Africans and the Politics of Popular Culture

Edited by Toyin Falola and Augustine Agwuele
Contents

List of Illustrations ix
Preface xi

Introduction 1
Augustine Agwueke and Toyin Falola

1 From Primitive to Popular Culture: Why Kant Never Made It to Africa
Hetty ter Haar 17

Part One: Politics of Culture in Habitual Customs and Practices

2 Popular Culture of Yoruba Kinship Practices
Augustine Agwueke 41

3 Justice from Below: Cultural Capital, Local/Global Identity Processes, and Social Change in Eastern Niger
Antoinette Tidjani Alou 64

4 Popular Culture and the Resolution of Boundary Disputes in the Bamenda Grasslands of Cameroon
Enmanuel M. Mbah 84

5 Reverse Mission or Asylum Christianity?
A Nigerian Church in Europe
Asonezh Ukah 104

6 Performing Pop Tradition in Nigeria:
From Yoruba Bata to Batá Fuji
Debra L. Klein 133

Part Two: Politics of Culture in Popular Representations: Films and Performances

7 Reclaiming the Past or Assimilationist Rebellion?
Transforming the Self in Contemporary American Cinema
Celeste A. Fisher 167
Contents

8 Neither Bold nor Beautiful: Investigating the Impact of Western Soap Operas on Kenya
   Maurice N. Anumah
   185

9 The Lions in the Jungle: Representations of Africa and Africans in American Cinema
   Sarah Steinbeck-Pratt
   214

10 Sexuality in Caribbean Performance: Homocroticism and the African Body in Trinidad
    Denise Amy-Rose Forbes-Erickson
    237

11 Family Health Awareness in Popular Yoruba Arts
    Arinpe Adejumun
    261

Part Three: Politics of Culture in Popular Texts

12 Literary Cultural Nationalists as Ambassadors across the Diaspora
    Nicholas M. Coursy
    277

    Tokunbo A. Ayola
    299

List of Contributors

Index

Illustrations

5.1 A banner advertising the church in South Africa
5.2 A prayer session during an RCCG service
5.3 The regional headquarters of the Redeemed Christian Church in South Africa
5.4 The Tabernacle of Praise: RCCG South Africa
6.1 Ayán with Yoruba Básí drums
6.2 The Òjútúde group at Erin-Ósun’s Egúngún celebration
6.3 The Òjútúde group at a local outing. Òjútúde’s front pocket is full of naira
58. During the ordination ceremony, Adeboye had to tell his pastors that he was aware of the "behind the scene negotiations and lobbying" between the candidates for ordination and their superiors, and that some senior pastors had been lobbying him by writing letters in support of their candidates. He was clear that many might be seeking ordination in the RCCG as a way to cope with the hardships and uncertainties of migrant life in the UK.


Performing Pop Tradition in Nigeria: From Yorùbá Bátá to Bátá Fújí

DEBRA L. KLEIN

Introduction

Lead vocal: Èmi làyé!
Second vocal: Èmi! Èmi!
Lead: Èmi làyé!
Second: Èmi làyé mi!
Lead: Èmi làyé.
Second: Èmi làyé mi!
Lead vocal: It's me, alive in the world!
Second vocal: It's me! It's me!
Lead: It's me alive in the world!
Second: It's all about me!
Lead: Me! Me!
Lead: It's always me,
Me, alive in the world!

Wasin Alabi's catchy melody and lyrics, consisting of every possible combination of the words èmi (me), làyé (alive in the world), and mi (me), became a popular choral refrain with the cohort of fújí-loving bátá artists in the rural town of Erin-Quan, Nigeria, during the late 1990s. Whenever I joked with these artists about their potential stardom as globally renowned fújí front men, they would try to out-perform each other by singing and dancing some version of the tune, "Èmi làyé mi." Not only are the words and melody easy to remember, but they represent a significant shift in the style and content of performance for extended families of drummers and dancers who specialize in traditional Yorùbá bátá. "It's All about Me" gave the young artists the creative license to transform their traditional artists' identities into pop culture personas (see fig. 6.1). However, these young artists' fathers criticized
The traditional "Yorùbá Bátá generation," whose members are in their fifties and sixties, came of age in a newly independent and hopeful Nigeria. They have traveled the world as representatives of traditional culture since the 1960s, witnessed their tradition lose substance and meaning with the passing of each generation, and have come to see bátá as an endangered culture form. The "Bátá Fóji generation," whose members are in their twenties and thirties, came of age during two military dictatorships in which Nigeria's political economy plummeted into turmoil. They have traveled minimally with their fathers, inherited the bátá tradition and networks, invented bátá and pop music fusions in order to keep their tradition relevant, and relate to bátá as an evolving popular culture form.

While the late 1990s was economically challenging for most Nigerians, the members of the Yorùbá Bátá generation sought refuge in overseas networks they had built around the celebration and perpetuation of Yorùbá bátá; they continued to successfully recast themselves as traditional performers in a global market. Meanwhile, the Bátá Fóji generation invented a new performance genre through which its members revitalized their profession as purveyors of traditional culture during times of economic stress and cultural globalization. The market for bátá performance has slowly changed through the past fifty years due largely to cultural, religious, and economic factors, such as the following: (1) the social pressure to identify with Islam or Christianity has resulted in dwindling support for bátá, since bátá is still associated with ìrúk, the pantheon of Yorùbá spirits/gods/goddesses, even though bátá is also a secular entertainment tradition; and (2) increasing migration from the countryside to urban centers has meant that ceremonies are mostly held on weekends, when families and friends have time to travel back to their city homes to celebrate funerals, marriages, or naming ceremonies, thus confining the artists' performances to weekends. It is within this changing political, economic, and cultural context that both generations of bátá artists are reinventing their roles as traditional performers.

As an anthropologist trained in the United States during the 1990s, my primary methodologies include language study, long-term participant observation, semi-structured interviews, conversations, and life histories. Building on feminist and contemporary anthropological theory, I incorporate my subject position into my descriptions to clarify my epistemology. Specifically, my methods of data collection included the following sets of research activities between 1996 and 1998: (1) participant observation within Ààyàkínle's family compound in Òṣìṣi-Oṣù; (2) apprenticeship to bátá drummers and dancers, following performers during their outings to learn and practice skills; (3) participation in the daily occupations of the artists and their families, including farming, barbering, carpentry, hair weaving, kolanut processing, assembling drums for sale, and cultural brokerage; (4) informal and formal interviews with more than thirty men and
women of drumming and masquerade families, their friends, and audiences regarding their changing profession and performances; (5) audio and video documentation of performances and other activities; (6) collection of national and local newspaper articles about arts and culture in Nigeria; (7) participant observation with state and privately sponsored cultural institutions, such as the Ogun State Cultural Center and the Njikê Center for Arts and Culture; (8) archival and interview research on the history of Erin-Qu$n town; and (9) twenty life-history interviews with members of three generations of drumming and masquerade artists in Ogun State.4

Through analyses of interviews with $bádi artists, Batai Fuji performance (recorded in 1992), and a traditional masquerade skit (recorded in 1995), this essay will illustrate the following: (1) tensions between the Yoruba Bata and Batai Fuji generations; (2) how the members of the Batai Fuji generation incorporate Yoruba popular music and their overseas sensibilities into their worldly fusion; and (3) how the generations collaborate to produce social and political critique from a Yoruba perspective. While the Yoruba Batai generation identifies strongly with a precolonial, pre-Islamic Yoruba culture, the Batai Fuji generation has crafted an identity that comfortably fuses Yoruba, Islamic, and global cultures.

