The Many Who Dance in Me

Afro-Atlantic Ontology and the Problem with "Transnationalism"

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In her memoir, *The Altar of My Soul*, the Santería priestess Marta Moreno Vega describes the multinational score of beings whose convergence—as much within her body as upon her domestic altars—makes up her soul. “Among my ancestral spirit angels,” she reports, “are the Native Indians of the Caribbean, the Moors, Kongos, and Yoruba of Africa, Gypsies and Europeans from Spain and the Caribbean” (Vega 2000: 17). Though Vega herself is a New York-born Afro-Puerto Rican, her main form of devotion—Santería, or Ocha—originated as a specifically *Cuban* style of devotion to the gods, or *orisha*, of what is now Yorubaland in West Africa. Brazil hosts similar religions called Umbanda and Candomblé. Haiti has Vodou, Trinidad and Tobago has Shango, and Cuba hosts not only Santería but also Palo Mayombe and Abakuá. Immigrants have brought these religions to the U.S. mainland as well. However, even some domestic forms of Protestantism embody the same African-inspired conceptions of personhood that are the focus of this argument. In ways that long preceded the phenomena fashionably described as “transnationalism” and “globalism,” Afro-Atlantic sacred ontologies boldly exemplify a characteristic that they share with most religions: they belie both the isomorphism of the body with the person and, concomitantly, the isomorphism of territory with community.

What the Afro-Atlantic religions share is the articulate consciousness that multiple beings, who usually originate in faraway places, inhabit, hover around, and periodically take control over the body, displacing the consciousness of the worshiper. In sum, these are religions of spirit possession, and they assume a logic of personhood, geography, and history at odds with the recent conviction in the academy and the mass media that transnationalism is new and is driven primarily by the Invisible Hand of capitalism. With

regard to the antiquity of translocalism and the inherently translocal nature of religion, the Afro-Atlantic religions are exemplary rather than unique.

This chapter makes four points, the first three of which are prefatory. First, transnationalism is not new—as a material phenomenon or as a way of imagining communities—and the term *globalization* is an exaggeration (Matory 2005a: 73–114). Second, religions are typically and perhaps essentially transnational. This fact, if it is so, may result from the nature of religions generally. However, it is also indebted to the definitions and institutional constraints that have shaped the phenomena that have come to be called “religions” since the seventeenth century and to the political and economic circumstances of the people who most rely on these phenomena. Third, much current theorizing about transnationalism and globalization is itself religious in its conceptualization and its language. However, its main inspiration seems to derive from eschatological religions, which understand the entire universe as a single cosmological field forever on the verge of unprecedented, cataclysmic change. These religions hardly represent the full scope of human subjectivity in the production or experience of the translocal movement of people, ideas, goods, and gods. Yet the eschatology of these religions does not nullify but merely overshadows a translocalism deep within their roots.

Fourth, at the ethnographic and disciplinary heart of this chapter, I argue that a careful consideration of religion—particularly of noneschatological religions and religions of spirit possession—demands a major rethinking of the dominant notions of transnationalism. That is, we must understand the shape of nationalism and transnationalism not just in terms of the material technologies that make them possible but also in terms of the cultural-specific ontologies and cartographies that make them thinkable and also shape the situational choice of any given contemporary class of people to act in terms of either.

THE TRANSATLANTIC “NATIONS”

In Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, and their extensive spheres of spiritual influence across the Americas, worshippers expressly identify each of their African gods and spirits as members of one or another “nation”—such as Lucumí, Quêto, Nagô, Ijexá, Efá, Carabalí, Congo, Jeje, Rada, and Arará. Each of these nations unites an African ethnic group and its spirit beings with their American-born descendants and counterparts. These spirit beings, their worshippers, and their masters have sustained such transatlantic nations for the century and a half since the end of the slave trade. Moreover, it is with no apology, expectation of correction, or rivalry that devotees call these diasporic religious networks “nations.” Devotees’ defiance of the nation-state’s pretensions of monopoly over that term, and over the loyalties of the citizenry, is entirely casual. Hence, it is not that Afro-Cubans devote themselves to the Lucumí nation *instead of*

the Cuban nation, or that Afro-Brazilians love the Quêto nation *rather than* Brazil. Instead, devotees have—since about the same time that a transnational inspiration drove the proliferation of territorial nation-states—understood themselves as the simultaneous inhabitants of *multiple* nations, some territorial and some transoceanic. Or, in terms more faithful to Afro-Atlantic ontology, they have understood that beings of multiple nations inhabit the *workshop* and that adequate communication with the distant heartlands of both the African diasporic nations and the American host nation is a precondition to the worshiper's health, good fortune, and personal integrity.

We are asked in this volume to offer our thoughts on religion and globalization. My reply proceeds from the observation that social scientists who specialize in studying the Bongo-Bongos and those who specialize in the Zunga-Zungas often generate very different generalizations about what the *whole world* is like and where it is going. The social class, race, and religion of the observer also influence the generalizations that he or she is inclined to make. To put it bluntly, a decade and a half of hoopla over what theorists describe as a qualitatively unprecedented transnationalism or globalization has often left me—like the Caribbeanist anthropologist Sidney Mintz (1998) and the Africanist historian Frederick Cooper (2001)—wondering what all the fuss is about (see also Matory 1999a, 2005a).¹ My own subject of study—the Afro-Atlantic spirit possession religions—recommends a more careful look at the relationship among ontology, consciousness, and geography than current Euro-Americanist and Asianist theorists of the transnational have so far demonstrated. My objective is a revised sense of transnationalism and globalization—one that is more attentive not only to the African diaspora but also to the culture- and class-specific notions of personhood, geography, and history that inform all such theories.

TODAY'S TRANSNATIONALISM AND "GLOBALIZATION" ARE INSTANCES OF AN OLD, BUT STILL FINITE, PHENOMENON

Millennia before the terms *transnationalism* and *globalization* took the academy by storm, Buddhist missionaries dispersed Buddhism across South Asia, the Greeks carried their gods around the Mediterranean and central Europe, and the Romans established correlations between their gods and those of the colonized. For millennia, Christians and Muslims have spread their faiths through conquest, trade, and neighborliness. And for as long as these religions have existed, the world has been crisscrossed with pilgrimage routes and the more individual pathways of priests and supplicants, all of which simultaneously channeled the flow of commerce, texts, and technology. From the seventeenth century onward, the Oyo-Yoruba people spread their *orisha* gods through the imperial conquest of the multiethnic savannahs around the Bight of Benin in West Africa. And since the beginning of the nineteenth

century, those same gods have massively colonized Brazil, Cuba, Trinidad, and Haiti through the efforts of African captives—as well as free indentured laborers, pilgrims, and traders who have, by the thousands, crisscrossed the Atlantic up until the present (Matory 2005a, 1999a; Cohen 2002). Since the mid-twentieth century, Cuban labor migrants and political exiles have carried what they call the *orichas* to the United States and Puerto Rico, Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, and beyond. Such Afro-Atlantic worshippers have created translocal pilgrimage routes and translocal communities, few of which respected the emergent boundaries of territorial nation-states. Yet these transatlantic and Pan-American routes and communities follow a history of precedents in the long-distance movements of priests, pilgrims, supplicants, and patients. The sacred communities constituted by these movements have crisscrossed continents, deserts, and oceans since time immemorial.

Perhaps more than scholars of, say, state politics or business management, scholars of religion must be tempted to ask whether the theorists of “transnationalism” and “globalization” have discovered a *qualitatively new phenomenon* or simply a *new term for an old phenomenon* that they had not noticed before. Or, to put it another way, to *whom* are these transnational phenomena and ways of thinking a new discovery? The recent discovery of “transnationalism” and of what has, with great exaggeration, been called “globalization” actually turns out—like the so-called discovery of the Americas—to be a rediscovery. Long before the terms *transnationalism* and *globalization* became shibboleths in the academy, we had “diaspora,” “pilgrimage,” “colonialism and imperialism,” “cultural imperialism,” “acculturation,” “syncretism,” Fernando Ortiz’s “transculturation,” Braudel’s “circum-Mediterranean world,” Sidney Mintz and Richard Price’s “creolization,” Robert Farris Thompson’s “Black Atlantic” world, and so forth. Indeed, the Brazilian anthropologist Gilberto Freyre was the one who, in the 1940s, first coined the term *transnational* ([1945] 1959: 154). He employed it to describe the transoceanic and supraterritorial nature of Portuguese culture since the fifteenth century.

Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* ([1983] 1991) laid the foundations for the transnationalist wave in the social sciences and the humanities. Anderson argues that print capitalism and vernacular print media enabled citizens of a territorial nation-state—a new phenomenon in the eighteenth century—to “imagine” themselves as a face-to-face community. What I doubt is the Andersonian view that the territorially nationalist imagination *replaced* other kinds of imagination and is now giving way to others still.² Theorists of the nation as an “imagined community” and of what is represented as its transnational sequel (e.g., Harvey 1989; Appadurai 1996; Sassen 1998; Verdery 1998; also Anderson 1998: 66–67) tend to imagine world history in *stages* driven by the advance of capitalism, particularly in terms of the speedup in transportation, migration, and communication that capitalism *requires* for its continued profitability and *enables* through technological in-

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novation. In one stage, empires or religions allegedly monopolized or dominated our imagination of the communities to which we belonged. In the next stage, territorial nations monopolized or dominated our sense of community, and these imaginations are now giving way to transnational imagined communities.

Such "stagism" (Buck-Morss 2000) and the single "engine of history" model are also the stock-in-trade of nineteenth-century evolutionisms (including the grand historical schemata of Maine, Marx, Durkheim, and Weber), which often render sensitive portraits of the authors' "present" but falter as analyses of the past and of the contemporary peoples mislabeled as "primitives." Likewise, in today's writings about "transnationalism," apocalyptic announcements of a recent historical "break" or "rupture" often preface insightful and surprising accounts of translocal commerce, migration, and communication in our time. These works hail the recent disruption of an old Eurocentric order but simultaneously adopt the same orientalizing narratives about the temporal Other.

The reader is led to assume, rather than being shown any evidence, that the past was devoid of such colossal types and degrees of translocalism and/or that history has been a linear march toward ever-increasing degrees of interaction among everybody everywhere. The rise and fall of the Roman Empire, the Silk Road, Islamic civilization, and the globalized African civilization that has flourished since the sixteenth-century takeoff of the Atlantic slave trade disappear into a homogeneous past of cultural localism and social stasis. Conversely, the nation-state, until its recent disruption, is credited with a degree of autonomy, control over its territory, and completeness of citizen loyalty that was in fact rare even among the most exemplary nation-states—France, England, and the United States. The transnationalism theorists' recognition that not all imagined communities and flows of people, ideas, and money are isomorphic with territories of governance is indispensable (e.g., Appadurai 1990). However, they do a deep disservice to history by implying that such nonisomorphism is radically or qualitatively new.

Neither was such isomorphism equally absent in all places in the past, nor is it equally present in all places today. Even if it is quantitatively greater in many places than it was before, the *qualitative* novelty of this phenomenon will not be evident to all groups of people. In sum, the newness of transnationalism is a matter of perspective. Different nations have, to different degrees, *always* been permeable by various translocal forces, and the permeability of each nation to any given translocal force has changed over time, often in nonlinear, vacillating ways. Territorially indexed barriers to the free flow of people, ideas, and goods have always fallen and risen over time—no less along the Silk Road than on the borders of the United States. Different nations have always provided different degrees of service and inspired different degrees of loyalty and dependency from their citizens. Likewise, dif-

ferent races, genders, classes, ethnic groups, and religions within any given nation-state have long varied in the degree to which the territorial nation is, for them, a central constituent of personal identity and a reliable source of material support and emotional affirmation. Contrary to Andersonian and post-Andersonian historical teleologies, it is not clear that imagined communities of religious and imperial inspiration withered into insignificance with the rise of the nation-state, or that the nation-state is, in turn, withering amid the reported proliferation of transnational communities. Charted across regions and over time, the relative prevalence of these diverse imaginations of community has been less stagelike than "lumpy" (Cooper 2001).

That is not to say that nothing changes when religions are dispersed across wider translocal spaces, or that the current state of the world economy has left the religions I study unaffected. It is, instead, to assert that we have more to lose than to gain by assuming that some recent historical break or rupture renders the lessons of today's transnational connections inapplicable to the long cultural history that preceded them, and vice-versa—that the lessons of yesterday are inapplicable today. It is not the case that collective identities were once all and entirely territorial and are now all and entirely deterritorialized, or that the two principles are now engaged in a duel to the death. Nor is it obvious that the class- and region-specific ways in which time and space are being "compressed" (Harvey 1989) are more interesting than the ways, the places, and the moments in which the movement of people, ideas, goods, and money is being blocked, bounded, and regulated more efficiently than they were twenty, thirty-three, or five hundred years ago.

IS RELIGION INHERENTLY TRANSNATIONAL?

In a word, my answer is yes. But I await word from the students of the Zungas. However, the point is both definitional and empirical. Or, rather, it manifests the dialectical relationship between the definitions created by intellectuals and the realities that powerful institutions produce as they act in response to those definitions.

For example, Talal Asad says there is nothing self-evident or universal about the category "religion" (Asad 1993: 40; see also Beyer 2006: 73–74). Its current meaning in the academy is, he argues, a seventeenth-century artifact of the European separation of church and state. The genesis of the "religion" concept, as we know it today, also coincided with the European Age of Exploration, inspiring the systematic comparison among diverse peoples' beliefs about a supreme power, their protocols of worship, their ethics, and their conceptions of the posthumous consequences of living people's behavior. Owing to the cultural biases of the European explorers, missionaries, and scholars who subsidized the "religion" concept, contemporary Western scholars of religion tend to focus more on the *beliefs* and *moods* associated

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with our object of study than with, for example, the *criminal laws* or *rules of commerce* that non-Western religious practitioners might regard as equally essential to their sacred commitments.

Yet, as Peter Beyer (2006) argues, no matter how recently made-up the category, it has become part of a global logic according to which political systems, educational systems, and science confine the purview of the institutions that we call religions. Beyer is correct, except for the fact that most of this confinement is, in fact, occurring at the hands of nation-states rather than at the hands of some location-free global system, and different nation-states treat religions differently. For example, Christianity does not take shape in the same political, economic, and educational environment in Nigeria as in Germany or the United States. Moreover, few nation-states behave toward all the religions under their authority in the same way. For example, American politicians these days make obligatory references to the centrality and preeminence of "the God that all of us—Christian, Muslims and Jews—worship," as though Hindus, Buddhists, Wiccans, and *santeros* do not really count as part of "us." Propaganda against gay marriage tends to begin with the pseudo-ecumenical premise that "all religions condemn homosexuality," which says more about how mainstream politicians define religion than about the demonstrable history of religions.

Beyer adds that the recent interaction among religions has caused them to define themselves and each other in comparable terms. Again, Beyer is demonstrably correct in many cases. However, to the extent that religions have come to define themselves as comparable, the phenomenon did not begin in 1500, 1974, the 1980s, or any of the various dates that have been designated as the beginning of globalization. Why, for example, would Beyer's insights not equally illuminate the structure of religious interaction and mutual transformation in the Greco-Roman world, or in any other translocal context where specialists in the sacred compete with each other, imitate each other, and conduct themselves in a larger, shared political, economic, and educational environment? Moreover, many religions are still selective with regard to which other practices they find worthy of definition as comparable. For example, the Abrahamic faiths tend to regard each other as comparable in ways that they deny the comparability of, say, ancient Canaanite religion, pre-Islamic Arab religion, Wicca, or the African spirit possession religions.

Despite these caveats, Asad and Beyer leave me with a question that I have tried to pursue seriously: How have the dispersion of any given religion, its interaction with the priorities of diverse nation-states, its interaction with an increasing array of other religions, and the enforcement of certain seventeenth-century definitions affected its practice? A few general points might be made.

First, the self-definitions of all of these religions have tended toward ab-

stract statements of worldview—one in which, furthermore, a declaration of belief in a high god is de rigueur. Particularly in the places where they are subject to state regulation, the leaders of these religions must learn how to explain their beliefs abstractly through the mass media. Moreover, if they wish to retain or gain followers, they must offer explanations of life that not only refer to the distinctive experience of their followers but also encompass and redefine the same real-world material and social realities that all the religions, politics, and economies share in any given locale. This demand to articulate an abstract worldview presents an especially transformative challenge to religions that prioritize devotional practice and secrecy, for example, as opposed to those with long traditions of textuality, exegesis, and proselytizing (e.g., Johnson 2002). Still, it must be remembered that this challenge arises less from globalization *per se* than from the diverse degrees to which different nation-states wish to regulate citizens' religious activities.

Second, mutual recognition among religions can lead to rather opposite reactions. That is, to put it oversimply, some practitioners will seek to differentiate their religion from others, while other practitioners will deliberately absorb neighboring practices. Not all religions see other religions as mutually exclusive rivals. Some religions endeavor to encompass not only the shared real-world circumstances but also the other religions themselves. With exceptions, Yoruba religion and Hinduism tend to fit this pattern, appropriating the personae, signs, and ritual techniques of multiple neighboring religions. By contrast, evangelical Christianity tends to define other religions as unworthy of imitation. In an interstitial case, Islam defines a role for Abraham, Jesus, Jews, and Christians in its history, cosmology, and legal system.

Third, it must be added that these processes of mutual transformation through imitation or exclusion are by no means confined to the period following the European maritime revolution, European colonialism, World War II, or the oil crisis. Missionaries, traders, wives, soldiers, hunters, captives, and voluntary immigrants have long engaged in mutually transformative religious discourse and practice with their far-flung hosts. Religious and magical services of long-distance origin have long been among the most salable commercial products within and around diasporic ethnoreligious enclaves.

