despite its disregard in recent time, the *mfam* ritual was successful in shaping the attitudes of Ejagham people with respect to witchcraft and wicked deeds. It is alleged that up to this day, people possessed with witchcraft and other demonic spirits are afraid to come to the *mfam* sacred space. Moreover, since *mfam* can be given to any son or daughter of Ejagham land through drinks (in liquid form), or through wearing the bangle on the left hand, such sons/daughters are believed to be beyond witchcraft because evil spirits cannot come close to them.[74]

The Sacred Space of *Arem (Ebhuni Arem)*

As a sacred space, the *ebhuni arem* is considered the dwelling place of *arem*, the god of good luck among Ejagham people. Recognized and present in all Ejagham villages from the pre-colonial period to this day, and pronounced variously, *ebhuni arem* is widely respected and worshipped by all Ejagham villagers. In some parts of Ejagham land, this god is called *animm*, *ndem*, or *ndim*.[75] The Ejaghams believe that *arem* resides in the ground, in water, stones, or on trees[76] and has the capacity to kill bad people and witches; it has also

been associated with enhancing agricultural productivity and fertility with respect to procreation.[77] Because of its association with procreation, *arem* is believed to revolve around distinguished women priestesses and is represented by a female virgin. *Arem* is also used by the Ejagham to give thanks to the Supreme Being (God Almighty) for his goodness and mercies in their life and to solicit for help and assistance in the succeeding years. Among Ejagham villages, the sacred place of *arem* is situated close to a small stream within or on the outskirts of the village. Within this space is planted a traditional sacred tree (*Iseen*).[78] Around the tree's perimeter is attached a premature palm leaf with a mixed green-yellowish color extracted from the middle of a palm tree and locally referred to as *Ibhum*.[79] White cam wood is usually thrown around *arem*'s *sacred* place, and beside the tree is placed an old rusted cutlass with a white cloth attached to it. The place is cleaned and guarded by the community at all times, but especially just before and during periods of ritual performances.[80]

Arem is also reserved a sacred space inside the village traditional halls, at the right hand corner of the hall where its appurtenances include a horn, a traditional bag, a white plate, and an ebony stick with small stones of different sizes and shapes. It is believed that the little stones attached to the ebony stick represent children who cry during the day and at night especially when they are hungry, or when ritual performances have been neglected.[81] The Ejagham community believes that neglect or abandonment of *arem* rituals may result in chaos and evil deeds such as death, rape and poor harvest.[82]

Arem Ritual Performance

Arem rituals among the Ejaghams are sacred and are performed only during the period between harvesting and planting (March and April), targeting the first rainfall of every year.[83] Prior to the performance, there is a general announcement by the village crier on behalf of the chief and his council of elders. Following the announcement, individuals and households are summoned to appear at the village with a small portion of the previous season's harvest.[84] They come with items ranging from food crops such as yam, cocoyam, palm oil, corn, okra, plantain, bananas, sugar yam, cocoa, mango, and domesticated animals such as goats, chickens, and ducks. On the day of the ritual, all females, both children and adults are decorated in paintings of white cam wood from their faces right down beneath their breast, covering their private parts with a small loin cloth.[85] The men also use loin cloth to cover their manhood; from their faces right down to the stomachs are decorated with a few dots of white cam wood that has been dissolved in water.[86]

On this main day, between 4 a.m. and 5 a.m., a virgin (female) is assigned to go to the main village stream alone, to fetch water before any other person

in the village can carry water or take a bath out of that stream.[87] This is supposed to be discrete as the virgin, who is guarded by spirits, is not supposed to be seen by anybody at this hour around the stream; she communicates only with the *arem* spirit and does some rituals while the spirit blesses the pale of water she carries.[88] If any other person sees the virgin or fetches water from the stream before the virgin does, the ritual is cancelled as this is considered temptation and trial by the devil. The virgin takes the water directly to the *arem* sacred space and returns to her house.[89]

By 6 o'clock in the morning all the villagers, dressed in their respective regalias, march to the sacred place with a small portion of their harvest. Kola nuts, pepper, and a jug of palm wine is shared to the elders.[90] The traditional chief priest then collects the inner central part of a fresh palm leaf locally called *ibhum*, deeps it into the pale of water brought by the virgin and sprinkles it on everybody while chanting some incantations. In the course of chanting the incantations, he uses words in the dialect like *nse obhasi*, *nse nson*, and *nse okot* while calling upon the name or names of the founder(s) of the village. Everyone then proceeds in an organized manner to offer a portion of their harvest unto the sacred space, thank god for the harvest,[91] and make a wish for the coming year; those who seek health, marriage, and children drink the water,[92] while women who specifically need children will go to the traditional hall and place their two hands on the *arem* sacred stones for a few minutes and then place them on their breast and stomach while speaking to god about their wish. The same goes for those seeking healing and marriage.[93] After the ritual performance at the sacred space, all in attendance proceed to the traditional hall where a jug of palm wine is shared. The women then sing and dance in praise of their god.[94]

Believe in the *arem* spirit was characteristically strong among precolonial Ejagham communities where it was believed that the *arem* spirit was powerful enough to attack little virgin girls. When this happened, the girl was required to go through a ritual performance, alone, for seven days in a virgin forest.[95] If she comes out alive after the seven days, she becomes a priestess of *arem* and is endowed with supernatural powers; but if she does not come out of the forest alive, it was believed that she had been consumed by the spirits.[96]

In the past, *arem* ritual performances were performed frequently and at short intervals; in recent times, however, the intervals between ritual performances have been very long, taking place only under pressure from villagers when misfortune and chaos become recurrent in the community, as was the case of Mbarakom village in 2012, where the *arem* ritual was induced and performed after twelve years of chieftaincy dispute. For twelve years Mbarakom had no legitimate chief, and was ruled by a usurper who used his wealth and power to silence opposition.[97] It is believed that after the *arem* ritual

performance of 2012, a little virgin girl of about five years old appeared in the village after a few days, went into the village traditional hall, took a walking staff and offered it to a man declaring him the legitimate chief of the village.[98] This brought an end to the chieftaincy dispute that had plagued the village for the twelve years prior to the 2012 ritual.

Similar examples of *arem* ritual performances include that of Otu village in 2010 where the people called on their god to intervene on their behalf to stop evils and bad harvest in the land,[99] that of Ndebaya village in 1999, Babong village in 1999, 2002, and 2011.[100]

The Sacred Space of *Ebhro-Kpabi* (the God of Good Health)

In the Ejagham community, *Ebhro-kpabi* represents the god of good health and the direct agent of God Almighty. It intercedes on behalf of the people in case of epidemics such as chicken pox, measles, small pox, yellow fever, yaws, malaria, and typhoid.[101] Whenever such epidemics befell the land, *ebhro-kpabi* was invoked to speak to the Supreme God on behalf of the people. In precolonial days, the Ejaghams, like other African communities, were plagued with tropical diseases such as measles, small pox, and chicken pox.[102] Health issues such as these were major concerns for European colonizers in much of tropical Africa, and Cameroon was no exception. For instance, between 1916 and 1945, Southern Cameroons—where part of the Ejagham community is found—was awash with epidemics such as, yaws, influenza, small pox, dysentery, and malaria.[103] These epidemics were often considered by local people as spiritual attacks from enemies or the devil. Thus, until the advent of colonialism and the introduction of modern medicine, the people of Ejagham respected *ebhro-kpabi* as the only god that gave them good health. Even with the creation of a medical post in Mamfe in 1922 by the British,[104] most Ejagham people were still heavily attached to this god; it was only after independence that such sentimental attachments began to dissipate. This, notwithstanding, some Ejagham villages have continued to perform the *ebhro-kpabi* rituals.

The *ebhro-kpabi* sacred space is situated at the top left corner of the traditional hall of every Ejagham village.[105] This sacred space is decorated with a clay pot mounted on three logs of wood in the form of a cooking stand. These three logs are secured with cane rope and on one side of it is tied a fresh and immature palm leaf that stands as tall as a flag waving from all angles.[106] Inside the pot is a concoction of water and other blended ingredients and herbs that are known only by cult members. The clay pot is covered with a flat stone and remain unopened until when the rituals are performed.[107] This sacred space is carefully watched day and night by both elders and youths of

the village. It is a taboo for any child to play around the place.[108] The Ejagham people believe that if the pot falls down and breaks, the entire village will go into darkness; such intransigence, it is believed, will require human sacrifice for the community to be restored.[109]

The *Ebhro-Kpabi* Ritual Performance

There is no specific period for the ritual to the god of good health to be performed. Ejagham elders attest to the fact that a general performance is always done at the beginning of each year in all Ejagham villages.[110] This was corroborated by the traditional chiefs of Inokun and Ekoneman-Awa villages during their rituals of February 1988 and January 1996 respectively. According to the traditional chief of Ekoneman-Awa village, *Ntufam* Etta John:

> In 1995, a very serious epidemic plagued the land killing more than a quarter of the people. The attack came from the Ejagham of neighboring Nigeria. It was noticed that small pox and measles [had] attacked the village of Mfaminyen in neighboring Nigeria because their god of protection known as *igu* which got angry due to the too much evil and witchcraft happening in the land. It decided to kill all those who were possessed with witchcraft. The *igu* tree changed its leaves to completely yellow and they started drying off. A very serious wind then went past the village spreading small pox and measles. Each time a leave falls from that tree, a person from the village must die. The people started fleeing the land. It was those who ran across the borders that transferred the small pox into the Ejagham villages of Cameroon. Through consultation with *ebhro-kpabi*, the people resolved that ritual performance was the only alternative to appease the god.[111]

The *igu* ritual sacrifice was supposed to be performed first by the people of Mfaminyen before the *ebhro-kpabi* rituals could be done. *Igu* ritual sacrifice was the most dangerous sacrifice in Ejagham land. It involved the private part of seven virgins gotten from a distant country out of Ejagham land.[112] These secret human organs were used to appease the god and were buried under the *igu* sacred tree to restore it back to life.[113] A virgin girl was chosen to be the guardian of this god. No man was supposed to sleep with her. The first man who sleeps with her dies after seven days.[114] So a serious warning was given to all family heads to transmit to their sons and other young men of the community not to have intercourse with her. When she attained the age of sexual maturity, she was given money and banished from the village to a far off land where she had as a mission to sleep with any man before returning to Ejagham land to get married.[115] This ritual, it is believed, has been performed by many Ejagham villages along the Cameroon-Nigerian border in recent time.[116]

As mentioned earlier, the ritual performance of *ebhro-kpabi* in Ejagham villages was the responsibility of seven people, and they were the only ones who knew the different types of herbs and other components that were concocted in the clay pot; the Ejaghams allege that the special herbs are mixed with human intestines.[117] After this secret mixture, a general announcement was made throughout the community, summoning everyone to the courtyard of the village traditional hall for the appeasement to begin. It is only then that the chief priest of the *ebhro-kpabi* cult would forward and chant the incantations calling on the god to see the number of good people that needed his intervention. In the course of chanting the incantations, palm wine and kola nut was offered to the god, at the end of which the traditional gung was sounded.[118] The sound of the gung signified acceptance by the god to clear the disease and protect the people against any future epidemic. All the villagers present at the ritual are expected to take a sip of the liquid from the pot.[119] As they drank, some took small quantities of the liquid, diluted it with water and took baths.[120] Before the ceremony ends, the liquid is sprinkled on everyone in thanks to the god and in anticipation of guidance and protection from it. There is mystery surrounding *ebhro-kpabi* such that no one understands its actions with certainty; but Ejagham elders purport that after each performance, the village returns to normalcy and good healthy.[121] Although these rituals were frequent during the pre-colonial era, some elders maintain that it has been performed in recent times in the village of Nsanakang in 1996, Mbinda, Ayaoke, Otu, and Nsanarakati in 1996, and in Ogurang in 1998;[122] but there is no evidence to prove that human parts constituted part of the concoction.

The Sacred Space of *Eja* (the God of War)

Eja is the god of war among the Ejagham. This god was dreaded and considered dangerous. Its mission was to protect the community against attacks from enemies.[123] The sacred space of *eja* is located at the right corner outside traditional village halls and is represented by a stone of about one meter high, centered between trees such as the *eti mfam*, *iseen*, *egak*, and *etu* that grow taller than the stone, and never wither.[124]

Ejagham oral traditions reveal that the first sacrifice of *eja* on the sacred place of every village involved the burial of seven human heads.[125] The centered trees at the *eja* sacred space shaded the stone, enough to hide what was inside or underneath. *Eja* was respected more in certain Ejagham villages such as Babong, Inokun, and Otu. Not many Ejagham villages were in possession of this god and its secret was never revealed to villages not in possession because it was used even against other Ejagham villages in times of war, especially during the precolonial era.[126]

Eja has high regard in Otu village where it is believed that it assisted the villagers in the war against the Germans, killing some of its officers in 1899 when the Germans attempted to stop the flow of trade from Ossidinge district to British Nigeria by confiscating coffee belonging to Otu traders.[127] It was this confrontation that led the people of Otu village to consult and invoke *eja*.[128] Consultation of *eja*, the villagers allege, is what led to the death of German officer Von Weise and almost all members of his company, with the exception of Wilfred Fine Boy who managed to escape.[129] *Eja* is in the form of traditionally blended tobacco snuff that when blown into the air renders the enemy blind.[130] That same year (1899) another confrontation broke out between the people of Okuri, Otu, and Ekoneman Ojong-Arrey versus the Germans that led to the death of six German officers and one hundred and twenty porters. According to Etta "the people used a war charm called *eja* to hypnotize the Germans."[131] Similarly, elders of Otu village allege that the major reason for their triumph over Ekoneman-Awa in their boundary dispute in 1992, and over Ayaoke in 1996 was because of the powerful manipulation of *eja*.[132] Although there was no physical confrontation or exchange of bullets during the boundary skirmish between Otu and Ayaoke, Otu subjects believe that *eja* blinded their opponents in the forest around the boundary line at the Nkam River (claimed by Otu as the boundary); it also rendered Ayaoke, they allege, speechless in court during most judgment sessions in spite of Ayaoke's claim to have used *ejiri-kpoto* (another secret god) to counter *eja*.[133]

The Ritual Performance of *Eja*

As mentioned earlier, *eja* is the preserve of only a few Ejagham villages—Mbakang, Nsanakang, Otu, Nsanarakati, Mbeyan, Inokun, and Babong—believed to be stronger since they had the protection of this god.[134] Ritual performances of *eja* were done only when there was trouble or war. The rituals involved the following items: palm wine, kola nuts, red oil, yams; to these was added the virginal part of a virgin gotten from a far off land outside Ejagham community.[135] The virginal of the virgin girl was dried and mixed with other traditional herbs and blended. Sometimes, a slave was buried alive on the *eja* sacred spot.[136] By midnight, all males of fighting age were required to report, prepared for war, at the sacred place of *eja* where each was handed a small quantity of the blended stuff.[137] The main bag containing the *eja* powder was left on the sacred place when the warriors departed for war. It is believed that the carrier of the *eja* bag was the spirit of the buried slave who appeared to fighters in need.[138] Many elders attest to the fact that during the precolonial and early colonial periods, slaves often volunteered to be used for the sacrifice, alleging that the slaves saw this as an act of heroism to save the land.[139]

The Sacred Place of *Igumi* (the God of Protection and Good Luck)

The *igumi* sacred space was decorated with a mounted stick from an ebony tree, two meters in length, with a little hole on the edge where an egg was perched. The main stick was fenced in a circle, one meter in diameter, with other smaller fresh sticks that were never allowed to dry out or decay.[140] This special space was used to perform rituals to appease the god and to call on it not to forget its responsibility of protecting the people.[141]

Igumi rituals were performed only when the need arose, especially in situations of attacks on individuals or when epidemics plagued the land.[142] The ritual involved the use of items such as tobacco snuff, kola nuts, and cooked food that contained a limb of bush meat of any kind and a jug of palm wine. When these items were offered to the god, incantations were recited to invoke the spirit to wake up and protect the community.[143] According to *Ntufam* Samson Etta Igbor, an elder in Otu village, the *igumi* ritual was progressively abandoned when villagers embraced Christianity from the late-nineteenth to late-twentieth centuries.[144] The last *igumi* ritual performances that took place in March 1992 involved the entire village of Otu and a cross section of Ekwe villages[145] after the death of the oldest chief in the Ekwe cluster—*Ntufam Ete*[146] Teket Etem. At his death, *Ntufam Ete* Teket Etem was the only *Iyamba* (Sessekou) of Otu and guardian of all traditional sacred cults. According to *Ntufam* Samson Igbor:

> Ete died in 1992 and his death affected the entire Ejagham nation to which he was widely known. After his burial, a very serious illness attacked many new born babies. This illness was unknown and very mysterious. It was after consultation with the chief priest that the revelation was made known to the people. It was revealed that Ete Teket who just passed away, was angry that his name was going to disappear from the face of the earth. All the little children who fell sick were therefore his incarnates who were supposed to be named after him but have been given other names. All sacred societies then organized and [the] ritual performance [was] carried out. Renaming ceremonies were made for the children and the name Teket given to them. By 1993 peace and good health had returned to the land.[147]

Apart from *igumi*, the *obasinjom* society is also responsible for protecting the people from witchcraft.[148] As a sacred society, *Obasinjom* is not the exclusive preserve of the Ejagham community; it is also popular among other ethnicities in Manyu Division, Fako Division (among the Bakweri) as well as with the people of Oroko, Lebialem, and Bakossi land. It was referred in the past as the cult agent of god[149] and believed to have originated from Mbakang in the Keaka cluster of the Ejaghams of Cameroon.[150] Mbakang is

also regarded as the origin of many Ejagham villages of the Qua and Akamkpa clusters of the Ejaghams of Nigeria.[151]

With the exception of its normal dance, *Obasinjom* has no ritual performance; it has a sacred place located deep inside the forest, and referred locally as the *ebhuni obasinjom* in the Ejagham dialect.[152] This sacred place was known only to its members; none-members who ventured there, the Ejaghams believed, risked blindness or ultimate death.[153] According to some of its members in Eyumojock and Nsanarakati, two Ejagham villages where believe in *obasinjom* is still very strong,[154] *Obasinjom*'s sacred space has a special tree known as the King Tree, separated from other trees, and taller than any other tree in the middle of the forest.[155] Only its members can see this special tree.[156] It is also believed that the leaves and bark of the tree are medicinal,[157] and these can only be gotten by its members who have the power to command the tree to come down.[158]

Private Sacred Spaces and Ritual Performances

Private sacred spaces were designated areas used only by individuals, families, or lineages to perform their own rituals. Such areas were graves or particularly decorated sections of the family compound.[159] A good number of old people who have passed on in Ejagham land were considered ancestors and their graves were kept sacred. Sometimes, these graves were decorated with a few of the dead person's belongings such as loin cloths, dishes, brooms, cutlasses, and spoons.[160] Private rituals were performed on the graves of these dead ancestors to invoke their spirits. On some of these ancestral ritual spaces were placed special stones; on others, a tree is planted in the compound by designated family members where broken kola nuts are spread around it.[161] In the precolonial and colonial periods, it was believed that family fortune tellers in Ejagham communities had the ability to predict when a family ancestor or god was angry, especially when a child had been wrongly named—a situation that was perceived to result in imminent danger.[162]

Family ritual performances were performed by individual families during periods of misfortune, or when there was a mysterious illness affecting one or more family members, or when it was believed that a child had been given a wrong name.[163] The ritual was also performed when family members dreamed of the apparition of a dead ancestor making a specific request/demand[164]; it was the fortune teller's task to interpret the dream before consulting with the family head. Once it was agreed that a ritual performance was necessary, items for the ritual such as palm oil, one live chicken, kola nuts, tobacco snuff, palm wine, and food were assembled and a special meal composed of pounded coco-yams and soup made up of melon and palm oil was prepared.

The meat was prepared separately.[165] The chicken was slaughtered on the edge of the ancestral grave and its blood was poured on the grave. The cooked food was shared, equally, between the dead ancestors and the other living members of the family by the family head who chanted incantations calling the names of the ancestors to come and share in the meal and to intervene on their behalf.[166] The portion of food and other items reserved for the ancestors were left on the graves; a kola nut was broken and two halves were also thrown on each grave. The manner in which the kola fell determined whether the ancestors had accepted their gift and plea or not.[167] If the ancestor's portion of the food was eaten by domestic animals, this was considered a sign that it was eaten by the ancestors.[168] Considered by many Ejagham families in recent times as a thing of the past, some families still practice and perform family rituals when the need arises.[169]

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

This chapter has examined a rich cultural heritage, as portrayed in the various sacred spaces and ritual performances endowed in Ejagham villages of Cameroon. The Ejaghams' were not so different from many other ethnicities in Cameroon and elsewhere in Africa where African traditional religious practices were at the center of most human activities. Ejagham gods such as *mfam*, *arem*, *eja*, *igumi*, *igu*, and *obasinjom*, for example, inhabited the various sacred spaces discussed earlier, and it was in these spaces that different forms of rituals were performed to appease the gods and make the lives of the people meaningful through the adoption of a moral code crafted from these religious believes.

NOTES

1. All names of interviewees are pseudonyms and identifying factors have been stripped.
2. P. A. Talbot, *The People of Southern Nigeria*, Vol. 3 (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1969), 526.
3. Interview with Awu Aya (age 55), Member of *asunka*, Inokun village, February 18, 2014.
4. Ibid.
5. Interview with Asong Raphael Ashu, age 67, second in command in the *ebhro-kpabi* cult, Otu, February 2, 2014.
6. Ibid.
7. S. O. Onor, *The Ejagham Nation in the Cross River Region of Nigeria* (Ibadan: Kraft Books Limited, 1994), 95 (hereafter Onor, *The Ejagham Nation*).

8. Interview with Asong Raphael, age 67, second in command in *ebhro-kpabi* cult, Otu, February 2, 2014.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Interview with Bernard Oru, age 72, elder, Ebam, February 25, 2014.
12. Interview with Simon Ntui Ndifon, age 69, retired chief of service in charge of research and documentation, MINSEC, Otu, February 3, 2014; interview with Anthony Atom, age 79, leader of Epke in Otu, July 26, 2017.
13. Ibid.
14. Onor, *The Ejagham Nation*, 16.
15. R. A. Etta, "The Ejagham of Cameroon and Nigeria 1884–2003: A Historical Assessment of the Impact of European Partition" (University of Yaoundé 1: PhD Dissertation in History, forthcoming), 94. Hereafter cited as Etta, "The Ejagham of Cameroon and Nigeria."
16. Onor, *The Ejagham Nation*, 17.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. J. V. Dewhurst, "Ejagham Improvement Union," Calabar District Archives (CADIST), 1/4/193, 25–30.
20. Ibid.
21. Etta, "The Ejagham of Cameroon and Nigeria," 126.
22. Onor, *The Ejagham Nation*, 17.
23. I. E. Ayuk, "A Survey of the Precolonial History of Ejagham in Cameroon and Nigeria up to 1914" (University of Nigeria, Nsukka: BA Thesis in History, 1981), 16.
24. M. O. Bonchuk, "International Boundaries and Divided People: The Case of the Boki and Ejagham Communities in the Cross River Area 1884–1994" (University of Calabar: PhD Dissertation in History, 1999), 41.
25. Ibid.
26. Onor, *The Ejagham Nation*, 31.
27. Etta, "The Ejagham of Cameroon and Nigeria," 63.
28. Chem-Langhee Bongfen, *The Road to the Unitary State of Cameroon, 1959–1972* (University of Yaounde 1, *Annals of the Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences*, Vol. VI, No. 1 & 2, 1990), 6.
29. M. B. Funteh, "Cameroon-Nigeria Dispute over the Bakassi Peninsular: A Specimen of Collective Peace Approach," in *Boundaries and History in Africa: Issues in Conventional Boundaries and Ideological Frontiers*, ed. Daniel Abwa et al. (University of Yaounde 1: Department of History, 2011), 74.
30. R. A. Etta, "Modern Migrations and Settlements of Ejagham Njemaya, 1947–1982," (University of Yaoundé 1: MA Thesis in History, 2007), 12 (hereafter cited as Etta, "Modern Migrations and Settlements").
31. Ibid.
32. N. C. Atem, "German Colonial Administration in Ossidinge District 1896–1914: A Historical Survey" (University of Yaoundé 1: MA Thesis in History, 2001), 33.
33. Ibid.
34. Etta, "The Ejagham of Cameroon and Nigeria," 128.

35. Etta, "Modern Migrations and Settlements," 42.
36. Ibid., 126.
37. Ibid., 168.
38. NAB File No 65939/1926 "Ikom-Mamfe/Bamenda Road, 1947."
39. Etta, "Modern Migrations and Settlements," 45.
40. Victor Atom Ntui, "Inter-Village Boundary Disputes in Northern Ejagham Njemaya 1952–1992: Causes, Manifestations and Impacts" (University of Yaoundé 1: MA Dissertation in History, 2005), 12 (hereafter cited as Ntui, "Inter-Village Boundary Disputes").
41. Ibid., 22.
42. Etta, "The Ejagham of Cameroon and Nigeria, 60–68.
43. Ibid., 65.
44. Interview with Tabe Mathiew, age 52, youth leader, Bakwelle, February 24, 2014.
45. NAB File No Af27/1927, "Assessment Report on Keaka."
46. Onor, *The Ejagham Nation*, 108.
47. Interview with Emmanuel Mkpot, age 70, retired teacher, Otu, February 6, 2014.
48. Ibid.
49. E. S. D. Fomin and V. S. Ngitir, "Rituals in Traditional Boundary Settlements in the Cameroon Grassfields," in *Boundaries and History in Africa: Issues in Conventional Boundaries and Ideological Frontiers*, ed. Daniel Abwa et al. (University of Yaoundé 1: Department of History, 2011), 32.
50. Interview with Henry Agbor Attah, age 57, regent chief of Eyumojock, February 10, 2005.
51. Ibid.
52. Interview with Akiangbe Henry Ekpo, traditional chief of culture in Otu, February 3, 2014.
53. Ibid.
54. T. Eyongetah Mbuagbaw, Robert Brain, and Robin Palmer, *A History of the Cameroon* (Essex, England: Longman Group Ltd., 1974), 68 (hereafter cited as Mbuagbaw et al., *A History of the Cameroon*).
55. Interview with Tabe Tanyi David, age 90, traditional chief of Otu, February 4, 2014.
56. Ibid.
57. Interview with Erem David, age 90, traditional chief of Eyumojock, February 10, 2014.
58. Ibid.
59. Interview with Ojong Moses Ojong-Ntui, age 84, chief of Otu, February 5, 2014.
60. Ibid.
61. Interview with Atom Anthony Ntui, age 79, chief of Ngbe, Otu, February 3, 2014 and July 26, 2017.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.
65. Interview with Asong Raphael Ashu, age 67, second in command in the *ebhro-kpabi* cult, Otu, February 2, 2014.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid.
69. Mbuagbaw et al., *A History of the Cameroon*, 77.
70. R. A. Etta, "The Impacts of African Partition: The Case of the Ejagham of Cameroon and Nigeria 1884–2005" (University of Yaoundé 1: DEA Dissertation in History, 2008), 83.
71. Interview with Agbor Cyprian, age 65, elder of Full Gospel Church, Otu, January 3, 2014.
72. NAB File No 3364,Af28, "Keaka Assessment Report."
73. Interview with Ajing Ajing Omom, age 46, witch doctor, Inokun, February 18, 2014.
74. Interview with Ete Ayamba, age 88, *mfam* chief priest, Mbakem, February 23, 2014.
75. Onor, *The Ejagham Nation*, 23.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. Interview with Akajoy Ekpe, age 70, *arem* priestess, Babong, February 20, 2014.
79. *Ibhum* is very importance to the Ejaghams. This is an immature palm leave. Apart from being used for rituals, it is also dried and used for decorations of most masquerades.
80. Interview with Ekpe Bassey Ita, age 55, elite, Mbarakom, January 18, 2014.
81. Interview with Ejoga Arrah, age 49, *arem* priestess, Yaoundé, March 3, 2014.
82. Ibid.
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid.
85. Interview with William Ochacha, traditional chief, Ndebaya, February 10, 2014.
86. Ibid.
87. Interview with Ndifon Samson, age 73, chief priest of *arem*, Ekoneman Ojong-Arrey, February 19, 2014.
88. Ibid.
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid.
91. Interview with Ntuiban Patrick, age 86, traditional chief, Ayaoke, February 12, 2014.
92. Interview with Obi Nja Francis, age 71, elder, Ayaoke, February 12, 2014.
93. Ibid.
94. Interview with Antonia Ojong Esoh, age 52, *arem* priestess, Ossele, February 28, 2014.
95. Ibid.

96. Ibid.
97. Interview with Gladys Bassey Ita, teacher, Mbarakom, January 18, 2014.
98. Interview with Anang-Abho Peter, age 48, personal assistant to the new chief, Mbarakom, January 18, 2014.
99. Interview with Bernard Ojongori Igbor, age 89, elder, Otu, February 7, 2014.
100. Ibid.
101. Interview with Asong Raphael Ashu, age 67, second in command in the *ebhro-kpabi* cult, Otu, February 2, 2014 and July 27, 2017.
102. Ngoh, *History of Cameroon since 1800*, 176.
103. Ibid.
104. Ibid, 177.
105. Interview with Bity Stephen, age 72, chief of Ekoneman Awa, February 14, 2014.
106. Ibid.
107. Interview with Asong Raphael Ashu, age 67, second in command in the *ebhro-kpabi* cult, Otu, February 20, 2014 and July 27, 2017.
108. Ibid.
109. According to Mr. Asong Raphael Ashu, he was apprised of the issue of darkness covering the land in case the pot is broken only when the secret was handed to him as the second in command; but he has never witnessed where the pot fell.
110. Interview with Asong Raphael Ashu, age 67, second in command in the *ebhro-kpabi* cult, Otu, February 2, 2014 and July 27, 2017.
111. Interview with Eta John, age 69, president of EKCUDA (Ekoneman Awa Development and Cultural Association), Ekoneman Awa, February 14, 2014.
112. Interview with Felicity Eret Esoh, age 42, Queen Mother of Igu Sacred Cult, Mfaminyen, January 27, 2014.
113. Ibid.
114. Ibid.
115. Ibid.
116. Interview with Oru Ndifon, age 69, member of *Ebhro-kpabi* cult, Nsanarakati, February 16, 2014.
117. Ibid.
118. Interview with Moses Ita, age 67, chief priest of *Asunka*/member of *ebhro-kpabi* cult, Babong, February 20, 2014.
119. Ibid.
120. Ibid.
121. Interview with Oru Ndifon, age 69, member of *ebhro-kpabi* cult, Nsanarakati, February 16, 2014.
122. Ibid.
123. Interview with Atom Anthony Ntui, age 79, chief of *ngbe*, Otu, February 3, 2014 and July 27, 2017.
124. Interview with Oru Ndifon age 69, member of *ebhro-kpabi* cult, Nsanarakati, February 16, 2014.
125. Ibid.
126. Ibid.

127. Etta, "The Ejagham of Cameroon and Nigeria," 18.

128. Ibid., 127.

129. G. Atem, "Cameroon-Nigeria Relations, 1884–1916: A Study in Political, Economic and Social Interactions between Two Neighboring States" (University of Calabar: PhD Dissertation in History, 1984), 14.

130. Interview with Oru Ndifon, age 69, member of *ebhro-kpabi* cult, Nsanarakati, February 16, 2014.

131. Etta, "The Ejagham of Cameroon and Nigeria," 127.

132. Interview with Ayamba John Agbor, age 54, farmer, Otu, February 5, 2014 and July 28, 2017.

133. Ibid.

134. Interview with Ferdinand Ojong Obi, age 75, traditional chief, Mbenyan, February 13, 2014.

135. Ibid.

136. Interview with Oru Ndifon, age 69, member of ebhro-*kpabi* cult, Nsanarakati, February 16, 2014.

137. Ibid.

138. Ibid.

139. Ibid.

140. Interview with Osang Ambang Enow, age 62, chief priest of *igumi*, Okuri, January 24, 2014.

141. Ibid.

142. Ibid.

143. Ibid.

144. Interview with Etta Samson Igbor, age 86, elder, Otu, February 3, 2014 and July 29, 2017.

145. Ibid.

146. *Ete* is an Ejagham word used to refer to the oldest men in the community. It is the most preferred appellation because to the Ejaghams, even the word papa sounds disrespectful for such old men.

147. Interview with Etta Samson Igbor, age 86, elder, Otu, February 3, 2014 and July 29, 2017.

148. Onor, *The Ejagham Nation*, 108.

149. Ntui, "Inter-Village Boundary Disputes," 23.

150. Ibid.

151. Onor, *The Ejagham Nation*, 108.

152. Interview with Ashu Stephen Ayamba, age 52, *Obasinjom* dancer, Yaoundé, April 10, 2014.

153. Ibid.

154. Mr. Ashu Stephen attests to the fact that in recent time, Eyumojock has become the strongest Ejagham village in terms of the *obasinjom* dance. He claims to be one of the seven spirits who revived *obasinjom* in 1998 when most villages in the area had neglected the cult.

155. Interview with Ashu Stephen Ayamba, age 52, *obasinjom* dancer, Yaoundé, April 10, 2014.

156. Ibid.
157. Ibid.
158. Ibid.
159. Interview with Abhim Janet, age 77, chief of *Ekpa*, Okuri, January 24, 2014.
160. Ibid.
161. Interview with Obhim Enobho, age 90, traditional chief, Okuri, January 24, 2014.
162. Ibid.
163. Ibid.
164. Ibid.
165. Interview with Andrew Ayuk, age 62, secretary for education, Calabar, January 19, 2014.
166. Interview with Atom Anthony Ntui, age 79, chief of *Ngbe*, Otu, February 3, 2014 and July 26, 2017.
167. Interview with Bassy Okon, age 56, family head, Okuri, January 24, 2014.
168. Ibid.
169. Ibid.

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Chapter 5

Masjid

Sacred Space in Nigerian Islam

Muhammadu Mustapha Gwadabe
and Muhammad Kyari

Islam is a monotheistic religion, a belief system, centered on the oneness of Allah, and that Muhammad (Peace Be Unto Him, PBUH) is His messenger. Although Islam encompasses all aspects of the lives of its followers, one of its most important rituals is the practice of saying the five daily prayers. More significant also is the exhortation that these prayers should be said in congregation, and in a dedicated, sacred space, the *Masjid* (Mosque) for this purpose. This makes the mosque a very important place for all Muslims, regardless of ethnicity or culture. The Mosque is simultaneously a universal sacred space and a culturally specific sacred space. It serves as a meeting point where common understanding and unity for community development are shared. Beyond its role in daily prayers, the mosque also functions as a space for the teaching and learning of the basic texts and doctrine of Islam. Thus it is both a sacred and ideological space. The challenge in this chapter is therefore to examine the multiple functions of the mosque as enshrined in Islam. The chapter anchors on the history and origins of Islam, its architecture and structural outlook.

Wa annal masajida lillahi falaa tadúu maállahi ahada (Arabic transliteration) is what Allah (God) says about the mosque (*Masjid*), which means "and the places of worship (mosque) are for Allah (alone), so invoke not anyone along with Him (Allah)."[1] The mosque is nothing but a sacred place of worship whose objective is to provide a serene environment where nothing is remembered but Allah. Some of the features of the mosque include a peacefully quite, calm, and unruffled location; a state of mind without worry or anxiety and unaffected by disturbances. Indeed this goes with what Islam stood for, that is, monotheism, the belief that there is none worthy of worship but Allah, the creator, the cherisher.[2] The mosque is neither anybody's property nor is

it a place for the performance of any activity beside the worship of Allah.[3] Instead, it is a simple structure to house worshippers by creating the necessary environment that condition them to be possessed by the remembrance of Allah. Such a structure must be unique, focussed on Islamic faith, and not on any individual, as found in some other faiths.[4] It is this specific desire, in addition to some others, that mandates Muslims to strive[5] for a comfortable space conformable to Islamic worship, such that sacred practices could hold with little or no disturbance and devoid of any form of human character or precept. Thus, it is always encouraged that the mosque be sited in a secluded, free, peaceful, and quiet environment.

THE MOSQUE OF ISLAM

Masjid and its use started with the introduction of the religion of Islam in c. 610 AD.[6] The first place of worship of Muslims is the *Masjid Haram* in Mecca. According to the Holy Qur'an, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and his son Prophet Ismail (Ishmael) raised the foundation of the *Ka'aba* (in c. 2130 BCE) on the command and direction of Allah.[7] The *Haram* surrounds the *Ka'aba* (house of Allah), serving as *Qibla* (direction) where all Muslims faced when performing prayers. The *Ka'aba* is therefore one of the sacred structures that united all Muslims of the world, whether Sunni or Shiite, without an iota of ambiguity, to a common *Qibla* for the purposes of the worship of Allah. Indeed the *Haram* played the most important role of housing Muslim worshippers performing the annual pilgrimage (Hajj). The pilgrimage is an important pillar (of the five pillars) of Islam that requires all Muslims to perform at least ones in life time.[8] Pilgrimage in Islam involved a number of spiritual activities, including the circumambulation of the *Ka'aba*, and some others performed outside the premises of *Haram*. For a very long time in the history of pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula, the *Ka'aba* was turned into a place of idol worship, losing its status and holiness in the worship of Allah until the victorious return of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in about 630 AD.[9] From this time therefore, *Haram* regained its sacredness as Muslim's place of worship, bringing to an end all forms of idol worship within its premises.

The first mosque outside Mecca was the mosque initiated by Prophet Muhammad at the Banu Amr Ibn Awf's community in Quba'a.[10] Quba'a is a small village (now a district) located on the way to the present day Medina (first Islamic city). The Prophet was in Quba'a during his Hijra (historic migration) from Mecca to Medina.[11] The migration was in response to the ill treatment Muslims suffered from the hands of the unbelievers of Mecca, especially the leadership.[12] The Quba'a mosque has since been rebuilt and is one of the few

sacred places pilgrims visit during the annual pilgrimage. Islamic traditions emphasized that the Prophet participated actively during the building, carrying on his hands and head building materials, and encouraging others to do same. The Prophet (PBUH) resisted all attempt by followers requesting him not to take part, signifying the importance of taking an active role in the building of a mosque.[13] Within three days (Monday to Thursday) of his total fourteen nights in this community the construction of the mosque was completed. As reported by Ibn Umar in one of the Prophetic teachings (Hadith), Prophet (PBUH) continued to visit the mosque every Saturday throughout his stay in Medina, either on foot or by walking.[14] The mosque of prophet Muhammad at Medina was built after the building of his residence was completed. Significantly therefore, this is indicating that though the building of a mosque is important in Islam, but more important is the building of residence.

The choice of the location for the erection of the residence and the mosque was miraculous[15]; of interest was that the Prophet insisted on purchasing the land himself. It is said that the land belonged to two orphans named Sahalu and Suhailu. This is also teaching that mosque should not be built on lands not legitimately owned or paid for. Thus the commonly practice (mostly in Nigeria) of building mosques on any available government land, sometimes blocking water ways or other forms of passages is not acceptable in Islam. For a mosque to merit the bliss, it must therefore be legitimately owned and built in a location conducive for the remembrance of Allah.

At its completion, the architecture of the Prophet's mosque continued to provide the prototype of mosques through the ages, and locations. The mosque was described as having a simple form, rectangular in shape and a low shaded prayer area on the *Qibla*. Though the residence, housing the family of the Prophet was within the vicinity, it was never considered part of the prerequisite for a mosque. More specifically, the mosque should have an open space (courtyard) to accommodate the growing populace. It should have, in its surrounding, shades of trees to boost the natural outlook, comfort worshipers, and to create the atmosphere of meditation and submission. The emphasis here is with its natural outlook in which the powers (omnipotence) of Allah as the creator of all creatures is appreciated, remembered and respected. This is giving the mosque its status and place in Islam, as a space where none is remembered, cherished, and worshipped, but Allah.

