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# Governmentality, Modernity and the Historical Politics of Ọ̀yọ́-Hegemony in Yorùbá Transnational Revivalism

Kamari Maxine Clarke *Yale University*

**Abstract:** In this essay, I argue that it was the influence of transnational forms of knowledge in Nigeria—the shift from indigenous oral forms to accessible circulating literary writings—which facilitated the generative locus of power that led to the privileging of Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá ancestry as the popular literary icon of African American revivalism. With the increasing significance of late nineteenth century scientific inquiries deployed by native-born Africans, a newly developing Nigerian elite participated in the documenting of human sciences and thereby contributed to the invention of a particular type of “Yorùbá history.” This process, mediated by the temporalities of modern subjectivities, led to the standardization of “the Yorùbá” as we know them and was allied with the development of the Nigerian nation. In examining changes in social meanings over time, I examine what changes and which canonical tenets must remain the same for new meanings to be seen as legitimate. I demonstrate that these fields are embedded in historically complex webs of power that code geographic and temporal meanings in particular ways.

**Keywords:** history, power, geotemporality, race, Yorùbá, Ọ̀yọ́túnjì, African village

**Résumé :** Dans cet article, je soutiens que c'est l'influence de formes transnationales de connaissance au Nigéria—le remplacement des formes orales indigènes par des réécrits facilement accessibles—qui a facilité l'apparition d'un centre de pouvoir qui a conduit à privilégier l'héritage Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá comme emblème populaire de la revitalisation africaine-américaine. Avec la croissance importante, à la fin du dix-neuvième siècle, de recherches scientifiques menées par des Africains de naissance, une nouvelle élite nigérienne a travaillé à l'élaboration de la documentation en sciences sociales et a ainsi contribué à la création d'un type particulier d'«histoire yoruba». Ce processus, médiatisé par les conditions des subjectivités modernes, a conduit à l'image standard des «Yorùbá» que nous connaissons, laquelle se trouve liée au développement de la nation nigérienne. En examinant le changement de signification sociale à travers le temps, je me demande qu'est-ce qui change et quels croyances officielles doivent rester les mêmes pour que de nouvelles croyances puissent être perçues comme légitime. Je démontre que ces champs sont inclus dans des réseaux de pouvoir complexes qui codifient les significations locales et temporelles de façon spéciale.

**Mots-clés :** histoire, pouvoir, géotemporalité, race, Yorùbá, Ọ̀yọ́túnjì, village africain

Red blood splattered throughout the oval-shaped room. Robed in his best African clothes and by pulling the trigger of a borrowed shotgun, one of Ọ̀yọ́túnjì's young men had fallen to his death. The news of the suicide rang throughout the community. His last words inscribed on paper expressed how much he tried and wanted them to be proud of him, how much he hurt and how much he could not deal with the addictions that haunted him, how much he continued to fail those who he loved the most. His solution saddened the residents as they scrambled to explain how it could have happened, wishing that they had only paid more attention to the signs; if only they had tried harder. The lack of experience dealing with death in Ọ̀yọ́túnjì, a three generation-old community, left residents with a numbing powerlessness and malevolent curiosity about how the leaders would deal with a life taken in this way.

The emotional inclination of many, regardless of the cause of death, was to honour with a special ritual the life of their friend and “brother in the religion.” During the first few hours members of the Ọ̀yọ́túnjì community scurried in search of the appropriate ritual procedure. They called the city of Beauport authorities, consulted the ancestors through the use of divinatory rituals, telephoned knowledgeable practitioners outside of Ọ̀yọ́túnjì, and consulted various historical texts in which Yorùbá traditions were documented. Although in the midst of a crisis, they not only sought the advice of their ancestors by conducting divination readings to determine the course of action, but they conducted literary research in search of the protocol of “traditional” burial practices among the Yorùbá of Southwestern Nigeria who committed suicide.

Over the course of the development of the black cultural nationalist movement, as it moved from Harlem, New York to South Carolina, African Americans disillusioned with Christianity converted to Yorùbá practices in an attempt to revive their African past. At the beginning of bi-weekly town meetings and other formal

events, in an attempt to enact the social, religious and political life of Yorùbá ancestors, Ọ̀yọ̀túnjì revivalists have attempted to recreate their understanding of Yorùbá cultural practices by educating themselves about Yorùbá history and cultural practices. This has ranged from pursuing ritual apprenticeships, learning the divinatory corpus, attending workshops about Yorùbá cultural practices and reading and studying texts about the history of African peoples. Most of the texts that document Yorùbá “traditional” practices and are used in Ọ̀yọ̀túnjì today were published prior to 1955. These include various early 20th century Yorùbá revivalist classics such as Samuel Johnson’s *The History of the Yoruba* and N.A. Fadipe’s *The Sociology of the Yoruba*. These texts form the source of knowledge for African American ancestral history and despite the apparent stability of these written historical forms, Yorùbá revivalists participate in shaping norms of acceptability by basing their terms of practice on renditions of those accounts.

Despite the attempts of various leaders within the community to focus on historical customs and “traditions” documented in Yorùbá history texts, the friends and relatives of the deceased who lived in Ọ̀yọ̀túnjì mourned the loss of their compatriot. Disappointed in the traditionalist prohibitions against suicide, they disputed the actual relevance of applying Yorùbá funeral rites in present day circumstances. The vehement debates on what aspects of “tradition” should be fully adopted and what aspects should not be admissible took place within the community, in political forums, during work duties and in the midst of ritual processes.

Three days later, the eight chiefs, all members of the Ọ̀yọ̀túnjì governing council, known as the Ọ̀gbóni Society, voted on their rule of action. Claiming directives from the ancestors who they believed prevailed over the Society meeting, the Ọ̀yọ̀túnjì Ọ̀ba (king) and leader, Ọ̀ba Osejeman, announced the results. Prefacing his statement with a declaration that Yorùbá traditions were based on ancient Yorùbá practices and that it was his job, as supreme ruler, to ensure that ancestral directives are followed, the Ọ̀ba by ruling that “the deceased man’s body was neither to be honored by the Yorùbá family and friends, nor were village practitioners to attend any rites offered on his behalf.” He made clear that Ọ̀yọ̀túnjì did not have and could not invent a space for dishonourable death. Instead, locating other American cities as sites to which the body should be deposited—to family in Atlantic City, New Jersey or Philadelphia, Pennsylvania—the Ọ̀ba made clear that other U.S. sites could serve as dumping grounds for those who do not abide by

Ọ̀yọ̀túnjì Yorùbá traditionalism. “We must see beyond our emotional reactions and human desires” he added. “He (*the deceased*) allowed the spirits of evil to win his soul and honoring his life would be like honoring the spirits of evil and that would only cause his spirit further turmoil in the next life.”

The popular villager response, that Yorùbá American practitioners who are victims of the extremes of poverty and oppression should be honoured with new and different rituals updated for African Americans in different circumstances from their African ancestors, was dismissed by the Ọ̀ba as not in keeping with “traditional” Yorùbá approaches. In addressing my request, made on behalf of some of the relatives of the deceased, that he consider, for the purposes of making the rules relevant to Ọ̀yọ̀túnjì life, updating the U.S. applications of Yorùbá “traditions,” he replied that he could not.

“Our young man, brother, and friend, died a dishonorable death and I cannot, in good faith, venerate such evil.”<sup>1</sup>

Even with personalized sorrow and objections to the application of canonical traditions, as recorded and published in historical texts, the existence of written documentation, as proof of traditional authenticity, prevailed as the basis for identifying archaic Yorùbá practices. Three days later, the fallen man’s Christian family in New Jersey family received his body. In the absence of both Ọ̀yọ̀túnjì funeral rites and a representative delegate, they held a Christian ceremony for him in a New Jersey funeral home.

Named after the once powerful West African Ọ̀yọ̀ Empire of the 16th to 18th centuries, Ọ̀yọ̀túnjì means “Ọ̀yọ̀ again awakes”—figuratively, that here, the Ancient Empire of Ọ̀yọ̀ rises again. A black nationalist community of African American religious converts to Yorùbá practices who have reclaimed West Africa as their ancestral homeland, most Ọ̀yọ̀túnjì practitioners trace their origins to that of the descendants of the men and women taken from West African communities and exported to the Americas as slaves. As a result of the belief that they have a right to control the African territory that was their homeland, prior to European colonization, residents of Ọ̀yọ̀túnjì Village, claiming diasporic connections to the ancestral history of the Great Ọ̀yọ̀ Empire of the Yorùbá people, have reclassified their community as an African Kingdom outside of the territoriality of the Nigerian postcolonial state.

Three national flags<sup>2</sup> wave in the Ọ̀yọ̀túnjì palace courtyard representing black American emancipation from slavery, Black Nationalism and the establishment

of an ancient Yorùbá Empire in South Carolina. Though born in America, the vast majority of practitioners within and outside of Òyótúnjí have also rejected their place-based citizenship. Rejecting modern American citizenship as their shared nationality and, instead, claiming African cultural citizenship as their national identity, Òyótúnjí Village is a deterritorialized kingdom in a nation. Situated on the outer perimeter of Beaufort, U.S., approximately 65 miles southwest of Charleston, South Carolina, Òyótúnjí is five thousand miles from the Western-most tip of West Africa. Lying outside of the geographic boundaries of African nation states, Òyótúnjí was borne out of complex controversies over both the conditions of slavery that brought Africans to the Americas and the contestations between African American converts and Afro-Cuban Catholics over the legitimacy of their adaptations of West African practices.

Over a period of three hundred years, the United States became the home to millions of black Americans some of whose ancestors were enslaved, sold to traders and transported to the Americas as slaves. As captives in slave ships large numbers of hundreds of thousands settled in small and large plantations in places such as Mississippi, Alabama, South Carolina, Texas, Georgia, Florida, North Carolina. Since the abolishment of slavery to the mid- to late 1960s, large waves of black migrants moved to northern urban cities such as Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Buffalo, Boston and Detroit in search of employment and educational opportunities. However, in the U.S., even with the demand for labour in the north, the politics of enforced racial segregation, known as Jim Crow, led to the development of racialized spaces that enforced legal racial segregation. Jim Crow segregation shaped the terrain under which the development of American democracy took shape and in that realm the migration of Cubans to U.S. urban centres also complicated the urban landscapes within which black Americans and predominantly light-skinned Cubans negotiated the politics of African ritual practice. It was in this historical context that the historical tension between black Americans disenchanted with Judeo-Christianity and interested in African religions took shape.

The basis for selecting who or what social practices will be revered or forgotten is embedded in particular rules of social conduct that are extensions of these normative practices. These rules shape the types of knowledges and histories that constitute different types of subjectivities. The governing elite of Òyótúnjí is dependent on maintaining a differentiated hierarchy of traditional rules. As such, ritual acts operate within social hierarchies of scale within which social acts are valued

and revered. As suggested with the suicide opening, there are some individuals whose life practices are in keeping with the values ideal for the development of particular forms of governance and others whose are not. The leader of Òyótúnjí Village had to necessarily undermine the villager's move to revere the deceased body as a disavowal of power. He took the opportunity to emphasize legitimate ritual acts and to punish other acts as deviant, as unacceptable.

Òyótúnjí Village was built on a commitment to revering traditional values, hierarchies of kingship and religious ritual. The goal is for black Americans to be redeemed from the effects of trans-Atlantic slavery. That is, for practitioners to sacrifice their worldly possessions in order to protect the integrity of their community, their racial group and therefore make ritual acts sacrificial acts. With this underlying principle, the assumption is that the human body is not simply an extension of the individual. Rather, the body belongs to the spiritual and human triad—the community, ancestors and the individual. The taking of one's life is not only not seen as a sacrifice, it is a desecration of power—a mockery of the chains of succession within which the body lives.

