Building Status and Overseas Networks: Erin-Osun Artists Manage Devaluation

Debbie Klein

Everything depends on money. My son knows the art of drumming very well: anybody can just come and invite him for a performance. But because there may not be musical performances all the time, he opted to go and learn driving! Before in Nigeria, we had a lot of performances because we had a large number of traditional worshippers who would organize different traditional festivals then. But nowadays, we do not have them again; we just have weekend performances. In the past, my father would go from one ceremony to another playing drums for the celebrants. They even knew him quite well. He was very popular—Osogbo, Ile-Ife, Ede. We went to play, and we ate and drank a lot. No problem at all that time. Although we might not realize a huge sum of money then, we were satisfied. But now, if you go out to perform, you may realize something like four hundred naira or two hundred naira, by the following week, you will have spent it. That is why individuals are looking for other fine opportunities. For instance, my other son, though he is a very good drummer, is still training as a barber. If there is no ceremony, he can go to his workshop. It is not an easy thing.

—Ayangbola, January 2, 1997

How do members of Yoruba drum and masquerade lineages manage to earn a living during prolonged periods of economic decline? This chapter examines how artists incorporate money into their culturally specific negotiations of status and reputation in the small Oyo (Yoruba) town of Erin-Osun where the Ayan
and Oje families constantly debate their problem of access to money during times of scarcity. It centers on the ways in which artists survive through their negotiations of money, status, and identities as worldly performers. My argument is built upon the Yoruba understanding that the possession of money is not only a realization of material wealth but also, symbolically, a realization of self (Guyer 1995; Barber 1995).

The story that follows pivots around a quarrel between two brothers and is told to illustrate the tensions that emerge as Erin-Osun artists negotiate for money. On the one hand, masquerade dancers and drummers manage to access foreign currency—giving them an enhanced status—through their participation in international performances of African art and culture. On the other hand, the limited access to overseas networks provokes more intense competition for status, which is potentially divisive. This study explores the emergence of a particular type of transnational identity among Yoruba artists as they imagine and survive within the fluid, far-reaching networks of sponsors, collaborators, friends, and fans at home and abroad.

This study is set in Erin-Osun, a small rural town about five kilometers from Osogbo. Since 1990, I have conducted fieldwork in Erin-Osun on three occasions: in 1990–1991, when I was an exchange student at the University of Ibadan; in 1995, when I did preliminary postgraduate research; and from September 1996 to December 1997, when I lived full time there. My research focused on the extended lineages of drummers and masqueraders in Erin-Osun for the most part but also in other parts of Southwest Nigeria. My methods of data collection included: participant observation for fifteen months in the Ayan family compound in Erin-Osun; apprenticeship as a drummer of the báá́á drum and dancer during which I accompanied the performers on their outings; participation in the daily nonperforming activities of the artists (farming, barbing, and making drums); informal and formal interviews with men and women of the Ayan and Oje families, their friends, and audiences about alá́rínjó (traveling masquerade dancers) performances; audio and video documentation of performances; the collection of national and local newspaper articles about arts and culture; participant observation with state and privately sponsored cultural institutions, such as the Osun State Cultural Center and the Nike Center for Arts and Culture; archival and interview research on the history of Erin-Osun; and the collection of twenty extensive life histories covering three generations of Ayan and Oje artists. My study has shown that small towns like Erin-Osun are not isolated, culturally static, or neatly bound communities and that the people living there do communicate with and participate within the larger institutional structures that make up Nigeria’s popular economy.

**BRIEF HISTORY OF ERIN-OSUN DRUM AND MASQUERADE PERFORMANCE**

Since the 1950s, Erin-Osun artists have been involved with what has come to be known as “the Osogbo arts scene.” Beginning in the 1940s during colonialism, this grew out of an organized network of Yoruba theatre companies (see Adekola 1995; Barber and Ogundijo 1994), various visual artists’ workshops, and a lively local performance culture—which involved a wide cast of actors, dancers, musicians, visual artists, and sponsors of the arts. A central figure in this scene was the German scholar and patron of the Yoruba arts, Ulli Beier, who lived in the Osogbo vicinity for many years between 1950 and 1970 and indeed contributed to the development of the Yoruba arts scene. Over the years, Beier has sponsored several Osogbo artists in Nigeria, personally hosting and arranging performances for Erin-Osun artists in Germany. Beier set up an “Iwáráalé [good behavior is beauty] House” in Bayreuth, Germany, a venue that soon became a magnet for African art exhibits and cultural performances in Europe. Thus, for the past fifty years, Osogbo and Erin-Osun artists have been intimately intertwined with wealthy overseas (particularly German and American) patrons. This transnational connection has altered the state of these artists’ economic status within Nigeria, their relationship with money, and their identities as international artists.