Indeed, religions are among the most widespread and institutionalized ways in which people employ the image and reality of faraway places and times as models of underlying, ideal, or super-powered realities. The populations that share a commitment to any such faraway place and time form cultic communities that subdivide, cross-cut, or encompass the nation-state and other territorial communities. Indeed, the mythically charted distance between the Other Place and the worshippers' Present Place tends to be the main road and central axis of a spiritual map that encompasses the whole known, supralocal world.

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The Other Place might be the Olympus of the ancient Greeks, the Ginen of Haitian *vodouisants*, the Israel and the Heaven of Abraham's followers (which, in its visualization by American Christians, tends to feature Greco-Roman imagery), the Mecca of the Muslims, or the "Africa" of Brazilian *can-doblecistas* and Cuban *santeros*. Thus, the imagery of the Other Place is not merely geographic. It regularly conflates Otherness of Place with Otherness in Time and with an Otherness of Horizontal Plane. In most religions, Otherness of Place, Time, and Horizontal Plane are mixed metaphors, as it were, in a single symbolic geography, furnished with the alien language, landscape, sartorial style, currencies, bodily gestures, houses, and interior decoration that distinguish this world from the Other.

While the supreme agents in this encompassing order are, in many religions, regarded as immanent within us, they usually wear their difference from us on their archaic, foreign-tailored sleeves. As Godfrey Lienhardt (1961) and Fritz Kramer [1987] 1993 have observed, what contemporary Westerners tend to regard as feelings, or mere temporary temperatures of the self, are represented in many African religions as *passiones*, as immaterial but visibly foreign beings penetrating the body. Health and ritual order, then, depend not simply on the existence of the faraway Other Place, but on the management of the arrival, presence, and departure of its personnel and powers. On these matters, I suspect that the foreignness of African *passiones* is simply more explicit than the foreignness of their European counterparts, as in the Euro-Christian imagery of "epiphany," "filling with the Holy Spirit," "descent of the Spirit," being "lifted up," "calling," "conscience," "looking up to the hills," and so forth.

The ontology of any given religion is closely connected to an implicit geography and to its real-world geopolitics. Whereas the Abrahamic faiths name highly precise geographic territories, territorial promises, and covenants of territorial ownership in their construction of the Other Place, even those religions with a vaguer cartography of the Other Place describe transactions with the divine in terms of the "paths," "roads," "journeys," and other trans-territorial conduits that connect us, collectively or individually, to the divine Other Place. In many religions, those paths are literally transterritorial pilgrimage routes that cross-cut numerous political boundaries. The Yoruba-affiliated religions of the Americas are as *vague* about landed territory and its ownership as they are *explicit* and *obsessive* about paths, roads, and journeys.³ Even at the height of what Anderson (1988) calls the "classical nationalist" project, the adherents of Afro-Atlantic religions gave absolute priority to metaphors of translocal flow and to the daily conduct that made those metaphors real. Indeed, the idiom and reality of translocalism are intrinsic to most religions.⁴

That is not to say, however, that locality and proximity have lost or—even amid the oft-mentioned proliferation of religious communities on the In-

ternet (e.g., Vásquez and Marquardt 2003)—will lose their centrality in religious practice. For example, the Yoruba-Atlantic religions and many others richly employ smells and tastes—through incense, candles, herbs, beverages, and foods—in the evocation of divinity and sacred community.⁵ The religious transaction between the Other Place and the Present Place cannot do without the reality of the Present Place.

However, as we shall see below, not all religions are alike in their conception of the transactions between the Present Place and the Other Place. In the Afro-Atlantic religions, worshipers focus far less on the literal or metaphorical journey *to* the Other Place and far more on the continual movement of beings *between* Places than do the Abrahamic religions.

WHAT MIGHT THE YORUBA-ATLANTIC RELIGIONS TEACH US ABOUT TRANSNATIONALISM?

This is my central ethnographic question. What would a theory of transnationalism and globalization look like if equally inspired by the ontology, historical consciousness, and geography implicit in spirit possession and polytheism rather than by the ontologies and eschatologies of the Abrahamic and the karmic religions? What might the Yoruba-Atlantic religions teach us—to put it in Andersonian terms—about the imagination of community?

The Abrahamic and the karmic religions are deeply inscribed with translocal realities and idioms of experience. However, the elements of these religions that have been integrated most deeply into the Western social sciences are an individualist notion of personhood and a linear, destination-focused conception of history. These dimensions of Christianity and Judaism little contradict Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. All these religions focus on the relationship between an individual's actions and his or her posthumous and still-individual destiny. The Abrahamic faiths add a conception that a single historical destiny—as well as specifiable intermediate stages of approach—await the entire world. Much of nineteenth- and post-nineteenth-century Western social science rests on these very assumptions. The lack of circumspection about these culture-specific assumptions gives transnationalism theory itself a religious tenor, like the return of the repressed. Conventional theories of transnationalism are religious not simply because of their intense concern about relations among faraway places but also because of their eschatological assumptions, their apocalyptic language, and their conviction that a single force rules the course of history and the minds of men. Transnationalism theory is the most recent in a long history of millennial prophecies heralding the imminent end of everything as we know it. Amid its foregone conclusions, every page of the *New York Times* overflows with signs and omens of unambiguous portent. The audience of these prognostications is warned in charismatic terms and tones that some superlatively new trans-

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localism is on the verge of transmogrifying the world into something hitherto unrecognizable and unimaginable. The millennial language of this augury—"What we are witnessing is..."—mimics the preaching of visionary prophets. We are led by a drumbeat of "New! New! New!" to believe that the momentum of "time-space compression" (Harvey 1989) is ever-increasing everywhere, rather than sometimes up and sometimes down, sometimes here and sometimes there, and punctuated by a chain of failed predictions about its conclusion. The end is near, we are told, and its conditions will be absolute. History will be transcended.

The dominant theories of transnationalism and globalization also tend to be monotheistic, if not monotheistic, in the autonomous and transcendent power they attribute to capitalism. On the contrary, Al-Qaeda's expanding holy war shows that the major threat to the nation-state is not transnational capitalism. Indeed, the consequent resurrection of the national security state shows that the juggernaut of capitalism is hardly the single engine of history. Current theories manifest an exaggerated faith in the unidirectionality and predictability of human history.

Like the prophets of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Marxism, the prophets of transnationalism and globalization preach of a progression of eras, of a historical march toward an explosive end never before seen by humankind—a linear, rather than, say, cyclical, vision of how the world changes over time. These models propose that only one order of communal imagination—in effect, one god, to extrapolate from Durkheim—can reign at a time, in contrast to the view that people can, opportunistically, imagine and enact several *different* sacred communities over the course of any given day. Also like the *avowed* prophets of monotheism, the prophets of globalization and transnationalism imagine a force that will ultimately encompass everything and every place. Such prophets assume that the world is a single, united cosmological field, ordered by a single, omnipresent spirit. Yet, like expressly religious prophecies, the world-changes predicted by our academic prophets often address a region-, class-, race-, and religion-specific fraction of the universe far narrower than their audiences realize.

My observations about transnationalism and religion arise from a different religious inspiration—not one uninfluenced by the Abrahamic traditions, but one focused on the victims of Abrahamic imperialism and on those who articulate alternative self-understandings in environments of Judeo-Christian or Islamic political dominance. "Yoruba religion" is a product of a vibrant interaction among the populations of the Gulf of Guinea, among their dispersed kin and admirers around the Atlantic perimeter, and among the university scholars and nationalist folklorists who have interpreted this set of traditions in the service of their own projects. Like Hinduism, Yoruba religion did not have a unitary name for itself until transnational traders, travelers, and scholars chose to identify it as a single religion comparable to and

in contrast with the Abrahamic religions. Certainly the gods worshiped and the protocols of their worship continue to vary across what is now called Yorubaland. However, the rapid expansion of the Oyo Empire, starting in the late seventeenth century, and its use of certain categories of priest as provincial viceroys spread a relatively homogeneous set of gods and practices across approximately half of present-day Yorubaland, in Nigeria, as well as the kingdom of Dahomey in present-day Benin Republic.

The Atlantic slave trade carried tens of thousands of *orisha* worshippers to Brazil, Cuba, Trinidad, and the United States. But then thousands of African captives and freedmen in the New World went back to Africa or traveled back and forth for various reasons. Some engaged in transatlantic pilgrimage, the subsequent "legitimate" circum-Atlantic trade in palm oil, religious goods, and other goods attractive to immigrants, or international conferences of *orisha* worshippers. All these movements have increased the contacts among *orisha* worshippers from these various countries and engaged them in an ongoing mutual transformation since the early nineteenth century.