One of the characteristics of European normative approach to the individual was the presumption that subjectivity is inert and is, thus, tied to particular linear and spatially contingent definitions of personhood. I explore these complexities of subjectivity through the rubric of modernity by examining the emergence of discourses about trans-Atlantic slavery and contemporary trans-Atlantic alliances in order to understand Western modernity as both centrally West African and remotely European. Following Benedict Anderson (1983), I suggest that exploring the circulation of European literary institutions of knowledge such as the development of print capitalism is key to understanding how it is that particular versions of the Yorùbá past have become dominant features of trans-Atlantic cartographies of diaspora.

One such form of diasporic governance evident in the specificities and complex circulations of meanings is the way in which social realities are both mapped and knowledge of the past reproduced. For while identity has been popularly conceived of as rooted in place, within the confines of national borders, the criteria for what constitutes a national subject has been rooted in linear distinctions between the temporality of life and the inertia of death. Western temporal classifications have posited time as unilinear progressions, linking living individuals within a temporally linear progression of evolution. While these ordering schemes continue to

naturalize inner laws of morality and logic, the dominant trope of Yorùbá revivalist practices is that death is a linear extension of ancestral life. In order to maintain connections with their African ancestors, Yorùbá revivalists reconceptualize human time as cyclical and reclassify national boundaries, de-centring their spatial separation from Africa. These forms of temporal and spatial reconfigurations of human realities not only establish chronologies of time outside of modern notions of succession, but reconfigures relations of belonging in ancestral and racial terms.

In understanding the varying ways in which the symbols of Africa and slavery are employed by Yorùbá revivalists to shape social memories, it is necessary to highlight the local networks of power and knowledge within which agents actively cultivate relationships between the past, present and the future, the here and the there, or within the simultaneous conflation between the temporal and spatial. These complexities complicate the capacity of the imaginary by shaping the micro-politics of belonging in particular ways. What I refer to as geotemporality, therefore, reflects this self-conscious assertion of distinctly different temporal and spatial (chronotopic) experience posited against modernist standards of being. Operating in deterritorialized modes of contact, resignifying origins in both nationalistic and counter-national terms, it is a process of redistributive enactments through which individuals, recasting the time and space within different forms of chronological succession, assert different types of subjectivities. This process of articulation points to both the uses and limitations of European modernity in shaping daily lives and highlights complexities of reclassification within the context of larger orders of time and space.

Understanding the ways that different chronologies and spatialities are employed in a range of discursive strategies highlights how using geotemporal narratives allows agents to produce new mechanisms for charting counter-normative approaches to measuring reality. In an attempt to understand how normative practices gain the power to operate in domains outside of particular normative geographies, my goal is to explore the ways and the institutional means by which temporally and spatially contingent rules of conduct are differently established within the territoriality of the nation and circulate outside of it. Such an inquiry brings to the fore the dubious role of literary institutions in facilitating the standardization of identity, and therefore shaping the criteria for the transformation of governmentality from regimes of slavery, to precolonial orality, to that of modern nationalization. Within these changing governmen-

tal domains, the determinants for which practices are constituted as legitimate are directly connected to the ways that domains of knowledge are authorized as foundations of social practices.

In order to understand the ways that individuals reclassify identity within relations of power, we need to examine the ways that they both incorporate and recast prevailing ideologies of 19th-century science. Here we see how the teleology of scientific progress and evolution, signified as vertically constituted, are recast as horizontal or ancestrally recursive. This reorganization of objective reality, in which individuals are believed by some to be reincarnated into the world after their death, has implications for the ways in which social norms are shaped by particular technologies of knowledge. These cultural adaptations are just as strategic as they are symbolic and highlight Òyótúnjí attempts to reclassify the history of the Yorùbá within a continuum of social change. For, ultimately, Òyótúnjí practitioners' use of the Nigerian historical classics represents their search for an ancestral past which, based on both the consequences of slavery and British colonialism, benefits from the legitimization of practice that emerged from particular institutions of hegemonic power.

### **Slavery, Colonialism and Institutions of Power**

The history of the trans-Atlantic enslavement of African men and women transported to the Americas during the 15th to the 18th centuries was one in which African slaves were placed at the bottom of the human hierarchy and, categorized as chattel or property. As a result of the capture and enslavement of Africans dispersed during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the basis for documenting the transfer of slaves from one place to the other did not involve the detailed documentation of enslaved Africans. Instead, although they listed ports of slave embarkation and disembarkation, as well as some given trade names or numbers, the majority of records which document in genealogical detail the continuity and ancestral succession of enslaved Africans are minimal if not non-existent. Much of the remaining evidence about those Africans who were enslaved and transported to the Americas consists of ship records that numerically list the enslaved bodies for trans-Atlantic trade, auctioneer records of slave advertisements and bills of sale. This erasure of African identities and their connection to African American family genealogies led to the dependence of African revivalists on textual knowledge. Despite this absence of historical specificity, beginning with the solidarity of racial membership through which

they retell their story of dispersal and precolonial nobility, members of Ọ̀yọ́túnjí Village-aligned communities actively reconstruct their African roots.

In the transition from premodern oral societies to modern colonial spheres of power where writing was central to the authority of knowledge, it was the structure of technologies of print capital that contributed to the production of literary institutions. The development of these institutions of modern knowledge fueled the massive processes of social change in modern Nigeria. These institutions set organizational standards for documenting truth and knowledge, thereby leading to the legitimization of Nigerian history as textually documented and temporally specific. This, in turn, played a critical role in establishing the forms of knowledge that were necessary for the legitimacy of Yorùbá revivalist communities outside of Nigeria. Using these texts, communities of revivalist practitioners interested in reclaiming Yorùbá practices as their own and establishing rules of Yorùbá governmentality outside of Africa adapted this work within accepted discourses of historical science and truth. They borrowed from the institutional symbolic power of British colonial governance which played a critical role in ordering, standardizing and ultimately circulating knowledge about particular types of colonial subjects. This form of subject formation was not only constituted from a diverse African past, but was prominently resituated within the transition from orality to written texts and through a colonial governmental apparatus organized around the science of objective inquiry, intensive documentation and the possibility of uncovering a knowable subject. Ultimately, these processes of defining new subjectivities across geographic space and time were regulated by particular dictates of nation building that shaped both temporal and spatial determinants for classifying belonging and determining appropriate behaviour in relation to it.

The central issue is that the factors for determining which practices and histories are worthy of historical endorsement constituted the basis by which revivalist norms were shaped within institutions of power. By incorporating modern techniques of science and knowledge from which modern subject formations were developed, Yorùbá revivalists in the U.S. actively shaped the basis for producing new identities. But this process of invention is not a new phenomenon. The hypothesis that I am putting forward is that it was the influence of transnational forms of knowledge in Nigeria—the shift from indigenous oral forms to accessible circulating literary writings—that facilitated the generative locus of power that led to the privileging of Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá ancestry

as the popular literary icon of African American revivalism. With the increasing significance of late 19th-century scientific inquiries deployed by native-born Africans, Nigerians participated in the documenting of human sciences and thereby contributed to the invention of a particular type of “Yorùbá history.” The production of these histories took shape with the participation of large numbers of formerly enslaved Yorùbá speaking men and women from various parts of Southwestern Nigeria, especially the Old Ọ̀yọ́ region. The newly developing Yorùbá elite, who in documenting Nigerian history were themselves inserted into British colonial regimes, challenged not only the politics of historical representation, but also the pre-existing formations of values and principles that rested within Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá relations of power and knowledge. This process, mediated by the temporalities of modern subjectivities, led to the standardization of “the Yorùbá” as we know them and was allied with the development of the Nigerian nation. These subjectivities, intellectually framed in relation to an Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá historical imaginary, were recorded, published, standardized and ultimately circulated from literary texts to new oral forms and continue to form the basis for black American Yorùbá revivalist populations.

In examining changes in social meanings over time, it is important to locate the sites of variability and to question why they exist as such. What changes and which canonical tenets must remain the same for new meanings to be seen as legitimate? In identifying transnational mobility and the consequent mixing that emerges, we must necessarily distinguish between the ways in which emergent identities are facilitated by various techniques of governmentality which allow for particular forms of deterritorialized cultural production and delimits others. For to understand how some national re-classifications are accepted as legitimate, we must understand how, based on contemporary codes of classification, they are already allied within shared fields of power. These fields are embedded in historically complex webs that code geographic and temporal meanings in particular ways and exist both within and outside of the nation.

### **From Orality to the Written Word**

Anthropologist, Jack Goody has speculated that the shift from orality to written language engendered a shift from the creative fluidity of oral knowledge to a recorded canon of stored and linear information within which incremental knowledge could be added (Goody, 1977). He argued that orality led to more variability than

engendered within literary texts. The debates concerning the extent to which written texts lend themselves to new interpretations, and variability within them, is not new to anthropological studies of culture and power, but they have significance for understanding the role of literary institutions in the production and maintenance of transnational cultural citizenship. Goody's explorations have import for theorizing transnational negotiations of cultural belonging as a facilitator of new forms of knowledge however, it misses the multiple layered complexities of global influences as well as the intersection between local domains of power. For even as interpretations of oral traditions that circulate locally may give analysts the impression that orality provides an intellectual ease with which new histories can be forged, written texts about dispersal, disappearance and ultimately dissolution also provide vehicles for innovation. This distinction highlights the flexibility of both written and oral knowledge and, in the context of my argument, points to the interplay between the institutional power of Protestant Christianity and British Colonial governmentality, and the science of historical models of inquiry.

This chapter has three parts. In the first, I begin by asking how a new zone of Yorùbá cultural production emerged in Nigeria as a consequence of British colonization and how related early to mid-20th-century anthropological conceptions of the village, as constitutive of a timeless place of traditional primitivity, have been incorporated by revivalist practitioners to establish Ọyótúnjí as the modern city of Ọyó. I look briefly at the standardization of a particular type of Yorùbá nationalism as an ideological and political force in which European colonial forces deployed particular forms of modernity which had the effect of contributing to the already developing formations of a sense of Nigerian national identity as a formal identity. This nationalist project which was set in motion by Christian missionaries had its greatest impact in the ideological (and not necessarily economic) domain. The next two sections of the chapter unfold with two key examples of how early ethnic and national identities were shaped by large communities of liberated slaves in Brazil, Cuba and Sierra Leone who resettled in Yorùbáland. I centre the first example of what I see as a politics of constructing a particular Yorùbá canon from which New World practitioners incorporate notions of authentic practice.

In understanding the role of various literary institutions in facilitating Yorùbá transnational linkages in the late 20th century, and in an attempt to understand how individuals use them to facilitate dominant forms of revivalist governmentality, the third section explore

another form of change. I show how written texts, like oral narratives, which circulate through acts of interpretation, not only undergo significant historical variation, but also incorporate particular temporally linear forms of hegemonic symbolic capital. Such formats, mediated by the very modern codes of legitimacy that shape their intelligibility, erect the colonial subject as a participant in the documentation of his or her past.

