FIRE, HOPE, PRAYER – TRINIDAD ORISA, CREOLIZATION AND THE POLITICS OF AUTHENTICITY

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by
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ABSTRACT

Trinidad Orisa is one of the many Yoruba-Derived spiritual practices that have thrived for centuries throughout the African Diaspora beyond enslavement. Initially, Trinidad Orisa was practiced in a form born and bred in the Antilles. However, recent interactions with the Yoruba Spiritual community from Nigeria have sparked questions and debates about both the authenticity of diasporan versions of Orisa as well as ways in which Orisa may be returned to its original Yoruban form as practiced in Nigeria.

This thesis, Fire, Hope, and Prayer derives its title from the opening lines of Trinidad and Tobago’s National anthem where it states, “Forged from the love of liberty, in the fires of hope and prayer”. Metaphorically it represents the journey of Orisa in Trinidad that although drawing from a Yoruba name (Orisa), is actually formed with a combination of identities such as Congo, Hausa, Indian, and other local cultures. Under the fires and pressures of colonization and enslavement Orisa represented both a freedom and a rebellion from the suppressing culture, religion, and creole seasoning process imposed upon the Caribbean populous. Hope and prayer went hand and hand as the traditions were handed down from generation to generation thus forming an African spiritual practice that is distinctly Trinidadian.

Fire, Hope, and Prayer: Trinidad Orisa, Creolizatoin, and the Politics of Authenticity suggests that it is an impossible and unfair to suggest a “return” to an “original” since all things inevitably change. Trinidad Orisa is no more similar to early 19th century versions of Yoruba spiritual practice than what the Yoruba themselves are practicing today in Nigeria. Furthermore, just as variations will be found from village to village in Nigeria no matter the proximity in Yorubaland – the same goes for the diaspora. Orisa traditions have been formed under a
number of historical, spiritual, and social circumstance that account for the differences, not only from country to country in the African diaspora – but also from town to town. In Trinidad an Orisa spiritual house in Woodbrook close to Port of Spain would not hold a feast in the same way as one in Claxton Bay in the South.

While it is important to learn from each other as we are re-introduced to ourselves in the diaspora, we must also come together with an understanding that the fires of colonialism spread throughout the diaspora. While we all sought different means to be released from or to cope with the throws of oppression, we all created our own alternative realities with glimmers of hope as prayer reconnected us to our ancestral, spiritual, and imagined “home”. To exalt one tradition as purer, or more authentic than another turns the same oppressive hand upon ourselves that we have sought for so long to overcome.
BIографical Sketch

Jessica M. Alarcón is a visual and performing artist, poet, author, and Yoruba Priestess of African diaspora and Filipino descent born in Brooklyn, NY. She holds a dual Bachelor’s degree in Romance Literatures & Language (BA French/ BA Spanish. She graduated summa cum laude from North Carolina A&T State University and upon graduation, immediately embarked upon a Fulbright - Hays Group Project Abroad in Nigeria where she spent the summer studying the Yoruba language at Obafemi Awolowo University (formerly the University of Ife).


She is fluent in four languages other than English and has traveled and studied business, languages, and performing arts in Europe, Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas. She recently completed a study of Architecture and Early European Art History at the University of Cambridge (UK) to work on her
Masters Thesis as well as returned to Africa and the Caribbean for further fieldwork.

Alarcón's work combines the performing arts and the written word, using them as catalysts for education, social change, and building bridges between communities. Jessica feels that the diversity of her work enables her to reach a wider audience. It is her intention to showcase the art rather than the artist, to impress you by the message instead of the messenger. Jessica hopes to inspire others to pick up the pen and write.
For my African people.

May we remember ourselves as we stretch our hands across the diaspora.
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classroom and allowed me to sit in on a very important course on Caribbean identity where some of the key arguments raised in this thesis were engaged in class discussions. Also Professor Rawle Gibbons who not only availed materials from his extensive library, but invited me along to attend the feast at St. Helena and a number of his theatrical productions which reflect the Orisa tradition in Trinidad & Tobago. Dr. Denise Noble, whom I met while studying at Cambridge – kept me grounded while in the UK. Thanks for your friendship Denise and thank you for your continuous help on my academic endeavors. Also thanks to the Africana Studies Department at Cornell University, in particular Dr. James Turner. I had the joy of serving as his Teaching Assistant in the Fall of 2009. Dr. Turner is a respected elder and founder of the Africana Studies department at Cornell. 40 years later we are still marching on ’til victory is won. Happy 40th Anniversary to Africana studies.

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To the Rapso community, especially Brother Resistance and Sister Ava – where I was able to “break grounds” and become inducted in the Rapso fraternity and even was able to return and sing in the Calypso tent, Divas International in 2008 as I joined with the local community in celebration of the Rapso tradition.

Special thanks to Ms. Ella Andall who shared Osun and valuable life lessons with me. She always encourages me and as I was embarking upon this thesis project she urged that I cannot fail. That I must always do my best because I do not just represent myself. Full Osun, always Iya.
Lastly, but very importantly I thank my parents Jessie M. and Anthony V.C. Alarcón – my beloved grandmother, Bobby Jean Ricks Alarcón who was nearly lost this time last year and returned to us all and continues to make memories through her voice, through her art, and through her love.

To Chief Adedoja Aluko who has the proverbial patience of Job and has been an important anchor for me since the beginning of my undergraduate years and is still here. To Mrs. Barbara George and to Joann “Auntie Remi” Marie and to Afua Asiama Adjei, simply put – thanks for being you. You help me keep faith in friendship. Much love to all of you.
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The **East-West Corridor** is the built-up area of north Trinidad stretching from the capital, Port of Spain, 15 miles east to Arima. The term was coined by economist and political philosopher Lloyd Best, after gleaning the works of a technocrat named Lynette Attwell. The Corridor includes such towns as Barataria, San Juan, St. Joseph, Curepe, St. Augustine, Tunapuna, Tacarigua, Arouca, and Five Rivers, once distinct communities, now districts within a continuous urban area. For the most part it runs along the Eastern Main Road, between the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway and the foothills of the Northern Range. It is a densely populated and fairly congested strip of development along some of the best agricultural soils in the country. Over 548,000 Trinidadians live in the densely populated strip.

**Source** [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:East-West_Corridor.PNG](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:East-West_Corridor.PNG)
ORTHOGRAPHIC NOTE

This thesis is a multi-lingual text that will introduce non-English words in italics the first time they are encountered, followed by an explanation given either in-text or within the footnotes. There is also a keyword list (glossary) at the back of the thesis for further reference.

Yoruba words will be written in the following ways, unless cited as a direct quotation or otherwise noted:

- The Yoruba “Ṣ” (“sh” sound) will be written as “s” ... eg. Orisa, Osun, Sango (instead of Orisha, Oshun, or Shango)
- Yoruba is a tonal language; however, this text does not demarcate tonal differences unless it is done to illustrate a particular point.
- I have left translations as the original authors have written them
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Forged from the love of liberty
In the fires of hope and prayer
With boundless faith in our destiny
We solemnly declare

From: Trinidad & Tobago National Anthem
Patrick Stanislaus Castagne (1962)

“Fire, Hope, Prayer”

On August 31, 1962 when Trinidad & Tobago gained independence from Britain, there was a national search in the months prior for an anthem which best embodied the spirit of independence. Guyana born Patrick Stanislaus Castagne emerged as the winner of the contest and his song became immortalized as a significant national symbol. Trinidad’s independence represented more than the establishment of a nation – it represented a stand against Old World colonial order and a proclamation of autonomy. This stance included among other things the restructuring of political edifices, the selection of a flag, National Anthem and other defining symbols. That period of time was filled with the air of self-identification and an internal “sorting out” of identities.

As I reflected on Trinidad & Tobago’s break from colonial structures and the quest for a self-proclaimed identity, my attention turned towards the opening lines of the National Anthem as a metaphor for the aims of my thesis project. In particular, the second line seemed to capture my intent as “In the Fires of Hope and Prayer” suggested a parallel beyond its initial purpose as an epithet of nationhood and spoke to the movement of diasporan peoples beyond survival, in
particular African peoples. I write “peoples” with deliberate intent because a key argument of this thesis is that the Trinidadian Orisa system has morphed from the earlier indigenous Yoruba (Nigerian) spiritual faith to a contemporary faith of intra-African creolization lending to a unique Trinidadian interpretation and experience. Specifics of the Orisa system and its journey throughout the world will be discussed in further detail later in the thesis, however for now what is most important is not the mechanics of the tradition, but rather the environment that has cultivated the space for a creative interpretation of combined spiritualities which can today be identified as being specifically “Trinidad Orisa.”

In the over 300-year presence of Africans in Trinidad, identities have both been forged and sought in a variety of ways. In other words through the vestiges of enslavement and colonization identities were forcefully rendered. Yet even within such an environment there was not a sweeping acquiescence of forged constructions of self. The forging of colonially placed identities was resisted and simultaneously “self-forged” while people sought to preserve, deny, or reclaim personal identities. African peoples of various ethnicities had no choice but to blend themselves and to rely on each other for the sake of survival. Yet African peoples in the New World did not merely survive, they found many ways of defining themselves for and by themselves as they created spaces beyond survival. In this way even under the pressures of confinement, creativity was yet one window of freedom. Thus, “forged from the love of liberty” the first line of the anthem captures this process of creating amid the constraints.

The title of this thesis takes off, respectfully, from this anthem and moves forward with an analysis of what diaspora has represented for the preservation of African-derived traditional practices in Trinidad. The modern day African-Trinidadian is evidence of survival and perseverance, but this survival did not
come without cost or question. Today’s African-Trinidadian who has moved through “the fires of hope and prayer” – is still seeking, still defining, still detaching/attaching along the trail of smoke clad footprints. The aim of this thesis project is to analyze not only the processes of self-definition for African-Trinidadians, but also to provide an analysis of the changes that have occurred vis-à-vis the historical and continuous blending and interactions of African communities – continental – New World diasporan (USA for example) as well as interactions right within the Caribbean. These are very crucial to the development of the Orisa tradition in Trinidad and Tobago – especially since the Trinidadian Orisa practice is a blend of Yoruba and other continental African traditions such as Congo and Hausa. The trajectory of Africans in Trinidad has paved the way for the current developments in the Orisa tradition that has built upon that foundation and continues to morph.

*Overview*

*Fire, Hope, Prayer* looks towards creolization as a process that manifested in the New World through *survivals* or *continuities* that combined with the creation of, preservation of, and the forging of new identities. Creolization is a creative process in which elements combine to form a continuously morphing, yet cohesive identity born in a physical (spiritual, linguistic, or cultural) space. The creativity and diversity of creolization make the recently stirring arguments over the authenticity of the Trinidadian Orisa movement in comparison with the continental Nigerian version a misnomer. Trinidad Orisa is unique for where it is and for what it has gone through. As Judith Byfield frames it, “the fight around authenticity overlooks the creative alchemy in the Caribbean.”

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1 Personal communication October 2009 – Cornell University.
This thesis traces the path of the Orisa traditions in the East-West Corridor of Trinidad\textsuperscript{2}. It focuses on Trinidadian interpretations/practices of Orisa and explores the quest for an African spiritual identity. It demonstrates that the question of authenticity is not only imposed from the outside. Within some spaces Trinidadians are also reaching back to Nigeria in search of an “authentic truth” and practice.

Interest in this research project sparked during a semester long stay in Trinidad and Tobago in 2007 and several subsequent visits when I observed various Orisa houses. In my observations, a major theme was the hovering question of authenticity and seeking. Initially I set out to study how Osun/St. Philomen is worshipped in the Trinidad Orisa practices in order to see how Trinidadians constructed Osun in their “home-grown” spiritual practices but in the end I was moved more in the direction of looking at perceptions of Orisa in contemporary (focusing on the last ten years) Trinidadian Orisa practices. In a span of nearly 3 years (2007-2010) I have seen major metamorphoses in Trinidadian spiritual spaces. The influence of the new wave of Nigerian Yoruba visitors on a mission to spread the “authentic” Orisa practice in Trinidad and perform ceremonial rites has caused a shift that I hope to highlight in this thesis.

Some African-Trinidadians embraced this shift and were eagerly seeking to link with the newly-arrived Nigerians who were purporting in their orientation to “right the wrongs of a diluted practice\textsuperscript{3}.” Others found ways to incorporate both the new knowledge along with the current expressions while another group frowned upon the changes and declared their contentment in the ways the Trinidadian ancestors developed Orisa practice through time. These

\textsuperscript{2} From Maturita in the East to Diego Martin in the West
\textsuperscript{3} quotes mine
questionings have caused a number of shifts and rifts that continue to the present.

Like other diasporan Africans, many Trinidadians were either drawn to the Orisa traditions because of their link to community activism and the desire to connect with 'home' (Africa) or have practiced the creolized form for generations. This is an important distinction that will be further explained in the thesis.

“Fire, Hope, Prayer” represents the findings of a study based at the University of West Indies – St. Augustine Trinidad and Tobago through affiliation with the Centre for Gender and Development Studies. This study included field research consisting primarily of observer/participant studies, resources, and the use of local Trinidadian libraries and site visits including meeting with various scholars, activists, and artist/s who have been inspired by the Orisa in their personal or professional lives. As an initiate myself I found that at times being a practitioner made the line between being an observer researching and a participant worshiping difficult to delineate, however the insider knowledge can also be advantageous in presenting a multi-dimensional analysis of persons, events, and interpretations of Orisa.

This research is centered on two forms of African Spiritual practices in Trinidad: (1) The “traditionalist” Orisa practitioners – in this case, the self-identified “traditionalists” are those who practice Orisa according to how it has been practiced in Trinidad for generations; and (2) the Ifa community of Trinidadians who have made a conscious effort to identify themselves with Nigerian Yoruba practices. I have also visited sites related to the Shouter/Spiritual Baptist faith and the churches of other denominations in order to see the differences and similarities between each group.
The intention of this study is to elucidate answers to the following research questions:

I. **How is the Orisa tradition represented in the East-West Corridor, (Port of Spain) of Trinidad?** While I am limiting this study geographically to the area from Maturita (Arima) in the East to Petit Valley in the West, this question will lead to the definition of Orisa in the context of Trinidad. Specifically it will identify how Trinidadian Orisa from its practices in other places in Africa and the Diaspora. Furthermore, this question intends to establish ways that the Orisa manifest in wider Trinidadian society such as in music (Rapso, Calypso, Soca...) culture (Carnival, Folklore – *La Diabesse, Mama Glow, Soucouyant, Midnight Robber*), language (sentence structure, words, etc) and in general.

II. **What conditions permitted the Orisa tradition to survive through space, time, and modernity?** This question addresses authenticity and the inevitability of change, regardless of if one is at the source in Africa or has gone through the Middle Passage and has moved beyond survival. The trajectory instigated by the institutions of enslavement and colonization will be evaluated for their influences on the current Orisa traditional practice in Trinidad.

III. **What does it mean to be African and what does Africa represent to the diaspora?** If it is in fact inevitable that all things must and do change, what then does Africa represent to the diaspora and vice-versa. While this is a mammoth question to attempt to answer, this thesis at least opens the door for dialogue
Methodology

“Fire, Hope, Prayer” is a heuristic study. In *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology and Applications*, a research methods book (1990), Clark Moustakas, a leading expert on clinical and humanistic psychology, defines the heuristic process as:

a way of being informed, a way of knowing. Whatever presents itself in the consciousness of the investigator as perception, sense, intuition, or knowledge represents and invitation for further elucidation. (Moustakas 1990: 10)

What makes this study heuristic is that I am personally connected to the topic, both as a member of the African diaspora and as a member of the Yoruba priesthood. I grew up in a spiritual practice that was truly diasporan, but later was initiated in the Nigerian system. Like the communities researched, I too, was in search of an “authentic” truth – a greater sense of Africanness, yet I later found Africa was right here in the Americas. This is a significant part of heuristics. As Moustakas writes:

Essentially, in the heuristic process, I am creating a story that portrays the qualities, meanings, and essences of universally unique experiences. Through an unwavering and steady inward gaze and inner freedom to explore and accept what is, I am reaching into deeper and deeper regions of a human problem or experience and coming to know and understand its underlying dynamics and constituents more and more fully. (Moustakas 1990:13)
His choice of words are interesting as he uses the term “universally unique” which suggests a connection to a larger question/problem but also identifies a specific quality which distinguish one part of the connected whole from the others. This is essential in identifying the Orisa practice in Trinidad as specifically “Trinidad Orisa” but connected to questions of diaspora. I was introduced to the Trinidadian version of Orisa practice through fieldwork in Trinidad beginning in 2007 during an affiliation with the University of West Indies – St. Augustine. The direct contact with various Orisa communities has continued since then and my perception of the communities has also shifted during that time frame. Initially I set out to determine how the Yoruba goddess Osun was interpreted in Trinidadian Orisa houses. Although I did not set out on the journey with any particular expectations, much of what I encountered was unexpected. My earlier experiences as an Orisa practitioner were mainly with the Cuban and Oyotunji (African-American) versions, although I was exposed to the Brasilian Candomble as well as the Haitian Voudou, although not as closely.

My “inward gaze” enabled me to perceive the Trinidadian Orisa experience, in a different way from many researchers who are not insiders to the “tradition”. Although being so deeply involved sometimes made a disconnected scientific approach difficult. Moustakas explains:

The initial “data” is within me; the challenge is to discover and explicate its nature. In the process, I am not only lifting out the essential meanings of an experience, but I am actively awakening and transforming my own self. Self-understanding and self-growth occur simultaneously in heuristic discovery. (Moustakas 1990:13)
I decided the self-discovery aspect is not a negative and I embraced my diasporaness as an important part of the methodological approach, yet there were times when as the researcher I enveloped myself in an academic formation that may even contradict some of my emotional conceptualizations, as I extracted essential meanings.

I have benefited form the methodological approaches of other similarly situated scholars such as Marta Moreno Vega, author of *When the Spirits Dance Mambo* (2004) have successfully incorporated scholarly and creative approaches in their spiritual practices. Vega, for example is the founder and president of the Caribbean Cultural Center/African Diaspora Institute and cofounder of the Global Afro-Latino and Caribbean Initiative/Latin American Studies Program at Hunter College. In addition, according to Frances Henry, she was instrumental in founding the Orisa World Congress in 1981. Other practitioner scholars who have combined their works with an inner quest of Orisa practice are Wande Abimbola, author of *Ifa Will Mend Our Broken World* (1997), Migene Gonzalez-Wippler author of *Santeria: La Religion* (1999), and Diedre Badejo, *Osun Seegesi: The Elegant Deity of Wealth, Power, and Femininity* (1996). All of the scholars are able to successfully integrate scholarly methodologies and analyses while maintaining their spiritual integrity.

Although the thesis project is about Trinidad Orisa the questions extend with “unique universality” to other parts of the diaspora. Many of us have been raising the same questions and are confronted with the same measures of authenticity. The entire African diaspora has been through the *fires* of enslavement, with *hopes* of a better future for generations to come and for many of us spirituality or *prayer* has been at the core of our hope, our passions and our optimism towards the future.
A secondary methodological level is that of participant-observation. Abu Raihan Muhammad bin Ahmad al- Biruni (10-18-1025) is credited with having come up with participant-observation as a methodology. He wrote:

...an observer should keep alert, constantly scrutinizing his work, promoting his self-criticism, moderating his self-admiration, and pursuing his researches without impatience or boredom (Biruni cited in Douglas, A.V. 1973: 209)

This has been refined and updated by numerous scholars in the academic world especially those studying cultural continuities in the fields of anthropology, dance, music, folklore, and religion. David Fetterman’s *Ethnography* (2010) argues that a participant/observer approach to fieldwork is:

...crucial to effective fieldwork. Participant observation combines participation in the lives of the people under study with maintenance of a professional distance that allows adequate observation and recording of data.

(Fetterman 2010: 37)

Therefore, in my field research I maintained a multi-focal vision as I kept a balance between a spiritual and historical connection to the topic and giving the questions raised a distanced scrutiny with as much objectivity as was possible.

Very important to this research was the participation in events and observation of various sites related to Orisa which I have described with brevity below.

**Site Visits/Interviews** – Trinidadian Orisa communities have responded in different ways to the recent Nigerian influences. This chapter highlights *Orisa Yards* that responded in the following ways (1) Petit Valley – shifted to a more
Nigerian style practice (2) Ella Andall – learns from Nigerian practice, but embraces Trinidadian practice as an equally authentic practice, and (4) Molly Ahye – coronated during Ooni’s visit in 1999 and has since been ostracized from the local community, (5) Olu Dari – Performs his own creation of Orisa, and finally (6) Osun Crowns, a group sanctioned by Nigerian priest, Poopola, who believe to be the reincarnation of Osun in Trinidad.

**Theoretical Framework**

Africana theorists and philosophers are at the center of my theoretical arguments. The theories of Stuart Hall and Kamau Brathwaite were therefore critical particularly as these relate to diaspora and creolization within the specific issues of Caribbean culture and identity. The most important idea to iron out was the perception of culture and identity and the way that history and “environment” shape the people’s being and interpretations of being. Stuart Hall’s (2007) “Identity and Diaspora” presents two theories of “cultural identity” Hall posits that the two ways of framing cultural identity are:

First identity understood as a collective, shared history among individuals afflicted by race or ethnicity that is considered to be fixed or stable; and second, identity understood as unstable, metamorphic, and even contradictory – an identity marked by multiple points of similarities as well as differences (Hall 2007: 233)

In the first, collective sense of identity, the Trinidadian Orisa community shares an overarching historic commonality with the African Diaspora in general and with other Trinidadians in a more specific sense. Underneath that skin lies the

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4 “Black”, African Diasporan, or invokers of Black Conscious thought.
bubblings of a more “unstable, metamorphic and contradictory” self that outlines the body of Trinidad Orisa. Drawing upon philosopher Jacques Derrida’s theory of Différence as he presents a diagram of cultural identities as:

Heterogenous composites defined in relation to first world terrains and in relation to the different heritages of the Caribbean islands – as the play of three dominant presences: Présence Africaine, Présence Européene, and Présence Américaine. (Hall 2007: 233)

In Hall’s configuration, Présence Africaine is the “site of the repressed”; Présence Européene is the site of the colonialist, hegemonic construction of knowledges and Présence Américaine is the New World” site of cultural confrontation, possibility for creolization and points of new becomings. I diverge from Hall slightly. I analyze Trinidad Orisa from the perspective of those living within the “heterogeneous composite” but I move beyond this form of heterogeneity and begin to see the diaspora itself as heterogeneous, even within a highly specified cultural community such as Trinidad Orisa. There is a historical heterogeneity with the “Orisa” tradition of the New World for it includes, not only Yoruba “survivals”, but also Congo, Bantu, Hausa, and even Akan influences. In reality Trinidad Orisa may not be primarily “Yoruba” at all. This is explained further in the second chapter of the thesis where I discuss Trinidad’s unique historical foundation, African presence and conditions of enslavement. The relatively short period of enslavement coupled with the fact that many of the Africans brought to Trinidad in the early 1800s were brought from other islands in the Caribbean had a profound effect on the interaction of communities, and the formation of cultural identity.
A *spiritual heterogeneity* distinguishes the different types of Trinidad Orisa spiritual communities such as Shango (the older practice that has been in Trinidad since enslavement), Orisha (the newer practice with less Christian elements) and Ifa (the Trinidadian practice that is more inclined to the newly arrived Nigerian’s instructions of Yoruba practice). The third chapter reveals the specifics of these communities and discussions among them.