THE MOSQUE AS AN EDIFICE

The mosque consists of a number of features that are expected to accommodate the various processes necessary in the performance of the religious

obligation. Among these features were some few that are an obligation (Primary), as found in the mosque of the Prophet (PBUH) in Medina. Others are important because of the role they play in making the mosque more functional or decorative, but not that they are an obligation (Secondary).[16] Among the Primary features includes, but not limited to,[17] a praying ground, Qibla wall and Mihrab, Minbar, Pool or Ablution fountain, and Minaret.[18] Each of the listed items has a functional role in making the mosque a sacred space of worship, but none has any specific sacred status in itself. The prayer ground is where congregation of people stood to perform the ritual practice. It is an orderly arrangement facing same direction with an *Imam*, who leads in the prayer (positioned a lone in the front row) and the followers (*Ma'amun*), who, in a systematic way repeat exactly what the *Imam* performs. The arrangement is such that people of knowledge, age and responsibility are encouraged to mount the first row, and it goes to the last row. This is to support the Imam in case he finds himself in a condition that he cannot continue with the prayer.[19] The *Imam* is assisted by a *Na'ib*, who stands for him in case he travels or cannot perform due to sickness and so on. The prayer ground is mostly in rectangular shape, but no restriction to that; it depends on what is found to be available. It can also be in an open or roofed form; presently, most of the mosques are roofed, some others are made up of the two styles. Therefore there is no restriction on that; it depends on the availability and capability of the community.[20]

Qibla wall and *Mihrab* are a necessary part of a mosque too. This is found within the mosque serving as the focal point or direction which all those in prayer face. The *Qibla* is one and unique for all Muslims of the world, but the direction depends on the position of the mosque on earth. As their *Qibla*, all Muslims face a direction towards the *Ka'aba*, located in Mecca, specifically within the main premises of the *Masjid Ihram*. Earlier in the history of Islam the *Qibla* was facing the direction of Jerusalem, but it was changed with the establishment of Islamic state in Medina, to face the Holy Mosque in Mecca, pointing at the *Ka'aba*.[21] Attached to the Qibla wall is Mihrab, which serves as the most centrally part where the Imam stands and faced, but it does not possesses any sacredness. It only functions as an indicator of the direction to be faced by the congregation during prayers. Indeed in the past when the mosque was not modernized with electronic appliances, the structure of the *Mihrab* creates a loud echo that magnify the voice of the Imam to the hearing of all those in the mosque and outside. The hearing of the voice of the Imam is therefore considered very important to all those in praying session. It is important to note that not all recitations are made loudly during prayers; recitation during some prayers are said by heart, but the various commands, which expressed the action taken by the *Imam* are always said loudly. That is also the reason for

appointment of Mu'azzim, who functions during prayer session to repeat the command of the Imam loudly to the hearing of the larger audience.[22]

Minbar is another primary feature, but found mostly in those mosques where Friday prayer is said. Also called a pulpit, the *Minbar* is stationed by the side of the Imam's row to make the Imam visible by all those in the prayer session, when he climb. In its present outlook, it is made of wood and in the form of a stair case, on top of which is a small flat form from where the Imam addresses the congregation, especially during Friday sermon (*Kutba*). The history of the use of a pulpit started when population of Muslims in Medina increased and the need arise for the use of a form of aid to lift the Prophet (PBUH) above the heads of the congregation. The wisdom was to ensure eye contact between the speaker and the listener such that organic linkage is established to enhance concentration. There is no particular specification for its make, shape, or height; during the times of the Prophet, ordinary trunk of a tree was used. Over time more sophisticated structures are commonly found, well decorated, but performing the singular function.

No prayer is acceptable without ablution, as well as no ablution is acceptable unless the body if purified by way of spiritual birthing (*Gusul Janabah*) and the cleaning of the body parts from where a waste product, as urine and faeces, comes out from.[23] These necessitate the desire for a pool or ablution fountain, for the performance of such an important ritual before ablution. This important service follows the command of Allah that: "O ye who believe, when ye prepare for prayer, wash your face, and your hands (and arms) to the elbows; rub your heads with water and wash your feet to the ankles."[24] The emphasis on purification found another support in a Qur'anic verse that states thus: "O ye who believe approach not prayers . . . in a state of ceremonial impurity."[25] These verses made it an obligation to provide water around the premises of a mosque; where possible toilet facility are also recommended, so that these purifications can be conducted in a respected manner and in accordance with the Shari'a. Though not necessarily in a fountain form, of importance is that there should be water and a container (kettle), and a secured place for one to clean up (urine or other bodily waste products).[26] Indeed provision should be made that separate gender, so as to ensure respect and to support both sexes to participate in a congregational prayer. The participation of women in the mosque is, however, not obligatory, they are encouraged to pray in their homes. The wisdom in this is also to encourage them acquire some level of Islamic education such that they can administer the prayer on their own. It is also to avoid the mixing of men and women; the categories of women encouraged to attend congregational prayers are mostly the elderly ones.

Modern day mosques have a well design pool with water taps and a suitable kind of seat for the worshippers to perform ablution. A good example is

the one in the Holy mosque of Mecca and the Prophets mosque in Medina. It is designed to be used by a large number of people at a time, since its purpose is to serve the global Muslim worshippers' at a time. The common experience in Nigeria is that facilities of different sorts are made available to store water for the use of worshippers. In mosques meant for large crowd of people, facilities are made to that effect, in smaller mosques provision are equally made to serve the purpose. The issue however is that source of water must be made available, but it has no any sacred status. The only condition necessary is that it should be cited some distance away from the main mosque, and that it should not be positioned facing the *Qibla* or backing it.[27]

Minaret is another primary feature that characterise a mosque; it is a tower-like structure at the side of the mosque building. It is found in different shapes and has no single design or modelling.[28] The obvious is that it is pyramidal and its function is to help prayer calling (*Adhan*) reach out to distant places. This follows the history of Islam when modern facilities as loud speakers were lacking, as a result the person in charge of calling the prayer Mu'ezzin used to climb a certain height of the minaret to make the call. When the Islamic community was first established in Medina Bilal was made the Mu'ezzin; he used to climb the roof top of the house of the Prophet to call the prayer to the hearing of everybody in the town. The building of the minaret started later; professionally it was in about the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It is presently so dominant in the Islamic architecture that it is found in buildings other than the mosque. Also important is that the minaret has no any sacred status in the performance of the Muslim religious duties. Indeed, mosques can be without a minaret, especially those mosques that are not for Friday prayers. In addition to the primary features, mosques also have some secondary features that include a Dome, an Arch, a Column, and Muqarnas. Though not a necessary part of a mosque, these features are commonly found in most mosques, and have created a niche for themselves.

The Dome is a particular kind of architectural design, mostly found on the top of the Mihrab. Its most important role is to create a sense of spirituality on the architecture of the mosque, which means that it does not have any sacredness in it, but a mere symbol. The use of the dome found prominence under the Ottomon Sultanate (Turks), who had mastered the art of such construction due to contact with the Byzantine. In the contemporary world, the dome differentiates between the mosque and residences, even though some important places such as the White House in the United States, not having any spiritual stand, carry on their top a dome architectural structure. A dome can stand for a symbol acknowledging an important space, not necessarily for its religious but also for political relevance.

The entrance to most mosques and indeed the inner part of it are designs in an arch shape that enhance the architectural frame as well as creating a sense of spirituality also. From the point of view of architecture, the arch also supports the roof frame and provides a sense of balance and rhythm in the minds of the observers.[29] The sense of balance is achieved by repeating the arcades at regular intervals, which is done in different architectural shapes and styles. The arch played a dominant role in the mosque architecture that it serves as a cornerstone of architecture of most Muslim communities across the globe.

Columns are erect structures mostly in the form of a pillar that strengthen the mosque structures, especially in those mosques built to take a large population of worshippers at a time. The columns, therefore, represent a sense of emphasis on the verticality of the space, by creating relationship with the strict vertical postures adhered to during prayers.[30] More than anything else, this gave the columns an important role in Islam, so essential to be adhered to when offering prayers in congregation.

ISLAM, THE MOSQUE, AND MUSLIMS

It is clear what a mosque should be in Islam; a training ground, where lessons are given on religious education, making it also a community center. Doctrinally, the mosque is never to plan and execute any evil. This is justifiable considering that Islam is a religion well guided and therefore consistent, even though its scholars and temporal policy makers are, like all human beings, mortal. The strength of Islam is in its common canon, a collection of sacred authoritative text, which every Muslim accepted, and remains unchanging, but very broad to swim through time and space. The only dividing line is that Muslim scholars are allowed to interpret, which philosophically can be said to mean no interpretation is wrong so long as it is within the bounds of the teachings. It was on this background that Islam built a standard society, culture, and traditions whose influence extended to Europe, Asia, Africa, and beyond to the Americas. The impact of Islam in the world is acknowledged by statesmen and politicians, particularly, Britain's Prince Charles, who stated that:

> The contribution of Muslim Spain to the preservation of classical learning during the Dark Ages, and to the first flowerings of the Renaissance, has long been recognised. Not only did Muslim Spain gather and preserve the intellectual content of ancient Greek and Roman civilisation, it also interpreted and expanded upon that civilisation, and made a vital contribution of its own in so many fields of human endeavour—in science, astronomy, mathematics, algebra, law, history, medicine, pharmacology, optics, agriculture, architecture, theology, music.[31]

The United States President, Barack Obama, also echoed Prince Charles's sentiment during his 2009 visit to Cairo:

> As a student of history, I also know civilisation's debt to Islam. It was Islam—at places like Al-Azhar—that carried the light of learning through so many centuries, paving the way for Europe's Renaissance and Enlightenment. It was innovation in Muslim communities that developed the order of algebra; our magnetic compass and tools of navigation; our mastery of pens and printing; our understanding of how disease spreads and how it can be healed. Islamic culture has given us majestic arches and soaring spires; timeless poetry and cherished music; elegant calligraphy and places of peaceful contemplation. And throughout history, Islam has demonstrated through words and deeds the possibilities of religious tolerance and racial equality.[32]

How all these achievements got lost, and Islam, and Muslims, took new identities is what still awaits scholars' explanations. What is very obvious to most Islamic societies, were the proliferation of "mosques" and "association" (groupings), championing varying courses, all in the name of Islam.[33] Also obvious was the struggle for influence and dominance by two important Muslim countries, Saudi Arabia and Iran, professing different interpretation of the religion. While Iran, influenced by the revolution led by Ayatollah Khomenein 1979,[34] was throwing its ideological challenge all over the Muslim world, Saudi Petro-Dollar (oil money) found its way into most parts of the Islamic world, financing the division of Muslims, as well as militarising Islam.[35] The damage these developments have done to Islam and Muslims is unquantifiable. In more general term, it redefines the role and meaning of the mosque, making it lost its spirituality or sacredness. Rather, the mosque is now a space for intra-Muslim squabble, debate, disagreement, insults, and sometimes open fight.[36] As the case with the mosque, so also with the Muslim world, there is presently no Muslim country that is at peace. Indeed, no part of the world is safe today, consequence to the development within the Muslim world. It is the position in this essay that none of these can be understood outside what obtains in the present global politics and struggle for cultural dominance in which Islam stands clear.

CONCLUSION

A mosque in Islam is a dedicated sacred site where five daily prayers are performed. The mosque can be in the form of a well built structure with modern facilities or an ordinary earmarked, but purified, clean place where the five daily prayers are performed. The mosque is therefore meant for just worship,

not anything else, and that is what it is in the Holy Qur'an as well as the Prophetic traditions. Though recent developments have turned the mosque to serve roles such as venues for naming and wedding Fatiha (ceremony), source of accommodation, seat of learning and social center, these roles are never primary to the mosque.

NOTES

1. *Holy Qur'an*, Surah 4: verse 3.

2. The best and most apt description of Allah is found in Surah Ikhlas (the Purity) (Q. 112: 859) where it is stated that: "Say, O Muhammad (PBUH):

i. He is Allah, (the) One.
ii. He is the Self-Sufficient Master, Whom all creatures need (He neither eats nor drinks).
iii. He begets not, nor is He begotten.
iv. And there is none co-equal or comparable to Him.

3. I. A. Jawondo, noted other roles as place for accommodation, as a meeting place, seat of learning and a social center. When looked more critically however mosques are not necessarily meant for those roles. Such roles are rather secondary roles, not roles primarily meant for the mosques. For such roles as discussed by Jawondo. See his doctoral dissertation, "The Place of the Mosque in the History of Ilorin Emirate, 1823–2000," Usman Danfodio University, Sokoto, Nigeria, 2004, 71–77.

4. The religion of Buddhism that is made up of the use of temples and palaces revolved around a central theme, the Buddha through meditation.

5. In his explanations for rebuilding the Prophet's mosque, the second Calipha, Uthman Ibn Affan stated that "I heard Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said that whoever built a mosque for Allah's sake, Allah will build for him a house in paradise." For details refer to, Mabarakpuri, Shaikh Safiur-Rahman, ed., *History of Madinah Munawwarah: A Concise Book about Madinah Munawwarah Specially for Guidance of Visitors* (Darussalam, Global Leader in Islamic Books, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 2002), 70.

6. Abu Khalil, Shawqi, ed., *Atlas on the Prophet's Biography: Places, Nations, Landmarks* (Darussalam, Global Leader in Islamic Books, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 2003), 62.

7. Mabarakpuri, Shaikh Safiur-Rahman, ed., *History of Makkah: A Concise Book about Makkah Specially for Guidance of Hajj Pilgrims*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Darussalam, Global Leader in Islamic Books, 2002), 34–47.

8. Islam consists of "five pillars": (1) the Shahadatayn or the "two testimonies of faith" (meaning the acknowledgement of God). (2) The five daily prayers (whose meaning is the attachment to God). (3) Giving alms or Zakat—one-fortieth of one's income and savings annually to the poor and destitute (whose meaning is the detachment from the World). (4) Fasting during the Holy month of Ramadan annually (whose meaning is detachment from the body and from the ego). (5) Making the Hajj (whose meaning is to return to one's true inner heart, the mysterious square, black-shrouded

Ka'ba in Makkah being the outward symbol of this heart). An important point to note in the case of the performance of the pilgrimage is that it is only mandatory on those in a sound condition to perform it.

9. This is one of the most important mosques in Islam. Its place in the history of Islam is best explained in one of the prophetic sayings that "whoever went out until he came to this mosque, Quba'a Mosque and prayed therein, it would be equivalent to performing 'Umrah' (i.e. in reward)." In another Hadith, the Prophet (PBUH) was reported saying "that I pray in Quba'a Mosque is more beloved to me than that I should pray in Baitul-Maqdia;" See Mubarakpuri, Shaikh Safiur-Rahman, *History of Madinah Munawwarah*, 110.

10. Muhammad K., and Hamid, M., *Zikra minal Madinatil Munawwarah* (Cairo, Egypt: Red Design and Co., 2002), 53.

11. In Quba'a the Prophet (PBUH) was hosted at the house of Kulthum bin Al-Hadm, of the tribe of Banu Amr bin Awf and he took his camel-pen and built a mosque and he took part in the building, and he prayed therein, and it is confirmed that it is the first mosque in which he prayed with his companions openly in congregation. See Mubarakpuri, Shaikh Safiur-Rahman, 109.

12. P. K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs* (Hong-Kong: Macmillan, 1984).

13. Mubarakpuri, Shaikh Safiur-Rahman, 109.

14. Muhammad K., et al., 53; See also, Mubarakpuri, Shaikh Safiur-Rahman, Ibid., 110.

15. Muhammad, K., and Hamid, M., *Zikra minal Madinatil Munawwarah* (Cairo, Egypt: Red Design and Co., 2002).

16. Idakwo, A. S. A. *Islamic Architecture: Mosque Design Across the Globe*, Graduate Terminal Essay, Department of Architecture, Faculty of Environmental Design, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 2002, 36.

17. A mosque is made of a standardised assembly of components that are subject to scale and usage. It may therefore range from small village sanctuary for few people to a principal Friday mosque that attracts larger audience (worshippers).

18. Dikka: This is a wooden platform of single step high positioned in line with the Mihrab, having its own staircase from which the top is accessed. Its function is to house the Qadi (respondent) of the mosque who repeats the initial postures of the Imam and speaks the response, in order for the stages of prayer to be transmitted by the size of the mosque. Dikka is mostly used in Anatolian region, one of which is the Dikka of Selimiye Mosque, and Edirne in Turkey;

Kursi: This is the lectern on which the Holy Qurán is placed and from which the Qadi reads and recites. It is usually placed next to the Dikka or by the side of the Mihrab, for those mosques without Dikka. It is found in most mosques in Iran;

Maqsura: This is a safe guard for the Imam against assassination attempt as experienced in the early years of Islam. Over the years, the use of this feature has diminished and most modern mosques do not have this special space. Idakwo, 42–45, made a detailed discussion of these features.

19. Muslim's prayer is guided by obligations that must be fulfilled before it is executed. Where for one reason a certain obligation is lost, the prayer is voided. For example, if in the course of the prayer the Imam should have his ablution voided,

anyone from among those behind him can take his place, while he goes out. Thus the essence of encouraging the knowledgeable ones in the first raw is to provide this form of support. It is also saying that Islam has a complete way of worship described and exemplified during the life time of the Prophet.

20. Interview Sheikh Ibrahim Sheikh Abdulqadir, Zaria, November 8, 2015, Islamic scholar, 50 years old.

21. *Holy Qur'an*, 2: 142; and 2: 144.

22. The function of Mu'azzim has a very distant history reaching out to the life time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This was on the circumstances of the increase in the number of Muslims and the development of Islam as a defined religion. The first issue was on how to call the attention of the community to the time of the five daily prayers, the necessity for this led to the appointment of a Mu'azzim with the responsibility to call prayers and to loudly repeat the commands of the Imam during prayer sessions. The function of the Mu'azzim is today of less relevance, beside the initial call to prayer due to the availability of loud speaker. Notwithstanding, a number of mosques still make use of the office, even in the Holiest mosques at Mecca and Medina. For detail on the history that produced the office of a Muázzim in Islam refer to Muhammad, K., and Hamid, M., *Zikra Minal Madinatil Munawwarah* (Cairo, Egypt: Red Design and Co., 2002).

23. Islamic religion is a highly disciplined religion with clear directives on how to conduct the rituals. It begins with the purification of the mind (heart) by the pronunciation of the conviction (*kalimat Shahada*) that there is none worthy of worship but Allah and that Muhammad is His messenger (Prophet). It prohibits a number of acts and directs the execution of some others for the purposes of purification. After having intercourse with ones wife, a special birth is expected before a Muslim should perform any religious obligation. Similarly if a non-Muslim converts to Islam, he is expected to purify himself by observing birthing. Such is emphasising the need for water and a toilet in any standard mosque, but neither the water nor the toilet hold any sacred status in Islam.

24. *Holy Qur'an*, 5:7.

25. *Holy Qur'an*, 4:43.

26. It can be in the form of an ordinary well common in most of our villages and cities in Nigeria, a tap, pots filled with water, or a well celebrated ablution pool in Mecca and Medina, as well as in other development countries.

27. Muslims are encouraged to neither face nor back the spiritual direction (Qibla) when urinating or defecating. The Qibla is the direction Muslims face when in prayer session and it is facing towards the holy Ka'aba.

28. At the beginning it used to be just a single minaret, under the Ottoman Sultanate it increased to two, occupying the two extreme sides of the Masjid (mosque). In its present state, the number has increased to about four as in the case of the main mosque Abuja, in Nigeria and indeed most central mosques around the world. Indeed experience has shown that there is no limit to the number of the minaret since the present purpose is more for decoration.

29. Idakwo, Abdulkarim Salifu A., *Islamic Architecture: Mosque Design across the Globe*, 57.

30. Ibid., 59.

31. Prince Charles, The Prince of Wales, "Islam and the West," a speech presented at the Oxford Center for Islamic Studies, The Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford, published on October 27, 1993.

32. Barack Obama, "On a New Beginning," Cairo University, Egypt, June 4, 2009.

33. The formation of *Izala* in 1978 contributed to the proliferation of mosques in Northern Nigeria. *Izala* emerged as a competing group in the religious space and condemned what they regarded as "polytheistic practices." They interpreted a number of Sufi practices as innovations hence unacceptable. The predominant nature of Sufi groups coupled with the influence of their *ulama* made Izala to be on the margin of the society. *Izala* constituted two fundamental challenges to the Sufi groups; it condemned the theological basis of the Sufi practices and competed for their religious space and followers. The only way that *Izala* could get followership was through building of independent mosques and schools in the *Sufi* dominated areas. They used theological rhetoric in their public lectures, daily *tafisr* and annual national *tafisr* to de-campaign Sufi followers with a view to luring their adherents. They chose to build mosques on the Metropolitan fringes of Kano metropolis, thus distancing them from what they perceived as Sufi led mosques.

34. Impliedly, the impact of this revolution would be the spread of *Shiism* beyond Iranian border to other parts of the Muslim world especially where *Sunnis* are the predominant populations. For more information see C. Cantone, *Making and Remaking Mosques in Senegal*, 14.

35. The spread of *Shiism* in Africa was a source of concern to Saudi Arabia because it would challenge its authority. Perhaps, the only move that could avert this threat was to commit resources and impact on the spiritual and symbolic life of the distant Muslims. Nasr further opines that the soaring oil prices poured untold billions into Saudi's coffers from 1974 onward, and the kingdom began to subsidize various Islamic courses through charities. Thousands of aspiring preachers, Islamic scholars and activists from Nigeria to Indonesia went to Saudi Arabia to study, and many joined Saudi funded think-tanks and research institutions. Saudi Arabia also built universities, schools, research institutions, and mosques in many Muslim countries. These schools, universities, and research institutions were meant to promote Islamic knowledge production, proselytization and check the spread of *Shiism* and Iran's influence, whose leader (Ayatollah Khomeini), wanted to assert his authority and justify his global outreach. The Saudi funded mosques are signposts for its religio-material influence and at the same time serving as springboards for the promotion of *Salafi*-oriented doctrines. It seems that this had worked for them and huge money was continuously injected into this project. For details, see V. Nasr (2006), *The Shia Revival: How Conflict within Islam will Shape the Future*, 14.

36. A. Tayob, *Islam in South Africa: Mosques, Imams, and Sermons*, published in association with Religion in Africa, a Series of the African Association for the Study of Religion, University Press of Florida, Gainesville, 1999, 115–136.

Section 2

CROSS-CULTURAL, ENVIRONMENTALIST PERSPECTIVES

Chapter 6

The Metaphysics of Space in Yoruba Traditional Religion

ʼBioDun J. Ogundayo

IFA ACROSS YORUBA CIVILIZATION

Ifa is a versatile corpus of knowledge in Yoruba civilization, culture, and traditional religion. It is rich in elements of myth, history, and legend. It is also a complex and comprehensive system of knowledge with its own epistemological principles. To have a basic sense of this episteme, we are reminded that Ifa must by necessity be understood on its own terms. However, this does not preclude the application of intellectual, or analytical, rigor to its discussion. Long before the advent of western presence in Yorubaland (especially in today's southwestern Nigeria), Ifa functioned as a Delphic oracle for the both the people and their leaders. Ifa was consulted in matters of life and death, sickness and health, adversity and prosperity. It had a preeminent role in shaping social cohesion and morality; as well as individual conscience and consciousness. For the Yoruba peoples Ifa provided a teleological context and focus for understanding earthly life, or existence, as a journey that could have both adventure and misadventure. It served as the point of departure for the Yoruba in their negotiations with life and its challenges. Ifa has been the arbiter of Yoruba value systems across the world and across time.

Over half millennia since the African encounter with the West, Ifa has survived to become even more relevant today, especially for the descendants of African slaves in the Americas and the Caribbean. Evidence of this fact abounds in the profusion and proliferation of internet resources dedicated to the phenomenon of Ifa. For example, a simple Google search for the term "Ifa" yields an average of over half a million results. For the Black diaspora, it has been a sure anchor of identity[1] and spirituality in an environment that still, and willfully, vitiates Black humanity and personhood via the instrumentality of

institutionalized white supremacist racism. Indeed, today on the continent of Africa itself, Ifa is a veritable source of knowledge and wisdom for the Yoruba people of Nigeria, Bénin Republic, Togo, and Ghana, even as these societies have been greatly impacted by the western spiritual traditions of Islam and Christianity. The average Yoruba still uses Ifa either as a source of practical ways of coping with existential challenges, or as a source of rich folk wisdom that provides clarity of thought in discourse and social interaction through its rich and versatile repertoire of truisms, sayings, metonymies, proverbs, aphorisms, metaphors, and others that the Yoruba deploy in conversation and communication. Despite aggressive evangelical (American) Christian proselytizing as well as fervent fundamentalist Islamic recruitment of agrarian Yoruba communities, Ifa is the arbiter of morality through the Babalawo, or Iyanifa and the propitiatory guidance they provide (ritual, rites, and behavioral choices). Even when they proclaim Christian or Islamic confession, today's Yoruba tend to present a syncretic outlook that most often incorporates elements of Ifa spirituality in the practice of their Abrahamic faiths. According to John S. Mbiti:

> It is not enough to learn and embrace a faith which is active once a week, either on Sunday or Friday, while the rest of the week is virtually empty. It is not enough to embrace a faith which is confined to a church [. . .] or mosque [. . .]. Unless Christianity and Islam fully occupy the whole person as much as, if not more than, traditional religions do, most . . . revert to their old beliefs and practices for perhaps six days a week, and certainly in times of emergency and crisis.[2]

Indeed, in most instances the theologies and practices of these religions seem insufficient for the average Yoruba as they seem unconnected and alien (and even irrelevant) to their lived experience and sense of self. Consequently, Ifa, or any other ancestral spiritual traditions, bridge this breach. Again, Mbiti explains:

> Traditional [African] religions are not primarily for the individual, but for his community of which he is part. Chapters of African religions are written everywhere in the life of the community, and in traditional society there are no irreligious people. [A] person cannot detach himself from the religion of his group, for to do so is to be severed from his roots, his foundation, his context of security, his kinships and the entire group of those who make him aware of his own existence. [. . .] Since traditional religions occupy the whole person and the whole of his life, conversion to new religions like Christianity and Islam must embrace his language, thought patterns, fears, social relationships, attitudes and philosophical disposition [. . .].[3]

In this chapter the focus is on Ifa geomancy, the accompanying paraphernalia in its practice, and the sacred space of the divinatory process, and the

space which Ifa and its accoutrements occupy when divination is not happening. Specifically, the geomantic tray, *opon Ifa*, offers an exciting opportunity to reconceptualize African space as a metaphysical and spiritual concept. Ifa divination is earth- or land-based. But it also connects the human and the divine. Even the constituting elements of the divinatory process are all derived, in their various iterations, from the earth. Land, the physical manifestation of space, is (re)presented in the opon Ifa as an inherently metaphysical (spiritual) concept, and it transcends the various sociologies of identity—gender, tribe, clan, class, or social status. Also, connections can be established between land, the earth, the opon Ifa, and the geomancy of Ifa, the primordial and primary way of knowledge and wisdom in Yoruba traditional religion. Thus, part of this essay will focus upon the reconceptualization of the Ifa divinatory paraphernalia, especially the opon Ifa (or divination tray) as the ultimate sacred African space because of its centrality and role in the construction, maintenance, and sustenance of African/Yoruba identity and spirituality. By its permanence, it symbolizes immortality (of the soul) for the Yoruba.

Multiple references have been made to the earth, land, the heavens, and space in Ifa literary corpus, and in Yoruba traditional religion and culture point to a metaphysics of space, and thus to a profoundly ecological attitude among the Yoruba about the world we live in. In other words, Ifa as a practice compels a more wholistic vision of the environment and nature. Thus, it is relevant to current global conversations about the environment and sustainability. The key notions of *isembaye* (myths of origin) and *ori* (predestination, destiny, and fate) are discussed with a view to determine or establish Yoruba historicity and ethics, since these transcend the sociologies of identity and rather emphasize the cosmological and universal nature of being, encompassing the ontological, the eschatological, and the apocalyptic.

IFA AS YORUBA PRIMORDIAL LITERARY TEXT

Ifa as text is a literary corpus of 256 *odu* (mysteries) or chapters. It belongs to the epic literary genre. Thanks to modern technology, it is now accessible in physical, or literary form to anyone literate enough to read it in either Yoruba, or English. The corpus has been translated and transliterated thereby making it even more accessible. As part of Yoruba literary tradition Ifa is a collection of poems, tales, myths, and legends, about historical and ordinary Yoruba characters, their feats and exploits, as well as their misdeeds and the consequences of these. It is the lore as well as the law of Yorubaland. It governs Yoruba attitudes in a very dynamic manner. Ifa text also contains a rich bestiary of animals, both ordinary and mythological. These animals

participate in the dramatic narratives of the odu, either as props, or vehicles for evacuating human transgressions and suffering, just like the sacrificial lamb of the Christian Bible.

Furthermore, the universality of Ifa as epic poetry inheres in what its bestiary has in common with the bestiaries of other great epic traditions such as the Chinese bestiary, Homer's *Iliad,* Aristotle's *Historia Animalium*, Medieval Europe's bestiary and to cite a more contemporary example, Jorge Luis Borges's *Book of Imaginary Beings*. As in these texts, Ifa literary corpus is a compendium of the natural world of Yorubaland; a world replete with real, mysterious, and mythological animals and plants which are allegorically presented to discerning Yoruba to teach moral lessons.[4] Thus, Ifa as text is not only evidence of Yoruba literary patrimony, it also demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of nature and the necessity (for humans) to coexist with it in harmony and balance, as will be discussed subsequently.

The odu are essentially poems meant to be declaimed, or chanted, during the encounter between the Ifa adept and their audience. Thus, the primordial role and power of the spoken word is inherent in and reiterated every time Ifa text is presented to an audience. The Ifa practitioner thus becomes an intermediary, or agent of primordial speech. Interaction with Ifa text is dramatic, intense, and profoundly spiritual. Indeed, there is an *odu* of Ifa that presents speech as spirit and truth. The 219th *odu* (Òsá-Òtúrá) or chapter has this to say:

I II
II I
I I
I I

Òsá-Òtúrá I kinni Òtító?
Emi I kinni Òtító?
Òrúnmìlà I Òtító ni Oluwa orun ti nto aye
Òsá-Òtúrá I kinni Òtító?
Emi I kinni Òtító?
Òrúnmìlà I Òtító li Eni airi ti nto aye
Ogbón ti Olodumare nlo. Ogbón nla,
Opolopo Ogbón
Òsá-Òtúrá I kinni Òtító
Emi I kinni Òtító?
Òrúnmìlà I Òtító ni iwa Olodumare,
Òtító ni Oro ti ko le subu.
Ifa li Òtító, Òtító ni Oro ti ko le baje
Agbara nla, Ajulo, Ire ailopin
A difa fun aye, A ni ki won maase Òtító
Ki awon omo araye le maa mo Òtító lati inu wa

Kio si le ro won lorun lati maase Òtító [. . .]
Eni s' òtító ni Imàlè yoo gbe o . . .[5]

English Translation
Òsá-Òtúrá asks: What is Truth?
I ask: What is Truth?
Òrúnmìlà says: Truth is the way of the Almighty
Guiding the earth . . .
Òsá-Òtúrá says: What is Truth?
I say: What is Truth?
Òrúnmìlà says: Truth is the unseen One guiding the earth
The wisdom of the Almighty; great wisdom, limitless wisdom
Òsá-Òtúrá asks: What is Truth?
I ask: What is Truth?
Òrúnmìlà says: Truth is the essence of the Almighty
Truth is the Word that never fails
Ifa is Truth
Truth is the Word that never spoils
Truth is mighty power, surpassing all
Truth is eternal blessing
People of the earth must live the Truth
The inner Truth so they will have peace
In living the Truth . . .*[6]

This reminds us of the Verb of the Christian Bible,[7] or the Judaic reverence for vowels in the Torah. The Ifa epic is not unlike others across continents and cultures. It is the fundamental text of Yoruba ontology, mythopoesis, and ethics. It is the text that explains the cosmos and ultimate reality to the Yoruba. It can be considered as the Yoruba sacred text—a repository of wisdom not only on how to live a good life, but also on how to simply live; simply be—in truth and harmony with themselves and the divine. Thus, Ifa as roadmap is prescriptive, descriptive and, sometimes proscriptive.

Comparable to *Genesis* of the Christian Bible, the Mayan *Book of Community*, or *Popol Vuh*, the Finnish *Kalevala*, or the *Japanese Nihon-gi*, or *Kojiki*[8] Ifa literary epic has universal themes. In its grandeur it is accepting of contradictions. It is also endlessly capable of being reinterpreted, re-presented, and therefore versatile and relevant across time. For example, eminent scholars have compared its binary, or quaternary, mathematics to that of modern computing, which is the very foundation of today's internet and information technologies. Harold Courlander, in his *Treasury of African Folklore* offers this pertinent observation on the African epic and its universality:

> Man in Africa, as elsewhere, has sought to relate his past to his present, and to tentatively explore the future so that he might not stand lonely and isolated

> in the great sweep of time, or intimidated by the formidable earth and the vast stretch of surrounding seas. In his myths and legends he bridges back to the very dream morning of creation, while in his systems of divination he projects himself into time not yet come; in his epics he asserts the courage and worth of the human species; in his tales he ponders on what is just or unjust, upon what is feeble or courageous, what is sensible or ridiculous, on what moves the spirit to grief or to exultation; in his proverbs and sayings he capsulates the learnings of centuries about the human character and about the intricate balance between people and the world around them.[9]

From the foregoing, Ifa is worthy of study as part of African literary canon and as a masterpiece of the world's oral traditions. Ifa as literature bespeaks of the depth, versatility, as well as the relevance of Yoruba culture and creativity as major contribtuions to human civilization and universal culture. Indeed, this fact was acknowledged by the United Nations in 2005. Thanks to the efforts of the late Yoruba scholar and philosopher, Akinwunmi Ishola, Ifa literary corpus was nominated and formally proclaimed as a masterpiece of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity. According to the United Nations: "The literary corpus is a treasury of knowledge concerning Yoruba history, philosophy, medicine and mythology."[10]

IFA AS SACRED AND THEOLOGICAL TEXT

Compared to the western and Abrahamic religions, Yoruba traditional religion does not have a single, coded, or written text such as the Bible, the Torah, or the Qur'an. While these texts were birthed in mystery and myth, across history they all have been subjected to all manner of discussion, debate, dissension, and even denial in response to specific epochs and their needs. Thus, bodies of texts have emerged from these foundational texts to form intricate palimpsests of interpretation, reinterpretations, dogma, and doctrine governing the very notions of what it is to be Jewish, Christian, or Muslim. All these texts have been, and still are, hermetic in their substances—replete with dizzying and endless possibilities for interpretation, re-invention, or even mis-interpretation. Every hermeneutic tradition and practice involves both the esoteric and exoteric aspects to the foundational texts.

It is no surprise that scholars of the esotericism of these texts devote entire lifetimes to them such that what they do becomes a vocation; a calling without attendant material or pecuniary rewards (prizes, titles, and cash). Wisdom, or gnosis, becomes its own reward. In the end they become or embody this wisdom. Let us also remember that scholars of antiquity were called philosophers and philosophy was the mother of all sciences (*scientia*, or knowledge).

In this sense, Ifa is no different. It requires a lifetime of total commitment to its learning, which in turn necessitates a becoming, or a series of changes in consciousness of the Ifa adept. In contemporary, western secular context, academic professors and scholars are obvious equivalent examples. This may explain why there are millions of Yoruba, but very few Babalawo, or Iyanifa, just like there are millions of Jews, Christians, and Moslems, but very few rabbis, cardinals, or ulema.

Ifa corpus as a hermetic metanarrative, or master oral text, in the sense of text being any mode of re-presentation and communication of reality, morality, knowledge, and wisdom undergirds Yoruba traditional religion. Therefore, Ifa text can be conceptualized as a sacred or theological text in that it commands the attention and reverence of its audience because it is mystical, mythical, and primordial speech imbued with the power to create, to heal, to inspire, to destroy, or to regenerate. It is the source from which almost all other narratives in Yoruba life and spirituality derive their value and meaning. It speaks with authority. It is indeed authority. The Babalawo is the human embodiment of the totality of the Ifa oral texts. He is, in his person, a sacred space, together with his divination paraphernalia, and any physical space he occupies is transformed into an African sacred space as a result. His clients must comport themselves with due reverence whenever in his presence.

The Ifa adept starts as a neophyte who, during their training, must memorize, through mnemotechnic, and the ingestion of ìsòyè ("that which awakens the mind")—a herbal potion designed to open up and sharpen the neophyte's intellect and make it receptive to all the 256 chapters and accompanying knowledge and code of ethics. These chapters contain thousands of verses when transcribed with modern alphabets. At the end of their training, the Ifa priest is described as having ingested the Verb (or Ifa) ('O ti je Oro, o ti je Ifa, ase wa l'enu e')[11] and thus possess (*ase)* the power to bring into manifestation through speech in all its variety—chants, incantations, blessings, curses, invocations, proclamations, etc. According to the Ifa sage, Wande Abimbola:

> after a trainee has properly memorized the first sixteen *ese,* the task of learning Ifa is greatly aided by a medicinal preparation known as ìsòyè which they take with their food three times a day. This is supposed to make it impossible for any priest to forget any ese which he has already learnt.[12]

The Babalawo, or Iyanifa begin each day with this invocation, which is cited from Epega and Neimark's The Sacred Ifa Oracle:

> Òrúnmìlà! Elérí Ipín
> Ibikeji Olodumare
> A-je-ju-Oogun

Obiriti, A-p'ijó-ikú-da
Oluwa mi, Ato-i-ba-j'ayé
Oro a-bi-ku-j'igbo
Olúwa mi, Ajiki
Ogègè a-gb'ayé-gún
Odúdú ti ndu orí èmèrè
A-tún-orí-kò sunwon se
A-mo-i-kú
Olówa Aiyere
Agiri Ilé-llógbón
Oluwa mi; amoimotán
A kò mo O tan kose
A bà mo tán ìbà se ke.[13]

English Translation
Òrúnmìlà! Witness of fate,
Second to God Almighty
Thou art far more efficacious than medicine
Thou the Immense Orbit that averts the day of Death
My Lord, Almighty to save
Mysterious Spirit that cheats death
To thee salutation is due first in the morning
Thou Equilibrium that adjusts the earth's forces
Thou are the One whose task it is to reconstruct the
Creature of bad lot; Repairer of misfortune,
He who knows thee becomes immortal.
My Lord, the undeposable king,
Perfect in the House of Wisdom!
My Lord! Infinite in knowledge!
For not knowing thee in full, we are futile
Oh, if we could but know thee in full,
All shall be well with us.

In making this invocation the Ifa adept, even though extremely knowledgeable in Ifa and its practice, must demonstrate the utmost humility and reverence for the Verb that Ifa embodies and symbolizes. To perform the magic (etymologically speaking) of his vocation, for it is a vocation, not a job, the magus must first acknowledge the hierarchies (again, etymologically speaking), or source(s) of his being and status namely, the Yoruba hermetic deity—Orunmila and God Almighty—Olodumare. An interesting fact to note is that this invocation predates and sounds like the Yoruba version of the Christian hymn, *The Doxology*, composed by Thomas Ken (1637–1711) in that both begin the day by acknowledging the presence of the superhuman and divine and the need for them in human affairs. The Christian hymn is a

staple of morning worship in every Christian Yoruba household, and it is fair to ask whether Christian Yoruba are even aware that the Orunmila invocation might be the basis for the Yoruba rendition/translation of Thomas Ken's liturgical masterpiece:

E fi iyin fun Olorun
E yin, e yin, eda aye
E yin eyin eda Orun
Yin Baba, Omo, on Emi.[14]

English Translation
Praise God from whom all blessings flow
Praise Him all creatures here below
Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Ifa as oracle provides the myriad responses, or attempted responses that the Yoruba need to understand the great themes and challenges of the human condition: God, the devil, good versus evil, the purpose of life, life and death, etc. In other words, Ifa offers a roadmap (or roadmaps) to the Yoruba throughout their sojourn here on earth. Ifa shapes Yoruba attitudes, choices, and self-knowledge through ritual, sacrifice, and specific behavior patterns to adopt in negotiating life. The text of Ifa, through practice and reinterpretations, full of contradictions just like epics across the world, offers great insights into the psychology of the Yoruba, individually and socially. It offers multiple opportunities for the unfolding and expression of Yoruba being, rootedness, and belonging. What does it mean to be rooted? What does it mean to be destined, or fated? How do the Yoruba conceptualize related concepts of personhood, choice, and action? All these questions find answers in the overarching, complex, and intertwined concepts of *iwa* and ori in Yoruba life and spirituality. There are no single-word translations in the English (or Europhone) languages for these terms. In this regard the myth of the three souls, in the Ogbegunda odu of Yoruba lore, which functions as a prologue to the Ifa corpus, offers some clarity, and it is worth recalling that myth here.