By using two ethnographic examples that demonstrate how new temporalities and geographies are used by Yorùbá practitioners to both incorporate British colonial written codes while they also violate them, we see how new institutional histories of Yorùbá ancestral linkage have been reconceptualized by revivalist priests and clients who produce variation from written histories. For although these innovations are not always in alliance with dominant norms of print capital, they hold power through the commutation of shared racial codes to designations of African ancestry. These shifts, represented through African American reconfigurations of modern temporal and spatial codes as the basis for shared historical origins, take shape within abstractions of governmental jurisdictions. In understanding these transnational reconfigurations of citizenship as culturally and historically embedded, the more significant distinction, therefore, is between the incorporation of written narratives and the uses of orality to narrate redemption and slavery discourses as the site of incremental change and, therefore, as the basis for new narratives of descent.

Although colonial inscriptions of Nigerian Yorùbá history played a critical role in promoting some narratives over others, approaching the production of knowledge in terms of the hegemony of Nigerian state building alone demonstrates how some discourses carry the force of institutional power. In order to situate all histories as representations of innovations on multiple levels over time—highlighting what constitutes history, what is disregarded as history, or what elements are borrowed from historical canons—different historical versions of the past must be recognized as deeply enmeshed in the politics of capitalist modernity. For if history is useful insofar as it provides us with a point of reference for understanding long-standing social relationships, then exploring the complexities of reinventing history and their uses is equally critical. In contemporary revivalist communities such as Ọyótúnjí, the leaders have, similarly, proscribed an “authentic” history of the Yorùbá, on one of the early histories written over a hundred years ago. Rather than focussing on a sustained search for the authentic past we need to examine the relationship between written histories and those histo-

ries by historians, local elite and individuals in their particular contexts. This is the task that modern scholarship written about the Yorùbá has traditionally set for itself. It is important to shift the problem altogether, following Hayden White's suggestion that "history is not a matter of 'truth,' but of the choice of a particular expository style that is itself determined historically." The benefit of treating written texts in the same way that we would oral texts is that it recasts the question not as how can we best derive the "authentic" past, but how we can understand the ways that authenticity is constructed within changing historical forms.

By examining the forces of legitimacy which shape what gets to count as "traditional" Òyó history, we can see how what was regarded as the Òyó nation in the 18th century was propelled by social, colonial and literary institutions that brought together individuals who shared similar sociopolitical and linguistic capital. As such, the formation of the category of people subsumed under Òyó dominance came to be known as Yorùbá. Nevertheless, as an ancestral sign of both political prestige and a place from which captives of war originated—the concept of Yorùbá identity changed over time. As we shall see, British colonial literary institutions, as they worked in alliance with early Nigerian scholars, played a major role in the standardization of these conceptual organizations within written historical texts. This development of modern literacy was a means of assembling knowledge in particular ways. It contributed to interrelationships between European regimes of knowledge and power with various assemblages of local knowledge. In this vein, I turn to two sites of Yorùbá cultural production: the first is the history of the demise of the Òyó Empire that led to nation building in colonial Nigeria; the second is the development of a Yorùbá community in Òyótúnjì Village that uses 19th-century colonial history to reconstruct its ancestral past. I highlight these two cases to examine the way that the same written history has been used differently in two locales and have been shaped by convergent and divergent relations of symbolic and material power. The power relations embedded in each community have given rise, out of the same texts, to inventions of belonging that have markedly different spatial and temporal contours and that demonstrate how history-making is inextricably bound to institutional domains of power—both with varying terms of legitimacy.

Although choice is enacted in both examples, connections to European modernity led to the production of written sources upon which Yorùbá revivalist concepts, histories and spatial arrangements were framed.

Through the process of documentation, the knowing subject became the historically informed subject. Genealogies of family roots were embedded in textually documented sources. Identity classification became a matter of the state. The study of race developed from a long history of 17th and 18th century biological and social analysis. And alongside these productions of Yorùbá ethnic history were notions of racial difference. I end by demonstrating how Yorùbá revivalists in the U.S. have reconstructed black Americanness in an attempt to reconfigure their connections to West African ancestry. By employing taxonomies of racial difference in order to claim black homogeneity across national boundaries, revivalists both use the techniques of British modernity and reorient them in order to chart new meanings.

### **Literacy, Enlightenment and European Modernity**

In northern West African cities such as Katsina, recorded history extended as far back as AD 1000, however, what little has been recorded about the Yorùbá of Southwestern Nigeria prior to the 19th century exists only in the eyewitness accounts of early missionaries and travellers who wrote cataclysmic descriptions of warfare and Empire rule. In villages along the West African coast, as in other early societies prior to the 18th century, in which writing was unknown, or where only a minority of people—clerks, bishops, the wealthy classes—were engaged in the reading and writing of texts, the art of oratory flourished (Akinnaso, 1985; Barber, 1991). The nucleus of daily knowledge emerged from the ritual authority of the local chiefs and social values were reproduced and encoded within the form and content of oral genres such as songs, divinatory verses, mythic tales and adages (Goody, 1980; Kay, 1977). Embedded in a complex system of multilayered rule, the quotidian gained knowledge through collaborations with diviners, elders and governing councils.

By 1838,<sup>3</sup> European missionaries, explorers, traders, settlers and government officials of the colonial regime stationed in Yorùbáland worked on stabilizing pre-existing treaties for commercial and political alliances. These inquisitors documented pre-existing social spheres with the goal of gaining dominance over political and economic resources as well as religious moral orders. Conversion to Christianity and the development of individual relationships with missionaries involved the substitution of indigenous superstitions with the grandeur of various technologies—clocks, books, compasses. Many relied on parallels with indigenous occult or magical beliefs in order to prepare them to employ what seemed to be com-

parable magical technologies of knowledge for the sake of achieving political influence. The Ègbá and Efik chiefs, representing prominent Yorùbá speaking clans in the Southwestern region of Yorùbáland, welcomed missionaries and new techniques of knowledge as an instrument to achieve political ends (E.A. Ayandele, 1966: xviii; Williams, 2001).

Among those Africans who attended Christian educational institutions during the mid-19th century and eventually converted to Christianity, most adopted principles of Christianity through the force of new technologies of institutional knowledge. These technologies of literary knowledge worked to establish the moral grounds on which particular types of modern subjects were produced. Notions of liberty, justice, individual accountability to society and the nation were shaped with the development of Nigerian civil society. By entering Christian Missions they planted seeds of nationalism as a way to transform the region, early converts to Christianity were introduced to the goals of nation-building in Europe, first by Christian missionaries and then by British officials.<sup>4</sup> However, many envisioned black self-government independently from Colonial rule, arguing that they were fit to represent themselves on the international arena.

Despite African participation in Christian missions, there was considerable disagreement among missionaries about whether it would be more effective to teach Christianity to non-Europeans, often classified as “uncivilized” people, or whether it would be best to “civilize” them first. If the latter, many felt that with the acquisition of European civility Africans would evolve in such a way that they would “naturally” become Christians—something that they thought they could not learn without this training.<sup>5</sup> With discourses of civility as a central component of Christian conversion, both British missionaries and African converts proselytized with the goal of eradicating native traditional ways and implementing new moral practices. These practices formed the basis for the development of legal codes under which both converts to Christianity and non-converts were expected to abide.

Yorùbá missionaries contributed centrally to the widespread understandings of Yorùbá life through their participation in transforming modern Nigerian nationhood. By the late 1800s, Christian missions were key revolutionizing institutions that further propelled the formation of the Nigerian colonial state within newly forming regions. Among the Yorùbá, the once prominent gods known as the *Òrìṣà* and organized around ideas of ancestral continuity and reincarnation gave way to a

mass movement of Christian conversion in the non-Muslim areas of what was to become the southwestern region of Nigeria.<sup>6</sup> In the south, the transformation was slower and the reaction of *Òrìṣà* practitioners and royal monarchs to missionaries often depended on personal and political incentives that in some cases were achieved through their building of alliances with British colonial forces. As a result, Africans exposed to literacy adopted various forms of knowledge, thereby participating in spreading literacy throughout Yorùbáland.

In order to participate in what was increasingly seen as a Christian civilizing mission, increasing numbers of Christian missionaries migrated from Europe to the newly developing British colonial nation. The changes, though propelled by Christian missionaries and later by British colonial institutions, contributed to the processes of nation-building. The eventual penetration of late 19th-century Christianization was facilitated by nation-building and print capitalism. For although the spread of literacy was facilitated by the expansion of Christian missions, the development of Nigerian statehood served as one of the key facilitators of the colonization of the Yorùbá.

These new processes of production were deployed through a range of social, economic and legal-political institutions. Under indirect rule the British annexed coastal towns and subdivided kingdoms in order to promote colonial governance. Nigerian chiefs, working under new forms of governance, assisted in the enforcement and imposition of governing regulations, collection of taxes, and documentation of social life. The political economy of the growing British regime along the coastal areas eventually penetrated formerly dominant Yorùbá administrative districts. This included the establishment of Nigerian civil society that, in theory, separated the state from religious rule and led to the eventual British take-over of the region now known as Nigeria. Nevertheless, British direct rule of the early 20th century reduced the authority of the former chiefs, undermined indirect colonial governance by replacing it with indirect mechanisms of governmentality. This turn of governance was maintained by British economic control of resources and land and played a central role in the development of the new governing institutions that shaped Nigerian civil society.

With the growing development of national colonial institutions, print capital served as a useful technique of governance. It involved the circulation of particular notions of civil society which were enmeshed in principles of Protestant Christianity the institutionalization of particular ideas about the redeemable individual in relation to society that presumed human life as embedded in

linear properties of succession. This development of notions of subjectivity in relation to civility set new standards for a critical arena of knowledge acquisition that involved the training, governance and accountability of the subject and had the consequence of circulating certain forms of European bourgeois moral codes.

However, scholars such as A.B. Ellis (1894) and Leo Frobenius (1913) were among the first Western scholars instrumental in writing comprehensively about the Yorùbá people. In their attempt to trace the origins of the Yorùbá to migration patterns from Ancient Egypt, they set the framework for a genealogy of Yorùbá descent that persists in both formal and informal origin stories today. With the circulation of knowledge, spread through these developing secular and non-secular literary institutions, populations were enumerated, classified and racial codes were legitimized as constituting fundamental differences. The shift from indigenous approaches of governmentality to principles of European civil society involved the replacement of clan accountability with individual accountability to both God and the law. Despotic rulers were given new jurisdiction over populations and new moral standards and policing of personal practices were imposed regional colonial subjects. Individual actions were legally constituted through the language of individualism, choice, justice and accountability. Notions of life and death, and its related rituals, were taken from the domain of the community, becoming a matter of the state and the law. Practices such as human sacrifice and suicide were outlawed and instead, particularly in the Southern Nigeria, new notions of the individual and society were recast within the formation of a secular state that rested on Christian temporalities and Protestant moral codes.

In the process of establishing a secular nation, Nigerian Colonial government officials eventually adopted new codes for defining national ethnic identities that conflated pre-existing linguistic, ethnic and religious affiliations in the region that became known as Nigeria. The regions invested in non-secular governmental rule, such as that of the Muslims in the north, for example, eschewed the idea of a secular non-Muslim government. However, this exclusion of the presence of Islam in Nigerian state-building is a critical example of the ways that Protestant webs of power are established along ideological governmental alliances.