Finally, there is an *ideological heterogeneity* that sets apart members even within the same practice such as those in the Orisa tradition who still believe in holding feasts which incorporate the reading of biblical text followed by an African ceremony, while other hold that practice as ideologically incompatible with an African-centered mind-set. This ideological difference was apparent, not only in the 1999 World Orisa Conference held in Trinidad, but with various incidents where the authenticity, “correctness”, and validity of one method of practice over another was called into question. The final chapter of the thesis poses the question of “Africanness” and the dangers of standardization and a forced process of authentication.

The theoretical framework for this study is informed by the work of Kamau Brathwaite. In *Contradictory Omens* (1974) Brathwaite argues that the process of creolization unfolds simultaneously with what he calls indigenization. Pollard (2004) sums up Brathwaite’s theory in the following way:

He rejects defining creolization on the basis of any “either/or distinction,” claiming that it is not a choice between mimicry and authenticity but “both imitation (acculturation) and native creation (‘indigenization’)” that leads to interculturization... In true modernist fashion, then, Brathwatie describes his creolization as a
poetics of "creative ambivalence," a poetic method that seeks to hold together the contradictory forces of acculturation and interculturation (Pollard 2004: 30)

The traditions that formed in the New World are therefore, constructed both from the memory and the creativity of peoples living together in the conditions of the New World. My work is hypothesizing that even the “Nigerian” re-claimed practices in Trinidad are still distinctly Trinidadian because a person, no matter how much he or she studies or emulates the practices of another, will always naturally reflect the totality of their existence.

Various constructions of “Creole” identity have been quite helpful in explaining this process such as Brathwaite’s theory, in both Contradictory Omens (1974) and in The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica (1971) where he wrote about creolization in the Caribbean, but paid special attention to elucidating the fact that creolization is a process and not a product. This differs somewhat from Jamaican sociologist M.G. Smith (1965) who proposed that there is a strata of “kinship systems” that both connect and separate people, and these separations are cultural and not racial. M.G. Smith’s analysis can be viewed as a product of colonization and creolization, while Brathwaite’s work explains how people inherited these characteristics.

Other sources have been helpful as well in analyzing questions of Creole.

Bolland in Questioning Creole (2002) looks at creolization as a process as well, but put into simpler terms he views it as a process that distinguishes something of the “old world” from something that develops in the “New World” and in his anaylsis provides a number of definitions that distinguish Creole, Creolization, and the Caribbean-specific usage of the term:
1. **Creole** - Generally, the term “Creole”, referring to people and cultures, means something or somebody derived from the Old World but developed in the New. In the United States of America, in accordance with racist pressures in the nineteenth century, “Creole” came to refer to Caucasian people of French or Spanish descent, but elsewhere the term was not so racially differentiated. “Creole” refers to locally born persons of non-native origin, which in the Americas, generally means people of either African or European ancestry, or both. (Bolland 2002:15)

2. **Creolization** - The concept of “creolisation” then, refers to those processes of cultural change that give rise to such distinctiveness. (Bolland 2002: 16)

3. **Caribbean Usage** – “Creole” refers to a local product which is the result of a mixture of blending various ingredients that originated in the Old World. (MG Smith)... A version of the old “melting pot” hypothesis

And for Bolland it was not just a Euro/African binary either. He cites the Sierra Leonian Creoles as an example of a context in which “Creole” refers to the population of “westernized” Africans that were returned to Sierra Leone. He writes:

In Sierra Leone, “Creole” refers to the “westernized” community of descendants of liberated Africans who, in 1787, began to be resettled in the area that became
Freetown. In this case, too, “Creole” refers to people who are *culturally distinct* from the Old World populations of their origin. The concept of “creolisation” then, refers to those processes of cultural change that give rise to such distinctiveness (Bollando 2002: 16)

While this definition does move beyond a black/white conceptualization of “Creole” it limits the discussion to a particular time period and does not speak to what happens beyond the forming of an Old/New world, culture, society, language, or peoples. This definition *would* translate to Trinidad Orisa being a “Creole” practice in relation to the Nigerian, version, but then what is it in relation to Trinidad? Furthermore, what are the current Trinidadian Orisa practices in relation to the new practices that are developing as a result of the combined “old” (Trinidadian) practice and the “new” (Nigerian influenced) practice? These definitions, even when relevant within a particular ethnic group, like the Sierra Leoneans, still highlight binaries and blends of two or more *unlike* and *unparalleled* variables. In a sense the term *Creole* is a marker of authenticity since its initial use was a marker of distinction and legitimization. Hintzen (2005) writes

To be “Caribbean” is to be “creolised” ... Creolisation brought with it notions of organic connections across boundaries of ethnicised and racialised difference. It was the mechanism through which colonial discourses of difference, necessary for its legitimization were accommodated. Everyone located in its discursive space, whatever her/his diasporic origin, becomes
transformed in a regime of identific solidarity. (Hintzen 2002: 92)

Therefore, a creole identity both distinguishes and separates the community from other identities. The crux however, is that there is a valid distinction. So how does one negotiate these differences without alienation? Why is it even important that the Trinidadian version of Orisa be ‘legitimized’ and made more like the Yoruba “original" version? I propose that the means of viewing these identities should be shifted.

The earlier questions of Creolization can be reprised by Edouard Glissant in Poetics of Relation5 (1997) where I found of great importance, his take on connections in the diaspora. In the following passage from his essay on “Errantry, Exile” where he opens by saying, “Roots make the commonality of errantry and exile, for in both instances roots are lacking” (Glissant 1997:11). Whereas errantry is a loose translation of the French word meaning wanderer, what he is saying is that whether one's diasporization is by choice or forced this motion puts one in a state where the antecedent is lacking. He continues.

The root is unique, a stock taking all upon itself and killing all upon itself and killing all around it. In opposition to this they propose the rhizome, an enmeshed root system, a network spreading either in the ground or in the air with no predatory rootstock taking over permanently. The notion of the rhizome maintains, therefore, the idea of rootedness but challenges that of a totalitarian root. Rhizomatic

5 Also see: Glissant, Edouard. Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999
thought is the principle behind what I call the Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other (Glissant 1997: 11)

This approach to diaspora and identity complements the primary argument of this thesis. I argue firstly that Yoruba Orisa, to borrow from Glissant is rhizomatic, not singularly rooted. Secondly I am arguing that when one considers the space and time used to develop Orisa in the New World along with the rhizomatic properties, the tape of authenticity is an unfair measure. Also interesting in Glissant’s analysis is the perception of the root, as opposed to the rhizome as being destructive to itself and all which it surrounds.

As one sorts out the rhizomatic connections, in an attempt to “make sense” of Diasporan African infused spiritualities that combine both Christian and African elements, some people choose to use the term “syncretic”. The perception of African-based spiritual practices in the New World as syncretic is a long held belief that stems from a wider discussion on syncretism. Siv Ellen Kraft (2002) writes of the origins of the term syncretism that:

The term syncretism was first given academic currency by German historian J.G. Droysen in his Geschichte des Hellenismus (1836) (Martin 1996:215). It became part of religio-historical and theological discourse during the late nineteenth century and appears, from this period on, to have been employed both as a descriptive and a normative category. Defined in a neutral sense, syncretism came to mean, “a blending of religious ideas and practices, by means of which either one set adopts
more or less thoroughly the principles of another or both are amalgamated in a more cosmopolitan and less polytheistic shape” (J. Mofatt, quoted in Martin 1996:216). Paralleling this usage, syncretism was taken up by Biblical theologians to denote religious confusion and disorder. As Herman Usner put it in 1898, syncretism is a “mishmash of religions” – the unprincipled abandonment of the faith of the Fathers (Colpe 1987:219). (Kraft 2002: 143)

The blending of various traditions were therefore seen as a deviation from the norm or the Judeo-Christian belief system that was so strongly promoted, not only in the New World, but throughout the world. Furthermore the blending that occurs in syncretic traditions is not something odd or rare. All things that move through time and space encounter some sort of blend, adaptation, or shifts in the older ways of practice. In fact, Kraft’s next point connected to a proposition by Robert Baird of the normalcy of syncretism, a concept which in the early 1970s many scholars were beginning to suggest be banned. Kraft continues,

Robert Baird, in his highly influential study *Category Formation and the History of Religions* (1971), included syncretism among the concepts to be banned from religio-historical research. Processes of blending are, Baird argued, regular aspects of religious history. To describe something as syncretistic is therefore to say nothing at all. As Baird put it: “Historically speaking, to say that Christianity, mystery religions or Hinduism are syncretistic is not to say anything that distinguishes
them from anything else” (Baird 1971:146). (Kraft 2002: 143-44)

This is directly in alignment with the premise of this thesis; that change and coalescence is a natural and inevitable historical component. Therefore, we will negate the usage of “syncretic” in the discussion of Trinidad Orisa straight away, both for its use in describing alternative religious practices (outside of Christianity) as deviations and an “abandonment of faith” as well as for its “not saying anything at all”. Orisa is instead seen as a spirituality of the “heterogeneous” Diaspora that has come through the fires of colonization and the creolization process, and the hopes of a survival, progress, and a “moving beyond” that has been shared from one generation to the next as they traded secrets, tragedies, joys, pains, and healings – through the fires of hope and prayer.

**Literature Review**

This work is by no means the first work on the Orisha Traditions and African Based Religions in Trinidad. For example, as early as the 1930s, J.D. Elder, Mellville Herskovits (1940s), George Simpson (1940s) and Frances Henry (1950s) have been writing about Orisha in Trinidad. In contemporary time there is the work of James Houk (1994), Frances Henry (2003) as well as that of Funso Aiyejina and Rawle Gibbons who have produced numerous papers, creative works, and conference presentations about the Orisha traditions in Trinidad. Their work was very helpful in understanding the Trinidadian Orisha practices. In addition, archives at the University of the West Indies and various places in Trinidad have articles, manuscripts, and other information relevant to Trinidad Orisa. This archival research has been supplemented with visits to Orisa houses, community events, and practitioners throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Some of
the practitioners, such as professor Gibbons and Pearl Eintou Springer had their own personal archives, which I was able to search. Although there were many creative articles ranging from the influence of the Orisha on the development of the Steel pan and the influence of Orisa on Carnival to what Professor Gibbons calls “Syncretism and Secretism in the Manifestation of African Spirituality…”, I noticed that much of the work on Orisa is not published. For example, there are fewer than ten published books about the Orisa in the UWI Library and in the National Library in Port of Spain where there were only two books about the Orisa tradition, yet there are many collections in various archives that contain unpublished works. Professors Aiyejina and Gibbons, and Eintou Pearl Springer, in particular have written about the Orisa in Trinidad from various perspectives.

In addition, Cornell University has two theses that relate to themes similar to the ones I present in the thesis project. Saadia Nicoe Wiggins’s “African Continuities in the Afro-Caribbean Religious Complex: An Examination of the 1994 Iyolorisa Installation Process for the Opa Orisha (Shango) Movement of Trinidad” (1996), analyzes continuities through an exploration of the ceremonial rituals in the installation of Molly Ahye as an Iyolorisa in Trinidad. Her approach was anthropological and historical and looked for current expressions as clues to traditional African folkways.

Sean Michael Jansen’s “African Continuities in the Phenomenon of Trinidad Carnival: An Evolution of Cultural Resistance and Liberation” (2000), looks at the continuities of African customs in Trinidad Carnival, but also how thes continuities have “systematically shown an inventive and ever-present means of resistance and assertion” (Jansen 2000) that he says “continue to uplift Afro-Trinidadians”.
Although my work looks at continuities, the focus is not only on what makes Trinidadian Orisa “African”, but rather, what makes Trinidad Orisa Trinidadian. This is the main point that the experience of New World Africans in the diaspora is not limited to “survivals,” “continuities,” and the “masks” – that something new was born and created in the New World, indigenized and creolized (Brathwaite 1974) as it became distinctly of the diaspora. So while our projects are similar, they diverge on that point and also on the discussion of authenticity and the notion of a Pan-Africanist reach towards a conceptualized “home” that gives Orisa and other African-based traditions a uniqueness in the diaspora, as Africans of the diaspora have a unique position as the majority of the diaspora being descendants of more than 10 million enslaved Africans forced into exile. This large number does not include the millions of Africans who lie between Continents at the bottom of the ocean and whose bones have now formed the sand lining the sea floor.

Of the works surveyed, quite central to the thesis are the texts of Maureen Warner-Lewis, Guinea’s Other Suns (1991), and Frances Henry’s Reclaiming African Religions in Trinidad: The Socio-Political Legitimation of the Orisha and Spiritual Baptist Faiths (2003). I also cannot fail to mention the work of J.D. Elder and Mellville Herskovits which predated the aforementioned work and provided a foundation for some of the studies on African based religions in Trinidad.

Warner-Lewis, a linguist in the Department of English in the University of the West Indies Mona, Jamaica has published a number of books that trace the historical line of Yorubas in Trinidad. She uses narratives from interviews, comparative analyses of linguistic patterns between the Yoruba language and

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6 From (Brathwaite 1974:16) Contradictory Omens – refers to people in the New World taking forced identities and making them “their own” and specific to their environment
Caribbean English (patois) as well as other mediums such as song and photographs to trace the journey of the Yoruba and other African ethnic groups through the processes of creolization that have shaped the modern day Caribbean. *Guinea's Other Suns* provides the historical context for the conceptualization of African-African creolization via her essays on the retention of Yoruba cultural practices in Trinidad.

Temple University sociologist, James Houk’s *Spirits, Blood, and Drums*, describes his initial contact and eventual initiation into the Spiritual Baptist society of Trinidad and Tobago. The strength of his work lies in the detail provided in his research. His book reads like a personal narrative and even when he is going through his initiation, he takes his reader into the room to the extent to which he is able to expose his ritual. He describes every aspect of what he observed and his observations are supported with diagrams, statistics, charts, and photographs. While I have not written much about this text within the body of this thesis, the work was helpful in understanding some of what I encountered during my field research in Trinidad.

My research differs from previous publications on Orisa practices in Trinidad in a number of ways. First, my work focuses on the African-African creolization and the current debate on authenticity, while the work of Henry and James Houk’s provides more of an overview of the Trinidadian African-based religions without the analysis I will be engaging in this thesis project. Furthermore the Orisa scene in Trinidad & Tobago has changed greatly from the time of JD Elder, Herskovits, and the Drewals through the latest publication in 2003 (Henry). Secondly, and more importantly, I have learned greatly from some of the earlier works both in positive ways as well as in more critical ways. It is my attempt to let the people of Trinidad who I visited, interviewed, and interacted
with be the voice of this work. Yet, I ascribe to the assertion of JD Elder who urged that Trinidadians write their narratives in their own manner, so hopefully this research will inspire native Trinidadians to further

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1: Introduction - will provide an overview of the thesis project and introduce the primary questions and methodologies of the thesis.

Chapter 2: Creolization, intra-African Creolization and Diaspora-
Introduces the reader to the specific history and environment which shaped the contemporary practice of Orisa in Trinidad. Since Creolization is a major theme of the thesis, after giving a brief history of the presence of Africans in Trinidad, the chapter will be organized into two parts – the first giving a general overview of “creolization” while the second part will speak specifically to creolization in Trinidad and the formation of the Orisa system.

Chapter 3: “Are You a Warrior” – Trinidad Orisa from disparate movements to Organized Structures (Case Studies)- Analyzes today’s Orisa practice in Trinidad beginning with the Orisa World Conference in 1999 which is significant because it marked, not only a time when international attention was focused on Trinidad’s Orisa community en masse – but also the a major restructuring of the Orisa system. The Oni of Ife appointed a Council of Elders to govern Orisa practice in Trinidad and Nigerian/Trinidadian contact has increased every since.

Chapter 4/Conclusion: What is Africa Tuh We?: Trinidad Orisa Community and the Politics of Authenticity – This chapter is structured around the question of “Being” for Africans in Trinidad and Tobago as it relates, both to a spiritual Pan-African identity in the diaspora, as well as to the search to

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better comprehend their *Dasein*. Pan-Africanism connects Africans in the Diaspora to a Yoruba Diasporic identity through a, socio-political historical movement, as well as the geographical mass-movement (exodus) of African peoples, which contributed to the “Pan-ness”. The physical “MOVEments” and configured pluralities of combined genetics and geographies transformed us from *Ijebu, Mandé, Toucouleur, KhoiKhoi, Shona, Igbo or Luyia* to “African,” “African-American,” “Afropean,” “Afro-Caribbean” or “African-Trinidadian”.

Will sum up the key points and any interesting reflections on the journey towards finding the answers to many of the questions posed in the research. This chapter will also provide areas within the discourse on Orisa that could benefit from further investigation.

The issues surrounding the 21st Century Orisa community, both in Africa and in the greater diaspora are so diverse and so complex that this thesis project can barely touch the surface of its depth, however it will hopefully begin a dialogue that should expand upon the observations and challenge the ideas presented.
CHAPTER 2

CREOLIZATION AND INTRA-AFRICAN CREOLIZATION IN TRINIDAD

I have never seen a damask wrapped so sweet – a lace draped so nice on a mother’s body, and the sight of young African men transforming into warriors, princes, and hunters – just beautiful and strong, gives me a warm feeling inside. I am wide-awake, having a conscious daydream of Nigeria in the heart of Yorubaland, and yet I am strolling along the Brian Lara Promenade in Port of Spain, Trinidad. The loud sounds from the bootleggers’ speakers as they push the huge units through the streets, peddling the latest pirated sounds is one of the reminders of where I am.

The Colonel guards a corner that is draped in emblems of Kentucky Fried Chicken, while the next block is painted green and red, demarcating the territories of Bmobile and ScotiaBank. The market on Charlotte Street between the taxi stand and Church’s Chicken looks like any African market: women with headties selling fruit, selling wares on tables with callalou packs, all kinds of things on a mat or on a cloth spread out. As I see Rastas selling groundnuts and channa in front of the St. James taxistand – I am once again sobered by the reality of where I am. Yet I cannot deny that the span of faces – African, Indian, and Syrian alike, collectively represent the sum total of a history that began long before there was a Trinidad in name.
However, I turn my focus to the Africans. In their eyes and faces one can see the Congo, Dahomey, Kotonu, Abomey, Porto Novo, Badagry, the Goree island and other ports and doors of “no return”. These are the children and great-grandchildren of Africa, still looking like themselves, still moving like themselves.

These are the people of Trinidad – with all of the Trinidadian mannerisms and ways of being. Yet the unspoken panoramic view transposes one to a nearly four-century old journey and process, which has transformed multiple identities into a nation. As much of Africa as is seen within the peoples, there is also a knowing that things have changed and that those who may have forcefully been taken from various locations on “the Continent” – and even perhaps intermixed with other diasporas are now undeniably African-[hyphen] Trinidadian. Telltale signs exist which reflect historical accountings, but the journey that created the hyphen is important. This hyphen is significant because it distinguishes both the root and the route.

Root/route is a popular trope in recent academic discourse, especially African diaspora and cultural studies, referring to both the source or origin of a person as well as the transformative journey. Therefore, although the Afro-Trinidadian Orisa practices of today look like the African Yoruba practices we conceptualize to have come from as we imagine our roots/ancestry, it is different and unique as we factor in the route/journey.

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Antonio Benitez-Rojo’s explanation, in *The Repeating Island*, is that the islands of the Caribbean repeat and are tied by a common history, but have their own stories to tell that expose the particularities and uniqueness of each space. He writes:

[O]ne can sense the features of an island that “repeats” itself, unfolding and bifurcating until it reaches all the seas and lands of the earth, while at the same time it inspires multidisciplinary maps of unexpected design.

(Benitez-Rojo 2006:3)

This chapter, entitled “*Creolization and Intra-African Creolization in Trinidad*” will focus on the call and response between the past and the present of the African-Trinidadian community with an approach that unrolls a “multidisciplinary map” to reveal the “unexpected design” towards “Trinidad Orisa”. Like a compass, guiding the direction of a map, four features will be highlighted in this chapter:

(a) The *History of Africans in Trinidad*

(b) *Diasporization* vis-à-vis the Middle Passage

(c) *Creolization* as a process that marks a New World Identity, leading to a discussion on the origins of Orisa in Trinidad.

(d) *Origins of Trinidad Orisa, which* was shaped through all of the above processes.

Diasporization, in this case represents the physical spreading of African people, while *Creolization* represents the process that would later identify the “diaspora” as specifically Trinidadian.
Abbreviated History of Africans in Trinidad

The history of Trinidad, leading up to the introduction of African-descendants is essential in describing the formation of the Orisa tradition in Trinidad. Trinidad and Tobago has had an African presence since the 1700s – roughly three hundred years after European attempts at colonisation. Even so, there were a series of events which explain Trinidad’s relatively short period of enslavement and presence of Africans in the country.

Originally named lere by the Caribs, meaning land of the hummingbirds and Tobago called – Kairi meaning “the melancholy island,” the twin-island republic of Trinidad and Tobago is the southernmost of the Caribbean archipelago. On the 31st of July, 1498 Christopher Columbus re-named the land and claimed it for Spain. MacLean (1988) claims that Native resistance and the “ease of access to marauders from the mainland, discouraged serious colonisation by Spain” (Norton & Maclean 1988:19). In addition, the already existing indigenous population who descended from Shebaio and Arawak ethnic groups were erroneously categorized as Caribs, which is depicted as meaning aggressive. Furthermore when a group was declared Carib it meant that the Spaniards could wage war upon that particular group. There was a constant resistance movement among the indigenous population and some historians describe the early (European) interactions in Trinidad as tumultuous. It is described by early scholars, as pirate ridden and too much “of a bother” so while there was much activity happening in other parts of the Caribbean and New

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World, Trinidad for many years remained untouched save for two very important historical events: the Sir Walter Raleigh Massacre and the Catholic Massacre.

In 1584... Don Antonio Berrio y Oruña established himself in the Island and founded the city of San José de Oruña. [St. Joseph]. This town, which until a few years previous to its capture by the British a was the capital of the Island, was burnt by Sir Walter Raleigh in 1595...

From the date of Raleigh’s raid ... until 1783, the history of Trinidad has no great interest for the general reader.