Three souls, Oríseékù (son of Ogun, the god of iron), Oríléemèrè (son of Ija, a minor deity), and Afùwàpé (son of Orunmila-Ifa), leave the world above to sojourn on earth. After taking on their physical beings, molded by Obàtálá, the deity charged with molding the human form, the three are warned to go straight to the foundry of Àjàlá, the mythical molder of ori, or destiny, to choose their destinies with which they would live on earth. Àjàlá is the only one able to discern good ori from bad ori. In other words, Àjàlá is part of the divine order responsible for the human condition. However, only

the third soul, Afùwàpé, ignores the warning; as he seeks the counsel of his father, Orunmila, and his priests. Their divination advises Afùwàpé on what propitiatory ingredients (salt, cowries, and humility, or patience) were to be crucial in his encounter with Àjàlá, who by the way, was always indebted and hiding from his creditors. Meanwhile, earthbound souls proliferate at Àjàlá's compound, weary, waiting and impatient as he is in hiding in the rafters. We are reminded that once chosen no soul can change their *ori,* or destiny. As he makes his way to Àjàlá Afùwàpé encounters an elderly woman who needed very scarce and expensive salt to add flavor to her insipid stew. He offers her the salt and she is greatly appreciative of Afùwàpé's gesture. In gratitude, the woman divulges information about Àjàlá's chronic debts. Armed with this knowledge, Afùwàpé could use his large load of cowries, which is the local currency, to defray Àjàlá's debts. Again, Àjàlá in turn commits to mold and shape the strongest, the most fortunate, and the toughest ori for Afùwàpé so that would not only survive travails, but and thrive as well on his earthly sojourn.

Meanwhile, Afùwàpé's two comrades, Oríseékù and Oríléemèrè, after waiting interminably for Ajala to mold the appropriate ori for them, impatiently go to his backyard and pick the nearest available ori and leave for the world. Upon their arrival, each of them suffers the five evils of Yoruba religion namely, poverty, disease and ill-health, no family or lineage (due to impotence, sterility, or barrenness), bad luck, and finally short lives. Whereas Afùwàpé arrives in the world endowed with a destiny that enjoys the five good of Yoruba religion: abundance, wealth, family (many wives and lots of children), good health, and longevity which all culminate in a peaceful death. In short, Afùwàpé lives a full and accomplished life, and his earthly sojourn ends well. His story has a happy ending and it symbolizes an optimistic outlook among Yoruba if one has chosen a good destiny. This myth bears further discussion.

First, in a Neoplatonist, or gnostic sense, the deities mentioned in the myth can be described as hypercosmic entities for they create the essences, lives, and souls of the three protagonists. Indeed, they overdetermine (in analytic philosophy, or Freudian psychoanalysis) the fates of the three souls before, and upon their arrival on earth. These entities are agents of the Creator, or Olodumare. Conversely, Àjàlá the shaper of ori also functions as a demiurge, or creator, even though subordinate to the Supreme Being, Olodumare. Furthermore, the complexity of Yoruba metaphysics is enhanced when we consider that Orunmila, Ogun, and even the elderly woman of the myth could also be demiurges because they are co-creators (or co-conspirators in the fates) of Afùwàpé, Oríseékù, and Oríléemèrè of the myth being discussed.

Second, the names of the three friends of the myth offer important insights into how Yoruba names are poignant signifiers and indicators of individuality, or personhood. A person's names encapsulate who they are and will be; what they are and will be . . . across the spectrum and dynamics of their humanity. A Yoruba person's name is indicative of their destiny, their life circumstances. And these include time, date, family situation at, and during, conception and actual natality, potential for success (or failure), moral and even physical outlook, as well as the implications of all these throughout their life. It is not an accident that Yoruba do not name a newborn until after the seventh day of birth. Until then the new baby is often referred to as *alejo*, or sojourner from the world beyond. Thus, every Yoruba person has their own, personal, myth of origin and their name (*abiso*—birth derived name). Hence Yoruba names are really mini-narratives of each individual's biography (or even résumé)! Except for the uninitiated, the names of Afùwàpé and his two fellow travelers in the myth previously told are revelatory enough of what fate eventually befalls each of them.

Oríseékù literally means "truncated, or unfulfilled destiny"; while Oríléemèrè is "the un-individuated, mischievous and metempsychotic soul from the world of spirits prone to short life, mischief, evil, and wickedness in the human realms."[15] The contrast between these two and their "lucky" friend could not be starker as the latter's name, Afùwàpé, literally means "he who overcomes and lives long by dint of his character"!

Third, the *Ogbegunda*, or Afùwàpé myth clearly presents a metaphysics of space in Yoruba traditional religion and imaginary because the whole mythical narrative unfolds *in illo tempore*, outside of the human concept of time. Indeed, by its very nature, myth transcends history (time and space). It is a *telling*, not a *showing*, and it can be reiterated infinitely without ever being irrelevant to the past or present because it responds to specific historical needs and contexts. When we first encounter the three sojourners they are only names. They are non-human (souls? spirits?) and as there are no descriptions of their physicality. So, they are divine beings whose trajectories begin in the divine realm populated by superhuman beings. The drama of their incarnation takes places in two major sacred spaces namely, Òrúnmìlà's domain and Àjàlá's foundry. Also, the intermediary space occupied by the elderly woman is transformed into yet another sacred space because she is presented to us a divine intercessor for Afuwape, just as his father and Ajala are. Furthermore, earth where the three destinies will manifest also becomes transformed into a sacred (negatively and positively) space because the three souls emanated from way beyond the earth. The concept of *isembaye*, or origins is what makes both the worlds of up above and here below sacred spaces because human and divine beings participate in both.

Fourth, the Afùwàpé myth implies a certain determinism, or predestination in Yoruba thought because ironically Afùwàpé and his companions seem destined to end in vastly different circumstances. The following questions are worth pondering: Where is justice in what happened to Oríléemèrè and Oríseékù? Why were they fated to end up how they did? Was their misfortune due to some karmic penalty they had to pay? By implication, did they live poorly in a previous incarnation to merit their current fate? Why did Afuwape choose to ignore the injunction to head straight to Àjàlá's foundry? What force or power placed Orunmila and the elderly woman in Afùwàpé's path as guides to his subsequent good fortune on earth?

To all these questions it could be argued that one answer that emerges is that of freewill expressed through individual choice, or action, or ìwà. The individual is not just a hapless and helpless pawn at the mercy of fate. Despite advice, the three souls had agency in their destinies. Two of them, Oríléemèrè and Oríseékù, made choices at specific points on their way to the earth. They heeded the injunction to head straight for Àjàlá's foundry without reflection or pause. Next, they chose not to wait any longer for Ajala and they acted upon their choice in selecting by themselves, their own ori, thereby transgressing a taboo when arrogated to themselves the sacred task and role of Ajala, even though they are not *irunmale*, or deities in the Yoruba pantheon; even though there were others that had been awaiting Ajala. Both were victims of their character flaws.

First, they lacked the insight and patience to proceed with caution. Second, and in contrast, Afuwape demonstrated aspects of omolúwàbí.[16] Omolúwàbí refers to a person of unimpeachable virtue and character who embodies the following attributes: humility, intuition, foresight, physical and moral courage, intellect (judgment, self-knowledge, self-control, silence, and verbal dexterity), wisdom (including knowledge, cunning, and guile—when appropriate) kindness, and generosity, among others. Omolúwàbí as a concept of personhood also means that the individual so described consistently cultivates appropriate, relevant, thought processes, and habits that they adapt to life's changing circumstances and events. Briefly put, these are dynamic individuals, reflections of the divine spark that created *aye* or the universe. They are *exemplars* whose reputations always precedes them. In death they become mythical, or legendary figures in Yoruba tradition, such as *Ogun*, *Sango*, *Yemoja*, *Osun*, or even *Ifa* of the Yoruba pantheon. Also, they become ancestral figures whose spiritual help is often invoked by the living. As avatars, these ancestors connect the living Yoruba to their past and, in so doing perpetuate the eternal and cosmic cycles of ultimate reality.

OPON IFA AS AFRICAN SACRED SPACE

According to *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*:

> Space, inseparable from time, is simultaneously the place where all is potential—and . . . where all is actualized—and in this sense [space] symbolizes the cosmos or ordered universe. Space . . . cannot be measured . . . the centre cannot be determined. . . . Space symbolizes the infinity in which the universe moves . . . a dynamic sphere of limitless expansion. Space embraces the entire universe, actual and potential.[17]

Any space defined, or described, as sacred should not be valorized as such from a purely positivist, and reductionist, perspective as is the wont of religionists. The sacred is a totalizing phenomenon that includes both the negative and positive polarities of time, space, and being. In other words, it includes both good and evil in their broadest cosmological dimensions. Thus, evil should not be the material opposite of good, but as a countervailing energy that participates in good. So is the reverse. A most pertinent illustration of this can be found in the story of Job of the Christian Bible. Again, the Yoruba succinctly express this through their proverb: "*Bi a ba nro rere, ki a maa ro ibi*" (When contemplating good, be conscious of its twin—evil). The foregoing is relevant to our discussion of Ifa geomancy tray as sacred African space.

Ifa is both a divinatory practice and a deity in Yoruba culture. It is mythological in the sense that is closely bound with Yoruba identity (origins, history, and religion) as stated previously. Myth has it that Ifa, in the Yoruba pantheon of deities and daemons, is the closest deity to *Olodumare*, the Supreme Being and Creator. Described invariably as *Ekeji Olodumare*, Ifa is also known by another appellation: Orunmila (literally: only the Heavens know where the lots of destiny fall). Comparatively speaking, Ifa parallels Hermes of Hesiod's *Theogony* as the mediator of communication between the human and divine realms. Just like Hermes, Ifa is the guardian of the secrets and mysteries of God Almighty. But Ifa is also an epistemological system that informs the actions, choices, and destinies of the Yoruba people, individually and socially. As systems go, Ifa has its devotees, practitioners, and specific paraphernalia through which it finds expression and gives meaning to the people.

Who are the Yoruba, and where is Yorubaland, the home of Ifa geomantic divination? According to the historian, Anthony I. Asiwaju,[18] three concentric circles of the Yoruba as a people can be discerned. First, the innermost, or ancestral homeland, extending from southwestern Nigeria

(west of River Niger) extending into Bénin Republic, Togo, and southeastern Ghana. Second, the outer, or Yoruba-related peoples, east of the River Niger; ranging upwards to southern parts of northern Nigeria. Third, the outermost, or Yoruba of the Americas, particularly in Brazil, Argentina, Cuba, Trinidad, the United States, who are mainly descendants of enslaved Africans, and recent Yoruba immigrants who have kept alive their religion and spiritual traditions in the Black Diaspora. But this last circle includes Yoruba populations in Sierra Leone, Gambia (descendants of returned slaves), and Côte d'Ivoire—due to modern migration as the Yoruba are easily the most urbanized Africans who are comfortable traveling and settling beyond their native homeland. The Yoruba readily embrace sojourning in other lands as the motif of life as a journey is essential to Yoruba psyche and the understanding thereof.

Figure 6.1. Map of Nigeria: Shaded Area is innermost and ancestral Yorubaland. Compare with Figure 6.2.
Map generated by Author

Figure 6.2. Map of Nigeria and the Yoruba states where Ifa divination is active. Yorùbáland covers 8 of 36 Nigerian states. A: Lagos State, B. Ogun State, C. Ondo State, D. Osun State, E. Oyo State, F. Kwara State, G. Ekiti State, H. Kogi State.
Map generated by Author

Figure 6.3. Map of Africa: Yoruba migration and dispersal are indicated by arrows.
Map generated by Author

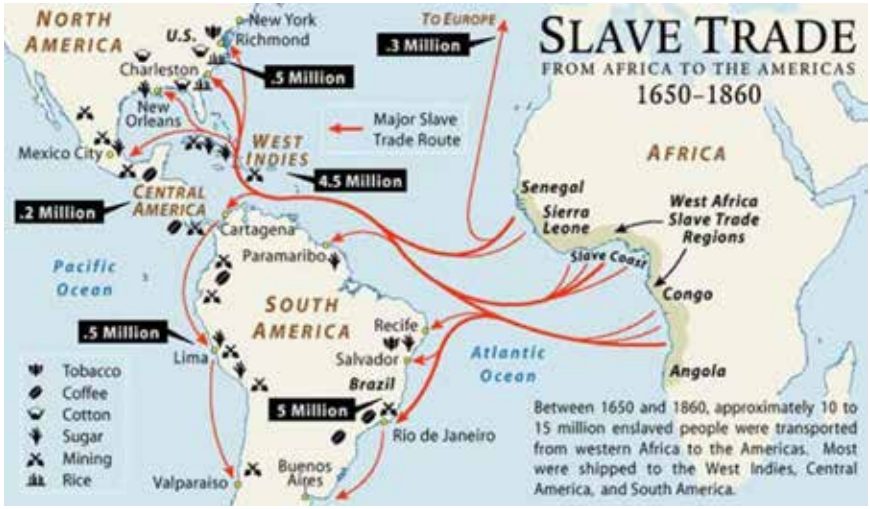

Figure 6.4. African Diaspora: Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries.
Map generated by Author

Ifa divination is the preeminent mode and method of knowing in Yoruba religion and culture. It is not exclusionary in that a Christian or Moslem Yoruba sees no contradiction in consulting Ifa about major life decisions (such as marriage, building a house, creating children, or traveling abroad) for a better life, and asking their local priest or imam to intercede for them. Ifa divination is a practical and functional tool that gives depth and purpose to the Yoruba person's choice. It is a way of co-opting the powers of the divine for complete success. The Yoruba regard life as a long journey for which everyone needs allies and all the help they can get along the way. Ifa divination is also used by contiguous cultures such as the Edo, Itsekiri, Ewe of Togo (Afa), the Ga people of Ghana, and the Fon of Bénin who call it *Fa*.[19]

For the citizens of the Black Diaspora, especially in the Americas and the Caribbean, Ifa has in recent years generated much interest and has been increasingly promoted as an alternate cosmogonic and complex belief system comparable to Christianity, or Islam in the imaginary of the descendants of African slaves. For them it is indubitable proof of Black genius and creativity. There, it has provided for them a platform for the validation of Black people's contribution to human civilization—contrary to the dehumanizing and racist claims of the intellectual traditions of Euro-American Enlightenment as obvious in the writings of Hegel, Kant,[20] Hume, Jefferson, and Gobineau, to cite a few. Today myriad resources exist online and in libraries

on the history, role, and practice of Ifa geomancy for both the merely curious and the assiduous seeker.

It is also relevant to describe and discuss Ifá practice, the training, and equipment required for the reader to have a basic but sober understanding of Ifa practices and its ethics. To be fully qualified as a Babalawo, Oluwo, Iyanifa, or Ifá priest/priestess, a neophyte must undergo a series of initiations that take between three and fifteen years before they can become adept at divination, Ifa oral poetry skills, Ifa ethno-botany and ethno-psychiatry, and all knowledge connected to Ifa as traditional religion and practice. Bascom on the "academic" and professional training of the Babalawo has this to say:

> the duration of the period of training, mentioned by diviners in their own cases, varied from three, [. . .] to nine and ten years; but none of them stopped learning when it was completed. The informant who dictated most of the verses had been studying Ifá thirty years, and most diviners continue to study Ifa as long as they live, either by associating with their colleagues while they are divining, or by paying other diviners to teach them specific verses or medicines. Once a diviner has agreed to teach a particular verse or medicine and payment has been received, he must teach it correctly without holding back any part of it.[21]

From this quote comes the observation that Ifa is not for the cultural tourist, any more than Christian, or Islamic, esotericism, and practice are for the merely curious. Knowledge of Ifa is not only a way of *knowing*, but a way of *being* that engages the entire human being their entire life. Furthermore, there is also an ethical aspect to training, becoming and being a Babalawo or Iyanifa. The Ifá priest swears, at the end of their training, to never personally enrich themselves from the wisdom and knowledge acquired, to use the same to help, cure, and treat all those who come in need of Ifa's perennial wisdom. If they must be compensated, must be on the client's initiative. Aspects of this code of ethics reminds us of the priestly vows of humility, celibacy, and poverty in the Roman Catholic Church. According to Wande Abimbola:

> No babalawo should use his position to enrich himself in any way; he must not refuse anybody his service on account of money—if any person is too poor to pay the customary pittance for divination, the babalawo must divine for him free . . . ; or if the person cannot afford the prescribed sacrifice, the babalawo must take whatever he can afford and translate the will [of Ifa] for the deed. It seems, in fact, that the babalawo is under a vow of poverty, to spend himself in the service of the community, making just enough to keep himself, his real reward being in the service of Orunmila.[22]

But, an even more relevant comparison of Ifa priestly ethics can be found in the Hippocratic Oath, parts of which are quoted here:

> I will follow that system of regimen which, according to my ability and judgment, I consider for the benefit of my patients, and abstain from whatever is deleterious and mischievous. I will give no deadly medicine to any one if asked, nor suggest any such counsel; [. . .] With purity and with holiness I will pass my life and practice my Art. [. . .] Into whatever houses I enter, I will go into them for the benefit of the sick, and will abstain from every voluntary act of mischief and corruption; [. . .] Whatever, in connection with my professional practice or not, in connection with it, I see or hear, in the life of men, which ought not to be spoken of abroad, I will not divulge, as reckoning that all such should be kept secret. While I continue to keep this Oath unviolated, may it be granted to me to enjoy life and the practice of the art, respected by all men, in all times! But should I trespass and violate this Oath, may the reverse be my lot![23]

Indeed, there can be no Yoruba spirituality without the opon Ifá. The tools of divination so to speak, include ecologically (from plants and nature) derived elements, to emphasize the interconnection between nature and the divine. These include:

- ***opon Ifá***—geomancy, or divination tray
- ***ikin***—palm nuts, or seeds (or cowrie shells); sixteen in number (even kola nuts are used when improvisation requires this, but the number must still be sixteen
- ***opele***—geomantic, or divination chain
- ***iyerosun***—the powder is used in Ifa divination, spread across the face of the geomantic tray to mark the odu during the divination proceedings
- ***ebo***—objects of sacrifice or propitiation

In discussing the symbolism of Ifa sacerdotal paraphernalia the very physical spaces where the divinations take place, and where Ifa instruments are subsequently housed are African sacred spaces because they participate in, as well as create the ambience and energy for the divinatory experience and worship. While the space of divination is not Ifa paraphernalia, it is nonetheless imbued with sacredness because it houses all elements of Ifa divination and ethno-medical practice. Each divination process, for each querent, is ceremonial, elaborate, and detailed. It is an act of worship (of appropriate Yoruba deities, the client's *ori and guardian spirits*, and Olodumare) that involves the participation of both the sacred and the profane. The *opon Ifá* is thus the altar and the focal point for the unfolding of the sacred process. Yet again, the comparison to a Christian worship ceremony is so obvious. It must be noted that both, while similar as performative religious acts, are not one and the same, and therefore not identical. This is what makes the Ifa geomantic tray the quintessential African sacred space.

As an indigenous way of knowing the divination is based on binary or quaternary mathematics[24] whereby sixteen palm nuts, or cowrie shells are held in the right palm, while one or two are retained in the left. While there are various iterations of the Ifa divinatory process, the following description is best suited for the purpose in this chapter:

> The Ifa divination process begins when a client consults a diviner, and the diviner casts the divining chain (opele) on the divining mat or uses a set of sixteen palm nuts to arrive at a solution. The result of divination is referred to as the Signature or Signs of Ifa, which in principle may be one of 256 possible signs, forming a double tetragram produced by manipulating the sixteen palm nuts [of the divining chain]. With his finger, the diviner traces the Signs of Ifa, now discernible in the yellow divining powder (iyerosun) sprinkled over the surface of the divining tray (opon Ifá). Thus, the diviner pronounces the results, and chanting, he recites the message of the Signature of the Ifa deity who appears in the process. The diviner explains the message to the client, prescribing appropriate sacrifices to be carried out.[25]

All life's questions and contradictions find answers in Ifa geomancy. The geomancy tray is a versatile vehicle for the Yoruba in throughout life's journey. It is the space where the sacred and the profane converge in a *coincidentia oppositorum* to resolve all existential challenges. The location of the querent, or ògbèrì, becomes the domain of the profane, the mundane, and the secular (literally the *pro-fanum* of ancient Roman temples—the space before the altar) which is connected via the geomantic tray to the sacred world of the Ifa and the initiate babalawo. Before proceeding, Henry J. Drewal's groundbreaking work on the iconography of Ifa geomantic must be mentioned here as a great resource that highlights the connections between Yoruba art, Ifa divination, especially the *opon Ifa* and Yoruba religion and spirituality.[26]

The symbolism of the geomantic tray enhances its role as a sacred space. There are two basic forms: circular, or rectangular. Both trays have bestiaries etched on the outermost edges. These zoomorphic images are set on the tray in the manner of a procession. These animals, especially the birds, are of symbolic importance in Yoruba traditions because they possess supernatural, or mystical powers and abilities. These can reflect the individual Babalawo's totems, spiritual lineage, and professional affinities. In turn all connect the priest to the larger communal, cultural, Yoruba spiritual contexts. The circle by its very shape represents totality and infinity. The opon Ifá is thus symbolic of the totality of the cosmos. The circular form recalls the universe, the globe, the human womb, or the Cosmic Egg redolent in many of the world's mythologies. It is a space of the Kabbalistic No-thing where the unknown, and the potential, the beginning and the end, are brought into manifestation

through the Babalawo, the intent and focus of the client; all infused with the wisdom of Ifa, Orunmila and Olodumare. As a matrix, or womb, the circular opon Ifá is sacred African space in Yoruba imaginary because it functions as an altar where the ritual of divination occurs. In this space time becomes a continuum of pasts, presents; all melded into the eternal present, where history while relevant, is not the primary shaper of man's trajectory through life. Herein lies the optimism of Ifa: the Yoruba individual can reshape their destiny. Perhaps this is the ultimate message of the Afuwape myth. Choice and personal responsibility are major factors in being Yoruba. While à*y*à*nm*ó (what soul is fated to become) may be the deterministic aspect of ori, à*k*ú*n-l*èyàn (what the soul chooses to become) counterbalances that because the soul also has freewill, or liberty. Thus Ifa divination becomes a tool of choice for the Yoruba to counter some of the deleterious effects of fate during life here on earth.

In the opon Ifa and what it reveals, humans can recreate, or overcome history because Ifa can resolve all challenges by providing appropriate answers for the querent. Indeed, the moment of divination, the space of divination, become yet another reiteration of the original act of creation by Olodumare who through Orunmila knows all the secrets of life, death, individual destinies, and all of existence; and expresses the same through their agents—the Babalawo and his divination tools, specifically the opon Ifá. During each divination on the tray, Yoruba being, rootedness, and belonging are renewed and affirmed individually, socially, ethnically, and universally, or metaphysically. The tray and the acts of divination on it all always happen in *illo tempore*.

After divination all elements mentioned earlier must be returned to a space appropriate for, and dedicated to Ifa—*igbó Ifa*, or *agbo Ifá*. These places are sacred. This is usually a shrine, or grove. In Yorubaland these shrines and groves command overwhelming awe, reverence, and even terror within the community. Activities such as hunting, fishing and farming are prohibited in these spaces because doing so is sacrilegious, or *taboo*, and capable of inciting the wrath of the gods. Also, those who find themselves on the Ifa grounds must have no footwear; no matter how uncomfortable that might be. They are on sacred ground, in a sacred space; in the presence of the sacred. They must submit to its power and energies, for the spirits are believed to be watching and listening. Thus, the sacred space Ifa occupies is comparable to those of the church, mosque, or synagogue of the Abrahamic religious traditions. People are forbidden from loitering or wandering therein except by necessity.

The Ifá shrine, as sacred African space, itself is a living, vibrant, being that must be maintained and sustained for it to be efficacious for all who seek Ifa's knowledge and wisdom in facing the world. According to Margaret Thompson Drewal, in an interview with an Ijebu Ifa devotee and priest:

> [W]here the spirit of the deity, which is an active force, may reside. It is composed of containers holding vital ingredients to activate the spirit; objects necessary for the diviner's performance; [. . .]. Because it resides at that place, the spirit must be continually fed and nourished through sacrifice. [. . .] If a person neglects his shrine, that is if he does not offer it food—however little—the spirits will leave. Therefore, when a shrine is neglected, all you are seeing are the images . . . the person has relegated the deities to *idols,* ordinary images . . . Deities do *not* come because of the images; images come because of the deities.[27]

Ifa divination is an indigenous way of knowing that must be studied and understood on its own terms as stated at the beginning of this essay. It has provided the Yoruba, long before the advent of Christianity or Islam, the tools, (spiritual, religious, psychological, cultural, and historical) with which to respond to the human condition, especially the evils and challenges resulting from the encounter with the west. It is a dynamic and vibrant expression of African and Yoruba capacity for mythmaking and survival. The ethnocentric and arrogant tendency in Western intellectual traditions to proffer civilized models and modes of thought are constantly (and rightfully) subverted by civilizations such as the Yoruba that clamor for inclusion in the universal human culture and spirituality in all its forms, whether familiar or otherwise. We reminded by Michael Risku and Letitia Harding that:

> indigenous people traditionally acquire knowledge from two spheres; via an axis from above, that is, from the spirit world, and from the earth below. Within this system of learning, science, art, and religion are integrate, and education brings knowledge of how to live and how to be moral.[28]

Finally, Ifa geomantic tray as sacred African space has several functions in Yoruba traditional religion and culture. First, it is an altar consecrated to the worship of a major deity, the god of wisdom. Together with other Ifa paraphernalia, they represent important aspects of Yoruba material culture and Yoruba attitudes about nature, community, history and ultimate reality. Second, opon Ifa artistry, especially the bestiary, reminds us of a highly sophisticated episteme based on symbolism and modes of representation among the Yoruba, in this specific instance, wood carving. Third, the Ifa tray, the space it occupies during and after divination, as well as efforts deployed in keeping all three viable and relevant (for example, through ritualized sustenance when no divinations are performed) point to a profound historic sensibility, because the physicality of the paraphernalia is rendered spiritual and therefore timeless.

Finally, Ifa corpus, practice, and divination paraphernalia offer the world, especially the Black Diaspora as defined earlier, alternatives to western systems of mental health. In this regard, Ifa divination accoutrements, in addition

to the chants, invocations, incantations, pharmacopeia (derived from local flora and fauna), and Ifa bestiary, when combined with the training, and experience of the babalawo, or Iyanifa, and the reverence accorded to them as sacred beings, all are powerful evidence of a veritable ethno-medical system for the Yoruba across time and space. They also emphasize the interconnections between man, nature, and the divine—a pertinent message in today's concerns about the environment and the world we live. It is all about balance.

The Ifa system belongs to a network of African indigenous healthcare technologies across the continent and beyond. It is no surprise that the most fervent promoters and researchers of the Yoruba spiritual tradition tend to be Afro-Caribbeans and African scholars in the Americas. Their efforts remind Africans back on the continent (and the rest of the world) that Africans have contributed immensely to the development of civilization; that they have also, through examples such as Ifa, provided viable and ethical solutions to the challenges humans have faced across time. Even the Abrahamic religions have appropriated aspects of these indigenous ways of knowing and incorporated them into their practices, to remain relevant to their congregants. Also, in coping with the trauma of today's globalization and subsequent migration to Western nations, some African immigrants have found succor in the practices, values and attitudes promoted by indigenous ways of knowing such as Ifa while striving to build better lives in their new communities.

NOTES

1. Cf. Falola, Toyin, and Matt D. Childs, eds., *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

2. Mbiti, John S., *African Religions and Philosophy* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1997), 3.

3. Ibid.

4. Peek, Philip M., "The Creatures of Ifá," in *Ifá Divination, Knowledge, Power, and Performance*, ed., Olupona, Jacob K. and Abiodun Rowland O. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 277–93, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1b7x4sw.25.

5. Epega, Afolabi A., and Philip John Neimark, *The Sacred Ifa Oracle* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 464–465.

6. Ibid. The English translations are mainly mine because Epega and Neimark's versions seem inadequate to me because they are too literal; not literary.

7. *The Holy Bible*, John 1:1–11. The Holy Bible, New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2018).

8. Jackson, Guida M., *Traditional Epics, A Literary Companion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 10.

9. Courlander, Harold, *A Treasury of African Folklore* (New York: Marlowe & Company, 1996), 1.

10. https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/ifa-divination-system-00146 (Accessed May 17, 2018).

11. I am Oyo Yoruba with an intuitive grasp of Ifa-related idioms, and I also have interacted with Babalawo's during my graduate studies and research in Nigeria and the USA.

12. Abimbola, Wande, *Ifa: An Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus* (New York: Athelia Henrietta Press, Inc., 1997), 17.

13. Epega, Afolabi A., and Philip John Neimark, *The Sacred Ifa Oracle* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), xi–xii.

14. Smith III, James D., *Where Did We Get The Doxology?*, https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-31/where-did-we-get-doxology.html. (Accessed May 17, 2018).

15. My own translations.

16. Olanipekun, Olusola Victor, "Omoluabi: Re-thinking the Concept of Virtue in Yoruba Culture and Moral System," in *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies* Vol. 10, No. 9 (October 2017).

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18. The DAWN Commission, *Yoruba Historical Conversations*, 7th edition featuring Professor Anthony Ijaola Asiwaju. "Much Bigger Than in Southwestern Nigeria." https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BvuOHqqYmIc (Accessed May 23, 2018).

19. Bascom, William, *Ifa Divination: Communication between Gods and Men in West Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), 10.

20. Cf. Eze, Emmanuel Chukwudi, ed., *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1997).

21. Bascom, 86.

22. Abimbola, Wande, *Ifa: An Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus* (New York: Athelia Henrietta Press, Inc., 1997), 17.

23. The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Hippocratic Oath," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., November 15, 2017. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hippocratic-oath (Accessed May 25, 2018).

24. Cf. Ogundayo, 'BioDun J., "Ifa," in *Encyclopedia of African Religion*, ed., Asante, Molefi Kete and Ama Mazama (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2009), 330–333.

25. "Divination: Ifa Divination," *Encyclopedia of Religion*. *Encyclopedia.com*. http://www.encyclopedia.com/environment/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/divination-ifa-divination (Accessed May 25, 2018).

26. Drewal, Henry J., "Art and Divination among the Yoruba: Design and Myth," *Africana Journal* 14, no. 2–3 (1987): 139–156.

27. Drewal, Margaret Thompson, and Henry John Drewal, "An Ifa Diviner's Shrine in Ijebuland," in *African Arts* 16, no. 2 (February 2, 1983): 64. *UCLA James S. Coleman African Studies Center*. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3335852 (Accessed May 19, 2018).

28. Risku, Michael, and Letitia Harding, *Education for Tomorrow* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2012), 9.

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Chapter 7

Sacred Spaces

Mountains in Yoruba Spirituality

Enoch Olujide Gbadegesin

> God is free to manifest himself under any form—even that of stone or wood. Leaving out for a moment the word "God," this may be translated: the sacred may be seen under any sort of form, even the most alien. In fact, what is paradoxical, what is beyond our understanding, is not that the sacred can be manifested in stones or in trees, but that it can be manifested at all, that it can thus become limited and relative.[1]

The Yorùbá people are one of the major ethnic groups occupying southwestern Nigeria. According to the CIA World Factbook, the Yorùbá are approximately 35 million people, representing 21 percent of the Nigerian population.[2, 3] They are one of the largest ethno-linguistic groups in Africa. The Yoruba are a very religious people. They participate in traditional and western, and modern Christianity in its various forms, such as the Aláàdúrà. The Aláàdúrà groups of churches belong to the African Initiated Churches (AICs) that were founded by Nigerian or African leaders in the first decade of the twentieth century. They include various churches including, Christ Apostolic Church, Eternal Sacred Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim, and the Celestial Church of Christ. Indigenous or traditional Yoruba religions include the worship and veneration of a variety of deities in the Yoruba pantheon such as Ògún, Òsun, Obàtálá, Sàngó, Esu, among many others. Ritual and spaces are therefore essential elements in Yorùbá life and spirituality.

The centrality and significance of mountains in African traditional thought make them a major subject of African religious and experience. For the Yorùbá people, it is widely known that mountains are significant for their cultural, ecological, and sacred properties. It must be stressed that the Yorùbá make very few distinctions between considerations of ecology and spirituality. In traditional Yorùbá thought, both are intricately tied and yet interdependent.

As a result of the interconnection of the two concepts, mountains, as experienced in Aláàdúrà spirituality, are significant in the religious attitudes of the worshipers. This idea is very well captured by the Zen Buddhist aphorism, "If there are no humans in the forest, are sacred spaces still sacred?"[4] Cognitively then, mountains provide features which function to orient humans to the landscape. Each mountain's meanings is only interesting when described accurately and in detail. Thus, mountains become sites and places that can focus our comparative understanding. They are not merely blank slates on which adherents of local traditions impose particular (and incomparable) meanings.[5]

This chapter is organized into five parts, namely: Religious experience as expressed through religious practices and rituals; a theory of the sacred and its relationship to spaces; mountains and their importance; mountains as conceived and experienced by the Aláàdúrà; and mountains as conceived and experienced in Yorùbá traditional religion. Ethno-graphic field and indigenous hermeneutic approaches are employed in a critical and comparative analysis of the motivation behind Aláàdúrà and Yorùbá ritual and religious traditions of popular pilgrimages to the mountains. Also, the roles of mountains in the lives of both the leaders and members of spiritual traditions, their ideas regarding the performance of rituals on the mountains, as well as the impact of modernity on these practices are discussed. One prefatory conclusion is that for Aláàdúrà and Yoruba traditions, mountains are primordial sacred spaces where physical and spiritual transformation takes place. They are also where healing and deliverance are received and where "negotiation" and "conflict" between humans and the divine occur.

MEANING OF SACRED SPACE

The Latin word for sacred is called *sacer*, which means to make holy. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*[6] defines sacred as: "consecrated to; esteemed especially dear or acceptable to deity . . . set apart for or dedicated to some religious purpose; made holy by association with a god or object of worship; consecrated, and hallowed." Sacred space is defined as a space or place where the divine essence is putatively manifested. Borrowing from Rudolf Otto's terminology, Mircea Eliade in his book, *The Myth of Eternal Return*, calls this space *hierophany*. Eliade extends the concept to where the power of the divine breaks out. This he designates as *kratophany*.[7] For Eliade, sacred space is markedly different from profane or ordinary space. Otto would probably call it the space where the sense of the *numinous* is experienced. As a result, sacred space can be understood as a geographical location set apart from ordinary ones. It is a spatial rather than an abstract human construction.

Christian theology does not restrict sacred space to the physical geography of a place. It also extends the concept of sacred space to that which is embodied in human beings. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul calls the body the temple (the sacred place) of the living God. Again, in a Christian understanding, Jerusalem is regarded, not only as a concrete, geographical, and sacred space, but also, as a symbolic one. For example, Christian pilgrims all over the world go there on pilgrimage to perform religious rituals as part of their devotion. It is symbolic because many Christians conceive of Jerusalem as a later expression of the heavenly city where there is going to be eternal peace. The actual meaning of Jerusalem is, interestingly enough, "City of Peace."

SACRED SPACE: A BRIEF THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING

Sacred space is central not only to religious practitioners all over the world, but also to the scholars of religion who have a keen interest in the subject. The geography of religion is principally concerned with the spatial elements of religious practice. According to Chris Park:

> One of the more prominent geographical dimensions of religious expression is the notion of sacred space. Most religions designate certain places as sacred or holy, and this designation often encourages believers to visit those places in pilgrimage and puts responsibilities on religious authorities to protect them for the benefit of future generations.[8]

Park's observation is apt, for no religious experience can be fully expressed without a sacred space where worshippers can perform appropriate rituals. For example, in theistic variants of Buddhism sacred space still is prominent in its religious practices.[9] Park further observes that: "recent interest in the geography of religion has focused on how religious practitioners enact sacred space through their embodied sacred practices as well as the relationship between religion and geopolitics."[10] It also has been pointed out that "all of life can be consecrated, sanctified and there is nothing in which God cannot be found. The ordinary, the profane, is simply the not-yet-hallowed."[11]

Arguably, Eliade, more than any scholar of comparative religion, has concentrated his energy and scholarly talents to the interaction between sacred space or sacred time and the dialectical relationship between the sacred and the profane.[12] Jacob Olúpònà believes that "Eliade was the first historian of religions to popularize the idea of sacred space to the understanding of religious phenomena. Yet heavy criticisms have been raised against him."[13] Apropos, Olúpònà mentions scholars such as Jonathan Smith, himself a

historian of religion, who criticizes Eliade for "over-emphasizing the significance of centers,"[14] and Roy Rappaport an anthropologist who observes, that Eliade "seriously overvalued the case for the priority of space in the religious experience."[15] For Rappaport, "Nature is seen by humans through a screen of beliefs, knowledge, and purposes, and it is in terms of their images of nature, rather than of the actual structure of nature, that they act. It is upon nature itself that they do act, and it is nature itself that acts upon them, nurturing or destroying them."[16]

Rappaport seems to devalue the sense of epistemic concreteness in the people who value mountains. He assumes that nature is only in the imagination of the people and not what they actually experience. Rappaport is wrong in making this assumption as will be indicated later. Again, despite criticisms of Eliade by his own academic group, Olúpònà contends that Eliade's theory is acceptable as a durable classic in the history of religions.[17] It is arguable that Eliade is closer in his thought to the native experience of natural phenomenon than these other scholars. For example, Eliade argues that:

> In archaic stages of culture it is believed that the divine may be manifested both in natural objects (stones, plants, etc.) and in various sectors of the universe (heavens, stars, bodies of water, etc.); in fact, a large part of the history of archaic religions may be reduced to such cosmic revelations, that is, to the worship of the sacred as directly manifest in the universe."[18]

One can only add to Eliade's argument that the idea of divine manifestations does not stop with these archaic people and their concepts of the divine. In modern times human have fetishized places and objects without necessarily claiming, or presenting these, as divine or imbued with sacredness. For example, one mode of deep religious experience in this modern age is pilgrimage to the mountain which people believe is a source of power; which they believe inhabits spirits or spirit beings.

