

The Yorùbá God of Drumming

TRANSATLANTIC PERSPECTIVES ON THE WOOD THAT TALKS

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Edited by Amanda Villepastour

Preface by J. D. Y. Peel

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Being Àyàn in a Modernizing Nigeria: A Multigenerational Perspective

Debra L. Klein

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My family is the most important thing to me. I know how valuable they are to me. They are my roots—where I learned the art of drumming and skills I will never forget. And now I must pass this knowledge along. That's how it is. (Àyánníyì, pers. comm., July 24, 1997)

A medium-sized, semi-rural town in Òṣun State renowned for its traditional culture, Èrín-Òṣun is home to a multigenerational family of practicing bàtá and dùndún drummers from a compound called Ìyálòjà.¹ Training their children in the art and profession of bàtá and dùndún drumming, the past three generations have inherited a common thread of Àyàn identity, or “Àyàn-ness” as expressed by the young Àyàn drummer quoted above; they are rooted in the Àyàn drumming profession and work hard to keep bàtá and dùndún performance traditions alive by performing for local and global audiences in secular, ritual, and educational settings and by teaching their knowledge and skills to family members and students from Nigeria and all parts of the world.²

Yorùbá drumming families in Nigeria identify with Òrìṣà Àyàṅàgalú (also known as Àyàn), the spirit of the drum. While Èrín-Òṣun artists do not directly incorporate the òrìṣà Àyàn into their everyday or ritual lives, they acknowledge Àyàn's spiritual role in their family's history. This chapter will illustrate that “being Àyàn,” for three generations of drummers, revolves around an inherited and professional identity rather than religious beliefs or ritual practices. Yet each generation has crafted its Àyàn identity within local, national, and international contexts characterized by intense juxtapositions between the national devaluation of

the òrìṣà, shaped by Nigeria's modernizing discourses, and worldwide demand for the òrìṣà, shaped by global and diasporic discourses of culture preservation. Each generation has performed its Àyàn-ness differently; in an effort to understand what it has meant to "be Àyàn," I turn to the words and experiences of the past three generations of Ìyálójà's Àyàn drummers.

Since the 1960s, the past three generations have contributed to and been shaped by their participation in a Yorùbá culture movement, a global network of artists, students, scholars, and òrìṣà worshippers who participate in and perpetuate aspects of traditional Yorùbá culture. The idea of a Yorùbá culture movement emerged from my everyday conversations with the artists and their apprentices from Germany and the United States. Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun artist "discourse"³ about the meaning of Yorùbá traditional culture was thus produced in dialogue with German and US collaborators. Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun artist discourse often hinged on their networks of concrete relationships—real people from real places navigating real relationships. Greg Urban's (1996) juxtaposition of "intelligible" with "sensible" aspects of discourse lends further clarification to the concept of a Yorùbá culture movement. The sensible side is discourse about lived experience, actual people narrating their experiences. The intelligible side is "discourse about meaningful discourse" (Urban 1996, 22), meta-discourses such as a culture movement about the production of culture. In this sense, a Yorùbá culture movement has become a metaculture that has self-consciously and collaboratively produced its forms of tradition and culture.

Within the global community of òrìṣà devotees, there appears to be a prevailing assumption about Yorùbá identity that also holds true for Àyàn identity: being Yorùbá and Àyàn hinges around belief in and worship of the òrìṣà. I suggest that, in a global discourse about Yorùbá identity, "performances"⁴ of Àyàn identity have become naturalized as "òrìṣà belief and worship," leaving little room for the notion of Àyàn-ness as a professional lineage-based identity that changes over time and does not privilege the òrìṣà. Arguing against the assumption that "being Àyàn" equals Àyàn worship, I examine how the "performativity"⁵ of Àyàn-ness has changed within Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun from the 1950s to the present. By looking at "being Àyàn" as a performative process, this chapter tracks how Àyàn-identified artists have historically, institutionally, and discursively redefined and recreated the social category of "Àyàn."

It is worth noting that the discourse of Àyàn-ness revolving around the worship of the òrìṣà Àyàn began, at least in part, in New York in the 1950s, when Cuban drummers introduced bàtá to the United States. Cornelius describes the context in which bàtá grew:

New York's drummers understood the relentless power of sinew and drum to move the body and free the mind. These, after all, were the currencies of America's African-rooted musical experience . . . of slave-era ring shouts, of the tonal slides and rhythmic grooves of Louis Armstrong, of the dance bands of Machito and Mario Bauza, and the ferocious rhythmic drive of jazz drummer Elvin Jones. These were the sources of authenticity from which New York musicians drew as they ventured outward into the rhythmic styles and sonic efficacy of bata drumming. (Cornelius 2008, 11)

Associating some sort of authentic or natural experience with the Yorùbá drumming tradition of *bàtá*, US-based practitioners helped shape the discourse that naturalized Yorùbá drumming as religious and spiritual versus lineage-based and professional. Thus, the tendency to naturalize Àyàn-ness as *òriṣà*-centered is variously rooted in diasporic contexts and histories.

This discourse of Yorùbáness rooted in *òriṣà* worship also emerged during the project of Nigerian nation building, from the 1950s through the 1970s. During this time, Nigerian politicians, scholars, and artists became invested in defining a Yorùbá identity that predated and stood in opposition to Islam and Christianity. Many scholars have documented the collaborative movement to revive Yorùbá *òriṣà* and artistic cultures in Òṣogbo as an example of a successful and multi-valenced commitment to reinvent a Yorùbáness rooted in the *òriṣà* (see Beier 1991; Klein 2007; Probst 2011). This intellectualization and folkloricization of *òriṣà* culture has been and continues to be part of a Yorùbá nationalist movement.

Since the conversion of Nigeria to Islam and Christianity, *òriṣà* worship has seriously declined in Nigeria; many *òriṣà* scholars and remaining practitioners are alarmed that *òriṣà*-related traditions, including those around the *òriṣà* Àyàn, are endangered (Vincent 2006; Klein 2007). When I began my fieldwork with Èrín-Òṣun's most prolific Àyàn lineage in the early nineties, the artists had been enmeshed in overseas networks of sponsors, researchers, and fans for over thirty years. Without these networks, these artists' Àyàn identities would have been very different, perhaps nonexistent. These artists' senses of "being Àyàn" were crafted within their town and in collaboration with their overseas interlocutors.