West Africans represent the *orisha* variously as lineage ancestral spirits, local spirits, city-state founders, heroes, and masters of particular substances (such as iron) or natural phenomena (such as thunder and lightning). The Brazilian *orixás*, the Spanish American *orichas*, and the Anglo-American *orishas* have much in common with their West African counterparts. In the Americas, the gods remain larger-than-life, anthropomorphic beings who personify the virtues and deficits, the problem-solving and the problem-causing dispositions of particular types of people.

On both sides of the Atlantic, these divinities are the focus of magnificent religions of music, blood sacrifice, divination, healing, and dance. Dances, rhythms, and songs induce the worshiper to embody the feelings and complexities of the multiple beings who personify aspects of the social and physical universe. Deftly executed, the right sequences of songs and percussive rhythms can induce one of those beings to come to the fore and take over the dancer's body and displace her consciousness for a time. Yet the radical bodily transformations that occur at the height of ritual dance also underline the fact that these spirit beings coexist and subtly interact in every healthy and prosperous life.

The history and logic of the Yoruba-Atlantic religions differ in many ways from those inspired by Abraham. Suffice it to mention just a few of those differences here. First, the Yoruba-affiliated religions are noneschatological and nonteleological. They do not represent social dynamics as a form of temporal progress toward sacrality or as the predictable and sequential transcendence of one social order after another. Second, the Other Place of the Yoruba-Atlantic religions is less a place to long for, or an ideal Other Place to aspire to, than an Other Place from which the gods cyclically arrive, conveying a powerful influence that human beings must nourish, use, and recycle with care.

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The gods are a raw power that must be called to the Present Place, contained, and organized by people and then returned to the Other Place. When that power does not circulate between the Other and the Present Place, or when it does not, in turn, circulate through the social networks of the Present Place, it dies, ineffective (see also Matory 1986, 2005b; Johnson 2002).

Third, the Yoruba-Atlantic religions dramatize not the individuality of the person—individuality of the sort suggested by the Abrahamic Judgment Day, the karmic cycle of reincarnation, and Social Security (and other features of Bentham and Foucault's Panopticon)—but the multipleness of the person (see Foucault 1977). Multiple conscious beings are co-present in and around the Yoruba-Atlantic human body. The self is the convergence of multiple beings—a manifestation of the ritually engineered balance among those beings. Equally explicit in these religions is the view that these beings are normally exogenous to the body and, most often, literally *foreign* to the worshiper's place of residence. Consequently, the territory taken for granted in Yoruba-Atlantic ritual is not land and land claims, as is the case in the Abrahamic religions, from the Book of Genesis to the latest Crusade. The taken-for-granted territory in the Afro-Atlantic religions is the worshiper's body itself.

Fourth, it must be assumed that every religion is shaped deeply by the historically changing role of its adherents in a local and translocal political economy. Therefore, the fourth general difference between the Yoruba-Atlantic religions and those that apparently inspired current theories of globalization and transnationalism is that the Yoruba-Atlantic religions are, at least partly, the products of Africans' role in the post-sixteenth-century Atlantic economy. The economically and politically central mobility of people that has characterized African history since time immemorial reached a crescendo during the Atlantic slave trade—a crescendo as great as Africa's earlier engagement with Islamic trade and imperialism (eighth–sixteenth century C.E.) and almost as great as the Bantu colonization of subequatorial Africa since the first millennium C.E. The multiplication of the self in the religions of the Yoruba diaspora reveals what is probably the latest intensification of the ongoing intercommunal struggle for the control of African bodies. The control over people, rather than the ownership of land, has long been the cultural priority and the limiting factor in African political power (Thornton 2006), a fact that may lie at the roots of the African religious formula that the spiritual colonization of the person matters more than the battle over land. And the fact that elaborate spirit possession religions proliferate at the slavery-ridden borderlands between Africa and the Islamic world suggests a pattern equally applicable to the Yoruba-Atlantic religions. Spirit possession by multiple beings is a vivid idiom in the management of social marginality at cultural crossroads.

The following comparison of Oyo-Yoruba religion in West Africa with its Brazilian and Cuban counterparts suggests the ironic hypothesis that no re-

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ligion is ever in its homeland. Even at their putative geographic origins, religions imagine in what I have called *Other Places* their indispensable partners in the sacred exchange that generates health, prosperity, and power. In the Afro-Atlantic religions at home and abroad, exile is not an abnormal and lamentable condition but a precondition to the empowering *transaction* with the sacred Other Place. Yet some differences of emphasis between West African Yoruba religion and its American counterparts seem to flow from the scale and rapidity of the latest displacement. In the diaspora, the number of self-conscious religious groups interacting is larger. Still other differences appear to flow less from the objective fact of transoceanic dispersion than from the forms of political subordination that Africans in the Americas had to manage with their complex ritual wherewithal.

OYO RELIGION

West African Yoruba language and rituals suggest that multiple beings make up the self. A person is a vessel containing and surrounded by multiple spirit beings, some of whom help to guarantee the subject's proper progress through life. Other spirit beings interfere in that progress. Moreover, virtually all of those beings are described as exogenous to the body and as geographically alien to the Present Place of the subject. The most important among these alien beings is called *ori*, or head. This head embodies one's intelligence, perceptiveness, personal strengths and weaknesses, and, in a word, destiny.

Before birth, each of us stands in the Other World (*orun*) and selects one among the available heads. A person who chooses a bad head suffers numerous misfortunes due to his or her poverty of instinct, wisdom, coolness, and fortitude against malevolent human beings (such as *aje*, or witches) and spirit beings (*ajogun*, or warriors) in an essentially adversarial world. These "warriors" are personifications of death, illness, paralysis, and loss (Abimbola 1976: 152). The head is said to have been made by a potter, whose products are sometimes sturdy and sometimes flawed. The head chosen in heaven is a spiritual one, called the inner head (*ori inun*), which, upon one's birth, occupies the physical, or *outer*, head (*ori ode*).

Yet the inner head is not the only spirit that occupies the body. Knowledgeable Oyo-Yoruba people speak of a spirit that occupies the back of one's head (*ipakọ*) and, when alert, sees dangers coming from behind, as well as a spirit (*ipori*) that dwells in one's large toe and, when alert, guides us around the dangers ahead. Moreover, one's inner head is not confined to one's body. For example, Yoruba people who wish me well might pray that my mother's "head" accompany me wherever I go (*Ori iya e aa sin e lo*). Similarly, the spirit animating a witch is described as a bird that can invisibly fly out of her body and eat of her victim's body before returning to its abode in the witch's guts.

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"Legs" (*ese*) too are living beings, irreducible to the mere physical legs. According to Abimbola, the spirit "legs" are a "symbol of power and activity . . . , which enables a man to struggle and function adequately in life so that he may bring to realization whatever has been marked out for him by the choice of *ori* [head]" (1971: 85). Some of the most African-influenced forms of African American Christianity also avow the presence of multiple innate agents within the person. For example, though they are Protestants, the Gullah people of the 1930s in the South Carolina Lowcountry spoke of two spirits that exited the body of a deceased person—the "heaven-going spirit" and the "traveling spirit," the second of which, when ritually neglected, sometimes remained on earth to haunt the living (Creel 1988: 317).

The Yoruba case vividly illustrates Csordas's argument (2004) that bodily anatomy itself—such as the separability of the two lips, the detachability of a limb, and the simultaneous ability of the hand to feel things and to be felt by the other hand—is a foundational experience of the Other within, and is thus the experiential foundation of religious consciousness itself. Indeed, Yoruba sacrificial religion—and particularly its initiations—mime the separability of the worshiper's head through the proxy of the animal victims. The proxy head appears—like that of the novice—as both a choosing agent and the object of forcible recruitment (Matory 2005b: 202–7).

When affliction or hereditary recruitment requires a person to be initiated as a possession priest of, say, Šango—deceased Oyo emperor, god of thunder and lightning, and tutelary divinity of the Oyo Empire—the god is surgically inserted through one's scalp and fed with the blood of sacrificial animals. At the same time, the head-shaped stones that also embody the god's power and sit in a wooden altar vessel are fed with blood. *Òrisha* altars are covered with calabashes, pots, and mortars that mime the hollow head and its availability for ritually mediated penetration by spirit beings.

The newly initiated priest is called a "bride" (*yawo*) of the god, and mature possession priests are called "horses" (*ẹyin*) or "mounts" (*ẹlegun*) of the god. During spirit possession, the god is said to "mount" (*gun*) the priest, just as a male animal or brutish man mounts his female partner or a rider mounts a horse. At periodic festivals intended to display the power of the god and offer healing to noninitiates, the possession priest's own inner head gives way to the god, whose consciousness and power take over the priest. The god's entry fills the priest's head to the point of bursting. To dramatize this conception, the hairline of possession priests is often shaved back, and wooden carvings show possessed priests with closed but monstrously bulging eyes. Though the priests are personally unconscious, their heads are literally filled to the bursting point with the power and consciousness of the god. In turn, supplicants faced with the god-filled medium bow down and uncover their heads to await the empowering touch of the manifest god. Blessings applied through a touch to the head also bless and eventually fill other pro-

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ductive vessels of the body—particularly the womb and the breasts. Scholars since Herskovits ([1941] 1958) have suggested that the prominence of “shouting,” or “filling with the Holy Spirit” in African American Protestantism is indebted to similarly African cultural dispositions. Hence, African American Protestantism entails an implicit hollowness of the self that parallels that in the Yoruba-Atlantic religions.