While many of the Erin-Osun artists have traveled widely, the story that follows shows how their interpretations and understandings of the world emerge from culturally and economically specific positions. This story concerns an ongoing rivalry between a junior and a senior brother who are in their twenties; both are masquerade performers. As with many Yoruba rivalries, this enmity involves whole families, the town police, the king, and townspeople, showing the durability of kinship support systems as members of kin groups vie for status and money. Set within the economic devaluation of the mid-1980s and early 1990s, the story is timely, as it gains momentum from the artists’ changing experiences with overseas travel and access to international networks. Overseas travel has become a critical means of accessing “money”—both material wealth and importantly, a sense of self—and has become a means of survival for Erin-Osun artists.

While overseas travel provides these artists with immediate access to various international economies, they are simultaneously active members of the Nigerian economy. Much of their income derives from their participation in local ceremonies that provide a regular cash income, though meager, as well as opportunities to gain popularity and visibility within Nigeria. The market for alá́rínjó (itinerant drummers and dancers) performance has slowly changed throughout the past fifty years due to various cultural, religious, and economic factors. Adherence to Islam and Christianity has reduced the frequency with which báá́á drummers and masqueraders are formally invited to perform at certain types of functions, especially as the worship and celebration of the òrìṣà (Yoruba deities) declines. Until fairly recently (the past twenty years), the Erin-Osun drummers’ and masqueraders’ performing schedules followed the yearly ritual calendar, which featured a series of two-week or even month-long celebrations for different òrìṣà, depending on the particular season and town. Today, the same artists’ performing schedules have been largely consolidated to week-
ends, when families celebrate secular rites of passage, such as funerals and weddings.

Because of the declining practice of ṣe (traditional religion), the drums once closely associated with Yoruba ṣe have steadily begun to lose their religious association. Thus, bárádrummers and dancers are now invited to perform for social occasions, despite their religious and ritual historical significance. Thus, now bádra drummers and dancers may perform more frequently than before, for celebrants no longer perceive the presence of such performance as a threat to their religious beliefs. Celebrants assume that even the artists themselves are practicing Muslims (or Christians) who continue to engage in bádra drumming and dancing as a profession.⁵

Nevertheless, religious tension continues to shape the performing patterns of Erin-Osun artists. It is not uncommon for a family to suggest politely to drummers and dancers that they should not play at a particular celebration because a devoutly religious Muslim or Christian celebrant prefers a different type of performance: fúrú, alárinjó performers, jùjú, highlife, or Christian gospel music. However, plenty of Muslim and Christian celebrants still welcome bádra drummers and dancers because they are proud of the talent and skill of the artists, who are conversant with historical and cultural texts, dances, and music. The fact that these artists have also performed overseas increases their marketability within local ceremonies: “If the òyìnló (white men) appreciate these artists, they must be worth inviting.”

Migration from the countryside to the larger urban centers has meant that ceremonies now mostly occur on weekends (Fridays and Saturdays) when families and friends have time to travel back to their country homes to celebrate funerals, marriages, or naming ceremonies. Whereas previously the Erin-Osun artists used to travel from celebration to celebration every day of the week, often physically unable to perform at all the functions to which they had been invited, now the artists must depend on the one or two ceremonies for which they play during the weekends to provide enough money to cover their immediate travel and food (and possibly accommodation) expenses. Historically, some artists were also apprenticed to other trades in order to have another career option and source of income to tide them over periods when few ceremonies occur. Today, these artists rely more heavily on alternate careers—barbing, carpentry, taxi driving, tailoring—because of this market contraction.

Active participation of the artists in the expanding overseas market for Yoruba traditional performance can complement, not necessarily compete with, their involvement in the changing performance market in Nigeria. Ironically, though Nigeria has not fared well in the international arena because of its prolonged economic and political crisis, Nigerian cultural performance continued to thrive in international arenas of music, dance, and religion—the growing global market that commodifies African culture through the international sale of music, textiles, and the accoutrements of ṣe worship.⁶ For access to this market, Erin-Osun artists are highly dependent upon their past and present networks of sponsors, friends, and co-artists who arrange international performances and teaching venues for them.