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND EXPRESSION

Roger Schmidt asked, "If the spiritual life is, metaphorically speaking, a quest or a journey, then what are the paths that lead to religious experience and salvation? How is the sacred known? Where is it found—on the mountaintop, in the recesses of human heart, in the power and vitality of nature? Is there but a single path to having religious experience or by which salvation or deliverance is achieved?"[19] Addressing these questions helps shape the focus of this section. William James has argued compellingly that there is no single way of knowing and apprehending the sacred, or for that matter of having a religious

experience. There are ways of looking at reality.[20] Religious experience is a means of seeking and responding to what numerous people experience as holy. However, not all experiences lead to experiencing the holy. There are similarly scientific, aesthetic, and humanistic ways of seeing and speaking. For example, J. Milton Yinger argues that "when religion is being examined within the framework of science, it is dealt with as part of the natural world, subject to the laws of cause and effect and the rules of logic."[21]

The scientific way of seeing and speaking has shaped and has had a profound influence on modern consciousness.[22] Importantly, the European Enlightenment and the subsequent Scientific Revolution had a seminal impact on religion. The Enlightenment was a movement where humans sought to control and master their environment through scientific knowledge and empirical inquiry. The normative, religious, way of seeing, thinking and acting was regarded as one mode out of many ways of seeing, thinking or acting. Another way is the aesthetic. For example, the aesthetic way of seeing, which notices things for their own sake rather than for their utility, is what Kant calls "things-in-themselves."[23] One can, of course, argue that dealing with art this way only began in the Romantic period of eighteenth century. It was in itself a reaction to the Enlightenment or Rational period of the seventeenth century when religion was violently overthrown and consigned to the private sphere, only to be subsequently replaced by the empirical method of apprehending reality.[24] It was during this period, then, that artistic or aesthetic perception for its own sake became the primary motive for creating works of arts.[25]

Unlike the scientific approach, which is primarily cognitive, the aesthetic approach concentrates on the richness of perceptual experience. Where science may claim to add to knowledge in order to manipulate and control phenomena, perceptual experience leads us to engage the object for its own sake, without looking to manipulate or mold the object to our own purposes. As an artifact, the aesthetic object is something made in order to be consumed, or contemplated visually, and/or by our physical senses.[26] While these modes of experience are very interesting, they have not been able to satisfactorily (or even competently) answer a fundamental human yearning for transcending our common, quotidian experience. This is where religious experience is relevant as a complement and a vital component. Religious experience deals with the "ultimate concern" of Paul Tillich and the *mysterium tremendum* of Rudolf Otto.[27] It concerns itself with what is "non-rational," as opposed to the rational element that science seeks to explicate. The only way one can think of religious and aesthetic experiences being similar is that they are both mediated through attitudes, feelings, and values.[28] In this respect, one can think about the close comparison between a sacred mountain and an aesthetically constructed space called Skyspace.[29] There is a close connection between

religion and a work of art. Perhaps, this is why, in spite of Immanuel Kant's critique of religion, he still situates the aesthetic experience and religious experience as experiences with a common denominator in his *Critique of Judgement*. In this book Kant points out that, "It is the first, and not the second, which is the archetype of revelation. It is the aesthetic experience which reveals the sense of the world."[30]

If Kant is understood correctly, aesthetic experience, just like religious experience, leads humans to an intimate appreciation of the divine than any other mode of experience. In other words, to experience art is akin to the religious experience. As a matter of fact, virtually all the sacred shrines of the Yorùbá indigenous religions which are aesthetically designed, are also often religiously interpreted. For the Yoruba, art is life; life is art. You cannot have one without the other, as both enrich and edify the other. It is equally interesting to note that Aláàdúrà houses of worship, or designated sacred spaces, are replete with religious art and iconography such as angels, Jesus on the cross, the open Bible, and the image of Mary with child and a host of other artistic designs. These works of art are not there for mere visual consumption. They are also means by which the devotees are divinely inspired and, perhaps, are able to gain profound religious contemplation.

THE SACREDNESS AND PROFANENESS OF MOUNTAINS

What makes one mountain sacred and the other profane, or secular? According to Eliade, "the sacred and the religious life are opposite of the profane and secular life."[31] He even thinks that sacredness or commonness of an object or a place depends on its functions and what they mean to people. In supporting this Eliadean notion, Chris Park claims that a place or space is signified as sacred as long as it has some specific religious association attached to it, and it is carved out from its surrounding geographical space.[32] In essence, secular or profane space is where mundane non-religious activities occur. Examples may include quarry sites, stadia, parks, (among others) where sporting or hedonistic activities take place. For example, mountaineers in the West would most likely consider their activity as purely secular and not religious.[33] A pilgrim does not think of her/his journey to a sacred site as an ordinary event but as a religiously motivated odyssey. Regarding the mountains, religious people often claim that they are divinely inspired to go, either to encounter the divine, or out of another religious or theological obligation or motivation. The pilgrimage to Mecca by the Muslim faithful is a good example of a divinely ordained religious journey. While secular sites or spaces are often treated with little or no respect, sacred spaces or places are treated with the utmost reverence.

Sacred mountains may be viewed as a source of power which generates awe and reverence in the believers. Typically, this power is seen as dangerous, terrifying, awe-inspiring, and overwhelming. An excellent example in the Old Testament occurred during the call of Moses when Yahweh gave Moses the Decalogue. Often, this means that access to the sacred mountain is restricted to special votaries, and due to the respect accorded to its sacred power, many areas surrounding it are off limits for construction, mining and a number of other mundane activities. It also remains preserved and conserved for posterity, a key tenet of a sacred or religious space. Sacred mountains are monuments and sites where religious peoples usually gather to perform sacred rituals and ceremonies to propitiate their gods and goddesses in order to achieve spiritual enlightenment. One of the most obvious truths conveyed in our context is that indigenous Yorùbá people have indeed developed a rich spiritual tradition based on an intimate and a close relationship with nature.[34] Mountains considered to be home to deities are also central to supplications to the deities reputed to live there. This consideration also creates a sense of purity emanating from the mountain. Consequently, streams connected to the mountains are also considered sacred, and people are prompted to protect them against pollution and related unnatural human depredations. Later, more light shall be shed on the importance of streams and their protection vis-à-vis mountains.

MOUNTAINS AS SACRED SPACES IN YORÙBÁ SPIRITUALITY

Contrary to the Eliadean dichotomy between the sacred and profane, virtually all places are regarded in Yorùbá spiritual tradition as the abode of the spirits. Hence, they are deemed sacred. The Yorùbá say *Ibi gbogbo ni ilè* òwò ("Every space is a hallowed place"). This is because for most Yorùbá there is no distinction between sacred and profane existence, even though certain spaces are more sacred than others. According to J. Omósádé Awólàlú, "solid elevated rocks and highlands are regarded as abode of some spirits."[35] Olúpònà also claims that indigenous Yorùbá religious worshippers of Ògún, Sàngó, Òsun, Obàtálá, and others, often believe that myriad spirits, which are said to populate the world of the Yorùbá, are associated with hills, mountains, rivers, rocks, caves, trees, brooks, lakes, and thick forests.[36] The memorable journey of all the principal divinities (Òrìsà) from heaven to the earthly realm culminated on Òra hill, according to the mythic accounts recorded by Yorùbá scholars.[37]

Mountains also play influential roles in the religious imagination and experience of Christian worshippers, especially the Aláàdúrà people. For the latter, mountains are considered to be one of the holiest spaces where people

can have variety of spiritual experiences such as visions, dreams, prophesies, inspirations and commission prior to embarking on God's assignment. Eliade argues, "mountains identified as sacred spaces are where spiritual ascent and descent often take place, and these mountains are seen differently than the ordinary ones."[38] Sacred mountains are the locations where individual worshippers go to seek communication with supernatural beings. The Yorùbá even believe that this (albeit large) rock does not die (*Ota kìí kú*). Adherents of Yorùbá traditional religion believe that reverence toward spirits dwelling in sacred spaces such as mountains and hills guarantees a long and salubrious life.[39] Rituals in the form of prayers, songs, divinations, and/or prophesying are often performed on the sacred mountains just as they would be performed in other sacred spaces or shrines. Rituals provide psychological and spiritual assurances and balms to the worshippers on the mountains.

In concordance with Eliade's assertion, many Yorùbá towns have few mountains unconnected to some important myths and hence, have sacralized and made those mountains sources of their culture, pilgrimages, ritual sites, and tourist attractions.[40] The danger in making them tourist attractions creates the risk of debasing elements of the sacred. Since these mountains not only serve as important markers of their identities, but also because they have played important roles in the past and during intra-tribal wars served as protective shields and refuges, the Yorùbá have devoted large amounts of their energies and their material wealth to their preservation. Examples abound all over Yorùbáland of such mountains. There is the Olumo Rock in Abeokuta city in Ogun State. In Òyó State, there is Òkè-Ìbàdàn Hill in Ìbàdàn; Bíáyìn, Òkóforí, Olófin, Eéyèlè, and Ifòerè in Òkè-ihò (or Òkèhò, located in the Òyó north), the Olósùnta in Ìkéré-Èkìtì in Èkìtì State, the Orósùn in Ìdànrè, Ondo State, and Òkè-Írágbìjí, in Òsun State, just to mention a few. These mountains are placed in their own location for the spirit of the hill which the people believe had not only offered them help in the war days but that the spirit residing on the hill or the mountain continues to pour blessings on them to this day. Olúpònà contends that, "what separates African traditional religions from strands of other modern religions is that connections to the natural world have remained as central to religious belief and practice today as they have been in the past."[41]

MOUNTAINS IN ALÁÀDÚRÀ AND INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS

Based on the author's ethnographic experience, Aláàdúrà churches and Yorùbá traditional religious worshippers conceive of mountains as places where there are recurrent and compelling images of spiritual and transformed lives.

They are also symbols, or sites for mystical experiences and encounters with the sacred. Furthermore, mountains function as spaces where human souls can be liberated from existential concerns and the mortal coil. As a consequence of their religious imagination, many Aláàdúrà members often resort to *gigun orí* òkè àdúrà ("climbing prayer mountains"), which they believe will lead to healing and a deliverance from psychosomatic ailments which they usually attribute to spiritual or metaphysical causes. In this regard, many of these mountains have been christened because of their peculiar spiritual features, or in order to adhere to the purposes which they are meant to serve. Latter clause of this sentence does not make sense. It is interesting to note that there are many sacred mountains as there are many Aládúrà churches scattered all over Yorùbáland.[42]

The Aládúrà churches, especially the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) and Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S), have developed a preference for the use of what they term *Ilè mímó* (sacred grounds) or *Orí* Òkè *mímó* (sacred mountain tops), *Ilè* àánú (Abode of Mercy), or *Orí-* Òkè àánú (Mountain of Mercy); which they use for the purposes of prayer. These spaces also double as resorts for "spiritual retreats" such as personal meditation during a short or long fasting, personal and congregational prayers and scripture study. For example, there are Òkè *Bàbá* Àbíyè ("Mountain of safe delivery") located in Ede, *Oríòkè Hórébù* ("Horeb Mountain") at Alákòwé in Ile-Ife and *Oríòkè Alásepé* ("Mountain of Perfection") in Ikire, all located in Òsun State in Nigeria, to mention just a few. Hence, apart from praying in the vicinity of various churches, and all other designated sacred centers, Aládúrà church members also attach importance to praying on the mountain top. It is considered serene and "sacred" and they claim that prayers get answered quickly, as distractions are minimized and controlled. There is no doubt that these religious groups often conclude that spiritual power and energy is quickly and easily generated through the ascent to the hills or mountains because of the ostensible sacred qualities of the upper slopes. To the Yoruba, sacred mountains and hills are the natural intersection between the physical and metaphysical worlds. These liminal zones are believed to be more powerfully touched by the metaphysical world.

In Ìbàdàn Yorùbá traditional religious worshippers have consecrated the Òkè-*Ibadan* shrine much as they have the Òkè *Mògún shrine* in Ile-Ife ("If you want to conserve all, consecrate all." —Joseph De Maistre). Both, located upon hills have become the *locus* where patron gods are ritually commemorated and propitiated at annual festivals. These hills are valued because of their sacredness, which does not have to be re-established with a new generation, since there is a common patrimony holding up and perpetuating the sacredness of these sites.[43] As the abode of the gods, there has been sharp

resistances against the secularization of these spaces. Furthermore, Yorùbá traditional religious believers and worshippers have placed responsibilities in the hands of religious authorities, the king, and the government to protect these sacred spaces for the benefit of posterity.[44]

This is clearly demonstrated in the manner in which both Òkè-Ìbàdàn and Òkè-Mògún have been carefully enclosed and preserved from the "polluting" and "profane" effects of modern secular life. For instance, when, Ile-Nlá at the Enuwá square in Ile-Ife, overlooking the Òkè-Mògún shrine, was slated to be demolished and replaced with a modern town hall, the ritual personae and worshippers resisted the heavy-handed and thoughtless action. Their argument was that the shrine is the sacred space where Ògún entered into the earth, according to Yoruba tradition and mythology. Hence, ceremonial rituals must take place there and not in any other place. One can argue thus that this is one of the functions of indigenous myth. Myth has the power to strengthen traditions. Bronislaw Malinowski claims that the function of myth is to strengthen tradition and endow it with greater value and prestige by tracing it back to a higher, better, or more supernatural reality of initial events.[45]

SACRED MOUNTAINS: SPACES FOR RENEWAL AND TRANSFORMATION

Pilgrimage to sacred sites seems to be a very popular act in virtually all known religious traditions of the world. In Nigeria, the majority of people among the Yorùbá Aláàdúrà who have embarked on pilgrimage to the mountains usually admitted that they did so because they had begun to experience a midlife crisis or depression, which characterize what Carl Jung calls the "afternoon of life."[46] Jung asserts that all his patients in the second half of life had resorted to discovering a religious outlook on life because they faced serious crises. While it is correct to argue that transformation, salvation, enlightenment, self-actualization, and ultimate liberation can be sought in a variety of ways, according to William James, it is also true that in the narratives of religious transformation few Yorùbá Christians—both at individual and communal levels—references to pilgrimages to the mountain have been carefully documented. Some relevant examples are discussed below.

Park argues that, "pilgrimage plays a significant role in changing the pilgrims. They begin in a familiar place (at home), followed by a journey to a far place (the pilgrimage shrines, which are usually distant and peripheral to the rest of their lives), then return—ideally changed—to the familiar place."[47] In this regard the story of African-American activist Malcolm X is quite perti-

nent and interesting. After embarking on pilgrimage to Mecca, he was transformed from being a black nationalist and racial supremacist to a promoter and teacher of the equality of humanity through his religion of the Nation of Islam. Arguably, there seems to be more to Malcom's transition, but that is not the purview of this chapter.

In June 1991, this author embarked on a pilgrimage journey to a prayer mountain at the village of Alákòwé, near the city of Ile-Ife to seek God's face by praying and fasting for seven days. On the fourth day on this mountain, a man arrived (name withheld), who claimed he was advised by a prophet in Lagos to come and seek God's help in prayer and fasting. According to this man, he used to be very wealthy and comfortable but claimed that all of a sudden he began to notice a rapid decline in his wealth. This led him to nagging depression and insomnia. According to him, his problem defied medical and psychological solution. Hence he sought spiritual assistance. A prophet had told this man to come to the mountain to seek God's help in prayer because his life needed to be transformed in order to make him "an instrument" God would use for "His (God's) service." Examples like this abound and this author was able to document at least two of them in October 2012. Here are the stories of those two people:

> My name is Sunday; I am an assistant prophet on this Mount Horeb of the Cherubim and Seraphim along Ilesa road in Ilé-Ifè. I came to the mountain for a solution to the problem of lack and serious poverty about four years ago. On my arrival on the mountain, the senior prophet whom I am now working with, asked me to go into fasting and fervent prayers. Before I spent few days, my problems began to get solved. Not only did my business begin to flourish again, I was also able to regain my health. As a result of that transformation, I decided to stay on this mountain to be serving as a prophet, in order to be a source of blessings unto others. As you see this place, many people have come from London, United States of America and Ghana and their problems were being solved. This is indeed Mount Horeb!

A second man whose name is Prophet Michael from Lagos was also interviewed the same day and on the same mountain. His story goes like this:

> I am Prophet Michael, I am resident in Lagos, and I have a church there that I pastor. The name of my church is Celestial Church of Christ along Mile 2 in Lagos. I am also a business man. I noticed that things were not going on right in 2011; I was perplexed and began to be afraid. A friend of mine, who is also a prophet, advised me to come to Ifè and ask for Mount Horeb along Ilésà road. Thank God, I heeded the advice. As soon as I got to this mountain, the *Baba Aláàdúrà* (senior prophet, who is in charge of the mountain) told me that "my situation had turned out to be joy." He prayed for me and as I got back to Lagos,

> everything was turned around for good. That is the reason why I came back here to thank God and spend some time in prayer retreat. Sir, God is here indeed!

These two stories present us with the transformative effect of prayer while seeking God's face or the divine in a sacred space or place. As bizarre as these two stories may sound, especially to secular minds, functionalists would have no problem accepting the fact that religion can minister to human needs through experiences analogous to the ones laid out in the above example. According to J. Milton Yinger, religion endures because, "it is an attempt to explain what cannot be otherwise explained; to achieve power, all other powers having failed us; to establish poise and serenity in the face of evil and suffering that others have failed to eliminate."[48]

As already mentioned above, Malcolm X, in his autobiography says something about the transformational power of his religious experience as he embarked on a pilgrimage to Islam's most sacred place, Mecca.[49] Even though he began his political activism defending methods of violence to end white racism in the U.S., in Mecca, he had an epiphany—becoming aware, in a very moving way, that the God of Islam is Lord of all peoples and all nations. It was in Mecca, that he was transformed into accepting the common humanity of all. In his words:

> Since I learnt the truth in Mecca, my deepest friends have come to include all kinds some Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, agnostics, and Communists! Some of my friends are moderates, conservatives, extremists—some are even Uncle Toms! My friends today are black, brown, red, yellow, and white![50]

Malcolm X's story not only shows how a divine encounter during a pilgrimage can change and transform one's life. It also has the capacity to change one's outlook on life. His pilgrimage experience to Mount Arafat in Saudi Arabia helped Malcolm X change and cross over from hate to love, from ideology to spirituality. It is a unique encounter with the transcendent! Based on the foregoing evidence, it is not that unique, certainly not *sui generis*, but it is unique for the individual.

At the communal level, local Aláàdúrà churches often take their members to the mountain for a retreat and spiritual renewal. The duration of a stay on the mountain varies. It might be for a whole day (24 hours), or three (72 hours), or for a whole week, depending on the inspiration of the leaders by the Holy Spirit or according to their teachings. Different activities are usually scheduled. This is done so the experience is enriching and uplifting for members and seekers. At the site of the mountain, coruscating sights and sounds are usually experienced. By sights we mean visionary experiences, or the more banal experience of the aesthetic and architectural landscape that make up such mountain. In both cases, there is usually a transformation and

renewal of life. By sounds we mean sounds of nature such as the sounds of singing birds, rustling of leaves, wind, and the bubbling of streams at the base of most mountains. Also included are sounds made by supplicants such as hand clapping, foot stumping and loud acclamations through singing, drumming, and shouts of "Hallelujah!"

The idea of going to the mountain, as well as other forms of religious expression introduced to the Yorùbá Christian experience by the Aláàdúrà group of churches, were never part of the liturgy or doctrine of the Mission-oriented, or imperialist, churches. What occasioned this move? Many explanations are possible as to why the Aláàdúrà churches incorporate pilgrimage to sacred spaces like mountains into their liturgical practices.

Many African scholars believe that the Aláàdúrà churches are closer to indigenous Yorùbá religious worshippers in their religious imagination and thought. Religious pilgrimage to mountains set apart as shrines has been part of the Yorùbá's indigenous ways of reconnecting with their ancestors. For example, Benjamin Ray observes that, "In Africa, shrines may be purely in natural form, such as forest groves, large rocks, and trees where gods and spirits dwell. Almost every African landscape has sacred places of this kind which are the focus of ritual activity."[51] While the foregoing explanation is very intriguing and highly informative, one can also suggest more important and intriguing reasons why Yorùbá traditional religion promotes pilgrimage to the mountains.

SACRED MOUNTAIN: PLACE OF HEALING AND DELIVERANCE

The ritual of healing (in a variety of forms) is one of the distinguishing features of indigenous religious practices. Sacred spaces play a major role in these rituals. It is part of every aspect of existence and all members of the tribal community automatically share their identity with and orient themselves to such religious experience. We must note that there are no Yoruba secularists because every Yoruba is culturally (and reflexively religious, even the most westernized). Communal ritual is usually shared in similar ways and in most cases, all worshippers are never skeptical about the efficacy of any ritual performed in the name of the community. The performative act is a context in which the symbolism of words, gestures, and objects are employed to do things.[52] When religious symbols are grounded in the natural order of existence, respect for and devotion to such a worldview is likely to be a primary value, according to Fiona Bowie.[53] Bowie believes that "traditional peoples rarely try to convince others of the rightness of their worldview, as it is self-evident."[54] Òkè-Ìbàdàn, in Ìbàdàn and Òkè-Mògún, in Ile-Ifè are

very good examples in this regard. All traditional worshippers in these two cities share similar religious sentiments. The guardian spirits on these two hills/mountains have not only delivered them in the past from their various enemies, but they continue to do so in the present. It is also pertinent to note that because the ancestral spirits have much to do with the well-being of their descendants, proper respect and devotion are duly accorded them.[55] In this regard the examples that follow are appropriate.

During the annual commemoration of Ògún (Olójó Festival) at Òkè-Mògún shrine, in Ile-Ife, devotees come together to supplicate this deity for healing and deliverance from disease—both individual and communal—and barrenness. They also pray for fecundity (both human and agrarian); and protection from evil spirits among other things. The priests and the king also pray on behalf of the whole community—after ritual performance and animal sacrifices have been offered as propitiation unto the god or spirit of the mountain. The offering of animal sacrifice has two important dimensions. First, it is part of religious worship, which is given because worship is germane. Second, it helps to enliven the faith of the devotees who believe that they are privileged to engage in gift and reciprocal relationship with the divine. The belief is that sacrifice has a psychological function on the individual in particular, and, perhaps more importantly, the community at large.[56] In this connection, the Oba (king), who is also regarded as the divine representative of the gods on earth, is expected to be either present in person or to end a representative during the annual commemoration of the mountain god/spirit. The Oba on many occasions is in fact the one to provide the prescribed animals for sacrifice on the mountain. This experience is shared in similar way by Aláàdúrà Christianity. According to pastor Awe, the minister in charge of Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) located on Mountain Alákòwé, in Òpa along Ilésà road, Ilé-Ifè, "all kinds of women and men come to the mountain here, for prayer of healing and deliverance [they] are always bringing 'sacrificial gifts.'"[57]

SACRED MOUNTAIN: A PLACE OF CONFLICT AND NEGOTIATION

Nowhere are conflicts and negotiations more brought into the open between humans and the divine than when one embarks on religious pilgrimage to sacred spaces, especially to mountains.[58] Pilgrimage to the mountains (like to any sacred spaces for spiritual exercises) can be more challenging than one may envisage at first. There is usually an encounter with an opposition between nature and culture, the spiritual and the physical, the sacred and the profane; between reason and faith; self-exultation and self-abasement, life and death, and so on. It is a place where one is "ritually controlled and perhaps manipulated." Reli-

gious ritual often can be very demanding; it is meant to be internalized rather than rationalized. In other words, the symbolic power of various words, objects and performance of the ritual must be part of a person's (or group's) mentality. Pilgrimage is a movement in particular from a city (site of culture) to the forest (nature) outside of the city. The forest is supposedly the abode of demons, spirits, ghosts, dangerous animals, wild plants and trees. It only means that there are perils and ordeals that must be encountered as one travels from the secular, social and familiar life to the sacred realm of existence. Eliade argues that: The journey to the sacred center "is arduous and fraught with peril because it is, in fact, a rite of passage from the profane to the sacred; from the illusory to reality and eternity, from death to life, from man to god."[59]

Conflict can also be interpreted as real struggle as one encounters the divine as seen in the biblical experiences of Abraham on the mount of Moriah, of Moses on Mount Sinai (Horeb), of Jacob at Jabbok and of Elijah on Mount Horeb. All these spiritual figures have had their own struggles. Abraham was asked to go and sacrifice his only son. While saying yes to God, he had an inner struggle about how to convey the same divine message to his wife Sarah and his son Isaac. Here, Moses's experience provides a better example. Moses did not particularly start his journey as a pilgrim. His journey to Mount Horeb was purely economic; that of taking his father-in-law's, Jethro, animals for grazing. The uniquely divine encounter Moses had at the foot of Horeb Mountain concluded his journey as a pilgrimage. During this encounter, there was a conflict and negotiation between God and Moses. God is willing to send Moses to go and deliver his people, the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, but Moses is unprepared for that enormous, epoch changing task. C. S. Lewis claims that something in Moses tried to protect the temporal from being invaded by the eternal. He expresses the idea this way, "I came into the presence of God with a great fear lest anything should happen to me within that presence which will prove too intolerably inconvenient when I have come out again into my 'ordinary life.'"[60]

Conflict and negotiation can also mean that when one determines to go to the sacred mountain, one has to abide by the rules governing its ritual space. Religious rituals, according to Ninian Smart are often associated with God or gods, and these in turn bask in the feel of *numinous*. The numinous according to Rudolf Otto, is awe inspiring, it is not carelessly encountered.[61] Victor Turner states that, "Most of the accounts I have read stress the opposition between social life as it is lived in localized, relatively stable, structured systems of social relations such as village, town, neighborhood, family, and the total process of pilgrimage."[62] Pilgrims are always looking forward to having a new experience, strange and unique, other than what they bring to the sacred space. Still bringing in his all-too-familiar terms *liminality* and *communitas* into the pilgrimage picture, Turner further says that, "because

of the release from social ties there is *liminality* or sense of *communitas* in the journey."[63]

Following Turner's analysis, there is a sense in seeing pilgrimages to sacred spaces/places as *rites of passage* according to Arnold van-Gennep, whose concept of liminality greatly influenced Turner in his theorizing of rites of passage.[64] When a journey to the sacred space is embarked upon, there are three stages involved: separation, initiation (liminality of Turner) and then incorporation (aggregation) back into the larger society. Van Gennep defines a rite of passage as a transition of a person from one stage, or one state, to another. The significance of this can be demonstrated in a person who formerly belonged to location or stage A, will have to move to stage or location B to be qualified as transiting. Many examples are given in this connection; birth, puberty, marriage, death, installation of a king or queen, and pilgrimage rites. For example, at birth, a child separates from her mother's womb to join a social world, but the process of naming the child and rituals involved not only help to initiate the child but also eventually to incorporate the child into the broader human society. Or let us look at the marriage ritual. A girl who has been betrothed is expected to join with the family other husband at a future date.

In this marriage ceremonial ritual, the girl separates from her family on the wedding day, to be initiated into another family, that of her husband, and finally to be incorporated into the larger society of married couples. Pilgrimage can be seen in an analogous manner. The only difference between pilgrimage ritual and marriage ritual is that for the pilgrim, the separation is just a temporary one, whereas for a woman who is married the separation from her family is total. Turner thinks about the process of the pilgrimage to sacred place this way:

> While pilgrimage is personal, it remains a very communal act. The pilgrim's sense of the sacred turns from private to public particularly once they reach their destinations. Rules regarding social class become very flexible, as participants assist each other often as well as share a collective experience. This is where communitas comes in: communitas is a social relationship that exists outside of kinship or social class structure. In one sense it's a shared trauma relationship, only extending deeper as friendship.[65]

This is very correct, especially in a situation like this, individual rules cease to exist and one is bound to abide by the rules of the collectivity.

In Yorùbáland virtually all sacred mountains are guided by specific rules and regulations. At the base of every prayer mountain in the Yorùbáland are usually the following in junctions: First, you remove your shoes for you are in a Holy land. Second, you do not wash clothing, or bathe near the consecrated water **(**usually the flowing spring located at the base of the mountains, which are ritually prepared for drinking and bathing. Third, no person is permitted

to engage in any chit chat aside from prayers, spiritual meditation, and reflection. Fourth, no man is expected to stay close to a woman and so on. In some situations, a woman who is menstruating is forbidden to either come near the mountain, or climb it. All these rules are meant to be observed. While some of them rules might not be difficult to abide by, there are others that may seriously conflict with one's way of life. The flowing river or spring might not be what one is accustomed to drinking. However, since it is seen as a symbolic ritual exercise, which one needs for one's spiritual breakthrough, one is compelled to do as the ritual practice demands. One can borrow from the often invoked example of Naaman in the Bible (II Kings 5: 1–19) who was asked by Prophet Elisha to go and bath in the Jordan River contrary to his expectation.

Max Gluckman and Victor Turner have shown how social control is maintained by addressing the ways in which ritual deals with conflicts. For Gluckman, "Tribal rituals entail dramatization of the moral relations of the group . . . and that ritual is effective because it exhibits all the tensions and strife inherent in social life itself."[66] For Turner, ritual affords the formal structuring that maintains the ordered value system of a group as well as a cathartic experience of *communitas*, or antistructure. He further claims that "ritual works as a mechanism that periodically converts the obligatory into the desirable."[67] This is all too true, for people who are performing rituals often see those rituals as obligation that must be followed, but there are instances when negotiation or bargaining comes into the picture. This negotiation, one can claim, is part of modernity and modern culture. For example, one may either drink water from the river at the foot of the mountain as a mark of respect for religious ritual, or one may make an appeal to the religious authority on the mountain to bring one's own drinking water when coming to the mountain to pray.

This is a practice that is now allowed as elites and people from the Western world go to pray on the mountains. This author observes that part of the dynamics of modernity is not only the constant reappraisal of religious rituals but also its reinterpretation to conform to modern principles. This does not mean that modernity renders ritual less efficacious. On the contrary ritual becomes effective and dynamic only if it is adaptable to every situation and all times. For example, a Olójó festival that used to be a nightly ritual affair in the past has been brought to the day time and in the open, not only because of the political crisis involved, but because, the ritualists actually want the ritual worship of Ògún to attract larger participation than usual.[68] Another example is given by Margaret Drewal of a Yorùbá priestess in Ilaro, 1978, who decided whether to ride in a car or walk to a ritual space. After the priestess's due consultation with her peers, she decided to ride a car only so far, after which she would bear her ritual loads on top of her head as her predecessors had done.[69]

Beyond this ritual controlled practices, however, there have been examples of the personal conflict during an encounter with the divine. Since one is in

the presence of the "Holy," one is engaged in constant "conflict and negotiation" as one dialogues with the divine. It is closer to what Rudolf Otto calls the experience of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*; a situation whereby one is situated in-between the divine wrath and divine love.[70] It is an alternation between the repelling and the alluring aspects of the numinous . . . a situation according to Otto constitutes the pulsebeat of human religious history. In the contemporary Yoruba religious world, many prophets in Christendom claim that they were told by God to stop secular jobs and take up "spiritually assigned jobs during their encounters with the divine on the mountains tops," an instruction which according to many of these spiritual leaders was not so much easy to obey initially.[71]

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the motivations behind the Aláàdúrà churches' and the Yorùbá traditional religion of going to the mountains have been explored. The argument is also made that not all mountains are rigidly sacred. They can either be subject to secular or spiritual usage, depending on the perceptions and reinterpretations of individuals and communities. They are multivalent spaces. Again, one wonders why in spite of modernity, many Yorùbá people still embark on pilgrimages to the mountains. First, this happens, because there is always a yearning in the heart of everybody as Turner describes it, for a "center out there."[72] Many people, especially among the Aláàdúrà group and the indigenous religious worshippers who are dissatisfied with their present spiritual and material conditions will continue to resort to visionary and revelational experiences by visiting sacred spaces such as mountains in the hope of getting answers to their problems. Second, Nigerian political elites, businessmen and women continue to seek the help of priests and prophets, wherever these are—in the brooks, riversides, mountain tops, and the plains—for power and spiritual mandate for their political ambitions and business affairs.

Many people from the diaspora travel to Africa, especially to Yorùbáland to worship and give themselves to the gods and goddesses of the hills and rivers. They continue to encourage the ritual of pilgrimage to the mountains and other sacred spaces. Again, some Aláàdúrà and Yorùbá indigenous worshippers tend to create sacred spaces purely for financial gain—just as some Pentecostal snake handler preachers in the US have been doing in recent decades. Mountains, as sacred spaces, will continue to have considerable impact and allure for humans of all cultures because of their perceived, real or imagined, capacity to provide relief from the human condition; and relief that modernity and its technologies seem increasingly incapable of providing.

Figure 7.1. Mountain where Christ Apostolic members go for prayer retreat and personal renewal at Erio Ekiti.
Picture taken by author.

Figure 7.2. Christ Apostolic Church Prayer Mountain at Alákòwé, Ile-Ife.
Picture taken by author.

Figure 7.3. Prophet Sunday of Cherubim and Seraphim Church's Mount Horeb, Alákòwé, Ile-Ife.
Picture taken by author.

Figure 7.4. Worshippers at the annual traditional Olójó festival at Ògún Hill in Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria
Picture taken by author.

Figure 7.5. Sacrificial dog at Ògún Hill in Ile-Ife for communal healing and deliverance.
Picture taken by author.

Figure 7.6. Aesthetically designed Skyspace by James Turrell in Rice University, Houston Texas, where tourists go to experience Twilight Epiphany. Ironically the Skyspace has also become a contemplative space for spiritually-minded people.
Picture taken by author.

Figure 7.7. Inside the Skyspace tourists maintained contemplative posture.
Picture taken by author.

NOTES

1. Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed with introduction by John Clifford Holt (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 29–30.

2. All names of interviewees are pseudonyms and identifying factors have been stripped.

3. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *The World Factbook*, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html (accessed November 18, 2014).

4. This quote is from Geoffrey Simmins's article on *Sacred Spaces and Sacred Places*—2008. dspace.ucalgary.ca/bitstream/1880/46834/1/Sacred%20Spaces.pdf (accessed June, 6, 2013).

5. This chapter was originally presented as a paper at American Academy of Religion (AAR) in Chicago in November 2012; some of the suggestions by Mary Keller and others who responded to the paper and those of my other panelists have been used to revise it for publication. Their comments are highly appreciated.

6. See *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, Sixth Edition (Oxford Publisher, 2007).

7. See Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 6 cf.; Eliade, *The Myth of Eternal Return: Cosmos and His-*

tory, trans. William R. Trask with a new Introduction by Jonathan Z. Smith (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 4.

8. Chris Park, "Religion and Geography," in *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed., John R. Hinnells (London: Routledge, 2007), 451.

9. Russell Johnson and Kerry Moran, *Kailas: On Pilgrimage to the Sacred Mountain of Tibet* (Inner Tradition Publisher, 1989).

10. Park, 451.

11. Roger Schmidt, *Exploring Religion* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Inc., 1980), 217.

12. In talking about dialectic relationship between the sacred and the profane, Eliade proposes that, a particular space that is secular in one context can be sacred in another context or that a space that is sacred today does not guarantee that it will continue to be sacred at another time. One can think about the secularized European society which has converted many religious spaces into secular space such as museums, theaters and cinema spaces.

13. Jacob Olúpònà, "A Sense of Place: The Meaning of Homeland in Sacred Yorùbá Cosmology" in *Experiences of Place*, ed. Mary N. MacDonald (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 97.

14. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in History of Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 98–101.

15. Roy Rappaport, *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion* (Richmond, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1979), 97–99.

16. Ibid., 97.

17. Olúpònà, "The Meaning of Homeland," 89.

18. Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religions*, 56.

19. Schmidt, 237.

20. In reading William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: New American Library, 1958), one is struck by different modes by which experience can be gained.

21. J. Milton Yinger, *Religion, Society and the Individual* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1957), 12.

22. Read the following revolutionary thinkers, Immanuel Kant, *What is Enlightenment* Konigsberg, Prussia, 30th September 1784 in http://www.saylor.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/What-is-Enlightenment.pdf, downloaded January 12 2010; Frederick L. Nussbaum, *The Triumph of Science and Reason* (New York: HarperCollins Press, 1953); and Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

23. See *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* titled "Immanuel Kant," http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant/, accessed October 5, 2012.

24. Roger Scruton, *Modern Culture* (New York: Continuum Press, 2000), 20–21.

25. Ibid., 30–35.

26. Schmidt, 109; Scruton, 30–46.

27. Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959); Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. by John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 6.

28. Schmidt, 124; Scruton, 30–46.

29. The pictures are shown in figure 7 and 8. What is very intriguing though is that the same aesthetically constructed Skyspace has turned out to serve contemplative spiritual experience for many people coming to this place.

30. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (New York: Hackett Publishing Co., 1987), quoted in Scruton, 31.

31. Eliade, 1.

32. Chris Park, "Religion and Geography," in *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. John R. Hinnells (London: Routledge, 2005), 452.

33. Quite a number of my friends in the USA do mountain climbing, but they never consider such an exercise a religious activity or devotion; to them it is purely sporting activity.

34. Wándé Abímbólá, *Ifá: An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus* (Ìbàdàn, Nigeria: Oxford University Press, 1976), 195; J. Omósádé Awólàlú, *Yorùbá Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites* (New York: Henrietta Press, 2001), 45.

35. Awólàlú, 48.

36. Jacob Olúpònà, "Religion and Ecology in African Culture and Society," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 267; see also Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 99.

37. Adé M. Obáyemí, "The Phenomenon of Odùduwà in Ife History," in *The Cradle of a Race: Ife from the Beginning to 1980*, ed. I. A. Akínjógbìn (Port Harcourt, Nigeria: Sunray Publishing Company, 1992), 70.

38. Eliade, 99.

39. Awólàlú, 48.

40. Eliade, 99.

41. Olúpònà, Religion and Ecology," 266.

42. Interestingly, in the short time since the author has arrived in Nigeria, many mountains, which had not been put to religious use in the past, have now been appropriated for religious rituals, including prayers and worship. It seems that the more Aláàdúrà seers and prophets are evolving the more Prayer Mountains are being appropriated and annexed. On a recent trip to his hometown in Oke-Ogun in Kajola Local Government Area of Oyo State, the author discovered that many mountains that were previously used for processing cassava flour (*gari)* are now being used for prayers and spiritual activities.

43. Chris Park, *Sacred Worlds: an introduction to Geography and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1994), 245.

44. One needs to see how sacred places such as Òkè-Ìbàdàn in Ìbàdàn and Olumo rock in Abéòkúta are jealously guarded. These sacred spaces have fences around to protect them against secular encroachment.

45. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (Westport, CT: Negro University Press, 1971), 91–92.

46. Carl G. Jung, *The Portable Jung*, ed. Joseph Campbell (New York: Penguin Books, 1971).

47. Park, *Sacred Worlds*, 260.

48. J. Milton Yinger, *Religion, Society and the Individual* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1957), 10.

49. See *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 1965, chapter 17; Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X, Bloom's Comprehensive Research and Study Guides* (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2008), 10, 51–55; Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 3.

50. Schmidt, 32–33.

51. Benjamin C. Ray, *African Religions: Symbols, Ritual and Community* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), 26.

52. Schmidt, 153.

53. Fiona Bowie, *The Anthropology of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 250.

54. Ibid., 250.

55. J. D. Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yorùbá* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 51–53; Jacob K. Olúpònà, *City of 201 Gods: Ile-Ife in Time, Space and the Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 51–86. An observation has even been made that, "traditional African religions often viewed land and its resources as communal property that belonged not only to the living but to their ancestors and to future generations." See Omari, C. K. (1990), "Traditional African Land Ethics," in *Ethics of Environment and Development: Global Challenge, International Response*, eds. J. R. Engel and J. Gibb (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990), 167–75.

56. Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Functions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

57. Pastor Awe was interviewed on October 1, 2012, at Mountain Alákòwé located along Ilésà-Ife road at 4:30 p.m. He even showed this author some of the gifts brought by men and women who had been coming for prayer on the mountain, such as plastic chairs, electricity generating plant, monetary gift for the pastor(s), and some other useful items.

58. The conflict mentioned here has nothing to do with the experience of violence, or fighting between two or more individuals. Here it connotes inner spiritual struggle, and/or psychological tension.

59. Eliade, 382–383.

60. C. S. Lewis, "A Slip of the Tongue," *Screwtape Proposes a Toast* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 121.

61. Ninian Smart*, Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 77.

62. Victor Turner, "The Center Out There: Pilgrim's Goal," *History of Religions* Vol. 12 (1973): 192.

63. Turner, "The Center Out There," 92.

64. Arnold Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

65. Turner, "The Center Out There," 193.

66. Max Gluckman, *Politics, Law and Ritual in Tribal Society* (Chicago: Aldine Press, 1965), 265.

67. Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), 30

68. Olúpònà, *City of 201 Gods*, 123.

69. Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 8.

70. Otto, *The Idea of Holy*, 6.

71. Bishop Olu Fátúnwàse was the past General Overseer of Salem Gospel Mission International. He used to be a very successful teacher and business man before he felt God called him into ministry. He constantly went to a very high Mountain at Ayórunbò village, located between Ilésà and Ile-Ife, in Nigeria to pray and fast. During my conversation with him in June 7, 1994, he told me that answering God's call into the ministry is often very difficult.

72. Victor Turner, "The Center Out There: The Pilgrim's Goal," in *History of Religions* Vol. 12, No. 3 (Feb. 1973): 191–230. Can also be accessed on http://www.jstor.org/stable/1062024, accessed on 14/1/2011 16.09.

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Chapter 8

Tradition and Modernity

The Dynamics of the Management of Osun Sacred Groves in Osogbo, Nigeria

Saheed Balogun Amusa

One of the basic features of African groves is their sacredness and inviolability. In the pre-colonial period, and for a greater part of colonial era, the sacredness of African groves was maintained and jealously guarded by the traditional custodians of these groves. In modern times, most of these African sacred spaces are fast losing their spiritual importance and relevance due to aspects of modernity such as tourism, commercialism, and urbanization. Thus, crassly materialistic activities are supplanting traditional African ecological practices and spirituality in the management of these sacred spaces. African states and societies still endeavour to preserve the sacredness of their traditional groves.