Well until the middle of the colonial period, possessed Šango priests served as viceroys and delegates of the Oyo monarch. Šango priests were and are also responsible for preparing another category of royal delegate, known as *ilari*, each of whom embodies a particular order or decision on the part of the monarch. Sent by the monarch to a subordinate chief or neighboring monarch, the messenger's body itself became the message and his or her name an order, such as “Bring-Me-Money,” “The-King-Is-Not-Ready,” “There-Is-No-Fight,” and “No-Compromise” (Matory 2005b: 11). So thoroughgoing is this logic of authority as a materially and technologically embodied spirit that the Oyo monarch himself is initiated as a wife and vessel of the dynastic god Šango.

Not all West African *òrìṣà* are so closely identified with the monarchy, though most are associated with some hierarchical social group (such as a lineage or guild) whose divine personification can, periodically, displace a person's consciousness and act directly through the person's body. Šango's priesthood and ritual complex, however, have influenced the American religions more than those of any other West African god.

Nowadays, most Oyo-Yoruba are Muslim, and many are Christian. In this religiously plural environment, *òrìṣà* worship is now lumped together with the Egungun and Gelede masquerades and called *esin ibilẹ* (lit., “native worship”). Nevertheless, the gods are typically described as foreign. For example, Šango is said to be Muslim and to have come from the neighboring Tapa, or Nupe, ethnic group. In most places where any *òrìṣà* is worshiped, that god is said to have come or been brought from another town, ethnic group, or even religion. This construction of the divine as foreign parallels the premises, found in societies all over the world, that great rulers and royal dynasties originate from outside the society and are not of the people they rule. As Sahlins observes, folk histories in many polities around the world represent monarchs and sovereign power as foreign, even in places where the literal geographic foreignness of the sovereign dynasty is not empirically demonstrable (1985: 76).

The myths of the *òrìṣà*, like those of other Oyo-Yoruba culture heroes, tend to report the sequence of their arrival from some Other Place, their making of a mutually beneficial pact with someone or some community in the Present Place (where the god becomes a ruler, a spouse, or a savior from some danger to the collective), and, finally, the god's flight back to the Other Place when the contract is somehow violated. It is when the gods depart that they

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turn into the rivers, wild animals, wind, lightning, and or other force of extrasocial nature with which they continue to be associated.

Other myths and, above all, rituals dramatize the successful efforts of supplicants—who are sometimes other gods—to bring the fugitive divinity in from the wild and harness him or her for the social good. Hence, West African *òrìṣà* rituals typically involve the pouring out, washing in ritually empowered herbs, and feeding of the gods' stone icons with cooked food and sacrificial blood, as well as various methods of recontaining the gods' replenished power in the ritual vessels, which—in parallel fashion—include pots, wooden mortar bases, calabashes, and human heads. For example, priestesses of the river goddesses—such as *Yemoja*, *oṣun*, and *Ọba*—place pots of river water on their heads, inducing possession by the goddess, and bring those pots of water into the goddess's shrine room in the palace. With similar implications, in some towns the priests of *Şango*, the god of thunder and lightning, carry pots of fire on their heads.

Ọyọ-Yoruba sacred dance dramatizes the hollowness of the person and the multiplicity of the self. Polyrhythmic music, its crescendos, and its breaks, or sharp disruptions of its rhythmic patterns, are used to induce spirit possession (Thompson 1983). Such breaks induce and dramatize both the discreteness of the body's various denizens and the proper nature of their interaction. The baseline of metarhythms that unite the diverse rhythms of the sacred drum corps already suggest a form of sociality—as much among people as among spirit beings—quite different from what is implied by Western music and dance. In Yoruba sacred dance, the shoulders might respond to one drum and the legs to another. More often, the whole body movement adds an additional layer of syncopation that answers an already syncopated palimpsest of drum rhythms. As John Chernoff (1979) argues, this type of music mimes a conception of social life in which the skilled actor does not follow a preestablished protocol but negotiates a pattern of living in dialogue with the multiple idiosyncratic patterns of others' lives. The rhythmic breaks that further unsettle the emergent patterns of this musical negotiation are what induces possession, inviting the dramatic display of a rhythm and personality from the Other Place in interaction with the head and body of the priest (see also Barber 1981; Brown 1987).

At the end of the sacred festival, the gods' reenergized stones are returned to their wooden, ceramic, or calabash vessels and shut in their shrine rooms, where priests and monarchs can tap their power until the next festival. The containment of the gods' being and power in shrine pots, mortars, and calabashes mimes the containment of the gods' being and power in the heads of the priests, monarchs, and royal messengers as well. Palace shrine rooms gather up the power—personified in the god—that results from the sacred transaction between the Other Place and the Present Place. These cycles of containment within and release from human heads and their vessel coun-

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terparts lead to mutually empowering social relationships between the Other Place and the Present Place. Then, monarchs, royal messengers, and priests carry that power out into the sociopolitical world. Except for the shrines of Šango, the shrines of gods and palaces gather up the power of not just one god, but multiple gods—either gods who are mythologically related to the main god of the temple or gods inherited by the priest from deceased elders. Thus, in sum, personal well-being and political order depend on careful transactions with multiple Other Places.

Furthermore, the iconography of the gods is rich in the accretions of literal transactions with Other Places—interregional and transoceanic trade. For example, American corn is the favorite food of the river goddess Yemoja. Cowries are the imported, archaic money found on the altars of virtually every god. They were originally brought by the Portuguese from the Maldivo Islands. Dane guns are a preeminent symbol of the hunter gods Ogun and Oṣoṣi and are among the symbols of other gods as well. Dutch Schnapps, along with chickens, is the standard offering when one solicits the aid of the gods.

The other omnipresent symbol of the gods is beads, which, in Yorubaland, are closely associated with commercial ties to Europe, Asia, and faraway African locales (e.g., Drewal and Mason 1997: 39). The diverse colors of the beads allow an intricate display of the gods' diversity. For example, priests of the hot god Šango wear necklaces with a combination of red and white beads; white beads identify the presence of cool gods like Ọṣun and the lord of purity, Ọbatala. The diviner-priests of Ọrunmila, or Ifa, wear a combination of yellow and green beads. Like Ọyọ polyrhythms, polytheism, and the embrace of Islam within the bosom of "native religion," Ọyọ beadwork manifests an aesthetic of *assemblage*: combinations of rhythms, of foods, and of beads from diverse origins are arranged into locally evocative patterns, just as the diverse religions, gods, and spirits are delicately balanced in the translocal dance that makes up human selves and kingdoms.⁶ Ọyọ ritual arts reinscribe the signs and citizens of multiple Other Places within an Ọyọ ontology and cosmology. Translocalism is perhaps the most enduring premise of this technology of fashioning the self, the priesthood, and the monarch's political domain.

Yet royalism is not the only social project that the *òrìṣà* have served or the only Yoruba project deeply imbued with a translocal consciousness. For example, in the 1880s and 1890s, Western-educated Yoruba who had staffed the British colonial project in coastal West Africa faced increasing racial discrimination, as improved tropical medicine enabled white British physicians, clergy, and administrators to replace them. In response—like many a European or Latin American cultural nationalist during the same era—these newly alienated subjects of imperialism resurrected and published accounts of their people's ancient gods and traditions as evidence of the national distinctiveness and dignity of the colonized. These Yoruba cultural nationalists

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in the British colony of Lagos often bolstered their argument with the assertion that their ancestral culture had origins in the prestigious and faraway Middle East.

It was through these same processes that the diverse practices of their ancestors and kin came to be called a religion, comparable in dignity to Christianity and conceptually detachable from both British and Oyo state administration (Matory 1999a). Yet, the Lagosian Cultural Renaissance of the 1890s was probably as influential on New World Candomblé and Santería as it was in colonial and postcolonial Nigeria.

HOW TRANSNATIONALISM HAS TRANSFORMED ORISHA WORSHIP IN THE AMERICAS

The slave trade was a form of transnationalism with such distinctive and intergenerational consequences that it has been easy for most theorists of globalization and transnationalism to overlook. American slavery and racism—both direct products of a half millennium of translocalism, transimperialism, and transnationalism—have indelibly colored Candomblé and Santería, which entered into an unprecedentedly complex struggle for the consciousness, subjectivity and imagination of the New World. In the idioms of Oyo royalist spirit possession, Santería and Candomblé dramatize the multiplicity of the communities in terms of which every African diaspora person—and many a white creole—is ambivalently forced to consider herself. Yet these religions empower the priests to master the outcome of this negotiation and to articulate a model for white creole nationalists to follow as well.