**STATUS: COMPETING HIERARCHIES**

Status, as argued here, is a category of historical and present cultural significance that is constantly debated and created. The story that follows centers on the contestation over status of two brothers, Saidi and Wasiu Ojetunde. It illustrates ways in which the indicators of status, and the process of judging it, are negotiated along the paths of seniority (within a kin group), performance skills/abilities, international travel, and finally, gender. During the devaluation crisis of the 1990s, status contests were intensified because status fluctuated at an even greater rate than before; status became more difficult to achieve and maintain as the naira decreased in value. The struggle of the two Ojetunde brothers provides a complex picture of masculinity as expressed by masquerade performers. Men of masquerade families are known as lágíbrá (owners of strength), because their work requires them to execute difficult acrobatic tricks and dances while adorned in heavy masks and costumes. Members of the Ojetunde family have a well-known reputation as hot-tempered fighters, especially when they are provoked or challenged. Masquerade dancers, however, combine this rather typical attribute of masculinity with performances of grace and skill, where they are adorned in elaborate, flowing costumes, often made of the latest fashionable material—“baby lace,” “mirror,” “satin lace,” or “ankara.” The local slang that best describes the ìwá (character) of a masquerade dancer is “guy”—a tough, self-assured, fashionable worldliness. While girls and women are also capable of being guy, there is a particularly masculine guy expressed by masquerade dancers—a combination of the physical prowess of a fighter and an acrobat and the highly stylized composure of a dancer and a praise-singer.

It can be argued that men’s contests for identity and money between themselves are often contingent upon their relationships with women, especially during hard economic times.⁷ The dispute that sparked the rivalry inherent in the story between the brothers was between Saidi Ojetunde, the senior brother, and his junior wife, Doja. Throughout the story, Doja’s actions make matters increasingly difficult for her husband as she leaves their home and freely reveals damaging information about Saidi to impugn his reputation. Doja fires the rivalry between Saidi and his junior brother, Wasiu. She strategically deploys her own guy status to threaten her husband’s guy qualities in order to control their marriage.

**STORY AS METHODOLOGY**

Initially, I came to know about the Ojetunde family dispute through everyday conversations with different members of the Ayan drumming family of Iyalọja’s compound, in particular with my close friend, Lamidi Ayankunle, who was
directly involved in the fight as a supportive friend and dispute mediator. Lamidi is also a well-respected drummer in town as well as a close friend of the Ojetunde family. The original fight (the source of later contestation) lasted for about a week, during which Lamidi helped to diffuse and mediate daily events. Through Lamidi’s emotionally charged explanations of events as they occurred, I first came to understand the story that follows. During this week, the conflict between the brothers was the talk of the compound. Everybody was talking about it. As a member of the household, I discussed the story with my age group, the younger members of the drumming compound, who were also involved as friends and mediators of either one of the parties. As news about this type of fight tends to spread quickly throughout the town, interpretations and adaptations of the story spread in the local food canteens and beer parlors.

After I had written and presented an initial version of this text for an academic workshop in Ibadan, one of my research assistants and I discussed the Yoruba version of the account with two of the story’s characters, Saidi Ojetunde and Lamidi Ayankunle. To my initial surprise, this meeting revived some of the tension that had emerged in the fight. Though the events of the fight occurred almost a year previously, they were still sensitive and difficult matters for Saidi to discuss openly. Before Saidi gave me his permission to narrate his personal struggles, he requested that parts of the story be removed from the text, as he felt that a documented report of such a fight might exacerbate existing tensions. These events are recounted to illustrate how debates on social and economic issues can change during periods of economic depression. The story provides a form of discursive data, which allows us to appreciate how Erin-Idun artists interpret cultural values and practices within the broader dynamics of status and power (Tsing 1993, 9).

BACKGROUND TO THE STORY

Twenty-seven-year-old Saidi Ojetunde is his father’s firstborn child. As a little child, Saidi learned masquerade praise songs, dances, and drumming through traveling with his parents and the usual forms of socialization and apprenticeship at that time. Because both his mother and his father belonged to masquerade families, Saidi learned a variety of old songs and dances. His seniority as his father’s firstborn child and his thorough training also made him widely known for his praise-singing/greeting, dancing, acrobatic, and masquerade skills. Saidi is accorded respect as the most versatile performer of his family.