While the oldest of three generations of Àyàn artists in my study did not have much contact with overseas collaborators, the next two generations have come of age in a global culture movement.⁶ While I show how "being Àyàn" revolves around family identity and professionalization of drumming for all generations, I also illustrate that the past two

generations have incorporated the popular diasporic discourse about Àyàn-ness into their performances of Àyàn identity. I argue that Nigeria-based Àyàn artists have become inspired to re-embrace the òrìṣà, challenging the discourse of Nigerian modernity that excludes the òrìṣà yet performing a Yorùbá modernity defined by such strategies of incorporating old and new cultural elements.

As an anthropologist with a long-term commitment to an Àyàn lineage in Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun, I challenge the dominance of the òrìṣà-based notion of being Àyàn by paying attention to multiple and emergent meanings of Àyàn-ness in Nigeria. Though that is my central concern in this chapter, it is significant that the òrìṣà-based notion of Àyàn-ness has influenced and empowered Nigeria-based Àyàn artists. But I caution us against the assumption that Àyàn-ness is endangered if the òrìṣà are not at the center.

Àyàn Artists of Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun

According to oral and written primary and secondary historical sources (Johnson 1976; Peel 2000; Villepastour 2010), Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun was founded by Yorùbá refugees from Èrìnlé (close to Ìlọ̀rín in today's Kwara State) who fled the violence of the Fulani invasions during the mid-nineteenth century. Èrìnlé is storied to have been founded by Ọ̀bàlùfọ̀n (òrìṣà of cloth and weaving), who walked north from Ilé-Ife, the reputed birthplace of Yorùbá people (Villepastour 2010, 29). In 1817 Àfọ̀njá, the ruler of Ìlọ̀rín, wanted to enhance his power (after having lost his bid to become the next king of Ọ̀yọ́) and thus invited a prominent Fulani priest known as Álími to support him in Ìlọ̀rín. Significantly, Àfọ̀njá was not a Muslim himself but a believer in the òrìṣà. Álími and his army of Hausa slaves turned against Àfọ̀njá and carried out a jihad against "pagan" Yorùbá people (Peel 2000, 33). According to Àyándòkún of Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun, the people of Èrìnlé supported Àfọ̀njá and ended up fleeing their town on the fateful night when the Fulani invaded. The ancestors of the Àyàn family of Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun with whom I work were responsible for warning the king, Ọ̀bà Ọ̀yágbódùn, and waking up the town so that they could escape. This was when they fled and founded Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun. When the war ended in Ìlọ̀rín, the king returned but left one of his sons to continue the kingship in Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun (Villepastour 2010, 31).

Today's king of Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun, Èlérín Ọ̀bà Yusuf Ọ̀mọ̀loyè Ọ̀yágbódùn II, is a descendent of Ọ̀yágbódùn. Though he is a Muslim, the Èlérín hosts an annual festival in honor of Òrìṣà Ọ̀bàlùfọ̀n during the harvest in June or July. In the late nineties, the king estimated the number of Muslims in Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun to be about 65 percent and the number of Christians to be

about 35 percent of Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun's total population of about 100,000. In our interview, he said that a small percentage (less than 5 percent), including practitioners of Islam and Christianity, also continue to worship the ọ̀rìṣà.⁷

Analyzing linguistic and archival evidence, J. D. Y. Peel argues that Songhai people from the northwest, rather than Hausa people, initially brought Islam to Yorùbá people as early as the late sixteenth century. But by the eighteenth century, predominantly Hausa and other Nigerians were converting Yorùbá people. And by the 1810s, a substantial number of Yorùbá people had already converted to Islam. When the founders of Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun fled south, it is likely that many of them had already converted to Islam. As Peel states, however, the Islamization of Yorùbá people "varied from town to town according to local circumstances" (2000, 191). Given the two-hundred-year history of the mutual constitution and coexistence of ọ̀rìṣà worship and Islam, coupled with the Yorùbá ethos of incorporation, I suggest that the Àyàn artists' ways of being Muslim are historically and specifically flexible and even incorporative of the ọ̀rìṣà.

My long-term ethnographic research with Àyàn artists, beginning in 1990, has revolved around the extended family of Lámídì Ayánkúnlé in Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun. One of the few compounds that continues to school its children in the art of traditional drumming, the Ìyálọ̀jà compound consists of about two hundred members, spanning five generations and five different towns in Ọ̀ṣun and Kwara states. There are Ìyálọ̀jà compounds in the towns of Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun (Ọ̀ṣun State) and Èrínlẹ̀ (Kwara State). Over the course of three years of fieldwork in the nineties and during subsequent research trips in 2005 and 2010, I lived with the Àyàn drummers in their compound and attended about one hundred Àyàn and Ọ̀jẹ⁸ performances as a participant-observer. Ọ̀rìṣà ceremonies comprised about twenty-nine of these performances: three for Şàngó, three for Ọ̀ṣun, two for Ọ̀gún, and twenty-one for Egúngún.⁹ Though it was not a topic of everyday conversation, I was able to engage the artists in dialogue about their identities as members of Àyàn and Ọ̀jẹ lineages and their relationships to the ọ̀rìṣà during formal interviews, which I recorded and transcribed with the help of my research assistants, Ràṣìdì Àyándélé and Tájù Àyánbíṣí. Throughout the nineties, we conducted series of formal interviews with about thirty members of three different Àyàn and Ọ̀jẹ generations.

In order to understand and articulate generational shifts in Àyàn family members' identities, I have differentiated among the three generations of artists. After listening to, reviewing, and analyzing my interviews with the artists, I came up with the following phrases, from direct

quotations during interviews and conversations, to help characterize each generation's relationship with the òrìṣà: the "No More Òrìṣà" generation, the "Reviving Òrìṣà" generation, and the "Grasping for Òrìṣà" generation.

Those of the No More Òrìṣà generation were born between 1925 and 1940 during British colonialism: they were mostly in their sixties and early seventies when I lived with and interviewed them. Most members of this generation were not formally educated in Western or Koranic schools and were second-generation Muslims in their families. Their Àyàn heritage signified an inherited drumming profession and family identity as drummers for traditional leaders and òrìṣà worshippers. During the 1950s and 1960s, many members of this generation bought kola nut or cocoa farms in nearby towns in order to supplement their incomes from drumming. At the time of this writing, the artists I interviewed from this generation have all passed away and are sorely missed.