This chapter examines specific sacred places associated with Osun worship, both at the Osun main grove and other shrines in Osogbo. The sacred places associated with Osun worship both at the main grove and other shrines in Osogbo and in Yorubaland of south western Nigeria are critically analyzed. The impact of modernity on the nature and management of these sacred places and the evolution of Osun worship and festival in contemporary Osogbo are also discussed. The chapter concludes that conscious efforts must be made to maintain the sacredness and inviolability of the spaces (and people) associated with Osun worship in Osogbo.

The impact of modernity on traditions and cultures of the African peoples is profound. Since the end of colonialism in the 1960s and beyond, Westernization, globalization, and modernization have altered, modified, and influenced African cultural practices, value, and norms.[1] In spite of the cultural changes, African traditions and cultures have proved to be dynamic and resilient. In contemporary Africa, some of the traditional and cultural practices relating to indigenous festivals, coronation rites, worships, and rituals have incorporated new aspects and elements into the old practices.

The Osun worship is one of the most famous Yoruba cultural and religious events within and outside Africa.[2] The annual Osun festival in Osogbo, southwestern Nigeria, is arguably the most popular cultural festival not only in contemporary Yorubaland, but also one of the most acknowledged traditional festivals in the whole world. The Osun worship in Osogbo has given the town a special status as the cultural center, as Ile-Ife is considered as the spiritual headquarters of the Yoruba.[3] Osogbo receives this status because of the recognition of the Osun festival, its global tourist attractions, and the preeminence of the annual celebrations.

While Osogbo is famous for the annual celebration of the Osun festival, it is not widely known that Osun worship is more than the annual festival which attracts dignitaries from home and abroad. Osun is worshipped in Osogbo on a regular basis by its devotees and adherents (daily, weekly, periodically climaxing in the annual event in August every year). The regular worship of Osun in Osogbo has a number of sacred places and people associated with it. The sacred places associated with Osun worship are located in different places within Osogbo ranging from the Ataoja's palace to the Osun sacred shrines and groves in the outskirt of the town. In recent times, the management and control of the sacred places have been affected by modernization and developments. This chapter examines the changing nature of the management of the sacred places associated with Osun worship and festival in Osogbo and the implications of these for the sacredness and inviolability of Osun grove and Osun worship in Yoruba pantheons.

UNDERSTANDING THE SACREDNESS OF OSUN WORSHIP

Osogbo, the capital of Osun State, is a Yoruba city in the southwestern part of Nigeria. The city is under the traditional administration of the Ataoja, its paramount ruler, assisted by a traditional council of chiefs. Osogbo is globally famous for the annual Osun Osogbo festival, which usually comes up in August of every year. According to Osogbo traditions, the Osun festival is celebrated in commemoration of the founding of the town and the historic roles played by the goddess of Osun River.

In the Yoruba mythology, Osun was a powerful woman and the only female of the sixteen major Yoruba deities (orisa).[4] She is regarded, among other things, as the goddess of wealth and beauty; an herbalist or healer; a diviner; a dyer; a leader of women; a giver of children; a goddess of fertility, protection, and blessing. Her full appellation is Osun Seegesi Olooya Iyun ("Osun the owner of the flaw-less, perfectly carved beaded comb").[5] During

her lifetime, Osun is said to be the most favourite of the powerful Alaafin Sango's three wives—the other two being Oya and Oba. The three wives of Alaafin Sango—Osun, Oba, and Oya were said to have turned into rivers upon the death of their husband and they became the goddesses of Osun, Oba, and Oya Rivers respectively.[6] Oral traditions indicate that the Osun River takes its course from a swampy area of Igede-Ekiti in Ekiti State of Nigeria flowing through Ijeshaland to Osogbo where it broadens out meandering through the forest and finally empties itself into the Atlantic Ocean. Today, the waters of Osun River are seen as being sacred capable of making barren women pregnant, healing various diseases, warding off evil machinations as well as opening doors of prosperity.[7] It was the goddess of Osun River that is believed to have played great role in the founding and settlement of Osogbo.

There are several versions of the traditions of origin of Osogbo and most of these traditions have been published by scholars. One of these versions, which was popularized by Reverend Samuel Johnson, claims that Osogbo was established in the seventeenth century during the reign of Alaafin Kori in Oyo Empire.[8] According to this tradition, the Owa of Ilesa established Osogbo in order to counter the action of Alaafin Kori who had established Ede under the authority of Timi in his bid to provide security to Oyo traders attending the Apomu market against the constant harassment from some Ijesa elements. Having established Osogbo, the Owa of Ilesa saddled the Ataoja with the political and religious responsibilities of the new settlement and to rule over the town and worship the fish in the Osun River.[9] All other versions of the traditions of origin of Osogbo agree that Osogbo was founded by two Ijesha princes—Olarooye and Olutimehin, and that Osun goddess played active roles in the founding and settlement of the town.[10]

Since this chapter does not go into the details of the various versions of the traditions of origin of Osogbo, provides only a synthesis of all the various versions. Like other Yoruba groups, the people of Osogbo trace their descent to Oduduwa, the progenitor of the Yoruba. According to Yoruba traditions, when Oduduwa became blind as a result of old age, Ajibogun, one of his children, succeeded in fetching the sea water which was used to cure their father's blindness. This earned him the appellation *Obokun* ("He who fetched sea water").[11] During the period of Yoruba princes' dispersal from Ile-Ife, Ajibogun and his younger brother, Adebuyisoro, left Ile-Ife and founded Ibokun. When Ajibogun died, Adebuyisoro became his successor as the Olubokun. Upon the death of Adebuyisoro, Adefokanbale, his son, succeeded him. It was Adefokanbale that later founded Ipole Omu upon his departure from Ibokun and reigned as the first Owaroki of Ipole Omu (Owa Oroki). Osogbo traditions continue that Olarooye, the Eighth Owaroki of Ipole Omu, and his brother, Olutimehin, were the founders of Osogbo.[12]

Osogbo traditions narrate that when Olarooye and his people were faced with a perennial water scarcity in Ipole, he sent out a group of hunters led by Olutimehin and Ogidan to explore possible sources of water supply and a new site of settlement. Upon the discovery and reports of Olutimehin and his hunting group of Osun River, Olarooye and his people left Ipole and settled on the flood plain of the Osun River.[13] It was said that the goddess of the Osun River welcomed Olarooye and his people and there was cordial relationship between the new settlers, the goddess, and her spirits. This is why the Osun goddess was, and is still regarded as the spiritual mother of Oba Olarooye and all subsequent Ataoja.[14] However, it was not long before the relations between the Osun goddess and the new settlers became strained and the people had to move to another location. Two major factors were responsible for the departure of Olarooye and his people from the flood plain of Osun River to the upper terrace called "Oke Ohuntoto."[15]

The first of these factors was that after Olarooye and his people had settled down on their new settlement, they started to clear the bush around them for farming purposes. In the process, a tree fell on the river and a voice came from the river saying: "Laro, Timehin, gbogbo Ikoko aro mi ni e ti fo tan" meaning "Laro, Timehin, you have broken all my dyeing pots." Afterwards, Laro and Timehin heard the voices of some spirits saying: *Oso Igbo pele o; Oso Igbo rora o* ("Wizard of the forest, we commiserate with you"). The name Osogbo derived from *Oso-Igbo* ("wizard of the forest"), referring to the goddess herself.[16] Another tradition has it that the term "Oso-Igbo" was actually used by Osun goddess to refer to Olarooye and Olutimehin when the tree fell on the river and she shouted: *Ta lo fo Ikoko aro mi o? Eyin Oso-Igbo e tun de o* ("Who broke my indigo pot? You wizards of the forest are here again").[17] After this incident, the goddess of Osun River is said to have spoken to Olarooye and Olutimehin and asked them not to settle near the Osun River, but rather at a farther place where her voice would no longer be audible to them.

The second factor that informed the movement of Larooye and his followers away from the flood plain of Osun River was that the settlement was always flooded during the raining season causing a great havoc to their property.[18] The settlers were convinced that the goddess of the river was not pleased with their settlement there. They therefore consulted the oracles which asked them to offer sacrifices to appease the goddess. After the ritual sacrifices, a god-fish "Iko" emerged from the river and Olarooye welcomed the fish with his palms. From this act, Olarooye derived his title of *Atewogbeja* or *Ataoja* ("one who welcomes the god-fish with his spread hands").[19] In the night of that great day, the Osun goddess was said to have reappeared to them and instructed that these sacrifices should be offered to her every year

while she also pledged her continued support and protection to the people. This marked the origin of the annual Osun Osogbo festival.[20] On the advice of the goddess, Olarooye and his people moved to the upper terrace of the river and settled there. This place became known as "Ohuntoto" where the people built a palace for their king and a flourishing market. This was the second palace of the Ataoja and is now known as Iledi Ohuntoto, that is, Ohuntoto Temple.[21] It was after this settlement that Olutimehin seized a sixteen-point lamp (Atupa Oloju Merindinlogun) from some spirits dancing round it during one of his hunting expeditions. When Osun goddess heard about this incident, she told Olarooye and Olutimehin that the lamp must be celebrated the way the spirits were doing before the seizure anytime Osun festival is about nine days to come.[22] Also, the goddess handed a calabash containing some materials to Olarooye and instructed him that a royal virgin lady must convey it to Osun grove during the climax of the annual Osun festival. It was also promised by the goddess that her messenger "Iko" would be sent during the annual Osun festival to pour curative waters into the calabash being held by the reigning Ataoja and Osun priestess.[23] All these events are re-enacted every year and they form parts of the major activities during the annual Osun Osogbo festival.

When the population of these people began to grow, they moved to another place called, "Ode-Osogbo" upon consultation of the oracles. It was from this point that Osogbo began to develop as an important economic and commercial center. The rapid expansion of Osogbo is also attributed to the influence of Osun goddess. According to traditions, Olutimehin caught a small elephant at the Osun grove and brought it to Ode Osogbo on the advice of the goddess to nurture it very well because as the elephant began to grow, the city would continue to expand. Olutimehin took the advice and tied the elephant at "Idi Ogun" behind the palace of Olarooye, which still stands in the front of the present palace of the Ataoja.[24]

From the foregoing, some basic historical facts about the founding of Osogbo and the place of the goddess of Osun River in the whole process have emrged. First, Osogbo was founded by Olarooye and Olutimehin who were descendants of Oduduwa through Owa Ajibogun and Adebuyisoro of Ibokun and Adefokanbale who founded Ipole Omu and became the first Owaroki (Owa oroki). Second, Osun goddess was the original owner and the earliest inhabitant of the place where the ancestors of Osogbo settled after they left Ipole Omu and that the goddess welcomed them and considered them her children.[25] Furthermore, the term "Oso-Igbo" from which Osogbo was derived was the name of Osun goddess or that she gave the name to the town when she referred to Olarooye and Timehin as *Oso-Igbo* ("Wizards of the forest"). Moreover, the title "Ataoja," the traditional title of the paramount

ruler of Osogbo, today emanated from the event of Olarooye receiving a god-fish on his palms from the goddess of Osun River.[26] Finally, the annual Osun Osogbo festival originated from the historic ritual sacrifices made by Olarooye in appeasing and seeking the favours of Osun goddess during the travails of the early settlers of the town. All these points combine to make the people of Osogbo regard Osun goddess as the mother of the town and she had, ever since then, continued to provide security and protection to the town. It is believed by the people that it is Osun Osogbo who helps Ataoja rule Osogbo.[27] In return for this, the people have been offering annual sacrifices to her through the famous annual Osun Osogbo festival.

SOME SACRED PLACES ASSOCIATED WITH OSUN WORSHIPS AND FESTIVAL IN OSOGBO

There are several sacred people and places associated with the regular Osun worship and the annual Osun festival in Osogbo. The Osun worship in Osogbo is hinged on some sacred people and personalities such as the Ataoja, the traditional ruler (Oba) of Osogbo, the Iya Osun (the Chief Priestess), the Arugba Osun (Votary Maid), the Aworo Osun (Osun Priest), the Balogun Osun, the Iyalase, the Otun Awo, the Osi Awo, and a host of others.[28] These people have specific roles to be performed in the regular and annual Osun worship and festivals. The Osun worship is carried out in several places in Osogbo beginning from the Ataoja's palace to several other places within the town particularly at the Osun Grove on the outskirts of the town. The Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove is an organically evolved cultural landscape that covered an area of 75 hectares of undisturbed primary rainforest vegetation with about 47 hectares serving as buffer zone. The Grove is located at latitude 7°46 and longitude 4°33 on the banks of River Osun in the Southern part of Osogbo.[29] It is about two kilometers away from the modern palace of the Ataoja of Osogbo. It is a living and historic sacred grove with numerous species of plants and animals. The grove is an exceptionally rich herbal pharmacy. The landmass of the grove is of pre-Cambrian rock basement with a fertile clay-loamy soil within the grove and encircling the land mass of Osun River.[30] The grove stands as a rare center of traditional knowledge system and practices with significant sociocultural obligation of worship and appreciation of Osun and other deities in form of the well acclaimed annual Osun Osogbo festival that has become an international tourism destination in Nigeria.

The Osun Sacred Grove is a place of regular worship where devotees come to renew themselves, offer presents, redeem their pledges, or consult Osun goddess and other deities. It is today a symbol of identity for all Yoruba

people not only in Nigeria but in different parts of Africa and among the Africans in Diaspora especially in the Antilles (Cuba, Puerto Rico, Trinidad, and Tobago) and the Americas.[31] All the living contents in the Osun Grove and River are regarded as the totemic children of the Osun goddess. Thus, fishing, poaching, hunting, felling of trees, and other related activities are regarded as sacrilegious and forbidden by customary laws and religious sanctions within the grove.[32] Within this grove are some sacred places associated with the regular and annual Osun festival and worship as analyzed below:

Osun Lakokan: Osun Lakokan is the first deity to be seen and appeased upon entry to the Osun sacred groves located at the outskirts of Osogbo. It is to be worshipped before approaching the Osun goddess. It is said that Osun Lakokan has its own priestess that worships it on a regular basis.[33]

The Iya Mopo (Mother of Sentry Hill): Iya Mopo was the soldier who was always on guard in the watch tower overlooking the entrance into the Osun grove. It is generally believed by the people of Osogbo that Iya Mopo possessed mystical powers and this accounts for her superb ability to guard the whole grove effectively. Iya Mopo was reputed to be the Matron goddess of Pot makers because of her skills in the moulding of clay pots. Apart from moulding pots, Iya Mopo was an acclaimed expert in the production of palm oil.[34]

Agbala Osun (The Osun Courtyard): This is a large courtyard located within the Osun sacred groves in Osogbo. The actual Osun worship point (Ojubo Osun) along the Osun river bank and the Osun Shrine (Ile Osun) are located in Agbala Osun. It is at this Osun Courtyard that all ceremonies on the annual Osun festival are concluded on the grand finale day. Here the Chief Osun Priest and Priestess lead other Osun devotees in the offering of sacrificial items to the goddess. They also intercede in prayers and supplications for the development of the town as well as granting the requests of everybody who comes to the goddess for anything. The Osun Courtyard is a sacred place which cannot be entered by the non-initiates on the day of the grand finale of the festival or on any other day.[35]

Ile Osun (Osun Temple) was the first residence or palace of the first king of Osogbo—Oba Gbadewolu Larooye when he arrived at Osogbo from Ipole Omu. It was built on the flood plain of Osun River with constant incessant flooding of plains during the rains. Oral traditions have it that after necessary consultations with the Ifa oracle as well as performance of ritual sacrifices, Oba Larooye and his followers moved to the upper terrace (Oke Ohuntoto) where he built the second palace now known as Iledi Ohuntoto.[36]

Ojubo Osun (The Main Osun Worship Point): The Ojubo Osun is located within the Agbala Osun and it is the place where the main rituals of Osun

worship are carried out, hence, it is acknowledged as the major place of worship in the grove. Ojubo Osun is about two kilometers from the Ataoja's palace and it is the place where the first Ataoja, Oba Larooye made his sacred pact with the Osun goddess. The Ojubo is also the spot where Osun goddess is worshipped and can be invoked. Whenever Osun goddess is invoked, it is the belief of the devotees that Osun goddess herself would be present spiritually to meet them, receive their prayers and offerings as well as bless them. It must be stressed that it is at the Ojubo that all the objects of sacrifice such as pounded yam, fowls, *efo yanrin* and so on are thrown into the river as sacrifices to the goddess. It is also here that the Osogbo High Chiefs and other people pay their homage to the Ataoja. After receiving them, the Ataoja, led by the Iya Osun and the Aworo Osun, offer the objects of sacrifice to the Osun goddess as the Ataoja sits on the rock on which Oba Larooye sat when it all began. It is also the sacred spot where the Ataoja communes with Osun goddess.[37]

The Second Palace of Oba Gbadewolu Larooye–The First Ataoja: The second palace of Oba Gbadewolu Larooye, the first king of Osogbo after evacuating from the first palace situated on the flood plain of Osun River is known as "Oke Ohuntoto." Oke Ohuntoto is now used as the temple of the Ogboni Cult (Iledi) and there the Alare worships the ancestors particularly Oba Larooye annually.[38]

Oja Ohuntoto (Ohuntoto Market): This market is a mythological market where human beings and spirits are said to have interacted. It is the first market in Osogbo. A traditional shrine is located on its grounds. According to Osogbo mythology, this was a market place for the gods, subterranean and supernatural beings. Evidence of grinding activities is seen by oval pits out of the pre-Cambrian outcrops of stone slabs that cover the "market space."[39]

Odo Osun (The Osun River): The river drains the Osun groves in Osogbo. It is said that the River takes its course from the swampy grounds of Igede Ekiti in the neighboring Ekiti State of Nigeria, flowing through Ijeshaland into Osogbo where it becomes broader meandering through the sacred grove and finally empties into the Atlantic Ocean. It is believed that the sacred water of Osun can make barren women pregnant, heal various diseases, ward off evil machinations of the enemies, and open the doors to prosperity and great success.[40] Moreover, the fish in Osun River was said to have been used by Osun, the goddess as a messenger of peace, blessings, and favour dating back to the pact between her and the founders of Osogbo.[41] The annual ritual re-enactment of this episode is the hallmark of the Osun Osogbo festival which links the Ataoja of Osogbo with the Grove.[42]

Other Osun Worship Points in the Grove: There are several other sacred worship points along the right bank of the Osun River in Osogbo with designated priests and priestesses connected with different quarters (residential lineage groups). From these points, Osun is worshipped regularly, her waters collected and drunk for healing of infertility and other diseases. Spiritual cleansing through bathing also takes place at the various Osun points within the grove such as: Busanyin, Ijumu, Daeke, Junlepon, Asaba, Ojubo, Laro, Orubu, Elegba, and Lakokan/Iweda as well as other points outside the grove but within Osogbo such as: Gbodofon, Eleiyele, Ororun, Olomowewe, Oloyo, Ajangboro, Ibuaje, Ajigun, and Oniyanmerin.[43]

The Osun Shrine within the Modern Palace of the Ataoja: The 12–day Osun festival always come to an end on Friday with worship at the Osun Shrine located within the oldest Ataoja's palace at the bank of Osun River. This shrine is quite different from the one at the Ataoja's palace where the image of the goddess is displayed along with several antiquities. The antiquities include cowries (once a medium of exchange in Yorubaland) which indicate that the Osun goddess was a very wealthy woman in her lifetime, guns and swords made of brass depicting her might and soup pots that symbolize her legendary motherly roles in protecting Osogbo town and the citizenry.[44]

Other Sacred Places within the Osun Groves: There are other sacred places within the Osun groves in Osogbo which are meant for the worship of other Yoruba deities apart from Osun. These include the Igbo Ifa which is a sacred place dedicated to Ifa oracle devotees and medicinal herbalists (Babalawo). Igbo Ifa is a sacred grove located within the Osun grove where Ifa disciples are initiated by the Oluawo (Chief Priest) into the Ifa Cult. The Babalawos (Ifa diviners) are seers, diviners or prophets who possess the gift of second-sight and can foretell the future, uttering the words of Supreme Being as revealed to them by Orunmila who is believed to be the intermediary between man and God. The Babalawo represent the gods among the people foretelling them what would happen, teaching them the laws of God and rebuking them whenever they violate the laws.[45] There is also the Obatala Shrine located inside the Osun grove adjacent the Olu Igbo sculpture. Obatala, to the Yoruba, is the god of creativity, co-worker and assistant to Olodumare (Supreme God). For quick sighting, the Obatala Shrine is located close to the main road leading to the Osun Grove. It overlooks the Iledi Ohuntoto, the second palace of Oba Larooye.[46] Another one is the Ogun shrine located within the Osun courtyard (Agbala Osun) opposite the first palace of the Ataoja. Ogun is the Yoruba god of iron. There is also the Igbo Epa (*Epa Forest*) within the Osun grove. This is the location of the cult associated with hunting as well as the ceremony associated with marshal art.

FROM TRADITION TO MODERNITY: THE CHANGING MANAGEMENT OF OSUN SACRED GROVE

The impact of modernity on tradition is enormous, particularly in Africa where the people still strive to protect and project their indigenous cultures. In the case of Osun worship in Osogbo, modernity has affected profoundly the nature of the celebration of the annual Osun festival as well as the management, ownership, and control of the Osun sacred grove in the city. The management of Osun Sacred Grove in Osogbo has been greatly influenced by modernity. Two major historic events can be pointed out in this regard. The first was the 1965 declaration of Osun Grove as a national monument by the Federal Government of Nigeria and its subsequent placement under the custody of the Federal Government by the Decree 77 of 1979.[47] As a consequence, the Grove came under the watchful eyes of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM). The second major event was the declaration of Osun Sacred Grove as a World Heritage Site on July 15, 2005, by the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).[48] This was after the Grove satisfied the UNESCO's guidelines and criteria that included the fact that it had exhibited an important interchange of human values over a period of over 500 years within the Yoruba people both in Nigeria and in Diaspora.[49] These two historic events have changed the ownership and management of the Grove from the exclusive preserves of the traditional Osun devotees in Osogbo to a common national heritage.

Legally, the federal and state governments are the owners of all declared sites and monuments in Nigeria while the communities only exercise cultural rights. The Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove had possessed a legal status since the day it was declared as a National Monument in the year 1965. The National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) which was established by Decree 77 of 1979 was vested with the custodianship of all monuments, shrines, and antiquities in Nigeria. It was empowered to declare and gazette monuments, sites and buildings as well as administer them.[50] Also, the Nigerian National Cultural Policy of 1988 states that "the state shall preserve as monuments old city walls and gates sites, palaces, shrines, public buildings, promote buildings of historical significance and monumental cultures."[51] To this end, the Osun Sacred Grove is a property of the government and therefore, its formal control and management are that of the government.

The management of the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove is carried out at the three tiers of Nigerian government—at the federal level by the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM); at the state level by the Osun State Government; and at the local level by the Osogbo Local Govern-

ment Council and the Olorunda Local Government Council. It is only at the local government level that the Ataoja-in-Council and Osun priests are given some traditional roles in the management of the Grove as the custodians and devotees of Osun worship. Going by the existing arrangement, the Federal Government of Nigeria through its agency—the NCMM employs virtually all the work force that daily administers the Grove. The workforce is made up of patrol guards that monitor the grove's monuments on a daily basis, sculptors, conservators, skilled and unskilled artisans as well as administrative, middle, and top management officers. This category of heritage workers that include heritage caretakers and heritage guards is under the supervision of the Curator of the National Museum, Osogbo, who also acts as the World Heritage Site Manager.

While the Federal Government protects the forest grove through legal instruments, the traditional and cultural control measures are tendered by the King of Osogbo (The Ataoja) and his Council. Some nongovernmental organizations such as the Osogbo Cultural Heritage Council (OCHC), Osun Grove Support Group (OGSG), and Adunni Olorisa Trust (AOT) (a group that works under the auspices of Susanne Wenger) have all been working harmoniously with the NCMM in the management and protection of the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove.[52] The NCMM has continued to play its statutory role of ensuring that conservation standard within the Osun sacred grove is kept. To this end, the Commission put in place a training programme that guarantees technical cooperation as well as participatory community collaboration with traditional authorities, the Osun State Government, nongovernmental organizations, and donor agencies. Significantly, local development plans relating to the grove always take into consideration the sacredness and sanctity of the grove.

In terms of funding and financial management of the grove, the Federal Government through the NCMM is the main employer of all the workers at the site. The Federal Government is therefore solely responsible for the payment of the workers' salaries and their entitlements. Apart from paying the staff salaries, it is said that about eighty percent of all the capital projects at the grove are borne by the Federal Government. Besides, the representative of the NCMM–the Curator/Site Manager in Osogbo is allowed to make use of the revenues generated at the site for conservation activities. The revenue is mainly realized through the collection of entry fees from tourists into the grove. Adult tourist pays a sum of N200.00 per head while children and students pay N100.00 per head as gate fees to enter the Grove.[53]

Other source of revenue has been the rights often paid for video/filming for corporate use. These rights are paid to the coffers of the National Museums Osogbo Accounts. The revenue is shared on 40/60 ratio by the Osogbo Cultural Heritage Council—a nongovernmental organization linked to the

traditional authority of the Ataoja and the NCMM. Inside the grove, a small gift shop manned by the employees of the NCMM is being operated. The shop contains such items as heads, rings, necklace, traditional clothes with local designs, traditional drums, and so on. Apart from these, Osun priests and priestesses who engage in the regular worship of Osun goddess also receive voluntary monetary and material gifts from beneficiaries of Osun's "water of life" from consultations and patronage.[54]

Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove is now managed by a stakeholder's committee, which comprises representatives of the NCMM, the Government of Osun State, the Oba of Osogbo (Ataoja) and his Council, the Osogbo and Olorunda Local Government Councils, the Osun Priestesses and Priests, the Ogboni Sacred Society, the Nigeria Police Force, Tour Operators, the Osun Grove Support Group (OGSG), and the Adunni Olorisa Trust (OAT). This Stakeholders Committee meets regularly to discuss issues concerning the Grove and to define priorities for its protection and conservation. The terms of reference of the Committee are as follows: To ensure full respect of protected zone and improve control over the buffer zone; to improve general aspects of the site; to improve conservation of the grove and of structure; to continue to carry out researches on the different facets of the groves; to ensure that results of researchers are widely made available for education and for interpretation to visitors; to upgrade capacity for the regular maintenance as well as gradual and sustained improvement of the site; to promote the site and ensure that it serves the purpose of contributing to development and poverty alleviation; and to establish a Management Committee that will ensure that the site can benefit from the capacities of all government bodies (Federal, State, and Local Government levels, Traditional authorities and organizations as well as NGOs and that initiatives can be favoured and synchronized).

Over the years, the Committee has not only been carrying out its mandates but has also been playing useful roles in the organization of the annual Osun Osogbo Festival. The implication of this is that Osun sacred grove whose control and management were under the authority of the Ataoja and Osun devotees has been subjected to secular and profane authority of the government with far-reaching consequences for the sacredness and sanctity of the Grove.

THE IMPACT OF MODERNITY ON THE SACREDNESS OF OSUN GROVE SINCE THE COLONIAL PERIOD

Since the colonial period, the Osun grove had been opened to secular influences. In fact, during the colonial era, the Grove was never spared from encroachment by the colonialists. During this period, parts of the sacred grove were acquired

for the Colonial Department of Forestry and Agriculture for agricultural purposes. This involved the felling of trees in parts of the grove thereby leading to demystification of the Osun goddess. Some traditional sculptures within the grove were said to be stolen and incidents of regular hunting and fishing took place in the Grove.[55] Also, land speculators entered into the Grove and contractors began to undertake quarrying works on the rocks in the grove. In addition, a motorable road was constructed right in the middle of the grove in order to link Osogbo with some neighboring towns and villages. The road construction was aimed at easing the transportation of farm produce from the surrounding settlements to Osogbo that was gradually becoming an urban center within the colonial economic system.[56] The same reason accounted for the construction of the famous Suspended Bridge now within the Grove by the Colonial Government in 1935 ostensibly to serve as a bridge over the Osun River that will help to link Osogbo with other Yoruba towns. Today, the Suspended Bridge has become a tourist trail and a viewing point of Osun River as well as the surrounding groves. Unfortunately, both the road across the Grove and the bridge that allowed for free vehicular and human movements within the Grove now constitute a big threat to the security of arts and artefacts within the Grove.[57]

The introduction of Islam and Christianity into Osogbo in the nineteenth century also had negative impact on the sacredness of Osun Grove and Osun worship. The coming of Islamic religion to Osogbo in the latter part of the nineteenth century and its rapid expansion was as a result of the fact that the religion got the support of traditional rulers, chiefs, and distinguished traders who were proud to associate with the prestige, knowledge, and skill known with the Muslim traders, medicine men, masons, tailors, etc. Islam thus became the religion of most of the ruling houses and notable royal families.[58] Just like Islam, the embrace of Christianity by the people of Osogbo in the early twentieth century also had its impact on the people as many of the people jettisoned the traditional religions.

The impact of these new religions on Osun worship was that Osun adherents lost so many of their young ones to the new faiths and Osun grove and worship were almost totally abandoned safe for a few old ones who sticked to its worship. For Osogbo Muslims and Christians, it became less fashionable to be openly identified with traditional institutions such as Osun cult system. Thus, the hitherto devotees of the various deities in the Grove abandoned them and stopped regular patronage and devotions. The new converts into Islam and Christianity were afraid of reprisal from other Moslems or Christians that could take the form of outright ostracism, molestation, deprivation, maiming, and killing in some extreme cases. Hence, the grove that was for several centuries a sanctuary became isolated and a taboo or "forbidden forest" for whosoever wishes to go to heaven.[59]

This was the situation until the arrival of Madam Susanne Wenger, an Austrian woman, to the grove in 1957. Her arrival and activities changed the deteriorating tide. Popularly known as Adunni Olorisa, Susan Wenger not only made Osogbo her permanent abode but she established several places in the grove which have become major points of tourist attractions within the Grove today.[60] She devoted the whole of her life to Osun worship and succeeded in becoming one of the major actors in the regular and annual Osun worship until her death in 2009.[61] Apart from the colonial onslaught and impact of Islam and Christianity on Osun worship in Osogbo, the modern management of the grove has had some adverse effects on the sacredness and sanctity of the grove in spite of the continued efforts of its custodians to maintain its sacredness. First, since the government has taken over the management of the grove and most of the modern guardians of the grove are not Osun devotees proper, the grove is now plagued by a number of challenges ranging from desecration of the sacred sculptures and monuments, theft of some relics, encroachment and destruction of some parts of the groves.[62] Other contemporary problems facing the grove include poor funding, violation of traditional laws, natural disasters like bush burning, forest felling, and other man-made risks which often put strenuous pressure on the grove guards. This is in spite of the presence of day and night guards that are on regular surveillance in the Grove.[63]

Furthermore, the nature of the celebration of the annual Osun Osogbo festival has also been affected by modernity. The impact of modernity on the celebration of Osun festival is felt more on the festivity aspect of it rather than its ritual aspects. Indeed, several modern activities have been incorporated into the conduct of the annual Osun festival and the planning of the festival in the contemporary time involves elaborate committees of experts in various fields who ensure that all aspects of the festival such as publicity and promotion; marketing, finance and administration; workshops and seminars; security, competitions and contests; reception and accommodation and so on are successful.[64] In contemporary times, the planning, organization, and celebration of the annual Osun festival are carried out by the people of Osogbo led by the Ataoja and other Osun devotees, the Osun State Government, the Federal Ministry of Culture, Tourism and National Orientation, the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, and other corporate bodies which give financial supports to the various aspects of the festival.[65]

Some of the newly incorporated activities in the Osun festival include the festival business exposition where some of the Yoruba cultural items such as clothes of various types, beads, caps, shoes, and so on in their original forms are exhibited at the palace of the Ataoja and Osun grove; contests and competitions in various activities like beauty contest (Miss Osun), *Ayo Olopon* game, inter-schools football, essays and quiz competition; film shows, theatre stage performance, Egungun (masquerade) display and traditional Yoruba

musical concerts featuring famous musicians such as Apala, Sewele, Bata, Juju, and Fuji super stars.[66] All these activities add both traditional and modern flavours to the annual celebration of the festival. More significantly, an important aspect of the contemporary nature of the celebration of the Osun festival is the organization of several key workshops, seminars, and symposia on cultural appreciation, rejuvenation, investment, and tourism potentials of Osun grove and its subsidiaries as well as other places of cultural importance in Osogbo.[67] All these are modern innovations to the celebration of the festival and they add colour to the grandeur of the celebration of the festival. From the foregoing, it can be seen that, in spite of the conscious effort of its adherents, modernity and modern management of Osun sacred grove in Osogbo has had its toll on the sacredness, sanctity, and traditional aura of the grove since the advent of colonial rule, Islam, and Christianity in the city.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has assessed the dynamics of the modern management of the Osun sacred grove in Osogbo and the implications of this for its sanctity. It has been shown that the government take-over of the management of the grove through the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) in 1979 and the UNESCO admission of the grove into the prestigious list of World Heritage Sites in 2005 have opened up the sacred grove to profane and secular influences. To this end, the control and management of the Osun Grove in Osogbo are no longer within the ambit of the Ataoja Traditional Council and the Osun priests and devotees. As shown in this piece, the secular influences on the control and management of Osun sacred Grove in Osogbo have impacted not only the nature of the celebrations of the annual Osun festival but have also impacted on the sacredness of the grove.

The sacredness and sanctity of African traditional religious groves are being gradually eroded in the contemporary times in the name of modernity, civilization, and globalization. The sacred spaces are giving way to profanity and secularity as seen in the case of Osun Sacred Grove in Osogbo, southwestern Nigeria. It must, however, be emphasised that, in spite of modernization, the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove remains one of the few sacred groves in Nigeria which have relatively survived modern onslaughts on its traditional aura. In fact, the grove has kept most of its traditional aura and remains very central to the sociopolitical development of the community. The grove still sustains some of its traditional and sacred aura due to the fact that the host community—Osogbo has continued to maintain some mythological bonds with the Grove through regular worships and the annual Osun Osogbo Festival and Rituals.

NOTES

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14. Diedre Badejo, *Osun Seegesi*, 185.

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16. Ibid., 14.

17. Awe and Albert, "Historical Development of Osogbo," 3.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., 2.

20. G. O. Oparanti, "The Origin of Osun Festival," *Osun Osogbo 2004 Official Magazine* (Osogbo, Nigeria: Office of the Ataoja of Osogbo and Osun State Government, 2004), 10.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., 11.
24. Ibid.
25. Farotimi, *Osun Festival*, 4.
26. Awe and Albert, "Historical Development of Osogbo," 2.
27. Diedre Badejo, *Osun Seegesi*, 20.
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29. Makinde Olakunle, "The History, Challenges and Constraints of Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove since Inception" (A Presentation by the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Osogbo at the Meeting of the Osun State Chapter of the National Forum of Heads of Federal Government Establishments, 2010), 1.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Afolabi Kayode, *Osun Osogbo: Sacred Places and Sacred People* (Charleston, SC: BookSurge LLC, 2006), 2.
34. Oral interview with Mrs. Sidikat Lawore, aged 57, Osun priestess, Ataoja's Palace, Osogbo (October 23, 2015).
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Oral interview with Mr. Isiaka Lawore, aged 60, Osun priest, Ataoja's Palace (October 23, 2015).
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. See Amusa, S. B., "Chieftaincy, Festivals and Rituals: The Role of the Ataoja in the Osun Osogbo Festival in Historical Perspective," in *The Chieftaincy Institution in Nigeria*, eds., Tunde Babawale, Akin Alao, and Bimbo Adesoji (Lagos, Nigeria: CBAAC, 2010), 65–84.
43. Oral Interview with Pa S. Gbadamosi, aged 73, farmer/hunter, Isale Osun, Osogbo (October 24, 2015).
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. The Decree 77 of 1979 established the National Commission for Museums and Monuments to replace the Nigerian Antiquities Commission (NAC). For details on the composition and duties of the Commission, see National Commission for Museums and Monuments Act in Chapter 242 of the Laws of the Federation of Nigeria (1990).
48. Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, *Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove's Nomination to the World Heritage List* (Abuja: National Commission for Museums and Monuments, 2004).
49. Oral Interview with Mr. O. F. Adedayo, aged 56, civil servant, National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Ataoja's Palace, Osogbo (October 24, 2015).

50. See National Commission for Museums and Monuments Act (Chapter 242) of the Laws of the Federation of Nigeria (1990).

51. See Cultural Policy for Nigeria (1988) cited in Ajah, Okpo, *Africa: Basic Issues in Cultural Orientation for Sustainable Development* (Lagos, Nigeria: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization, 1990), 99–100.

52. Oral Interview with Mr. L. Adereti, aged 48, civil servant, National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Osogbo (October 24, 2015).

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

55. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, *Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove: A Guide* (Abuja, Nigeria: NCMM, 2015), 2.

56. The extension of the railway line from Ibadan to Osogbo via Ede in 1905 made Osogbo a center of colonial economy. It became the northern terminus of the railway system and attracted immigrants from neighboring cities. It also played host to the European commercial firms such as United African Company (UAC), John Holt, Paterson Zochonis (PZ), G. B. Ollivant, British Cotton Growing Association (BCGA) etc and witnessed the influx of Lebanese and Syrian middlemen. As a consequence, Osogbo became a strategic location as the center of collection and grading of produce greatly needed in Europe during this period. Therefore, cocoa and kernels came from Ekiti, Ijesa, and Ife communities to Osogbo while raw cotton got to the town from Oyo and Ilorin. The railway network which linked Osogbo with other parts of the country also influenced the early link of Osogbo with road transportation as the town became one of the major areas plied by motor vehicles from Lagos and Ibadan during the colonial period. For some details on the role of Osobo in the colonial economy and its urbanization, see W. B. Schwab, "Osogbo—An Urban Community," in *Urbanization and Migration in West Africa*, ed. H. Kuper (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965) and Layi Egunjobi, "Osogbo: Aspects of Urbanisation, Physical Planning and Development," in *Osogbo: Model of Growing African Towns*, ed. C. O. Adepegba (Ibadan: Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, 1995), 13–29.

57. Oral interview with Mr. Olakunle Makinde, aged 50+, curator, National Museum, Osogbo and Head of NCMM, Osun State, Ataoja's Palace, Osogbo (October 24, 2015).

58. For details, see A. K. Makinde, "The Emergence and Growth of Islam in Osogbo," in *Islam and Society in Osun State: Essays in Honour of Oba Raufu Olayiwola Olawale, Adedeji II, Akinrun of Ikirun*, ed. S. Oyeweso (Ibadan, Nigeria: Matrix Publishers, 2012), 51–78.

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62. Oral interview with Mr. Olakunle Makinde.

63. Ibid.

64. See "2004 Osun Festival Features," in *Osun Osogbo Festival 2004 Official Magazine* (Osogbo: Office of the Ataoja of Osogbo and Osun State Government, 2004), 5.

65. O. Omosimua, "Osun Osogbo opens Tourism Mines in Nigeria," *The Capitol: The Authoritative Tourism Magazine* Vol. 1, No. 2 (2005): 11.

66. S. B. Amusa, "Historical Context of Osun Festival: A Background Analysis of the Traditions of Origin of Osogbo," *IFE: Journal of the Institute of Cultural Studies*, Special Edition, 2011 (Institute of Cultural Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria), 187–206.

67. Ibid.

Section 3

SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATIONS AND UNDERSTANDINGS

Chapter 9

African Sacred Groves and Sustainability

Reflections on Zimbabwe's Chirinda Forest and Guhune Mountain

Fortune Sibanda

The grove is the centre of their whole religion.

—Tacitus, Roman historian and senator

In contemporary times climate change and global warming have been the most critical challenge for resource conservation. Anthropogenic factors such as uncontrolled fires, expanding human settlements, sporadic logging activities for wood fuel, timber, and farming gobble up the richest forests throughout the world. It is obvious that the survival of humanity is anchored on a holistic approach to life. Agazi rightly observes that "there is need to create the awareness that the environment cannot be destroyed without destroying the world with it. Hence, there is need to harmonise cultural evolution with natural evolution."[1] Thus the subject of African sacred space, specifically Zimbabwean sacred groves, can be explored, in spite of the depredations on the environment by "human pox." Sustainability of these spaces is also of critical importance because nature and culture must be kept in balance.