Saidi also enjoys a good reputation within the community. Gentle in spirit, respectful of people, stout and well built, Saidi is thought to have agbara (strength) and the capacity for bigness. He is a popular performer, well known for his skillful praise-singing, dancing, and acrobatic displays. Often, he is asked to bring his group to perform at ceremonies or celebrations in town. The audience likes him because he is more even tempered than other masqueraders, does not drink alcohol, and avoids fights.

Erin-Idun Artists Manage Devaluation

In 1992, Saidi traveled overseas to the United States for the first time under the sponsorship of the Nike Art Gallery of Osogbo. He was accompanied by his father, two of his father’s wives, his junior sister, and other artists from the Osogbo gallery. The following year Saidi traveled again to the United States, but this trip was poorly arranged and thus disappointing. Though the trip was a bit difficult because of the lack of prearranged programs, Saidi made a point of inviting his junior brother, Wasiu, to perform with him and, of course, to reap the symbolic and material benefits of traveling to the United States. Despite the uncertainty of the 1993 trip, the group managed to arrange performances; Saidi insists it was his favorite travel experience, because he was able to buy a car (which is now for sale) upon his return to Nigeria. In 1995 and 1996, Saidi went to Germany to perform in an annual festival organized by Ulli Beier. The master drummer from the Ayan compound, who arranged these trips with Ulli Beier, chose Saidi because of his solid reputation and performance skills. After his first trip overseas, Saidi married his first wife, Banke; after returning from his second trip, he married his second wife, Doja. Because of his relative youth, his ability to marry two wives was considered a major accomplishment, especially given Nigeria’s poor economy in the 1990s.

Saidi’s junior brother, Wasiu Ojetunde, is twenty-three years old and the firstborn of a different mother. Unlike Saidi’s mother, Wasiu’s mother is not from a masquerade family, so Wasiu learned his skills from his father and Saidi’s mother. Because of his poor health as an infant, Wasiu was presented with a protective egungun, an ancestral mask/spirit, which takes the material form of a costume made of assembled strips of old, imported cloth. Since then, this egungun has belonged to Wasiu, a significant symbol of his true membership in the Ojetunde lineage. Ownership of a masquerade enhances Wasiu’s status as a son of a masquerade family. Though Saidi also has a personal masquerade, Saidi’s egungun is self-invented and does not have the power and prestige of that of his junior brother. While Wasiu’s performance skills generally match those of Saidi, his knowledge of esu (masquerade texts) and his praise-singing skills have yet to develop fully. Because Saidi is senior, he has often asked his junior brother to back him, so Wasiu has had fewer opportunities to develop his own singing style and repertoire. In international performance contexts, this does not matter so much because praise-singing and esu are not very popular with audiences who do not understand Yoruba.

Before Saidi invited his junior brother to accompany him to the United States in 1993, Wasiu had already given up his profession as a masquerade performer because he was not able to make a good living. Although Wasiu grew disenchanted with dancing and drumming, Saidi encouraged him to continue with the family tradition, contending that things would improve. Wasiu had not been included in the group that went to Germany in 1995 and 1996. Hoping to make his own arrangements, he moved to Osogbo where he succeeded in meeting an artist who helped arrange a trip to a college in New Jersey in the United States. Thus, at the end of 1996, Wasiu traveled without his senior brother and
Money Struggles and City Life

came back to Nigeria one month later boasting of his great success and plans to return to the United States for programs already lined up for him. These plans failed to materialize, for he did not have enough funds for air travel, and consequently, could not qualify for a United States visa.

A CROWD GATHERS

On the night of February 17, 1997, two of my friends and I were strolling by Saidi Ojetunde’s house on our way back from Ile Igbamololu, a local beer parlor. There we met a growing crowd of people arguing heatedly. On enquiry, we were told that there had been another fight between Saidi Ojetunde and his junior wife, Doja, who had just fled the scene in their barely operational car, driving to her family house in the neighboring town, Ilogbo. Although the crowd intervened and begged the couple to stop fighting, concerned neighbors could not persuade Doja to stay with her husband. As we entered the scene, Saidi was explaining the substance of the disagreement to a curious crowd.

MANY WIVES, MANY PROBLEMS

Men in beer parlors tend to exclaim, after heated discussions about family disputes and many drinks: “Iyawo pâpô, wâhâlâ pâpô” (many wives, many problems). Saidi’s initial motivation in marrying a second wife was that his first wife, Banke, had not produced a surviving child since their marriage in 1994. At the time of the dispute under discussion, she was, however, pregnant. Although friends and neighbors did not question Saidi’s decision to marry again, they had advised him against marrying Doja, the wife who was now at the center of the dispute.