Background: Ayán and Ójé Performance

Training their children in the art and profession of $bádi and/or $dàndàn drumming, Yoruba drumming families celebrate and honor oríṣà Ayángálah. Children born into an Ayán lineage are thus given names beginning with the Ayán prefix, such as Ayángálah, meaning “drum spirit fills the house.” Ójé families or $ṣí́gún òjú are entertainment masqueraders—also known as agbègèjí, alárínjú, and ópò.5 Children born into an Ójé lineage are given names starting with the Ójé prefix. Ójé families work closely with Ayán families: Ójé dancers dance, praise sing, and perform acrobatic and masquerade displays, while Ayán drummers provide the accompanying drum rhythms and texts. I refer to the Erin-Ogun Ayán and Ójé group (with whom I performed and lived) as the “Ojútúndé group.” During the duration of my fieldwork, Ojútúndé was the group’s most senior masquerade dancer, whose primary occupation was to sustain and travel with his alárínjú group.

Having spent days on end for several weeks with Ayán and Ójé artists in Erin-Ogun and on the road, I came to experience and understand their version of $bádi drumming and masquerade dancing as the fusion of popular and traditional performance styles. Somewhere in between $bádi and $jújú lay the Ojútúndé group’s self-styled genre that the group called “Bádi Fuji.” I call this fusion pop/tradition—a worldly, innovative, gendered, and uniquely Yoruba fusion. I was introduced to fuji music through the albums of Sikirí Ayánde Barrister, known as “Mr. Fuji” by his fans.

The Yoruba term fuji refers to a cluster of popular music and dance styles, produced and patronized mostly by Muslims, and performed live at events like weddings, festivals, and life-cycle celebrations—funerals, funerals, and business launchings—in cities and towns throughout southwestern Nigeria.6

The Ayán drummers in their teens and twenties have formed and performed with their own fuji bands since the rise of fuji’s popularity in the 1990s. As part of a “Muslim” versus “Yoruba” style and is thus quite critical of its popularity as a Yoruba genre. As Akin Barber and Christopher Waterman illustrate,6 however, fuji—like oríṣa (praise singing)6 and báádi—is eclectic and incorporative and thus distinctly Yoruba, emerging from the struggles (against Muslim jihadists, Christian missionaries, and each other) of the nineteenth century. With roots in Yoruba praise singing and Muslim music (particularly vocal style), fuji emerged out of the pivotal turbulence of the nineteenth century, which necessitated the first-time formation of a Yoruba “ethnic” consciousness or pan-Yoruba identity. Barber and Waterman thus argue that fuji music’s evocation of a Yoruba identity is quite distinct from oríṣa’s (or báádi’s) evocation of various Yoruba subgroups such as ìjọba or Òṣíkó.7 Through my analysis of a Batai Fuji performance, I build upon this argument to show how the Batai Fuji generation embraces the ideologies of báádi and fuji at once. On the one hand, the boys identify as Ayán performers from Erin-Ogun, tracing their roots to Ayángálah. On the other, they identify with a pan-Yoruba popular music genre with strong ties to Muslim music. The fusion of these modes of identification with their sense of global citizenship is pop tradition. On the other hand, Lamidi Ayánkúkú has strategically reinvented òṣíkó traditional culture. Through his collaborations with Europeans and U.S. Americans, Ayánkúkú began to promote himself as a teacher of Yoruba traditional culture, defining his version of òṣíkó (traditional culture) against the cultures of Islam and Christianity. It is no accident that Lamidi earned his nickname, “Father of Foreign Lands,” in conjunction with his self-asserted identity as a traditionalist. Willing to represent Africa, Ayánkúkú has strategically wielded his status as a traditionalist to play the postcolonial market. As a pop traditionalist, the members of the Batai Fuji generation continue to build upon Ayánkúkú’s momentum by figuring out ways to transform their art and identities in the world.
A Yorùbá Bátiá Generational Perspective

The tension between fathers and their sons over what constitutes a worthwhile Yorùbá performance was rife throughout my fieldwork. It played itself out within everyday discourse and artistic practice. Ayánkínú’s generation of drummers would often joke with each other about the vacuous lyrics of fújí music. Ayánkínú’s junior brother, Añán, Ayándokun, a well-respected and well-traveled bátiá drummer active throughout the 1980s in various Lagos-based fújí bands, is quite concerned that fújí music could distract the bátiá generation from becoming well versed in their bátiá drumming heritage. In one of our interviews, Ayán thoughtfully situated fújí in the context of Yorùbá music history, all the while comparing the popularity of fújí to traditional bátiá:

It has no meaning to me. You know, fújí is just like what I am talking about. Bátiá is not traditional music. It started from sakura music. There were some musicians in the past—we call them sakura musicians—like Yañ Olatunji. Yes, that’s where fújí music took its source from. But they changed its tempo into a fast one. Later, they introduced gôngun drums into it. Then they brought jaaj drums into it from fújí. You see... the vocal style is from sakura, but they quickened the tempo. They even brought some slang and jokes into it. Then they took the sound and invented different styles. For example, my son can say he wants to play am (a type of drum) fújí, and he goes to play sakura, the sakura player. And he introduces it into his own fújí to make a different style. ... What I am saying in essence is that if we work at making bátiá popular and respected, it will become like fújí. But if we don’t work bátiá—if we depend on playing at funeral ceremonies without invitations—bátiá won’t compete with fújí.

And if you have played abroad like me, you know that the desire to play at home is very low. This means that we should gather ourselves and try to hold a practice session to bring out something tangible and different. But right now, it is not possible to do such a thing because if there is a funeral ceremony, Ojúemí and others will go there to play for money. They know that if they don’t go, nobody will invite them. So, if we can change the context and expectations for bátiá, it could just be like sakura in terms of receiving invitations.

You see, bátiá music—accompanying iṣẹ’í, for example—is more meaningful and more melodious than fújí. Before any fújí man can collect money from me, I must have drunk a lot. He can’t praise my orí very well. If I ask my wife to chant my oríki now, Ayán may also give her money because she sings my oríki, she sings part of Ayán’s oríki—because we share a family history. But... fújí musicians cannot sing oríkítí while dancing and expect me to give them money when I am not mad [laughs]!

While Ayán may be critical of fújí as a meaningful genre, he recognizes its overall acceptance and popularity—especially as evidenced by the community support for fújí performances. Preferring bátiá drumming and masquerade singing and dancing to the “nonsense” of fújí lyrics and posing, Ayán dreams about changing the shape of traditional bátiá performance as it has been passed down for centuries. Why not imagine a staged venue for bátiá performers, to which they are invited and for which they are compensated and appreciated for their expertise and entertainment? Ayán’s generation of performers—some of whom have traveled and performed overseas—has no patience for the types of local gigs that require lots of (often uninvited) effort in exchange for little financial support. The coexistence of bátiá and
fiji and the cross-participation of young artists in both genres provide
grounds for rich debates around the meaning of tradition within local and
global contexts.

This chapter illustrates the generational shift in the culture of bata perfor-
mancc, from the performance of “tradition” to what I call “pop tradition”—
an innovative, popular, worldly, gendered, Yoruba style and identity. In
order to keep bata culture alive, members of the Bata Fuji generation fused
traditional bata with the popular musical genre of fiji, invoking their lin-
gage-rooted skills as a means through which to participate in a Yoruba-based
music movement. The “pop” part of pop tradition signifies this generation’s
desires to identify with a pan-Yoruba culture, fueling a particular worldliness
rooted in the Ayán tradition as well as a modern Yoruba identity. 18

While Ayánkọ́n and Ayán are critical of their sons’ inventions of pop
tradition, almost seeing this shift as a sellout, they also admit that local per-
formance venues are depressingly different today than in their apprentice-
ship days. Both Ayánkọ́n and Ayán came of age playing for frequent ìròsù
ceremonies. And as these ceremonies became less frequent, the nation-state
made an effort to support the art and identities of traditional artists through
the sponsorship of state, regional, and national cultural competitions and
festival such as NAFEST, as well as through the funding of cultural cen-
ters. 19 In Ayánkọ́n’s version of the past, bata drummers were respect-
fully invited by town royalty and families to celebrations during which they
were treated as guests. 20 Nowadays, the Òjútùndé group often shows up to
events without a personal invitation. Since radio advertisement has become
the prevalent mode of advertising local events, the dissemination of invita-
tions to any event has become relatively impersonal. Whenever Ayánkọ́n
questioned my decision to follow the Òjútùndé group from town to town
without an explicit personal invitation, he would simply ask: “Who will give
you food?” Frustrated by their dwindling patronage, loss of their custom-
ary preeminent position, and altogether lack of community respect for bata
artists, Ayánkọ́n himself refuses to perform at just any event, if it meant
buying his own food, paying for his own transport, and returning home with
little gain. Instead, Ayánkọ́n chooses to survive by working his overseas
networks. Yet the Òjútùndé group has no other option: its members still eke
out their existence by going out and working the streets for a living. Despite
his frustration, Ayánkọ́n still encourages his boys to train and practice by
playing with the Òjútùndé group.