This chapter focuses on the sustainability of two Zimbabwean sacred groves through Indigenous Ways of Knowing (IWK). The groves are located in Chipinge and Chimanimani and Districts in Manicaland Province. The first site to be explored is Chirinda forest (under chief Mangwana), located in the south-eastern part of Chipinge District and the second one is Guhune Mountain (under Chief Mutambara) in Chimanimani District. Through Chirinda forest and Guhune Mountain, the study examines the nexus between spatiality and spirituality among the Ndau people of Zimbabwe.

Sacred groves are places that encompass large mountain ranges, forests, and mountain forests. One informative definition says that "sacred groves are

areas of vegetation preserved through local taboos and sanctions that express ecological and spiritual values."[2] In terms of function, sacred groves "act as sacrosanct areas, which are at the same time temples, places for spiritual retreat and meditation, wildlife sanctuaries, and places where medicinal plants can grow in safety."[3] This shows the social and spiritual significance of sacred groves. This chapter posits that the Ndau people utilise African Indigenous Religions (AIRs) or specifically, Ndau Indigenous Religion (NIR) and the IWK to sustain the sacredness of Chirinda forest and Guhune Mountain, thereby maintaining the nature/culture balance. The quote at the head of this chapter, attributed to Tacitus the second century Roman historian, is pertinent in understanding the Ndau environmental management strategies that are consistent with an "earth and nature-based spirituality."[4] Before exploring the Ndau natural heritages of these sacred African spaces, the research methodology and the theoretical framework are discussed.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A multifaceted approach was adopted in gathering, describing, and analyzing data. Data collection techniques included documentary analysis of electronic and print media. In addition, in-depth interviews were carried out with information rich participants such as traditional leaders, elders, and some residents in the vicinities of Chirinda forest and Guhune Mountain. Also, the observation technique was invaluable as it captured the cultural and religious activities of the Ndau people as related to Chirinda forest and Guhune Mountain. Furthermore, a grassroots approach was pivotal in the study. It enabled tapping voices of the indigenes as custodians of the sacred groves. Leavitt regards the grassroots "as those living at the base," at times representing the marginalized rural, or urban, communities.[5] Colonialism and missionary Christianity have contributed to the vilification and demonization of African culture and beliefs regarding forests and mountains. The merit of the grassroots approach to this study is that, as a "bottom-up" research technique and process, it captures the "ground-level" views of Ndau indigenes. This in turn validates the community as a knowledge and research resource, familiar with the subject. Thus they are "agents for their own knowledge, not objects to be examined, prodded, or studied."[6] This allows for a greater appreciation of the ecological activities of the Ndau.

On another level, data collection techniques were subtended and corroborated by insights from phenomenological, historical and sociological methods through the processes of description and analysis. It is to be noted that the phenomenological approach in the study of religions seems to be less rel-

evant, plummeting in Western contexts because of its limitations, while it is of increasing importance in studies of African Indigenous Religions.[7] In spite of its critics, the phenomenology of religion was invaluable for this chapter. This is because the phenomenological tenets such as *epoché* (bracketing preconceived ideas), empathy, comparative element, descriptive accuracy, and *eidetic* intuition, which seek to get the meaning of religion from the believer's point of view,[8] have been applied as indispensible in light of understanding the sustainability of Chirinda forest and Guhune Mountain. Also, the historical approach and phenomenology, which are distinct but complementary under the science of religion through anti-reductionism, are relevant to this study of Zimbabwean sacred spaces.[9] The merit of the historical approach is to excavate the "hidden histories" on Ndau people's traditional beliefs in order to compare these with their cross-fertilized, constructed and confrontational, Christian identity. For this research, the gaps between methodological interests and theoretical approaches can be regarded as strengths. The sociological approach shows how religion affects society and how society affects religion.[10] Thus, understanding how continuity and change affect the sacredness of these groves is enhanced through the sociological method.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of spatiality theory is deployed as the main theoretical framework for understanding Ndau perspectives on the sacredness of Chirinda forest and Guhune Mountain. Different scholars have contributed to discussions on sacred spaces. Knott observes that space is multi-dimensional, complex, dynamic and relational.[11] The dimensions of space include physical, mental, and social categories, which are produced and reproduced through human action and interaction. This is the matrix in which the three aspects of space as "perceived, conceived and lived by people" are anchored. Ndau religious beliefs have been expressed through spatial acts in line with Chirinda forest and Guhune Mountain. These beliefs and acts are rooted in stories, legends, myths, rituals, and taboos that have overwhelming ecological and social significance. One can argue with Kim Knott in the context of this study that while space does not exercise agency, the Ndau people's agency and identity are recurrently expressed and experienced through Chirinda forest and Guhune Mountain as ethnic and aesthetic sacred groves.

The spatial theory is also characterized by a spatial terminology such as the notions of the insider/outsider, or Eliade's dichotomy of the "sacred and the profane" space and time. For Mircea Eliade, sacred space is not "ordinary" but "other."[12] It is the *axis mundi* and the center that conveys and manifests the sacred such that the meaning and power of the sacred can be

realized. However, although the Eliadean notions of sacred and profane are enduring categories in the study of religions, they are problematic when applied to Ndau cosmologies, which mirror John Mbiti's notion that Africans are notoriously religious, notwithstanding the limitations of this position.[13] In addition, Suzanne Owen refers to the ideological nature of space or the "politics of space," which entails the power dynamics regarding spatiality and spirituality.[14] Consequently, "the positioning of a sacred place was a political act, whether that positioning involved . . . selection, orientation, limitation or conquest."[15] Given that space is owned, possessed and appropriated, this places humanity at the center of "producing, constructing, contesting and imagining sites."[16] In other words, sacred spaces such as Chirinda forest and Guhune Mountain become sources of identity, contest, and struggle because with the advent of western Christianity and colonization, they became special for different reasons to different creators, owners, and followers of these sacred African groves.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NDAU

The Ndau people are located in Manicaland, one of the ten provinces of Zimbabwe. They share a border with Mozambique, east of Zimbabwe. There are seven districts in Manicaland province namely, Chipinge, Chimanimani, Nyanga, Mutare, Mutasa, Makoni, and Buhera. The first two listed districts are crucial for this study because the Ndau are mainly found there. Much of the province is a mountainous terrain with high rainfall patterns. This has earned Manicaland the label of *kumakomoyo*, Shona for "mountainous region."[17] The Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe have three major mountain ranges, namely, Nyanga, Vumba, and Chimanimani Mountains, which are sacred in their own right. Geographically, Chirinda rain forest is on the southernmost tip of the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe.

Although there are diverse ethnic groups in the province, the study concentrates on two Ndau groups. The first are the Ndau under Mapungwana Chieftaincy in Chipinge District. They are associated with Chirinda forest. The Mapungwana group is a Ndau unit of the *Mbizi* (zebra) totem. The second Ndau group is also known as *VaGarwe* and is under Chief Mutambara in Chimanimani District. The Mutambara peope are associated with Guhune Mountain. The Mapungwana group arrived in Chirinda forest area well after the settlement of earliest Ndau groups of Musikavanhu who are of *Dziva* (water) totem and Garahwa who are of *Soko* (baboon) totem, both of whom migrated from Zimbabwe-Khami area.[18] Like the Ndau of Mapungwana, they belong to the *Mbire-Rozvi* clan, unlike the preceding groups who were from

the Hungwe clan.[19] Today, this Mapungwana group is referred to as "*VaRozvi vakabve Mbire*" or "the Rozvi who migrated from Mbire" led by their founder, Samhesa Chihwechirema, who arrived at Chirinda forest. According to lore, his son, Chimwoto, "source of fire," is reputed to have introduced the use of fire in the area. *Muriro* (fire) could have enhanced Chimwoto's power and influence as fire symbolized "life, vitality, and continuity. Its burning . . . symbol[izes] . . . prosperity of a ruler and his people."[20] Chimwoto gave birth to Saurove (also known as Sauroyi because he was ruthless with *varoyi*, that is, witches) and Chirinda after which Chirinda forest was named.

Tradition claims that Chirinda was tasked with guarding the natural resources of the rain forest, including flora and fauna, against trespassers. Nevertheless, one tradition says that one of the sons of Saurove known as Samapuka was the first formal chief to settle in the area within Mapungwana Chieftaincy. Legend has it that his *chikumvu* (umbilical cord) was buried at *Chirongwe Chamambo* at the edge of the forest. The Mapungwanas lived near *Gandwa* (known as the Great Pool). They claim to work with a *svikiro*, or spirit medium, who was guardian of the sacred Chirinda forest. Later, the leadership of Mapungwana Chieftaincy was disturbed by the invading Gaza-Nguni under Soshangane, missionaries, and colonialists. Yet, the Mapungwana group continued to identify with the Sacred Grove of Chirinda rain forest, something that kept the memory, history, and identity of this group.

The Mutambara Chieftaincy is a Ndau group found in Chimanimani District. Their totem is *Shumba* (lion) or Sigauke/Tusabantu totem and the indigenes of the area are also known as *VaGarwe* (crocodile) people. The etymology of the label *VaGarwe* is linked to two competing traditions about the origins of the Mutambara people, but both have a connection to crocodiles. The first tradition asserts that the group came from Mbire and when Mukonawanhu (their founding father) arrived at Odzi River (some say it was at Sabi River), it was in flood. They were guided by *vadzimu* (ancestors) who, whilst sitting on a crocodile (*Garwe*) instead of a dugout canoe, assisted them to cross the river. This is the origin of the people's name—*VaGarwe*—though some said that the land they settled was already called "*nyika yevaGarwe*" (land of the Garwe people) because it had lots of crocodiles. The group stayed at Guhune Mountain. The second tradition links the origins of the people to Swaziland migrating through Mozambique. Upon crossing the Vembe (Limpopo) River, their leader, known as Karimera, saw a lion (Shumba) eating a crocodile. He is reputed to have said: "*ndinoera shumba yakadya ngwena/Garwe—Shumba yeGarwe*" (I am adopting the lion totem; the very lion that I saw eating the crocodile). One of Karimera's two sons, Sigauke, was so named because he was born when lions howled continually through all night (*kugauka*). Sigauke named his son *Mutambarakede* after settling in

Mutambara. Thus the name Sigauke is the equivalent of the *Shumba* totem of Mutambara. These folklores of myths and legends have kept alive the history and identity of this group.

The land under Mutambara Chieftaincy is bordered to the east by the Mussapa River, the Mungezi (now Wengezi) River, and Zimunya to the north. The Odzi River is to the west, bordering Marange. This chieftaincy also shares land borders with Muwusha (Muusha) at Nyanyadzi and Chikukwa Chieftaincies to the southeast. According to oral tradition, the long history of the traditional leaders of Mutambara chieftaincy is complex as it is punctuated by inter-tribal wars, clashes with the marauding Gaza-Nguni people, missionaries, and colonialists. In the first generation, leaders included Mukonawanhu, Fuhwa, Chikomo, Charima, Ziweya, and Bapiro Gozhombwe Munyavi. It is said that after wandering from place to place in fear, Bapiro Munyavi named the land *Mutambaratasa/Mutambarakede*, which is the root of the name Mutambara. He chose this title to show the end of his struggles with rivals. During the wars with the Gaza-Nguni, there were helpers and load bearers who included Chieza (who came from Nyanga), Bvumbura (who came from Buhera), Tambarare, and Nezandoni. To compensate them for their assistance these people were given land in the four corners of Mutambara Chieftaincy where they were to act as buffers in times of danger. Today, they serve as Madzibaba (fathers) and are responsible for installing Mutambara chiefs; but they are also headmen.

Even though Mutambara I (Bapiro Munyavi) welcomed missionaries and their education, aspects and traits of traditional culture and heritage endured. Furthermore, it is important to mention Munyavi's sons, including Gumbezu, Sandada Tumani, Dindikwa (Matindike), Ngani, and Sam Mwoyowasemhuka. One of the interviewees noted that following the death of Mwoyowasemhuka Mutambara, who reigned from 1989 to 2001, there has been confusion in lines of succession within the chieftaincy. Guhune Mountain, central to this study, is named after the mother of Gumbezu, whose name was Guhune. Legend has it that *Mbuya Guhune* (grandmother Guhune), from Mukonyerwa family, was the only woman to ever live in Guhune Mountain. Upon her death Mbuya Guhune was buried there, and it has since been a Sacred Grove.

NDAU COSMOLOGY

Ndau universe is anthropocentric, as in most African traditions.[21] It is composed of spiritual and non-spiritual entities, as well as visible and invisible forces. This worldview is both dual and tripartite consisting of the spiritual,

human, and natural worlds.[22] In Ndau cosmology the spiritual world consists of benevolent and malevolent spirits. It is hierarchical and at the apex is *Mwari* (God) also known as *Musikavanhu* (the creator) and *Mudzimumukuru* (the Great Ancestor). Subordinate to the Great Ancestor are the *Vadzimu* (ancestral spirits), which can either be family spirits or *mhondoro* (territorial ancestral spirits). The ancestral spirits are very significant in Ndau culture as they are the intercessors between humans and God. They are also the "guardians of the land," alongside the chief, headmen, and spirit mediums who are responsible for preserving natural resources.[23] The human world, also hierarchical, consists of people ruled by the chief at the top, followed by the headmen (clan heads), spirit mediums, traditional healers, elders, and the youth. The natural world has flora and fauna, as well as other natural resources that are non-biological, but the Ndau believe that these are imbued with ancestral spirits.

Ndau ecological attitudes and religious beliefs can be understood through the filter of the various *mitupo* (animal totems) that are taboo to some families. Indeed, some animals, pools, forests, rivers, trees, and mountains are seen as living beings imbued with the power and consciousness of ancestral spirits through pan-vitalism.[24] Thus pan-vitalism, which upholds that everything in the universe has life, is relevant to our understanding of the sacred groves that are central to this study. Ndau myths, *zviera* (taboos) and restrictions reflect a balanced and ecologically respectful belief system because they believe in the sacred nature of the spaces—select forests, groves, and mountains—they inhabit, or with which they interact. As a result, the Ndau people of Mapungwana and Mutambara Chieftaincies have managed to preserve the sacred groves of Chirinda Forest and Guhune Mountain, respectively. We now explore the extent to which the Ndau people of Mapungwana Chieftaincy have succeeded in sustaining the ecological balance of Chirinda forest through their environmental ethic and IWK.

Sustaining the Ecological Balance of Chirinda Forest

My research established that the Ndau community of the Mapungwana Chieftaincy have environmental strategies that they have deployed in preserving Chirinda Forest from time immemorial. Even though it is protected by different stakeholders such as the Forestry Commission and the Environmental Management Agency (EMA), traditional leadership and the community at large are significant players in the preservation and survival of this sacred grove. The forest has a practical and symbolic significance anchored in Ndau history. It is necessary to explore the location, meaning, and significance of this natural landscape.

Location, Meaning, and Significance of Chirinda Forest

Chirinda forest is situated on the southernmost tip of Zimbabwe's Eastern Highlands plateau. As noted earlier, there are three major mountain ranges in the Eastern Highlands, which form a natural boundary between Mozambique and Zimbabwe, namely, Nyanga mountain range in the north, Vumba mountain range near city of Mutare in the middle, and Chimanimani mountain range in the south. In this study Chimanimani mountain range is significant for two reasons. First, this high plateau stretching from Chimanimani Mountains passes through Gwindingwe to Mount Selinda Mission, where Chirinda forest is located. Second, Guhune Mountain range, which is discussed later, is a part of the larger Chimanimani range. *Gwasha reChirinda*, as the Chirinda forest is sometimes affectionately called by the locals, is some twenty miles southeast of Chipinge town and not too far from the eastern border between Zimbabwe and Mozambique.[25]

The etymology of the Ndau word "*Chirinda*," after which the forest is named, refers to a look out, or a place where one could keep watch over approaching, or encroaching, entities.[26] Given that Chirinda is a mountain forest, a prototypical indigenous rainforest with woody creepers and a canopy of 40–55 meters covering approximately 950 hectares and capping a highland ridge of 1240m in altitude, on the northern end—compared to 1200m on the southern end—the place was a natural strategic site for guarding against enemy attacks. Therefore, *Gwasha reChirinda*, an evergreen forest, was used as a vantage-point from which one could see lower lands to the west and to the northwest.[27] Another tradition says that "Chirinda" was the name of one of the sons of the founding fathers of Mapungwana Chieftaincy, Chimwoto, who was responsible for guarding the forest (*kurinda gwasha*). Therefore, Chirinda Forest was a significant ancient sacred grove with multiple benefits for the Ndau in general, and for Mapungwana leadership in particular.

Traditionally, the forest was of religious importance to the people. It served as an *axis mundi*, a doorway between the spiritual realms and the human (Ndau) world. Notably, it was a traditionally important sacred symbol. For the Ndau it symbolized a matrix, or "womb" with various significant sacred features which the people accorded much reverence. Although it is quite difficult to establish the influence and spiritual importance of Chirinda Forest, it can be said that for the Ndau people of the Mapungwana chieftaincy, it is most important due to their proximity to this space. Also, one tradition notes that the neighboring Musikavanhu chieftaincy sometime in the past revered this forest like the Mapungwana group, before they shifted their attention to Chikore Hill Shrine. Nevertheless, the ownership of the forest remains in the hands of Mapungwana chieftaincy whose claim was briefly challenged during

the over-lordship of the Gaza-Nguni people. By and large, the Mapungwana people continued to respect, associate and identify themselves with Chirinda forest. For example, the following salutation and panegyrics associated with the Mapungwana leaders clearly reflect this fact: In Ndau, they say:

Mapamba pashi, Chihwe chirema,	Conquerors of the land, heavy as a stone,
Chakaremera vari kuretu,	Heavier to those who are far (while),
Vari pasinde ngevekutamba nacho.	Those who are near play with it.
Mapungwana! Mapungwana!	Mapungwana! Mapungwana!
. . . Gwasha reChirinda . . .	Great Forest of Chirinda . . .

There is a connection between the Mapungwana royal family and Chirinda forest that can be traced to the earliest times when the founding fathers settled and claimed authority over this sacred grove. For instance, the praise poem refers to the founding fathers, Samhesa Chihwechirema and Chirinda. The Mapungwana anchor their authority and identity on *Gwasha reChirinda* and this is why they readily defended, preserved and respected it as a sacred grove. Chirinda forest is integral to Ndau individual and collective identity as noted in some features such as *Gandwa* (Great Pool) and rivers.

THE GREAT POOL: SACRED SITE AND SOURCE OF RIVERS

Aspects of Mapungwana identity are derived from the physical relief features associated with the Chirinda forest such as *Gandwa* (the Great Pool), rivers and wetlands. The Great Pool (*Gandwa*) is a landmark in the history of Mapungwana founding fathers. Tradition says that this is the point where they once established their early settlement. There are myths surrounding the formation of this Great Pool, which became a source of several rivers and streams. Whereas some say the pool was a result of an explosion, others also believed that the pool was created by the Ndau who used *mazinjanja* (hoes). Ndau legend has it that Nyakuimba the spirit medium fell into a trance whilst sitting on a *chixibo* (spear) and rain fell for eighteen continuous days to fill up the Great Pool that overflowed to form rivers. This mythical origin of rivers in the Sacred Grove of Chirinda forest shows the vital importance of water to fertility and life in Ndau culture.

Ecologically, Chirinda forest is a watershed and the source of big and small rivers such as Chiredza, Zona, Musangazi, Chinyika, and Ruringa/Musirizwi. Just as the Great Pool, Gandwa is considered the abode of water spirits such as mermaids, the big rivers and wetlands are also significant hosts to fish and

other aquatic creatures. Traditionally, babies born and those that die before developing teeth are buried along river banks and wetlands, thereby turning these into sacred spaces. According to Ndau tradition, these spaces enable the mother's womb to continue to be productive. One participant also indicated that all girls of the royal family of Mapungwana Chieftaincy are buried along the river flowing from the Great Pool. This river is known (in Ndau) as *Mukowa weVakunda* (the sisters' river). In addition, the Ndau of Mapungwana dedicated spaces and make burial arrangements for chiefs and royal dignitaries at the three sites of *Chirongwe Chamambo, Pfindini* and *Rupango rwemadzimambo* in the vicinity of Chirinda forest.

CHIRONGWE CHAMAMBO, PFINDINI, AND *RUPANGO RWEMADZIMAMBO* SACRED SITES

Chirongwe Chamambo is a sacred site that is located near Ngungunyana Forest Saw Mill at the edges of Chirinda Forest. It is a place where *chikumvu/ guvhu* (umbilical cord) of Samapuka, the first formal chief to settle the land in Mapungwana Chieftaincy, was buried. In Ndau cosmology, the navel is significant. The Ndau believe that the navel must be handled with care and buried properly. A person who steps on a wrongly disposed *chikumvu* develops *man'a,* or permanent cracks on their soles. In the same manner, *Chirongwe Chamambo* consists of a heap of stones and metal scraps piled high to mark the point where *chikumvu* is buried and a precaution for people not to unknowingly step on it. The place is kept clean and revived annually in ritual action by the royal family.

One of the interviewees from the royal family had this to say:

> *PaChirongwe Chamambo ndipo pakatangira umambo. Pakaiswa chikumvu chezibaba rekwaMapungwana . . . Panoiswa chikumvu panoera nekuremeredzwa nokuti pane umambo hukuru* ("*Chirongwe Chamambo* is where the royal leadership started. It is where the navel of a great ancestor of the Mapungwana is buried . . . Where the umbilical cord is buried is sacred and respected because therein lay the origins of Mapungwana royalty"). The Mapungwanas hold *Chirongwe Chamambo* in high regard as the source of their *umambo* (royal leadership). The spot on which the umbilical cord is buried is therefore the *axis mundi*, or center of the chiefdom. Annually, in the months of August and September, rituals and ceremonies are performed at the same place to honour Samapuka; and to seek spiritual guidance and protection.

Compared to *Chirongwe Chamambo,* the space made sacred through the burial of Samapuka's umbilical cord, *Pfindini* and *Rupango Rwemadzimambo* are burial sites for members of the Mapungwana royal family. *Pfindini* is a site where a royal sister (*zitete*) of Mapungwana was buried. It is

located at the chief's current homestead near Ngungunyana Forest. Women of the royal family are given a privileged place. Every year this site is ritually visited and prepared before people get to *Rupango Rwemadzimambo*. Every August/September people visit *Rupango Rwemadzimambo* to perform annual rain requesting rituals. *Rupango* is significant because it is the burial site for all chiefs of the Mapungwana family. It is located under a thicket of natural evergreen, indigenous trees right next to *Chigezaanguni* pool, which is said to contain fish and mermaids, therefore, sacred. This place has big indigenous trees one of which is identified as *murombo*, around which rituals are held. The place looks like an island surrounded by a sea of gum tree plantations of Ngungunyana Forest, interspersed with patches of indigenous flora. However, exotic trees such as pine and gum trees constitute an industrial forest that provides all kinds of timber and wood fuel. Regrettably, the exotic trees also create loss of water resource and are detrimental to the drainage of marshlands. This is one bad impact of the good intentions of modernity.

In 1998, when I did a participant observation at *Rupango Rwemadzimambo*, traditional beer and a black goat were brought over to the site. All the participants removed their shoes just outside the cleared open sacred space. Those who were not ritually clean did not enter the consecrated space of *Rupango Rwemadzimambo*. As goat meat was roasted, people danced and sung ritual tunes using colourful, ribald, language as part of the *kutuka midzimu* (provoking ancestors) tradition. In one of the songs, the following words were used: *Tinode Gandwa mambo woye, Rekugeza ndiro. . . . Tave kunhuhwa ngekutame mvura* ("We want a pool of water chief; so we can bathe ourselves. . . . We stink because we lack water/rain"). The roasted goat meat, which by rule was unsalted, was placed on fresh tree branches alongside pots of beer under a *murombo* tree and then presented to the respective ancestral spirits by elders of the royal family. At this occasion, the chief also used the salutation and praise poem that celebrated the authority and identity of the royal family as *Gwasha reChirinda*. Also, to respect protocol, the meat and beer were distributed to the people using *mutani/tsero* (winnowing basket) and *mukheyo* (guard/clay pot), respectively, until there was nothing left. Rituals such as this, re-enacted and reinforced Ndau myths as they relate to the founding fathers who are the guardians of the land.[28]

MUTI MUKURU (BIG TREE) AND VALLEY OF THE GIANTS

Chirinda forest is also popular as a home to countless indigenous trees that characterize its biodiversity. Mapaure notes that the forest is composed of moist evergreen forest, bushed grassland, and woodland such as

Acacia Karroo-Hereropyxix dehnie woodland, *Bridelia micrantha* mixed woodland and *Psidium guajava* bush land.[29] The tallest tree in Zimbabwe is found in Chirinda forest. It is called *Muti Mukuru* (Big Tree). It is a *muwawa* (red mahogany or *khaya nyasica*) variety and it stands at 68 meters tall.[30] According to tradition, as the biggest tree in the forest it was once used as a *murombo* (shrine) under which different individual and collective rituals were performed. As such this was an ideal *axis mundi* whose verticality enabled believers to link the spiritual and the human worlds. Yet, because of its height, the tree has been hit by lightning from the top and some parts have been adversely affected. At the same location as the Big Tree is the Valley of the Giants, which is a constellation of very big trees that form a unique feature in the forest. This space is believed to be inhabited by nature spirits. Local lore claims that mysterious hierophanies of the spirit world, known in Ndau diction as *madzangaradzimu*, may be experienced at this location. Anyone on these sacred grounds must show proper respect as irreverence is not condoned because people can be disoriented through *chahwihwi*.

Another place worth mentioning is *paChimhene/paChimbambande* (the forest clearing). It is said to be a passage way of *mhondoro*/*shumba dzemarombo* (ancestral totemic lions) and *chahwihwi*. It is a taboo to log trees in the forest, whether big or small, as this act is considered sacrilegious to the ancestors. Thus, in Zimbabwean culture, Chirinda forest is typically a sacred forest known as *Rambatemwa* (woodlands that cannot be cut). However, historically, the missionaries once expropriated the forest resources such as clay for moulding bricks and tiles and timber used in constructing Chikore and Mt. Selinda Missions until this was stopped through a State order in 1956.[31] Thus due to the missionary and colonial influence, the Ndau control of this sacred place was compromised. The forest also functions as a food source because it has fruit trees such as *mazhanje* and *guavas* in some parts. The forest also provides various ethnobotanical medicines to traditional healers who, guided by ancestral spirits, visit to extract herbs for traditional medicine in a sustainable way. Today, under the auspices of nature tourism to *Gwasha reChirinda*, people usually travel to the Big Tree and the Valley of the Giants as a group, but which must abide by rules designed to respect the sacred integrity of the space. The Forestry Commission has commercialised tourist element of Chirinda forest. It is hoped that the emphasis will be placed on ecotourism, which is deemed to preserve biodiversity.[32]

The foregoing echoes the observation that the Forestry Commission protects and manages Chirinda forest as a Botanical Reserve for the conservation of its biodiversity, educational, scientific, and aesthetic values.[33] This interplay between Ndau culture and their natural environment is important. This

confirms Owen's observation that "space is shaped and acted upon, but also acts upon and shapes social lives."[34]

The Ndau people of Mapungwana Chieftaincy are essentially self-proclaimed custodians of the Sacred Grove of Chirinda forest, whose ecological balance has been preserved from time immemorial. This is comparable to the case of VaGarwe people under Chief Mutambara in the context of Guhune Mountain, to which we now turn.

Sustaining the Ecological Balance of Guhune Mountain

The study established through observation and interviews that the VaGarwe people under Mutambara Chieftaincy have lived in harmony with the Sacred Grove of Guhune Mountain from the precolonial times to the present. As owners of the land, the traditional leaders of Mutambara had a direct spiritual control over the land and its resources. Therefore, the ancestral spirits from the leaders were deemed responsible for the protection and prosperity of the land. In fact, the leaders and elders used informal environmental lessons to instil awareness and sensitivity in community members regarding the preservation of nature and knowledge of environmental conservation in general. The eco-friendly attitude, which is anchored in Indigenous Ways of Knowing, was transmitted through oral tradition, particularly through the use of stories, myths, rituals, songs, and taboos. Based on the value of the spiritual and religious orientation of the people, it can be asserted that AIRs and IWK play a critical role in sustaining the ecological balance of Guhune Mountain. In this manner, it is vital at this juncture to illustrate the self-understanding of the community of Mutambara in relation to the sacred nature of Guhune Mountain.

Location, Meaning, and Significance of Guhune Mountain

As has been noted above, *Gomo reGuhune* (Guhune Mountain) was named after a great female ancestor of Mutambara chieftaincy. It is a natural and cultural landscape which is part of the larger Chimanimani mountain range to the north and stretching from Gonzoni area to the east towards Cashel. It is a high ridge that extends for close to ten kilometres. According to tradition, Guhune was the mother of Gumbezu who lived in Guhune Mountain. *Mbuya Guhune* is on record to be the first and last woman to have lived on this mountain. When she died, she was buried in Guhune Mountain. In addition, another legend says that Guhune is where people used to stay as *Guta* (large family complex), given that Bapiro Munyavi (Mutambara I) had up to twelve wives. Later on, they moved on to stay around Mutambara hospital area until

Figure 9.1. Guhune Mountain Peak captured from the direction of Nhedziwa
Photo by author.

they were displaced by Christian missionaries. This caused some to move to Nyambeya (at Dingane) and Nechiramba. All the same, Guhune Mountain remained a focal spiritual point with the Gonzoni settlement at the foot of the sacred mountain (see Figure 9.1).

Guhune Mountain was and is still a burial ground for royal ancestors; which qualifies it as a sacred cultural landscape. In fact, Guhune Mountain is said to have *mapako/ninga* (cave shelters) used for the interment of royal family members. The caves were a mortuary heritage where important ritual objects for ancestors were kept at the time of burial. The material cultural objects and ritual items include *hari* (clay pots), gourds, *tsvimbo* (walking sticks/knobkerries), *mapfumo* (spears), and *makano* (battle axes). These ritual objects are the tangible cultural heritage that reminds people of the power and authority of the founding fathers from the time of Bapiro Munyavi (Mutambara I) and other leaders. Therefore, the relics of the material culture in Guhune Mountain elevate the space to the highest levels of spiritual significance.

According to one participant, Guhune Mountain was "*gomo remidzimu yekwaMutambara*" (the mountain of Mutambara ancestors). This can be explained through some of the phrases employed in the Mutambara praise poetry as established in interviews. Although there are various elaborate ver-

sions of the Mutambara praise poetry, I have settled for the following edition in this essay:

VaGarwe vakapera . . .	The Garwe who perished
Ndinopika nevariGuhune	I swear upon the dead were buried in Guhune
VaGarwe vakaenda Bocha ngeropa	The Garwe who went to Bocha
	On account of blood that was shed
Chibudu ari mutsoka (mugwasha). . .	On Chibudu who is in the forest
Chirya chimire,	One who eats what is above ground/ on its feet
Chawa pashi hatiryi	What has fallen down is not eaten.

Notably, in line two of the panegyric, Guhune sticks out clearly as a sacred space in which grand ancestors were laid to rest. The Sigauke/Shumba totemic aspects in the praise poem are captured by "*Chirya chimire . . . chawa pasha hatiryi*," which refers to the characteristics of wild dog, *mhumhi/ makechana.* The history and identity of VaGarwe people is also stressed. For instance, traditionally, when Charima was killed by the Gaza-Nguni with help of the Bocha people, he came back as an avenging spirit in Bocha. The Bocha people came to appease and the Mutambara people were given eight virgins and land called Chikwariro in Bocha. As a result, it is important to explore the various rituals and taboos associated with Guhune Mountain, which have helped to sustain its ecological balance and integrity.

Rituals and Taboos Associated with Guhune

Guhune Mountain is a Sacred Grove associated with specific *zviera* (taboos) and rituals. The most regular ritual is *makoto/bira remvura*, or rain requesting ceremony. The ritual is performed every year around August and September. It is said that certain signs emerged from Guhune Mountain, as indication from the ancestral spirit realm when it was time to perform the rituals. For example, a self-generated fire (*muriro*) appeared on top of Guhune Mountain and it could only be put out by the rains created from a successful rain bringing ritual. Another sign of the imminence of rain rituals as directed by the ancestral spirit guardians of the land (*mhondoro dzenyika*) would be the emergence of white ducks with ducklings (some said white hen with chicks), in a sacred pool known as Muruviri found along Mvumvumvu River, near Gonzoni Township at the foot of Guhune Mountain. The ducks/hen would mysteriously disappear when people got closer to them. Therefore, these birds were regarded as manifestations of the sacred with messages for the people.

Each household was expected to brew and bring pots of traditional beer to the function under the auspices of the traditional leaders and elders. In recent years, people began contributing cereals such as *rapoko*, finger millet, and sorghum through *mukwe-mukwe* to make *doro* (the local beer), which was prepared by post-menopausal women. Before the planting season begun, farmers also brought their seeds for ritual presentation and blessing for a bountiful harvest, eventually. The spirit medium for rain, *svikiro remvura*, Mashanguyo led the people in propitiatory rituals to ask for rain from Musikavanhu. Also, a rain messenger known as *Kuretu* was significant in this regard.

During harvest time the guardian ancestral spirits of the land again sent a signal from Guhune Mountain. A baboon would go across Gonzoni village from Guhune Mountain and this was an indicator for the people to begin to harvest their crops. Those who flouted this tradition were sanctioned by the traditional leadership. Permission from the chief to harvest crops was a communal rule to be followed by everyone. This echoes Mbiti's observation about the inter-dependence between the individual and society as an expression of community. It encompasses participation in the "beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of the community."[35] Guhune Mountain was of spiritual significance for both individuals and community through the performance of these annual rituals.

In the history of Mutambara Chieftaincy, males and females of the royal family were accorded respect. Sisters from the royal family were given the title of "*Vashe/Ashe*" which prefixed their given names. Some of them have played leadership roles as village heads. An example is Peggy, who is referred to as *Vashe APeggy* in Gonzoni area. Of significance in ritual circles is Mwanambo, a female member of the royal family who was mistakenly killed by Maunza during the first generation. As a form of appeasement they demanded, amongst other things, beer, a beast, *mafuko* (cloth) and land in Maunza territory.

Members of the royal family are not supposed to be buried in Maunza territory because this land was given in appeasement. The clapping of hands in honour of the chief, or *gusvi,* and drumming and the use of ribald songs to mark the death of any member of the royal family are both forbidden in Maunza territory. This is the effect of spatiality on the people's spirituality and identity. There are taboos to be observed surrounding the case of the Mwanambo. An annual ritual in honour of Mwanambo is held in Guhune Mountain. In recent years, the performance of ritual to honour Mwanambo has been challenged following the death of Sam Mwoyowasemhuka Mutambara and also, perhaps, because of the influence of Christianity.

Although Guhune Mountain is a natural windbreak to the Gonzoni settlement and sustainable agricultural activities in the community, I was also

informed that there was a ritual performed annually, around August/September, to block the wind (*kuvhara mhepo*) and diseases (*zvirwere*). It is performed in Guhune Mountain to the east, towards Cashel Valley, at a location called Mukonane. There is a spirit medium (*svikiro)* known as Regerwi, and messengers from the chief and other elders are sent there. People go there with a black-feathered chicken and *rapoko* mealie-meal which are prepared to make a *braai* (roasted chicken) and eaten without salt. The bones of the chicken are thrown in a cave or hole. It was taboo to use salt in the ritual meal lest the harsh winds prevail unperturbed as a sign of displeasure from the ancestors. This echoes the observation that when taboos are breached, the community gets to know about it through subsequent unusual events.[36] Knowledge of these spiritual practices and injunctions have made possible the sustainable conservation of Guhune Mountain as a vital cultural and sacred space.

The Aquatic and Vegetal Ecology of Guhune Mountain

Another aspect of the sacredness of Guhune Mountain is the presence of springs (*tsime/zvinyuka*), as well as flora and fauna specific to this space. The springs in Guhune Mountain are perennial. They are associated with *njuzu* (mermaids) and *mhondoro*, which are totemic animals such as lions, baboons, leopards, and snakes (pythons) that protect them. There are rules of governing how to fetch or drink water from the springs in Guhune Mountain. For instance, it is taboo to drink directly from the water source using one's mouth (*kunatira*). Another taboo is the use of metal cups or plates to fetch water from the spring. It was said that the guardian spirits abhorred such practices. Those who breached the taboos could encounter dangerous beasts such as *mhondoro* (lions) and snakes, or they may get lost in the mountain through *chahwihwi*. These taboos have practical ethical applications because they are effective checks against bad behaviour, against cruelty to animals. They also warn people against danger and create awareness in them of proper hygiene and healthy living.[37]

The Guhune Mountain range has various kinds of trees, both fruit and non-fruit. Some of the fruit trees include *mazhanje* (loquats) and *matohwe*. The *mazhanje* fruits are a delicacy and are considered as gifts from the ancestors. There are stories and taboos surrounding *mazhanje* fruits. For example, one woman had a bad experience after making negative comments about the size and sour taste of the *mazhanje* she had been gathering to sell. She was attacked by *chahwihwi*, became confused and lost her way such that she ended up somewhere other than her original and intended destination (at Cashel)! Thus, it is a taboo to make negative comments about these fruits regarded as

gifts from guardian spirits. There is also the taboo that forbids people from logging the trees of Guhune Mountain. It is clear that the preservation of the ecological balance of the mountain is essentially a communal rather than an individual endeavour.

Guhune Mountain is not used for livestock grazing. However, it was common that livestock do stray in that direction. The herdsmen who lose their cattle usually find them in a location called Chiara. Myth has it that voices shout "*dziri uno mombe*!" (Your lost cattle are here!). To retrieve them, they had to clap their hands to the mountain's guardian spirits. The cattle would find their way home. Also, it was not wise for one to be in Guhune after sunset. One could hear weird sounds of scotch carts and the noise made by their riders while spurring the animals, without seeing anything.

There is also the story of Rhodesian soldiers, who during Zimbabwe's liberation struggle, wanted to camp on the top of Guhune Mountain in order to make it a strategic lookout post. Legend has it that they got disoriented overnight, and in the process of shifting from there, some of them lost their lives mysteriously. All this mythology attests to the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* of the sacred space of Guhune Mountain.[38] It has the power to inspire awe and devotion for those who recognized and respected its sacredness. At the same time, it has power to instil fear and dread for those who transgressed its various taboos. It had the power, a sacred grove, to shape the lives of VaGarwe. It is not surprising that the elders deployed all their energies to live in harmony with this cultural and spiritual landscape. All this helped the sustainability of its ecology across time.

PRESERVING AFRICAN SACRED SPACES: CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

The two examples of Chirinda Forest and Guhune Mountain as Sacred Groves share some similarities and differences. On one hand, both are natural geographic features in the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe at the Districts of Chipinge and Chimanimani. However, both deal with experiences of different Ndau communities, whose religious beliefs and cosmologies are similar. Whereas the Mapungwana Ndau identify with *Gwasha reChirinda* as stressed in their praise poem, the Mutambara Ndau in their praise poem, similarly link their identity with Guhune Mountain where their ancestors are interred. Therefore, the two groups consciously, or otherwise, have created and developed a cosmology that preserves and sustains the flora and fauna of these two spaces. They both believe and accept that all aspects of nature are under the tutelage of ancestral spirits and guardian animal totems.[39] Also, both cultures

believe in the power and efficacy of ancestral spirits as sources, and guarantors, of life, peace, security, protection, health, and wealth.

Communal and individual stability (and sustainability) is possible through harmonious relationships with the spirit and natural worlds. As S. Ellis and G. ter Haar observe, the spirit idiom serves as a framework for explaining illness, adversity and misfortune, which is sometimes experienced as rapture between the spiritual and human worlds.[40] Therefore, the preservation of the natural landscapes is rooted in the belief that they are sacred African spaces to be protected by Ndau Indigenous Ways of Knowing, coupled with deeply held environmental ethics, which are consistent with the rhythms of nature.