Doja is considerably older than Saidi, a large woman, financial well off, previously married, but without children. Why should Saidi marry a woman who had no children? There were two main reasons in favor of such a marriage. The prospective bride and groom felt that Doja was more likely to get pregnant if she married a young, strong man like Saidi. And Saidi further reasoned that Doja would not be a drain on his limited financial resources, like most potential new wives but would instead be a help to him financially. Since their marriage, however, the couple has fought quite a lot, and Doja has exhibited considerable jealousy towards her senior co-wife. When Banke again lost her baby, rumors began to circulate that Doja was the one who was responsible for the failure of the child to survive. Consequently, tension increased among Saidi and his two wives.

THE EIGHT-THOUSAND-NAIRA CLOTH

High quality, beautiful cloth is not cheap. This is where Saidi’s younger brother, Wasiu, enters the scene. Unlike Saidi, Wasiu exemplifies a masquerade dancer who is hot-tempered, ready to fight, and very gung. When Wasiu returned from his month-long trip to the United States, these characteristics became enhanced. One way in which Erin-Okun artists negotiate the disparities of wealth and opportunity that separate them from other Nigerian artists is to keep their previous experiences of overseas travel at the forefront of everyday discussions. By emphasizing their worldwide popularity and successes, Erin-Okun artists keep alive the promise and reality of their upcoming opportunities to go oké (overseas) again. When Wasiu returned from his trip to the United States, he returned in style, dressed in latest United States fashions—huge sportswear, thick name-brand trousers and T-shirt, baseball cap, and black leather jacket. He was reputed to have a large sum of money in hand, which, according to rumor, he intended to use to buy a car. Physically, his stature had changed—he had become fatter—evidence that he had enjoyed life overseas. Advised by his father not to hurry into buying a car, Wasiu felt free to “burn” some of his naira on cloth—a well-known sign of wealth and status (Barber 1995, 214). Wasiu also bragged about his plan to return to the United States in February 1997 to participate in Black History Month programs, although he has not been able to do so. The cloth that Wasiu bought was white lace of the highest quality, which his tailor then made into a Yoruba-style sọkọlù and ìbìbì (trousers and a long, roomy shirt). Wasiu proudly told me that he spent eight thousand naira on his cloth, which, he correctly assessed, was much more valuable than the cloth I happened to be wearing at the time. At that time (February 1997), eight thousand naira was the equivalent of one hundred dollars. When Wasiu was called by his father or Saidi to perform, he donned his new cloth. Naturally, the townspeople could not help but notice and comment upon Wasiu’s new affluence, which also reflected well upon his father. Wasiu was now able to incorporate his American experience into the self-introduction sections of his praise-singing.

Saidi, the senior brother, who had not traveled overseas since the summer of 1996, was annoyed and jealous that his younger brother had begun to attract attention away from himself and showed it openly. On Christmas Day, 1996, for instance, Saidi refused to lead his usual group of masquerade dancers and drummers on their annual tour of Erin-Okun houses, greeting and performing for families celebrating the holiday. Wasiu capitalized on this, leading the group, wearing his new white lace sọkọlù and ìbìbì. When I asked about Saidi, the group said that they thought he might be sick. About a month and a half later, I learned that Saidi chose not to perform that day because he could not afford to buy new cloth: he could not be seen wearing old cloth, performing alongside his younger brother.

Two months after the embarrassment and financial loss of Christmas Day, Saidi asked his junior wife, Doja, if she would lend him some money to buy new cloth. She refused. At this point, Saidi was desperate to have new cloth. He needed this as a face-saving measure—to defend his status and the public respect he had worked hard to achieve. In order to perform alongside his
Erin-Osun Artists Manage Devolution

After their failed attempt to see the king, Ojetunde and two of his wives went to Lagos to visit their relatives. Upon their return, they were greeted by Daja's house. When they asked about the fight, Daja straightened up, and his daughter, Hal, would travel for a year, his younger daughter, Yaka, would travel to the United States for six months. At the time, I understood that such plans to travel overseas are constant, and the process is uneventful. Sometime, however, they are seen as a means to an end.