(Fraser 2: 1971)

This gruesome event is indicative the violence associated with the forging of not only Trinidad, but the entire Caribbean, then called the West Indian nation. Kamau Brathwaite, who also engaged questions of root/route creatively, used the relationship between Caliban and Prospero as a metaphor for the Caribbean Diaspora. In a lecture at the University of Kent, titled “Caliban’s Guarden” (1992), Brathwaite explains the allegory, which has been used frequently to describe the Caribbean:

The Caliban that you I supposed have already imagined is Shakespeare’s Caliban. I ’m suggesting that Caliban is wider than Shakespeare. This applies to those of us who come from a colonial situation. It applies to those of us who come from tempestuous islands and I wanted in these conversations to give you an idea of our dialogue, not only with Prospero, but with ourselves using myself in a way as an xample (sic) to you of how one’s poetry, how one’s articulation of the world, how one’s
articulation of a fragmented world begins to come about. (Brathwaite 1992: 2)

According to Brathwaite, the so-called “making” of the Caribbean began with violence. Not the story of the violent and savage natives, but he instead references the violent intrusion of Columbus who is oftentimes depicted as a “discoverer” and “explorer,” and the hero of the New World and yet a victim. But Braithwaite also points out that he (Columbus) was a “destroyer” who mercilessly wiped out entire nations of Amerindians. Brathwaite writes:

...destroying because Columbus like a virus touched thirteen million Amer-Indians and within a period of thirty years the islands that Caliban would have inhabited, the inhabitants of those islands were dead, so that our history begins in a way with the destruction of a people. A destruction of their culture. And Caliban as he comes to inhabit this garden has that memory, that echo of genocide within his psyche and that’s the first thing he remembers. (Brathwaite 1992: 2)

So another way of looking at the vacuousness of Trinidad for a number of decades is that it was not empty, but emptied and left in such a state that even those who were there before the “discoverers,” would only discover themselves in a state of disappearance and erasure. Therefore the allusion of a forging in the Trinidadian National anthem is very befitting. The Webster’s Dictionary defines “forge” as the following:

1 a : to form (as metal) by heating and hammering b : to form (metal) by a mechanical or hydraulic press with or without heat 2 : to make or imitate falsely especially
with intent to defraud: **counterfeit** <forge a document> <forge a signature> 3: to form or bring into being especially by an expenditure of effort <working to forge party unity>

*intransitive verb*

1: to work at a forge 2: to commit forgery

(Webster.com cited March 19, 2010)

When applied to the conditions of *conquest, discovery* and beyond as enslavement reached the archipelago, the definition without question, certainly falls in *Calibans Guarden* (garden). Even the National Anthem picks up on this with the next line denoting a *fire* of hope and prayer. Like a hammering and a heating, *dis-COVERers* pounded through the Caribbean and falsely imitated a “founding” and “exploration” a myth that still exists to this day in the minds of many. In my song “West In Dese Rhymes” I refer to this fraudulent activity as I write: “Moving with the West in dese rhymes/moving with the West in dese hearts. Switched up the CARIBbean name reproduced “Masters” without knowing the art” (Alarcón 2007).

Still, aside from the major violences, with all of the tension described in earlier accounts of the history of Trinidad & Tobago, the twin islands remained fairly untouched until the 1700s when Spain encouraged immigration. This led to an influx of people from the French Antilles and their enslaved Africans thus introducing African populations *en masse* to Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad with a high population of Africans had what some would call, a short period of enslavement:

The period of slavery in Trinidad was a relatively short one, compared to other Caribbean islands, the
United States or Brazil...Slavery in Trinidad really started with the Cedula Population in 1783, when French settlers, free blacks and people of colour were granted land and came with their African slaves from Marinique, Grenada, St. Lucia and Guadeloupe to work on the estate. Fifty years later, the British, who had conquered Trinidad in 1797, abolished slavery in 1834.” (Besson 2001: 9)

With such a short period of enslavement and such a high concentration of Africans from throughout the Caribbean, identities forged, blended and were recreated in the New World to reflect the climate of the newly forming nation. Yet enslavement and the pressures of slavery and colonization were a reality of Trinidad and Tobago. Important in the analysis is the fact that the Africans coming to Trinidad in the late 18th Century were already in the creolization process as they had encountered enslavement and other forms of oppression in other societies of the Caribbean and New World. The African descendants coming to Trinidad were already diasporized.

**Diaspora**

The more than 500 year journey, ushered in through enslavement, has sought to define/re-define as well as set parameters on identity and diasporan connections\(^{11}\). The fragmentation of Africa and the forced dispersal of its inhabitants were channeled through the conduits of colonization, creolization, and

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and imperialism that were filtered through vessels of racism\textsuperscript{12}. These were the factors that contributed greatly to the \textit{diasporization} and eventual (re)defining of African identities in the diaspora. (Re)definition is a significant element of diasporization because as Continental Africans and already \textit{Creolized} people of African descent dispersed in the New World their sociogenic values had to be adapted to the New World environment. Thus, Trinidad, as one ray in the spectrum of involuntary\textsuperscript{13} \textit{diasporization}, reflects various means of seeking and actively redefining what it means to be African, Trinidadian, and African-Trinidadian in the New World.

The next section focuses specifically on \textit{diasporization} as an essential factor in the formation of Trinidad’s Orisa practice that has evolved from the pressures and circumstances of exile and Middle Passage and has continued to grow and morph beyond survival in the New World. Furthermore, it addresses diasporan notions of Trinidadian Orisa practice that shift through the trajectories beyond survival that are revealed through a number of tensions, creative ambivalences, nuances, and contradictions.

In this respect, African communities in Trinidad are seen as active agents in the formation of African-Trinidadian spirituality\textsuperscript{14} that have made numerous conscious moves towards re/definition and re/creation of their identity in Trinidad.

First, a review of various constructions of “Diaspora”, as well as the working definitions for this essay will provide the entry points for our consideration of these topics.

\textsuperscript{12} From Eric E. Williams’s \textit{Capitalism & Slavery} (1944) where he writes: “Slavery was not born of racism: rather racism was the consequence of slavery” (Williams 1944: 7)
\textsuperscript{13} And later voluntary diasporization (which will be discussed later)
\textsuperscript{14} See Warner Lewis’s \textit{Guinea’s Other Suns} (1994) and \textit{Trinidad Yoruba: From Mother Tongue to Mother Memory}; Tony Martin \textit{The Pan African Connection}(1983); Hollis “Chalkdust” Liverpool’s \textit{Rituals of Power & Rebellion: The Carnival Tradition in Trinidad & Tobago} 1763 – 1962 (1993)
Diaspora - Origins

Diaspora\textsuperscript{15} is a term frequently, and at times very loosely used within the academy. According to Braziel and Mannur, “Etymologically derived from the Greek term\textit{ diasperien} coming from\textit{ dia}-, “across” and –\textit{sperien}, “to sow or scatter seeds,” diaspora can perhaps be seen as a naming of the other which has historically referred to displaced communities of the people who have been dislocated from their native homeland through the movements of migration, immigration, or exile” (Braziel and Mannur 1: 2007). Although the Jewish community initially adapted the term, it was later used to refer to the African Diaspora community for the association with exile and forced im/migration. Beyond this brief definition, the co-opting of the term in relation to peoples of African descent has a historical reference. In the article, “African Diaspora: Concept and Context” written by George Shepperson,\textit{ African Diaspora} as an expression is traced to the period of time between the mid 1950’s and 1960s when various African states were parting with Colonial empires and becoming independent. He writes, “the expression\textit{ African diaspora} began to be used increasingly by writers and thinkers who were concerned with the status and prospects of persons of African descent around the world as well as at home” (Shepperson 41: 1999). Specifically Shepperson points towards the First International Congress of Negro Writers, organized by\textit{ Presence Africaine} in Paris in 1956 (41).

However the implications of diaspora began long before any conference was assembled. Kwame Turé, for example, opens his biographical book\textit{ Ready for Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokley Carmichael} (Kwame Turé) (2003)

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\textsuperscript{15} See Braziel, Jana Evans and Anita Mannur (Eds.)\textit{Theorizing Diaspora.} Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2007 (cited from article “Nation, Migration, Globalization: Points of Contention in Diaspora Studies” pg1)
with a chapter called “Oriki: Ancestors and Roots”, an interesting title which explains the importance of lineage and the connection of the dispersed seeds of Africa. Although the narrative is personalized, his story maps out the interconnection of communities through space and time that have shaped the African diaspora. Ture writes:

Diaspora means survival. Like most African families of the diaspora, my family is a collection of people who are ordinary in extraordinary ways. I claim no special distinction for us. Like all our neighbors and friends in the surrounding communities – whether in Trinidad, the Bronx, or Mississippi – we are simply the survivors of the dispersal. (Carmichael 2003: 14)

Turé’s concise explanation underscores the exigency of unity in the New World across diaspora lines. This urgency is not just a contemporary phenomenon, but one that has existed for centuries. In fact, scholar Carole Boyce Davies returns the definition of Diaspora to the origins of humanity. She writes the following in the introduction to the Encyclopedia of the African Diaspora (2008):

To study the African Diaspora is, indeed to study the world. This is the first realization to which any scholar of the African Diaspora comes very early in the process, for at least two reasons: (a) Africa is the birthplace of human civilization, and from there human beings migrated to various locations worldwide; and (b) African peoples in our contemporary understandings (continental Africans and
African-descended peoples) exist globally, following a series of subsequent migrations. (Boyce Davies 2008: xxxi)

Still, Boyce Davies does not limit the definition of diaspora to migration, movement, and dispersal alone. Delving deeper into its meaning Boyce Davies notes further that,

While all migrations do not necessarily create a diaspora, what is particular to diaspora creation includes, first of all, a migration, but second, some historical, emotive, political, economic, and cultural connections to that homeland and a consciousness of that interaction. (Boyce Davies 2008: xxxi)

Returning to the relevance of diaspora to Trinidad’s Orisa system, we can argue that Diasporization not only spread humans across spaces, it spread cultures, languages, customs, genealogies and spiritualities – of which Orisa is one. These very important elements of Diaspora anchor the Trinidad Orisa experience, not as a masking, or a syncretic merge of two foreign systems as outlined in the introductory chapter – but rather as a rhizomatic window into diaspora. The specific rhizomatic connection and systems of roots that have shaped Orisa in Trinidad is what makes the Trinidadian Orisa and African based traditions distinct.

The resistive measures and the caustic conditions under which diasporan spiritual and cultural identities have formed ironically fueled the fire for the maintenance and practice of New-World African traditions such as Shango/Orisha in Trinidad and Tobago. Additionally, constructed in the fires of enslavement and colonization, the various ethnic groups of continental Africans

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and diasporan Africans joined together and formed a tradition in the New World formerly known as *Shango*.

The pressures under which the Shango (Orisa) form of practice developed is what makes it specifically Trinidadian and different from other similar practices such as Cuban Santeria, Brasilian Candomble, or the African-American Oyotunji experience. Although each of the spiritual practices were formed under similar conditions and are generally associated with the Nigerian Yoruba, the difference between the practices is the result of the different African, Indigenous, Asian, and European sub-ethnic groups that interacted and coalesced to create unique and yet fundamentally alike spiritual practices

**Orisa Spirituality and Diaspora**

In *West African Traditional Religion* (1979), a book centered around the people and the practice of African traditional religions from as far south as the Congo and as far North as the Niger and Ghana, Awolalu and Dopamu write, “the study of any religion is the study of the people who practise the religion. Apart from man, there can be no religion whatsoever” (Awolalu & Dopamu 1979:1). Anthropologist Clifford Geertz in *Religion as a Cultural System*, an article which places great focus on the “symbols” of religion and culture, proposes that a religion is:

1) a system of symbols which acts to 2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in [humans] by 3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and 4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that 5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic
For Geertz, the “symbols” are not just arbitrary, but a reflection of the people carrying the symbols. He writes:

As we are to deal with meaning, let us begin with a paradigm: vis., that sacred symbols function to synthesize a people’s ethos – the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood – and their world view...In religious belief and practice a group’s ethos is rendered intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life ideally adapted to the actual state of affairs the world view describes, while the world view is rendered emotionally convincing by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs peculiarly well-arranged to accommodate such a way of life. (Geertz 1973:90)

This section therefore is a window not only into the cosmology of the Yoruba and the African diaspora of Yoruba practitioners, but into the people of the New World, in particular the Trinidadian Orisa society that formed.

Orisa refers to the indigenous faith of the Yoruba ethnic group located primarily in Southwest Nigeria. The Orisa system, otherwise known in Yorubaland as Ifa, is constituted by belief in a Supreme Being called Olodumare and 13 major divinities although it is said that the total number of minor deities is well above 600. Each divinity exerts a specific energy and corresponds with a particular natural element or force such as Sango – the god of thunder, drums, dance and justice. Each person is said to be a child of the Orisa (divinity) that
governs his or her *head* (inner spirit).

Every Yoruba town has a patron divinity and historical associations. Ile-Ife, for example, literally meaning *the spreading of the earth*, is the central home of Orisa practice and is the place where the progenitor of the Yoruba race, *Oduduwa* spread the earth (over water) and began the Yoruba civilization. However, we turn our focus to another town very significant to the diaspora. Oyo\(^{16}\), located North West of Ile-Ife is the place many Yoruba practitioners in the New World have an affinity for\(^{17}\), and from which the Sango tradition of Trinidad & Tobago has an eponymous meaning. In fact, the Yoruba inspired African village in Sheldon, South Carolina is called *OYOTUNJI* or the second rise of Oyo.

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*Figure 2 Festival, Oyotunji African Village - Sheldon, SC (Clark Photog 2009)*
Figure 3: Return of Wande Abimbola Oyo, Nigeria (Source: elegba.com)

Oyo was a stellar, very well organized statehood until civil disputes under the leadership of Oyo king Aole led to a collapse in Oyo’s stronghold. Rev. Samuel Johnson’s The History of the Yoruba (1976: 192) states that Aole’s reign, “marked the commencement of the decline of the [Yoruba] nation” (1976: 192), and therefore the story of Aole is important to the Kingdom of Oyo – from which the Shango Yoruba of Trinidad have derived. Johnson writes that although the locals called for the death of the King Aole, his death (1831) and curse cast irrevocable damage and energies upon the Kingdom:

The death of the late King was all that the rebel chiefs demanded... [f]rom this time the spirit of rebellion and independence began to spread throughout the kingdom... This was the commencement of the break-up of the unity of the Yoruba kingdom... [a]s the King’s authority waned, so also the respect and deference hitherto paid to the citizens.
of the capital ceased. (1976: 192)

The Oyo Kingdom was one of the most organized and famous of the Yoruba Kingdoms. Especially noted for its militia, Oyo among other Kingdoms kept Yorubaland from being invaded and taken en masse into Trans-Atlantic enslavement. Oyo, in addition to the pragmatic reasoning for its popularity and its stronghold (military, government, etc.), also had to its credit being the home of Sango, former Alafin of Oyo. Sango is described below:

Sango, son of Oranyan, and brother of Ajaka was the fourth King of Yoruba. He was of a very wild disposition, fiery temper, and skilful in sleight of hand tricks. He had a habit of emitting fire and smoke out of his mouth, by which he greatly increased the dread his subjects had of him. (Johnson 1976: 149)

Shango, different from Aole, was not purely ruthless. He was firey, but was well loved by the people. His love of making charms and fascination with lightning caused him to one day send a storm which struck the palace in Oyo with lightning, killing many of his wives and children. Shamed and hurt by his deed, Sango decided to commit suicide. The people of Oyo pleaded with him not to do so and sympathized with the loss, in the end Sango hanged himself on a shea butter tree at Koso. From the time of Sango and even after his death the Oyo people maintained their loyalty and affection for him. He became deified and in honor of him, anytime lightening struck, the peop were dispersed in the New World and later came to be known as Yoruba. Also New World translations (and some Nigerian mythologies) of Oba Koso become “the King (Sango) did not die”.

In fact, Maureen Warner Lewis writes that, “Yoruba was an alternative term used by the Oyo to define themselves and was based on – ‘Yaraba’ – the
Hausa designation for the Oyo people. That term later came to be used by Europeans to describe the speakers of the cluster of languages which were recognizably cognate with the Oyo dialect” (Warner-Lewis 1991: 20). This is not to say that all of the Yoruba in Trinidad descend from Oyo. In fact, there was a presence of Yoruba in Trinidad prior to the seizure of the Oyo Kingdom in 1831, however, the capturing of Oyo was significant in the shaping of the Shango spiritual practice in Trinidad and Tobago. In his unpublished Doctoral thesis “The Orisha Religion in Trinidad” (1992) James Houk writes:

There was virtually no African presence to speak of until about 1790, when the sugar plantations became a salient part of the socio-economic landscape of Trinidad...many of the [enslaved Africans] hailed from southern Nigeria and the surrounding area, but only about one percent of the African-born [enslaved] in 1813 were Yoruba... Trotman (1976:2) notes a significant influx of Yoruba into Trinidad beginning in the 1830’s and lasting until 1867. (Houk 1992: 116)

This corresponds with the time-period of the fall of Oyo and Aole’s death which was in 1831. Due to the historical circumstance with Trinidad entering into the enslavement trade late and with emancipation occurring shortly thereafter the maintenance of African traditional practices was more likely. Houk states, “We have, then, for the first time, a significant presence of Yoruba in Trinidad during the 1830’s. This immigration coupled with the complete emancipation of [the enslaved] in 1838, probably led to the establishment of the Orisha religion on the island at that time” (Houk 1992:116). Although 1838 marked the ending of the period of enslavement, it by no means suggests an end
to hegemony and oppressive practices that prompted further need for survival tactics. In fact, a series of laws were passed to ban and suppress drumming, Orisha practices, and other cultural retentions. Some of these prohibitionary laws were not lifted until the 21st century.

Thus begins the analysis of the formation of the Orisha tradition in Trinidad. Just as there were numerous Yoruba ethnic sub-groups which were exiled into Trinidad, one must not also conflate the names “Shango” or “Orisha” with a totally analogous practice of the Yoruba form in its Nigerian state. As Houk writes, “The Orisha religion in Trinidad, as it exists in its current form, is the product of almost two hundred years of growth and development” (Houk 1992: 95).

In a very diasporan way, various ethnic groups pulled together in the Caribbean in order to survive creating a distinct African-Trinidadian culture. Studying the history of Trinidad Shango and Orisha practices is also a study of the ways in which African diaspora peoples fought to preserve culture, define themselves and create spaces of empowerment. The practice of Orisa in the New World also represents a fight to return to/connect with/find home within Africa, as well as a means of resistance. Essential to the discussion on the formation of Trinidad Orisa is the acknowledgment of a diverse African/African diaspora population in Trinidad that provided both the initial African populus as well as the continued population of enslaved and freed Africans. In a 2007 University of West Indies lecture Bridget Brereton states:

We need to know that there were groups of Africans in Trinidad who were free men and women long before the Emancipation Act became law. One of themost interesting is the Mandingo community. They were
people born in the area of West Africa known as the Senegambia, Muslims, who had mostly been enslaved and taken to the Caribbean in the early 1800s...Despite all the pressures towards Christian conversion, this group held on to their Islamic faith well into the 1840s, when they disappear from the record; and they never forgot Africa. This we know because they petitioned more than once for help from Britain to get back there, and though the group as a whole could not return, a few individual members did beat all the odds and manage to go back to West Africa. (Brereton 2007: 8-9)

Although this group did not practice Orisa, I have included them in this discussion to point out four facts: 1) Various ethnic groups have been documented in Trinidad in the nineteenth century  2) These Africans, both came from the continent or other places in the diaspora. 3) Resistance against the imposed form of Christianity was apparent and not just among the Orisa community, and 4) Even as early as pre-Emancipation, African peoples sought to return or reconnect with “home” (Africa).

Returning to Geertz’s (1973) and Awolalu & Dopamu’s (1979) definition of religion as a cultural code that encompasses, not only spirituality, but also the environmental factors that shape human beings, Brereton’s example becomes further important. As we discuss the different ethnicities and already Creole societies that were the base of the Orisa community along with an imagined “home” and connection to Africa – it becomes clear, the conditions that would necessitate the survival of a system like Orisa, Islam, or even the Baptist who came to Trinidad as well.
The intent here is not to trace a linear comprehensive historiography of the Yoruba in Trinidad, but rather to illustrate the ways in which Orisa travels from Nigeria and manifests in Trinidad as a tradition adapted to meet the needs of the Diaspora. It is also important to note that the Orisa tradition was carried from Nigeria, not only to Trinidad, but to various places in the New World where it morphed and took on other names. In Cuba it is called Lukumi, meaning “friend”\textsuperscript{18}. Brazilians named their tradition Candomble\textsuperscript{19} which has sub-groups called Ijesa or Anago, which locally translates to mean a pure form of the tradition. Trinidadian Orisa practices have been referred to as Shango as it was also in Recife Brazil (Xango). While there was also a category in Trinidad referred to as Shango or Baptist, while my research shows that today's Trinidad makes specific distinctions between what was called Shango or Baptist and what is identified as Orisha or Ifa – a distinction which will be covered in detail later in the chapter. Although each of these traditions are rooted in the Yoruba Orisa system, each has its own specific practices, rituals, languages, and cultural dynamics that do not always translate so succinctly. This has to do with the ways in which societies in the New World re-shaped their identities. Amid the similarities, the differences lend to unique narratives of various forms of Orisa practice that at times even overlap. In the case of Trinidad, the overlap of various diasporas has been essential to the formation of the Orisa structure. Because the


Trinidadian form of Orisa was (re)born in the New World, it is a localized tradition bearing the Yoruba name.

*Diaspora, Middle Passage, and “Creolization”*

The peoples of the Caribbean have long been curious about where they come from and how they came to be where they are... they are creatures of that contradictory and awesome process of creolization forged in the crucible of myriad encounters”
- Rex Nettleford, Foreword to Maureen Warner Lewis’s *Guinea’s Other Suns* (1991)

Prior to the division of Africa in 1884-1885 during the Berlin Conference and again in 1935 after WWI, African peoples had already met with another simultaneous dispersal/separation/division and forging of peoples through the major dispersal of Africans through enslavement. These divisions of the African peoples to serve European interests were forced. Even so, this coercive process had a major impact on the world. Tony Martin in his book *The Pan African Connection* (1983) maintains that:

Pan-Africanism [in this case, the uniting of African peoples in exile] became inevitable with the inception of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Europe, by scattering Africa to the winds, inevitably if unwittingly set in motions the process which would bring scattered Africa
together again, at a higher level. It was inevitable that the forcibly uprooted Africans would yearn to rediscover their homeland. It was inevitable that the journey to rediscovery would be a journey against the colonialism that had uprooted Africa in the first place. “
(Martin 1983: vii)

The process of Middle Passage is that of simultaneous occurrence which on one hand fragmented families, communities and identities, and on the other coalesced them and forced them to create a space within a space. This concept is relevant to the Orisa practice in Trinidad in that, in the earlier stages as it was transported to the New World, the Orisa tradition was protected and adapted for the purpose of survival through a process referred to as Creolization. However, as time progressed, the Orisa practices moved beyond survival and into a state of rediscovery, reconnection, and self-definition. Through efforts of self-discovery Orisa also became an anti-colonial mode of resistance to and rejection of structures of Western hegemony such as the imposed Christian religion. The combination of seeking to unite and reconnect with Africa after an involuntary division and dispersal for the purposes of survival, as well as the later conscious effort to reconnect with Africa in order to have a better understanding of self, is what distinguishes the Trinidadian Orisa practice as a form tradition of the Diaspora. This section of the chapter establishes, not only the adaptations made under the “Creole” society that was formed in the New World, but the important limitation of the Creole discourse.