Members of the Reviving Òrìṣà generation were born between 1945 and 1960 during a Nigeria on the edge of independence: they were mostly in their forties and fifties when I lived with them. I spent most of my time with members of this generation, particularly Làmídì Àyánkúnlé and his family, with whom I have collaborated on documenting the history and culture of Yorùbá bàtá. Làmídì and I maintain regular correspondence via email and mutual friends. Like their fathers, most members of this generation were not formally educated in Western or Koranic schools. In addition to drumming professionally, most of them apprenticed in and mastered another trade, such as carpentry, barbering, or sewing. They were raised as third-generation Muslims. This generation came of age during Nigeria's nation-building decades and its members have traveled extensively within and outside Nigeria as representatives of Yorùbá culture. Their Àyàn heritage signifies pride in and a desire to revive their culture's traditional roots, *àṣà ìbílẹ̀* (literally "deep culture").

The Grasping for Òrìṣà generation incorporates those born between 1965 and 1980 during a modernizing Nigeria: they were mostly in their late teens and twenties in the late nineties. Most members of this generation attended Western-modeled elementary school and then studied a trade to supplement their incomes from drumming. They were raised as fourth-generation Muslims and identify with and perform the Muslim-inspired, Nigerian popular music known as *fùjì*.¹⁰ Like their fathers, they are proud of their Àyàn heritage, yet they have come to realize that they have been steadily losing touch with their *àṣà ìbílẹ̀*, Yorùbá roots. Several members of this generation have since become interested in understanding and documenting their cultural roots. During our interviews,

for example, they expressed goals of publishing their own family histories. Many of my collaborators¹¹ from this generation have performed overseas, following in their fathers' footsteps, and several have moved to the United States.

No More Òrìṣà

The Àyàn forefathers of Ìyálójà's compound had not yet converted to Islam during the Fulani invasions; they continued to worship the òrìṣà until the early 1900s. During our interviews, I learned that the parents of the No More Òrìṣà generation converted to Islam during their performance- and business-related travels around Nigeria and West Africa. Once converted, this generation raised their children as second-generation Muslims in Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun.

Despite being second-generation Muslims, the primary profession of this generation was to play bàtá and dùndún for year-round òrìṣà and secular rituals.¹² When the careers of musicians in this generation were at their height, the daily, year-round ritual calendar, a series of two-week or monthlong celebrations for different òrìṣà, was still intact. These drummers had plenty of work during the peak of their professional lives. Even though most of these drummers also owned kola nut or cocoa farms to supplement their incomes, their identities revolved around their occupations as traditional drummers. Members of this generation raised their sons to follow in their professional footsteps and remained rooted in their roles as husbands, fathers, and drummers for their town and the Yorùbá region.

As Nigeria transitioned into an independent nation-state in the 1960s and the economy went through cycles of boom and bust, the drummers' work schedules, which once followed the yearly ritual calendar, were largely consolidated to weekends, when families celebrated naming ceremonies, funerals, and weddings. Òrìṣà festivals also dwindled as Islam and Christianity continued to dominate the religious and ritual landscape; thus, the drummers were unemployed on weekdays and were forced to turn to other kinds of work for wages. As it became increasingly difficult to depend on drumming as a sustainable profession, many Àyàn families stopped drumming and stopped passing their inherited profession down to future generations. The No More generation witnessed this transition: their profession became less relevant in a modernizing Nigeria. Significantly, however, they became the first generation of their family to become active players in the emergent global Yorùbá culture movement of the 1960s. While members of other Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun drumming

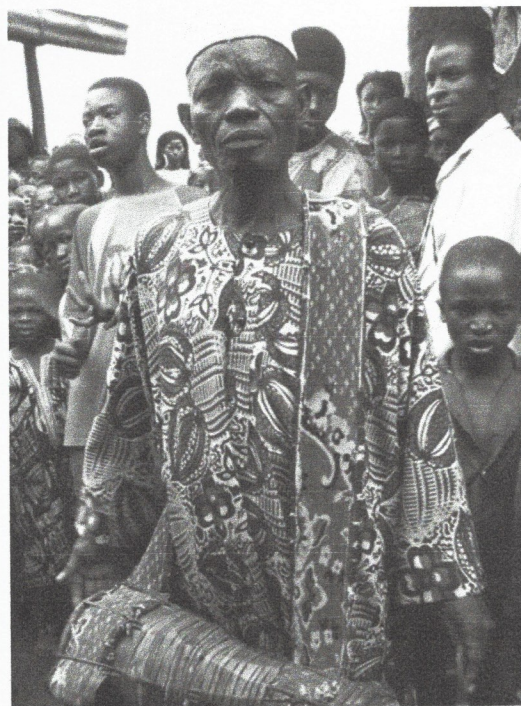


Plate 8.1: Bába Ràşídì was a member of the No More Òrìṣà generation. (photograph: Debra Klein, Èrín-Òṣun, 10 June 2005)

families began to leave town to pursue other forms of work or education in Nigerian or West African cities, the Àyàn drummers of the Ìyálójà compound were discovered by and began to collaborate with Ìbàdàn- and Òṣogbo-based artists and scholars who were founding members of the movement for the revival of traditional Yorùbá culture.¹³

In the 1950s, for example, German scholar and culture broker Ulli Beier began to work closely with Ìgè Àyánşínà, a member of the No More generation and father of Lámídì. Beier's academic interest in and sponsorship of Àyánşínà's profession contributed to Àyánşínà's desire to pass his skills and passion for bàtá down to his sons. At the same time, Austrian artist (and eventual resident Òbàtálá priestess) Susanne Wenger (1915–2009) became enamored with the artistry and skills of Àyánbíṣí, another member of the No More generation: Wenger asked Àyánbíṣí to become her personal drummer for her weekly òrìṣà ceremonies in Òṣogbo. Àyánbíṣí played for Wenger's ceremonies, working as her personal drummer for about thirty years until his death.

Another member of this generation, Bába Làtí, remarked on his family's unique success: "Since our family has passed down our profession to the next generations and we have become well known throughout the world, our success will continue into the future. We can say, 'This is the

drummers' compound,' and people from all over the world will come to us to learn the art of drumming" (Bàba Làtí, pers. comm., December 10, 1997). As these drummers became more involved with local, national and international networks of Yorùbá culture enthusiasts, they began to spearhead a significant shift away from the negative perceptions of traditional drummers. The perception of drummers as irrelevant and uneducated grew out of a dominant nationalist discourse about what it means to be a modern Nigerian citizen: someone with a formal education who practices Islam or Christianity is modern, while someone who trained in a traditional "craft" with no school certificate is not. As opportunities for work waned, drummers began to rely more heavily on small sums of money from individual patrons. The success of Ìyálójà's drummers countered negative perceptions of drummers as uneducated beggars. These drummers garnered national and international work and respect precisely because they were lineage-based professional drummers.