Although six months later, it came as no surprise that Ojetunde, Wasi, and his wife, Sadi, would travel to the United States for six months, the reality of the situation was quite different. The energy and hope of overseas travel with which masquerade dancers pursue are not easily found in Wasi's case. Today, after so many years of travel, it is hard to imagine that Wasi's life would never be the same.

The subsequent partial state of Nigeria made it difficult for the family to secure visas, and the cost of air travel to the United States was prohibitive. In better days, travel agents could save at least a small amount of money toward that purchase of plane tickets, but before tourism could be exchanged, the family elders pulled the brothers apart and called the police.

GIVING ADVICE, SEEKING RESOLUTION

The third day of the fight began with Wasi going to Sadi's house, but he was still angry. Immediately before the fight, Wasi had discussed the matter with Ojetunde. According to Wasi, the young Ayomide was the only way to calm things down. The third day, Wasi was going to Sadi's house, but before the fight, Ojetunde told his wife, Sadi, that he must talk to his wife, Sadi, about the matter, and they must work together to figure out the best way to resolve the matter.

At this point, the king intervened. He offered prayers to hold their family together and pleaded with Ojetunde to seek revenge against his senior brother, but before things could be exchanged, the family elders pulled the brothers apart and called the police.

At this point, the king intervened. He offered prayers to hold their family together and pleaded with Ojetunde to seek revenge against his senior brother, but before things could be exchanged, the family elders pulled the brothers apart and called the police.

At this point, the king intervened. He offered prayers to hold their family together and pleaded with Ojetunde to seek revenge against his senior brother, but before things could be exchanged, the family elders pulled the brothers apart and called the police.

At this point, the king intervened. He offered prayers to hold their family together and pleaded with Ojetunde to seek revenge against his senior brother, but before things could be exchanged, the family elders pulled the brothers apart and called the police.
and the quality of their lives in Nigeria. "Nisâùrù" (be patient), they advised. They imploded:

By the grace of God, both of our families will benefit from our travels overseas and from the oyinbo [foreigners] who come to Erin-Osun. There is no sense in breaking apart your family because of money and unnecessary competition between two brothers, who are still only learning how to build their names. Please, stop this fighting.

But my drummer friends did not really think that the omo eléégün (children of masquerade dancers) would listen. They felt that this fight would continue to the bitter end. And so it did. Wasiu and Saidu could not control their anger and continued fighting, finally spending the better part of the day in the town jail. When their father learned of the morning fight between his sons, he was enraged; yet, he eventually arranged for their release by late afternoon.

**WOMEN’S THREATS**

The whole town gossiped about the fight. Saidu’s name was steadily being defamed. For instance, one of the popular stories started by one iyá olónjẹ (canteen owner) was meant to illustrate Saidu’s rather seedy and disrespectful character. One day in the past, her story went, Saidu, Wasiu, and Ojetunde were eating at her food canteen. All three men began to joke disrespectfully about the iyá olónjẹ, making sexual advances toward her and inquiring about her personal life. Saidu, she explained, had gone so far as to ask her to sleep with him. The next day, however, both Wasiu and Ojetunde returned to apologize for their offensive talk. Saidu, on the other hand, never apologized. “You see,” said the iyá olónjẹ, “everyone thinks Saidu is gentle and respectful, but his character is really questionable.” This story was powerful enough to spread doubts about the solid reputation Saidu had acquired over the years; however, the politics of gender are such that men often joke or flirt with women in public places as a display of masculinity.

Meanwhile, in an effort to appease Doja, three of the younger drummers went to her house to beg her not to be annoyed with Saidu. They apologized on Saidu’s behalf and asked her to return to Saidu’s house in Erin-Osun. The incentive for this visit was to investigate the rumor that Doja wanted to end the marriage—that she had had enough. Very worried about Doja’s desire for a separation or divorce, Saidu decided to diffuse the tension between him and Doja by asking her to return home. Indeed, Doja’s threat to end the marriage frightened Saidu and his family. If the marriage ended, they reasoned, Doja would be well positioned to use “medicine” against Saidu. Partly out of their fear that Doja could use her status as a financially secure, “big” woman to turn against Saidu, Ojetunde’s family and friends begged for her forgiveness.