Recent approaches to theorizing modernity in Nigeria have highlighted its role not only in contributing to the production of standardizing mechanisms, but also in pointing to the production of human evolutionary differences through the use of scientific approaches. British

colonial nation-building, fueled along racial lines, involved the creation of distinctions between African subjects and British citizens. These forms of differentiation and reorganization have implications for the ways that we understand the role of literary institutions as facilitators of governance and accountability. For such distinctions in the production of national identity were germinal, not so much for the way that Samuel Johnson was to circumscribe the Yorùbá as unified, but also for forging the basis for racial difference and establishing the virtues of honourable behavior for the communities of the diaspora in the 20th century. In the next section, I demonstrate that Yorùbá returnees reproduced Òyó-dominant histories which led to the normalization of particular practices. These, in turn, shaped the ways that Yorùbá revivalists, in an attempt to institutionalize placement in displacement, adopted colonial grand narratives about the Yorùbá past from which they generalized about Nigerian society as a whole. This construction of a Yorùbá ethnic identity was a process brought about in large measure by the development of various classificatory institutions which shaped the basis for racial, thus nationally distinct, territorial differences.

### **Missionary Returnees, Print Capital and the Circulation of Moral Subjectivities**

The formation and regulation of the modern concept of national identity, therefore, was a recent innovation that emerged along side Christianity and was facilitated by the spread of print capitalism. By the mid-1800s, many Yorùbá returnees, once enslaved captives, returned as freemen to their countries of birth from locations such as Sierra Leone and Brazil to Yorùbáland. Much of the impetus toward the formalization of written Yorùbá, as well as the translation of Yorùbá oral texts to English texts, and vice versa, was driven by the involvement of returnees who participated in developing national institutions (Matory, 1999). With the temporal and conceptual ordering that Christianity offered and after many years of British training, these early missionaries, once sold to white European traders, were schooled abroad and converted to Christianity.

One such missionary was Samuel Crowther. Enslaved and freed by a British intercepting ship in 1822, he, along with thousands of other captives, was taken to Sierra Leone where he became an Anglican missionary. Upon returning to his homeland, he participated in building early literary institutions by publishing the first history of Yorùbáland. In 1843, Crowther was instrumental in the development of a Yorùbá orthography—a writing system that continues to be

used in Nigeria today and that led to the standardization of Yorùbá as a language.

The process of standardizing Yorùbá as a written and translatable language involved the merger of the Ègbá lexicon with a predominantly Òyó morphology and syntax (Adetugbo, 1967; Ajayi, 1960; Matory, 1999). The result was the formation of an official language that resembled the dialect used by a range of men from the Lagos ex-captive returnee communities to the Òyó-political elite. Although there is significant evidence to suggest that most Yorùbá speakers who were once under the rule of the Òyó Empire of the early 19th century saw themselves as distinctly Ègbá, Ìjèbú, Èkìtì or Òyó, most subjects of the British crown claimed belonging not to the newly developing colonial state but to a standardized ethnic category under which Nigerian national identity was constituted.<sup>7</sup> Through the formalization of the Yorùbá language, Crowther greatly influenced the ways in which members of the Church Missionary Society used Yorùbá and therefore legitimized it within British Colonial spheres of power. For, prior to the 19th century, neither a unified national identity nor a linguistic identity known as Yorùbá existed under such a name.<sup>8</sup> Nineteenth century linguistic categories that were subsumed under either Yorùbá or Hausa governmental enclaves, were eventually subsumed under the domain of 20th-century categories of Nigerian nationhood. Yorùbá returnees played critical roles in contributing to the standardization of Yorùbá ethnicity and, in developing the infrastructure for various institutions of knowledge. And it is Samuel Crowther, however, who is today credited for popularizing the term, Yorùbá, for popular usage.

Other projects on which Crowther and his colleagues embarked included the formation of Christian educational institutions, training institutes and venues of higher learning, such as universities which added to the hierarchies of knowledge and separated the learned scholars from the non-literate classes. They formalized land deeds, produced taxation papers, translated *The Bible*<sup>9</sup> and adopted British historical formats by using budding scholars documented and incorporated local lore and myth within modern scientific investigations, creating innovative approaches to producing historical knowledge.

Two early English publications included a list of the Kings of Lagos since the late 18th century, documented by Reverend C.A. Gollmer in 1877, and under the title, *Historical Notices of Lagos, West Africa*. Another prepared by Reverend J.B. Wood published in 1878, charted the history of Lagos from its origins to the 1861 British annexation. These publications, written by a small pio-

neering elite who participated in the early literary production of written texts, circulated as authorial documents about Nigerian history. Other Nigerian returnees included such people as John Olawunmi George, John Augustus Payne and Samuel Johnson, all of whom played key roles in the transformation of the Nigerian colonial state (Falola, 1993; Matory, 1999; Moraes and Barber, 1990). In an attempt to document early nationalist history, all became teachers and linguists, contributing to the newly forming Nigerian literary community. John Augustus Payne, an Ìjèbú-native, also a former captive who was exiled in Sierra Leone, returned to Yorùbáland and produced a comprehensive study published in the 1890s. In the years following his return to Yorùbáland, he served in the British Administration in Lagos where in 1893 he published, *Table of Principal Events in Yorùbá History*, and, from 1874, published annually the *Lagos and West African Almanac and Diary*. Similarly, as a member of one of the early societies of educated young men, John Olawunmi George, also a returnee who was exiled in Sierra Leone, lectured locally, eventually becoming a prominent Lagos-based Christian merchant. He authored a short book about the history of the Yorùbá from their origins to the Yorùbáland wars of the 1800s.<sup>10</sup> His work described the Yorùbá ethnic groups, Ègbás, Ketus, Òyós as homogeneous, “of one stock” (1875: 18) and described the Yorùbá Empire as a Kingdom which incorporated many tribes and countries, and one which described the destruction of the Empire as caused by invasions by Fulani Muslim groups. Although George’s historiography attempts to generalize about Yorùbá history, it is regionally shaped and based on the power and uniformity of the Òyó Empire and not the differences within it.

Reverend Samuel Johnson, a native of Òyó and also a former captive freed in Sierra Leone, was educated in missionary schools facilitated by the Christian Missionary Society (CMS). His *The History of the Yorùbá (1921)* became one of the most authoritative publications written about the Yorùbá of Southwestern Nigeria. Inspired by his interest in highlighting the role of Christianity in promoting changes in traditional practices, it was a story about Christian redemption and served to formalize popular knowledge about Yorùbá traditions. It is no surprise that the historical and intellectual canon to which global practitioners, tourists and a range of historians in the Americas refer includes his works alongside those of his contemporaries, sociologist N.A. Fadipe, and American anthropologist, the late William Bascom.

Johnson, along with other literate Yorùbá returnees and members of the late 19th- and early 20th-century

intellectual classes, participated in the shaping of the burgeoning historical canon that came to be characterized as Yorùbá history. But, it was through the influence of various institutions, such as publishing houses, schools and missionary establishments, that there developed ethnic categories within which distinct forms of differentiation prevailed. With the shift in the economy from mercantile to early capitalist monetary systems of exchange and with the rise of print capital, the determinants for what was published and by whom was connected to a highly selective political and economic process governed both within and outside of the colony. Additionally, because of the magnitude of racial discrimination that fuelled the conceptual apparatus within which Johnson and his colleagues worked, they were both within and outside of colonial institutions.

Johnson's *History of the Yorùbá* presents examples of how new and differentiated fields of knowledge were legitimated under conditions of British governmental influence and within the specificities of local Yorùbá politics. It was the displacement of older forms of indigenous governmentality with the influx of British colonial institutional power, emphatically coded within codes of racial difference, that new forms of knowledge merged with international power. Notions of racial difference in colonial Nigeria were not free from Protestant institutional moral injunctions and global codes of ordering. By reproducing these Christian injunctions, Nigerian nationalists superimposed their goals onto pre-existing kinship and linguistic alliances. And since race did not supplant them, the axes onto which racial distinctions were forged converged within the newly shaped religious-ethnic relations.<sup>11</sup> In transforming oral histories into literary texts, as well as in translating English literary texts into Yorùbá, these elite classes of scribes and returnee missionaries adopted British epistemological approaches to initiate changes to various forms of indigenous knowledge. This, in turn, contributed to significant changes in the lives of village societies along the West African coast in which traditional conceptions of ethnic and religious identity shifted into differentiated identities. Such differentiated subjectivities were constructed with distinctive values and performed different purposes, as evidenced in the publication of Johnson's groundbreaking work. An analysis of the Christianization of Yorùbá history, as reconstituted by early Yorùbá scholars, moves us away from the overt politics of ethnicity, race and nation. Instead, as *The History of the Yorùbá* illustrates, looking at this past through the lens of British imperialism produced the illusion of Yorùbá homogeneity in the reality of heterogeneity. Yet, by privileging of black solidarity, and

thus demarcating racial difference, revivalist practitioners reconstruct the temporal geography of the Nigerian past as they create new distinctions within it. These politics take shape through the strategic uses of historical texts and have great import for understanding not only the site of variability within textual documents, but also the ways that institutions of power shape the mechanisms by which knowledge is legitimized. For if the mechanisms of power that through written texts led to the symbolic production of a unified concept of the Yorùbá people were facilitated by the development of international print capital, then the 20th-century development of literary institutions was also influenced by the absence of literary regional differentiation and the temporal underpinnings characteristic of the modern liberal subject. As I demonstrate in the next section that at the core of this Yorùbá literary canon used by African American practitioners is a politics of difference, even as they depend on the symbolism of black homogeneity.

### **Samuel Johnson: Nigerian Nationhood, Òyó-Centricity and the Politics of Difference**

The historical range of Johnson's book, *The History of the Yorùbá*, spans a period that exceeds four hundred years. Using mythic tales and historical documentation, his account of pre-18th-century wars and successions, practices and customs was based on the lore of the Yorùbá people. Submitted to a publisher in 1899, Johnson's manuscript, *The History of the Yorùbá* was neither published, nor was it acknowledged as being received. After Johnson's death in 1901, his brother reconstructed the lost manuscript using the notes left behind. Not only does the correspondence between Yorùbá intellectuals suggest that gaining access to publishing resources were extremely difficult, but the mysterious disappearance of Johnson's manuscript suggests that there may have been attempts to subvert the publication of a text focussed on specific details of Yorùbá life. Johnson's process of recording Yorùbá history was to systematically document information in relation to scientific approaches to causation and consequence. His intellectual effort was in alignment with both protestant aspirations for humanity and the principles of Western Enlightenment.<sup>12</sup> Identifying ancestor reincarnation as based on the primitivism of the old ways, he relegated Yorùbá deities to the category of myths and lore. With the eventual publication of *The History of the Yorùbá* in 1921, along with the range of historical analyses of earlier writers, the emergent Yorùbá canon formalized the institutional terms by which Òyó-Yorùbá history would

be consolidated as Yorùbá history for an increasingly interested international audience.<sup>13</sup>

Johnson charted the story of the decline of the Òyó Empire as taking place prior to the British takeover of Western Nigeria. He detailed the Òyó Empire as being at its height from the early 18th to the early 19th century. The Empire was ruled by, as he described it, “a ruthless Aláàfin” (king) who collected tribute from the kingdoms which he annexed under his control (including groups such as the Ègbá, Ègbádò, Nàgó, Aja, Ewe, Adangbe and the Ga) (1959: 42). Johnson’s reproduction of this history<sup>14</sup> is an attempt to clarify the concentric circles of Yorùbá lore by recasting the history of the Yorùbá through the lens of historical objectivity and is central to his struggle for representation in the burgeoning British colonial state. The passage that I will analyze is an attempt to explore how the history of what was to be the Nigerian nation was shaped not simply by members of excluded and marginalized groups. Rather, the historiography of the Yorùbá, which formed the foundation for the historical canon that circulates today, emerged from individuals who belonged to a developing ethnic group whose narratives of the past expressed the characteristics of Protestant liberal values central to British colonial governance. As shown by Johnson’s account, his description of the dishonourable acts of jealousy by the Òyó prince, Abíódún, led to Abíódún’s acts of alliance with “outsiders.” This alliance, he explains, eventually led to the weakening of the Òyó-Yorùbá political and military apparatus, governed by King Aole.