Members of this generation were not only successful participants in a burgeoning global culture industry, but they were also active in local and national politics. One of the traditional roles of a talking drummer is a spokesperson and critic of local and national affairs. I had the honor and pleasure of knowing one of the most gifted and understated artist-activists of southwestern Nigeria, Alhaji¹⁴ Dúrólù. Alhaji's instrument was the *iyáàlù* dundún drum. Following his father's advice, the young Alhaji studied dundún drumming at another compound and was responsible for bringing the art of dundún to Ìyálójà's compound. More so than the other drummers, Alhaji wanted to tell me what it was like for drummers during Nigeria's tumultuous early days as a nation.

During our independence wars, politicians used to invite me to drum for them. I played for my [political] party, "Ègbé Awólówò" Action Group. I would be sitting on the roof of a vehicle, and we would be campaigning all around the Òṣun area—Òṣogbo, Ifón, Ìlòòbù, Òkíní. On the day we won the election, our political opponents told the police to arrest me. They accused me of using my drum to incite people against the opposing side. I asked the police why I was arrested, and they said it was because I was the drummer for the opposing side. My family paid my bail so I was not imprisoned. I have experienced both positive and negative things as a member of the Àyàn lineage. We all witnessed the effects of the civil war. We were running helter-skelter. There were no ceremonies because of the war. It was during that time that we formed the Drummer's Union, "Ègbé Onílù." We formed this union when the military government passed an edict that there shouldn't be drumming or ceremonies because of the war. The edict did not allow us to do our

work. A highly educated man came to Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun from the lineage of drummers from Ògbómòṣó. He helped us to repeal the edict. (Dúrólù, pers. comm., September 7, 1997)

Today, most drummers claim to belong to all political parties and religions so that they can perform at any political or religious event. In fact, drummers are particularly accepting of multiple religions and political parties: they cultivate such open-mindedness as part of their professionalism. However, during Nigeria's first election, most drummers from Ìyálọ́jà's supported the Action Group, Ọ̀báfẹ́mi Awólọ́wọ's party. Taking seriously his role as spokesman for political issues affecting his community, Alhaji risked getting caught by members of the opposition party. Such a risk, he knew, came with the territory of doing his job well. In the 1970s, the traditional drummers formed their union, Ègbé Onílù, in the face of the Biafran war. This new level of organization helped validate traditional drumming as a professional career. In 1997 the Drummer's Union elected Alhaji as their chairman. He was honored by this title and considered it one of his life's crowning achievements. Alhaji's passing has left a hole in the drumming community and the social fabric of Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun. With the passing of the No More generation, the role of the drummer as spokesperson and critic has been steadily disappearing.

With the passing of the No More generation, many rhythms and songs for the òrìṣà have also been disappearing since they are played less and less. However, communities who continue to worship the òrìṣà have been working with Ìyálọ́jà's drummers to record, preserve, and learn their drum texts. Even though the No More generation had the most exposure to òrìṣà ceremonies and were the most familiar with a wide range of òrìṣà rhythms, they were the most adamant in their anti-òrìṣà worldview, at least publicly: they had been raised as Muslims. In the following quotations, note how the drummers emphasized that they were not òrìṣà worshippers and that their work as drummers in no way conflicted with their religion.

People know quite well that the art of drumming is our occupation. The same drums that we play for a Muslim or a Christian are the same drums that we play for Ẹ̀ṣàngó worshippers and Egúngún devotees. The only differences are the rhythms. There is a clear distinction between one's religion and drumming. (Àyándélé, pers. comm., September 30, 1997)

My father converted to Islam. Before that, he worshipped Òrìṣà Oko. When someone was born, the family consulted with the òrìṣà to find out what type of religion that child would follow. The òrìṣà might divine

that a child would become an Ifá devotee. But in the case of my father, the òrìṣà divined that he would become a Muslim. When my father grew up, he was totally involved with Islamic affairs. He never worshipped the òrìṣà. (Alhaji Èrinlé, pers. comm., October 24, 1997)

Due to the advent of Islam and Christianity, the children of òrìṣà worshippers did not get involved with òrìṣà initiations. Worshipping the òrìṣà is not our religion. Drumming is our work, and worshipping the òrìṣà is their religion. I am a Muslim. I have been a Muslim since my childhood days. There is no conflict when we play for different ceremonies because people know that we are doing our work by playing the drums. They know that we are not òrìṣà devotees. (Àyánbísi, pers. comm., October 30, 1997)

Having been disciplined by their society, this generation publicly embraced their Muslim religious identities; however, most members also maintained private relationships with town, family, and personal òrìṣà. While Nigerian society by and large rejected the òrìṣà, the global community was seeking to revive them. Members of this generation thus walked the line of this contradiction: how could the “civilized” world embrace the òrìṣà while Nigeria had abandoned the òrìṣà? While this generation, no doubt, lost touch with the òrìṣà through public ritual, their relationships with the òrìṣà were complex and are largely unknown due to the lack of representation of this generation of Àyàn artists in anthropological and historical records.

During the fifties and sixties, members of the No More Generation crafted their Àyàn-ness during times of contradiction and tension. As they witnessed Nigeria gain its independence, they experienced unrest due to local struggles for resource control. While their local communities were continuing to reject the òrìṣà, global demand for the òrìṣà was on the rise. And while they experienced a steady decline of professional opportunity locally, possibilities for professional opportunity were increasing overseas. This generation’s Àyàn performativity was characterized by their changing roles as professional drummers; their continuing roles as community spokesmen; and their up-and-coming roles as representatives of Yorùbá culture at home and overseas.

Reviving Òrìṣà

I want to tell the story of my birth. My parents went to the shrine of Òrìṣà Oko to pray for my birth. My mother gave birth to me there. My father was Ìgè Àyánṣìnà. My mother was Àwèrò. My mother had two

husbands before getting married to my father. Whenever she gave birth, she kept losing her child. None of her children had survived before she met my father and married him. When they married each other, her children kept dying. Later, she went to the shrine of Òrìṣà Oko. My father had accepted Islam. Before, he was not a Muslim. He accepted Islam when he grew old.