Diaspora, Boyce Davies (2008) points, is important in understanding the connection and dispersal of Africans around the world, this thesis argues so too is
Creolization an important entry point for questions of diaspora in the New World, and in this case, in the Caribbean.

It is important to state that “Creole” is a necessary, but problematic term given its historical development. The popularity of the term and the variations of definitions have caused great debate about the definition of “Creole. Relatedly, on the subject of creolization, Patricia Mohammed writes that,

“Creolisation” is a troublesome but useful term. Troublesome because there are so many interpretations of the word; useful because it confronts the issues related to ethnicity and ethnic relations in a multi-racial society” (Mohammed 2000: 130).

As Mohammed points out, the discourse on creolization is further complex since there are so many different definitions and layers to “Creole”. Thus the popularity of the term “Creole” and the variations have caused great debate about the definition of “Creole. In an article “Creole: The Problem of Definition” a chapter of the book Questioning Creole: Creole Discourses in Caribbean Culture (2002), Carolyn Allen writes, “Do we all mean the same thing when we say “Creole and “creolisation”? The “difficulty of defining this word with precision”, obliges writers to state the meaning they intend.” (Allen 2002: 48). In my research Creole and creolization are not synonymous.

So first let us begin with how Creole has been defined and the problematic therein. In my article, “Creole Seasoning: The Roasting of Identities and the Making of the African Diaspora” (2010), drawing on a range of definitions of the term I was able to conclude that:

Many scholars trace the New World use of the word “Creole” to the Spanish who called those born in [the]
Americas that were of European descent criollos. Criollo is thought to have derived from the words crio meaning child and/or criar meaning to raise or to grow (someone/something); but what is it that was criado by the crios in the New World? (Alarcón 2010: 31)

The English version of the word “Creole” derives from the French créole, just pronounced in an Anglophone manner and the term in the Caribbean context referred to Whites born in the Caribbean. However the most crucial point has nothing to do with enunciation or language base, it has more to do with the implications of the word. I continue:

The process in the New World was such that they [colonizers] sought to “breed” another race...Some scholars prefer the word “Hybridity” as an alternative to the word Creole, however the word itself is problematic when applied to humans for a number of reasons. Hybridity is defined as “characteristic of plants of animals that are the offspring of individuals belonging to a different species” (Macey 2000). The word is derived from the latin hybrida which means a mongrel or the cross between a tame boar and a wild sow. (Alarcón 2010: 31)

So the first problematic is the relation of a blended identity or an identity born in the New World as an animalistic characteristic similar to descriptions of a science lab experiment, therefore a fundamental feature of scientific racism. Secondly, even if we take the tem out of the etymological context, an additional layer of problematic lies in the relegation of “Creole” to plantation and racial
binaries as many scholars have done even when the line of thought is more
*African-diaspora centered* than *Eurocentric*.

So let us now look at creolization, which is the *process* rather than the
identity. Brathwaite defines Creolization as a process that included a period of
seasoning which he says was “a period of one to three years, when the slaves
were branded, given a new name and put under apprenticeship to creolized
slaves” (Brathwaite 1974:13). For its time, predating even the *creolité* movement,
Brathwaite moved beyond constructions of Creole as a racial mixture and looked
at the condition plantation life set-up vis-à-vis what Brathwaite said was a
process of:

**ac/culturation** – the yoking (by force and example,
 deriving from power/prestige) of one culture to another
(in this case the enslaved African to the European)

**Inter/culturation** – un planned, unstructured, but
osmotic relationship proceeding from this yoke...the
creolization which results becomes the tentative
cultural norm of the society

(Braithwaite 1974: 6)

Like the scene from Alex Haley’s film saga *Roots* (1977) (when Kunta Kinte
was whipped until he said his name was Toby), the creolization of Africans was
initially meant to be a breaking down of (African) identities and a making of a
Creole identity subordinated in relation to the dominating Euro-centric culture.
Tactics of fear, division, and lack of ancestral continuity were enforced to keep
those of non-European descent in a cycle of subordination to the Creole societies.
Creole in the Caribbean was layered with *Whites, Creoles* (a floating category) and
Africans.
Yet, the harness colonizers attempted to hold on human life did not amputate as many connections as colonizers may have expected to have severed during the process of Creole Seasoning. Michel-Rolph Trouillot writes in “Culture on the Edges: Creolization in the Plantation Context” (2010):

Creolization is a miracle begging for analysis. Because it first occurred against all odds, between the jaws of the brute and absolute power, no explanation seems to do justice to the very wonder that it happened at all.

The miracle is in the fact that today an African-American can write a thesis in an Africana program at an Ivy League University about an African-Trinidadian tradition. The miracle is also that Orisa survived enslavement and is being re-defined through newer interactions between Africans from the Continent and Africans in the diaspora who were not supposed to know 400 years later what a Yoruba was or from whence they came. We can see the miracle in Emancipation celebrations, Cannboulay, Steel Pan, Rapso, Soca, and in the scene described at the beginning of this chapter. None of these diasporan creations were supposed to happen. With an awesomely profound introduction, unfortunately Trouillot returns and leaves the construction of Creole on the plantation, but the miracle described is not to be overlooked.

In the making of a creolized Diaspora, for generations Africans in the New World, not only sought to understand their pluralities and to come to terms with them, but they had to discern how to function as a whole amid these pluralities as well. And this is no matter whether one refers to the individual self or the communal self or, as Taylor (1996) would phrase it, the horizontal self. This between-ness and multiplicity has been defined (or been nicknamed) in the
past, creolite\textsuperscript{20}, hybridity\textsuperscript{21}, and double-consciousness\textsuperscript{22}. The nature of the New World colonial project was such that Africans in the diaspora were ac/culturated\textsuperscript{23} through a seasoning process that encouraged a viewing of the world and of oneself through the eyes of the “other”.

Although the “Middle Passage” takes place in the Atlantic Ocean, the passage was not limited to one geographical space; it affected Africans on all continents. As one moves beyond definitions of Middle Passage\textsuperscript{24} as a synonym for enslavement or as a geographical indicator\textsuperscript{25}, the definition expands to a fuller viewing beyond physical boundaries. To this point, the between-ness that diaspora represents, also shows that changes were not just one sided.

The between-ness is revealed as Africans of the diaspora navigate between a local/national identity and the identity specific to one’s specific sub-cultural group\textsuperscript{26}. This is expressed in linguistic, cultural, and spiritual ways, but also reflects in one’s perception of self. Western philosophers such as Charles Taylor (Dialectics of the Self), Hegel (Phenomenology of Spirit), and Foucault (Antihumanist Historiography) analyze identity from various perspectives. However, philosophers of the African Diaspora such as Anna Julia Cooper\textsuperscript{27} (1892), W.E.B. DuBois\textsuperscript{28} (1903), Mary Church Terrell\textsuperscript{29} (1940), Frantz Fanon\textsuperscript{30}

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\textsuperscript{21} See: Bhabha, Homi. Location of Culture. New York: Routledge, 1994  
\textsuperscript{22} See: DuBois, W.E.B.. Souls of Black Folk , 1903  
\textsuperscript{25} Such as the longest leg of the Triangular trade of Enslaved Africans or as centered in the Atlantic (America/England/Africa)  
\textsuperscript{26} SEE M.G. SMITH AND OTHERS  
\textsuperscript{27} Julia Cooper, Anna, A Voice from the South: By A Woman from the South. 1892.  
\textsuperscript{28} DuBois, W.E.B. Souls of Black Folk. 1903.  
\textsuperscript{29} Terrell, Mary Church, A Colored Woman in a White World (Autobiography). 1940.  
\textsuperscript{30} Fanon, Frantz. Peau Noire, Masques Blancs.1952 (Black Skin, White Mask)
(1952), and Carole Boyce Davies31 (1994) have situated philosophies of identity (race, class, and gender) in a direction specifically related to their people. This personalized dedication is important as Africans of the diaspora sort through identities of the New World.

Figure 4 Tom Feelings "Middle Passage" (1995)

Like Tom Feeling's drawing of the slaveship in the *Middle Passage* (1995), although we propelled forward, we also resisted the identities that were forced upon us in the New World. Gilroy's *Black Atlantic: Double Consciousness and Modernity* (1991) opens with the following statement:

Striving to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness. By saying this I do not mean to suggest that taking on either or both of these unfinished identities necessarily exhausts the subjective resources of any particular individual. (Gilroy 1993:1)

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Gilroy’s opening is reminiscent of Bernabe, Chamoiseau, and Confiant’s *Eloge de la Creolite*\(^{32}\) (1989) where they declared, “Ni Européens, ni Africains, ni Asiatiques, nous nous proclamons Créoles,\(^{33}\) essentially what Gilroy, the authors of *Eloge* and to a certain extent, what the early DuBois is arguing is a creole\(^{34}\) identity exists which one must navigate bifocally. Yet in “An African Diaspora: The Ontological Project” (2001), Echeuro takes a very critical view simultaneously at DuBois’s and Gilroys\(^{35}\) text as he writes that Gilroy’s “very phrasing shows that what is at stake is not the possibility of living as an African (or a black) in the modern European (or white) world, but in supposing that both identities are equivalent in ontological terms” (Echeuro 2001: 5). Furthermore Echeuro begs the question of why the “African is the unique species of the human as likely as ever to feel his ontological self suffocated by the environment of his modern situation. It is always the African self that is so creolized” (Echeuro 2001: 6) or more directly he asks, “Why are Africans the ones to be “inserted” in modernity? Why are we not the makers of modernity? Why is it that Europe, for all the changes and transformations it has undergone over the centuries, has remained a recognizable entity, whereas Africa – the multifarious anomaly of *In My Father’s House*\(^{36}\) – is the sufferer and its children the natural victims of this unique mental disorder of double consciousness” (Echeuro 2001:6). Michael Echeuro criticizes the framing of creolization and hybridity as he asks, “why should this particular plague be visited upon black people? Why is it that creolisation is always an event attachable only to one of the two sources of hybridity?” (Echeuro 2001: 6). There were other forms of creation besides Euro-

\(^{32}\) Trans: In Praise of Creoleness

\(^{33}\) Trans: Neither European, African, nor Asian, we proclaim ourselves Creole.

\(^{34}\) Born in/of the New World


\(^{36}\) a reference to Kwame Anthony Appiah’s (1992) work
African. Maureen Warner Lewis’s text *Guinea’s Other Suns* (1991) reveals the interactions between various African communities in Trinidad & Tobago, as well as the conditions, which made it possible. Warner-Lewis also gives clues as to how the Yoruba, although not the only ethnic group of Africans, became the dominating figure of cultural representation and even clashed with other ethnic groups along those lines. She writes:

The Yoruba appear to have been as culturally arrogant as the Hausa, if not more so. Although they were the products of Yoruba imperial collapse, they were inheritors of a long history of territorial expansion and political stability based on a recognition of hierarchical order among the princes of the realm, and reinforced by a mytho-political rationale. (Warner Lewis 2001: 21)

This structure continued in the Caribbean, and although other ethnic groups joined in the creation of what is today called *Orisa* or colloquial called *Yoruba* practice, the dominant energy of the Yoruba is what made this sub-cultural acculturation possible. This is yet one example of creation (the combined efforts of the Congo, Hausa, Ibo, etc.) and retention (under the auspices of Yoruba structures) in the form of African-Caribbean spiritual practices.

This is where we return to the works both of Stuart Hall who noted the contradictions in the cycle of retentions and creativity, and that of Edouard Glissant who also, while writing of creolization, pointed towards unpredictability with creation. The between-ness then, once one has moved beyond the Middle Passage, may not be that at all, but instead be the completeness that one has formed and become in the New World – a combination of old and new, African and other African along with local cultures, the creations from retentions.
Diasporization and the creolization process set the grounds for the modern day Trinidadian Orisa practice.

**From Shango to Orisa – African Religion in “exile” in the New World**

Trinidadian scholar J.D. Elder refers to the experiences of Africans in the New World as a form of exile. In the diasporan experience, I interpret it to mean that the African religious community has been “exiled” in great numbers from Western Africa, many involuntarily as they were dragged, sold, and shipped into enslavement. In the New World there was a struggle to survive this “casting-out”, sometimes with one’s life serving as the collateral for holding on to one’s identity; an identity clutched onto as African communities went through various processes, sometimes creating spaces of at least temporary freedom within exile. This freedom came through the forms of song, dance, music, expressions, and spirituality.

Colonization and creolization began to (re)shape the African and the practice of beliefs, morals, values and expressions of spirituality. Under the conditions of enslavement, some would find it remarkable that Africans in the diaspora have managed to maintain elements of their traditional worship, let alone the names, characteristics, and rituals associated with the divinities. In order to survive changes had to be made that permitted communities to hold on to what they could remember. Through fieldwork in Trinidad, it has been determined that even the most “authentically” proclaimed Yoruba practices in Trinidad still carry a distinct Trinidadianess or diasporaness and there is nothing wrong with that. In fact it is natural and expected for reasons of circumstance and history. As Elder states, “a Shango shrine and a Shango feast in Trinidad in the 20th Century cannot in every detail compare with their African counterparts. This
is expected with the passage of time and the exiling of the religious culture of Africa” (Elder 1988: 3).

Simpson's *Religious Cults of the Caribbean* (1970) describes Trinidad Orisa, or as he frames it the *Shango cult* as combining,

...elements of Yoruba traditional religion, Catholicism, and the Baptist faith. In its theology and rituals, it bears considerable resemblance to the Afro-Christian cults in the Catholic countries of Haiti (Vodun), Cuba (Santeria), and Brazil (Xango). All of these syncretic cults retain the names of prominent African divinities, included animal sacrifices, gesture drumming, dancing and spirit possession, and utilize thunder stones and swords as ritual objects (Simpson 1970:11)

Herskovits’s interpretation veers a bit from Simpson’s in that he does not describe Sango or what he refers to as *shouter* as “Afro Christian”, Herskovits describes it as an “African worship... exemplified in present-day Trinidad in the Shango cult...shaped and reinterpreted to fit into the pattern of European worship” (Herskovits 1947:vi).

On the name Shango, Herskovits writes,

Shango the God of Thunder of the Yoruba people of Nigeria, gives his name in Trinidad to the complex of African worship found there. The Island has several Shango groups, each with mutually exclusive membership....They tell of his or her healing gifts, or the African esoteric knowledge he or she commands (Herskovits 1947: 321)
The fundamental descriptions of some forms of Orisa practice have not changed since the writings of Elder, Simpson Eaton, Herskovits and Warner-Lewis, however the most important factor that distinguishes Trinidad Orisa as Trinidadian is not just the mechanics of practice, but the diaspora aspect and the fact that it has been creolized. Although the focus has been primarily on African-African creolization, other major ethnic groups in Trinidad have influenced the modern practice. In particular the Indian community and interactions with the community.

**African/Indian Creolization**

In Muhabir & Maharaj’s 1988 study of “Hindu Elements in the Shango/Orisha cult of Trinidad they suggest that the two communities began to merge their practices in the New World due to the close contact of the two communities and the similarities of the traditional practices of both the Indian and the African. Their study portrays the early Indian and African communities as living harmoniously. This harmony, absent of what the authors call the “European-African superordination-subordination pattern” and fueled by the interplay of the two communities in the arenas of socio-religious functions, labour roles, and even living spaces developed into what they identify as acculturation. They state:

Acculturation occurs when two or more ethnic groups come into intimate contact with each other over time. The contact provides an opportunity for each of the respective groups to adapt in varying degrees to an alien/new cultural form or orientation, particularly when there are common or transferable elements and
when particular needs or situations arise. (Muhabir & Maharaj 1988: 1)

This definition resembles the definition of creolization except for the fact that according to Braithwaite’s (1974) definition cited earlier; ac/culturation involves the yoking of one culture deemed as subordinate to one that is superior. Muhabir & Maharaj propose that in the case of the Indian and African, there was a mutual respect, acceptance. He states, “conflict between the races was rare, and when it did arise, conspicuous” (Muhabir & Maharaj 1988: 1). They note that as early as the mid-nineteenth century Africans were joining East Indian Shia Muslim Hosay processions and becoming active participants. For the Africans, this participation rekindled a remembrance of some of the “almost-forgotten traditional practices”. Of the interchange they cite:

A striking example of agreement on basic beliefs is the combining of African and East Indian traditions of magic practice. Hindu pandits perform a “High Mass” for their Negro clientele who have not had their prayers answered in the Christian churches, Shouter temples, or Shango yards. In the same way, Indians employ Negro Obeahmen for curing and for manufacture of “trick” and “guard” amulets.
(Muhabir & Maharaj 1988: 4)

Muhabir & Maharaj’s thesis, although dated, present an interesting argument that explains some of the foundational elements of today’s Trinidadian Orisha practices. For example, one will find colored flags hanging in an Orisha yard that resemble those of the Hindus, except for the shape which tend to be square as opposed to triangular.
They cite an example from Frances Henry's work on Orisha where she described an Indian man who was cast out of his family for participating in the Orisha feasts. She said that “In so doing, he abjured his Indian ethnicity and became culturally Black.” (cited in Muhabir & Maharaj 1988: 5). Although he was rejected by his community, he became accepted by the African community and his heavy participation drew more Indians to the Orisha religion and thus began a rekindled interaction between Africans and Indians.

J.D. Elder also noted the “religious syncretism” that he observed in his 1951 fieldwork of the Orisha Religion in Trinidad and Tobago. He details his account:

By March 1951 Andrew Pearse and I had reached the Company Villages in our field-research into Trinidad and Tobago folk religion... We were gathering information, mostly popular accounts, of the African Experience, The African Image and most importantly we were seeking information about the persistence of African type world-view and religious rituals which we learned could be found from Indian Trail on the Montserrat Hills down through Mayo into the Bon Adventure Lolands where Congo, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo lived in close association with East Indians both Hindus and Islamic all participating in a religious syncretism about which some earlier observers had spoken and even written. (Elder 1987: 2)

This influence can be seen in the usage of flags in some Orisa yards that are very similar to the Hindu flags. In all of my travels in the Orisa diaspora, I
have not encountered another community of practitioners who uses the same flag system as the Trinidadian Orisa community.

**Visual Displays of Creolization - Rawle Gibbons “Guinea’s Other Suns”**

Creolization and the combining of various elements may not be evident while in the midst of the practice and continues to shift and change throughout time. When I first entered Trinidad to embark upon this research, my introduction to the creolization of the Orisa community came vis-à-vis Rawle Gibbon’s play – “Guinea’s Other Suns” (2007) based on the book by Maureen Warner Lewis.

On Thursday, March 8th, 2007, I sat in the cold auditorium of the Learning Resource Centre on the campus of UWI-St. Augustine to await the premiere of Professor Rawle Gibbon’s rendition of Maureen Warner-Lewis’s *Guinea’s Other Suns* (1991). This production, heavily influenced by the students creativity took the audience on a journey from present day, to the pains of the “middle passage” and then returning to modern day. Gibbons’s collaborative effort visually illustrated the processes of creolization in the Caribbean, from races to practices, to clothing and religion. One of the scenes depicts a baptism where during the day a regular church is held and by night there is a special ceremony that gives the message again, but in a more “African” way. Gibbons play unfolded many layers of creolized identities in the Caribbean and African diaspora. Through drama he was able to reveal some of the mental, emotional and physical conditions of enslavement and making of the “creole society” as well as demonstrate visually how these changes “looked”, such as the visual transitional creolization of the pictures below.
The first two pictures show as Victorian era European woman on the left and an African woman on the right. The pictures below show the ways in which the blending of the two styles of clothing combined to form the attire one will see at many of the diasporic Orisa events. Many of the women shown are wearing the Victorian era characteristic ruffled dresses that have a wide base, slimmer torso, and very frequently are made of lace. However, in this same outfit, one will see various styles of head-ties, African beads, sometimes African designed fabric and a variation away from the European style that makes it African. This is what Kamau Brathwaite refers to as *Indigenization*\(^{37}\). Defined by him as taking European forms and making them one’s own, Braithwaite brings to the fore another important part of creolizing societies, that is the fact that what begins as imitation eventually becomes indigenization – or one’s own.

Another of Profesor Gibbon’s productions *Ogun Iyan as in Pan* (2006) reveals the influence of the Orisha on the emergence of the steelband in Trinidad and Tobago. Very present in this work is the Yoruba divinities Ogun, Sango, and Osun. The opening scene shows a popular story of Osun enticing Ogun out of the woods with her honey. This is followed by a scene where a husband and a wife are sitting and casting *obi*\(^{38}\) to find out what the Orisa require. When the husband, who is blind is dissatisfied with the answer and continues to ask the same question repeatedly, suddenly the daughter appears, but she is not herself, but the Orisa speaking through her. The Orisa tells the family that a special child will be born and that this child has to come because it will be special. Without revealing the entire plot of the play, Gibbons within one play manages to weave a triple layered plot that includes the story of a family of the Trinidadian Orisa faith

\(^{37}\) *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770 - 1820* (1971)
\(^{38}\) Kola nut
with the story of the formation of the steel pan, and the stories of the Orisa who surrounded the movements. In Gibbon’s play Ogun, Osun, and Sango were key in giving birth to the Steel pan instrument/movement. Ogun represents the metal and the pounding it takes to shape the metal, while Sango’s heat gives the pan it’s shape and enhances the sound, but the shape, the concaveness that gives the pan such a sweet sound is owed to a woman energy – Osun.

Eintou Pearl Springer describes the Osun connection in her paper, “The Role of the Orisha in Carnival”(1999): “Time passes. Ogun, goes into his caves, and with alchemy of creativity invites the primal female force in concave reformulation of this drum of steel” (Springer 1999: 2). This may be why professor Gibbons opened the play with the scene of Ogun and Osun in the woods as she pulled Ogun out. Moving from a flat, stiff, stubborn piece of metal (Ogun), to being pulled out into concaveness (Osun), through the fire, heat and pounding thunder (of Sango), is how the pan came about according to Trinidadian oral history.

Gibbons also talks about this subject in his paper “The second coming: the Orisha factor in the emergence of the steelband in Trinidad and Tobago” (1997). He details Trinidad villages that have large numbers of Orisha families who had great influence on the steelpan scene. Some of these villages are Tacarigua, Laventille, and St. James, for example:

Throughout St. James, in the 1930’s there were Orisha yards four of which were located in the Bournes Road area alone. These belonged to the Ash family, the des Vignes, Alexanders and Pa
Leonard King. Early steelbands were all linked geographically to these yards. (Gibbons 1997: 6)

Gibbons concludes his research by connecting this story with the larger picture:

What does its manifestation through the national instrument tell us about the religion in Trinidad and Tobago? In the first place, the religion through ‘underground’ or relegated to the fringes of social life was clearly a powerful presence that ‘African people had at their disposal when under pressure as they were in the 30’s. Orisha was thus the base out of which the new instrument would ‘manifest’.