**CONCLUSION**

Despite the economic decline, professional drummers and masqueraders still nurse the desire to have a great reputation. Although their skills once carried more value within Nigeria, these artists are still working the (contracted) local market for their daily survival. However, the more promising market for their trade is the international market of cultural performance. Participation in this market has enabled the artists to prosper. By performing overseas, these artists enhance their status in at least two ways. First, they can publicly boast about their travel experiences (in everyday discourse and performances). Second, they earn foreign currency and sometimes import status-rich items, such as good cars, which are not easily affordable in Nigeria. Thus, traveling enables these artists to manage devaluation through the importation of foreign currency, goods, and styles.

The story of the Ojetunde brothers’ competition for status illustrates the continued cultural relevance of becoming “big” men through an accumulation of material wealth. For masqueraders, whose profession is to entertain, cloth is an extremely important mark of wealth and identity. Explaining his pride in his family’s reputation within Nigeria, Saidu remarked, “Don’t you notice that our family always wears the best cloth? That is what sets us apart from other alarinjó groups” (Ojetunde: October 1, 1997).

Whereas many Oje and Ayan families have stopped teaching traditional masquerade and drumming skills to their children because the occupation is less relevant and profitable in today’s Nigeria, the Ojetunde family and the Ayan drummers of Iyalajo’s compound continue to negotiate their niche in the local, national, and international arenas of cultural performance. As long as they can build a sense of self-esteem and a base of material wealth through careers as masqueraders or drummers, the children of these Erin-Osun families maintain...
Money Struggles and City Life

interest in studying their family professions. During the devaluation crisis of the 1990s, interfamily competitions for status and money became more intense as the stakes became higher. Performing overseas is not only a means of acquiring material wealth, but also a means for building a name, and finally, for repositioning drum and masquerade performances in local and international arenas.

For Erin-Osun's artists, performing Yoruba traditional forms of entertainment at home and abroad is *ere*, a transformational process meaning both "work" and "play" (Drewal 1991). From my study of Erin-Osun performers, I suggest that they not only "work" within the context of their performance events, but also "work the gap" between local and overseas markets for Yoruba culture. Although in some respects, Yoruba culture in Nigeria has been devalued, there is simultaneously a valuation of such performance abroad. Working this gap may require physical travel, but it also involves an active process of imagination. Through imagining their relevance and survival in the global context, the local struggles of Erin-Osun artists surface as they "work the gap" between markets and desires for Yoruba culture. This process opens a productive, translocal space for collaboration and dialogue about the meaning of Yoruba performance and identity.

The death of the prominent and well-respected masquerader, Ojelade, inspired a moment for reflection and pause. Despite the difficulties of building a satisfying living and name as an Ayan or Oje performer, the need to continue practicing a tradition/profession that may cease with the deaths of seasoned performers became clear. His death reminded young artists that they must continue to work the gap between local and overseas markets in order to acquire fame and build their careers. As Erin-Osun artists debate their tentative positions within their extended kinship and overseas networks, they open spaces for cross-cultural collaboration—a transformative survival strategy allowing artists to manage the ever-shifting Nigerian economy.

NOTES

I have changed the names in this account to protect the anonymity of the individuals except in those cases where individuals requested that their real names be used. They read a draft of the original paper and offered editorial suggestions, which were incorporated in this chapter. After reviewing the final draft, the subjects of this chapter generously gave me their permission to publish the piece.

I wish to thank the Ayan and Oje artists of Erin-Osun for their unconditional patience and generosity. I also thank LaRay Denzer, Jane Guyer, Jonathan Haynes, David Aremu, Bayo Ogundijo, Anna Tsing, Jim Clifford, Paulla Ebron, Carolyn Martin Shaw, and the participants of the Ibadan devaluation workshop for their comments on earlier versions of this chapter. A note on orthography: I have tone-marked and italicized Yoruba words and phrases, but not proper names, like Ayan and Oje.

1. I invoke the popular term "manage" in much the same way as Nigerians use the term—to refer to an ongoing process of negotiating political, economic, and social conditions which often seem beyond the control of Nigerians constrained by military rule and the worthlessness of the naira. Managing, in this sense, is an active process whereby people invent ways of "coping" from day to day, while situating themselves within larger networks of power.

2. "Ayangulu" is the Yoruba *ôríyá* (deity) for drumming families who pass the skills and profession of Yoruba drumming from generation to generation: fathers train their sons. Children born into an Ayan lineage are given an Ayan name, such as Ayankunle meaning "drum spirit fills the house." The drummers of Ifalaja's compound, where I have conducted field research since 1990, specialize in *dánná* and *báá* drumming—two very different styles of Yoruba talking drums.