Performing Pop Tradition

In this section, I analyze a Bata Fuji song text excerpt from a local perform-
ance outing: the story of Bata Fuji’s identity frames the excerpt. Lead
vocalist Saídí Òjútùndé’s song tells the story of Òjútùndé’s group taking the
world by storm, joining the popular genre of fiji music with its traditional
bata roots, and finally merging the two performing art forms and lifestyles
into one—Bata Fuji. Through the use of traditional ìròsù—a genre of neo-
traditional praise poetry—text, Òjútùndé fills in the frame with references to
his own stamina as a traditional artist and his dancing and presence. In
this performance moment, Òjútùndé and I both form integral parts of Bata
Fuji. Òjútùndé’s narrative conjures dialogue between the broader world and
the specifics of Bata Fuji, between the nonhuman realm of trees, water, and
goats and the human realm of dance and music. Inherent in the praise nar-
native genre is the invocation and presence of God, Olórún, and/or ìròsù.
Spiritual forces and forces of nature are the initial addressees in the opening
section and thus remain present as objects of praise and subjects of inspira-
tion throughout the performance.

It was mid-May, the height of Ògúngún season in Òrin-Óṣùn (see fig. 6.4).
In fact, the celebration described in this section was sandwiched between
Òrin-Óṣùn’s annual Ògúngún celebration at the town palace on Friday and
family Ògúngún outings on Sunday. Òjútùndé’s group and the Ayán drum-
ers were thus busily employed during this particular weekend and season.
Working the Ògúngún season is not entertainment as usual, but spiritually
heightened, inspired, and committed work. In addition to their regular per-
fomance duties, Òjútùndé’s family and the Ayán drummers participate in
private rituals during which they respectfully don representative masks and
play particular rhythms to invoke the ancestors of family members. This was
the season when Òjútùndé’s group performed their ìròsù aṣàsì skits rather reg-
ularly, replete with heavy, breakable masks and costumes.

In the context of the Ògúngún season, the Saturday naming ceremony
evoked below exemplifies a regular working day for Òjútùndé (see fig. 6.3),
the Ayán drummers, and me. My brief field journal entry below reflects the
everydayness of such a local outing within a familiar community:

A typical Òrin-Óṣùn outing of sorts. Òjútùndé mostly sat while watching his
son, Saídí and Wàsin, praise and entice the crowd. The drummers included:
Bàsírú on àkò́dú (two conga-like drums attached on one for carrying); Taufi
and Alání traded off on ìjii and ìsó(oto); and Òbíyàn on ìjájá. Sáhù danced,
while Òbíyàn and Folájú would occasionally join in. It was a naming ceremo-
y.

The celebrating family lived close to Òjújó’s compound where they held
their party, just south of the CMS church.

Taking note of the masqueraders and drummers who played at the various
events allowed me to assess the significance of an event as a paid outing and
social occasion. If the event was potentially lucrative, Òjútùndé would ask his
more experienced and seasoned lead drummer to accompany his dancers.
In this case, one of the younger "gus" Ayán drummers, Dayo, volunteered to play, garnering more experience and hopefully some cash. Dayo was not a regular member of the Ojútún ensemble. The supporting drummers also used this event as a training opportunity. Tauffi coached his younger brother on the awọn àpẹ̀rẹ́ while he played the awọn àbẹ́. In outings with higher stakes, Tauffi always played the awọn àpẹ̀rẹ́, working crowds with technique, skill, and creativity that he alone has developed over the years. Alani, Tauffi's younger brother, often played the ọkùn, the drum requiring the least skill but the most strength to cart around all day. Basími often played the awọn àbẹ́, the drum that deceivingly fades into the background as it provides the texture against which the lead drum improvises. A skilled and mature player like Basími, however, also uses the awọn àpẹ̀rẹ́ "talk" and converse creatively with the ọkùn, the lead drum.

Although the drummers for the event were Ojútún's second string, they were nonetheless well-represented and well-trained drummers of ìyàní's compound. Sádi Ojútún's role as lead singer, dancer, and acrobat was thus heightened on that day, since he was indeed the most practiced and skilled performer playing his own instrument. With less experience playing local events, Ojútún's junior brother, Wàsu, was a solid backup dancer and coperformer. Ojútún's father went along to support his group and reap the social benefits of a festive occasion—food, fun, and frolickation.

As I had already been living in Òrìṣà-Ọjọ́nà for six months by this time, my presence and dance style no longer created such a spectacle. Perhaps the most spectacular marker of my presence was my Sony professional Walkman, attached to a lapel microphone that Ojútún wore. After reaching a certain degree of comfort and familiarity with Ojútún, I had finally asked his permission to record his performance. Deciphering Ojútún's metaphorical text allows us to interpret the Ojútún group's spoken stories and messages. A narrative genre requiring much self-reflection, ṣànṣà provides structure for Ojútún's stories about his group's worldliness, innovation, and Yorùbáness.

Ojútún and his chorus improvised the ọ̀rìṣà that appears below in order to introduce his group, including me, to his father's friends:

**Song:**

Kàtìgò́rì o, sóùn nilé-ayé
Kirigó́rì o, sóùn nilé-ayé
Arébá ti ni iru mimá
Odò ló àgbéni lọ̀so
À tún ti yì funú tó páà ni o
Sí Bàtàà Fúṣù jí
Okùn réé, éó réé
Ení lá ẹ̀rò
O yì kùn lèmí
Kàtìgò́rì o, bái kàtìgò́rì o

**Category:**

Category: oh it's the world
Category: oh it's the world
Arábá tree get well-prepared
River is carrying away ìyàní tree
We've changed fùjì back again
To Bàtàà Fúṣù
This is the sea, the ocean here
He who can take a bath
Now go inside the water
Category: oh by category

**Voice:**

Ewní fún wáráájá báí kò kò, kò kò
Átabá, mì wáran màà
Ewní fún wáráájá báí kò ómì sì
Bàtàà Fúṣù fún ìyàní má
Déhí, n o nì ríyá ìràn má
Àyàní má, ná mà ríyá má
O sùn ni fùjì àjì
Déhí, jí ń ìràn Olókun
Okùn ìjóko
Àyàn sá là yì kò ìfọ̀ka
Omi kígbe
Àyàní má, jí ń ìràn Olókun ìjóko
Déhí, jí ń ìfọ̀ka
Omi kígbe
O yì jí ìfọ̀ka
Má sóni tó níàìdá jí ó
Oyá sofun ti ní àkẹ́lẹ́ má
Má si ò lásì yìjí è yàá
Kò jí jí
Emí tí ị̀ jíjí
tó jí jí
Atàsí
Kò jí jí Bàtàà Fúṣù jí