Women are not at peace without a child. They prayed to Òrìṣà Oko at the Ìdì-Òṣun shrine. My parents consulted Òrìṣà Oko. They prayed for my life and that I would not die. They gave birth to me. During the Òrìṣà Oko festival, they named me. My mother became a worshipper of Òrìṣà Oko. But she also claimed to be a Muslim for me not to die. I grew up knowing Òrìṣà Oko. I would always go to Òrìṣà Oko festivals with my father as a child. (Àyánkúnlé, pers. comm., October 10, 1996)

It was a clear, moist night in Èrìn-Òṣun when Làmídì Àyánkúnlé began to unravel the story of his life in my presence. We set up metal chairs in the unfinished, empty cement house next door to Làmídì's compound. The evening air and dim moonlight flooded into the empty space through the two large openings intended for windows. A certain wave of inspiration and urgency shaped the session that ensued. Làmídì and I knew that this meeting, if successful, would spark the formal opening of a lifelong dialogue between us: about his life story, the collaborative production of Yorùbá culture, and our mutual stakes in making the world a better place through the search for cross-cultural understanding.

While Làmídì neither identifies as a Muslim nor formally worships the òrìṣà, he believes in and gives thanks to Òrìṣà Oko for bringing him into the world safely and for protecting him throughout his life. Làmídì also believes in the power of the òrìṣà as part of his heritage. Faith in àṣà ìbílẹ̀, traditional culture inherited from his ancestors, drives Làmídì's life story. As he narrated the story of his birth, Làmídì repeated the point that although his parents converted to Islam, they continued to worship the òrìṣà. The fact that Làmídì and his parents inherited the òrìṣà, not Islam, continues to define Làmídì's identity. Làmídì identifies as a practitioner of àṣà ìbílẹ̀, cultural traditions that preceded Islam or Christianity. I would characterize Làmídì's experience of his parents' conversion to Islam as one of surprise and loss. Over time, Làmídì has developed his critique of Islamic influences in Yorùbá culture: Yorùbá traditional culture existed before Islam and has been threatened by Islamic beliefs and culture. According to Làmídì, the presence of Islam has not allowed àṣà ìbílẹ̀ to breathe, grow, and change in Nigeria.

In his late teens and early twenties during the late sixties, Làmídì was coming into his own as a master drummer. The No More generation,



Plate 8.2: Lámídi Àyánkúnlé (front), of the Reviving Òrìṣà generation, with his sons. (photograph: Debra Klein, Èrín-Òṣun, 19 June 2005)

including Lámídi's father, had become involved in the revival movement based in Òṣogbo and Ìbàdàn. Scouted by theater groups looking for local talent, Lámídi was approached by several of the Yorùbá popular theater directors and playwrights, including Kólá Ògúnmolá and Dúró Ládiípò. At a moment in Nigeria's history when Yorùbá traditional culture was going through a revival, Lámídi was coveted for his knowledge, skills, and ability to perform them. While the unsolicited opportunity to perform with such well-respected theater troupes appealed to Lámídi, his father exercised much ambivalence and caution around his son's participation in popular, non-traditional art. Despite his conversion to Islam, Lámídi's father continued to practice, teach, and respect the òrìṣà drum texts and ceremonies—cultural material he expected his son to carry on. As Lámídi recounted his entry into the popular theater scene, he always acknowledged his father's skepticism:

I have been a very skillful drummer since my childhood days. When I was discovered, I was playing drums for the masquerade festivals in 1969. Dúró Ládiípò invited me to play *bàtá* in his theater group, but my father did not allow me to play for him then. He told me that if I followed a theater group, I would no longer be an expert in the rhythms for

the different gods and goddesses. My friend from Lagos, who had been playing for Dúró Ládiípò's theater group, did not know how to play different rhythms for the òrìṣà. If I played for theater, I would forget how to play traditional drums. So we did not accept the invitation then. (Àyánkúnlé, pers. comm., February 1, 1997)

While Làmidì eventually accepted Dúró Ládiípò's invitation, he heeded his father's advice: he did not rehearse with the group every day so that he could spend the majority of his week playing for local celebrations. As other professional artists asked Làmidì to participate in their projects, Làmidì continued to limit his commitment to stage work. Like his father, Làmidì was more compelled by opportunities to play a wide range of drum music for various local audiences as opposed to repeating the same songs on stage.

Làmidì's understanding of àṣà ìbílẹ̀ emerged from his childhood training in the òrìṣà and the local traveling theater (*alàrìnjó*) tradition. Though Làmidì had witnessed his father's conversion, he also knew that his father still valued, practiced, and taught Yorùbá traditional culture, self-consciously passing along the Àyàn legacy. Làmidì's father, Ìgè Àyánsínà, was a purist when it came to bàtá: he was unwilling to fuse other musical genres or styles with bàtá. When it came to his profession, Àyánsínà strived to keep the classic bàtá repertoire alive by teaching his son to become a bàtá master as opposed to a popular theatre musician. Following in his father's footsteps, Làmidì's sense of being Àyàn revolves around his inherited notion of àṣà ìbílẹ̀: traditional culture rooted in an inherited body of drumming knowledge and skills. Influenced by his own faith in the òrìṣà and the culture movement's metadiscourse about authenticity, Làmidì's sense of being Àyàn is grounded in an òrìṣà-centered worldview.

In addition to their participation in the Òṣogbo- and Ìbàdàn-based revival movement, the Reviving generation also began to represent Yorùbá drumming in state and national festivals and competitions, including FESTAC '77 (Festival of Black Arts and Culture) and NAFEST (National Festival of Arts and Culture). In order to enter the competitions, artists were required to be affiliated with a state-sponsored cultural center. Thus, the Òyó or Òṣun State cultural centers hired the Àyàn drummers of Ìyálójà's compound to compete alongside their artists in residence. While cultural center artists had school certificates in the performing arts, most did not inherit their performance knowledge and skills within an extended family context. In order to win competitions, cultural centers relied heavily on the performance skills and experience of the Èrìn-Òṣun artists.