In charting a historical trajectory of flaws in the execution of Òyó-Yorùbá ancestral succession, Johnson explained that the region known today as modern Nigeria dates back to a period more than two thousand years ago. This was a time when Nok cultural practices flourished and where in AD 1000 Hausa Kingdoms and the Bomu Empire prospered as a centre of trade between North African Berbers and the local forest dwellers. With the establishment of the Dahomean Kingdom two hundred years later, the Òyó and Benin Kingdoms four hundred years later, and subsuming both the Benin and Dahomey kingdoms between the 17th and 19th centuries, the Òyó kingdom rose to its heights between the 17th and 18th century, becoming the Òyó Empire, thereby achieving high levels of political government.

Marking the tragic end of the Òyó Empire as beginning with quarrels concerning kinship succession and the loss of honour, Johnson linked the rise in the Islamic crusade of the 19th century (which led to the formation of an Islamic centre of governance located in the Nigerian northern city of Sokoto) to the internal problems

with egocentrism and the loss of noble honour for Yorùbá subjects. Explaining the succession with metaphors that described the rise and fall of the Òyó Empire in linear terms, he detailed the ways that the revolt at Ilorin<sup>15</sup> was the manifestation of Àfònjá’s success at mobilizing local and foreign (read Muslim) armies to overthrow the Aláàfin of Òyó. In an attempt to argue that it was the problems with succession that led to the downfall of the Òyó Empire, Johnson demonstrated that none of King Abíódún’s sons succeeded him on the throne. Instead, the installation of King Aolé was reallocated to a cousin rather than to a son. In other words, it was King Abíódún’s cousin, Prince Aolé, who was elected as Aláàfin (Ọba or king)—rather than King Abíódún’s eldest son—Àfònjá. King Abíódún’s son was given the title *Başòrun*, but as a Prince (through his mother’s line) the new title was below the rank that he had already achieved. Therefore, he rejected his given title and demanded the highest military title, *Kakanfò the Àfònjá of Ilorin*, which he claimed by force.<sup>16</sup>

For Johnson, it was Àfònjá—alone—who was depicted as the king’s enemy. Johnson explained that King Aole’s actions were intelligently calculated since to have mishandled the situation would have led to an even more destructive situation—and probably civil war. Instead, he explained that the King gave King Abíódún’s eldest son the royal title “the Àfònjá of the city of Ilorin” (1921: 188-190). In the passage that follows, Johnson represents the death of *Kakanfò Oyabi* as the beginning of the end of Òyó governance. Explaining that the Òyó Empire was under siege by insubordinate forces, he states:<sup>17</sup>

Several weeks passed and they were still encamped before Òyó irresolute as to what they should do next. At last an empty covered calabash was sent to the King—for his head! A plain indication that he was rejected. He had suspected this all along and was not unprepared for it. There being no alternative, His Majesty set his house in order; but before he committed suicide, he stepped out on the palace quadrangle with face stern and resolute, carrying in his hands an earthenware dish and three arrows. He shot one to the North, one to the South, and one to the West uttering those ever-memorable imprecations “My curse be on yea for your disloyalty and disobedience, so let your children disobey you. If you send them on an errand, let them never return to bring you word again. To all the points I shot my arrows will yea be carried as slaves. My curse will carry you to the sea and beyond the seas, slaves will rule over you, and you, their masters will become slaves. (1921: 192)

The trope of the fractured calabash represents the symbolic splintering of the Yorùbá people due to their lack of honour and their consequent display of greed and egocentrism. The calabash is, thus, symbolic of the popular perception of the homogeneity of the Yorùbá and the dispersal of its pieces is a reflection of their enslavement and disenfranchisement. The rise and fall of the Òyó Empire reflects dominant renditions of the ways that the Yorùbá have come to be seen popularly—as a homogenous group that was “invaded by strangers” within the borders of their governance. We can see how Johnson’s narrative of Yorùbá sameness was shaped through his deployment of Yorùbá unity. For Johnson’s classification of Muslims as invaders further reproduced a meta-narrative about Yorùbá homogeneity that located the concept of Yorùbá Muslims as a contradiction in terms, thereby re-inscribing particular tropes of Òyó-Christian inclusion and Islamic marginalization. And in addition to this elision, there were five modern-day Nigerian provinces—Ibàdàn, Òyó, Abéokúta, Ìjèbú and Òndó—which were home to multicultural subgroups of Yorùbá speaking people. The residents of these subgroups had distinct Yorùbá dialects and were highly diverse. This marginalization of Muslims and homogenization of Yorùbá identity assumes a particular type of Òyó unification.

Ilé-Ifè was the city popularly represented by most scholars as the birthplace of the Yorùbá—Johnson charted Òyó as the force of Yorùbá greatness and noble honour. Not only does this approach make secondary the symbolism of Ilé-Ifè as the birthplace of modern Yorùbá, but, it further reinforces age-old rivalries between Òyó and Ilé-Ifè. Many late 19th-century historians and early 20th-century sociologists tended to adopt one of the following versions of Òyó or Ilé-Ifè-centred prominence narratives.<sup>18</sup> One narrative posits that the mythic god, Odùduwà, settled in Ilé-Ifè, having arrived from the Far East. Odùduwà’s children and grandchildren are said to have dispersed throughout Yorùbáland. Over centuries, they became the rulers of the many Yorùbá kingdoms. Samuel Johnson is among those who decried this history and instead argued that the origins of Yorùbá culture began at Ilé-Ifè, where human kind was created and that the Òyó Empire was the site of Yorùbá prestige. What distinguishes the two narratives from each other is that the first posits Ilé-Ifè’s prestige as a product of the colonization of the Yorùbá by “outsiders”—Muslims. The second recasts Òyó, and not Ilé-Ifè, as the site of Yorùbá prestige and reign. Although by recasting the birth of Ilé-Ifè<sup>19</sup> as a home place for the Yorùbá, and Òyó as the place where the Yorùbá exercised power and flourished,

both narratives maintain that Ilé-Ifè was the place where the Yorùbá people came to see themselves as a unified people. Johnson’s own motive for placing Òyó as the site of prestige might stem from his own status as the grandson of King Abíódún. For Òyótúnjí practitioners, claiming Òyó provided an opportunity for legitimating their connection through their slave dispersal and, therefore, their nobility based on their connection to King Aole and his royalty.

Johnson enacted his version of the origins of the Yorùbá people through a number of literary constructions. First, by de-centring the mythic personage of Ilé-Ifè onto *Morèmi*, (Jephtha) the mythic wife of one of the ancient heroes of Ilé-Ifè and *Odùduwà* (*Òrányàn*), instead of endowing Ife with the prestige of origins and, therefore, a more prominent martyr, Johnson contributed to the construction of the symbolic imagery of Old Òyó, and not Ife, as the place of Yorùbá greatness.

Johnson claimed that the figures of *Morèmi* and *Odùduwà*, respectively, were actually Jephtha and *Òrányàn*, the deified mother and father of Òyó, whose two sons, *Ajaka* and *Sàngó*, succeeded them and became famous in the history of the Òyó Yorùbá people (1921: 148). By making animal sacrifices to the gods of Ife and sacrificing her only son, *Sàngó*, Johnson shows that *Morèmi* protected the people of her town from the repeated raids of competing outsiders, such as the Ìgbò tribes. This act made her a heroine of the Ilé-Ifè nation. By decentering the importance of *Morèmi*, Johnson is able to foreground the deification of Shango, the patron Òrìṣà of Òyó, and highlight the centrality of Òyó, and not Ilé-Ifè, as an icon of the Yorùbá past.

Second, Johnson’s description of the spatial and political organization of Ilé-Ifè contrasts with his description of the grandeur of the king of Òyó, the Aláàfin and renders Ilé-Ifè secondary in grandeur to that of Òyó. According to Johnson, the Aláàfin of Òyó lived in an exquisite palace surrounded by his administrators and non-royal servant residents. The government and social structure were based on a hierarchy of political officials, an Ògbóni cult, diviners and a chief priest of Ifa. This is not true of his description of Ilé-Ifè.

Third, although other historical accounts attribute the downfall of the Òyó Empire to a range of factors, Johnson indicts Àfònjá for causing the Òwu war which led to the eventual succession of Old Òyó by the Fulani. Ultimately, it is Àfònjá’s ruthless egotism that Johnson sees as the primary cause. In Johnson’s account, Àfònjá’s greed and recklessness led him to do almost anything, including inviting Muslim Fulani and Hausa foreigners from the north to join forces with him in

order to wage a war against King Aole. For Johnson, not even the symbolism of King Aole's metaphoric curse, a symbol of the enslavement and dispersal of the Yorùbá people, was represented as a dishonourable form of retaliation. Rather, he blamed Aole's actions on Àfònjá for, according to Johnson, the homogeneity of the Òyó-Yorùbá government was wrongly dismantled as a result of the 1810 revolt at Ilorin.

Finally, Johnson not only construed Àfònjá as the main cause of the Òwu War, but he identified the events surround the Òwu War, itself, as the leading cause of the Òyó Empire's downfall. In depicting the Òwu War as the source of the fragmentation of the Yorùbá people, Johnson upheld the centrality of Òyó as the primary hub of both Yorùbá origins and demise. Àfònjá's actions, such as the joining of forces with external Islamic powers at the beginning of the Òwu War, were represented by Johnson as indicators of greed and disrespect for empire while he describes King Aole's deliverance of the deadly curse and act of suicide as heroic martyrdom. Nevertheless, contemporary Yorùbá historians have noted that a range of factors such as shifts in mercantile consumption, British Colonialism, and the growing power of the Hausa states in the north contributed to the demise of the Empire.

The existence of two different regimes for the circulation of knowledge and the circulation of principles of governance requires analyses that make distinctions between the spheres of power that co-existed during the writing of late 18th- to 19th-century history and British interventions into Yorùbá governmentality. The intersection of these regimes of power defines the parameters within which individuals determine relations of belonging.

The act of emphasizing the "once homogenous, ever powerful Yorùbá Empire" and the consequent dispersal and/or enslavement of Òyó men and women made the centrality of Òyó a key component of the Yorùbá "homeland" imaginary. Unlike Johnson, however, Òyótúnjé use of Òyó-centred Yorùbá history has produced an insistent desire for redemption through which individuals realign themselves with the West African past. The prevailing discourse, as is often the case in oral discourses, describes a narrative of anteriority in which, before the demise of West African Empires, Africans were once noble kings and queens. These discourses provide possibilities for reconceptualizing the literary production of Yorùbá origins and its transnational metaphors of dispersal as constitutive of the ways that slavery and histories of dispersal can be detached from geographical space and symbolically rerouted to different places.

These metaphors are articulated through temporal and spatial convergences and for the purposes of legitimizing their geotemporal connection to the honour and prestige of the past, Òyótúnjé practitioners lay claim to Òyó ancestry, therefore repositioning black Americans (and not simply White European slave traders) as complicit in their own enslavement.