(Gibbons 1997: 14)

Here Gibbons employs an interesting play on words with ‘manifest’ also in the Trinidadian context meaning to be possessed by a spirit/Orisha. And by “new instrument” what could Gibbons mean? In the *Ogun Iyan* play, Gibbons shows how the police would enforce the rules banning the drums from being played. At one point African peoples even used bamboo to pound on the ground to keep the rhythm of the drum. But through challenges and the guidance of the Orisa “manifesting” on the devotees, Africans were able to turn a mere *Crix*\(^{39}\) tin into a musical instrument.

The steel pan, according to Trinidadian oral history, is an instrument of the Orisa and it has ‘manifested’ as the national instrument of Trinidad, which leads to Gibbon’s question of what this says about the Orisa religion in Trinidad. Perhaps the underlying assumption is that the Orisa speak through the actions, creativity and energy of the diaspora’s children. The Orisa were also the forces

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\(^{39}\) A type of salt biscuit (cracker)
who guided those who struggled the exiling of their culture and the persecution for being themselves, within their warriorhood.

The last sentence of the paragraph, “Orisha was thus the base out of which the new instrument would ‘manifest’” has a parallel, not just to the pan movement, but to the fact that the formation of pan can be called a movement since it was born out of a resistance and a rejection of the attempts to (impossibly) suppress African cultural remnants. The pan was a mask (of the drum) and this masque, born out of struggle, came to represent the peoples of Trinidad and Tobago.

Swelling in the concaveness, the sweetness of the steel pan, is the Orisa Osun. Some say that Osun, her charm and her sweetness – just like in the steelpan, joins hands with Sango and Ogun as her energy ‘manifests’ in the energy, charisma, and creativity of Trinidadians.

Considering that Orisa was able to survive through the fires of enslavement, the hope of freedom/survival, and the prayers of the Ancestors – the spiritual groundings and escape such as in manifestations, Orisa became an instrument of liberation and escape. Later as the world became smaller through travel, technology, and in today’s time internet and cellphones, survival and hope took on new meanings and we moved beyond the limitations of the past.

Today’s fight is to re-member the past. For some this means stretching both hands towards Africa in search of “truth” – the “authentic” Orisa. This is the subject of the next chapter.

**Conclusion**

Trinidad Orisa is a cultural practice of the African Diaspora in the Caribbean that is shaped by an ongoing exchange of interacting communities.
Although it is called Orisa or Shango, it is a combination of identities combined and “forged” in the New World. Reiterating that difference does not denote deficiency – simply means that a unique cultural-historical experience translates to the Trinidadian construction of cultural identity vis-à-vis the Orisa tradition as a distinct New World Afro-Caribbean practice that is similar to the Yoruba version but has its own characteristics, contradictions, nuances, and definitions.

However, the interesting factor in it all is that the changes instated by the newly arrived Yoruba, whether one agrees with them or not, are also becoming part of the Trinidadian’s Narrative and forming new histories, definitions, and implications of what it means to be an Orisa practitioner in the New World. Like J. California Cooper’s (2000) collection of stories, this “future has a past”. A world conference on Orisa in Trinidad held in the late 1990s would drastically change the Orisa scene on the island and bring, in mass scale, worldwide attention to Trinidad as the next chapter outlines.
CHAPTER 3

ARE YOU A WARRIOR? – TRINIDAD ORISA FROM DISPARATE MOVEMENT TO ORGANIZED STRUCTURES

San Juan market in Trinidad and Tobago is a bustling, busy market, rich with sounds, colors, people, and a diverse array of goods. People come to the market to find all kinds of things from herbs, to pig heads, music and shoes, to callalou ingredients or even live chickens. Some of the items are just too interesting to resist getting a closer look.

In the San Juan market, I stood at a corner booth between two tables watching blue crabs pinch each other’s limbs while a man with no teeth was giving me “sweet talk”. I was laughing at the comic scene, but disinterest in further engaging the courtship prompted me to stand even closer to the table where I was shopping for ingredients for the traditional Sunday lunch. While a customer began a negotiation of prices, I noticed the market woman working the table. She was an elderly woman whose looks alone could make a person forget he or she is not in Africa. While the other customers were busy admiring the produce on the table, the elder discreetly approached me and whispered a query, “Are you a warrior?,” she asked. Although I was not really sure of what she meant, I instinctively answered with affirmation, “Yes”. She smiled wide and nodded with acknowledgement as she confided in me that, “Yesterday, [she] was in the bush all day”.

I had no idea what kind of conversation we just had, but I felt an unspoken kinship. The elation transformed into puzzlement as I wondered; what is a “warrior” in this context and furthermore what was it that signaled that I might be a warrior?
In my assessment, I draw upon the work of Sidney Mintz’s *Caribbean Formations* (1989) where he analyzed Anglophone, Hispanophone, and Francophone Caribbean Nations for the differences in formation, but also for their connections. As he introduced his approach to the topic he notes that as we ask questions of:

How African traditions were preserved and rethought; how slavery and free labor led to different social outcomes; how the past affected the way Antillean national identities have unfolded. Comparing two Caribbean societies with each other makes it possible to see their shared features, and also how they differ.

(Mintz 1989: xiii)

Although the market scene was not a representation of two peoples from a Caribbean Nation, we were two people from the African Diaspora and in this instance had a choice of how to respond to each other. I was not sure what a warrior was, but I related to the metaphor and recognized the connection in her as well. In the broader perspective of this chapter, I decided to open with this memoir because as members of the Orisa have encountered each other they can, as Mintz pointed out, “see their shared features” or recognize “how they differ.

In the 21st century, beyond enslavement and “survival,” today’s incongruities and the fracturing African communities have endured make cohesion and linking across the diaspora of continued importance.

Not to be overlooked is her choice of words as she asked me if I was a warrior. As I interviewed other members of the Trinidadian Orisa and Spiritual Baptist community, I found that the notion of warrior was part of the local language that identified members of the Afro-Trinidadian spiritual community. In
a nearly poetic way, warrior is an analogy for the African diaspora’s struggle through fire, hope, and prayer as the title of this thesis suggests.

African Diasporic inter-relations have been of question since we were forcefully fragmented and movements spanned across the African Diaspora as we sorted out identities. In this sorting, Language became important marker of identity, in fact was one of the undeniable markers of Creole identity. As Trouillot (2006) points out,

Creole languages became the first products of the creolization process to attract the attention of scholars. First, creole languages were obvious. The features that demarcated them from European vernaculars could not be denied. On the contrary, these features had to be acknowledged if only for the purpose of communication. Even when the linguistic status of creole was denigrated, such denigration also reinforced the acknowledgement that they were different. (Trouillot 2006: 11).

Returning the theme of languages to the context of Trinidad Yoruba, the works of Maureen Warner Lewis (1991), (1997) explain the correlation between language and identity. It is through language that Lewis analyzes the struggles, formation, creolization, and creativity of the Yoruba in Trinidad. She identifies language as a means of solidarity under the isolation and the caustic conditions of enslavement. She writes:

One of the earliest sociocultural reactions to alienation and class oppression was solidarity. The cultural distance between the Africans on the one hand and the
Europeans, Creoles, and Indians on the other led Africans to seek the protection and security of members of their own linguistic group. This brought about the spontaneous formation of ethnically demarcated settlements. (Warner Lewis 1997: 40).

Warner Lewis then names a number of settlements in Trinidad with the corresponding African ethnicities. Of the townships referenced by Warner Lewis is Gasparillo. This is noteworthy because Trinidadian scholar JD Elder produced a very important article detailing the Orisa practice in Gasparillo. Warner Lewis’s article, “Affirming the Subaltern: The Contribution of J.D. Elder” (2009) highlights the important contributions of Elder as well as the growth of his writings that moved through a period when Trinidad & Tobago was under British Colonial rule to later writings of post-independence. She contextualizes his works within a socio-historical formation as she analyzed Elder’s response to the changing social and political climates of Trinidad. Although she criticizes Elder for limiting the Orisa system in Gasparillo to a “Yoruba Ancestral Cult,” she does highlight his contribution to the scholarship and documenting of the Yoruba communities in Trinidad & Tobago. Warner Lewis writes:

Gasparillo and the neighboring villages of Mayo, Caratal, and Bonaventure lie in the low central hills of Trinidad. His extensive fieldwork in this area had brought him into contact with second-and third-generation descendants of Yaraba (Yoruba) and Hausa who had begun their journey from Africa as enslaved persons,

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but who had been freed by anti-slave trade patrols off the coasts of West Africa and the Caribbean. They had then been forcibly hired as indentured laborers in territories of the Caribbean, to meet the labor needs of estate-owners in the years after 1838 when the slaves had been emancipated en masse. This arrangement had begun even earlier, after the British parliamentary act abolishing the slave trade in 1807, and continued into the 1860s and '70s. In fact, the Congo who were the subject of living memory in the 1940s and '50s in Charlottesville and at Culloden Moor in Tobago are likely to have been among this category of immigrants, especially given the historical evidence that, in 1851, about three hundred Africans, captured at sea by the patrols and landed at St. Helena island in the south Atlantic had been sent to Tobago; a further 225 followed in 1862 (Williams 125). Most of the Africans landed at St. Helena tended to have originated in West Central Africa. As a mid-Atlantic island off Angola, St. Helena lay along the sea routes from the Congo-Angola region to Brazil, which absorbed African labor until slavery was abolished there in 1886 (Warner Lewis 2009:3)

In Elder's work as well as Warner Lewis’s work one can see the ways in which African communities combined, later transforming into Trinidadian communities. Warner Lewis’s work in particular is a major influence on my
inclusion and focus on Intra-African creolization in this thesis. Movement and continuity is the focus of this chapter as we discuss the old ways of Orisha practice from when it was called “Shango” and some of the transitions since, as the language the Orisa community uses to define and question itself takes on a different meanings in the 21st century. Previously the distinction between the Africanized “Shango” and the heavier-Christian infused “Spiritual Baptist” was so thin that another term, “Shango Baptist” was used colloquialy to describe the local spiritual practices. Yet the earlier time periods, as Warner Lewis (1997) points out, staged an environment for such likeness and indifference to difference. Yet that thin line no longer exists – at least not in word. In other words, now the spiritual practice is no longer called Shango, it is called Orisa and there is a clear distinction between Orisa and Spiritual Baptist, which will be explained in further detail later in the chapter. Also, in response to the recent influx of Yoruba from Nigeria, an additional category of Ifa must be added to the discussion on naming. Ifa is distinct from the Orisa tradition in that it is the version that is deemed to be closer to the Nigerian practice.

The “new” African diaspora is operating under a much different world than during the periods of enslavement, emancipation, or even during the early 20th century. Today’s African diaspora has Internet, 3G networks, MagicJack, google, Wikipedia, Facebook and other means of instant access, not only to information, but also to each other. This access and “smallness” of the world has its advantages and disadvantages as we seek to re-connect, re-define, and re-create ourselves on our own terms.

Disparate Movement is a critical theme of this chapter because, especially after the 1917 ordinance, Orisa and in particular Spiritual Baptist began to transform from the “thin-line” systems described earlier to organized structures.
The extent to which they organized was to the point of lobbying to remove the ordinance and to be recognized governmentally.

This chapter is divided into four sections:

1. **Debates on Authenticity** – This highlights the questioning of “Authenticity” or “purity” that came about during both the first (1981) and sixth (1999) World Orisa Congresses.

2. **History of African-Based Traditional Religious systems in Trinidad & Tobago**- Introduces the “Shango” and “Spiritual Baptist” histories, definitions, similarities and differences.

3. **Artistic & Creative – “Warriors of the Word”** - Incorporates the examples, words, and thoughts of Trinidadian creative artists who have incorporated the Orisa into their works.

4. **Manifestations** - Highlights Ancestral connection and spiritual elevation through – spirit possession in Orisa and Spiritual Baptist

Through these sub-points, this thesis seeks to elucidate three main subjects: (1) How has Orisa been practiced in Trinidad from the mid 20th century until now. (2) How has the visit of the Ooni of Ife in 1989 and the World Orisa Conference of 1999 shifted the Orisa movement in Trinidad, and finally (3) What do Trinidadians of today say about their indigenous practice. Situational examples, interviews, and case studies from my fieldwork in Trinidad and Tobago will be woven between the subjects to further describe the themes of this chapter.
I. Debates on Authenticity

In The Rhythms of Black Folk (1995) Spencer argues that the “drumbeats of Africa endured the slave factories and the middle passage and were sold right along with the captive Africans on the slave blocks of the New World” (1995: xv). He states further that, “the diaspora generally de-drummed the enslaved Africans but it did not de-rhythmize them (1995: xv). The New World was filled with all kinds of “rhythms” and among them in Trinidad was the fusion of African, Indian, European and American (Caribbean) that were once called “Shango”.

Challenging question of authenticity and the climatic meetings and encounters have shifted the trajectory of Orisa in a major way. Tracey Hucks’s “I Smoothed the Way, I Opened Doors: Women in the Yoruba-Orisha Tradition of Trinidad” (2006), opens with the following scene:

In June 1981, Iyalorisha Molly Ahye publicly defended the legitimacy of Trinidad’s Orisha practice to an international audience attending the First World Congress of Orisha Tradition and Culture in Ile-Ife, Nigeria. At the conference, a Nigerian priest of the Yoruba tradition expressed his delight in the number of representatives from African diasporic communities in the Americas and the Caribbean who returned “home” to Africa in order to “correct a few points” concerning their local religious practices. Molly Ahye, a native-born Trinidadian, boldly responded to the Nigerian priest’s assertion. “I would like to say that we shouldn’t be ‘corrected.’ We should leave to ourself the way we worship because I am not sure that ‘you’ are correct or
‘we’ are correct.” Because both African and African-diasporic practitioners represent the various local trajectories that constitute the global Yoruba community, Ahye concluded, the goal of the conference should not be “a matter of correction, but to exchange ideas.” (Hucks 2006: 19)

Ahye’s response and declaration seems intuitive and respectable, yet this event was a foreshadowing of things to come in Trinidad as well as in other parts of the diaspora. This sentiment of “correcting a wrong” would ripple itself across the ocean and sit as the pool of controversy in today’s Orisa practice.

1989 Visit of Ooni and 1999 Sixth World Orisha Congress

Frances Henry cites the 1989 visit of the Ooni of Ife to Trinidad as “the most significant even in the restructuring and secularization of the Orisha religion” (Henry 2003: 78). She says that while the Ooni, the King of Ile-Ife and the head of Yoruba peoples, was in Trinidad he visited Orisa houses as well as other sites. The Ooni’s visit was controversial in that, he began appointing specific people as heads of the traditional practice without any discussion with the local community. For example, the highly respected and recently deceased Iya Melvina Rodney. Henry writes, “Iyalorisha Rodney says that the Ooni consecrated her shrine and anointed her as the spiritual head of the Orisha religion in Trinidad and Tobago” (Henry 2003: 79). Although it is noted that most people were in agreement with the appointment, there was some opposition. The problems of “secularization” and “restructuring” were just beginning to stir.
An elaborate ceremony was held to welcome the Ooni. Molly Ahye arranged the procession, with her son carrying a special staff of the divinity Obatala, Henry continues:

Midway along the processional he “caught power”, with Obatala beginning as an old man with faltering steps. As his steps appeared to lead him in the wrong direction, Ahye called him, “Papa, it up there you have to go”, and as she said this he became the young Obatala, taking huge strides. He marched towards the dais and addressed the dignitaries. In so doing, he appeared to be affirming his mother’s role as a legitimate Orisha priestess. This event was televised and at this point the television commentator, who was not sure of what was happening, announced that Molly Ahye used to be a dancer and choreographer and that the appearance of Obatala was a staged event (Henry 2003: 79-80).

The way the scene is described is somewhat embarrassing and perhaps initiated some difficulties between Ahye and the local community. This alienation was evident even during my fieldwork as some of the major figures in the Orisa tradition mentioned in Henry’s work of 2003 were no longer so visible.

Henry does not allude to any direct connection between the earlier stated event and the distancing of Ahye, but she does note that Molly Ahye tried unsuccessfully to organize a structured protocol and self-governance among Orisa practitioners without governmental intervention – just between local communities. Although Ahye played a major role in bringing the Ooni of Ife to
Trinidad, she, according to Henry was not shy about expressing her discontent with the changes thenceforth. Henry states that Ahye:

claims that she arranged for the Ooni of Ife to come to Trinidad and Tobago, but when he came, “he created confusion here”. She maintains that he has no authority to anoint leaders and that each shrine must be respected and treated equally. She also questions his dominion or authority over people and events in other countries, and feels the Nigerians are trying to use and exploit the New World religions because the people in Trinidad need the affirmation and legitimation that the Ooni and the Nigerians can confer. (Henry 2003: 81)

Charged with a passion to put the power of restructuring and organizing in the hands of her own people, Ahye eventually abandoned her initial methodology for another means. When her attempts to organize locally failed, Ahye stretched her hands across the diaspora to Marta Vega, a Puerto Rican scholar living in New York City. They began to collaborate on work and “In 1980 a cultural festival in New York was dedicated to the Orisha religion and apparently, at that time also, an international Orisha body, the World Orisha Congress, was formed” (Henry 2003: 82).

The OrisaWorld (World Orisha Congress), headed by the Ooni of Ife – world wide leader of the Yoruba nation, is the organization which sponsors the conferences on Orisa held in various parts of the world. In a description provided on the official website for the Orisa World Congress, OrisaWorld is described in the following way:
Founded in 1981, OrisaWorld is the largest organization of practitioners and scholars that research or teach topics related to Orisa tradition, religion and culture. OrisaWorld promotes cooperation, understanding and excellence in a world where Orisa Tradition and Culture plays a central role in the day-to-day lives of over 100 million people. OrisaWorld has individual and institutional members from over 50 countries.

([www.orisaworld.com](http://www.orisaworld.com) cited March 1, 2010)

In addition to the above, Orisaworld also lists a number of goals and missions such as hosting regular cultural festivals and activities at various locations in the world. However, I was particularly intrigued by the mission to “revitalize and rejuvenate the Orisa Culture and all its traditions” ([www.orisaworld.com](http://www.orisaworld.com) cited March 1, 2010). The “revitalization” and the “rejuvenating” somehow implies an awakening or in some senses bringing to life, something which is dormant. This very OrisaWorld was the machine behind the VI World Congress of Orisa held in Trinidad.

Scholar Frances Henry, who first traveled to Trinidad in 195641 to study the “Shango Cult” was able to return in 1999 to witness the VI World Congress of Orisa and also relay her observations of changes that have occurred in the time span since her initial visit. Her book *Reclaiming African Religions in Trinidad*

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(2003) reveals her observations of changes and questions of authenticity, primarily through the use of case studies. Henry noted that the sixth World Congress on Orisa was the first time a Caribbean nation had been asked to host the conference. A number of important things happened during this conference such as the Prime Minister’s speech which announced that "the Orisa Marriage Act had been passed and would soon become a law" (Henry 2003:150). The Orisa Family Day had already been made a national holiday, and this further step is significant because it signifies a shift from a very personal, colloquial, practice to one which is recognized nationally, governmentally and began to formalize structurally during this conference.

Amid Ahye’s reservations, not only was the Ooni assigning designees and appointed officials of the Orisa tradition, but so too now were other people from various diasporas. Another criticism in Henry's text was that the exorbitant fees of the conference shut out a great faction of the community, many of whom were working class peoples. Yet, the conference continued with a slight echo of the earlier conference and visit to Ile-Ife in 1981 as the Ooni declared,

Yoruba is spread throughout the diaspora, in the United States, Haiti, the Caribbean islands and elsewhere. He called it a “common culture in the New World” and noted that the first conference was held in Nigeria in 1981. The next congress would again be held in Ife, “Nigeria that is the source” and he noted that now, because of the extent of globalization, there is particular need to return to that source. (Henry 2003: 150)
In my experience as an Orisa devotee, I have frequently encountered this term, “the source”. The implication of “source” has double entendre. On one hand “the source” is one of Ile Ife’s nicknames as being the source of life from whence Oduduwa descended from heaven on a chain with a rooster who scratched dirt over water to create the earth as we know it today. In another sense, “the source” represents an idealized home for us in the diaspora – the Africa form whence we have come. Returning to “the source” implies a digging up of one’s past and a return the original home of Orisa. Evidently this message was indeed delivered since the conference proceedings, as documented by Henry, included a series of dialogues of what Orisa means to the diaspora. It begged questions such as whether people in the New World should continue to combine Christian and African elements or if they should do away with those means and grasp a full African practice. This sparked a series of inter-diasporan dialogues, some more heated than others about authenticity and the “right” way of practice.

As we reflect on the discussions held at the 1999 World Orisa Congress conference, what do we tell the people present at this ceremony? Do we tell them that the ceremonies that have been passed on to them for generations are wrong? Do I tell them that I am somehow a more credible and valid priestess because I was initiated in Nigeria?

Well, some attendees to the conference, did in fact share that sentiment with the local Trinindadians. Not only was the example Nigeria presented as more appropriate, but other diasporan Africans were offering to come to Trinidad as well to teach the Trinindadians the “correct” way to perform their rites.

One of the plenaries during the conference included a session on the Egungun rites in Trinidad. The woman presenting the report showed a video that
included women participants. Henry shares the following about the scene in her book:

Her presentation was challenged by one of the Oyotunji priests, who asked her during discussion if she was aware of the fact that Egungun, according to the Nigerian Ife usage, was celebrated only by men. He further said that her festival could not therefore have any religious significance since it was not done according to traditional Ife rules. Another African American entered the discussion, saying that using women in the Egungun festival serves to empower them...Meanwhile the original Trinidadian presenter made an attempt to answer the criticism by saying that divination had informed her that it was all right for women to be involved in the Egungun. She said that women started the festival, maintained it and are doing it in Trinidad and should therefore continue in its development...Using strong and forceful language, the Oyotunji priest told her that they should meet afterwards so that he could educate her in the traditional practices, and she softly agreed to do so. (Henry 2003: 153).

This scene brings to the fore the additional layer to the debate around authenticity, which is the question of gender. This is something which should be explored deeper in future research on Trinidad Orisa, but in this thesis I only attempt to present my observations
II. Marginalizing Women – Gender and “Re-Africanization”

Even in my short stay in Trinidad I was beginning to see major shifts in gender where Orisa Yards that were originally run by a woman priestess were now marginalizing women in an attempt to re-Africanize. Instead of asking for the “mother” of the house, people now began to ask for the Babalawo (high male priest). I have even witnessed ceremonies where initiated priestesses, including myself, were present and participants bypassed the women and an uninitiated person conducted divination and performed the rites of a naming ceremony.