The Oyo-Yoruba sacred technology of managing the multiple exogenous beings who make up the self is equally evident in Candomblé and Santería. Yet, rather than construct the sacred as coming from the bush (*igbo*), the sky (*orun*), the North, the Near East, the Nupe, Ile-Ife, or some other town of lineage origin, the New World worshippers of the *orishá* construct the sacred as arising from transactions with Other Places known as the forest (*el monte* [Cuban Spanish]), the sky (*o céu* [Brazilian Portuguese]), "Africa," "Yorubaland," "Quêto," and "the Coast" (in Brazilian parlance), "Ginen" or underwater (in Haitian parlance), "Lucumi" (in Cuban parlance), and "Cuba" (in the parlance of Cuban labor migrants and exiles).

Yet in the Americas the Other Places available for sacred transaction have multiplied. Further Other Places have become available through the imagery of Roman Catholicism, French Spiritism, Judaism, Freemasonry, and the Indianist lore of Euro-American nationalists. The Chinese gods—Guan Yin, Guan Gung, and the Buddha—are available in Cuba, as are the *caboclo* Indian spirits and the King of Turkey (O Rei da Turquia) in Brazil. In the Americas generally, an additional plethora of African "nations" becomes available

as Other Places—for example, Congo, Angola, and Jejes (for Yoruba-affiliated Brazilians) and Congo, Carabali, and Arará (for Yoruba-descended Cubans).

With the multiplication of Other Places in the Americas has also come a greater *systematization* of the pantheon and iconography associated with each African Other Place. On the one hand, Candomblé and Santería have each reduced the number of acknowledged *òrìṣà* to a far smaller set than the proverbial count of “201” or “401” given by West African Yoruba. Each of these American traditions actively engages fewer than twenty gods each. On the other hand, because they are all worshiped in close proximity to each other, the colors, numbers, herbs, foods, and problem-solving powers distinctly associated with each god have been differentiated far more meticulously than in Yorubaland. Moreover, in the Americas great care is taken to correlate each non-Yoruba god or spirit with a specific *òrìṣà* counterpart. In other words, each Congo *nkisi* god, each Dahomean *vodun* god, each locally important Catholic saint, and each spirit of the dead is also identified as an avatar or ward of a Yoruba-Atlantic *òrìṣà*.

In a related diasporic shift of emphasis, the West African assemblage aesthetic has hypertrophied in the Americas. In each of the American traditions, the number of vessel altars, the diversity of vessel types, the variety of objects required in the altars, the quantity and variety of beadwork and clothing ensembles, and the variety of iconic objects associated with each god have multiplied to include symbolically charged machetes, bows and arrows, beaded baseball bats, crowns for altars, shields, crowns, Roman Catholic saint statues, *garabatos* (sugar-harvesting hooks), canes, flags, maracas of diverse materials, costumes, cloth arrangements, bead necklaces, symbolic tools, and so forth, all marked with the correct colors and numbers.⁷

On the personal altars of the New World, these items accumulate alongside other evocative items—like mementos in a scrapbook—chosen by or gifted to priests according to more intuitive principles. In Santería and Vodou, even more than in Candomblé, each person’s body, set of vessel altars, and sacred paraphernalia thus embody the accumulating presence of a dozen or more gods, spirits of the nonkin dead, and ancestors who have been materially represented, nourished, and ritually inserted in or tied to the body of the priest.

Yet the most distinctive circumstance of the transatlantic diaspora is equally evident in Santería and Candomblé. This distinctive circumstance does a great deal to explain the American intensification of the ritual effort to link the person to multiple personifications of nonkin, non-nation-state, and nonguild communities. The foundational forms of *orixá* and *oricha* worship in the Americas emerged among populations separated from their lineages, marginalized politically in their host nation-states, and battered into low-status roles in the Present Place. The people who first brought the *òrìṣà* to the Americas were slaves.

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However, African captives in the Americas often reconfigured the imagery of slavery in their most sacred rites. The African diaspora gods are in some ways configured as beneficent masters, who punish the initiate harshly for disobedience. The solidarity of the captives in the same ship's hold is named and reenacted during Candomblé initiations: a group of people initiated together is called a *barco*, or boat, and must undergo all subsequent rites of priestly promotion as a team (Matory 2007). A bell called a *xavorô* is tied to a Candomblé novice's ankle to sound an alarm if she should try to escape.

The spirit *slave* too plays an important role in the spiritual ensemble of each Cuban or Brazilian priest. For example, in Karedist-inspired "spiritual masses," many priests of Santería and Umbanda channel the spirits of elderly deceased slaves, particularly house servants, who are regarded as gentle and wise but effective. In the Cuban Palo Mayombe tradition, the spirits of the dead (*mueritos*) are usually identified as people from "Congo," and they are literally chained down in their iron cauldron altars and forced to work for the priest. Each *prenda* altar is said to contain an enslaved *congo*, who himself enslaves a team of subordinate spirits, ultimately in the service of the priest. Perhaps reflecting the insecurity of connubial partnerships among New World captives, marriage symbolism has declined in the representation of the god-possession priest relationship, while the symbolism of sexuality, birth, childhood, and slavery has become more prominent.⁸

Santería and Candomblé rituals have not, however, been the prerogative of the poorest and least connected. These sacred practices require free time, space, privacy, and the money to purchase numerous sacrificial animals and much ritual paraphernalia. The skills and resources of professional cooks, butchers, and seamstresses are plainly evident in the elaborate clothing and the elaborate, specialized cuisine of the New World gods (see e.g., Brown 2003; Omari 1984; Matory 2005a: 118–19). Satisfactory service to the gods requires enormous competency at domestic service generally. Most of the vessels on *santero* and *candomblecista* altars are China food service vessels that either contain the sacred stones of the gods or are reserved for the service of their sacrificial foods. Hence, the year-round altars in these religions look like China closets or cabinets. The festival altars of *santeros* look like banquets, and the sacred postfestival meals are actual banquets.

Equally suggestive of the domestic skills by which people without people could establish ties of mutual dependency is the fact that, during most of the year, *santero* altars sit in a style of glass-front cabinet that elite Cubans once used to hold baby clothes—the *canastillero*. This fact is consistent with the symbolism that the *orichas* of any given priest are *born* from those of the priest who initiated her. But it is also suggestive evidence that many nineteenth-century priestesses were probably also nannies and wet nurses to elite Cuban families. Once their juvenile wards grew up, the *canastillero* cabinets could have no better use than as display cases for the African gods.

The servile conditions of the African captives who cultivated Candomblé and Santería have thus had at least two consequences. First, these religions have turned the tools of domestic servitude into instruments of empowerment through the establishment of relationships with the mighty denizens of an Other Place. Second, Afro-Cubans and Afro-Brazilians needed to balance the expectations and exploit the alliances available to them in multiple communities that accorded them a lowly status. These communities included elite white households, Euro-American empires, emergent American republics that reserved the best jobs and highest political posts for whites, and an international community of nation-states where primary producers and non-English speakers were, and remain, marginalized. Such a world was often disorienting to white Latin Americans as well.

Afro-Latin Americans ritualized the understanding that one is not the citizen of but one nation alone—in my view, partly because none of the available nations was adequate to their material or psychological needs. The racist American nation-state did not provide a sufficiently satisfying definition of the black or mulatto person, though one could not ignore one's relationship to it. Thus, like black North Americans, Afro-Latin Americans engaged in an intense struggle for respect. In one of the most characteristic of African American responses, *candomblecistas* and *santeros* ritually proclaimed themselves royalty in the iconography of *two Other Places*—Europe and Africa (for an excellent visual history of these iconographic transformations, see Brown 2003; Omari 1984). At moments of possession by the gods, they are Old World monarchs.

Whereas possessed Brazilian priests wear European-shaped royal crowns festooned with Yoruba royalist-inspired veils of beads, Cuban priests mount European-style crowns on new initiates and a crown with a veil of pendant sacred tools atop the soup tureen altar that mimes the spirit-filled head of the mature devotee. Indeed, *santeros* call the initiation itself a "coronation." Thus each priest is crowned the sovereign of an interior, embodied kingdom, where a dozen or more in-dwelling or nearby-hovering spirits affirm the divinity of the priest and her empowerment through transactions with multiple Other Places.