In *Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel* (1981), Mikhail Bakhtin examined how time and space fold into each other in specific literary genres. He explored the diversity of chronotopes (literally meaning the simultaneity of time/space) and their varied representations. One component of the chronotope, time, takes on diverse forms—cyclical time and linear time. Cyclical time, he argued, is reoccurring and locates events outside of the standards of human mortality as we know it. Linear time, on the other hand, lacks cyclicity and ties perceived reality to the human scale. Space, the other component of the chronotope, is changed with the movement of time and is used to define place in terms connected to the perceived relative stability of the written form. Such chronotopes, although reversible and interchanging, carry with them a degree of cultural specificity that limits the ways that new social rules order interpretive logic (Bakhtin, 1981: 84; Gilroy, 1993: 199; Irvine, 1996: 258; Stewart, 1996: 11). These specificities shape the cultural codes of a native's world, thereby explaining their states of "being" as well as legitimizing them. However, even as forms of time change from linear to cyclical and space to particular meanings of place, both the written and spoken word are characterized by an intrinsic connection, albeit abstract, between spatial and temporal narrative techniques. It is the chronotope that Johnson and other Yorùbá returnees transformed to shape new perceptions of Yorùbá history. This chronotopic incorporation of modern British peculiarities of linear time and abstract space produced not only new codes within which to interpret social norms, but also new forms of rhetorically structured communicative practices from which new standards for measuring belonging were established.

Ultimately, the codes of modernity which took shape in Nigeria involved the ideological separation of linear time from cyclical time, and three-dimensional responsiveness of space to the recognizability of place. But, it is not simply orality that was subjected to this form of variation, but rather the opposite. The ideological reconfiguration of state-based civil society, shaped by the peculiarities of modern life, transformed precolonial African governance into an international bourgeois order secured within the capitalist relations that shaped it. As I demonstrated, the scope of civil society and the

developing nation state shaped its legal, political and educational orders on the fixity of modern chronotopes. The contemporary manifestation of this invention has become so abstract that the chronotopic variables that in the past century radically remade the “real,” did so in such a way that achieved the homogenization of time as linear time. Written texts gained meanings from the standardization of distinctive expectations of stability and virtues of truth through the structure of textual authority. As a result, narratives of civility, morality and honour, as they were embedded in the written histories of the Yorùbá, were, even with their Africanized resonance, structural extensions of European modernity.

The goal of unifying analytically the global importation of modern European organizational principles with local social and political action is to demonstrate how everyday practices follow the same spatial and temporal conjunctures of the past and how the specificities of local history shape the particularities of interpretive variation. These chronotopic variations which ultimately set the terms for different relations of belonging are geotemporal. They represent people’s processes of employing chronotopic connections to reconfigure “reality” against which they recast European modern chronotopes and reuse them in order to rework them. These complex practices—dialogic and dialectical—have implications for governmentality—that is, for the forces of power that shape the determinants for how people’s lives should be lived on a daily basis. Although individuals engaged in related geotemporal processes are intentionally participating in distinctive acts of normative reconfigurations, they do so by building upon the very principles and form that they are undermining in the first place.

The Oba of Òyótúnjí Village and his constituents in South Carolina and throughout the U.S. are no different. In an attempt to recast their membership to Africa, they also employ chronotopic techniques that are interwoven with modern rules and order. These chronotopic strategies shape their world through the incorporation of the familiar of everyday life in a world partially unfamiliar to them. Despite these disjunctures, they use particular concepts of identity and racial subjectivity that not only emerged out of the history of European modern nation building, but that also structure their everyday life. These concepts are interwoven with contemporary rules of order in ways that blur the binary between the “real world” and “imaginary.”

To conclude my analysis, I now turn to my final example of the specificity of modern subject formations that employ particular rules of British colonial governance in non-colonial contexts. Òyótúnjí revivalists tie

chronotopes of modern human life to the temporality and spatiality of African worlds in a way that presumes congruence in the midst of structural incongruence. What is important to note is not only the rhetorical and historical devices that revivalists use to reconfigure Yorùbá transnational belonging, but the ways that the orator used the written text itself to embark on a transnational return to a imaginary “source.”

### Revivalist Governmentality: Conduct and Spatial and Temporal Linkages

One summer day, an open air town meeting (known as an *Obánjòko*)<sup>20</sup> was announced. The beating of the drums accentuated the imminent appearance of the main speaker, the Oba of Òyótúnjí Village. Dressed in white or pastel colours with traditional *lapas* (cloth that women wear around the bottom of their bodies), head wraps and Òyó tribal inscriptions etched on their faces, giggling girls and chattering young women gathered chairs for the impending event. The evening air thickened with the smell of the oncoming rain. As the rain started to fall people quickly entered a nearby building, often known as the community leisurely hangout—*The Òyó-Horseman*.

The low chattering stopped as the community members gathered into the main courtyard and the Oba entered the room. A senior chief opened the session, commanding loudly in Yorùbá, “*Dìde*” (Arise!) Everyone in the room stood up as his Majesty, Oba Adéfúnmi I, the Oba of Òyótúnjí, walked into the room. A relatively small-sized light-brown-skinned man, accompanied by his right-hand chief and royal wives, dressed in cloth of royalty walked in proudly. He sat on an elevated chair in the front of the room and faced his community members. The session began with the pouring of libation and followed by vows to the leader and the Yorùbá nation. The members declared their allegiance to the king, with fist outstretched and bodies erect. They shouted a series of words in unison, first in Yorùbá and then in English, lagging behind others, each one looking sternly at the Oba and the display of artifacts at the front of the room. At the conclusion of the pledge, the Oba’s right hand chief commanded that the audience take their seats. He addressed the audience, reviewing the order of events and using formal language, sometimes struggling with Yorùbá, sometimes in formal English.

Once the introductory rituals were completed and the relations of power and allegiance established the leader, Oba Osejeman I, prefaced his opening message by announcing the results of the divinatory “reading of the week” conducted a day earlier and posted on the side of the building.

So our reading this week indicated that we suffer from uncontrollable egomania. That in essence we could wind up destroying the very thing we are trying to build because of ego. Ego is that characteristic which all human beings have, unless of course it can be weeded out of them through cultural habits and forms. But ego is that thing that makes you think that you are really hot stuff. Ego is that thing that makes you think you are too big, too great, to endure any kind of rebuke or refusal, or that people will not pay you maximum attention and honor.

Upon establishing his legitimacy through the symbolic power of ancestral communication, the *Ọba* proceeded with his speech by linking the problems of greed among the elite in *Ọyótúnjì* to Samuel Johnson's textual description of the greed and egocentrism that led to the fall of Old *Ọyọ*. In an attempt to demonstrate how Johnson's account of King Aole's death, and therefore the downfall of the *Ọyọ* Empire, had prophetic consequences that were directly linked to their American community, he recounted Johnson's tale of King Aole relinquishing his power:

So the result of it was that King Aole went out and took with him a huge vase—a ceramic vase. He took with him a huge ceramic vase and he took four arrows. He went out and he pronounced his famous curse to the *Yorùbá* people. He shot one arrow to the north, to the south, to the east, and to the west, and then he took the vase and held it up and smashed it to the ground. And he said, "As a broken calabash can be mended, but never a broken vase, can never be mended, it is smashed into thousands of fragments."

In demonstrating how the dispersal of *Yorùbá* slaves was central to the linkages between the enslavement and dispersal of the prisoners of war of the *Ọyọ* Empire and black Americans whose ancestors were sold into trans-Atlantic slavery, he continued:

To the directions in which I have shot my arrows, to the north, to the west, to the east, to the south, may the *Yorùbá* people be carried as slaves. May they send their children out on errands and never hear from them again. May slaves rule over them and they become slaves. And then having pronounced his famous curse, as the high priest of the nation, which is what the *Ọba* is, this was like the servant of all of the Gods denouncing the people whom the Gods were supposed to protect, or who is to guide people to find ways of protection from the Gods. After he had smashed his vase and shot his arrows he went into his chambers and took poison and died, never retracting his words.

The above excerpts demonstrate how the leader of *Ọyótúnjì* used geotemporal approaches to transform the codes of European modernity. This approach to recasting belonging outside of the temporal distinctions of Nigerian citizenship involves a reconfiguration of transnational symbolic linkages between Africa and the Americas, the past and the present. Though this innovation was legitimized using both divinatory oral and written sociological texts, in order to lay claim to the authority of literary institutions, the orator used modern codes to produce interpretive variations. The following codes—(1) slavery as the basis for connection, (2) techniques of orality for community, and (3) literary and divinatory sources as geotemporal domains of governance—demonstrate how another generation of individuals whose ancestors were formerly enslaved in the Americas may, although differently situated in relation to the *Ọyọ* Empire, substitute their identities with different chronotopic sequences with which to establish recognizable codes of belonging.

### Slavery and Race as the Basis for Connection

Among African Americans interested in claiming *Yorùbá* ancestry, Johnson's descriptions of the dispersal of slaves is a modality through which the links between *Ọyọ*-*Yorùbá* and *Yorùbá* revivalists in the U.S. are shaped. Motivated by an attempt to claim membership to relations of power, *Ọyótúnjì* revivalists actively embraced Samuel Johnson's history of the *Yorùbá* as their own. They extrapolated from Johnson's work not simply because his text is one of the foremost to detail the history of the *Yorùbá*, but because it serves as a prestigious articulation of the principles of *Yorùbá* nobility that enrich that history. Nevertheless, the carry over is far from invariable for while Johnson distanced himself from the insubordinate actions of *Àfọnjá the Kakanfò* and the excessive pride of King Aole's, thereby blaming *Àfọnjá* for forcing King Aole to deliver the vengeful symbolic curse of enslavement, the *Ọba* of *Ọyótúnjì* linked its residents to both Aole and *Àfọnjá*.

Significantly, the *Ọba*'s use of Johnson's text encodes racial commonalities as the basis of shared origins. This renarrativizing of *Yorùbá* history was connected to the *Ọba*'s use of the symbolism of race as biology, thus shared ancestry. Through this symbolism of blood, he incorporated linguistic signifiers of unity, emphasizing the symbolism of black American slavery articulated with the history of *Yorùbá* dispersal in the Americas. In contrast, it is clear that Johnson's self-conscious racial analysis is absent. He was more concerned with ethnicity and nationality as units of analysis, that is,

similarities and differences of Yorùbá and European civilizations (Law, 1990; 81). At the heart of Johnson's articulations of Yorùbá membership are highly regionalized histories of Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá codes of behaviour from which hegemonic criteria of membership were shaped. On the other hand, the Ọ̀ba superimposed the notion of racial kinship onto those of culture, enlisting individuals to monitor themselves according to new alliances. His message demonstrated how race, thus kinship, figures prominently in the linkages between Nigerian Yorùbá and American Yorùbá revivalists. His use of the referential symbolism of the dispersal of black people creates a racially homogeneous imaginary.

Johnson's work is interpreted for local purposes. His classification of Yorùbá identity suggests that the cultural practices of the Yorùbá of Southwestern Nigeria were not reducible to shared racial or ethnic commonalities. Yorùbá were organized in units that cut across lines of ethnicity, kinship and religious practices. The effect of Johnson's typography was to cast those who were not members of the newly developing ethnic group as outsiders. However, the Ọ̀ba's incorporation of race as kinship replaced these regional codes with a deployment of a new politics of nationhood and place. This difference in historical expression represents differences in narrative intention. It also suggests that while, on the one hand, Johnson's history of the Yorùbá details the rise and fall of the Yorùbá people in relation to the downfall of the Ọ̀yọ́ Empire and the enslavement of Yorùbá captives of war, on the other hand, it provides the chronotopic opening by which Yorùbá revivalists can claim strategic complicity to their own enslavement. That is to say that the precarious mechanisms of modern values that enable the conflation of race with the ancestral unity of a shared African past is allied with a moral authority in which causality and historical consequences can be conflated and strategically substituted with grand narratives of blood and statehood.