Somehow the shift of spiritual power from female to male as women become more and more invisibilized has also integrated as part of the authentication process. And some of the real life events have been just as forceful as the earlier described scene between the Trinidadian presenter and the Oyotunji Yoruba priest. Boyce Davies and Savory Fido spoke to the voicelessness and historical erasure of the Caribbean woman writer as well as the critical context of this invisibilization. They write:

The concept of voicelessness necessarily informs any discussion of Caribbean women and literature. It is a crucial consideration because it is out of this voicelessness and consequent absence that an understanding of our creativity in written expression emerges. (Boyce Davies & Fido 1994:1)

In this case, I would apply the same terms, not just to Caribbean women and literature, but in orature – verbal expression and the means of passing down tradition. Language is an important aspect of the transmission of culture. This is why scholars such as Maureen Warner-Lewis have devoted so much effort to
analyzing our lineage through language. In fact language was one of the first important identifiers of “creoleness”. According to Trouillot (2006):

Creole languages became the first products of the creolization to attract the attention of scholars. First creole languages were obvious. These features that demarcated them from European vernaculars could not be denied. On the contrary, these features had to be acknowledged if only for the purpose of communication. (Trouillot 2006: 11)

This is one means of looking at language as a distinguishing factor. In another interpretation, Jamaican scholar/artiste Rex Nettleford writes the following in the introduction to Maureen Warner Lewis’s book Guinea's Other Suns (1991):

Not only does Africa ride the sense and sensibility – and bodies – of her offspring in the dispora. She also fertilizes the region’s Creole languages in dynamic interaction with master’s tongues as part of the all-pervasive process of cross-fertilization. Syntax and structure, idiom and lexion are transformed to create “third tongues,” even now struggling to gain legitimacy, if not form and purpose, in the very habitats in which they are created. (Nettleford cited in Warner Lewis 1991: xvii)

But what happens in these transformative spaces is that women are loosing their articulation – both the visual as well as the spiritual articulation. Yoruba traditional practices are centered around an oral/verbal connection with the spiritual forces. This happens through song, sounds made during a spiritual
possession, or even the spoken prayer – or acknowledgement of the prayer that may come in the form of an *amen* or an *ase*.

To remove women from central participation and articulation is like taking a step back in time. Therefore the erasure and invisibilising takes the African woman of the Caribbean out of the next phase of history, and while she is still visible and vocal and oral traditions such as singing (chants) and spirit possession, she is minimized in one of the most important areas of spiritual channeling and connecting with higher powers – which is the recitation of prayer and assuming the role of the priest/ess. I observed some of the local practitioners to accept this role as a means of practicing a more “authentically” Nigerian version of Orisa practice. Having an in-residence Nigerian *Babalawo* seemed to secure the validity of the spiritual house.

**III. Fragmenting Self – the dangers of dividing the diaspora**

The danger in upholding one spiritual belief as more valid than the other is that it creates a division for a people who have already gone through a forced fragmentation. Those of us who are in the diaspora have come together under the *fires* of enslavement and discrimination with *hopes* that future would be better for generations to come, are now being separated by the details of our methods of *prayer*. This fragmentation was evident from the very first event I observed for my field study in Trinidad. I attended a funeral\(^2\) where a division of “prayer” was obvious and separated, not only people who are foreign to each other, but an entire family.

*This was the first traditional funeral I ever attended. Half of the attendees were Orisha and the other half was Christian. They remained segregated*  

\(^2\)March 20, 2007 – Tunapuna (person’s identity protected for anonymity)
throughout the ceremony and kept at a distance. It seemed as if the Christians had an undertone of fear, while the Orisha people commented on the distancing, questioning why the others were so afraid.

This group claimed to be more Yoruba based, but they used ingredients such as Holy Water or Olive Oil which are not typically used in Nigerian practices. Ifa Odu was quoted like Bible verses (e.g. the Odu Eji Ogbe chapter 8 verse 4 says..”). The libation prayer in English/Yoruba was more similar to Lukumi (Santeria).

They fed the deceased woman with honey, salt, and other foods. They circled the body and sang. They would go back and forth, changing the direction of the circle at different points during the ceremony. All of the priests sat in the front with the officiating priests sitting at the pews to the extreme front that was alongside the casket. The priests looked in the face of the deceased, which is a taboo in the Nigerian tradition. There is a ceremony one must do after looking in the face of the deceased in the Nigerian Ifa practice.

At one point during the ceremony, there was a shift from Yoruba/Orisha to the type of funeral most people are familiar with. The officiating priest called for people to sing a Christian song. They asked if any of the attendees knew the words in particular, the Christians who were sitting in the back, said not one word. They waited a couple of minutes, but finally the son of the deceased woman began to sing and the Christians then sang the words to the song.

Next the Orisha priests read the ashes to ashes, dust to dust and put the dirt on top of the casket beside the flowers that were sitting atop.

**Observations**

The fact that the Christians and the Orisa never integrated and that there was an underlying tension between the two groups was one of the things that stood out during this ceremony. The Christians even seemed afraid. I was not
familiar with most of the songs they sang, nor the melodies and the drums are different from other Orisha diaspora drums as well. Someone mentioned dreaming about police and asked what it meant. At once, everyone answered Esu, while in my experience police is Ogun.

In this first encounter with Orisha in Trinidad, it seems that the tradition has creolized and while some fervently speak about the reasons why we as a people should move away from Christianity, I find that a lot of the practice witnessed today still holds on to some of the Christian comforts such as quoting Ifa like the Bible.

The pages cannot reveal the intensity of this event. The separation was clear and quite tense. You also begin to see people within the tradition challenging each other spiritually, publically, using the threat of the recently deceased that we were there to honor. Therefore, my first introduction into Trinidad Orisa was not of the unity and a perfect picture of how the diaspora has pulled together – but rather face forward fall into the divisiveness of our people even in the name of tradition. I have left my field notes intact and even read within my writing, a slight bias or measuring of the event I witnessed to a Nigerian tape.

Drawing upon the messages given in the earlier chapters in the thesis people of the diaspora must bare in mind that we are all unique. Each of the Yoruba derived traditions formed under various historical circumstances which distinguish one from the other and this makes it so there is not true, “right” or “wrong” way of worship. The World Orisa Congress conference highlighted, not only a Nigerian “source-ism” where “the source” in Africa is perceived as the only “correct” way of practice, but it also highlighted a diasporan taxonomy as well that claims one as more authentic, “African”, or true than another.
Addressing some local devotees, he proclaimed, “You folks just ain’t doing it right,” he maintained that Orisha as practised in the United States was the only true and authentic form of worship because Americans had learned it directly from the ancestral source in Ife without the unfortunate, but forced, intervention of Christianity...In a small group of four local participants, one very sophisticated Orisha member began the discussion by laughing at those “arrogant Americans”. He said, “They come down here and are trying to tell us what to do – just like Americans!” The counter-argument developed here was that the Americans easily sidestep the syncretic Christian influence because they “have no Orisha tradition”. They are only modern adherents of the religion that “they picked up recently in trying to empower themselves as Africans in America.” (Henry 2003: 155)

The tug-of-war between the diasporan Yoruba community does none of us any justice and works against our greatest strengths in the Diaspora. While I encountered very few Americans participating in the Trinidadian Orisa scene, I have witnessed waves of Nigerians who are quickly transforming Orisa yards in Trinidad, even renaming a few. Since the conclusion of the 1999 World Orisa Conference people continue to stamp flags on the island in an effort to “tame a wild” practice. Yet, people are quietly questioning the Yoruba occupation of Trinidad.
II. History of African Based Traditional Religious Systems in Trinidad & Tobago

Shango

There are different perspectives on what “Shango” means or represents but there are some similarities in the descriptions. Herskovits, for example, in Trinidad Village (1947) identifies Shango as not merely a homogeneous spiritual system, but rather an umbrella system with a number of groups. Additionally, rather than focus on the syncretic value, he describes Shango as being part of an African esoteric system (Herskovits 1947:321). George Eaton Simpson (1970), on the other hand, combines the view of Shango as a syncretic and retained tradition that compares with other Afro-Caribbean religions in the New World:

The Shango cult in Trinidad combines elements of Yoruba traditional religion, Catholicism, and the Baptist faith. In its theology and rituals, it bears considerable resemblance to the Afro-Christian cults in the Catholic countries of Haiti (Vodun), Cuba (Santeria), and Brazil (Xango). All of these syncretistic cults retain the names of prominent African divinities, include animal sacrifices, feature drumming, dancing, and spirit possession, and utilize thunder stones and swords as ritual objects. Each of these groups believes in a total magico-religious complex which includes cosmological, theological, ceremonial, magical, and medical aspects. (Simpson 1970: 11).

The eponymous Sango is the name of one of the Orisa, or spiritual divinities, yet there are many which are recognized in Trinidad and several
reasons why the naming of the Orisa spiritual system as “Sango” initially became dominant. As Simpson reveals, the Orisa tradition traveled throughout the New World and one thing that traveled with the tradition and all of its morphing in the diaspora as if formed under different historical circumstances, are a few parallels such as the nearly seamless adaptation of Orisa to the Catholic system. Trinidad had a version of this although many of the saints associated with Orisa are different from the ones found in the Santeria and Candomble traditions. For example in the Cuban Santeria tradition, the Yoruba Goddess Osun is linked with the patron saint Caridad del Cobre, while in Trinidad the saint is St. Philomen. The following chart, coming from an article by Angelina Pollak-Eltz in the Caribbean Quaterly (1993) edition on “Spiritual Baptists, Shango and other African Derived Religions in the Caribbean” highlights some of the main divinities and characteristics of the Orisa worshipped in the Sango system:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>African</th>
<th>Christian</th>
<th>Sacrifices</th>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Emblems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sango</td>
<td>St. John</td>
<td>Bull, white cock or dove, sheep</td>
<td>Red or red/yellow</td>
<td>God of thunder and lightening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ogun</td>
<td>St. Michael</td>
<td>Cock, sheep, rum</td>
<td>Red/white</td>
<td>War, iron sword, 1st sacrifice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osain</td>
<td>St. Francis</td>
<td>White potatoes, colored cock, goat</td>
<td>Brown, red</td>
<td>Healing, herbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shakpana</td>
<td>Hyronimus</td>
<td>Coloured cock, goat</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Brings disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emanjah</td>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Chicken, duck, female goat</td>
<td>blue/white</td>
<td>Water, rivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mamalatay</td>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>Wine, cake, goat chicken</td>
<td>Brown/white</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oshun</td>
<td>Anna, Philomena</td>
<td>Goat, chicken</td>
<td>blue/white</td>
<td>Oceans, paddle is emblem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oya</td>
<td>St. Catherine</td>
<td>Goat, chicken</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Wind, rain, calabash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legbara</td>
<td>Devil</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Trickster, messenger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eshu -</td>
<td>St. Peter</td>
<td>Cacao, wine</td>
<td>Green/beige</td>
<td>Water, stick and key</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the surface, the Trinidadian system looks very similar to other diasporan systems. As stated earlier in the thesis, initially I set out to understand how Osun was worshipped in Trinidad and how interpretations of her differed from other places in the diaspora. What I encountered was fascinating, moving
beyond the study on Osun revealed additional layers I did not expect to find. Somehow I ended up in the middle of a contracting, spewing, bubbling wave of changes, and exchanges between, not only the Trinidadian community, but the Trinidadian, Nigerian, and other Diasporan Orisa communities. The following examples from my fieldwork in Trinidad give insight, not only into the way Trinidadians have described local practices, including “Spiritual Baptist,” but into the history, story, and details of various Trinidadian African spiritual practices.

*From Spiritual Baptist to Shouter: Legitimization & Spirituality*

Caribbean Baptist is very different from the purely American version, yet many trace the spiritual community to African Americans from the United States. Brereton states that:

A group of free Africans were the ‘Merikens”, people who were formerly enslaved in the southern states of the USA. The men had fought with the British armed forces in the War of 1812 between Britain and America, and when the war ended in 1814, most of them, along with their families were settled as free persons in Trinidad. They began to arrive in 1819 and they were settled in their original military companies, hence Fifth Company etc. It was decided to locate them in the area around Princes Town and further south, because these were pretty remote and wild areas at the time, and the last thing the planters wanted was for these proud African-Americans, with a military past, to be in close contact with the enslaved people on the plantations.
The Company Villages developed as self-contained communities of families who were very proud of their American origins and their army history, and also their faith – the Baptist faith so typical of southern African-Americans. One of their first leaders was William Hamilton, after whom the Cowen-Hamilton Secondary School in Princes Town is named (Cowen was an English Baptist Missionary.) (Brereton 2007:9)

Different from the United States version of Baptist, Trinidadian Baptist also referred to as Spiritual Baptist. In a booklet acquired during my field study in Trinidad, titled My Faith Spiritual Baptist Christian (1999), the Spiritual Baptists provide the following history and definition of their faith:

The Spiritual Baptist Faith is the name given to the religious group emerging among Africans in the nineteenth century in Trinidad. They were called “Shouters” when, in 1917, the ordinance was being passed against their mode of worship which was considered to be ‘too noisy’ and ‘too African’, and therefore uncivilised and unacceptable. (Gibbs de Peza 1999:12)

According to the Baptists, a rise of “folk religions” was found on the heels of Emancipation of enslaved Africans or “indigenised forms of Christianity and reinterpreted and syncretised forms of African Traditional religions” (Gibbs de Peza 1999:11). The position of the Baptists is defended by stating that, the Eurocentric Christian view is that to be Christian it cannot be African...On the other hand, the growth of
Afro-consciousness has led to an anti-Christian view
which seeks to break the “Christian hegemony’...Both
positions ignore certain realities about culture, religion,
civilization and Christianity. (Gibbs de Peza 1999:12)

However, Peza argues that to limit the scope of the Trinidadian Baptists to
such a polarity negates the “whole picture” of the spiritual system. She instead
reinforces that,

“the ‘whole picture’ is a complex collage. As the Faith
grew and the society developed many changes took
place, new pieces were added and new streams
developed which no true history can ignore. In spite of
the deviations and the new dimensions there is still a
basic structure” (Gibbs de Peza 1999:12)

While it is not clear if the “deviations” refer to a redirection from
Christianity or from more African Based spiritualities, what is clear is that there
are a number of similarities between the Baptists and the Orisa community. De
Peza continues:

Growing alongside the Spiritual Baptist/Shouters was
the African Traditional Religion (Shango). Because
adherents of both religions were of the same kith and
kin many similarities abounded, similarities in cultural
practices, in world view and in attitudes. As a result of
the similarities and of an absence of documentation and
teaching of the practices of the two religions some
syncretisation took place and a fusion and confusion
arose in the minds of the members and nonmembers alike. (De Peza 1999:19)

Citing DePeza’s above description, I observed the thin lines between what is categorized as “Shango” – which for the purposes of this research will refer to the Orisa system that is indigenous to Trinidad. A meeting with University of West Indies professor, and former director of the Centre for Creative and Festival Arts, Rawle Gibbons, as I have shown, was very helpful in understanding the differences between Baptist, Shouter, and Orisa. Professor Gibbons was key in discussing the various African based spiritual practices because of his role, not only as a practitioner himself, but also as one who understands the tradition from the perspective of a scholar and an artist. In his work as a playwright, Professor Gibbons incorporates the mythology and essence of Orisa. His plays such as “Ogun Ayan as in Pan” (2006) or “Guinea’s Other Suns” (2007) address questions, not only of spirituality, but also of the creativity in the Caribbean that in “Ogun Ayan in Pan” for example created the Steel Pan instrument under the restrictive codes that forbade the beating of drums. “Guinea’s Other Suns,” based on Maureen Warner Lewis’s book with the same title visually presented African creation under the restraints of enslavement.

After visiting a number of Orisa sites in Trinidad, and attending various events I still did not fully understand what “Shango” was in the Trinidadian sense, why it was called “Shango” nor what the difference was between “Shango” and the other indigenized faiths of Trinidad such as Baptist or Shouter. The following notes reveal the outcome of our discussion:43

I walked up the wooden steps leading to the Centre for Creative and Festival Arts. The floor was creaky and wooden as well, yet the space was inviting. As I

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43 Personal Communication: April 4, 2007 – UWI St. Augustine
stood in the corridor leading to his office my attention was drawn to the library and I walked to the back, stepped in and browsed a number of titles. Looking through the Centre for Creative and Festival Arts’s catalogue it became clear that in Professor Gibbons’s tenure as Director of the Centre, he archived a number of films, events, and dramatical renditions that chronicle Orisa in Trinidad as well as other themes relevant to Trinidad’s rich and diverse cultural heritage. But as I was there to study Orisa, it was the large volume of African-Trinidadian themes that most impressed me.

I was so distracted by the wealth of resources, that I barely heard the voice calling me. It was Professor Gibbons who signaled for me to meet with him in the classroom where he just finished teaching. I pulled out my notebook and began the interview. First I asked about “Shango” which is what is commonly affiliated with Trinidad. His response ensured me that his professorial nature continues beyond the classroom. Professor Gibbons informed me that before the 1970s the term “Shango” was used for the Orisha Tradition. He says that maybe they called it Shango because the people came from Oyo. He said that Shango may represent resurrection, and Carnival. He indicated that Baba Sam⁴⁴ said that Shango was empowered here at feasts as the deity of prosperity since Aje (deity of wealth) was not brought to Trinidad and Tobago. Some practices transferred like when there is a problem getting an answer with obi, one prostrates flat.

Gibbons says that he first met the Orisha through his work. Initially he just wanted to learn more for aesthetic purposes – for the theatre, but eventually he became a practitioner as well. Ogun speaks frequently through his work since that is his Orisha.

⁴⁴ deceased (2007); was a leading elder in the Shango tradition
He says of Oshun that pink is used because of Saint Philomen, there are aspects of Oshun that are yellow or yellow and gold, but pink is the most popular color. There are different aspects of Oshun. Gibbons adds that Oshun represents fresh water, rivers, bodily liquids (amorous love) and she is powerful. Oshun is the last to be offended (she is not quickly offended), but when she is she is severe. Oshun is also primordial waters.

I asked him about the differences between the Shouter, Spiritual Baptists and the Orisha people. Now I truly felt like I was in class as he drew a chart denoting the carnal differences, but the spiritual similarities between the traditions.

Gibbons says that the spiritual similarities are that all have their forms of initiation and divination, all whether via mourning, baptism, or initiation have a form of spiritual seclusion and spiritual travel that brings about the “gifts”. Gibbons’s chart and concise way of explaining the differences and similarities between the Trinidadian African-based spiritual practices was quite helpful, yet I still had a number of questions.

**Table 2 Baptist, Shouter, and Orisa Comparison (Gibbons 2007)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPIRITUAL BAPTIST</th>
<th>SHOUTER</th>
<th>ORISHA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African but Christian, no drum, no blood sacrifice</td>
<td>Christian elements, uses drum, elekes (beads) but not Orisha</td>
<td>Sacrifice, rites, divination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DIVINATION</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manifestations/mediums, “gifts”; cutting the bible; reading a candle to get images</td>
<td>Obi, cowries, divination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INITIATION</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptism = Initiation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Geysonno = headwashing; Orisha initiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mourning = Graduation; A mourning is a ceremony where one lies on the ground blindfolded for at least a week. Through the mourning one can receive gifts. The gifts may come through dreams. One can even receive gifts from the Orisha, but they will have to go to the Orisha/people to “deal with” those gifts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes the Spiritual Baptist and the Shouters have a headwashing as well.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Just a few days earlier on March 30, 2007, I attended a church service and celebration of Trinidad’s Spiritual/Shouter Baptist Liberation day. The holiday falls on March 30 to commemorate the repeal on March 30, 1951 of the “Shouter Prohibition Ordinance” that passed on 16 November 1917 (Source: library2.nalis.gov.tt cited: March 22, 2010). On the NALIS website45 for Trinidad and Tobago’s National Library, where they note the reasons for the ban had to do with the “Shouting”, dancing and “convulsions” during the church services, but also the fact that “the established churches regarded such behaviour as heathen and barbaric” (Source: library2.nalis.gov.tt cited: March 22, 2010). In addition, NALIS adds,

Although not said openly, the real reason for the antagonism towards the Baptists was that many of their practices were of African origin. Things African were associated with the shame and degradation of slavery and a large part of the population of Trinidad did not want to be reminded of this. Hence the strong lobbying to have the religion banned.

The ordinance would soon pass prohibiting Baptists from “erecting or maintaining any “Shouter House” or from holding meetings” (nalis.gov.tt: 2010). Furthermore if anyone was found violating the ordinance they were liable to be arrested, jailed and beaten. The NALIS website indicates these forceful punishments and ostracizing forced practitioners to flee to the hills and forests to practice their religion.

The turning point came during the 1920s and 30s when the Baptists became more vocal and went to the courts to raise their claims and to fight to

remove the ordinance. According to the National Library and Information System of Trinidad & Tobago,

It was only when Tubal Uriah “Buzz” Butler emerged as a labour leader that attitudes towards Baptists gradually began to change. Butler himself was a devoted Baptist and controversial figure. His public meetings were reminiscent of a Baptist prayer meeting. His prominence gave the religion some legitimacy although he too was jailed for his political beliefs.

Uriah Butler’s impact was far reaching even beyond the Spiritual Baptist community and today there is a highway named in his honor. Also each year during Labour Day there is a procession held through the streets of Fyzabad, which I was able to participate in, in 2008, that honors Butler and other leaders of the Labour Movement, such as CLR James.

In the 1940s another wave of resistance garnered support for legitimizing the Baptist faith and in 1951, after years and much lobbying the ordinance was lifted on March 30. The Baptists would celebrate yet another victory in 1996 as it became recognized nationally through an annual public holiday, under the then, Prime Minister Basdeo Panday.

In 2007 I was able to attend a Baptist service held in Port of Spain. The first noticeable indicator was that a majority of the people were either dressed in headties or had on full African attire. They dressed in a manner I observed in Nigeria as well, where people belonging to the same family, group, or organization would dress in the same cloth with the same accessories. Some of the Baptists wore beads (like my own), others donned Rosaries or a combination.
Even dressed in full African attire with my Orisa beads on, I did not feel out of place in the Baptist church meeting.

They announced award recipients from the Baptist community, among them was an elder named Mother Vi. I was able to speak\textsuperscript{46} to Mother Vi later that day and inquire about speaking with her further about the Baptist faith and what it represents in Trinidad. She was cloaked in an ensemble that was reminiscent of a Catholic nun. Her cloth was burgundy, her head covered with a rosary around her neck. Her face was ancient yet endearing. Her stare was timeless and yet just as inquisitive about me as I was about her. She agreed to meet with me and provided directions to her home in Santa Cruz.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 5 Spiritual Baptists (Source: Trinidad Guardian: 31 March 2004)**

Mother Vi is one of the oldest elders of a Spiritual Baptist community. At the age of 91 she is quick, alert, and continues to perform healing work in the community. Sitting there was like speaking with ancient history. She gave narratives of different episodes of her life, including her call to baptize and

\textsuperscript{46} Personal Communication: April 5, 2007 – Santa Cruz
mourn. She told of when she was a youth and saw Jesus in a vision calling her to the “life” she would live. She didn’t come to the Baptist faith until the 1960’s when she said that she was well in her age. Mother Vi spoke of the ways she can look at a person and “read” them, how she can tell what is ailing them. For a couple of years she has eaten no processed, cooked, or heavy foods. She relies on vegetables, fruits, and salad for her sustenance and it seems to have paid off.

Part of her story was about the difficulties and blessings of being able to see things that happen before they occur. She spoke of how she handled the messages she received to speak to people. She has also seen tragedy happen when people did not take heed to the message. She says it saddens her that she can only do but so much.