3. Oje families or *èleégán oje* are entertainment masqueraders (also known as *agbèyèrè, alùírí* [moving theatre] and *apídín*, Barber 1991: 337). They pass their skills and profession from one generation to the next: fathers and mothers train their sons and daughters. Children born into an Oje lineage are given an Oje name. Historically and presently, Oje families work closely with Ayan families: Oje performers typically dance, praise, sing, and perform acrobatic displays, while Ayan performers provide the accompanying drum rhythms and texts.

4. Anthropologists and cultural analysts (see Tsing and Ginsburg 1990) use the term "negotiate" to describe the process in which people debate, discuss, and rethink ideas and/or practices. To argue that culture is negotiable requires an analysis of the complexities of cultural meaning, as opposed to oversimplifications and generalizations.

5. In fact, many of the Ayan drummers and Oje masqueraders are indeed practicing Muslims, having converted since the 1950s (interview data). Many Muslim converts, however, do not give up their traditional beliefs or practices. A few artists continue to practice traditional religion and follow a number of *ôríyá* even though this is often socially unpopular in some areas. They continue to practice traditional religion in secret, visiting a *babaláwò* to perform certain rituals.

6. Given visa restrictions, people’s understandable desire to sell in foreign markets can only take certain forms, so they have to manage their portfolio of income-generating activities, for themselves and their associates, as best they can.

7. Married male artists often depend on the incomes, resourcefulness, and labor of their wives. Many of the Erin-Osun artists are married to more than one wife, although it is common for one or several of the wives to work or live elsewhere. Women are expected to take care of the children and are often not satisfied with the limited financial support their husbands provide. I have witnessed many arguments between husbands and wives over the issue of the husband not being able to "take care of his wife." Wives of the artists participate in a range of economic activities including: trading kola nuts; selling food items such as meat, rice, or salt; tailoring; and hairdressing. While it is ideally expected that women’s incomes merely supplement the income of their husbands, women often stretch their incomes to cover the daily costs of food and provisions for themselves and their children.

8. I use "big" in the Yoruba sense: achieving ultimate success. The anthropological literature that describes the concept of "big man" in West Africa is vast. I find Barber’s characterization of "bigness" most relevant to my discussion about status and money:

A Yoruba proverb, often written up as a motto on parlor walls and the sides of lorries, says "Mo lóní, mi lóní, ki ló tún ká òlò wá ló tún ná?" (I have money, I have people, what else is there that I have not got?). Money was one of the principle ways of gaining public acknowledgment as a big man; but "having people" constituted that acknowledgment itself. Wives and children, visiting matrilineal relatives, attached "stranger" segments in long-term residence, bondsmen, laborers, vis-
According to Barber, money initially helps to attract crowds of followers, but ultimately the number of loyal followers makes a big man big. This observation supports my point that status is an important marker of success, since status is publicly assessed by one’s supporters. However, I would argue that today, due to the declining economy, money plays a more important role in determining one’s bigness. That is, if one loses money (which is common today), his/her bigness is also at stake.

9. The historical and cultural significance of egúngún is a large topic that has been addressed in several works (see especially, Babayemi 1980).

10. When such seemingly unexplainable events occur—such as a young woman losing several children in succession—it is common for involved parties to assume some sort of negative otherworldly intervention, such as using a babaláwo’s (divination priest) medicines.

11. Although the Yoruba practice of mobilizing huge sums of money in order to enhance one’s reputation dates back at least to the nineteenth century (Barber 1995), some Yoruba people have tried to make adjustments. For instance, Doja decided that Saidi’s cloth or status was not worth the naíra. We might see the brothers’ desire to buy and display beautiful cloth during times of economic depression as an act of reckless pride and economic irresponsibility, in which the brothers are not willing to compromise their desires because of economic limitations. We might also see this kind of spending as continuous with Yoruba cultural values. Finally, Saidi’s defiance of his wife exemplifies a gender dilemma in which a Yoruba husband should not really have to ask his wife’s permission for anything.

12. The story of Ojelade’s death is curious. Though he was not sick, Ojelade called his senior children to Erin-Osun to tell them of the possibility of his death. He then removed all of the protective “medicine” from around his house, which signified to his children and friends that he had made the decision to die.

REFERENCES

Interviews in Erin-Osun
Ayangbola, Lamidi. 1997, January 2; September.
Ojetunde, Saidi. 1997, January 3; September; October 1.

Books and Articles