The precolonial history of the Yorùbá and the largely undocumented history of trans-Atlantic slavery are, through the biological imagery of race, imbued with alliances that also extend beyond the imagination of the nation state. During the early stage of his lecture, the Ọ̀ba emphasized the link between Americans and Africans in which he identified contemporary Ọ̀yọ́túnjí royalty as former Yorùbá nobility.<sup>21</sup> By making central Ọ̀yọ́-origin narratives the basis of their racial ancestry, the leader established and further reproduced particular types of Yorùbá subjects by using tropes of slavery to lay claim to transnational Yorùbá nobility. He employed a narrative that connected recursive temporalities of

African greed and egotism with transnational connections to African American complicity. With this profound sense of duty and charismatic presence, he connected the people of Ọ̀yọ́túnjí to those great cultures of antiquity.

### **Oral Techniques for Unity: Knowledge, Power and Governmentality**

Speech acts are the social practices that enable individuals to develop certain types of knowledge which, in particular contexts, overtly reference modern regimes of "truth" that shape individual subjectivity. Speech acts are embedded in referential indexical practices and are formed in relation to particular regimes of knowledge. These regimes provide frameworks from which individuals produce particular rhetorical and historical genres of knowing that correspond to the temporal and spatial particularities of the actor in question. By shifting the temporal and spatial terrain that is "becoming" Yorùbá and therefore reclaiming the history of Ọ̀yọ́ nobility, the Ọ̀ba a grammar of plurality to invoke the relevance of slavery and redemption to African Americans as critical components of Ọ̀yọ́ ancestry.

Various Nigerian Ọ̀yọ́ Yorùbá narratives of historical greatness represent people's desire for a particular type of national history. It is history that rests on the antiquity of the soil, on past lessons learned, on the wars fought and won and homogeneity in the midst of heterogeneity. Those narratives describe how omnipotent forces from the heavens protected the people against human suffering. While they obscure the ruthlessness and eventual defeat that accompanied the transformation of both cities, these stories link the Yorùbá people to great victories of warfare and Empire, conveying the power of place in designating historical belonging. They render the antiquity of its people an intrinsic component of what constitutes national belonging. Though the Ọ̀ba's representations of shared ancestral origins among black Ọ̀yọ́ practitioners and black Americans in Ọ̀yọ́túnjí marked both a linguistic and racial connection between the Ọ̀yọ́ Empire and the U.S. Ọ̀yọ́túnjí Village, his use of linguistic markers such as "we" and "our," instead of "my" or "I," the selection of possessive markers to convey the link between the archaic Yorùbá of the Ọ̀yọ́ Empire and the community assembled in the room, were critical geotemporal techniques.

Further, in the Ọ̀ba used Johnson's imagery of King Aole's arrows dispersed in many directions in order to signify the scattering of the Yorùbá people to the four corners of the earth. This metaphoric dispersal posits the existence of their Yorùbá homeland as a shared homeland from which Ọ̀yọ́túnjí practitioners believe

they were expelled and which they have symbolically reclaimed. Such a notion of diaspora and home is a dominant paradigm in the lives of many African Americans in this movement. Ọyótúnjí Villagers often refer to places in “Africa” as home and identify phenotypically black people in America as “Africans” and as such, the notion of a physical return to Africa is not essential. Instead, the ritualization of transnational identity provides Ọyótúnjí practitioners with a sense of belonging.

### Literary and Divinatory Institutions as Geotemporal Domains of Governance.

Some of the parallels between the deceased man, described in the opening pages of this text, Samuel Johnson’s description of King Aole’s suicide, and the Ọba of Ọyótúnjí’s retelling of King Aole’s death are that they are connected to the factors that shape what constitutes honourable deaths. For while they all share the dilemma of colonial inscriptions entrenched within particular taxonomies of morality, virtue and retribution, the convergences between justifiable deaths and retributive deaths are taxonomically problematic. As obscure as the sources of these contestations may be, they both point to distinctions between the codes of governance and codes of personal accountability, highlighting the ways that acts are embedded in politics of governmentality.

Firstly, the social hierarchies of nobility and kingship were narrowly defined by the Ọba both in relation to Ọyótúnjí and its ancestral Ọyọ origins and through distinctions between rulers and followers. As an absolute monarch, the Ọba defined personhood by de-centring individual ownership of subjectivity. As he stated, “the ego of a nation should be contained within the Ọba. He should have an ego, nothing should be denied him and he should be above the common law.” In other words, it is different for a noble king to exercise the choice to take his own life. However, because of the politics of hierarchy and governance, everyday citizens are not expected to exercise absolute power by committing suicide. Their actions are expected to maintain standard codes of order.

Being highly stratified, Ọyótúnjí’s social hierarchy is divided into levels that range from the Ọba (king) at the head of the apex, the chiefs, the head priest and then the non-priest practitioners and finally general clients. Ọyótúnjí’s political sphere is represented publicly as a democratic dictatorship in which the political leader known in Yorùbá as an Ọba (king) ultimately has symbolic as well as physical decision-making power. The Ọba, sophisticated and traditionally learned, is more

commonly known by his followers both in and outside of Ọyótúnjí as the Yorùbá father of dispersed Africans. He claims a constituency of thousands of African Americans in the United States, hundreds of whom lived and trained in Ọyótúnjí and continue to be connected by computer based information technologies (the world wide web), telephone communications and postal mail.

It is the Ọba who appoints all of the chiefs. As wards of the state, the chiefs must serve the Ọba and Ọyótúnjí kingdom. They divided into two basic groups—those who are on his inner executive council and are voting members of the Ọgbóni society, and those on the outer executive council who are not voting members of the Ọgbóni society. They are the: (1) *Afin* chief, (2) *town* chief and (3) honorary or ancillary chief. Although not all chiefs sit on the Ọgbóni, all of the members of the Ọba’s inner executive—the *Afin* and *town* chiefs—constitute the Ọgbóni.

The *Afin* chiefs govern the well-being of the *Afin* or palace and oversee the affairs of the town. The duties may involve collecting taxes and documenting the monetary affairs of the crown. The town/district chiefs who are also on the inner executive council govern specific districts within the town. There are a total of eight *Afin* and town chiefs in Ọyótúnjí and these chiefs must be priests of an Ọrìṣà. Their titles reflect political positions of importance and are always described in Yorùbá: *Chief Ajetunka* (town chief and tax collector), *Chief Eléṣin* (the right hand man of the king), the *Chief Alàgbà* (the head of the men’s society), and *Chief Oni Sàngó* (head of the *Sàngó* temple). The other members include the chief priest who is the head of the society of priests (*Igbi-monolosa*), the head of the women’s society (*Egbé Morèmi*) and the head of the men’s society (*Akíkanjú*), the *Ìyálóde* (mother of the town), the *Dowpe gan* (head of the work force), the *Ìyá Oríitẹ* (mother of protocol), the principle of the Yorùbá Theological Archministry (school), the head of tourism and the head of the militia.

With knowledge about Yorùbá traditions emerging from traditions of Western scholarship, formal Ọyótúnjí Village politics are organized around a political system of governance known as and documented by scholars as the *Ọgbóni Council*. In Ọyótúnjí, like in 19th-century Nigeria, *Ọgbóni*, is a Yorùbá word referring to landholders who participate in the central ruling council. It is based on a form of formal representation in which member chiefs meet to consider and rule on issues and disputes that cannot be dealt with in smaller religious or interest-based councils. Instituted as the Ọyótúnjí governing board of the community, all governing decisions are made by the *Council of the Ọgbóni*. Represented by

the Ọyótúnjí priestly leadership having authority granted by the ancestors (the earth spirits), the Ọgbóni is responsible for administering religious, legislative, judicial, legal and executive matters. In general terms, most residents see it as serving the ancestors and their families. With the force of democratic input, each member of the council has one vote and the Ọba, as the chief priest of the Ọrìsàs and of the Ọgbóni society, has the final word on all decisions. He also has the power to appoint his chiefs and to dismiss them from office, but is expected to serve his administration with the goals and well-being of all of his members in mind. The various societies in Ọyótúnjí implement the goals of the Ọgbóni on a daily basis and are not only answerable to the king, but to all of the members of the Ọgbóni.

Like Old World Ọgbóni members, many of whom who took their membership to the earth cult seriously, Ọyótúnjí Ọgbóni members are also dedicated cult participants. To claim membership, residents must undergo a solemn induction into the secret society. This induction takes the form of ritual sacrifices, prayers, bodily inscriptions as well as private and public utterances of sacred oaths. As it is popularly believed by residents, secretive ritual initiation for public office provides practitioners with the ancestral power from which to reclaim Yorùbá cultural and political life as their own. The value of religion as the basis for Ọyótúnjí political and social life neither lies in the institution nor in the practice of religion itself. It lies in the geopolitics of transnational ancestry in which African Americans who were forcibly enslaved can reclaim pre-slavery/colonial religious beliefs as their own. Thus, many practitioners believe that Yorùbá ancestral forces live within them and it is through ritual that they communicate with them.<sup>22</sup> The links between Southwestern Nigeria and life in the Americas is played out through invocations to the middle passage by which ritual acts are used by practitioners to commune with their Yorùbá ancestors. Prominently displaying reminders of slave captivity through sculptures that feature life-size broad-nosed, proud African ancestors, they study, worship and wear the *elekes* (beads) of their initiation into Yorùbá *orisa* rituals, believing that it is to ancient Yorùbáland, and not to America, that their souls will return when they die.

To date, the lack of many transnational studies on African countries that examine the specificities of cultural processes as socially, politically and economically embedded within and outside of Africa, highlight the desperate need for such examinations of transnational social change. Yet, these links in the study of social change should neither be posited as exceptions nor

should they be relegated to the margins. Rather, such analyses are central to the ways that European colonial history is fundamental to the ways that we understand the geopolitics of making and unmaking transnational alliances in the midst of social contestations. This is so, especially in relation to the ways that individuals use competing notions of history to produce complex forms of governmentality.

Secondly, in examining the codes of governance in relation to the connections between spiritual and textual knowledge, the Ọba often legitimized his assertions in relation to books or ancestral designations. By claiming divine ancestral teachings the Ọba performed his duty within a system of authority, similar to what is mythologized in the histories of the Yorùbá Empire. With implicit references to canonical sources, the Ọba's political authority was evident during his introductory remarks in which he cited the established canon of Yorùbá literature and asserted it through his authority as a king. For in order for the Ọba to adopt and produce doctrine that his membership had to follow, it was important to establish boundaries for his membership to exercise choice. This opening for how to deal with choices is connected to the second issue, personal accountability. Clearly, in the Ọba's case, Ọyó-based nobility also extends beyond his person. His speech, like everyday oratory, was governed by codes of interpretive legitimacy that he used to modify the types of subjects and actions that he felt needed to be studied. However, in order to maintain his own authority to interpret history, his message was assumed to be informed by ancestral channels and historical sources. Thus, his identity was not that of a small-framed, American-born man from Detroit, Michigan. Rather, and as one woman mentioned to me in an interview, "the Ọba is a transmitter of royal Yorùbá knowledge."