The irony was not lost on the Reviving generation: how could their nation condemn as anti-modern their lifestyle and practices while rewarding them for their professional knowledge and skills? Làmídì's junior brother, Rábíù Àyándòkun, told me the following proverb about having to confront people's prejudice around Àyàn drummers' lack of Western education:

Ó lé mi ò kàwé. Ó lé mi ò kàwé. Alákòwé n ẹ lẹbirà ní Ìkejà. Ó lé mi ò kàwé o. Iṣẹ ọwọ́dè mi mò n ẹ. Ọrọ iwé kọ la n wí. (He despises me for my illiteracy. He despises me for my illiteracy. Meanwhile many educated people are engaged in laboring jobs in Ìkejà. Yet he despises me for my illiteracy. I profit from the work of my hand. Literacy is not the issue here.) (translation from Villepastour 2010, 145)

When I ran into someone who wanted to give me a hard time for not going to school, I would play this proverb on my drum. When I played the proverb, I was happy. If that person understood my drum's message, he would stop bothering me. Back then, a drummer might also play a message about something going on in our society. If I observed something going on, I would comment on it with my drum. Today, things have changed drastically because modern drummers play the rhythms but may not know the meaning of what they're saying. My son's generation had not been born when we were playing such rhythms. It is quite different today. They can play the percussion, but it's not easy for modern children to play the proverbs because they are very difficult sayings. (Àyándòkun, pers. comm., September 27, 1997)

When he played the proverb, Rábíù challenged his audiences to consider how other forms of knowledge—proverbs, rhythms, and professional musicianship—are just as valuable as book-based education. In our discussion, Rábíù expressed one of the defining tensions that members of his generation have negotiated throughout their professional lives. While his generation participated in the drumming profession when it had a significant cultural relevance in Nigeria, his children's generation did not participate in their inherited profession as an invaluable aesthetic art and commodity in Nigeria. Rábíù and Làmídì often commiserate that their children will never experience their own culture's support and celebration of the Àyàn profession in the same career-defining ways that they had.

In contrast to the modernizing Nigerian nation-state, the Yorùbá culture movement values the Àyàn drummers' inherited knowledge and skills. When members of the Reviving Òrìṣà generation began to tap into this movement by performing overseas, they were truly liberated from disparaging stereotypes of their profession and hence

rein vigorated. Another member of the Reviving generation, masquerade dancer Òjéyemí, described his first time performing in Germany in the nineties: "What surprised me about performing in Germany and the U.S. was how much they loved our performances! People do not like us as much here in Nigeria. This is because we are the owners of Egúngún performance. Nigerians look down on us for our association with the òrìṣà and for our lack of education" (Òjéyemí, pers. comm., January 3, 1997).

When members of the Reviving generation return home after touring overseas, they bring back stories about their performance successes. Incorporating their overseas experiences into their local performances, these artists have been re-educating their communities about the cultural value of their inherited profession. While most members of the Reviving generation have not publicly embraced an òrìṣà-based worldview, they have come to appreciate, value, and identify with the òrìṣà as central to Yorùbá culture and their identities as Àyàn drummers and Òjè masqueraders.

For the Reviving Òrìṣà generation, Àyàn performativity revolves around their commitments to sustaining their inherited drumming profession; roles as representatives of Yorùbá culture; and inheritance of the òrìṣà. Coming of age during the seventies and eighties, the Reviving generation negotiated a different set of contradictions. Their own nation at once embraced and rejected their Àyàn-ness. Yet while the global community embraced their Àyàn-ness, it expected them to be even more òrìṣà-centered than they were. Members of this generation learned to perform their Àyàn-ness by straddling their own culture of modernization and a burgeoning global market for the Àyàn brand. The global discourse that naturalized Yorùbá Àyàn-ness as òrìṣà-centered challenged this generation to question their religious beliefs and identities and to thus redefine their Àyàn-ness in conversation with global culture and market demands.

Grasping for Òrìṣà

Today, drumming has modernized. In the old days, we had real traditional rhythms for our gods and goddesses, the òrìṣà. But the young drummers do not know those rhythms. When I went to America for the first time, everyone asked me about those traditional rhythms. So, when I came back to Nigeria, I tried to learn them. While most people with the traditional knowledge in my family have died, a few are still alive. If you don't ask, they won't teach you the traditional songs. So, I wrote

down the music in my book. I worked with Alhaji Bàba Alágbàfò and Bàba Múdà. They are all dead now, but I wrote down their songs in my book. That's the only place you can learn the real thing. The only people you can ask now are Làmídì, Bàba Làtí, Alhaji, or Bàba Tájà. There are no other drummers alive with this knowledge. (Àyánníyì, pers. comm., July 24, 1997)

I am older, I have had opportunities that my younger siblings do not have. In the old days when there were many ceremonies, like Egúngún festivals in Ìwó, we would travel there to perform. There, we would meet different performers, and we would learn by watching their performances and listening to their songs. But today, we can hardly find traditional ceremonies. (Ọjéyemí, pers. comm., October 1, 1997)

Of the ten members of the Grasping for Òrìṣà generation I interviewed, Akeem Àyánníyì was the only one who had left Nigeria to settle in the United States. Akeem had married an American woman from Santa Fe, New Mexico, where they shared a home and had a child together. He still lives in Santa Fe, now with a Yorùbá wife, where he teaches and performs Yorùbá drumming. Túndé Ọjéyemí is a well-respected, well-traveled and gifted masquerade dancer who continues to perform locally, nationally, and overseas whenever possible. The other members of this generation who are still based in Èrín-Ọṣun have learned òrìṣà songs during annual òrìṣà festivals (viz., Sàngó, Ọṣun, Ọgún, and Egúngún) and during their fathers' workshops with foreign students.

While members of the Grasping generation have begun to appreciate the relevance of the òrìṣà to their heritage and to the broader Yorùbá culture movement, they grew up either as Muslims or òrìṣà worshippers who are comfortable with cultural fusions. For example, many members of this generation practice Islam and òrìṣà worship and easily incorporate fújì music and bàtá-fújì fusions into their Àyàn identity and repertoire. Inspired by the global interest in Yorùbá culture, members of the Grasping generation have been making efforts to embrace and/or rediscover their cultural heritage that once revolved around the òrìṣà.

Though the members of the Grasping generation were raised as fourth-generation Muslims, they have also been raised to represent their Yorùbá heritage at home and abroad. Coming of age in an era of increasing international respect for an òrìṣà-centered worldview, some members of this generation have been reinventing a belief system and ritual lifestyle that revolves around the òrìṣà. During our interviews, the members of this generation who identified with the òrìṣà were the Ọjè masqueraders. The



Plate 8.3: Àyánkúnlé's sons, Saheed, Musiliyu, Kabiru, and Muidini, are members of the Grasping for Òrìṣà generation. (photograph: Debra Klein, Èrín-Òṣun, 19 June 2005)

Àyàn drummers, on the other hand, identified as Muslims who embraced the òrìṣà predominantly as their cultural and professional heritage.