**Category:**

Category: It's of the world, by category
Category: It's of the world
Arábá tree get well-prepared
River is carrying away ìyàní tree
We've brought fùjì back again
To Bàtàà Fúṣù
This is the sea, the ocean here
He who can take a bath
Now go inside the water
If God does not retire me
I will not retire myself
I am así́ Ótò Òyókó̀má
The goat is looking at a butcher
Alábá, dò ní ìbi àyé
Goat is looking at butcher
Wishing for his transition
If God does not retire me
I will not retire myself
Ayàní mà, ná mà ríyá má
She has played more than fifty
Dehí, dance like Olókun, sea dancer
Ayàn è jí láwé àti aṣà yìjí àtì àkọ́kọ́
Dehí, dance like ìyàní mà
As he who extends dignity to me
I will follow you home, o home
Ready, shoot your butt back and dance
He who doesn't dance
Àtásí àti àjìjì
Will not dance Bàtàà Fúṣù jí

As singer and speaker of the above text, Ojútún was backed up by the Ayán drumming ensemble and two dancers, Wàsu and me. The excerpt above was part of Ojútún's self-introduction section, in which he poetically situated himself and his group in the human and human world. Easily broken down into four distinct sections, following Davis' traditional ṣànṣà usually begins with ìbù, a section in which the singer addresses
and honors her/his ancestors and the nonhuman spirit world for making her/his life and song possible. The second section is a self-introduction, in which the artist introduces her/himself to the audience by singing her/his own praise names, accomplishments, and other relevant material about her/himself. The third section is the body of the song/chant, addressing the audience. This section includes a combination of the following: personal oriki (ori-kiri oriki); prayers and incantations; proverbs, jokes, or anecdotes; and comments on local or overseas culture. The final section is a series of songs that refers back to the content of the previous sections. The text quoted served to tell the audience about the group’s unique style and contributions to the world, all while preparing the audience to receive praises and offer appropriate gifts of naa.

After humbly acknowledging the power of the sea and God to “retire” him, as a butcher might decide to kill a goat, Ojútún dé expressed his desire to live life at God’s will. He addressed me directly: “Debbie, I will not retire myself.” Praising me so that I would dance well, Ojútún dé evoked the goddesses of the ocean and the sea to encourage my performance. After commanding me to dance a specific set of ji–aše (a dance of elegance characterized by the motion of the buttocks), Ojútún dé reminded our audience that my dance was the dance passed down by his father (referring to his father by his oriki, “Atándà”). Finally, Ojútún dé summarized by claiming “Atándà’s dance” to be a defining feature of Bátà Fùjì. This is an appeal to the longheld tradition to which he and his more traditional view of the music subscribe; it also attests to the authenticity and longevity of the traditional form of music, which, as such, is presumed to be of greater value than the popular Bátà Fùjì.

The emergent theme is that Ojútún dé and his family have been blessed to have made their mark on the world as performers of Bátà Fùjì—a unique blend of the traditional and the popular that I call “pop tradition.” The pop tradition of Bátà Fùjì is thus a fusion of an “it’s always been this way” tradition and a pan-Yorùbà popularity, beginning and ending with Ojútún dé’s ancestors and his group. As I elaborate the meaning of Ojútún dé’s int, I will outline three emergent analytical points characterizing pop tradition: (1) worldliness; (2) innovation within local and regional settings; and (3) the use of traditional song structures and dances to tell new stories.

Beginning his introduction with the phrase, “Category, oh it’s the world,” Ojútún dé literally situates himself and the Ojútún dé group within the world—extending beyond Òrìṣá Ọjọ̀ or to include places overseas as well as the seas themselves. Ay or “world” in the Yorùbá sense also evokes the idea of having a chance in the world to fulfill your life’s destiny. The first word in the whole text, yet a rather out-of-place one, kàtẹgẹ, represents Ojútún dé’s attempt to play with the English “category” by incorporating it into traditionally structured Yorùbá verse. The sound of the word “category” is meant to point to Ojútún dé’s knowledge of and ease with the English language.34

From the opening of his introduction, Ojútún dé marks himself and his group as worldly—in the three senses mentioned above: (1) having participated and performed in various geographical settings, from Érin-Ọjọ̀ to overseas; (2) fulfilling the group’s destiny to inhabit the “house of the world” (álẹèyà) in the form of Bátà Fùjì, and (3) being voiced in English as well as traditional Yorùbá, combining both in the framing phrase. Additionally, the invention of the style “Bátà Fùjì” invokes the Érin-Ọjọ̀ artists’ association and identification with fùjì music—a music genre that emerged out of the nineteenth-century history of cultural mixing and eventual creation of a first-time pan-Yorùbá identity. The Ojútún dé group’s worldliness is thus linked with a popular Yorùbá identity.

I also offer the term worldly here to describe Ojútún dé’s presentation of himself and his group in its most commonsense English usage: a proudly performed sense of having been around the world and back again. As well-traveled performers, Ojútún dé and his group boast access to international languages, networks, and resources that transform their senses of themselves in the world. Performing his worldliness allows Ojútún dé to proclaim a particular mobility, importance, and worldwide fame. Community-based audiences respect and appreciate the worldliness of their hometown artists and are proud to associate with Ojútún dé and his group.

My presence is another key marker of the Ojútún dé group’s worldliness. My apprenticeship as a dancer and more authoritative guise as a researcher who lives in Lámiidí’s compound lends an exaggerated validity to all that Ojútún dé boasts through his song—that his group is at the center of the world. Having traveled to the far reaches of the world, Ojútún dé and his group always return home to Érin-Ọjọ̀. For the most part, Ojútún dé’s group and the Ayàn boys aspire to build their lives in or around their hometown. Ojútún dé’s performance of his own worldliness depends upon his rootedness in Érin-Ọjọ̀ and his performance of Yorùbà for a local audience. That I have come from overseas to study the bátà of Ojútún dé’s group illustrates and validates the group’s having been around the world. How else would I have known to come to them? The world invoked by Ojútún dé also includes the ocean and the sea as powerful forces of inspiration, movement, and decision. When Ojútún dé encourages me to dance like the goddesses of the ocean and sea, he incorporates me into yet another articulation of the world—a Yorùbá cosmos defined by the presence of Yorùbà sirújá. Ojútún dé’s performed worldliness is thus rooted in a Yorùbá cosmology that guides traditional praise poetry.

Taking its cue directly from popular Nigerian bands—from fùjì to fùjì—Ojútún dé’s group has coined its own innovative performance style called Bátà Fùjì, a style that took shape during local performances. By performing and then naming its own category of music, a popular music group becomes the master of its own genre, which it then celebrates as unique and innovative.35
Two examples of popular groups that invented their own blended genres during my stay in the early 1990s are Shina Peters’s “afro-jípú” and Síkóri Aṣìnì Barrisér’s “füjí garbage.” Afro-jípú and füjí are both specific forms of jípú and füjí performed solely by these artists and their groups. Füjí garbage is an album-specific genre that grew out of a multiple-part series by that same title, becoming so well recognized and commercialized that it inspired a particular set of dance moves. These song styles and dances were made popular through live performances, radio play, cassette sales, and bootlegging, as well as the emerging music video market. The members of the younger generation of the Òjútúǹ group has been a lifelong audience for certain types of popular music, having listened to, appreciated, and emulated füjí music since their early childhood. Like many Nigerian youth and young adults, these traditionally trained artists have also learned to idolize and copy their favorite pop front men. Combining an Islamic vocal tradition with Yorùbá drumming, füjí music is generally most popular among Muslims. In their discussions of Yorùbá traditional performance, Waterman, Barber, Barber and Waterman, Margaret Drewal, and Andrew Aptekar argue co-effectively for the malleability, adaptability, and flexibility built into Yorùbá tradition. Waterman captures well the sense of Yorùbá oral traditions.

Although Yorùbá traditions have been reworked with an eye to present and future interests, cultural memory, carried in oral traditions, constrains the play of strategic reinterpretation. Yorùbá notions of tradition are occluded in stone mortars of thin air.