Returning to the opening passage in which the young man from Ọyótúnjí committed suicide, we see that individuals are able to use canonical histories and themes to incorporate old forms, while at the same time reproducing those forms to create new forms of innovations. Even as they are entreated to form a way of life intended to reclaim a morality contrary to the egotism and shame of suicide (which sealed the demise of the Ọyó Empire), the Ọba used the symbolism of suicide to discuss the parameters of appropriate behavioural practices—that of the honour and nobility of redemption.

Given the differences in the exercise of the Ọba or King Aole's power, and the expectations of revivalist followers, the differences are not in the contradictions. The contradictions make the differing power relations and

shape the criteria for who should be revered after death. They are connected to the changing mechanisms of value that are based on the differential politics of power and the institutions of knowledge that legitimize some forms of knowledge and not others.

While Johnson's history aimed to show how the demise of the Ọ̀yọ́ Empire was based on a transcendence of power—the abuse of power which ultimately led to the victory of British and Moslem colonial interests, he also blamed “outsiders” for contributing to the forces that led to the “civilization of the Yorùbá.”<sup>23</sup> For the Ọba of Ọ̀yọ́túnjì, vices within the Ọ̀yọ́ governing elite did not produce long-term ideological gains. His narration of Johnson's history did, however, highlight other effects of that earlier period of disruption on the current Ọ̀yọ́túnjì community. For in his talk, people in the present who “descend” from those who suffered the consequences of disagreements among royal kin were told that they are embodiments of the long-term consequences of those disagreements. As he explained, “There is a lesson which we here have never forgotten and that is why we try to teach royals to restrain their obstreperous egos—because we have never forgotten what happened to Başòrun Gáhà.”<sup>24</sup> The Ọba referenced the historical royal figure, Başòrun Gáhà to show how the lessons of Gaha were relevant to members of the Ọ̀yọ́túnjì's own nobility, implying that their descent followed that of ancestral royalty.

In legitimizing his lesson, the Ọba linked historical and divinatory knowledge with textual histories. In relation to the task of creating homogeneity in the midst of spatial and temporal heterogeneity, he drew upon two beliefs central to the Yorùbá revivalist canon: the beliefs that black Americans are intimately linked to the antiquity of the Yorùbá people, and, despite their enslavement, that they carry noble blood. Through this connection, he adopted King Aole's curse of enslavement as a necessary consequence of Àfọ̀njá's dishonourable transgressions.

The authoritative sources that support Ọba Adéfúnmi I's narration of identity and history are critical for understanding the determinants of what constitutes history, how these are charted, and to what extent disjunctures and conjunctures are significant to the overall reformulation of the past. Today, contestations over the standardization of modern temporal and spatial configurations have profound implications for the ways in which Yorùbá experiences are conceptualized, “authenticated,” and claimed by those who see themselves as the offspring of enslaved Africans and who became “Yorùbá.” The interpretations of “traditional”

Yorùbá practices and histories are numerous. Noting the flexibility of some aspects of making history, we see how popular knowledge can be incorporated into dominant canonical ideologies and vice versa. Yet whatever the historical norms, the processes by which individuals achieve derive are of utmost importance. In the case of Yorùbá revivalist practitioners in the U.S., geotemporal means are critical for the reconfiguration of transnational subjecthood and highlight which institutions or what practices are relevant in legitimizing the establishment of norms.

Paying analytic attention to the circulation of forms of the knowledge which are reconstituted and produce new domains through which meanings are transformed raises questions about the authoritative sources that shape everyday meaning. In American communities where geographic rupture is fundamental to *Ọ̀rìṣà* imagery and “homeland” claims, the systematic knowledge that constitutes the Yorùbá canon is mutually tied to the modern processes of shaping categoric distinctions between blackness and whiteness, life and death, *civilization* and *heathenism*, in relation to other possible approaches to ordering. And although the ordering of normative meanings is critical to the authorization of knowledge, I have demonstrated that the reproduction of both oral and written texts depends on the regulated unity of a shared classificatory universe. Ultimately, variation is possible within the authority of particular institutions. In this regard, the notion of Yorùbá belonging has taken on different spatial and temporal dimensions in different sites within relations of historical and contemporary power.

This process of making and remaking Yorùbá history speaks to the ways that subjectivity is reconceptualized and narrated across transnational borders and the mechanisms by which individuals form alliances with power. Though many members of Ọ̀yọ́túnjì base the authority of their worldview on the same texts whose writing was constituted within different historical moments, the differences in relevance reflects the ways that power is negotiated in different circumstances, with different criteria, and for different processes of recapitulation. The institutionalization of various normative practices used by leaders of Ọ̀yọ́túnjì to enforce particular articulations of modern subjectivities is connected to the referential values embedded within them that circulate within relations of power. Thus, any analysis of the intellectual production of Yorùbá nationhood in the South Carolina Ọ̀yọ́túnjì enclave necessarily connects to the standardization of normative parameters of the past with the interpretive politics of governance and legiti-

macy in the present. It pushes us to go beyond highlighting the uniforming processes of colonialism and the development of national governance and to focus on the ways that individuals act within, outside and through historically constituted histories. It also provides us with ethnographic insights for theorizing the means and conditions under which new historical narratives are produced, reproduced and realigned along vectors of power.

*Kamari Maxine Clarke, Department of Anthropology, Yale University, 51 Hillhouse Avenue, P.O. Box 208277, New Haven, Connecticut, 06520-8277, U.S.A.*

## Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Carolyn Martin Shaw, Barnar Hesse, Steve Small, Brackette Williams, Jacob Olupona, Ore Yusuf, Jennifer Burrell, Mirhi Inal, and seminars at Welseyan University, Yale University, and the Anthropology department at the University of California, Berkeley, for their input and comments on this essay.

## Notes

- 1 Members of the family disagreed with the Oba's decision and attempted to address his appeal to literary documentation by asking the resident anthropologist to discuss with him the various ways in which traditions change—even in the literature.
- 2 The colours of the three flags are red, green and gold; red and black; white and black, respectively.
- 3 M.R. Delaney and Robert Campbell, *In Search for a Place: Black Separatism and Africa*, 1860, 114-115. Here the authors discuss the role of Liberia and Sierra Leone in putting an end to the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.
- 4 Although British officials in the 1890s trained groups of Nigerians to carry out the visions of nation building within standards of civil society, an earlier class of Yorùbá-speaking people who lived in the region in the mid-1800s preceded them.
- 5 See "Journal of a Visit to the Encampment" Samuel Annear, Badagry 1844, Methodist archives, London.
- 6 Òyó residents' overt religious alliances with either Christianity or Islam are often coupled with a degree of hostility toward what they classify as "pagan traditions" conceived of as "old-time" and in mystical terms. Despite the critique of paganism, large numbers of people participate in the major festivals, regardless of their professed faith. Yorùbá orisa worship and religious practices are still enmeshed in the cultural life of many traditionalists in the countryside.
- 7 This stratification of ethnicity within nationality was exacerbated during the post-colonial 1960s period of Nigerian nationalism in which ethnicity, religious, or kinship subcategories were reunited with deeply penetrating forms of ethnic difference which ultimately led to fierce civil rivalries.
- 8 The word *Yorùbá*, a derivative of the Hausa word *Yaraba*, referring to the people of Òyó, emerged outside of Nigeria. It was used in Sierra Leone by European C.M.S. missionaries and was re-signified as Yorùbá by literate Òyó

missionaries who claimed it as a way to describe Òyó as the country of the Yorùbá.

- 9 The interpretive oral descriptions of Yorùbá history, politics and beliefs that circulated within and outside of the British colonial apparatus were diverse and shaped the narrative tropes about the Yorùbá past.
- 10 In 1897, J.O. George published his lectures in a book entitled *Historical Notes on the Yorùbá Country and Its Tribes*.
- 11 Their original codes of organization were either appropriated or transformed.
- 12 For one thing, Johnson argued that missionization had advanced Yorùbá society beyond paganism and aided in its growing civility and general progress.
- 13 Samuel Johnson also provided records about the work of Captain Clapperton, an early British explorer who recorded his observations about Yorùbá social life, and Colonel Ellis, a prolific writer whose work on Yorùbá ethnography was prominent from the end of the 19th century into the early 20th century.
- 14 Johnson, using mythic tales and historical documentation, describes many wars and successions. His account of pre-18th-century history was based on the customs and lore of the Yorùbá people. Evidence of the details of military succession in Yorùbáland before the 19th century is scant, however; 18th-century travellers wrote about the rulers of the Òyó Kingdom as "a great warlike people" who from 1738 to 1747 raided Dahomey land until the Dahomey king promised to pay tribute to the Òyó Empire.
- 15 Characterized here as the first significant period of war that led to the decline of the Òyó Empire, the 1820 Òwu civil war, and then the Àfònjá revolt against the Aláàfin at Ilorin (1824).
- 16 In the ranking system Kakañfò is higher than Baṣòrun.
- 17 Following the death of King Aole, Àfònjá the Kakañfò and Opele the Bale of Gbogun, declared their independence and ceased extracting tribute from the local towns (Johnson, 1921: 193). The downfall of the Yorùbá kingdom coincided with the beginning of tribal independence. Johnson described the post-1837 period of the political struggle over Òyó's successor states. He depicts the Fulani southward invasion of Yorùbáland as symbolic of the aforementioned demise of Yorùbá dominance and of the development of the dominance of Islam in the Òyó region.
- 18 J.D.Y. Peel ascribes the contest between competing centres of national power—the Yorùbá Kingdoms of Benin, (Bini), Dahomey (Aja), and Òyó—as key to understanding the rise of Yorùbá identity. The rise in Òyó-Yorùbá power has been described as "three brothers quarrel and their homes are invaded by strangers." The strangers signify Islamic forces that are popularly represented by Yorùbá Christians as invaders into Yorùbá territory. Fage, on the other hand, emphasizes how the political system of the Òyó rose to empire status in the 18th century, thereby enforcing particular forms of Yorùbá identity. Other scholars such as Akinjobin, in an attempt to demonstrate how the development of a unified conception of Yorùbá people came into being, argue that through intermarriage, common religious practices over time and political and economic dominance the Yorùbá came to constitute a distinct-

- tive Yorùbá linguistic and cultural group (1972: 318-320). Regardless of the forces of power that enabled Yorùbá dominance or subordination, it is not difficult to recognize that they all share a fundamental assumption that the roots of the Yorùbá should be argued in terms of an authentic past.
- 19 Ilé-Ifè is often recognized as being the originary homeland, the site of the formative development of Yorùbá cultural practices, the place where Yorùbá gods originated and the place that the deceased are said to return.
- 20 *Obánjókó*, in Yorùbá means *the Qba sits*. It refers to the *Qba's* assumption of a position of authority which requires him to leave his royal quarters and join the community.
- 21 Ultimately, his invocation of black American slavery served to legitimize what he posited as the long-standing connection between African Americans and Africans along the West African coast. For the *Qba*, Johnson's Yorùbá also reside in the Americas and through divinatory ritual, it is believed, African Americans have the tools to interpret the past and redeem themselves from the injustices and the betrayal of enslavement.
- 22 "Blackness" remains the sole qualification for membership into the *Qyótúnjì* Yorùbá secret societies.
- 23 Johnson represented this as taking place through the partial eradication of non-Christian polygamy and heathenism.
- 24 The *Qba* misrepresented Baron Gáhà. His title is actually *Başòrun Gáhà*. This "misrepresentation" is telling, if not accidental, as it might be an equation of "noble" titles.

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