Cousins Túndé Òjéyemí and Kójèdè Òjèèwoyè were born into a powerful family of Egúngún worshippers. While Túndé and Kójèdè were raised both as Muslims and Egúngún worshippers, they have chosen to follow the path of the Egúngún.

I am not a Muslim. My parents are Egúngún worshippers. My grandfather was a Muslim, but his mother was an Egúngún devotee. My parents and I are Egúngún worshippers. An Egúngún worshipper needs to know how to chant *ewì* very well—that's number one. Secondly, he must know how to dance to traditional rhythms. Thirdly, he must know how to change in and out of Egúngún costumes while dancing. He must be able to handle the masks very well. It is not compulsory for one to be able to do acrobatic tricks, but today, acrobatic tricks are becoming more important in the art of performance. (Òjéyemí, pers. comm., October 1, 1997)

My parents initiated me into the Egúngún cult. And that's why they named me Akójèdè—that I would be an Egúngún worshipper and performer, right from creation. I give thanks to God that our Egúngún

heritage has been a blessing for our family. (Ọjẹ̀wọ̀yẹ̀, pers. comm., May 3, 1997)

Túndé explained what it means to be an Egúngún worshipper by defining the body of knowledge and skills of a masquerade performer. Both cousins have been performing overseas since the mid-nineties, so they have been participating in the global market for Àyàn and Ọjẹ̀ performance. In addition to their commitment to practicing and perpetuating Ọjẹ̀ performance, however, both cousins also pray to and honor the Egúngún during rituals with close family members, particularly during annual outings of the Egúngún masquerades.

The Àyàn drummers of the Grasping generation based in Èrín-Ọ̀sun play for ọ̀rìṣà ceremonies and have made an effort to learn ọ̀rìṣà rhythms; yet being Àyàn, for them, is mostly about their inherited profession. During a recent interview with half-brothers Múídínì Àyánkúnlé and Wáfídi Àyàn, Múídínì could hardly contain his enthusiasm when I asked him what it meant to him to have been born into an Àyàn family: "That is an important question. Our ancestors gave us a great opportunity. I am very grateful. Our fathers were serious about the work of Àyàn. If they didn't enjoy and excel at drumming, they would not have continued to play. Today, all of Africa knows us. And we love what we do. Today, we tour all over the world" (Àyánkúnlé, pers. comm., June 12, 2005). When I asked how they saw their future careers unfold, they said they would like to incorporate more bàtá and dùndún drumming into fújì, highlife, and jùjú music. For this generation, bringing their instruments and musicianship into pop music styles represents a rebirth and a recontextualization of Àyàn drumming in a modern Nigeria.

Following in the footsteps of the preceding generations, these Àyàn drummers identify first and foremost with their inherited knowledge and skills. While their fathers and grandfathers have been forced to negotiate the tensions between local culture loss and global culture revival, members of this generation came of age after this tension had begun to dissipate, at least locally. For the Àyàn and Ọjẹ̀ artists of this generation, popular culture dominated their landscape of culture production; they sought to bring their inherited knowledge and skills into the pop culture arena. On the other hand, they apprenticed to their fathers by hosting students and traveling overseas as representatives of "traditional" Yorùbá culture. Thus, this generation rides the tension between their identities as pop culture fusion artists and as heirs to an Àyàn legacy. Even though this generation is stepping into their fathers' roles, they are furthest

from fulfilling the expectations of the global community that naturalizes Àyàn-ness as òrìṣà worship.

Being Àyàn

Multiple generations of Àyàn-identified artists in Èrín-Ọ̀ṣun have been performing and continue to redefine and recreate what it means to be Àyàn in Nigeria. While I have illustrated how all three generations' Àyàn identities are rooted in: 1) their inherited and learned drumming knowledge and skills; 2) the Èrín-Ọ̀ṣun lifestyle; and 3) their roles as local and global representatives of Yorùbá culture, I have also revealed the complexity of each generation's relationship to Òrìṣà Àyàn.

Because members of the No More Òrìṣà generation were raised as Muslims, they did not publicly identify with an òrìṣà-centered worldview. Before the decline of òrìṣà worship in Nigeria, this generation played regularly for òrìṣà ceremonies. When they were discovered by the scholars and artists of the Ìbàdàn- and Ọ̀ṣogbo-based culture revival movements, members of this generation continued to play òrìṣà rhythms and texts in new venues: Wenger's rituals, popular theater, popular òrìṣà festivals, university music programs, etc. Members of this generation were also the founders of the Nigerian drummer's union that protected and legitimized the profession of drumming. I have illustrated how this generation navigated the tensions between a modernizing Nigeria that declared the òrìṣà irrelevant and a local/global culture revival movement that supported the òrìṣà. While many members of this generation maintained private relationships with the òrìṣà, their Àyàn performativity did not include the òrìṣà or Islam. The No More generation's Àyàn-ness was about the journey of their professionalization as Àyàn drummers in local, national, and transnational contexts.

Members of the Reviving Òrìṣà generation came of age during Nigeria's nationalist efforts to "unify through diversity" and thus embrace and support, at least rhetorically and symbolically, Àyàn cultural expression. While these artists were encouraged to perform and teach their repertoire of drumming knowledge and skills within national and global contexts, they were discouraged, on local fronts, from incorporating the òrìṣà into their lives and performances. Resisting societal pressures and inspired by global market demands, this generation began to explore and reclaim the òrìṣà culture of their grandfathers.

Most members of this generation, trained by their fathers, were artistically inspired by òrìṣà rhythms and song texts—to the point of making it a lifelong goal to preserve òrìṣà music through recording and teaching it

to their children and foreign students. In the case of Làmídì Àyánkúnlé, the òrìṣà became important to his spiritual and cultural identity. Even though they do not publicly worship the òrìṣà, members of this generation began to redefine and perform Àyàn-ness through òrìṣà rhythms and song texts. For members of this generation, being Àyàn came to exclude Islamic beliefs and cultural forms. Shaped in dialogue with foreign members of the global community, the Reviving generation has contributed significantly to living, transmitting, and reinventing an Àyàn-ness that began to identify with and privilege a repertoire of òrìṣà music and dances.