While Òjútúǹ’s ẹ̀kí performance, for example, relies upon an inherited tradition of metaphorical language and Yorùbá cosmology, the ẹ̀kí has always incorporated commentary on current cultural and political issues. Following the ẹ̀kí tradition, Òjútúǹ weaves the story of Bàtá Fùjí into generations-old song structure and verse. Understanding that Yorùbá oral traditions require innovation to maintain their social relevance, I ask what is unique about Bàtá Fùjí as a particular innovation within ọ̀dúnjú performance. What makes the Òjútúǹ group’s rendition of bàtá a popular tradition as opposed to a thriving “traditional” tradition?

As in my discussion of Yorùbá popular music above, I draw my use of the term popular from the post-nineteenth-century emergence of a pan-Yorùbá identity. Whereas bàtá was rooted in specific Yorùbá ancestral lineages, füjí emerged out of a nineteenth-century history of Islamic colonization, during which Yorùbá and Islamic musical styles merged. Füjí is thus popular because it cuts across distinct Yorùbá subgroups. Different groups of Yorùbá people could collectively identify with a common musical genre. By combining bàtá with füjí, the Òjútúǹ group chooses to identify as “Yorùbá”—bringing bàtá into the realm of the popular.

The Òjútúǹ group’s “tradition” is the alárínjú tradition. Àyàà and Òjú artists have performed as traveling theater groups to entertain diverse audiences for at least two hundred years. My ongoing genealogy—gathered through extensive life-history interviews with more than twenty members of Òjútúǹ’s compound—traces the art and occupation of alárínjú back to the 1790s, just before the Fulani invaded southern Nigeria and forced the migration of countless Yorùbá people to previously unsettled southern regions, including Òría. Oral historical sources date the origins of bàtá drumming back to the fifteenth century, when Sàngó, probably the fourth king of Òyó, was said to have hung himself and was subsequently deified. Sango’s favorite drum ensemble, bàtá, is said to have been institutionalized as a lineage-based tradition since the fourteenth or fifteenth century. Òría artists can trace their bàtá lineage back to the 1800s, thus they contrast bàtá’s ancient origins with the emergence of the syncopated music of jípú and füjí in the early to mid-1900s.

While Yorùbá oral traditions change, it is the sense of “tradition” existing from the beginning of time that I reemphasize here. Scholars such as Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger and Marilyn Ivy have taken pains to show how traditions are always “reinvented” within particular historical, political, and social contexts. The so-called original tradition may never have existed. As a thriving tradition, bàtá has endured as a lifestyle and an artistic practice: Òjútúǹ and his supporting drum ensemble create songs that their two-hundred-year-old ancestors would still recognize. Bàtá Fùjí is a tradition because it is rooted in an embodied historical past and is in Yorùbá cultural memory. Members of Bàtá Fùjí are loyal to the inherited structure, form, content, and spectacle of their ancestors’ work. Whenever I asked the oldest Àyàà and Òjú artists to describe the alárínjú performances in which they participated as children, they all said the same thing—their outings were exactly like those of Òjútúǹ’s group today. Àyàà and Òjú artists agree that the Òjútúǹ group and the Àyàà boys are traditional artists because they maintain the inherited integrity of their practice.

So what does füjí have to do with bàtá? Why the innovation of Bàtá Fùjí? Comprised of young “guy” performers, the Òjútúǹ group feels culturally in tune with the popular music scene and thus reinvents itself as a popular alárínjú (traveling) group. Not only are they hip with the times, but the group has a message to purport. The roots of füjí can be traced back to bàtá, and the two will now rejoin. “We’ve brought füjí back again to Bàtá Fùjí” is Òjútúǹ’s way of evoking the historical relationship between the two performance styles. The Òjútúǹ group manifests Bàtá Fùjí by incorporating many artistic and symbolic aspects of füjí into its traditional alárínjú program. For example, the Àyàà drummers prefer to wear their most “guy” clothes for their performances—buggy name-brand blue jeans, T-shirts with U.S. designs, baseball caps, sporty footwear, and sport watches. Sporting
these Western-inspired costumes, the Ayán boys make clear their alliances with urbanized pop culture as opposed to traditional village life. Artistically, Ojúntúdè and Wasiu quote popular jéjú lyrics, such as “Emi láyé mi,” in their choral refrains, sending the Ayán boys into a quick-paced frenzy on the drums, permitting them to break into their jéjú groove. Sakari as well is quite skilled at inserting popular dance movements, gleaned from various cultural sources, into her traditional dances. Without doubt, one of the most compelling aspects of jéjú for the young “gay” artist is its popularity among masses of Yorùbá people. Becoming popular—well known, well respected, well recognized, and well supported—is also becoming “leg” in Yorùbá culture; this cultural value persists. By naming Bátá Fuji a pop tradition, I contribute to the Ojúntúdè group’s desired effect: to revive the Bátá tradition by proclaiming its popularity. The Ojúntúdè group strategically sings its own popular music in Òrìṣà and the surrounding towns.

My final analytic point is that the Ojúntúdè group uses traditional songs and dances to tell new stories about the persistence of the aláarinjú performance tradition in the nonhuman and human world of the late 1990s. Originating within the context of a Yorùbá cosmological framework, the text evokes structures of the cosmos in order to best situate Bátá Fuji. In the threefold structure of the cosmos, ìlànàyẹ is the middle domain in which humans live.38 While Ojúntúdè begins his introduction by professing that “it’s the world” in which his group exists, he also invokes the other two domains of the cosmos: the earth below the world, which usually includes nonhuman forces such as forest spirits; and the sky, including the spirits of the ocean and the sea. Praise songs remind the participants that they are part of a larger universe that extends above and below the world. This is an old story that most audience members know and believe to some extent, even if they have committed to forgetting Yorùbá cosmology in light of their faith in Islamic and Christian cosmologies. Ojúntúdè thus weaves the story of Bátá Fuji into this taken-for-granted story of the cosmos.

Even though the force of the river always threatens to wash away the àrínjú and ànjú trees, the trees withstand the changing flows. Like the rooted trees, bátá also withstands the flows of change. The force of a tradition like bátá welcomes one of its many distant manifestations, jéjú, back to its roots by a merger into one—Bátá Fuji. Joined with jéjú, bátá cannot be easily swept away. Ojúntúdè associates Bátá Fuji with the sea and the ocean, the nonhuman forces of the world that have power to give strength to, nurture, and connect Yorùbá people to other people “overseas.” As Ojúntúdè derives his own strength from the ocean, he gains faith that he will not die, like a goat at the hands of a butcher, before his time. Likewise, his life’s work will not die before its time.

Bátá and jéjú are related traditions grounded in a shared cosmological order that emphasizes interconnections among the house of the sky, the house of the world, and the earth. Performing reverence for the sky, world, and earth, Ojúntúdè prays for the continuation of bátá in the form of Bátá Fuji. Ojúntúdè’s prayer is at the same time a praise song for his ancestors, especially his father who trained him. In 1990s Òrìṣà-ṣàngọn, singing and chanting jéjú was a transgressive art, as it preserves Yorùbá traditional thought and practice as alternatives to the dominant Christian, Muslim, and capitalist thought and practice. By moving bátá into the pop culture arena, young Òjé and Ayán artists update and refashion their inherited tradition’s relevance in the world. My membership in the Ojúntúdè group was striking evidence of Bátá Fuji’s sustained stint as a local pop favorite. As a pop tradition, Bátá Fuji became a political project that redefined ways of being Yorùbá in the world during the 1990s.