She also provided some information about the significance of the flags used in the Spiritual Baptist faith. These flags are called Insignia Flags and there are different types of insignia flags.

**Insignia Flags**

- **Nation Flag** – comes from Isaiah 5:26
- **Protection Flag** – Isaiah 11:10
- **Messenger Flag** – Isaiah 18:2
- **Deliverance Flag** – Exodus 2:3-5
- **Conquering Flag** – Isaiah 30:17
- **Defense Flag** – Zachariah 9:15, 10

**Colors of Flags**

- **White** – Purity
- **Red** – Blood
- **Pink** – Success
- **Blue** – Truth
• **Yellow** – Glory of God
• **Black** – Power

Mother Vi says that one should not post flags if they are not given to them. Flags are given to a person according to their height in spirit.

She says that a **warrior** is a perfect one on the road. A Spiritual Baptist, in her assessment is different from Orisha because they do not believe in blood sacrifice. She says that Baptist is not a religion, “we truly join Him”. Flags are put up with a ritual using milk, wine, corn (representing the word of God), and one reads, sings, and prays.

**After Mourning**

Mother Vi says that after one mourns a person becomes a Shepardsess or a Mother. She says that the flesh gives people problems so they train to live in the spirit. There is a center pole, which represents the boundary of our heart. Pants are not permissible for woman to wear. She says that people say “Hail Mary” incorrectly. Most say “Hail Mary Mother of God”, but they say “Hail Mary full of Grace”. Mother Vi gives spiritual baths that have ingredients such as oil, leaves, and powder.

Mourning occurs when one is blindfolded and is able to receive visions, or as she says, to receive God’s Holy name. She invited me to mourn, I smiled and declined, but if I were on her path I would have been honored to mourn with her.

So now I gained a better understanding of the differences between Shango and Baptist but what about Orisha?

Returning to the Orisa yard I encountered a practicesimilar to the ones the participants were describing as well as criticizing that combine both African and Christian elements. This particular house identifies as “Orisa”, but is not fully
integrated into a strictly Yoruban practice. It is more reminiscent of what is described as “Shango” or the original Trinidadian Orisa spiritual system.

When I inquired about the Orisa spiritual system that developed in Trinidad, without hesitation, I was directed to Sister. Sister’s shrine is in St. Helena, Trinidad and has a large community of practitioners. Her shrine is a prime example of the way the Trinidadians practiced Orisa before the push to re-authenticate and adopt the more Nigerian style of practice. I attended feasts at Sister’s shrine twice, the second time actually having the opportunity to speak with her privately about the Orisa tradition in Trinidad.

During the feast for Osun she shared a personal story with me about her Mourning experience, but what I observed that evening was even more revealing. Feasts, originally part of the Baptist and or Shango faith are held annually or bi-annually depending on what the Orisa request. Warner Lewis traces the practice to an event called a Sakara which she defines as “an event mounted for the purpose of ancestor commemoration. It was put on by a family on an annual basis and was intended to revere the memory of family members who had died and to placate their spirits” (Warner Lewis 1991: 5). She points out that Sakara was a Hausa word that was adopted by other communities in Trinidad. In today’s time it is just called a feast.

This event hosted47 by Sister, is held bi-annually. She has a house of Osun and a choir named Voices of Oshun who recently completed a CD along with Professor Gibbons and the late Orisa elder Baba Sam. The following is a description of Sister’s feast:

Sister, as she is known in the community, is the head of the Oshun Shrine in St. Helena. She holds feasts twice a year. When I asked if I could come back to the

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47 Personal Communication: April 18, 2007 – St. Helena
shrine to talk to her, she began to tell a story to me. I had to draw closer because she is very soft spoken. Sister said proudly that she is a mother of ten (10) children. Her grandfather used to run the church she now has as a shrine.

Pausing as if she were remembering the moment, she says that there was a long time that she did not talk to people. It was not necessarily that she didn’t want to, she just couldn’t talk to people for a long time.

She described her mourning ceremony where she mourned at a river and told me of a strange event that happened, which I will keep confidential. Sister sees Oshun as straightforward and says that one has to listen to Oshun; that sometimes she can have a strange way of teaching, but one must listen. She says she found Oshun at the age of 13. The feast was beginning so we ended the conversation for the time.

Before entering the door I could hear the clanging of bells and the harmonious chants that opened the week-long ceremony. When I reached the feast it was 5-till midnight and the event was only starting. The wood-fire burning at the entrance to the palais[^48], created a haze about the place contributing to the atmosphere. The brisk smell of wood burning slightly blanketed the sweet smell of resin incense. Fruits such as apples, pears, bananas, pineapples, and grapes hung from the ceiling. Pink was everywhere. Men and women alike accented their clothing and adornments in this soft pink color, symbols were used such as a boat anchor to represent Mama Osun. When it was time to “feast” they arranged an assortment of carrots, spinach, grapes, honey, wine, salad, lettuce, pineapples, melons, and other produce. The vegetables were so lush, abundant and healthy looking that one could feel the vibrancy of green life just by looking at the plentiful offering; these items, laid atop a spread of pink material. The abundant fruits filled

[^48]: shrine
up nearly the entire center space of the palais. Later they added candles and other items to the assortment.

Before 12am those present sang the Christian liturgical songs. Right at midnight there was a repeated reading of the Lord’s Prayer. Immediately after midnight all of the Bible verses and Christian references stopped and the members went directly into Orisha songs. Ingredients like fruits were hanging from the ceiling, and so many were in stacks in the middle of the palais. Today there were palm fronds as well. I asked about the fire burning in the front yard and in front of the palais. They said that as long as there is an ebo/ibo (feast) fire must be present. Furthermore, they say that the wood/fire represents Esu.

They did more prayers and sang the song Ise Oluwa, Kole Bale O...which is a Christian song in Yorubaland, that says Ise Oluwa (The work of God) Kole Baje O (is not spoiled/bad). In Trinidad they say “bale” instead of “baje” but I recognize the song. After singing this song they went to the four corners with different ingredients: powder, incense, Florida water, etc. They served food (Buss up Shot) and we left after the food was served.

As I watched the ceremony, I thought of the secret churches of African peoples, described in narratives of enslavement. How African people would have secret “meetings” in the woods and would include a Christian part and when no one was watching the African part would take over. Especially the way the members of Sister’s shrine were dressed or carried themselves sparked this vision. Most people were dressed in white with their heads tied. They carried machetes and danced in a circle, like the ring shout and carried ingredients to different corners as they returned to the center moving in syncopated patterns, changing directions at once.
What I experienced at Sister’s shrine was different from any other Orisa experience I previously encountered. First, the feast format was different from the Santerian tambor or bembe I was used to. Most other ceremonies I attended in other diasporan traditions began much earlier in the evening and did not include the bible reading nor the ceremonial placement of ingredients in different corners too. Also there was a specific liturgical opening with an unfamiliar rhythm and drum beat. In the other diasporan traditions Esu is usually the Orisa sang to first, opening the ceremony.

Even so, as a practitioner, I could relate to the experience and enjoyed sharing that window into the Trinidadian Orisa experience. At this feast, the people may not have been speaking perfect Yoruba. I never heard any of the songs sang when I visited “the source”, yet the Orisa were present and danced
around the modern day warriors as they played creole instruments, singing Yoruba songs, to a Trinidadian cadence and a pan-African rhythm.

**III. Artistic & Creative "Warriors of the Word"**

Through these mirrors of the Orisa it is clear that even through modernity, the Orisa live on. This is important because as Poet Laureate of Port of Spain, Eintou Pearl Springer states, modernity and tradition do not have to be divorced from each other, that for our survival they have to co-exist. She used the platform of the Rapso seminar held at the National Museum of Trinidad & Tobago in Port of Spain to bring forward this message and to emphasize the continuity of the integrity within African traditional practices, no matter the medium, technology, or rhythm used to express the tradition – such as in Rapso.

One of Rapso forefathers, Brother Resistance has a description of tradition and modernity working hand and hand through the voice of the Griot – Chantuelle – and Rapsonian. His website states that although people feel that he began the movement,

Brother Resistance himself insists that Rapso can be traced back to the oral traditions of Africa, when the Griot was the historian, counselor and poet of the tribe. After the middle passage, on the sugar-cane plantation, the Griot’s name was changed to Chantuelle. The role played by this individual was transformed as well, and he became the voice that made the suffering of the slaves bearable... The Rapso

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49 Eintou Pearl Springer – Personal communication May 11, 2007
artiste is therefore the revitalization of the old Griot/
Chantuelle traditions in perspective of our modern
day society”
(www.brotherresistance.com/biography.htm cited
May 30, 2007)

Resistance defines Rapso as “the power of the word, in the riddum of the
word.” In the keynote speech presented at the Rapso Seminar, Carole Boyce
Davies spoke on the role of the artist/es as Griots:

Each artist talks about power of the word, of being
influenced by the cultural presence of calypso,
carnival, the drums – oil and skin –; the living legacies
of Orisha, the inventions of steelband, and the actual
knowledge transmissions of the oral tradition that is
continuous. (Boyce Davies 2007: Keynote speech
Rapso Seminar).

Just like the Egungun jumping out of the shadows of the Moko Jumbie,
these “word warriors” as Eintou calls them carry within their arts the
‘manifestations’ of their African pasts but the realities of their modern day
present. Like in Sister Ava’s song, “Don’t be afraid to be a Rasta,” (2007) she sings
in African attire with her locks tied high, about the struggles of living in a
westernized society that castigates those who deviate from the societal norm.
From the drum rhythms, to the content, the manner of presenting to the call and
response styles rapso has a constant flow of tradition and modernity.

Music is not the limitation of this extension. Eintou Pearl Springer even
talks about Lancelot Layne, the father of Rapso, helping to organize the Lopinot
Celebration which is now the annual Orisha Family Day. Throughout the Rapso
conference side by side there were posted pictures of Layne as the Father of Rapso and of Cheryl Byron, wearing a Nigerian style *gele*\(^{50}\) as the Mother of Rapso.

There is an important connection between music, poetry, dance, performing/visual arts and the transmission of knowledge via spirituality. In that sense it is a language of sounds that falls within the trajectory of African continuity. Kamau Brathwaite’s poem “bridges of sound” which metaphorically represents the way music connects the African Diaspora is explained in a wider context as Carolyn Cooper phrases it:

> The reverberant metaphor “bridges of sound”...evoke[s] the substrate cultural ties that reconnect Africans on the continent to those who have survived the dismembering middle passage. The paradoxical construct “bridges of sound” conjoins the ephemerality of aural sensation with the technological solidity of the built environment. This arresting metaphor affirms the cunning capacity of Africans in the diaspora to conjure knowledge systems out of nothing as it were. Africans, taken away without tools, were able to rebuild material culture from the blueprint of knowledge carried in our heads. In long historical perspective, the middle passage thus functions like a musical bridge – the transitional passage connecting major sections of a musical composition. (Cooper 2004: 265 -66).

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\(^{50}\) Head-tie
In other words, our music and our rhythms are embedded within the trajectory of African peoples in the diaspora and carries with it, not only melody and sound but historical codes that transmit windows into our identity. Some artist/es display Africa in more subtle ways, while others carry an embodiment of traditional African customs in their music, in their rhythms, and in their daily lives. This next section will talk about Ella Andall, a warrior who lives Africa daily and whose philosophy about Orisa and challenges people to look at her in a different way – one that embraces the totality of her essence as a ‘life force’ and all that it entails.

**Ella Andall – Chantuelle, Diasporan Orisa Devotee/Elder**

_Say My Name_ - Ella Andall

Ella Andall Healing Fire

Do you know what strength and courage
Brought me through the middle passage
Still I stride with pride and dignity
As I fight to cling to my Ancestry
With these hands of steel forging Africa
And the blood of all the Yoruba
You who came dancing – From my womb
Now you lay silent – As a tomb
Now it’s time to wake from your life of death
Time to regain all your lost respect
Say my name (say it, say it) – I’m an African
Say your name – we are Africans
For survival – we need a revival

_Figure 7 Jessica Alarcon, Ella Andall, and Tasha (participant), Emancipation 2007 - Port of Spain_

One could not talk about the embodiment of Africa and fail to mention Trinidadian-based songstress, Ella Andall. Her style is so unique it is hard to categorize her. She proudly states, “When you see me, you see the whole of Africa full in the face” (Ella Andall personal communication April 2007). I set out to interview Ms. Andall about the Orisa Osun. Ms. Andall is of particular importance because she continues to hold on to the Trinidadian and Grenadian way of Orisa practice while incorporating aspects of the Nigerian worship into her daily routine. She does so without any weight or judgement on one version verses the
other, but instead with an understanding that each method of practice is shaped by the environment in which the practice exists.

I was standing in the line at a reception following a lecture of Professor Funso Aiyejina at UWI. The room was full of Orisa devotees and scholars such as Earl Lovelace, Rhoda Reddock, and others. Knowing that I am a visitor, those with whom I was attending the lecture assisted me with meeting different people of interest. When I nearly reached the refreshments table a young lady motioned for me to shake the hands of a person who was standing in line behind me. “This is Ella,” she said. I was cordial, but not knowing who “Ella” was I just said hello and moved on through the line.

I clearly didn’t receive the message the first time so Greater unseen forces stepped in once again to grab my attention. I was standing in the background at the reception, and this time a different young woman signaled for my attention. Since my mind frequently travels, I can’t even remember who it was that was calling me, but she asked, “Have you met Ella?” At that moment I felt as if a powerful hand tapped me on the shoulder, causing me to really look up and pay attention. This time it really hit me. I jumped back and said, “Ella? Ella Andall? I would like to talk to you about the Orisha tradition in Trinidad”.

I could not believe it was her, and she, being such a humble person, was cool as she sat at a table by herself. I asked if I could sit with her to talk about my work, she gave me her number and I called to arrange meeting. She answered the phone with a voice that was pleasant, but serious at the same time. I could tell she was about business. After stating who I was, she asked what specifically I was working on and what I wanted to speak about.

I was already nervous but now I had to find a way around the fact that when I set out to meet with Ms. Ella Andall, I had no idea of how she would be
connected to the narrative of Osun how she would relate to the wider questions of this research – in other words, I wasn’t sure what I really wanted to speak about. When she found out my research then, was about Osun, the elation jumped through the phone as she shared with me that she just finished the last track of a CD devoted to Osun. This was a good sign and even furthermore it was proof that sometimes things just fall into place.

I arrived at her house early, anticipating the interview. She appeared gracefully with her trademark gele\textsuperscript{51} as she greeted me in Yoruba. “\textit{Alaafia}\textsuperscript{52}” she said, “\textit{Se alaafia ni?}\textsuperscript{53}” Immediately I felt at home, especially since Mother Ella hugs you like she remembers you. After going to different corners of her yard to greet the Orisa, we sat at her table to discuss.

Honestly, when I set out to meet with Ms. Andall, I had no idea of how she would be connected to the narrative of Osun nor of how she would relate to the wider questions of this research. She said,

You see you are talking about Osun, and let me tell you something. You reach to me to talk about Osun, you never knew of me before you came and I have been working with Osun to put Osun energy, the women energy out there, and I try my best to interpret the song, going to fasting and so to bring Osun, how Osun should be so people would see Osun from the very way I sing for Osun.

This was a good sign and even furthermore it was proof that sometimes things just fall into place. While we talked about Osun she sat at the head of the

\textsuperscript{51} Headwrap
\textsuperscript{52} Peace/greetings
\textsuperscript{53} I hope you are well (how are you?)
table peeling Oranges (one of Osun’s favorite fruits) and handing pieces of the fruit over to share with me. I must have eaten five whole oranges while sitting there. When I was feeling awkward because the discussion was moving in a direction that was not planned, Mother Ella said,

Osun here you know? You know Osun is here. Because it’s two women believe in a particular essence of womanhood. One is a elder, one is younger; Two of them [younger] because she⁵⁴ (points to visiting student) manifests Osun and she walks in here today. So, there is fullness of Osun here. So even if you start this where you start this, I know Osun will deliver this to you so you can deliver it so that we will be a better people, so that there will be a better understanding of our spirituality.

Osun’s presence was definitely felt and Yeye⁵⁵ seemed to be dancing on Mother Ella’s tongue with honey on her feet as the characteristics of Osun were described:

Well see most people give Osun a face, mine is the epitome of femininity and the power of women...There is this Osun that is embedded in us, a spirit that is the essence of womanhood ...I know there is nothing more powerful than woman for me and if Osun is sweet waters then Osun is life itself. Osun is embedded in woman and Osun is

⁵⁴ talking about a student who was visiting as well
⁵⁵ Affectionate name for Osun, means mother
womanhood and Osun could plant, could build, could give birth to the people to gods and kings; woman can do that. And woman should see everything as extension of themselves and not themselves. Woman should be extension of God.

Mother Ella is not a trained scholar, yet I have rarely known Osun described so eloquently and precisely. She laughs as she affirms “is me mother teach me”. She says she was taught by the community, the Orisa and the Ancestors. It seems that for her, Orisha are not just a distant energy; they represent humanity and the lessons that can be learned from understanding their energies. Her mouth must have been jealous during this conversation because all of her words were coming from the depths of her spirit. I nearly fell off my chair when she started singing.

She called the Orisa with all of her heart and it seemed she was waking them one by one. My entirety smiled wide as she sang to Osun. I clanged on glass cups with a spoon making a bell sound and singing along. Sitting in her kitchen full of young people playing drums, singing, laughing, smiling, and sharing a meal, Mother Ella was looking just like Olomoyoyo. Although her crowning Orisa is private information, she is a true embodiment and representation of each of them in different ways and I am sure that Osun is pleased with her work.

I am still stunned by this serendipitous reunion which theoretical “book” research cannot explain. It was such an honor to be in the presence of such a great person whose greatness comes from her generosity, good character, and incomparable talent – but most of all from her wisdom and her humility. Mother Ella is a warrior. She is one who may not recite Ifa verses in perfect Yoruba, nor

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56 Osun, mother of many children
does she know all of the rituals and rites, but she does however, fight to ensure that she best representation of the Orisa that she can be.

From music, to sound, to speech, and beyond Andall is certainly a warrior of the word who merges transmittals of Ancestry with a flow set in the current era, and this returns us to an analysis of language, words and rhythms. Andall identifying as a Chantuelle serves two major purposes. First is the distinction of her as a modern day griotte, teacher through the arts. Second is her location directly within a Trinidadian framework. In terms of her orature and connection with the larger diasporan context, I cite Glissant who states in *The Poetics of Relation* (1997) that:

It is not just literature... these musical expressions born of silence: Negro spirituals, blues, persisting in towns and growing cities; jazz, *biguines*, and calypsos, bursting into barrios and shantytowns; salsas and reggaes, assembled everything blunt and direct, painfully stifled, and patiently differed into this varied speech. This was the cry of the Plantation, transfigured into the speech of the world. For three centuries of constraint had borne down so hard that, when this speech took root, it sprouted in the very midst of the field of modernity; that is, it grew for everyone. This is the only universality there is: when, from a specific enclosure, the deepest voice cries out. (Glissant 1997: 73-4)

Enslavement was one of the most arduous enclosures the African Diaspora has had to endure yet, even through that system African people managed to create, retain, gain and to *manifest* on their own accord in the New World.
IV. Manifestations

The shrine of Orisa worshippers

At the gate of most Orisa yards there is a goblet for Esu. People must greet Esu before entering the grounds and upon leaving. One style common in Trinidad is for there to be a row of Orisa in a line sometimes with cinderblocks forming the wall containing the Orisa. Many of the shrines I visited dressed the statues/representations of the Orisa in the color of the particular Orisa.

Wood will be burning in front of the palais when a ceremony/event is taking place. Most houses have a pond in their yard for Osun. The owner of the yard will use the pond for spiritual purposes. Sometimes a manifestation of Osun will come into the pond and bring other people in the pond to clean them or to perform a particular ritual.

Osun coming to Visit – Personal accounts of encounters with Osun

“The Jumbie” – Osun house in Arima

Iya Omotaiwo of Ile Awon Osun in Arima is of Ghanian, Indian and Nigerian Ancestry. She says that the first religion she knew was Hindu, but she also was a practicing Catholic, Anglican, Adventist and Baptist. She traveled through so many spiritual forms because she was always searching, and then there was a jumbie who kept following her.

She said that this jumbie has been with her from young. Her parents tried to get rid of it for a long time taking her to the church, the obeah man, to all kinds of healers and consulters. The jumbie would pelt people out of places or tell people about what was going on in their personal lives. The woman always questioned the information that was in the bible and why the jumbie that was on her would never leave. The jumbie would speak and challenge people and no one
seemed to be able to control this jumbie or keep it from speaking the secrets of people. Iya Omo Taiwo went for mourning at a river and the Jumbie told her to initiate. Later she found that the jumbie was Osun.

**Manifestations**

I had the opportunity to witness a number of Osun manifestations in Trinidad. Both males and females carried the energy of Osun. Some people who manifested Orisa would bulge their eyes very wide and would dance in a particular way that was sensual. Sometimes they would open their arms and spin. They would ask for honey that would be poured in the mouth or for milk which is used to cleanse.

- **Manifestation of Osun in Petit Valley** - The manifestation was dancing with his hands on his waist. They took off his shirt and he was given a yellow cloth to wrap around him. He went into the pond, his eyes were opened wide and he was talking in a high pitched voice, “me mama Oshun,” he said. He called for milk, honey, and grains. A few priests were standing around the pond. He took the honey and milk and smeared it on the people’s faces and then called for some to enter the pond. The other participants were called into the pond and were given a handful of grains. They were told to pray into the grains and then to throw them into the pond. A woman manifesting Ogun joined the Osun manifestation in the pond and they were swimming around. The water was then

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57 Spirit possessions
splashed on the participants while the drums were played to Osun.

Later the manifestation of Osun went to the front of the yard and drew a dollar ($) sign in honey in front of the gate and asked people to pray.

• **Quiet Manifestation** – I was sitting with a group of people who were just having a conversation about the Orisa. One of the people changed completely in demeanor but continued to talk about what Osun represents. She just did not seem herself. Later in the conversation they were having, she coughed and asked what happened. She was talking as a manifestation for over an hour.

These are the spiritualities of Trinidad through the voices of Trinidadians of various means, ages and backgrounds. This chapter opened with an exchange between myself and a Trinidadian, representing a difference of spiritual path bound together by the similarity of a wider historical path of being of the diaspora. Yet, it is not simply a question of New World African Diasporaness, it is a matter of responding to difference as members of the entire African Diaspora. Nigerian professor Funso Ayejina is a prime example of a Continental African Nigerian who enters the Caribbean and in fact embraces elements of the local Trinidadian culture as he combines them and explains them through his native Yoruba framework. Even the title of his lecture points to such a “bridge of sound” as he draws upon local parlance combined with the Yoruba as “From Esu to Bacchanal Aesthetics” implies.
This lecture represents yet another means of pulling together in the diaspora and moving away from re-fragmenting ourselves in the diaspora as we re-encounter ourselves.