On the other hand, while Ndau religious beliefs have not significantly diminished with the acquisition of formal western education, it can be argued that the two groups have been transformed by the encounter with western culture and Christianity. But this encounter with the west has led to the desecration of some of the sacred sites and objects. Today, *Gwasha reChirinda* has become a commercialized, tourist site, as aptly portrayed by Timberlake and Musokonyi's edited book, *Chirinda Forest: A Visitors Guide*.[41] Thus, this commercialization has exposed the sacred sites to the (profane) public. That the same spaces for tourist consumption are also other people's sacred places has led to a contestation of Ndau heritage, as in the case of Chirinda forest. Yet, they can be hopeful that their very efforts of "preservation in itself is a form of sacralizing place through its reconstruction as material heritage."[42] As a result, one can claim that Ndau use of their worldviews to sustain the ecological balance of Chirinda Forest and Guhune Mountain enhances their history, culture, identity, and spiritualities. What is crucial, when visiting these places, is to follow the necessary protocols, behave appropriately, and show respect.

CONCLUSION

The chapter has demonstrated that the Ndau people have their own native knowledge and understanding of Chirinda forest and Guhune Mountain as enduring sacred spaces. From time immemorial, AIRs and IWK have been critical to the sustainability of the Ndau Sacred Groves. Although Christianity and Westernization have challenged African beliefs and values, it can be concluded that the Ndau ecological ethics are relevant to, and complement, the current national and international struggles to protect the environment and promote ecotourism. The native see the sites as sacred groves and spaces for spiritual refuge, sources of food, health, and wealth. It is their patrimony in the broadest sense of the term.

Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Ndau traditional cosmologies are useful in creating ecologically friendly strategies that enhance biodiversity conservation and development of Chirinda Forest and Guhune Mountain for posterity and human survival. Finally, it is pertinent to invoke the Food and Agriculture Organization's reminder that "[f]orest resources*, mountains* and forest lands should be sustainably managed to meet the social, economic, ecological, cultural and spiritual needs of present and future generations" to stress the centrality of these sacred groves to Ndau religion and ways of being.[43] Among the Ndau people, Chirinda forest and Guhune Mountain epitomise effective practical educational and demonstrative efforts towards the preservation of biodiversity and ecologically correct behaviour reinforced through taboos, cultural traditions, and practices that give credence to the strategic significance of sacred groves in twenty-first-century Africa and beyond.

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Chapter 10

Space, Art, and Religion in *Changó, el gran putas*

Haakayoo N. Zoggyie

Religion, Karl Marx once wrote, "is the opium of the people." Religion, he contended, serves only "to comfort and placate the poor and wretched, while simultaneously justifying and protecting the privileges of those in control." Consequently, it "should not only be dismissed, but dismissed with scorn."[1]

Marx was referring, of course, to the tendency of certain religions to offer a divine justification for the injustices in this life, to argue that all unpleasant experiences are part of a Holy plan and should therefore be dutifully accepted. Although his argument was based on the philosophy of a rather limited number of belief systems, Christianity, to be precise, his prescribed solution has nevertheless been universally embraced. Revolt against oppression in whichever name it comes has been documented in all religions. For instance, while such revolt in Christianity takes the form of the so-called liberation theology, in African traditional religion, the belief system I shall focus on in this paper, the reaction is often that of the abandonment of the oppressive deity on the part of followers.

It is thus that in *Changó, el gran putas* (hereafter abbreviated as *Changó*), a novel published in 1983 by Afro-Colombian Manuel Zapata Olivella about the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its consequences on the victims both recent and remote, the characters are in constant rebellion against what they perceive to be unjust deities. Ranging from Shango, the Nigerian monarch-turned-god, to the entire pantheon of the Christian Faith, each is defied because of his failure to protect the interests of existing and potential followers. In the case of Shango, the disappointment is at his decision to send two popular generals (Timi and Gbonka) to their deaths because of fears that they might one day overshadow his own popularity. Although only one (Timi) eventually dies, the result is enough to trigger the overthrow and exile of the monarch on the part of his own advisors.

The deposed king in turn curses the rebels. The curse specifies that all of them would one day be taken as slaves to a foreign land where their women would be sold into "foreign arms" and their children "bastardized in blood."[2] Their gods would also be condemned to reveal themselves "under foreign masks," while they as a people would forget "the languages they had learned as children /thus repeating in strange jargons /the sacred names of the Ancestors."[3] While this forgotten word can be assumed to be the linguistic alienation discussed in "*Lengua e identidad en Changó, el gran putas*,"[4] the totemic name is undoubtedly African traditional religion, the loss of which amounts to what I have also described elsewhere as the spiritual estrangement of the New World African.[5]

The alien land is identified as "America /land of suffering" and home of "the White Wolves," who are depicted as "traders in men" and "rapers of women."[6] These white wolves,[7] the infuriated Shango repeats, shall destroy the race, the people, the gods, and the language of his traitorous ex-vassals. But none of this has to be permanent. Everything can be reversed if the exiles rebel against their enslavement. After all, they are his children, he, "Almighty Shango! /Breather of fire! /the Flash of the thunderbolt!"[8] This initial resistance may then be strengthened later if the outcasts miscegenate with the Indian and the *Loba Blanca* to create a New Man, one "without regard for ethnic differences,"[9] who would take over the struggle, this time for universal justice.

As with all things African the story is told by Ngafúa, a griot of sorts who invokes the help of his dead father Kissi-Kama. It is Kissi-Kama who must infuse Ngafúa's "kora" with "the penetrating gaze of Silamanka" so that the latter can properly tell his tale. It is also Kissi-Kama who must provide "the invocating word of Soundjata's sword" or the voice of the revolution to come.[10] This role undoubtedly stems from the character's status as a member of the living dead. In this capacity, he is considered to be closer to the other ancestral spirits, whose main advantage, it seems, is their ability to "converse with the gods."[11]

These gods are identified as the originless Odumare Nzame, "the great procreator of the world"; Baba Kwa, his invisible light and thought; and Olofi, his shadow, who "with water, land and the sun /still steaming from the heat of his hands /chartered the destiny of all mortals." The rest include Elegba, the keeper of the gate to the Spirit World; Orúnla, the knower of all Destinies; Obatalá, the son of Olofi; his wife, Odudúa; Aganyú, the very first human; his sister, Yemayá; their son, Orungán; and all the fourteen sons that the latter subsequently father with mother Yemayá: Changó, Omo Oba, Oshún, Oyá, Dada, Olokún, Olosa, Ochosí, Oricha-Oke, Orún, Ayé-Shaluga, Oko, Chankpana, and Ochú. Married, in turn, to one another, each of these gods is invoked because of the special role they play in the Yoruba cosmovi-

sion from which the Shango myth springs. A good example is Ochosí, who is identified as the "god of the bow and arrow /hunter of wild boars and panthers /in the dark and dangerous jungles." Another is Orúnla, who is also named as the "lord of life and death." In such capacities, both deities come in handy in the struggle that is expected of the exiles since the first would literally lead the charge, while the second would decide the number of fatalities the combatants suffer.[12]

But if the supportive African gods enjoy such wide-spread respect, their Western counterparts will receive the exact opposite treatment in *Changó*. For example, in the part of the novel titled *El muntu americano*,[13] which covers the early days of the first Africans in the Americas, there is a wholesale revolt on the part of the exiles against the Catholic Church's attempt to convert them to Christianity. Whereas the main representatives of this new Faith are Father Alonso de Sandoval and Saint Peter Claver of historical fame, backed by the Office of the Inquisition, those of the exiles are a diviner known as *El babalao* and a child called Benkos Biojo, who was born soon after the first slave ship docked in Cartagena de Indias in present day Colombia. Both characters are presented in ways that recall the life of Christ and his forerunner, John the Baptist.

For instance, like John, whose teachings and role in the preparation of the Ministry of Christ cost him his life, the *babalao* is condemned to die at the stake for secretly crowning Benkos as king of the slaves and for refusing to convert to Christianity, besides urging other slaves to do the same. And like Christ in relation to Satan, Benkos is the "avenger" of the Whiteman's crimes against all Africans, particularly the enslaved ones. Also like Christ, he was born "without a father /like the Jesus of White people," and was prophesied to die "at the hands of his enemies," rising again as the "puff of other lives."[14] Again like Christ, Benkos is said to have learned of his mission "from the womb of his mother"[15] when he heard stories of the Shango curse and its proposed remedy from his grandfather. And like the halo denoting the sanctity of the historical Jesus in Christian iconography, Benkos Biojo's emblem is the sign of Elegba, an imprint of two serpents biting their own tails located on his umbilical cord.[16]

While these details indeed signal Zapata Olivella's intent to reinterpret the African-is-synonymous-to-the-Devil image so prevalent in Hispanic literature "to an Afrocentric advantage,"[17] the rebellious attitude of the two bonded men further subverts another stereotype that has been perpetuated for an equally long time in the same literature. This is the idea of the contented slave. While Jorge Isaacs's *María* (1867) is perhaps the best known example, other works in which this characterization appears include Miguel de Cervantes's *El celoso extremeño*, Cirilo Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés* (1839-Part

I, 1882-Part II), Eustaquio Palacio's *El alfarez real* (1886), Alberto Insúa's *El negro que tenía el alma blanca* (1922), Tomás Carrasquilla's *La marquesa de Yolombó* (1926), and "Lo que se derrumba," a short story by Manuel Urbaneja Archelpohl. With the exception of Carrasquilla's work, where the notion of Christianity as an opportunity to take the savage out of the bonded African is criticized, all the others talk of Blacks who either prefer to remain in servitude or regret their freedom after getting it.

Zapata Olivella continues this crusade against the Christian Faith by portraying the Black characters as a people hungering for African spirituality, as opposed to Christianity. This is not only suggested in the continuing prevalence of the African gods we saw earlier, it is also intimated in the specific incidents of resistance undertaken by the characters in this section of the novel against all things Christian. The most notable of these is perhaps the philosophical exchange that transpired between King Benkos Biojo and St. Peter Claver when the latter attempted to use the idea of humility, as contained in the parable of the cloak, to convert the former. Apparently frustrated at the bonded monarch's insistence on following his ancestral gods, the saint is said to have advised:

> You have to be humble and submissive to your God. In moments of adversity, why don't you follow the example of the donkey? If she is beaten, she takes it calmly. If she is forgotten, she accepts the fact that she will be the last to be noticed. If she is mistreated, she bears the pain without complaint. If she is starved, she grudgingly accepts the hunger. If she is beaten in an effort to force her to hasten her pace, she moves forward diligently. If she is treated with contempt, she never complains regardless of how unjust the treatment is. If she is overloaded, she bears the weight without grief. In short [. . .] the perfect example of the true servant of God!

to which Benkos replied:

> You must know, Father, [. . .] that you make a rather simplistic distinction between the creatures of the Lord. The donkey is prone to silence in the face of adversity because He did not endow her with wit. On the other hand, He gave us men the power of reason. If I were a donkey, I would not aspire to even a paper crown.[18]

Benkos's response is undoubtedly one of the best deconstructions yet of the myth that only the "born again" and followers of organized religion can truly understand God. In having a man of his caliber, supposedly ignorant of the ways of the Supreme Creator, give such an illuminating answer, Zapata Olivella intimates that it takes more than a simple change of faiths to be a morally upright person.

The failures of the Judeo-Christian religion (the Catholic Faith in this case) are again exposed when Zapata has the character known as *el Babalao* write the following to the Pope in Rome:

> *"If you say the son of the Whiteman is White, that of the Blackman is Black, and his Native American counterpart is Indian, then why don't you allow each of these people to worship only the gods of their ancestors consistent with this condition you say comes naturally to everyone?"* (emphasis and quotation marks author's)[19]

Here again, as in the previous paragraph, the critique lies in the moral superiority of the Babalao's argument and the unrepentant tone of his language. Besides questioning the Church's claim to tolerance, which has been belabored so much in the Bible but rarely followed by those who preach it, the character also defends African traditional religion in a way only a Zapata Olivella could have allowed.

But if the perceived moral superiority of traditional African religion is merely suggested in the passages just analyzed, it is explicit in statements like the following:

> The Babalao invoked the dead ekobios from the ship's cargo holds, the living ones who are toiling in the casemates, the ramparts, and the plantations. He ponders about the false justice of the White God who converted them to Christianity and left them in shackles.[20]

Zapata's attitude at this point is not a mere reflection of the time to which the events refer, to wit, the beginning of the slave trade when Africans were still fighting Christianity. Defiance also marks "*Los ancestros combatientes*," the last and longest section of *Changó*, which deals mostly with the twentieth century United States, the decade of the sixties to be precise. Agne Brown, who is the main protagonist here, tells a group of brothers and sisters:

> I am addressing you, my *ekobios* (soul brothers), who are listening to me right now. Not to the deaf White people. I have not come to preach patience or resignation or illusive hopes: I have come to announce the Cult of Life and the Shadows which inspire the rebellious spirit that lies within us Blacks. Only the echo of our dreams can be found beyond that. But hear me well, life and rebellion cannot exist without the presence of our dead brethren. We are the strength of everything that was and everything that will be.[21]

While the passage again parodies such key tenets of the Judeo-Christian Faith as Non-Violence and Paradise, it should be noted that Agne Brown has not always been a follower of African traditional religion. Before Shango

hand picked her from among all her *ekobios* to reunite "the broken, persecuted, and assassinated family of the Muntu in the great melting pot of all the ethnic groups,"[22] she belonged to a Christian Church. This is confirmed by the reaction of one of her listeners:

> -Please Lord, do not abandon her!
> [. . .]
> -My sweet lamb, my placid angel, wrap yourself up in the pillow of this Bible. Pronounce the word of God. Only His name will liberate you from Satan and cleanse you [. . .]. Agne, for the last time I entreat you to allow the light [of the true God] to overtake and clean out the darkness that has engulfed you.[23]

Agne Brown can therefore be said to be the *Babalao* and Benkos Biojo reincarnated. She carries on the tradition they so proudly followed in the days of the Inquisition—that of preserving traditional African spirituality in the New World. Her dedication to this mission is insinuated in the statement she makes to Dr. Harrington, her former professor of Anthropology, soon after giving the speech cited above:

> -I cannot deny that I have my reasons for preferring the African tradition to its Anglosaxon counterpart, primarily because I am an African-American. We affirm ourselves in the brotherhood of the Muntu, which is praised by the gods of Africa, and in the struggles of our Ancestors in the plantations, the slums, the factories, wherever Shango chooses to light his fire of resistance.[24]

Agne Brown is not alone in this revolt against Christianity. She is aided by hundreds of other Black Americans, among them a single mother of five called Dorothy Wright, who is charged along with Brown with spreading a false and dangerous religion. This is, of course, the "Cult of Life and the Shadows" that the latter announced earlier. Miss Wright establishes her own credentials as a bonafide defender of traditional African spirituality when she tells the officer sent to arrest her:

> Just so you know, our religion is older than yours. Before Christ was baptized in the waters of the Jordan, the founders of our Cult were already bathing themselves in sacred ceremonies in the waters of the River Niger.[25]

But nowhere is this challenge to Christianity more apparent than in the fusion of the worlds of the living and the dead one notices throughout *Changó*. The ultimate mark of traditional African spirituality, the living interact with the dead to establish what Ian Smart has described as "the transcendental continuity" between the two worlds.[26] The noted scholar goes on to add that in the African conception of the universe, time does not exist as "something

yet to happen, a succession of time frames consisting of past, present, and future" but rather as "a single unit, a huge *now*, a perpetual present."[27] In other words, death does not remove the departed from the affairs of the living who occupy the *now* or the present life. It merely places them in what John Mbiti calls "another state of existence,"[28] a different dimension of the *now*, thereby assuring the continuity of interaction that the critic talks about.

That many African slaves struggled to retain this tradition is not only documented in fiction, as evidenced by the reaction of Zapata's characters, the subject has also been extensively discussed by anthropologists and historians of New World African religions like Melville Herskovits, Roger Bastide, and William Bascom. As Herskovits points out, New World slaves simply looked for parallels between the gods that were being forced down their throats and the ones they left behind in Africa. He calls this process "reinterpretations." Individual slaves would interpret the attributes of a saint for instance in the light of their similarity to the powers of an African god they knew. That way, the saint became less alien and assumed a certain degree of familiarity. A good example is that of Omolu, the Yoruba god of smallpox. This deity became identified with St. Sebastian in Brazil because of the physical conditions in which the latter's body is often presented in Christian iconography.[29] The wounds on his arrow-riddled body reminded African slaves in that country, in the words of Bastide, of "the pustules produced by smallpox."[30] A similar explanation can be given for the popularity of Shango, the Yoruba god of war, dance and fertility, in both Brazil and Cuba. As Bastide again observes, "Shango can be identified with St John because of St John's fires."[31] In the opinion of Bascom, the fires associated with this saint reminded the slaves of those Shango was alleged to emit whenever he was on the war path, hence the syncretization of the two.[32] Yansan, the storm goddess of the Yoruba people and wife of Shango, also became identified with "St. Barbara, the patron of gunners and artillery-men."[33] Although these syncretisms often varied "from one place to another and even from cult house to cult house,"[34] they nevertheless underscored the desire of the slaves to recapture the world they left behind.

But why did these Africans and, later, their colonized cousins on the Black continent find it so difficult to adjust to the teachings of Christianity? Why did they resort to the syncretisms just described? While Bastide thinks this is because the practice enabled them, especially those in the New World, to satisfy certain mental, sentimental, and affective "needs,"[35] it is Mbiti who provides a more comprehensive explanation. According to Mbiti, the African never perceives God in only transcendental terms. For the African, God is both transcendental and "immanent," that is, He is both absent and present in their daily lives. The former perception derives from the vastness of the sky

where God is believed to reside. Given its apparent limitlessness, whoever lives there, especially in its remotest corners, must perforce be removed from the affairs of men.[36] At the same time, however, God is also associated with such earthly phenomena as natural and man-made disasters,[37] rain and lightning, births and deaths, mountains and cliffs, oceans and rivers, good or bad deeds, or strokes of good and bad luck. He is thought to be directly responsible for each and every one of these acts. But He cannot accomplish such onerous tasks from so remote a locale as the skies. For that to happen, He must come down to the earth, hence the belief that He also lives among humans. This is particularly the case in times of crisis, when He is believed to be right beside the victims, doing everything possible to alleviate their suffering.

It is the absence of this last attribute in the Judeo-Christian traditions that directly led to the drive to syncretize among Africans, especially in the Americas. As a result of the unspeakable atrocities that slaves had to endure in this environment, it became imperative to envision the new gods as entities that could be reached, as beings who were right there among them, doing whatever it took to lessen their suffering, just as their African counterparts did.

In conclusion *Changó* can be said to be a novel of resistance against Black spiritual alienation. Consistent with the proverbial African tolerance for difference, especially in the realm of religious beliefs,[38] Zapata Olivella appeals for the right of his implied audiences to retain the spiritual identity of their forefathers. They revolt against Christianity not because they think it is an inferior religion, they do so because they want to determine their spiritual fate on their own terms. To that end the *babalao*'s letter to the Pope again bears repeating:

> *If you say the son of the Whiteman is White, that of the Blackman is Black, and his Native American counterpart is Indian, then why don't you allow each of these people to worship only the gods of their ancestors consistent with this condition you say comes naturally to everyone?*[39]

I could not agree more.

NOTES

1. Scheiderer, Sean, "'Keys to Paradise': Marx on Religion." http://home.columbus.rr.com/sciences/keys_to_paradise.htm (Accessed March 20, 2002). The link has since been removed. Also, the author incorrectly attributes portions of the quote to the 4th edition of Mary Pat Fisher's *Living Religions*.

2. Zapata Olivella, Manuel, *Changó, el gran putas* (Bogotá: Oveja Negra, 1983), 21. These translations and all subsequent translations of quotes from the novel are

mine. I therefore assume full responsibility for any errors or misrepresentations that may arise from my interpretation of the original text.

3. Ibid.

4. Zoggyie, Haakayoo, "Lengua e identidad en *Changó, el gran putas*," *Afro-Hispanic Review* 20, no. 1 (2001): 90–95.

5. Zoggyie, Haakayoo, *In Search of the Fathers: The Poetics of Disalienation in the Narrative of Two Contemporary Afro-Hispanic Writers* (New Orleans: University Press of the South, 2003). See in particular chapters 2 and 3.

6. Zapata Olivella, *Changó*, 24.

7. These are the whites who participated in or actively supported the trans-Atlantic slave trade. As Zapata himself says in a study titled "*Los Ancestros Combatientes: Una Saga Afro-Americana*," he used the term to distinguish this group of Whites from "all those of Caucasian blood who overcame racial prejudice and allied themselves with the African in his struggle for freedom" (*Ancestros combatientes*, 55).

8. Ibid., 27.

9. Ibid., 26.

10. Ibid., 7.

11. Ibid., 8.

12. All deities mentioned in the paragraph can be found between pp. 10 and 15 of *Changó*.

13. The author defines the term *muntu* as the singular form of the word "man" in the Bantu language. Provided in the index of terminologies located at the end of the novel, it transcends, he says, "the connotation of man since it includes the living and the dead as well as animals, plants, minerals, and the things that serve them. More than entities or people, however, be these real or imagined, it alludes to the force that binds every man and his ancestors and descendants to the present, past, and the future" (*Changó*, 514).

14. Zapata Olivella, *Changó*, 94–98.

15. Ibid., 41.

16. Similar comparisons are again intended in the descriptions that accompanied the death of the *babalao*. In this instance Shango is said to have visited the character just before he died and flooded the night with what the narrator calls his "radiant light." A detail undoubtedly meant to parody the events that preceded the death of Christ on the Cross, the idea is further reinforced when the reader is told that Omo-Oba, the god of volcanoes, split the earth "in two" in order to emerge and witness Shango's actions. And the two are not alone. In apparent distress at the death, Yemayá drinks off all the waters of the seas and the rivers, thus leaving "fish and [sunken] boats" exposed. All quotes in this note can be found on p. 166 of the novel.

17. Captain-Hidalgo, Yvonne, "El espacio del tiempo en *Changó, el gran putas*," in *Ensayos de literatura colombiana*, ed. Raymond L. Williams (Bogotá: Plaza & Janes, 1984), 146.

18. Zapata Olivella, *Changó*, 139.

19. Ibid., 149.

20. Ibid., 151.

21. Ibid., 346.

22. Ibid., 342.
23. Ibid., 347
24. Ibid., 349.
25. Ibid., 360.
26. For instance, at the beginning of its trip to the Americas, the slave ship runs into a huge storm which is immediately attributed by Nagó to the anger of Odumare and Elegba. Referring specifically to the latter, the narrator reports that Nagó "hears him enter passing between the two armed guards that kept watch at the gate." And once on board, the god gives the character a flaming rattle so that "no one can obscure your intelligence"; a fistful of wind so that "no one can entrap your spirit"; and the spear and sword of Orún so that he would be "empowered by the strength of your fist." So convinced are the remaining slaves of this visit that they start shouting in chorus: -Hear everyone! Elegba is in our midst! All quotes are from p. 43 of *Changó*.
27. Smart, Ian I., "*Changó, el gran putas*, una novela poemática," in *Ensayos de literatura colombiana*, ed. Raymond L. Williams (Bogotá: Plaza & Janes, 1984), 153.
28. Mbiti, John S., *African Religions & Philosophy* (Portmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1969), 153.
29. Herskovits, Melville J., *The New World Negro: Selected Papers in Afro-American Studies*, ed. Frances S. Herskovits (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1969). Herskovits' argument can be found in its entirety on pp. 321–61 of the book.
30. Bastide, Roger, *African Civilizations in the New World* (London: Hurst & Co., 1971), 157.
31. Ibid.
32. Bascom, William Russell, *Shango in the New World* (Austin, TX: African and Afro-American Research Institute, 1972), 12–14.
33. Bastide, *African Civilizations*, 157. For a complete discussion of the topic, see pages 152–170 of the book.
34. Bascom, *Shango in New World*, 7.
35. Bastide, *African Civilizations*, 153.
36. Mbiti, *African Religions*, 32.
37. I use the phrase "natural disasters" very loosely here because there is no such thing as a *natural* disaster in many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. Every unfortunate incident is attributed to a god or ancestor who has been offended by a human being. Consequently, solutions tend to be searched for only in the realm of religion since a repeat is often considered inevitable unless the injured entity is appeased through ritual sacrifice.
38. Wole Soyinka has written extensively on this subject. For instance in an interview with Ulli Beier, published in *Isokan Yoruba Magazine*, the eminent Nigerian Nobel Laureate had this to say about Yoruba (and by implication African traditional) Religion:

> Traditional religion is not only accommodating, it is liberating, and this seems logical, because whenever a new phenomenon impinged on the consciousness of the Yoruba—whether a historical event, a technological or scientific encounter–they do not bring down the barriers–close the doors. They say: Let us look at this phenomenon and see what we

have that corresponds to it in our own tradition, that is a kind of analogue to this experience. And sure enough, they go to *Ifa* and they examine the corpus of proverbs and sayings; and they look even into their [. . .] agricultural practices or the observation of their calendar. Somewhere within that religion they will find some kind of interpretation of that event. They do not consider it a hostile experience. That's why the corpus of the *Ifa* is constantly reinforced and augmented, even from the history of other religions with which *Ifa* comes into contact. You have *Ifa* verses which deal with Islam, you have *Ifa* verses which deal with Christianity. (3–4)

39. Zapata Olivella, *Changó*, 149.

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Chapter 11

Islam and Ancient Sacred Places in Hausaland

Mukhtar Umar Bunza and
Adamu Musa Kotorkoshi

Kwatarkwashi is one of the seventeen emirates of Zamfara State in Nigeria. Historians assert that the town was one of the ancient centers of Katsina Kingdom in Hausaland. The settlement is marked by massive and historic mountains. It is one of the most revered indigenous religious and political centers of Hausaland. In most of Africa, the rivers, streams, mountains, groves, forests, or trees often are imbued with spiritual powers, or qualities, in the local imaginary. All these natural spaces can be collectively termed sacred. They are usually the sites of rituals and practices that give expression and meaning to the religions and beliefs of the population. The Kwatarkwashi in Zamfara, Nigeria is one such uniquely sacred space. It contains a series of over twenty horizontally overlapping *inselbergs* (or inland mountains), rising some 1,300 feet above sea level. Each is believed to have powerful (*iskoki* in the local language) spirits within it.

Since time immemorial a series of ritual practices have been performed at notable shrines in the mountains of the region. They became part of the spiritual heritage of the people who settled the area. Also, other traditional religious practices prevalent in the area include the following: *Magiro*, *Kurjenu*, *Kamun Maiki*, and *Kunkurutu*. However, with the increasing influence of Islam in the region, these practices have diminished and others have completely disappeared. This chapter discusses the nature of Hausaland sacred space and its roles in pre-Islamic indigenous religious practices. The chapter highlights the impact of Islam on ancient, and widely practiced, rites and performances on specific sites in the Kwatarkwashi zones.

Historically, today's Hausaland was the site of fourteen ancient empires. Hausa primogeniture is feudal and bifurcated into *Hausa Bakwai* (or the "pure-bred" seven—descendants of the legendary Hausa progenitor, Bayyajida) and

Banza Bakwai (in ethnic lore the "bastard," inauthentic, seven). The *Hausa Bakwai* claim descent from a unique ancestor, while the *Banza Bakwai* are the believed to be descended from vassals, intra- and inter-ethnic marriage, as well as settlers of non-Hausa ethnicity. Thus the *Hausa Bakwai* (original seven Hausa states) comprises modern day northern Nigeria, Niger Republic, with some parts of Chad and Cameroon Republics. The *Banza Bakwai* comprises Kingdoms such as Yauri, Nupe, and the southernmost of parts of Hausaland territory such as the Kwararafa. Given the ethnic complexity and linguistic diversity of the peoples of the region, it is difficult to draw a definite demarcation of Hausaland. Many non-Hausa speakers are located in the region, especially in the Banza Bakwai states. Mahdi Adamu observes: "The boundaries (of Hausaland) are not exact, but approximate only. They do not reflect the current distribution of Hausa languages and culture even in the northern Nigerian area; they are simply the territorial bounds of the Hausa states of Gobir, Kabi (Kebbi), Daura, Katsina, Zamfara, Kano, Rano, and Garun Gabas." In these areas majority of the people speak Hausa as their only language, and the culture and social traits often associated with the Hausa people predominate.[1]

Defining a Hausa person is not an easy task. Abdullahi Smith, for example suggests the following: a Hausa is an individual who lived in Hausaland at the end of the fifteenth century, by which time all the former Hausa kingdoms had been established. A Hausa is also someone whose ancestry can be traced through natural migration from outside Hausaland.[2] Before the advent and consolidation of Islam in the region, traditional religious practices dictated all aspects of societal and individual life. Since the fifteenth century, Islam has served as the officially sanctioned state religion; especially in Kano and Katsina. The nineteenth century Sokoto *jihad* consolidated all Hausaland into a single political entity known as the Sokoto Caliphate. It helped to entrench Islam in all societal activities, in almost all aspects of living and in the quotidian affairs of the people. In some areas of *Maguzawa* (Hausa term for the adherents of traditional religion) in Hausaland, and especially in the Kwatarkwashi and Tsafe axis, traditional religion had sacred spaces in the form of shrines and sanctuaries for the various spirits and deities.

The presence and acceptance of non-Muslim peoples and their religious practices in the Caliphate lends credence to the Islamic regime's religious tolerance.[3] Thus, as is the case with other African societies,[4] the Hausa considered the mountainous areas as abode of *iskoki* (wind and air spirits), whom they were afraid to harm, or offend. These spirits were worshipped through sacrifice and ritual practices.[5] The gods were also propitiated as a way to seek protection against misfortune. In Kwatarkwashi, for example, these ancient sacred places are popularly known as *Dukura*, *Bakangama*, *Wuliga*, and *Dungai*. Islam and Christianity have greatly contributed significantly in changing the patterns of people's beliefs and perceptions of the traditional religious

practices in the Kwatarkwashi region. Monotheistic Islam eroded indigenous religious attitudes. Similarly, Christian missionaries did invest enormous resources in the proselytization of the region, especially among the non-Muslims of the area. Indeed, the first Christian convert in the Kwatarkwashi mountainous areas was made in 1935.[6] The spread of Islam and Christianity has had a pernicious influence on the norms, rites, and practices of the tradition religion. Even more serious is the effect of monotheism on indigenous people's attitude to the sacred places that used to be revered and by votaries of the traditional religions.

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF KWATARKWASHI

Kwatarkwashi is one of the ancient towns of Katsina Laaka, and it used to be part of the eastern part of Sokoto State before the creation of Zamfara state in 1996.[7] Today, it is located on the eastern part of Bungudu Local Government in Zamfara State, Nigeria. It is situated between Gusau and Tsafe, towns on the main highway to Zaria, Kaduna State. It is located within the Sudan Savannah vegetation belt. The area's predominant flora are neem, mango, and guava trees. The topography is marked by *loess* (windblown dust and silt) and sandy soils. Major agricultural activities include the wide cultivation of crops such as groundnuts, guinea corn, soy beans, millet, maize, and rice.[8]

What is today known as Kwatarkwashi is one of the ancient towns of Katsina, which emerged over six hundred years ago. The town was dubbed *Kwatarkwashi dutse da ganuwa, inda maiki* ("Kwatarkwashi town of rocks, wall and eagles").[9] The rock is about 1,300 feet above sea level and has a massive landmass of about 1 square mile. This great rock is beautiful and imposing. The surroundings offer a beautiful natural scenery for inspiration and relaxation. It is one of the most exotic natural rock formations in Nigeria.[10] The rock formations were a factor in the emergence of the town as a religious and political center.[11] Similarly, there are inselbergs attached to *Dukura* situated in certain villages of Kwatarkwashi such as Sankalawa, Dubewa, Tofa, among others.

Kwatarkwashi was founded by hunters from Katsina during the reign of Sarkin Katsina Kumayau, when Katsina was under Bornu rule.[12] The people initially settled at Dungai and later moved to a mountain named Dukura. They selected Mangul, on the approval of Kumayau, to be their leader. For approving Mangul, the people presented Kumayau with gifts contained in women's baskets, known as *Kwatashi*. Kumayau accepted their presents and appointed Mangul as the *Sarkin Kwatashi* (Chief of *Kwatashi*). Thus, the name "Kwatarkwashi" is the corrupted form of *Kwatashi* and all the

Figure 11.1. A front view of the Kwatarkwashi Mountain.
Picture taken by author.

subsequent chiefs of Kwatarkwashi to the present bear this title.[13] At the time of writing, the present Emir of Kwatarkwashi Ahmadu is the twenty eighth on the Kwatarkwashi dynastic chart.[14]

THE ANCIENT SACRED MOUNTAINS OF KWATARKWASHI

The religious relevance of Kwatarkwashi area rests in its history as well as it geography. According to Usman:

> The crucial factor (in the history of Kwatarkwashi was) in the emergence of the place as a religious and political centre, (which) was the existence of this complex of massive granitic outcrops which dominate the plains for several miles around. These *duwatsu*—mountains—are associated in the pre-Islamic religious beliefs of the Hausa speaking peoples with the *iskoki* (spirits), which are some of the active beings which directly influence human affairs. Because of this association, rocks like those of Kwatarkwashi all over Kasar Hausa became centers for the worship of the *iskoki* and for religious festivities over and above those of *dangi* (patrilineal clan).[15]

Furthermore, Usman identifies the historical importance of Kwatarkwashi in the traditional religious practices of Hausaland. He states that:

> Kwatarkwashi seems to have emerged as the major center for the worship of *Magiro* for an area extending beyond the *gulbin*—river—Ka into the Middle Niger Region. *Magiro* which seems to have developed out of the worship of the spirit of the ancestors, is one of the most ancient and powerful religious cults of the *Kasar Hausa*—Hausaland—and is often termed the *Kakan Tsafi*—"grandfather of all fetish." The center of this cult at Kwatarkwashi was at a rock called Dungai. The first *maigari* (head of a town) was known as Mangul, but his successor known as *Gemen Dodo* (beard of fetish), is said to have been responsible for Kwatarkwashi's relations with Katsina, before he became the Kwatarkwashi. The growth of the place as a significant center of population with a *maigari*, cannot be easily dated, but it is associated in the traditions with the move of the settlement to the rock of Dungai. It is likely, however, that Kwatarkwashi had emerged as a religious and political center before the formation of the kingdom of Katsina.[16]

From the above, the importance, position, and prominence of Kwatarkwashi in pre-Islamic ancient religious practices seems incontestable. Ritual practices pervaded all aspects of political, economic, and social life of the inhabitants. Thus, notable ancient deities were worshiped at *Dukura* Mountain and in other mountainous places of the advent of Islam and its civilization radically transformed the area. Major shrines and rites in the Kwatarkwashi region include the following:

Bakangama Shrine is a shrine at the bottom of Kwatarkwashi Mountain where traditionalists performed their rituals to express their people's spirituality. Believers came to this shrine to propitiate the gods and pray for all the good fortune in their lives.[17] *Bakangama* is a small stone situated southwest of a graveyard around Kura town in the Kwatarkwashi region. Forms of worship included the sacrificial slaughter animals; the offering some valuable items like perfume, sweets, and money.

According to folklore and local history, almost every year, the Dan Turwa family of Kwatarkwashi, one of the heirs of *Baura*[18] wrestling, slaughtered one to three hundred chicken as sacrifice to *Bakangama* in order not to be defeated during the annual competition by the enemies of *Baura*.[19] An informant stated that in the 1960s, he used to find items such as sugar, milk, and slaughtered chicken that had been sacrificed at *Bakangama*.[20] Furthermore, people from different parts of northern Nigeria came to this sacred place to perform specificancient ritual sacrifices. For example, a man came from Yola in Adamawa State, whose children died at infancy. He is said to have appealed to *Bakangama*, "O *Bakangama*! Help me; my children are dying at infancy." He then slaughtered a goat and put down some amount of money

Figure 11.2. A view of Bakangama shrine represented by a rock.
Picture taken by author.

at the shrine.[21] He was said to have had his wish granted. Purportedly, his children stopped dying at infancy.

Dungai Shrine is another notable sacred place located in Yartsakuwa under Gulubba district of Kwatarkwashi. It is another stone at the bottom of Kwatarkwashi Mountain. The shrine is associated particularly with the Kwatarkwashi ruling house. It was utilized for ritual sacrifices. A new chief is required to go to the *Dungai* for *wankan sarki* (ritual royal bath). Local wine is provided and then chickens are slaughtered. The royal candidate is asked to undress and mount the shrine. The *Kilago*, a symbolic mantle is put on him, and he is given the staff denoting office, followed by acclamation and jubilation of the people. The traditional practice of *wankan sarki* had ritual significance for the new ruler. During the ritual *wankan sarki*, the chief is persuaded to ignore and overlook all kinds of antipathy to him. He also required the support and goodwill of everybody.[22] Again, after the rites, the new chief is given a head of millet or guinea-corn to hold. Next, a black bull is slaughtered and its carcass is placed at the entrance of the palace prior to the chief's entrance. The belief is that with this ritual, his subjects would not experience famine, or pestilence during his reign. The new chief could thereafter assume the full power and authority of his throne, with absolute

control over his subjects. No one, after these rituals must and can resist his power, it is believed.[23]

The practice of *wankan sarki* was abandoned during the reign of Kwatarkwashi Aliyu Labbo (who reigned between 1954 and 1959). The *Dungai* shrine, however, is preserved and still respected not only by the ruling house, but also by members of the surrounding community.

Alagida Shrine is the ancient shrine associated with the Kwatarkwashi ruling house. It is a sacred stone located at the bottom of Kwatarkwashi Mountain and very close to the palace. Items such as earthen bowls, spears, snakes, and alligators were placed all-round the shrine as part of the traditional rites. The main reason for the sacredness of the *Alagida* shrine was that this space was the guarantor of the continuity and success of the rulers over their subjects. They believed that *Alagida* had the power to compel all their subjects to obey them. It was during the reign of Kwatarkwashi Aliyu Labbo, that *Alagida* was also repudiated as a sacred place. Labbo excised the site of *Alagida* out of the premises of the Kwatarkwashi ruling house.[24] Due to the growing influence of Islam traditional rituals associated with it, as previously alluded to, have been abandoned.

Figure 11.3. The Alagida Shrine at the Kwatarkwashi Mountain
Picture taken by author.

Wuliga Shrine

Wuliga is another national shrine where traditional rites are performed in the sixth month of the lunar calendar, when all the great practitioners called *Magajin Kara* would converge around the shrine to make sacrifices and fete the deities. Black goats and chickens were slaughtered at the shrine.[25] The *Wuliga* shrine was use as the space for arbitration of disputes between individuals and families. Folklore says that any person among the believers of *Wuliga* who makes a false oath and bears false testimony in any dispute will die because of his dishonesty.[26]

Alagwai Shrine is an axe-like stone located on top of Sankalawa Mountain. It is a domestic shrine in the Sankalawa district of Kwatarkwashi. Annual rituals are often performed there during the harvest season. Chickens, honey, and *gumba* (millet flour) are provided for the occasion. During the ritual, white and red roosters are slaughtered and offered at the shrine. Blood from the birds and honey are poured on the shrine as libation to the gods. Thereafter, celebrants would slaughter their sacrificial animals and birds on the shrine.[27] Like other shrines the number of ritual practices has declined markedly, due to the recent waves of Islamic revivalism in the region and in

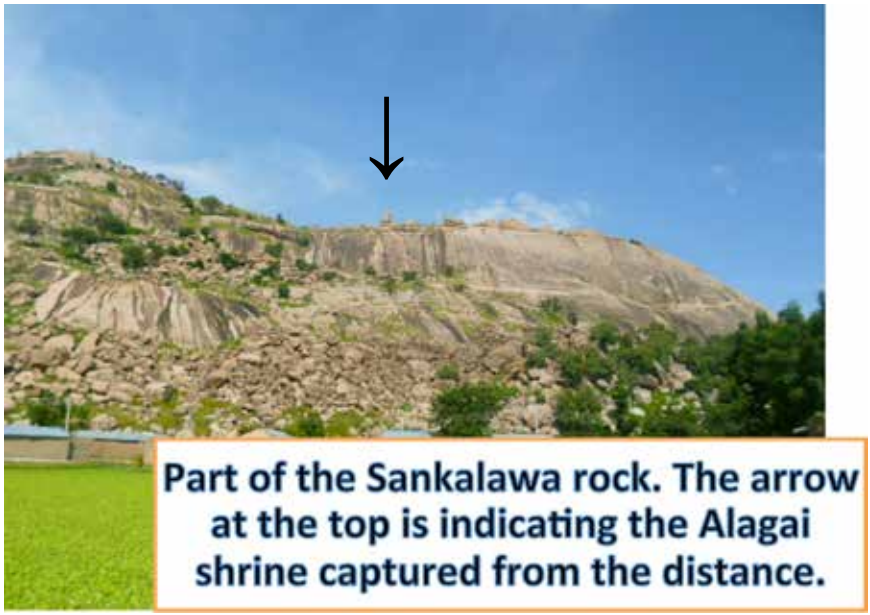

Figure 11.4. Part of the Sankalawa rock. The arrow at the top is indicating the Alagai shrine captured from the distance.
Picture taken by author.

the Zamfara State. However, some aspects of indigenous shrine practices still persist among remaining inhabitants of the area. *Alagwai* has great salience for the people of the area. It was considered as a spiritual bulwark against any external intruder. Traditionalists also attached social profitability to Alagwai as a desired consequence. Brides and their friends also used to have their tradition called "*Jifar Tuwo*"[28] at this shrine.