Ọyínbọ Skit: Yorùbá Bátá and Bátá Fuji Collaborations

This section features an analysis of a classical Yorùbá Bátá masquerade skit in which two masqueraders, through their dance, tell a humorous and entertaining story about white people while wearing masks and costumes. Bátá ensembles have been performing versions of this skit since they first encountered white people as missionaries in the early nineteenth century. In this particular performance, members of both the Yorùbá Bátá and Bátá Fuji generations collaborate to perform for a diverse audience of national and international tourists and festival celebrants. In this context, the Ojúntúdè group changed performance modes from its pop traditional to its traditional repertoire. Events such as these remind both generations that Yorùbá Bátá classics continue to translate across generation and culture, offering entertainment and social critique from a Yorùbá perspective. Adding a theatrical element to the music, singing, and dancing of Bátá Fuji, Yorùbá Bátá masquerade performances allow the artists the freedom to express themselves as masked characters. Since the masks personify archetypal characters from Yorùbá and Nigerian history and culture—the colonial, the drunk, the goat, the prostitute, the Fulani herder, the wife, the mother, and so forth—the Bátá Fuji generation has begun to tell new stories, inserting new spins, through these archetypal masks.

Though performances like the oyínbọ coupleskit—in which Yorùbá performers portray European colonials with some sort of mocking or critical intent—have been the subject of scholarly treatment, it is useful to interpret the Ojúntúdè group’s version of the skit within the context in which it was performed in August 1995. Both Yorùbá Bátá and Bátá Fuji artists were invited to perform a series of masquerade skits for three hours, from...
late afternoon to early evening, at the Cultural Heritage Hotel during the renowned Qaan Oṣogbo festival. An inspired performance that provoked a continuous stream of audience response, the skit portrayed the body habits of a typical white man and woman. The scene quickly revealed the man’s attraction for the woman and then developed into a dance in which the characters expressed and negotiated their mutual attraction. Upon review, one of the few moments of audience-performer contact was a momentary flash when the only real white man in the audience snapped a flash photo of the masked white man and then shook and kissed his gloved hand. I look to Michael Taussig’s discussion of mimicry and alterity to examine the story of the copied white man and woman. Interpreting the dancers’ movements and dramatizations, I analyze this skit with respect to the production of race, gender, and sexuality throughout the staged portrayal of white desire.

Aṣa arranged this performance because he had met some interested tourists, staying at the hotel, who had expressed interest in seeing his family’s traditional bẹ̀ẹ̀ performance, including masquerades. Representing their Yorùbà traveling theater heritage, this type of staged venue made members of the Yorùbà Bànà generation proud. Having arranged the spectacle, Aṣa himself joined the Qẹẹ̀ndé group’s first string drummers, alternating between playing the ọjọ̀ and ọmọ ọpọ̀ throughout the evening. Grateful to participate in one of Saniyu’s rare public performances, I joined the show primarily as a videographer, lending a certain degree of validity to the group’s self-proclaimed worldliness. While Qẹẹ̀ndé called upon me to dance toward the end of the show, my primary role during that summer’s tourist season was that of a cultural broker; the Érí-Oṣun artists called upon me to translate, arrange workshops, and host European and U.S. tourists in Érí-Oṣun.

The audience for that evening was fairly eclectic and spontaneously assembled, consisting mostly of adult Yorùbà tourists and locals celebrating Qaan Oṣogbo in some form or another. The non-Yorùbà audience members included an older British couple, a U.S. American woman tourist, and me. Children came and went throughout the show, as did hotel employees serving drinks. Though the venue was packed, there was room for only about twenty or so audience members. Onlookers joined the audience by sitting on top of the concrete wall surrounding the courtyard. Though I have since observed and participated in countless versions of the Qẹẹ̀ndé group’s two-hour aláàbingí assemblage of praise singing, dancing, acrobatic displays, and character skits, this particular show was my first opportunity to observe the full two-hour presentation. While all of the character skits are rife with social critique and commentary, I was drawn in by the ọjọ̀ ọ̣jọ̀ skit because of its multivalanced critiques of race, gender, and sexuality.

Building on Drewal’s description of the ọjọ̀ ọ̣jọ̀ skit as “a parody of the European propensity to display affections publicly,” I interpret the portrayal as a multilayered commentary on the habits of ọjọ̀ ọ̣jọ̀ and Yorùbàness. While the skit asks its audience to ponder the kinds of embodied structures white people reproduce below the level of discourse, it implies a comparison with a Yorùbà norm. In this skit, the white couple represents the antithesis of the Yorùbà aesthetic of iṣẹ́ lẹ̀yin, beautiful character emanating from the inside out. The white couple’s overt displays of attraction and sloppy swagger are particularly notable in contrast to the Yorùbà aesthetic of iṣẹ́ lẹ̀yin. During British colonialism, this skit provided a ritualized context through which Yorùbà people could mock and mimic British bodily aesthetics. By suggesting that white people did not even display iṣẹ́ lẹ̀yin, the performers maintained their sense of cultural pride and created a context for resistance. During the neocolonial 1990s in Nigeria, whiteness continued to represent oppression, appropriation, and imperialism; however, Érí-Oṣun artists’ collaborations with white artists, scholars, and fans since the 1960s had introduced them to white people who were fighting for equality, decolonization, and freedom for all people. During the 1990s in Qaan State, I would say that Yorùbà people were ambivalent about ọjọ̀ ọ̣jọ̀ people and culture. Performing the ọjọ̀ ọ̣jọ̀ skit became a means through which Yorùbà artists could express their critical interpretations of white people’s bodies, habits, and sexuality.

As Drewal and countless Yorùbà performers have already taught, Yorùbà ọjọ̀ ọ̣jọ̀ performances provide rich, multivalenced instances in which histories are constantly revised and revised in hypersensorial modes, including improvisation, parody, and play. Describing the ways in which ọjọ̀ ọ̣jọ̀ performances mediate between past and present, Drewal puts it best:

The performances . . . operated in a field between presumed pasts that are, from a Yorùbà perspective, documented in myth and the performers’ and spectators’ involvements in the moment. The masks themselves, then, not only mediated the spirit world and the phenomenal world, the past and the present, but they also mediated oral texts—themselves flexible through repeated performances—and the current social context, transforming a verbal, narrative form into a fragmented, multichanneled, multidimensional one of masks, songs, drumming, and dance.

Though ọjọ̀ ọ̣jọ̀ performances are hardly everyday events in Nigeria, they provide reflexive contexts during which performers and audiences alike negotiate and critique everyday discourses and practices. The analysis that follows examines Yorùbà performances of race, gender, and sexuality within the landscape of neocolonial relationships forged between Yorùbà artists and their white friends, fans, sponsors, and researchers. Homi Bhabha’s discussion of the ambivalences produced between stereotypes of white and Yorùbà subjects combined with an analysis of power open up more contextualized readings of the following white couple-skit.
The White Couple Takes the Stage

As soon as the eyíjẹjẹ reappeared on stage as a proud, confident, swaggering, trouser and sport-coat laden, white-masked man, the mostly Yoruba crowd roared with laughter and applauded with approval. Mimicking white men's everyday gestures, the performer secured the wonder of the audience by repeating a few (stereotypically white, male actions. Displaying his transformation into a white man, the performer exaggerated certain bodily habits, first establishing a bouncy, arhythmic strut. Picture a large-nosed, glistening white mask balanced upon sloppily swallowing shoulders, a slouching chest, a tucked-under butt, and turned-out legs and feet. As in all eyíjẹjẹ performances, the success of the parody hinged upon the performer's and audience's improvisational skills and imaginations. Without hesitation, the white mask straddled over to the only real white man in the audience who, upon translating the cae, appropriately assumed his character. As though he had rehearsed this skit several times before, the complicit tourist snapped a photograph of his copied self, and then shook the performer's green-gloved hand. Seemingly inspired by the spectacle of the moment, the gleeful, beyond-middle-aged white man concluded this mimetic exercise by bowing his head before the performer and then kissing his hand. Next, the performer shook the hand of the white man's wife and continued to enlist the rest of the audience's participatory support by shaking many of their hands, one after the other.