The Grasping for Òrìṣà generation came of age when their inherited skills and knowledge made more sense in the realm of popular culture than in the arena of òrìṣà worship; unlike their fathers and grandfathers, this generation never knew the òrìṣà outside of a community dominated by secular and Islamic culture. The Òjè artists of this generation were raised both as Muslims and Egúngún worshippers, while the Àyàn drummers were raised as Muslims. Perhaps ironically, members of the Grasping generation are stepping into their fathers' shoes as representatives of Àyàn culture at a moment when the global discourse of Àyàn-ness centering on òrìṣà worship has never been so dominant. If they want to claim relevance and status within the global community, this generation is under pressure to demonstrate its dedication to and knowledge of the òrìṣà.

All three generations have redefined their Àyàn identities within tensions among local, national, and global communities. While Nigeria was gaining its independence, it was also at war; Àyàn drummers became legitimate professionals but were forced to leave the òrìṣà behind and claim identities as Muslims. While Nigeria was celebrating its diverse traditional cultural roots, it was modernizing; Àyàn drummers represented their nation in spectacles but were condemned for being uneducated. Thus, they sought refuge and community in the global movement for Yorùbá culture. While Nigerian national discourse continued to disparage the lifestyle and profession of Àyàn artists, the global community became interested in Nigeria-based Àyàn artists as representatives of an òrìṣà-centered Àyàn-ness.

Àyàn culture is emergent and contested in Nigeria. In an everyday way, Àyàn drummers are constantly struggling (like the rest of us) to keep their profession alive and relevant in shifting local and global markets. For the artists of Èrìn-Ọṣun, what it means to be Àyàn has and will continue to mean playing the juxtaposition between local and global culture and market demands. By re-embracing the òrìṣà, the Reviving and Grasping generations are performing a Yorùbá modernity that flexibly

incorporates cultural forms relevant to changing political and economic contexts. But the òrìṣà are not equivalent to any other cultural form: the òrìṣà are spiritually and symbolically emblematic of Yorùbáness. Gods and goddesses, the òrìṣà are feared and loathed by many Nigerian Christians and Muslims; they are taken very seriously. By reclaiming the òrìṣà in Nigeria, the Àyàn drummers risk alienation in their own communities. Documenting exactly how the Àyàn generations reincorporate the òrìṣà into their lives and professions merits further research in order to deepen our understanding of Àyàn-ness in Nigeria.

Notes

1. Meaning “mother of market,” Ìyálòjà is one of the few important leadership positions and titles for women in traditional government. Not only is this compound reputed for housing the town’s traditional drummers, it is also known for being the family of the town’s market head.

2. Many thanks to the late Katherine Hagedorn, Jami Weinstein, the late Michael Marcuzzi, and Amanda Villepastour for their substantive comments on versions of this chapter.

3. By “discourse,” I mean the poststructuralist idea that people narrate, make sense of, and frame their worlds. These discursive frameworks vary from place to place and over time. Within a culture, there are always hegemonic and competing discourses.

4. According to an expressive theory of gender, when you read someone’s gender (or identity), you assume that that person is expressing something natural (i.e., biology, anatomy, etc.). A performative theory of gender (Butler 1988, 1990, 1993) includes the expressive theory but recognizes that gender begins as random performances; the actor is disciplined; the actor starts to internalize gender; and gender gets naturalized and thus read as expressive. Borrowing from Butler, I am arguing that Àyàn-ness has become naturalized through a similar process. While most Yorùbá people do know that Àyàn artists tend to be Muslims, they still naturalize Àyàn-ness as backwardness due to Àyàn artists’ association with òrìṣà culture as well as the fact that most lineage-based Àyàn artists have little or no formal education past the secondary school level.

5. Performativity refers to the production of performative acts (of identity) that are taken as real yet have been historically and culturally produced.

6. Although issues of cultural and religious identity among Àyàn drummers are in some ways unique, the wider contexts of colonial interventions, independence movements, modernizing nations, and the burgeoning global world music industry since the 1980s, have had loosely parallel impacts on musicians throughout Africa. See, for example, Berliner (1978); Tang (2007); Counsel (2009); and White (2012).

7. Pers. comm., Èlẹ̀rìn Ọ̀ba Yusuf Ọ̀mọ̀loyè Ọ̀yágbọ̀dùn II, Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun, October 2, 1997.

8. In addition to their roles as worshippers and bearers of the sacred masks for the Egúngún (òrìṣà of the ancestors), Ọ̀jẹ families or *elégún* Ọ̀jẹ are entertainment masqueraders—also known as *agbégijó*, *alárínjò*, and *apidán*. Children born into an Ọ̀jẹ lineage are thus given names starting with the Ọ̀jẹ prefix. Ọ̀jẹ families work closely with and at times marry into Àyàn families: Ọ̀jẹ performers dance, praise-sing, and perform acrobatic and masquerade displays, while Àyàn drummers provide the accompanying drum rhythms and texts.

9. The òrìṣà of lightning, femininity and fertility, iron and war, and the ancestors, respectively.

10. For discussion of how Àyàn drummers incorporate fújì music into their performance repertoire, see Klein (2007).

11. While I listened to the daily reflections and stories of Èrìn-Òṣun artists, it became clear to me that the artists had found meaning and sustainable resources in their local and international networks of collaborators, sponsors, friends, students, and fans. Becoming an active participant in the artists' local performances and networks, I began to understand the significance of these collaborative relationships in artists' everyday lives. When referring to the artists with whom I have been working over the years, I thus use the term "collaborator."

12. During our interviews, the Àyàn elders mentioned drumming for the following òrìṣà: Ègbé, Èlégùn Fópomoyò, Èlégùn Olojojo, Èlégùn Másóràntán, Erinlè, Òrìṣà Oko, Olóde, Òrìṣànlá, Oya, Šàngó, and Šòpònnò. Secular rituals include naming ceremonies, graduations, weddings, and funerals.

13. Prominent Nigerian playwrights, novelists, artists, and scholars (e.g., Wólé Šoyínká, J. P. Clark, D. O. Fágúnwà, Demas Nwoko, Uche Okeke, et al.) collaborated with an array of international scholars and artists—Susanne Wenger, Ulli Beier, and Georgina Beier—in the production of a cultural revivalist movement that centered around the legendary Mbari Mbayo Club (signifying "creation") (Klein 2007). While the movement proper was short-lived, no more than ten years, it paved the way for today's internationally renowned Òšogbo Arts style and has put Òšogbo on the map as a tourist destination.

14. Though Alhaji did not actually make the pilgrimage, he is respected for being an exemplary Muslim and elder in his community.

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