The territory of this sovereignty is not land but the body, and particularly the head. For this reason, *santeros* and *candomblecistas* are very careful about who touches their heads. Terrible misfortune is attributed to the improper permeability or the ritual mismanagement of the body's boundaries. That misfortune is described in terms of the closure or blockage of one's roads and paths. A closed body and an open road are the ideal state of the body's transactions with the adversarial Present Place. Conversely, the body's properly management of openness to spirits is the ideal state of the body's transaction with multiple but selected Other Places.⁹

Despite the transnational ontology, sense of geography, and practice at their

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core, these religions of the translocal self have been highly useful in the projects of territorial nationalists in the *Americas*, just as their African counterparts were in nineteenth-century Lagos. In Haiti, northeastern Brazil, and Cuba, nationalist folklorists have publicized the local Afro-Atlantic possession religions as major evidence of the cultural distinctiveness of their territorial nations and therefore as a primordial affirmation of their political autonomy from imperialist powers. For example, the Haitian physician Jean Price-Mars made Vodou into the foremost living proof of Haitian cultural integrity and autonomy from the cultural and political system of the U.S. invaders of his island. President François Duvalier turned the symbolism of the Haitian gods and the grassroots organizational networks of the priests into instruments of rule (e.g., Matory 2005a: 167; Rotberg 1976: 362–65). The Cuban folklorist Fernando Ortiz focused his seminal cultural history of a recently independent Cuba on the religion and the sacred music of Afro-Cubans. In Brazil the psychiatrist Raymundo Nina Rodrigues, the journalist Edison Carneiro, and the anthropologist Gilbert Freyre employed the beauty and dignity of northeastern Brazil's African-inspired religions—as well as the dignity and intelligence of its black transatlantic travelers—as bulwarks against the Europhile cultural pretensions and economic dominance of Rio and São Paulo.

In pursuit of respect for themselves, the regionalist and nationalist admirers of Candomblé, Santería, and Vodou argued that the preeminence of Yoruba and Fon religion in northeastern Brazil, Cuba, and Haiti made these places *culturally superior* to regions where West Central African captives had predominated, such as the United States and Rio de Janeiro. Their evidence for Yoruba and Fon superiority derived significantly from the Lagosian Cultural Renaissance, the writings from which appear to have reached Latin America by the hand of transatlantic Afro-Brazilian pilgrims and transigratory black merchants. Thus transnationalism is not only a mythological and ontological premise of the Yoruba-Atlantic religions but also a centuries-old material reality—based on the relatively minimal technological requirements of nineteenth-century oceanic travel *and*, more important, the sacred and mythological motivation to transact. However, the transnational material realities of these religions did not exempt them from effective use by territorial nationalists. Technology can open up opportunities, but neither technology nor capitalism is sufficient to determine what real historically and culturally positioned actors use them to imagine. We might still ask what transformations emerge as actors in any given field encounter new technological opportunities and confront others' uses of those technologies.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE FOREIGN OTHER IS ALIVE AND PRESENT?

When technology enables *faster* and *easier* material transactions between the sacred Other Place and the Present Place, does the character of those trans-

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actions change qualitatively, as the transnationalism theorists have suggested, or merely quantitatively? Certain fascinating qualitative challenges to the leadership and changes of perspective among leaders have indeed transformed the Yoruba-Atlantic religions since the early 1980s, in a way that might be correlated convincingly with post-1974 changes in global capitalism. Yet the teleologists of transnationalism will be surprised by the uneven response of different classes of priest, and by the similarity of these qualitative transformations to events that beset these religions in the early twentieth century.

In 1980 the Afro-Nuyorican *santera* Marta Vega led an international committee of priests and scholars in organizing the First International Conference of Orisha Tradition and Culture (Vega 2000: 204). With the special collaboration of Nigerian *babaláwo* diviner and University of Ife Vice-Chancellor Wande Abimbola, the first conference took place in 1981 in the West African city of Ile-Ife—the mythical origin of humanity, the mythical dynastic origin of Yoruba monarchs, and the preeminent Other Place among West African Other Places.

The potential for this event to happen indeed rested *partly* on the Invisible Hand of capitalism. The technologically advanced state of air travel greatly facilitated the gathering. And the 1973 OPEC oil embargo, which is often named as a watershed in the deterritorialization of capitalism (e.g., Harvey 1989), did affect Nigeria but not by forcing Nigerian capitalism to become more efficient. It is a sign of “globalization” theory’s parochialism that it narates history with exclusive reference to how such watersheds affect countries like the United States or England and not how they affected the economies and cultures of, for example, OPEC members. The 1978 Airline Deregulation Act in the United States probably did reduce the cost of travel to Africa for U.S.-based *oricha* and orisha worshippers. However, capitalist teleology hardly explains the choice of the oil-rich Nigerian government to fund both universities and celebrations of international black cultural unity, U.S. foundations’ post-sixties support of research on the cultures of the oppressed, or the Brazilian government’s sponsorship of activities that enhanced its leadership in the “nonaligned world,” all of which surpassed impersonal capitalist market forces in their influence on the new circuit of International Conferences of Orisha Tradition and Culture.

On their 1981 arrival in the most sacred Other Place, priestly delegations from Brazil, Cuba, Trinidad and Tobago, the United States, and other countries found no sacred idyll. Instead they encountered fundamentalist Christian protests against their presence and factional warfare in the town. They witnessed the advanced state of the Nigerian *orisha*’s impoverishment and marginalization, due to massive conversion to Islam and Christianity, as well as the persecution of *orisha* worshippers by Muslims and Christians. Yet the vivacity of the American traditions demonstrated the historical importance of this

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circum-Atlantic, transnational family of practices. Worshipers could see enough commonalities among their geographically divergent branches to believe that they shared a single tradition worthy of the title "world religion."

However, as in other world religions, diversity became no less a concern than unity. In the years after the first International Conference, the foremost controversies ultimately concerned the degree of authority that would be given to the real-life Other Place and its priests in the emergent world religion. For example, some leaders demanded the rejection of all syncretism with Roman Catholicism (see, e.g., Azevedo 1986), while others embraced syncretism as a worthy element of their distinctive national and hybrid ancestral traditions. The other controversy concerned the ecclesiastical preeminence of Ile-Ife itself. Should every other International Conference take place in Ile-Ife, in affirmation of its originary, foundational, and supreme status among the sites of *òrìṣà* worship, or should the gatherings take place in six other important locales of worship—in recognition of both the sacredness of the number 7 and the equality of all national "branches" of this world religion—before returning to Ile-Ife? The answer to this question would, in effect, also stipulate the relative rank of priests from the diverse national capitals of *òrìṣà* worship. Would 'Wande Abimbola become the "pope" of this new world religion, or would Marta Vega and other celebrated New World priests—such as Bahia's Stella de Azevedo—retain equal authority, or even acquire the authority to speak for and define orthodoxy within their own national branches of the tradition?

Subsequent International Conferences of Orisha Tradition and Culture took place in Salvador, Brazil, and New York City. But disagreements over the centrality of Ile-Ife and its priestly spokesperson—once they became live actors in Present Place politics—fractured the International Conferences into several rival circuits. Initiates with the institutional power to claim national-territorial leadership within one or another New World branch of this world religion—such as membership in an old and nationally esteemed temple—tended to favor the independence of and equality among national branches. Initiates without esteemed institutional affiliations and those without the right skin color to claim hereditary authority—such as Italian-Brazilian devotees in São Paulo—have tended to follow Nigerian priests and models. Their direct appeal to Africa circumvents time-honored hierarchies of authority and esteem among the age-ranked temples of Brazil or among the Cuban-pedigreed houses of Santería in the United States.

As a black scion of a respected Cuba *orisha* lineage and the foundation-funded director of the Caribbean Cultural Center in New York, Marta Vega would have much to lose through vassalage to the Nigerian priesthood. Thus, whereas more marginally positioned priests in the United States are especially likely to call their practice "Yoruba religion," Vega is careful to name her practice with respect for the legitimacy of its non-African roots and

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Caribbean distinctiveness. Contrary to the growing trend, Vega still calls her religion Santería, meaning the "Way of the [Roman Catholic] Saints." Concomitantly, Vega has seceded from the circuit of conferences that she founded with Abimbola and now leads a separate one.

Hence, it is true that newer technologies of transportation—albeit ones that were useful primarily because of the nonteological politics of foundation funding and cold war politics—were among the preconditions of *orisha* worship's emergence as a world religion, with its fairly typical fights over unity and diversity. Then again, such fights over unity and diversity have also always occurred within otherwise local religions as well. Moreover, the use of the direct, physical contact with the African Other Place in order to jump the local queue to authority and esteem did not originate in any recent "break" from the antecedent stage of capitalism or depend on the latest stage of technological efficiency.

Founded in 1911, the Brazilian Candomblé known as Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá was the newest and therefore the lowest ranking of the main three temples of the Quêto nation. However, from 1911 to 1938 the leader of that temple, Mãe Aninha, enlisted the help of transatlantic Afro-Brazilian travelers—such as the diviner, pilgrim, and writer Martiniano do Bonfim and the merchant Joaquim Devodê Branco—in "restoring" to her then-new temple to the supposedly primordial African practices that she claimed had been "forgotten" in the senior temple from which she and her followers had seceded. The dissemination of this claim of "restoration" and this temple's subsequent long-term pursuit of "African purity" have helped make Opô Afonjá, despite its relative youth, the preeminent Candomblé temple in Brazil and the most prestigious *orisha* temple in the world. Opô Afonjá's "African purity" is celebrated and financially supported as living proof that the Brazilian nation, the northeastern region, the Quêto nation, and the transnational black race all possess a standard that exempts them from incorporation into and subordination to the northern, white empires.