Drawing from Gates's discussion of African American traditions of signification, Dreyfus characterizes Yoruba ritual practice as play (ce) in at least two related senses. First, such practice is repetition with revision, so that revision of the signifier disrupts the signified/signifier equation and opens up meaning. Second, ritual play is about the performer's (and to some extent the audience's) improvisational risks—risking the transgression of the boundaries of appropriateness. Insofar as such play is parodic, it signals some kind of "ironic difference" from what is taken as conventional or from a past experience/performance. When parody works, it successfully calls upon (what Taussig has elaborated as) the mimetic faculty—the faculty to "copy, imitate, make models, explore difference, yield into and become other." After a repetitive and provocative exploration of mimesis and alterity, Taussig reiterates his main point: "the power of the copy to influence what it is a copy of." As the copy of the white man magically took on the power and character of the original, the original white man was moved. I too was moved: I too was influenced to the point of self-reflection and critique.

Rather than attempting to fool the audience into believing that they are indeed spirits, these masked performances are ritual 'play.' The mask itself is a reflexive comment on the performer's role as a masker. In the skit I have begun to sketch, the masker is not a white man, but he is also not a white man. This built-in reflexivity and ambiguity within the performance genre itself allows for multiple and endless readings of the on-the-surface stereotypical characters.

As I review the video copy of the iyánu couple-skits first sixty seconds, I re-experience the magic of mimesis each time. I am moved by the moment when the power of the copy—the masked white man—influences, touches, compels, interpolates what it is a copy of—the original white man. My subject position is also laid bare: I am forced to reflect on the humor of my own habi- tus in Nigeria while I ingest my copied self. All the while, I wonder how the original white man knew his part so well; he had never even seen an eyíjẹjẹ performance before, nor bad he ever met the performers. This is a familiar "contact" skit. When a white man meets another white man for the first time, they shake hands. However, by snapping the masked man's photograph before the handshaking, the tourist admits that he is not fooled. The kiss on the gloved hand—also out-of-line with the original white man contact skit—is a way for the tourist to display his approval of the copy, confessing aloud that he understands that the man behind the mask is truly already a Nigerian mimicking a white man. Transgressing the boundaries of appropriateness, the white man is able to break out of the rigidity of the handshake by adding in the emotive kiss. Observing the British tourist's improvised response to his encounter with a white Yoruba man, I am reminded of Taussig's analysis of U.S. citizen Marsh's transformation into a white Indian in the Panamanian jungle.

What better way for a white world to capture the alternating rhythm of mimesis and alterity than with the unmarked image of the white Indian? On the one hand is the mimetic revelation of alterity, on the other, the alterity of the Indian hidden in Bartèn's jungles, the two 'moments' of mimesis and alterity here energizing each other, so that the mere you see the phenomenon as mimetic, as "like us," the greater you make the alterity, and vice versa.

While the white tourist recognized the mimesis of himself—in the whiteness of the Yoruba performer—he also experienced the alterity. Though he easily shook the masked white man's hand, he comfortably slipped back into the ease of objectifying (required by the audience, but particularly by a white audience) when he snapped the photo. The flash photo, as it became a crucial part of the performance, reminded everyone of the performer's alterity—a Yoruba man becoming a spectacle to please a white man.

While Bātā Fujō reflects the younger artists' connectedness with fujō and global markets for African traditions, the collaborative performance of the iyánu couple-skits offers something that Bātā Fujō does not: an embodied style of storytelling that does not rely on the Yoruba language to convey its meaning. The artists' critique and exploration of race and culture difference were accessible to a Yoruba and foreign audience and thus opened up
the space for dialogue across cultures. The Yorùbá Bàá generation, having performed throughout Nigeria and on international stages since the 1950s, understands the translatability of masquerade skits across cultures. Through such collaborative venues, the Yorùbá Bàá Generation aims to train the next generation so that it will continue to engage diverse audiences through traditional performance modes, such as masquerading.

The White Woman Appears

While the white-masked man continued to play with the audience by performing white man’s habits, the white woman (played by a man, of course) strutted onto stage, barely balancing in her glimmering, pump-styled, white shoes. Her shiny white mask matched that of the man, except her dark hair fell down the back of her head, a clump dangling at the side of her face. She wore a conservative-styled navy blue dress with white polka dots—rounded neck, long-sleeved, cinched at the waist, stopping just below her knees. Her most exaggerated prop was her sparkling white purse hanging from her right shoulder, her left hand casually, yet constantly, grasping the purse’s strap. Taking her turn with the audience, she paraded back and forth across the stage for their perusal, performing white women’s habits—loosely striding with turned-out feet, displaying her purse as though it were part of her body, her left hand attentively on or near it the whole time. Sometimes, she wiped the clump of hair away from her face, only to let it fall back again the very next moment.

Always on opposite sides of the stage, she and the man walked briskly past each other to occupy opposite corners, hardly acknowledging each other’s presence. Finally, the white man signaled the bàá drummers to stop playing so that he could speak to the woman. Mimicking English, he sang with a rising intonation, “How are you?” As the audience laughed and anticipated the woman’s response and the man’s next move, the woman again walked briskly past the man and averted her eyes from his, bowing her head, perhaps uttering “fine,” but it was difficult to hear their voices beneath the masks. As he approached her body for the first time, he offered her his right hand while half of her body was still turned away from him. As she shook his hand, he touched her shoulder and she quickly, if awkwardly, reciprocated by touching his shoulder.

Though the man’s words were incomprehensible to most audience members at this juncture, it became clear that he would now have to further persuade and convince the white woman to accept him—perhaps as a dance partner, a lover, a friend? During the next few minutes, she acted out the hard-to-get woman who strutted back and forth across the stage, always moving away from her suitor. The white man, of course, played the hip, conniving suave, sweet-talker. He aroused the audience to applause by moving toward her in that overconfident, loose-knee, shoulder-bobbing strut, one hand in his pocket, the other hand gesturing like someone (mocking someone?) with money (rubbing the thumb against the fingers). After slight deliberation, she joined him in a European-style folk or ballroom dance.

An important parody in the ìgbáa ọjọ repertoire, the ìnjẹ́/bá coupleskít is appropriate partly because a Yorùbá coupleskít is not. Subjecting a white couple’s race, gender, and sexuality performances to scrutiny and critique is more sanctioned than subjecting a Yorùbá couple to such critique. The unfolding parody described above heralds the white man’s masculine powers of seduction. With hilarity, the audience cheers its man on as he tries to win over his object of attraction by displaying his own desirability. The white woman succumbs to the pressure of seduction quite easily, as white women do. While the scenario could have taken place between a Yorùbá man and woman, the power of the story lies in exposing the spaces of overlap and ambivalence between ìnjẹ́/bá and Yorùbá gender and sexuality. While the performer’s portrayal of masculinity—man as natural seducer—applies to both Yorùbá and ìnjẹ́/bá cultures of gender inequality, the portrayal of whiteness elicits the laughs, leasing the effect of the critique of Yorùbá gender inequality. Only white people would display their intimate negotiations so publicly.

Much like the white man’s, the white woman’s stance, posture, and appearance are white—tucked-under butt, legs turned out from the hips, slouched shoulders, and sloppy struts across the stage. Sexually available, yet shy and stubborn (hard-to-get), she is ultimately possible to persuade. So far, the white woman has developed her character primarily in relation to the white man. Unlike the white man, the white woman has yet to establish much of a relationship with the audience (by making jokes or shaking hands) or with the drummers. While participating in the skit, the audience has been prompted to root for the man, the skit’s local point, at the expense of the white woman’s further character development. The white man’s desire for the white woman occupies center stage, while the white woman’s desire remains understated, underexaggerated, and underplayed.

The ìgbáa ọjọ repertoire includes two extreme portrayals of Yorùbá women: the Prostitute and the Bride, each the subject of her own skit. The Prostitute, the “woman who laughs too much” mask with buck teeth, enjoys dancing at her own made-up pace and displays her irreverence by telling the drummers what to do. The Bride always concludes the show, performing a beautiful Yorùbá woman’s stance, posture, and appearance—gentle, smooth, understated. Portraying Yorùbá women’s propensities for badness and goodness, these skits do not risk too much. In the 1990s, the ìnjẹ́/bá coupleskít thus came to represent not only negotiations of white gender and sexuality but also reflections on Yorùbá gender and sexuality.
They Dance and Then They . . .