During the sacrifices, the devotees would prepare the *tuwo*. The bride placed her feet on the preparation three times, after which it was carried around *Alagwai*, accompanied by singing and questioning to whom she belonged: *Ke ta wa? Ke ta wane* ("To whom do you belong? You belong to so-and-so"). While doing so, the *tuwo* is broken into pieces and scattered around while the bride is asked to "take your *tuwo*." The practice was to symbolically test the bride's virginity. If she is pure and chaste, it is believed that *Kulbobi* (skink lizards) would appear and eat the *tuwo*. Otherwise, if she was guilty of lacking virginity, *Bakaken Kadangaru* (black lizards) would appear on the porridge. This tradition no longer exists, as it has been abolished.[29]

ISLAM AND ITS INFLUENCE ON KWATARKWASHI MOUNTAINOUS SACRED PLACES

When Islam was introduced to Kwatarkwashi is apocryphal. Some sources claim that in the early fifteenth century people of *Limanci* area arrived from Katsina to Kwatarkwashi as Muslims.[30] By the sixteenth century, Kwatarkwashi chiefs had started to adopt Muslim names, indicating conversion to Islam. Some of past chiefs with Muslim names include Umaru Jandaro (1500–1549), Abdu Dan Ma'aji (1640–1679), Umaru II (1689–1700), and Usman Kure (1700–1728). The names suggest that Islam was accepted and spread by the ruling elite.[31] Similarly, Yandoto, a town very close to Kwatarkwashi, was as an abode of renowned Muslim scholars and an intellectual center of Hausaland since the sixteenth century. Muhammad Korau (1466–1492/3) who was considered as the first Muslim ruler of Katsina was from Yandoto. By this period, the pace of Islamization and learning in Yandoto could have reached Kwatarkwashi, which was a neighbor of the Yandoto Centre.[32] However, great effort towards Islamization in Kwatarkwashi were made by Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto between 1962 and 1964.

The Sardauna succeeded in converting many Maguzawa to Islam, especially in Kwatarkwashi, Kanoma, Tsafe, and other places he visited during his political campaign tours between 1962 and 1964. On arriving at Kwatarkwashi, the Sardauna demanded all the *Maguzawa* to be gathered at Kwatarkwashi Township Primary School, where he persuaded them to abandon

traditional religion and accept Islam. Consequently, many among inhabitants accepted Islam. Their leader, Magaji Dan Turwa and the custodian of *Bakangama* shrine, accepted Islam and changed his name to Muhammad.[33] Another political agent of Islamization in Kwatarkwashi is the former governor of Zamfara State, Alhaji Ahmad Sani Yariman Bakura (1999–2007). Many of the remaining *Maguzawa* in some parts of Kwatarkwashi area converted to Islam during his time in office. Like Sardauna, Yarima also built many mosques and Islamic schools in Zamfara, especially in Kwatarkwashi area.

Some traditional rulers also contributed to the Islamization of the area. Most notable among them, Kwatarkwashi Aliyu Labbo, banned the sacred places of Kwatarkwashi, which included the Dungai and Alagida shrines. The effort of the present Emir, Kwatarkwashi Ahmadu, to abolish the traditional ritual practices in the Kwatarkwashi shrines cannot be over emphasized. He banned the annual practice of *Daukar Maiki*[34] and supported the efforts of the Sardauna and Yarima during the Islamization process in the area.

Muslim scholars within and outside Kwatarkwashi contributed to the spread and growth of Islam, especially Islamic education and *Da'awah* activities. These prominent Muslim scholars include Malam Abdullahi Dansankala (popularly known as Magatakarda) and Malam Abubakar Muhammad Imam (popularly known as Malam Abu Inke).[35] In the Sankalawa area, Liman Sa'idu Bala preached against the *Alagwai* shrine by persuading its adherents to repudiate it and accept Islam.[36]

Some Islamic organizations such as *Jama'at Nasrul Islam* (J. N. I.), established in 1962, made contributions to the expansion of Islam in the area. They helped in transforming religious outlook of the society. The Jama'at is an umbrella group for the Muslim communities of Nigeria. A J. N. I. school was established in Kwatarkwashi. This was considered the most important tool for the spread of Islamic education. Also, there is Jama'atul *Izalatul Bid'ah wa Iqamatu al-Sunnah* under the leadership of Murtala Salisu Kura. This institution has been in existence in Kwatarkwashi since the 1980s.[37] There is again *Jama'at Tajdid al-Islamy* (J. T. I.) under the leadership of Shehu Abdullahi Kwatarkwashi, founded in 1994.[38] These organizations and others often organized occasional preaching within Kwatarkwashi and its villages, especially where the belief in the shrines persists.

It is important to note the activities of Christian missionaries in the area. The church and schools they established in the area played major roles in eroding the importance of this sacred African space—just as Islamic religion and education have. The combined pressure from both the Muslims and Christians, and the influence of western schools continue to squeeze out whatever remains of traditional religious practices and rituals associated with the shrines and other sacred sites in the Kwatarkwashi areas. The traditions, beliefs, and

practices connected to Kwatarkwashi are now regarded as taboo and barbaric, and contrary to Islamic and western norms. For example, the custodians of *Bakangama* who inherited the practice of *Baura* have abandoned the shrine as a result of the emergence of modern hospitals in the region.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has analyzed why the Kwatarkwashi Mountain used to be an African sacred space. The ritual practices and the place the mountain occupied in the cultural and religious traditions of the people made it a primordial space for them. The regular and annual sacrifices were performed for social, political, and economic benefits. For instance, the *Bakangama* shrine was mainly associated with general well-being and prosperity of the people; *Dungai* was the royal deity of the Kwatarkwashi ruling house, with rites pertaining to the installation and coronation of a new ruler. *Alagida* was also associated with the royal worship. *Wuliga* shrine was the space for the cult of the highest priests of the Kwatarkwashi region, and *Alagwai* was for the celebration of the new harvest for current and future seasons; for protection of the society against famine and other calamities.

Today, the once sacred shrines now exist as mere historical sites and monuments for commercial tourism. They have lost their spiritual or religious significance as sacred African spaces. Maybe the new and increasing awareness, all over the world, of issues of sustainability, the interconnection between the environment and traditional, indigenous, religious practices—known to be far versatile and durable than any foreign influence will restore Kwatarkwarshi's lost glory. The pertinent issue is whether, African sacred spaces, some would argue, as the core of our cultural and spiritual heritage, are being lost in the rush to embrace modernity and westernization—be it Islam or Christianity.

NOTES

1. Mahdi Adamu, *The Hausa Factor in West African History* (Zaria, Nigeria: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1977), 1.
2. Ibid., 2.
3. See details in Mukhtar U. Bunza, "Religious Tolerance in the Sokoto Caliphate: Lessons for the Nigerian State," in *The Sokoto Caliphate: History and Legacies, 1804–2004,* eds. Boboyi, H., and Yakubu, A. M. (Kaduna, Nigeria: Baraka Press, Published by the Arewa House, Vol. II, 2006), 251–269.
4. See detail of some African Societies in T. O. Ranger and I. N. Kimabo, eds., *The Historical Study of African Religion: With Special Reference to East and Central*

Africa (London: Heinemann, 1972), and R. Ijatuyi-Morphe, *Africa's Social and Religious Quest: A Comprehensive Survey and Analysis of African Situation* (Jos, Nigeria: Logos Quest Publishers, 2011), 230–240. In reference to some aspects of Traditional Religious Practices in northern Nigeria among the Dakarkari see Mukhtar U. Bunza, "Girmace Shrine amongst the Dakarkari in Zuru: An Examination of African Traditional Religion in North-Western Nigeria," in *KADA: Journal of Liberal Arts* Vol. No. 1 (June 2007): 33–40.

5. Rocks as sites of divine importance was also significant in the Yoruba traditional Religious Practices as shown by Hunter in his study of the Oro Pataki Agunju, see Jo Anna Hunter, "Oro Pataki Agunju: A Cross Cultural Approach Towards the Understanding of the Fundamus of the Orisa Agunju in Nigeria and Cuba," in *Orisa: Yoruba Gods and Spiritual Identity in Africa and the Diaspora*, eds. Toyin Falola and Anne Genova (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2005).

6. Mukhtar U. Bunza, *Christian Mission among Muslims: Sokoto Province, 1935–1990* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007).

7. B. M. Gusau and S. M. Gusau, *Gusau ta Malam Sambo* (Kano, Nigeria: Benchmark Publishers Limited, 2012), 105.

8. A. B. Mamman, "Zamfara State Nigeria: A People United, a Future Assured (Survey of States)," in *Nigeria: A People United, a Future Assured, Survey of States*, Vol. 2, eds. A. B. Mamman, J. O. Oyebanji, and S. W. Peters (Calabar, Nigeria: Gabumo Publication, 2000), 133–134.

9. See *50th Anniversary—Golden Jubilee of his Royal Alhaji Ahmad Umar Mai Kwatarkwashi, Emir of Kwatarkwashi, March 1961–March 2011*, 15–16.

10. "Kwatarkwashi Rock: Zamfara's Untapped Resources," http://www.nigeriaa2z.com, retrieved on August 27, 2015.

11. Y. B. Usman, *The Transformation of Katsina: (1400–1883)* (Zaria, Nigeria: Ahmadu Bello University Press Ltd., 1981), 7–8.

12. P. G. Harris, *Sokoto Provincial Gazetteer*, 1932, 154.

13. Ibid., 154–155.

14. See Kwatarkwashi Dynastic Chart at the Place of the Emirate. See also 50th Anniversary—Golden Jubilee of his Royal Alhaji Ahmad Umar Mai Kwatarkwashi, Emir of Kwatarkwashi, March 1961–March 2011 and also S. M. Gusau, *Wakokin Baka a Kasar Hausa, Yanaye-Yanayensu da Sigoginsu* (Kano, Nigeria: Benchmark Publishers Limited, 2008).

15. Usman, *The Transformation of Katsina*, 8.

16. Ibid.

17. Muhammadu Zaki, (70 yrs.), practitioner of *Baura*, Sabawa, Kwatarkwashi, interviewed on January 15, 2015.

18. *Baura* was a competition between two towns like Kwatarkwashi and Kanoma or Tsafe and Kwatarkwashi. Experts' practitioners of *Baura* from both towns would make a dangerous combat which usually leading to lose lives. It was like boxing, wrestling, and *Tauri* (*Tauri* is one of the Hausa traditional games which related to magic for making skin resistant to cut).

19. Magaji Dan Tiye, (80 yrs.), custodian of *Bakangama*, Sabawa Kwatarkwashi, interviewed on January 31, 2015.

20. Malam Ibrahim Gambo (Dan Rago), (61 yrs.), Kwatarkwashi, teacher, interviewed on March 30, 2015.

21. Muhammadu Zaki, (70 yrs.), practitioner of *Baura*, Sabawa, Kwatarkwashi, interviewed on January 29, 2015.

22. Mamman Kalago, (about 90 yrs.), Tazame Kwatarkwashi, interviewed on September 26, 2015.

23. Ibid.

24. Mamman Kalago.

25. Ibid.

26. Magaji Dan Tiye. The same the Yoruba considered Sango and Ogun which the latter was feared and always held in awe. See Toyin Falola, *Counting the Tiger's Teeth: An African Teenager's Story* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2014), 8–10.

27. Liman Sa'idu Bala, (67 yrs.), Chief Imam *Juma'at* Mosque, Sankalawa Kwatarkwashi, interviewed on September 27, 2015.

28. *Tuwo* is a staple dish made from rice or flour of millet, guinea-corn etc. which is cooked in boiling water and stirred until thick. It is a kind of pudding or porridge with very thick consistency.

29. Musa Aya, (50 yrs.), civil servant, Sankalawa, interviewed on September 27, 2015.

30. Malam Bala Limanci, (70 yrs.), scholar, Limanci Kwatarkwashi, interviewed on February 21, 2015.

31. But the first *Juma'at* mosque was established during Kwatarkwashi Umaru III (1921–1954). Interviewed with the Emir of Kwatarkwashi Ahmadu Umar Mai Kwatarkwashi, February 16, 2015.

32. S. S. Gusau, "The Yandoto Factor in the History of Hausaland to 1806," M. A. Thesis, Department of History, U.D.U.S., 2009, 15.

33. Mamman Kalago.

34. This was one of the well-known annual ceremonies in the ancient Kwatarkwashi through which a living eagle is caught from the top of Kwatarkwashi rock and presents it to the king of the town. It was known as "*Daukar Maiki*" or "*Kamun Maiki*" means "catching of eagle."

35. Some of their students today are most of the prominent scholars of Kwatarkwashi Imam Musa Kura (chief Imam of Kwatarkwashi 2nd Juma'at mosque), Mal. Abdul'aziz Gamraki (Islamic scholar), Engr. Sanusi Muhammad Usman (chairman Joint Youth Islamic Organizations Zamfara State), Mal. Hussaini Ibrahim Rusawa (Islamic scholar), Mal. Ali Kura (Islamic scholar), Mal. Isa Bala Homawa (a lecturer F.C.E.T Gusau in the Department of Arabic) among others. Sourced from Mal. Husaini Ibrahim Rusawa, (54 yrs.), scholar, Rusawa Kwatarkwashi, interviewed on July 26, 2015.

36. Liman Sa'idu Bala.

37. Malam Musa Almajir, (61 yrs.), Deputy Imam 2nd Juma'at Mosque, interviewed on August 1, 2015.

38. Alhaji Shehu Abdullahi (50 yrs.), Chairman J.T.I. Bungudu Local Government, Kwatarkwashi, interviewed on July 28, 2015.

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Chapter 12

Sacred Space and Sacred Time on an African University Campus

Oluwasegun Peter Aluko

INTRODUCTION

Sacred space and sacred time are two phenomena that draw the attention of scholars far and wide. Scholars like Brad Olsen,[1] Robert S. Ellwood,[2] Chris Park,[3] etc. have all written on the phenomena of sacred place and sacred time. This essay is the result of the interest aroused by the work of Robert S. Ellwood, *Introducing Religion: From Inside and Outside*, published in 1993. In his book, Ellwood discusses the uniqueness of sacred space and sacred time. He identifies sacred space as a place of worship, that is, church, temple, holy shrine, or sacred hill.[4] He also describes sacred time as the time devoted to different festivals, rites, sacred stories, or holidays.[5]

The focus of this chapter is an African college campus, specifically the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, in southwestern Nigeria. It is an institution with so many religious groups that there is limited space to accommodate their various religious performances and practices. Thus, there are more religious groups than available sacred space. Consequently, there is intense competition for spaces to serve as worship centers. The crux of this chapter is to examine sacred spaces and how some otherwise mundane spaces have been converted, over time on this campus, into sacred spaces. The impact of this on the university community is also discussed through an analysis of the attitudes and perspectives of the students on sacred space and sacred time. Admittedly, much has been written about phenomena associated with sacredness, however in this chapter, sacred space and sacred time in a westernized African context will be of interest. The main reason is that two major western belief systems, namely Christianity and Islam, are the predominant and visible religions that have impacted the culture and life of Obafemi Awolowo

University. Sociological and anthropological methods are deployed in analyzing the data collected. One major conclusion of the chapter is that while some spaces are recognized as sacred (religious ground), what is sacred is mostly determined by the time during which the religious gather for worship.

SACRED SPACE AND SACRED TIME

Common to sacred place and sacred time is the notion of "sacred." When referring to the sacred, modern scholarship is indebted to Latin,[6] which uses the terms *sacrare*, and *sacer*, or "holy." For ancient Romans, *sacrum* meant what belonged to the gods or was in their power. Yet, when referring to *sacrum* one was not obliged to mention a god's name, for it was clear that one was thinking of cult ritual and its location; or was primarily concerned with the temple and the rites performed in and around it.[7] Emile Durkheim in his *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, sees most things as being related to the sacred. Durkheim relates religion to sacredness:

> A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden beliefs and practices which 1448 Sacred Geography in Native North America unite[d] into one single moral community called a Church; all those who adhere to them.[8]

Again, in his book *The Sacred and the Profane*, Mircea Eliade perceives the sacred as that which always manifests itself as a reality of a wholly different order from "natural" realities. Thus, in defining the sacred, Eliade views as being the opposite of the profane. According to him:

> Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane. To designate the act of *manifestatum* of the sacred, we have proposed the term *hierophany*. It is a fitting term, because it does not imply anything further; it expresses no more than is implicit in its etymological content, i.e., that something sacred shows itself to us.[9]

In another instance, Deward Walker, in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* states:

> "Portals to the sacred" is an expression I use to convey belief common among Native Americans that there are specific places that possess great sacredness, and this concept illuminates the ritual functions of sacred sites in Native North America. Such "portals" should not be viewed as limited in size or scale. Some may be large in their geographical extent while others are limited in size. Likewise, use of the portals concept must include the understanding that they are not

only positioned in geography but also positioned in time, such that they become sacred "time/spaces."[10]

Therefore, and from the foregoing, what determines a sacred space or sacred time is from the sacredness that is attributed to it by people. A sacred place is first a defined place, a space distinct from other spaces. The rituals that a people either practice in this space, or direct toward the same mark its sacredness and differentiate it from other defined spaces.[11] Also, what is sacred about sacred time is that it is set aside from its usual course. It can be a time of rest or ecstasy; of silence or drumming, of solitude or communion, as long as its rhythm is unusual, and it alludes to forces that rise above everyday turmoil.[12]

SACRED SPACE AT OBAFEMI AWOLOWO UNIVERSITY

According to Chris Park, one of the more prominent geographical dimensions of religious expression is the notion of sacred space. Most religions designate certain places as sacred or holy, and this designation often encourages believers to visit those places in pilgrimage. And it also compels religious authorities to protect them for the benefit of future generations.[13] The same reality obtains in the case of Obafemi Awolowo University. Certain places have been separated and designated as sacred by the management of the institution, using the terminology "Religious Ground." This is just as Eliade states: "For religious man, space is not homogeneous; he experiences interruptions, breaks in it; some parts of space are qualitatively different from others."[14] This "religious ground" is the space where religious activities in the institution take place. This designated space at Obafemi Awolowo University (henceforth referred to as OAU), houses just a few religious denominations, when compared to the large number of different religious denominations in the institution. Some of the denominations that occupy the religious ground are: Deeper Life Campus Fellowship (DLCF), Celestial Church of Christ Students' Parish (CCCSP), the National Federation of Catholic Student (NFCS) under the Catholic Diocese of Osogbo (Our Lady of Perpetual Light Chapel), the Redeemed Christian Church of God (Kings Court Parish), the Central Mosque for all Muslims in the institution, the All Souls Chapel, which is an interdenominational chapel for various Christian sects in the institution, and so on. All these religious groups have buildings within the Religious Ground which are regarded as sacred. Religious activities are held in the various spaces that have been allocated to these religious groups by the university management via the Physical Planning and Development Unit (PPDU). Also, at the extreme end of the Religious Ground is a space allocated by the University management for burials of the dead. Nevertheless, in this essay, the

"Religious Ground" terminology at OAU dovetails perfectly with Ellwood's definition of sacred space. He states:

> Sacred space is the precincts of temples or churches, holy shrines, or sacred hills—any space that has a special, different, awesome feel about it as a spot where the transcendent power breaks through.[15]

The buildings on this Religious Ground are mostly used for religious activities. Members of various religious groups in the institution make use of these buildings for their religious purposes in conformity with the nomenclature "religious ground" used by the University management.

Even though there is space that has been separated and designated for religious activities, there are still some secular spaces which are being used by students for spiritual and religious activities. These spaces range from classrooms, hostels, sports center, etc. This is because of the limited space versus the plethora of religious denominations in the institution, and also because the space allocated by the University management and designated as the Religious Ground is inadequate to accommodate all. Thus, the various religious denominations unable to secure space on the Religious Ground jostle for other secular, non-religious spaces that are available at the institution.

The notion of sacred space is clearly very important in both theory and practice. It demarcates specific spaces regarded as having some particular religious, spiritual, or metaphysical association in the people's imaginary.

Figure 12.1. Sacred ground of the Celestial Church of Christ Students' Parish, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife
Picture taken by: Oluwasegun Peter Aluko on October 7, 2015.

Figure 12.2. The Obafemi Awolowo University Central Mosque, Ile-Ife
Picture taken by: Oluwasegun Peter Aluko on October 7, 2015.

Figure 12.3. Sacred ground of the Catholic Diocese of Osogbo (Our Lady of Perpetual Light).
Picture taken by: Oluwasegun Peter Aluko on October 7, 2015.

This sets them apart from the rest of geographical space.[16] For example, members of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church Unification (C&S) makes use of Cricket Pavilion in the Sports Centre for their religious activities. The use of the pavilion started in 1984 and continues till today, in the twenty-first century. Before every use of this particular venue for any of its

Figure 12.4. The All Souls Chapel, an interdenominational church located in the religious ground of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.
Picture taken by: Oluwasegun Peter Aluko on October 7, 2015.

religious activities, especially the vigil, members of the church will sanctify the place with the reading of some Bible passages like Psalm 24, and with four males standing at each of the four corners of the space uttering prayers.[17] The founding members, and even the most recent members of the fellowship see the ground (Cricket Pavilion) as a place where the presence of God dwells despite its being a profane space. This is what Eliade mean when he said:

> By manifesting the sacred, any object becomes something else, yet it continues to remain itself, for it continues to participate in its surrounding cosmic milieu. A sacred stone remains a stone; apparently (or, more precisely, from the profane point of view), nothing distinguishes it from all other stones. But for those to whom a stone reveals itself as sacred, its immediate reality is transmuted into a supernatural reality. In other words, for those who have a religious experience all nature is capable of revealing itself as cosmic sacrality. The, cosmos in its entirety can become a hierophany.[18]

Furthermore, Ellwood affirms "a real sacred space is seen as a place where gods descended to earth, visions were experienced, the creation of the world began."[19] In other words, Ellwood sees a sacred space as the space where one experiences and gets the feeling of the presence of the supernatural and the transcendental. The same Cricket Pavilion that functions as a secular space (used sporting activity) for some people also serves as a sacred space for the

C&S Church Unificationists. 'Yomi Akande, a graduate-student member of the church once enthused:

> Cricket Pavilion is like the Bethel of Abraham and Jacob. This is our Bethel where we call on God and He answers. People come here to cry unto God and come back with testimonies. Attempts were made by the authorities to take the ground from us in 1995 but God did not allow it.[20]

Some other members of the fellowship even believe that the hierophany that transforms the secular into the sacred would be experienced anytime they reach the Cricket Pavilion, even if the place was still being put to the originally intended purpose (of sporting activities). Hence, they are convinced that every prayer they offer to God at the Cricket Pavilion will receive divine answering.

The Cricket Pavilion also serves as a locus of unity in the body of Christ. They use the term *Isokan* (Yoruba word for *unity*, or *unification*). This view was affirmed by another member of the church, Mr. Olagoke Oyedotun: "When I look at the Cricket Pavilion, I do not see just the structure but *Isokan*, a home where I do not feel lost. Apart from my mom, the next thing I miss is Cricket Pavilion. There is no other place I would like to be."[21]

Various other religious groups at the University also make use of other spaces and venues in the Sports Complex of the University. For instance, the Baptist Students Fellowship (BSF), The Apostolic Church Students

Figure 12.5. Cricket Pavilion, a secular space in the Sports Complex of O.A.U, in its mundanity.

Picture taken by: Oluwasegun Peter Aluko on October 7, 2015.

Figure 12.6. Religious service at the Cherubim and Seraphim Church Unification, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. A secular space at the university converted into sacred ground.
Picture taken by: Oluwasegun Peter Aluko on August 3, 2015.

Fellowship of Nigeria (TACSFON), Christ Apostolic Church Students Association (CACSA), and Christ Apostolic Church Youth Fellowship (CACYOF) use the Covered Pavilion, and Main Bowl respectively. In addition, religious activities are regularly conducted at the lecture theatres in the University, when these are empty. For example, the Redeemed Christian Fellowship (RCF), Gospel Students Fellowship (GSF), Christ Ambassador Students Outreach (CASOR), and Foursquare Gospel Students Fellowship (FGSF) use the Biological Sciences Lecture Theatres (BOOA, BOOB, and BOOC), Auditorium 1 (AUD 1) Lecture Theatre, Chemistry Lecture Theatre and Oduduwa Lecture Theatre 2 (ODLT 2) respectively. The venues of worship for those student fellowships are places of everyday activities that are turned into sacred spaces anytime the fellowships decided to meet in these various venues.

Furthermore, Islamic believers on campus make use of some spaces available within the halls of residence in the University. Muslim Students groups organise episodic and daily religious activities at various spaces allocated by university Hall Porters (residence directors and coordinators). For Muslims, it seems that sacred space allocation is gender-based, because the general rule in Islam forbids the mixing and mingling of the sexes during worship. For example, at OAU, space in the male halls of residence like Fajuyi Hall, Awolowo Hall, and the Muritala Muhammad Postgraduate Hall is for men, while female believers use some spaces available at the stair-

cases of halls of residence like Moremi Hall and Akintola Hall.[22] Available spaces at car parks on campus are also utilised for religious activities by Muslims in the institution. A prominent space for religious activities among the car parks is the Geology Car Park, where few slots that are unoccupied by vehicles of faculty staff and students are converted to places of prayer or into temporary mosques.

SACRED TIME AT OBAFEMI AWOLOWO UNIVERSITY

Sacred time is a time of escape from human and temporal routines because certain spiritual experiences make life feel unbounded. It includes the period of communing with ancestors or other-worldly realms. It involves being alert to voices and figures that call and dance beyond human confines.[23] It is s period set aside by, or for adherents of a faith to recollect and demonstrate what they hold sacred, thereby providing for continual spiritual renewal. Such a time is peculiar to the Muslims of Obafemi Awolowo University. The various times of prayers are observed daily, and especially on Fridays (known as *Juma'at*). The sacredness of this time is also respected by the University management. On Fridays, classes are often suspended between 12 p.m. and 2 p.m. to accommodate Muslim members of the University to go for prayers. Also, examinations are not held during this period on Fridays, as this was a holy day and thus sacred for the university's Muslims. Ellwood confirms this notion of sacred time: "This sacred time is any block of time in which the flow of ordinary, one-thing-after-another time stops and the transcendent, where time goes at a different rate or ceases altogether, takes over."[24] Christian students also may use this Muslim sacred time for their own religious activities. They[25] usually adopt the ecumenical umbrella of the Departmental Christian Students Fellowships that includes Law Students Christian Fellowship, Religious Studies Christian Fellowship, and History Students Christian Fellowship, among others. These Departmental Christian Students Fellowships frequently use classrooms and other available spaces at the Sports Complex of the University for their religious gatherings on Fridays at the same time the Muslims worship.

The use of a particular venue by different fellowships also constitutes the use of the sacred time to create a sacred space by members of the various fellowships. It was also observed that a specific venue could be used by different Christian Student fellowships. What separated the usage of such venues was the specific time allotted to each of the Christian Student fellowships. This factor was also applicable to the usage of halls of residence for religious purposes. The evening of every week after school hours (5 p.m.–10 p.m.) was when Christian Student fellowships conducted their religious activities in the halls of residence. Some Christian Student fellowships made use of the rooms

Figure 12.7. The Redeemed Christian Fellowship (RCF) in one of its worship centers at the Biological Sciences (BOOC) during its sunday service
Photo Credit: The official website of the fellowship (photo taken by the author for the fellowship)

while others made use of the Football Pitch or Basketball Court in the Sports Complex. When it was time for their religious activities, they hanged their banners and other relevant signage at the entrances of the rooms they devoted to their spiritual purposes as indicated below:

Figure 12.8. An example of a mundane place turned into a sacred place. This place happened to be a room in the Muritala Muhammad Postgraduate Hall, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria
Picture taken by: Oluwasegun Peter Aluko on November 23, 2014.

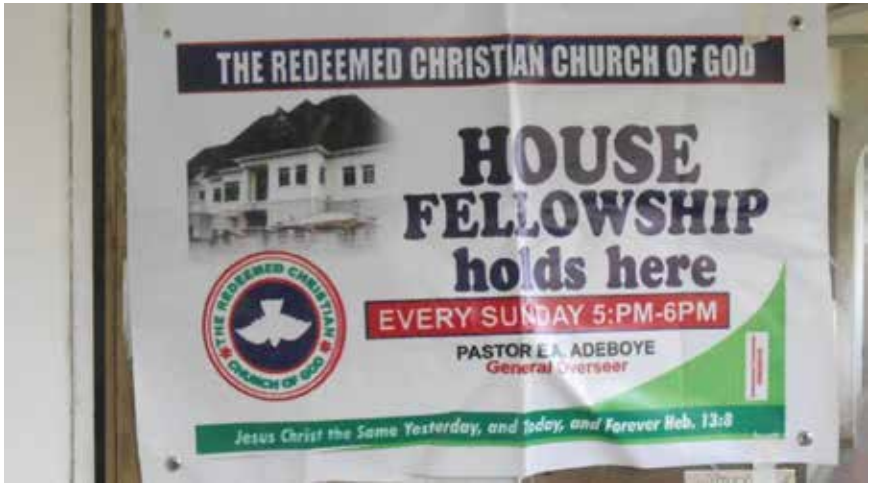

Figure 12.9. Another example of a secular space converted into a sacred place. This place also happened to be another room in the Muritala Muhammad Postgraduate Hall, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria
Picture taken by: Oluwasegun Peter Aluko on November 23, 2014.

The moment that the Christian students gathered in the various secular spaces in the halls of residence, these spaces became imbued with sacredness such that even the co-occupants of such spaces who do not belong to the religious sects usually vacated the spaces for the period that they were used by the religious groups. Out of mutual respect and tolerance, the release of a room for religious activities was easily done even when an occupant was not a member of the religious groups needing to use that space.

Yet another space in the Obafemi Awolowo University campus that serves as a sacred space at various times is the mountain. Mountains like the one behind the Postgraduate Hall and another one behind the Zoological Gardens. These are known as the PG Mountain and Agric Mountain.[26] The PG Mountain is located at the back of the Murtala Muhammed Postgraduate Hall of Residence while the Agric Mountain is located on the way to the Staff Quarters of the University, at the back of Faculty of the Agriculture via the Faculty of Environmental Design and Management. These mountains are often used for religious purposes by different religious denominations. Secular space on the mountains becomes transformed into sacred space as sectors for spiritual and religious purposes are clearly demarcated with inscriptions and signage containing visible ethical and moral injunctions in the local major language, Yoruba. Some of the messages include reminders of the sacredness of the space. Visitors are asked to remove their footwear in reverence (*bo bata ese re*) or are required not to bring specific food items/ingredients such as anything oily (*ma*

Figure 12.10. Plate 9: Picture showing one of the mountains in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, usually known as Agric Mountain by students.
Picture taken by Oluwasegun Peter Aluko on July 13, 2015.

se gbe nkan elepo gun ori-oke yi) to these mountains. Religious sects using the mountains also have shelters on the mountains to shelter adherents against the elements, as well as provide residence for the number of days that they may need to stay on the mountains for religious rituals and vigils.

Nevertheless, other people used the same mountains and spaces for recreational purposes. At the beginning of every school year, most academic units at the University also take their freshmen on tours of those mountains during their orientation programs, and as spaces for student interactions. However, the students taking a tour of those mountains, especially the Agric Mountain, sometimes ignored the ethical inscriptions to remove footwear, or avoid the use of oily substances. For these students, touring the mountains was akin to undertaking fitness exercise while familiarising themselves with the novelty of the mountainous terrain of the OAU. Yet, some students also visited those mountains for personal prayer sessions. Thus, the mountains in Obafemi Awolowo University also played a dual role of both the sacred and the profane.

SACRED SPACE AND TIME CONSCIOUSNESS IN AFRICAN SPIRITUALITY

It is now pertinent to discuss the effect, or impact, the various sacred spaces on worshippers/users. First, sacred space and time join people together and that is precisely what the term "religion" means. Here the role of religion is func-

tional and social at the same time. But the space, time, and activities therein transform the social experience into a spiritual reality through prayers, rituals, vigils, and other performances in reverence to a higher purpose beyond the secular and profane. Thus, the practice of religion unifies a diverse population and a plurality of faiths and creeds in a collection transcendental performances. The paradox is that while each religion is different and complete, it is also, in and of itself, incomplete until it is part of the transcending spirituality made possible by the sacred spaces and time at the university campus. In the case of Obafemi Awolowo University students from the different or similar academic units and of different or similar beliefs (but different creeds) do come together to worship their God especially on a Friday. The various sacred spaces on the campus normally bind these people together. They have served and hitherto serve as spaces where people of different backgrounds, and ethnicities gather together. Also, from the conversion and usage of various sacred spaces by adherents of both Christianity and Islam on the campus, positive relationships have been built beyond the immediate vicinities of campus and country.

Second, there is a (Eurocentric) cliché and tendency to regard Africans as non-respecters of time and punctuality. Hence the particular slogan known as "African Time," where by Africans are perceived as lazy and slacking. However, the example of Obafemi Awolowo University belies this attitude. There is, indeed, an African consciousness of time and space that must be understood on its own terms, that is time and space are closely linked to African spirituality and related concepts. On a campus that is very westernised and steeped in western religious traditions, there is a heightened awareness of time in the manner the various religious groups allocate space and time as resources that make possible the expression of spirituality. It is obvious, from all that has been stated in preceding pages, that Africans are efficient users of time and space. It is important to recall that at this campus, among the Christian denominations that use specific secular, or mundane, space there is an acute awareness of the needs of other sects for the same space for their own religious practices. Thus, there is a highly and effectively organized scheme to accommodate every faith's time and space. The result is not only effective time management, but also cultural and spiritual diversity, and harmony. For example, before the CCCSP finally moved to the religious ground after their relocation from their former sacred space (Old Buka),[27] they were temporarily housed at the Cricket Pavilion. This space was being used by the Cherubim and Seraphim Church Unification (C&S). The C&S Unification usually ended their service by 11:30 a.m. and left for the CCCSP to take over the space. Once, it is after 11, the C&S Unification always endeavoured to close, so they could vacate the space for the CCCSP in turn. The understanding that another Christian sect needed the same sacred space usually made the C&S Unification to be punctual by streamlining their long worship programs.

BEING AND BELONGING

Since identity is what makes an entity definable and recognizable, sacred spaces have given the religious groups an identity of their own. Identity in this regard is the label the sacred spaces have given to the religious groups in Obafemi Awolowo University. Sacred spaces at Obafemi Awolowo University are places that are often ascribed to both the adherents of Christianity and Islam. There are some spaces that when mentioned, people readily know which specific religious group uses that space and when. For example, the Muslims are known to always make use of the Geology Car Park for their prayers. For any Muslim faithful around the academic area, this space is available for them to quickly say their prayer if they are unable to go to the central mosque at the religious ground to pray. Also, the various Christian denominations are known to make use of so many spaces that these are now so synonymous with them. The Cricket Pavilion is one space that has become a space for the Cherubim and Seraphim Church Unification. Before the evacuation of Old Buka (a market place at the school), the Deeper Life Campus Fellowship and the Celestial Church of Christ Students' Parish are often known with this particular space. These spaces usually form the basis of unique identities for the different religious groups on the campus.

According to Lily Kong, research shows that places of worship assumes that "as long as people prayed in the same place and 'did things together,'" they felt part of the community and experienced a sense of belonging.[28] This is true of the sacred spaces on Obafemi Awolowo University. Since most people that worship together in these various sacred spaces have consistently partake in the act, they have experienced a greater sense of belonging. Even after some students must have graduated from the university, they still come back to some of these sacred spaces to offer their prayers. This is because they have been used to these sacred spaces, and also believe that whenever they offer prayers to their God on these sacred spaces, their prayers get speedy answers.

A SOURCE OF INCOME

Economically, the university administration raises revenue from renting out of such spaces like the Sports Complex. For example, the Cricket Pavilion is being rented by the Cherubim and Seraphim Church Unification. Each time they hold a service on that ground, they pay the school authority via the Sports Authority. Another secular space that is normally turned into sacred space is the Africa Amphitheatre. This is a 5,000-person capacity theatre that the Believers' Love World uses on Sundays. Apart from the normal services being held on Sundays, so many other denominations make use of this space

for their special programs. The cost of this space ranges from ₦50,000.00 to ₦70,000.00. The school authority in one way, or another makes a lot of money from rentals of these grounds to various denominations on the campus. These Christian denominations, insofar as they are willing to continue to have their identity linked to a specific sacred space, continue to pay to have the university's secular spaces available for their religious and spiritual purposes.

NOTES

1. Brad Olsen, *Sacred Places Europe: 108 Destinations* (San Francisco: Consortium of Collective Consciousness, 2007).
2. Robert S. Ellwood, *Introducing Religion: From Inside and Outside* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1993)
3. Chris Park, "Religion and Geography," in *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. John R. Hinnel (New York: Routledge, 2005).
4. Robert S. Ellwood, *Introducing Religion: From Inside and Outside* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1993), 14.
5. Ellwood, *Introducing Religion: From Inside and Outside*, 14.
6. Carsten Colpe, "The Sacred and the Profane," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Second Edition, ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005), 7964.
7. Colpe, "The Sacred and the Profane," 7964.
8. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1947), 47.
9. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. from the French by Williard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1959), 11. Cf. Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958), 7ff.
10. Deward Walker, "Sacred Geography in Native North America," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron R. Taylor (London, New York: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005), 1448.
11. Colpe, "The Sacred and the Profane," 7978.
12. Colpe, "The Sacred and the Profane," 7989.
13. Chris Park, "Religion and Geography," in *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. John R. Hinnel (New York: Routledge, 2005), 451.
14. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 20.
15. Ellwood, *Introducing Religion*, 14.
16. Park, "Religion and Geography," 452.
17. This practice has really not been given attention to by the church of recent as they now see even their gathering alone as having the presence of God to sanctify the area.
18. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 12.
19. Ellwood, *Introducing Religion*, 14.
20. *LaPacto Magazine*, A publication of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church Unification, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, 2010, 54.

21. *LaPacto Magazine*, 54. Olagoke Oyedotun is a graduate student member of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church Unification, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.

22. These practices are no longer allowed in the Halls of Residence as the School Management had placed an embargo on religious activities in the halls in 2016. Specifically, the places where the Muslims usually make use of at Fajuyi and Awolowo Halls had been under lock and key. Nevertheless, the Muslims have looked for a space beside their normal venues for their worship.

23. Colpe, "The Sacred and the Profane," 7987.

24. Ellwood, *Introducing Religion*, 14.

25. Not all Christians in their various departments do this. The Departmental Students' Fellowship is often interdenominational, as it is comprised of different denominations. What normally brings them together was the fact of their common religion—Christianity—and that they were also members of the same department. Friday was the only time that they meet to carry out their religious functions.

26. These are the popular names by the students but the mountains have various names and appellations ascribed to them by their users.

27. The Celestial Church of Christ Students' Parish (CCCSP) formerly worshipped at the then Old Buka (a marketplace behind the campus). They were relocated by the school authority and given a space at the religious ground.

28. Lily Kong, "Mapping 'New' Geographies of Religion: Politics and Poetics in Modernity," in *Progress in Human Geography* Vol. 25 (2001): 221.

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