Ironically, while such sacred purism is consistent with the principle that the inner self is *foreign*, such sacred purism *counters* the generalization that, in the Afro-Atlantic religions, the self is the convergence of *multiple* foreign beings. The current leader of the purist Opô Afonjá temple, Mãe Stella, insists militantly on the deportation of the Catholic saints and the *caboclo* Indians' spirits—not to mention the *boiadeiro* cowboy spirits, the King of Turkey, and the Gypsy spirits—from her kingdom of the transnational self. Across the Afro-Atlantic world—and perhaps the whole political and religious world—limiting the number of exogenous beings that inhabit the initiate's body favors authoritarian interests. On the other hand, the internal multiplication of the self seems to serve the interests of upstart priests and of initiates seeking independence from authoritarian temples. Hence, as motive forces behind the repeated qualitative transformations and synchronic vari-

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ations in the relations between New World *orisha* worship and its Other Place, class-specific strategy towers over any ostensibly inevitable trajectory of capitalism. Even within the class of nationally ranked priests, bargaining positions vary. Mãe Stella's Opô Afonjá temple has already secured such national power based on the African purity strategy of the 1930s that it is too late for any recently arriving Nigerian to offer symbolic resources greater than her own.

CONCLUSION

The biggest differences between the West African and the American branches of this long-transnational religion relate to (1) the *quantitatively* greater religious pluralism and (2) the oppression of the African in the Americas. First, while the qualitative protocol of constructing the self in transaction with the foreign is fundamental to all the Yoruba-Atlantic traditions, the Other Places and the sacred technology of transaction with them have been meticulously elaborated and synthesized in the American traditions of *orisha* worship. Thus the difference between these West African religions and their American counterparts strikes me not as qualitative—as recent transnationalist models might lead us to suspect—but as quantitative. The New World devotees construct themselves at the convergence of a *quantitatively* far more diverse set of nations and, *quantitatively*, a far more plural sense of the self than do the West African devotees. Second, and also quantitatively, the *number of* people who dramatize their penetration by multiple nations has increased exponentially, and the imagery of its involuntarism has grown.

The insertion of the Afro-Atlantic religions into the transnationalist historical analysis recently popularized by Europeanists and Asianists pushes me toward several theoretical revisions. First, transnationalism seems new only if the observer and/or the observed belong to a class of people who could once afford exclusive faith in the nation-state in the first place. Second, capitalism and technology by themselves are insufficient to determine how people imagine themselves, their communities, or the geographic and cosmological context of their lives. Third, the premise that people's imaginations of community proceed in a consistent linear sequence—and that a single form of community dominates all collective life within any given historical period—is perhaps more an artifact of the observer's monotheistic thinking than a considered product of social science.

Fourth, and finally, I offer for the reader's reflection the hypothesis that all religion is transnational and that what distinguishes Afro-Atlantic religion is its elaborate ritual and verbal reflection on the translocal constitution of all communities and persons. The Afro-Atlantic religions (perhaps more explicitly than most religions) and the study of religion (perhaps more explicitly than the study of material culture or political organization) suggest that all

human groupings are constituted not only by the technology but also by the ontology and ethnogeography of their relations to Other Places.

What remains a question is *why* religions are so transnational, and why *Afro-Atlantic* religions—in Africa and the Americas—are especially translocal in their orientation. Is translocalism inherent in “the religious imagination”—in the anatomical reality of the self as both perceiver and perceived and both subject and object? Is Africa inherently more religious than other places? Or have the seventeenth-century conditions that defined “religion” as a category focused the attention of religious studies scholars on only Other-worldly aspects of these diverse and complex worldviews? Or have numerous formerly complex and diverse phenomena now brought themselves into conformity with the institutional space that governments, scientists, and educational systems have designed for religion?

I am inclined to believe that all the above hypotheses are partially true, but I would add another, based on the observation that religious activity tends to be most concentrated among some of the genders, classes, and countries with the least power to demand help from territorial authorities: according to the Afro-Atlantic example—as well as today’s worldwide explosion of religiosity among the poor and displaced—it is the oppressed and marginalized who are the most likely to seek help from Other Places. However, it is not the *materially* poorest but the most *psychically* and *socially* marginalized actors who seek transaction with the greatest *number* of Other Places. In the Yoruba-Atlantic family of religions, these actors are the priests in the wealthiest nations but the least centralized and less nationally celebrated temples. After all, the knowledge of multiple Other Places requires time, money, education, and independence. Perhaps to the same degree that “transnationalism” and “globalization” nickname a set of very high class positions surprised by their suddenly increased mobility, “religion” nicknames the class positions that could never fully depend on the nation-state but also have the resources to invest in—and the moderate hope of profits from—its long-distance alternatives.

NOTES

1. One is reminded of instances in which the study of African arts reveals clear and ancient parallels to aesthetic sensibilities that theorists typically attribute to a novel postmodernism. For example, Barber (1991) recognizes parallels between the multivocal pastiche aesthetic of Yoruba oral poetry and “postmodern” Euro-American literary tastes. Similarly, the forms of “bio-power,” which Foucault attributes to novel, capitalism-driven developments in the European state during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, are similar to the Oyo kingdom’s disciplining of bodies and regulation of fertility through the ritual technology of omnipresent delegates’ “marriage” to the king and the gods, as well as their powers to make women fertile. A similar “bio-power,” linking political authorities’ fertility technology to the administrative

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tion of the polity is common among sub-Saharan African peoples but is not neces-
sarily dependent on capitalism (see, e.g., Matory 2005b).

2. On the contrary, the hierarchical logic of race, the phenomenon of political
"dynasties" (such as the Kennedys), and other hereditary modes of authority (such
as the British House of Lords and monarchy) have endured at the heart of the ter-
ritorial nation-state, as have religious definitions of citizenship. It is clear that the ter-
ritorial nation-state was a new idea in the late eighteenth century, but we must not
exaggerate the purity of the religious forms of community that Anderson says pre-
ceded it or the purity of the nationalist forms that followed its invention. Pace An-
derson, it is difficult for me to imagine a time or place in prenationalist Europe, where
Christendom's contrast to paganism, Judaism, and/or Islam was not central to its own
conscious imagination of community, and the nationalist period is notoriously
fraught with programs that defined citizenship by explicit contrast to the Jewish Other
in the midst of the nation-state. Officially Anglican, Catholic, Islamic, and Jewish na-
tion-states have been more the norm than the exception.

3. For example, even in some of the most Western-acculturated African-diaspora
religious forms, such as southern U.S. Protestantism, one finds the conversion ex-
perience of embracing Christ described as "travel" (Creel 1988: 286).

4. Hence the comfort and ease with which many religious institutions have taken
to the Internet is less a sea change in the way those communities function than a mi-
nor instance of the inveterately translocal *modus operandi* and geographic con-
sciousness of religions. For example, Boston's Roman Catholic Cardinal Sean P.
O'Malley, who literally wears archaism on his sleeve, in the form of a friar's habit,
sees no contradiction in filing daily reports on a blog about his ten-day trip to Rome
(Paulson 2006).

5. Aromatic herb baths and tobacco smoke powerfully symbolize readiness for
divine intervention in the Yoruba-Atlantic religions, while foods powerfully specify
which gods are intervening.

6. Yoruba attributive poetry (*oriki*) also embodies an assemblage aesthetic (Bar-
ber 1991). In poetically evoking the character of one substance, person, family, king-
dom, or god, the composers of *oriki* might string together verses from the poetry of
numerous other substances, beings, or collectives.

7. Conversely, the West African Yoruba tradition of wood carving—which is, in
my view, based far less on the assemblage aesthetic—has virtually died out in Can-
domblé and Santería.

8. The white lovers of enslaved African women were, in Latin America, potential
instruments of manumission and sponsors of religious activities, perhaps explaining
the increased relevance of literal sexuality in the reputation of possession priests. Yet
some of the most detailed sexual symbolism surrounds the assumption in Brazil that
any male possession priest is also the sort of man who allows himself to be penetrated
sexually. This category of men is also said to enjoy special favor by the Afro-Cuban
goddess Yemayá. In Brazil Oxum is often spontaneously identified as such men's tute-
lary god (Matory 2003).

9. The centrality of transactions with these sacred Other Places is equally evident
in the other profession that earned Afro-Brazilians a major livelihood in the nineteenth
and early twentieth century—the transatlantic trade in religious goods from Africa.
These goods remain indispensable in Candomblé initiations (Matory 1999a, 2005a).

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Transnational Transcendence

Essays on Religion and Globalization

EDITED BY

Thomas J. Csordas

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