Breaking into a brief Yoruba song about the ọjînhi dance he and she were about to perform together, the white man cued the drummers to resume playing, while grabbing the white woman's hand. For a few beats, they held hands while executing a type of bound shuffle, one leg scissorsing in front of the other like a Russian-Jewish folk dance step. Letting go of the other's hand, each twisted in circles and continued to shuffle on her and his own. Inspiring instant applause, the couple came together, faced each other, joined hands, and in perfect symmetry, mirrored each other in a series of side-kicks—one leg and then the other, in liirey union. Executing what appeared to be a tricky move, both the woman and the man simultaneously turned around in full circles, holding each other's hands above their heads all the while. After a few repetitions of these choreographed maneuvers, the couple and the drummers stopped their dance. The drama of seduction would have to continue.

As he walked away from her, she followed. He turned to face her, and she walked away from him. They stared at each other from opposite ends of the stage. "Fun mi ni address now" (Give me your address, OK), he pleaded, his body poised to seduce—hand in pocket, chest leaning forward, weight resting on the back leg, hip jutting outward. After momentary hesitation, she opened her purse, pulled out an imaginary pen, scribbled her address on her imaginary piece of paper, handed it over to him. Satisfied, he read the address and walked firmly over to her as if with purpose. They embraced and kissed passionately on the lips, massaging each other's backs. Appropriately enchanted, the audience "ooed" and "ahhed" while the drummers began their fast-tempoed commentary. And then she, for the first time in the skit, took control of the ensuing action. She motioned with her wrist for the drummers to stop playing, strutted proudly over to the man, apparently opening a moment of verbal negotiation, to which the man responded by offering his hand. They shook hands and simultaneously broke into their Russian-Jewish jig.

The finale of the ọjînhi couple-skit elucidates the power of its mimicry by opening up and closing spaces of ambivalence.

While the white couple's displays of affection and sexual desire are excessive, they also elicit genuine audience approval. Despite some initial doubts, the white woman seems quite content with her newly formed romantic alliance with the proud white man. The differences (where they may be argued to exist) between the white man and his Yoruba counterpart beneath the mask are subtle, if not ambivalent. On the one hand, Yoruba men and women engage in negotiations of desire similar to those of the masked white couple. On the other, the excess and public spectacle of the sexual alliance are Yoruba interpretations of white practices. While a critique of white gender and sexuality is clear, the mimicry opens a space for self-reflection. The skit allows for a critique of Yoruba as well as white masculinity; the man always assumes center stage, acts all the laughs, and comfortably inhabits the body of the ambitious seducer. In the end, the portrayal of the white woman is ambivalent. After performing her coy, suspicious, and seductive self, the woman takes charge: she shakes the man's hand, a more business-like gesture than the kiss, perhaps signifying the equality of their union. I read the ambivalence as both a critique of ọjînhi women's looseness and a celebration of their strength. The portrayal thus opens a reflection on the complexity and variability of Yoruba and white women's gender and sexuality. The ọjînhi couple-skit parodies the mimesis and alterity of white and Yoruba performances of race, gender, and sexuality. The Òjîníní's bodies, beneath the masks, play the extremes and in-between of whiteness and Yorubaness.

Those Who Don't Dance Our Ancestor's Dance

While Bààntù Àyàndókùn and Lámì̀ Ìyànì́nì́ do not easily recognize themselves in the new clothes of Bátá Fúji, their children have successfully invented an Islamified-Yoruba world music fusion. Although the Yoruba Bátá generation has been frustrated by what it sees as the frivolity of Fúji, a close look at Bátá Fúji song texts proves that the Bátá Fúji generation has preserved the structure and other-worldly content of bátá praise poetry. The Bátá Fúji generation embeds the teachings of its ancestors in its own story; it derives its strength from Òkùn and/or the Òtúà, reverses the forces of nature, identifies with fast-paced and playful Fúji music, collaborates with foreigners, and is placing its tradition on the world map.

The Bátá Fúji generation has consciously taken its inherited tradition to the next level. As Òjîníní sang, "He who doesn't dance Atumù's dance will not dance Bátá Fúji." In other words, a crossdressing in the ancestral tradition is necessary for participation in Bátá Fúji's pop tradition. The Bátá Fúji generation did not experience Islamic or British colonization firsthand and has grown up in an age of globalization; its artistic fusion represents its eclectic identity as a generation of Yoruba-rooted global citizens.

For the Yoruba Bátá generation, however, bátá represents the cultural authenticity and power of an ancestral tradition that preceded the advent
Appendix

Formal Interviews and Praise Song Recordings

Ajángù, Saaki.
Érin-Quarter, November 1997.
Ayan, Dayo, and Basiru.
Érin-Quarter, June 12, 2007.
Ayan, Sanni.
Ayan, Taiwo, Dayo, and Basiru.
Ayánkúle, Lásìtìdá.
Érin-Quarter, August 18, 1997.
Érin-Quarter, October 1997.
Ayánkúle, Lásìtìdá, Bāyì Ògùndíjé, and Sādīq Ojentùù.
University of Iłẹ, September 12, 1997.
Aṣaṣù, Modú.
Chief.
Iragbíjì, June 6, 2007.
Durok, Añiulado.
Érin-Quarter, August 9, 1997.
Kejede.
Érin-Quarter, June 8, 1997.

Notes

1. Lyrics by Wasiu Alabi, famous Jùjú band leader.
2. I met and lived with the Ayánkúle family for three months in 1999 while I was an exchange student at the University of Buchará. I conducted my dissertation fieldwork in Érin-Quarter from 1998 to 1999. I also conducted research for two months periods in 1999 and 2005.
6. Most of this data is stored in my personal archives. I have digitized all of the video footage and intend to make it available. I have edited some of the video footage into short films that are available on http://www.youtube.com.
Performing Pop Tradition in Nigeria

29. Barber and Waterman, "Traversing the Global and the Local."
35. The fifteenth-century reign of Sàngó marks the earliest documented use of básì drum ensembles in royal contexts. Euba, Yorùbá Drumming. The original source of the isà múrì was perhaps north of the Niger River before it was institutionalized and popularized in Old Òyò during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. See Amaan Vanessa, "Básì Conversations: Guardianship and Entitlement Narratives about the Bàsì in Nigeria and Cuba" (PhD diss., School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, 2006).
38. Based upon oral history, songs, and other forms of symbolic language, Peter Morton-Williams delineated a model to help explain Yorùbá cosmology and cult organization. His model divides the cosmos into three: ìrẹ́ òrò (house of the sky), ìrẹ́ èpí (house of the world), and ìrẹ́ (earth). In ìrẹ́ èpí, Òlùrùn (owner of the sky) or Olódùmarè is the one who guides the òrìṣà, the numerous gods and goddesses who dwell in that domain. Àà ààrùn (sky people) also exist in the sky as the spirit doubles of the living and the souls awaiting rebirth. Ìrù èpí is the domain of humans where good relations must be maintained with those of the sky and earth realms. Ìrù èpí is the domain of Oṣùkẹ́ (the earth owner), who receives the souls of the dead who become earth-walking spirits. Ancestors and other dead people pass through the earth on their way to the sky where they are reincarnated. Forest and tree spirits also live in Ìrù èpí.
39. Literally meaning “peeled back honey,” ìyìnlè is the term used by Yorùbá speakers to mark foreigners. While ìyìnlè literally refers to skin color, it is inextricable from nationality; for example, all U.S. citizens—white, African American, Asian American, Latin American, and so on—are considered ìyìnlè. In its most generalized meaning, ìyìnlè comes to stand for a privileged status.
Part Two

Politics of Culture in Popular Representations: Films and Performances