**V. Atanda’s Rebellion & the “choices” of Diasporic Reconnection – Nigerian Yoruba Scholar speaks on Orisa**

The title of Professor Aiyejina’s Lecture was “Decolonizing Myth: From Esu to Bacchanal Aesthetics”. He opened his lecture with a story of the Atanda Rebellion myth about the Godhead’s head that was smashed by a rock and split into many divinities. There were only two people on earth and one wanted to be freed. Aiyejina was interested in the contrast of Judas and Esu. His undergrad play was St. Judas and he felt that if Judas had not been the traitor he was there would be no Jesus as a saviour.

The inspiration for his talk was a radio show that was centered on a woman having a Yoruba name that began with Esu (like Esuyomi). The radio personality was questioning her and asking her if she had a real name and making a mockery of the name and tradition. He did not call in that night because he felt that he only had partial information but he made a promise that when he had the opportunity that he would talk about Esu. This was the opportunity and the fulfillment of the promise.

He talked about colonization and the use of religion in the colonial agenda. Ayejina says that, “the roads to the market are plenty” so the Yoruba don’t proselytize and that Esu’s eyes watch over the divining process. The Europeans capitalized on what he calls the “Three (3) C’s in Yorubaland”: Commerce,
Conversion, and Christianity. Some of the instrumental figures in these 3Cs were two Africans, Samuel Ajayi Crowther and reverend Samuel Johnson who translated bibles into Yoruba and worked to develop the written language in Yorubaland.

Aiyejina told the story of the tow-toned cap of Esu that caused a quarrel between the two friends. This story was used to demonstrate the dual consciousness, half empty/full story and that there are multiple truths. In another way this can represent the “difference” between the Nigerian and diasporan versions of the Orisa tradition – a quarrel between, not even two friends, but a quarrel within ourself. That we come from the same body of people and some of us see Esu (the spiritual tradition) riding in on a red cap, while others see it as black – not knowing that Esu is wearing a two-toned suit that has one side which is red, and the other side black, but still one suit. Neither side is wrong, just a different way of seeing things. We in the diaspora (including Africa) should pull together and stop trying to teach the other side how to paint the colors of Esu’s cloth differently, because even if we did, the original paint would remain under the stain.

**Conclusion**

Surviving and fighting for survival are a part of warriorhood. 93 year old Baptist Elder Mother Vi defines a Warrior as a “perfect one on the road” while Mother Vera, Orisa elder and wife of the late Baba Sam, says that a “warrior is a powerful woman in the spirit who is not afraid of anything. You do everything powerfully” (Mother Vera personal communication 2007), but the above story takes the necessity of “warriorhood” further. We did not just survive and defend
ourselves through the fires of hope and prayer – we created and moved beyond our situation.

Like Atanda’s rebellion, we in the New World have been divided and split enough to re-fragment ourselves. Sure we have been betrayed, even by some of our own, but from the ashes of the Middle Passage, we have arisen like Pheonixes – creating, re-writing, and re-membering a broken past. Without Judas, as Aiyejina stated, Jesus would not have been a saviour. Traited, and trotted, we continue to tread new grounds and break into the future as if we were meant to run across the horizon.
CHAPTER 4

WHAT IS AFRICA TUH WE? – TRINIDAD’S ORISA COMMUNITY AND THE POLITICS OF AUTHENTICITY

The drums reached into the streets, drawing nearer. Sweet sounds propelled me towards the Orisa yard as my body seemed to float to the rhythm of the chants. A chorus jolted from the gate as the devotees summoned Osun. The sun seemed to echo the warmness of the lace I was wearing. It was Nigerian. Pretty. Yellow, lined with green – earrings to match. De drums get stronger and so did the pull. Upon reaching the place everybody was singin “Ayaba – Yeye Olomi – Ayaba”. My body begin to sway as a manifestation take meh over. A next man pelt he body into the pond. They say Shango take he. The drums roll and come to a halt. A lady stammer into the middle of de circle. She pause and look around like if she manifesting a spirit or something. She drop ah spin and say, in ah foreign accent, “Finally Africa has come to Trinidad”.

I wish I could say I was writing a fiction, but the above-described scene is pulled from a personal observation during field study in Trinidad (2007). At that moment in the ceremony, the Trinidadian participants looked upon each other in an unspoken disbelief and amazement with what just took place. This scene would be repeated again and again during my residency, as Nigerians and other
foreigners claimed that they were bringing the “authentic,” “true,” Yoruba/African religion, culture, and identity to Trinidad. With a stunned numbness, I watched in awe, painfully observing the deep desire and yearning of this group of Trinidadians to connect with “the source” – with “home” – and with “Mother Africa”, being met with an exploitative, nearly condescending, perception of indigenous Trinidadian Orisha practices by the continental Yoruba. Both are caught in a web of authenticity and the personal relation to their perception of what is meant by authentic.

This chapter begs the question – If it is Africa they are bringing, then “What is Africa tuh We?” as one would say in Trinidadian colloquial English. The title, borrowed from the opening line of Countee Cullen’s poem Heritage (1927), suggests both a connection to and a distance from Africa – Whose Africa?, What Africa? – which corresponds with the notion of authenticity. The subtitle, claiming the politics of authenticity is constructed under the premise that no culture, no people, no moment, nor measure is static. The greatest constant of existence is change. Change has happened across the board and throughout time as the perception of authentic changes based on the factors of perception.

This chapter is structured around the question of “Being” for Africans in Trinidad and Tobago as it relates, both to a spiritual Pan-African identity in the diaspora, as well as to the search to better comprehend their Dasein. While we recognize the history of Pan African activism and political movements, Pan-Africanism in the context of this paper connects Africans in the Diaspora to a Yoruba Diasporic identity through a, socio-political historical movement, as well as through the geographical mass-movement (exodus) of African peoples, which contributed to the “Pan-ness”. The physical “MOVEments” and configured pluralities of combined genetics and geographies transformed us from Ijebu,
Mandé, Toucouleur, KhoiKhoi, Shona, Igbo or Luyia to “African,” “African-American,” “Afropean,” “Afro-Caribbean” or “African-Trinidadian”.

The search for an authentic self within the African Diaspora has been at once thrilling, cathartic, and joyously exciting and on the other hand has been wrought with pain, ambivalence, and with the unremitting bottomless well of the unknown. Philosopher Martin Heidegger would surmise that the yearning and burning questioning of self is, at times, a burden to self\(^59\). In *Meaning and Authenticity* (2008), Brian Braman writes that the importance of authenticity for Heidegger lies in the need to “provide the foundation for fundamental ontology – the question of Being” (Braman 2008:8). Furthermore he writes about Heidegger’s concept of *Dasein* which literally means “there-being,” and in vernacular German means “existence,” a concept which Braman says cannot be separated from the question of what it means to be authentic. *Dasein*, Braman writes, is:

> a burden to itself. ...In other words, as a burden to itself and a question to itself, Dasein (there-being) can never fully grasp its possibilities outside the context of the ‘they’; yet the ‘they is shot through with misinterpretations and misunderstandings” (Braman 2008:8).

Returning to the Heidegger’s philosophy and a further elucidation of *Dasein*, Braman’s analysis is that according to Heideger, “the question of authentic (*Eigentlichkeit*) or inauthentic human living... begins by first describing the lived and concrete situation of the person. (Braman 2008:9). Through questioning self and self in relation to *other*, the burden and question move to the surface.

\(^{59}\) Heidegger’s farewell speech to his students upon departing from Freiburg to Marburg
Colonization, enslavement and *diasporization* have all contributed to the dichotomous superlatives that have been awarded in the diaspora. In other words Africa becomes both the “Source” for diaspora (question) and a conceptual “primitive” “Dark Continent” (burden), while on the other hand the children of the diaspora are perceived as both a fantasy of the free world (question) and as the diluted estranged *Oyinbo*\(^6\) who sprang from Africa, but are sometimes perceived as other than African (burden).

The circumstantial and yet primarily involuntary dis-connect with what is perceived to be *home* instigates a desire within diasporan Africans to re-connect, re-member, and to re-construct the missing pieces that were lost in the construct of “diaspora”. So, if it is Africa that those of the diaspora seek then first we must grasp an understanding of Africa.

**What is Africa/n? – *Africanizing Africa***

In relation to the Caribbean, both the Continental Yoruba and some Trinidadians regard the practices and culture coming directly from Africa as singularly authentic and the Trinidadian version of Yoruba as an inauthentic derivative. However, it must be noted that contemporary *Yoruba* and *African* identities are in and of themselves, in part colonial constructs.

It is one of the great ironies of modern African history that it took European colonialism to inform Africans that they were indeed Africans. Europe’s greatest service to the people of Africa was not Western civilization... or even Christianity ...Europe’s

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\(^6\) Yoruba word translated as “white person” or “foreigner”
The supreme gift was the gift of African identity (Mazrui 2002: 37-38).

If a diasporan African is not considered an authentic African because he or she is not from the continent directly, then who is the *authentic* African but a constructed byproduct of European hegemony. The term Yoruba, as well is dated to the 19th century post- Berlin Conference. Prior to this, the Yoruba carried the names of the sub-groups such as Ijebu, Ilesa, Oyo, Tivi, or Ife (Odaye). Within the Yoruba traditional practices – culture, accent, and the fundamentals of language vary from village to village. Even more to the point is the fact that some villages are less than a mile apart – yet their mannerisms, speech patterns and cultural codes are completely different. This distinction is key because it highlights the fact that the generic *Yoruba* is no less homogeneous than is *Africa* or *African*. Each of these occupy a space within the designation of a constructed “Africa”. This then, reverses the question and re-poses to the Nigerian *African* the question of what is Africa to the African?

Some, such as Mazrui (1986) argue that Africa is just as much a concept as it is a landmass. When one gazes upon *Africa* in that light, it removes Africa from a geographic locality and transforms it into a fluid space of limitless possibilities. First, it is important to make note of the fact that although Africa was a generic label marketed by the colonial project, this labeling came with some reluctance. For a long time colonizers used the terms *savages* or the pejoratively intended label *natives* to describe “Africans”. Even in the eventual appellation of Africa/n, there was a specific concept associated with Africa, no different from the way in which “West” was constructed. Stuart Hall writes of “West” by stating that, “We have to use short-hand generalizations, like ‘West’ and ‘western’, but we need to remember that they represent very complex ideas and have no simple or single
meaning…” (Hall 1992: 15), he continues, “the West’ is no longer only in Europe, and not all of Europe is in the West...‘the West’ is as much an idea as a fact of geography...[it is] a system of representation...[that] provides a standard or a model of comparison” (Hall 1992: 15 - 16). In a like manner, Africa and African have distinct meanings especially when it comes to identity and goes beyond continental Africa. Mazrui writes of the roles the Trans-Atlantic enslavement of Africans had on defining “African”. According to Mazrui, there were four strategies employed by Europeans to “Africanize Africa” which he identifies as:

1. Monopoly over cartography and map making – making Europe and other Imperial powers central
2. Racism in history – “The humiliation and degradation of Black Africans across the centuries contributed to their mutual recognition of each other as ‘fellow Africans’”
3. Imperialism and Colonisation
4. Dialectical – fragmentation of Africa in terms of artificial state boundaries (Mazrui 1986:101)

Of each of these tactics, Mazrui writes, “the most relevant criteria of their Africanity was their skin colour” (Mazrui 1986: 104). He also notes that the “discovery” of the New World inflicted “irreparable damage” upon Black Africa since it at the same time ushered in a “new wave of racism”. The fragmentation of Africa and the shared oppressive state forced the entire (Black) diaspora into an identity of Africanness. This MOVEment, dis-location, dis-placement, and fragmentation also would prompt the diaspora to reverse the disjointure by re-Africanisation and re-connecting. Trinidadian scholar Tony Martin writes:

Pan-Africanism became inevitable with the inception of the trans-atlantic slave trade. Europe, by
scattering Africa to the winds, inevitably if unwittingly set in motion the process which would bring scattered Africa together again, at a higher level. It was inevitable that the forcibly uprooted Africans would yearn to rediscover their homeland. It was inevitable that the journey to rediscovery would be a journey against the colonialism that had uprooted Africa in the first place. “(Martin 1983: vii)

This Pan-African push, of course was countered by various decolonial means similar to the four outlined by Mazrui. The rupture caused by the colonial project as well as in the division of Africa caused a symbolic death – a transition from the pre-African Self to the emergence of a new Self as identities were recreated in the diaspora. Bramin states that, “‘The Self emerges only with the breakdown of self’ and furthermore that, “Heidegger sees Dasein as ‘being-towards-death’ (Sein-zum-Tode), which is at the same time being-towards-a-possibility of being-a-self” (Braman 2008:19). The traits that were been conceptualized as “African” were transported to the New World and began to take on a new form. Colonization and creolization continue to (re)shape the African and the practice of beliefs, morals, values and expressions of spirituality. The next section returns to the original question of what Africa is to the Trinidadian.

What is Africa to WE? Conceptions of Africa in the Caribbean

Like a child pulled from the bosom of its mother, the exilic nature of the dispersal of Africans in the diaspora has caused many to sometimes feel like a
motherless child – a long way from home. Under the conditions of enslavement, some would find it remarkable that Africans in the diaspora have managed to maintain elements of their traditional worship, let alone the names, characteristics, and rituals associated with the divinities.

In order to survive, changes had to be made that permitted communities to hold on to what they could remember. This is why even the most “authentically” proclaimed Yoruba practices in Trinidad still carry a distinct Trinidadianess or diasporaness. As Elder states, “a Shango shrine and a Shango feast in Trinidad in the 20th Century cannot in every detail compare with their African counterparts. This is expected with the passage of time and the exiling of the religious culture of Africa” (Elder 1988: 3).

In Trinidad Yoruba (1997) Maureen Warner Lewis writes about the “African Creole Cultural Ambiance”. She informs readers that under the harsh conditions of enslavement, Africans protected their culture and guarded their secrets with a vengeance. Sometimes they did not even share the specifics with their own children. (Schuler 1977: 178-79 cited in Warner Lewis 1997). Thus, many of the Africans in the New World were torn between perpetuating their culture and protecting the secrets of the culture. This situated the offspring of the African-born in the New World in a different place from their parents. Warner Lewis writes, “Yoruba Creoles reproduced their parents’ culture-forms, but either coopted [sic] other names for these cultural expressions or modified them by replacing or integrating elements form other ethnic sources. Such names and cultural elements were non-Yoruba African and European in origin” (Warner-Lewis 1997: 54). What began as a move for survival turned into the adaptation of each other’s cultural forms or imitation as Barbadian scholar Kamau Brathwaite

61 From traditional Negro spiritual “Motherless Child” dates back to the era of enslavement
would call it, to the eventual indigenization of the cultures where what was at once distinctly Yoruba or Hausa, now becomes Trinidadian, or Creole (born in the New World).

Kamau Brathwaite, in both *Contradictory Omens* (1974) and in *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica* (1971) wrote about creolization in the Caribbean, but paid special attention to elucidating the fact that creolization is a process and not a product. Brathwaite brings forth the idea of *creative ambivalence*, which is an ambivalent acceptance-rejection syndrome; a psycho-cultural plurality. Within the mimicry or imitation of European [and other] cultural forms, there also exists a degree of creativity resulting in both imitation and indigenization – the creation of something new, but familiar.

Through the layers of processes the African-Trinidadian “creoles”\(^{62}\) underwent in the New World, the notion of being the same “authentic” *Africans* they were when they first set foot is impossible – not just because of creolization, but because change is inherent irrespective of location. This is why the interrogation of the authenticity of Trinidadian Orisa practices is a moot point – an impossibility.

**Two Roads Meet Again: Re-Colonization or Authenticating?**

Trinidadians who are content with the creolized Trinidadian Orisha practices have even raised the question of whether the Nigerian imposition of cultural and spiritual values upon Trinidadians as the singular *authentic* or even the *correct* way of practice is a form of neo-colonization. Benitez Rojo, in *The Repeating Island* points out that,

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\(^{62}\) born in the New World
What happens is that post industrial society navigates the Caribbean with judgments and intentions that are like those of Columbus... the new (dis)coverers – who come to apply the dogmas and methods that had served them well where they came from, and who can’t see that these refer only to realities back home. So they get into the habit of defining the Caribbean in terms of resistance to the different methodologies summoned to investigate it. (Benitez-Rojo 1996: 1-2)

Nigerians have been circulating through Trinidad for centuries; the difference is that in recent time, the Orisha Conference, held in Trinidad in 1999, drew special attention to the community of Orisa devotees. Significant to this occasion was the visitation by the Ooni of Ife – the head King of Yorubaland – who established a council of elders in Trinidad and appointed a designated elder for the Trinidadian Orisha community.

Although the Ooni is an esteemed elder/leader among the Yoruba, some Trinidadians were not pleased with the manner in which the council of elders was selected and of the limited pool of people from which they drew the selection. From that point a number of Nigerians have returned to Trinidad in order to “spiritually redeem”, “authenticate”, and to “properly” instruct Trinidadians in the correct practice. Unfortunately for the Trinidadians, this has become a financially lucrative and a common practice for some Nigerians. Thus,
some Nigerian practitioners have even taken advantage of the Trinidadian’s yearning and desire to connect with Africa – in the name of authenticity\textsuperscript{63}.

Some ceremonies have been performed with inadequate substitutions such as piwa seeds for the Nigerian Ikin, which are dissimilar; people who are not initiated into the mysteries of Ifa spiritual practices have unscrupulously posed as priests and priestesses and performed invented rites for Trinitrians, charged high fees in American Dollars. Some have come to Trinidad and claimed to be powerful chiefs and men of status in Nigeria and have claimed locals for wives. Others have even established organizations and infiltrated local Orisha houses to carry out their own particular agendas. Likewise, some Trinitrians eager to declare authenticity have agreed to take on bogus titles, high profile positions, and have situated themselves to in alignment with the Nigerian posers.

In all fairness, not all Nigerian Orisa practitioners coming to Trinidad are hiding behind illusory agendas. Some are sincere and mean well, however those who have dubious intentions are giving a bad name to the Yoruba in Trinidad. Also, a one-sided blame is unjust as well, especially since if there were no willing participants, no one would be available for the advantage taking. Eager accomplices must be willing to distance themselves from their Being, but this places their Being in a paradoxical state of impossible since, no matter how authentically Yoruba a Trinidadian aspires to be, he or she will always carry within him or her a unique Being particular to their experience as a Trinitadian.

A person is intrinsically who he or she is. This who oneself is changes constantly; however there is a specific Self to which composes this person’s essence. When one moves away from that naturally the propensity would be towards self-estrangement.

\textsuperscript{63} For purposes of integrity, the names of people and specific situations are omitted
In embracing an “other-than” the Trinidadian becomes other than itself and in essence forgives its own authenticity.

**Conclusion**

Authenticity is not only impossible; it also contributes to an even greater fragmentation of the fragmented and can be oppressive in its most extreme form. Throughout the diaspora and in Africa Authenticity has been a hot topic, authenticity has even been enforced in some spaces. One of the most striking examples is Zaire’s 1966 Authenticity Movement which in 1971 became the official ideology of the country under Mobutu’s regime. Mobutu’s rules of Authenticity enforced laws that influenced both public and private life in order to create a central national identity. The major proponent of the movement was decolonization and the removal of Western culture vis-à-vis, for example (1) removing the European colonizer’s names from cities and replacing them with African names, and (2) Enforcing a law that citizens of Zaire be forbidden to wear Western clothing and instead had to wear a tunic called an **abacost** that was gender appropriated.

Although this leader sought to make a statement in the name of reclaiming an “African” identity and reaching towards one’s ancestry and “roots,” This form of “authenticity,” turned to be quite oppressive and imposing. To select one style as “authentic” and the purest form, even if it is a form indigenous to the local population, negates the creativity and freedom of a nation. In a metaphorical way, some would say that oppression knows no color – that it is possible for us to oppress ourselves even in an attempt to “re-awaken” a sense of culture and

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64 Formerly the Belgian Congo
65 Derives from the French *a bas le costume* meaning ‘down with the suit’
identity. This may be the reason some Trinidadians have questioned the motive of the Nigerian’s authentication process in the local Orisa community.

No matter the intention, the Nigerian’s claim to the authentic license on Africa is a misnomer – a misconception, set in the burden of one’s Dasein as discussed at the beginning of this chapter. This chapter sought to highlight three main points within the politics of authenticity, 1) Africa and African is a continent as well as a concept, which has been influenced by a European hegemonic agenda. This concept, although through a racist ideology, has linked the diaspora through the fact of Blackness and therefore extends Africa beyond a landmass; 2) Identities were reshaped and restructured through the fragmentation and dispersal of Africa. In Trinidad, the methods of struggle for survival, preserving and protecting the culture led to a creolized identity that informed present-day Trinidadian practices. 3) One is an active agent in accepting or rejecting one’s Self. All of these changes have taken place through the course of time.

Who one is at this moment is not the same as who one may be twenty days or even twenty minutes from now. Therefore, Time shifts the relevance and definition of whom, what, and why. Through time and space, the African of today cannot be the African of yesterday and therefore cannot be weighted with the same scales. Change is an inevitable constant of existence. Just as the Nigerian Yoruba have evolved and changed through time at times even debating their authenticity internally – Trinidad Yorubas – Trinidad Africans, have created their own African identity under the auspices of enslavement and the making of the New World. The Trinidad experience draws upon the essence of the legacy left by the Ancestors of today’s African –Trinidadians who by virtue of enduring the same hegemonic stresses own just as much a part in Africa as those who endured
hegemonic order while remaining on the Continent. I therefore surmise that Africa *tuh we is we very self* – that Africa is everywhere we are.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

Outcast

For the dim regions whence my fathers came
My spirit, bondaged by the body, longs.
Words felt, but never heard, my lips would frame;
My soul would sing forgotten jungle songs.
I would go back to darkness and to peace,
But the great western world holds me in fee,
And I may never hope for full release
While to its alien gods I bend my knee.
Something in me is lost, forever lost,
Some vital thing has gone out of my heart,
And I must walk the way of life a ghost
Among the sons of earth, a thing apart;
For I was born, far from my native clime,
Under the white man’s menace, out of time.

Claude McKay

As descendants of the enslaved Africans who were marketed in this human factory called the Americas, oftentimes, we the diaspora, outcast from our homeland seek to uncover our past. Left only with the clues into a perceived self, we dream of what it means to be “African” outside of the context of “American” or “Caribbean”– what it would be like if we never went through the stripping; the emotional, psychological, and cultural washing that happened to “ac/culturate” us into an environment in which we were rendered subordinates; made to believe we were the minorities, the others, people of color. [As opposed to those without color? White?] Even the United States Census in 2010 revived the long outdated term “Negro” once again distancing and placing our people in a forced category, a verbal regression, or perhaps even a reminder that even with the first Black
president of the United States, we are still up against an ideology that conceptualizes us in an archaic manner.

Lest I digress, and really the analogy is not a digression because once we begin to see diaspora and Blackness as a unifying factor, speaking of one nation over the other is the same as pulling a leaf off of the branch of the same tree. It is relevant in the discussion of Trinidad Orisa because as the thesis indicates – Trinidad is diaspora. Although violence transformed lere\textsuperscript{66}, land of the humming bird into “Trinidad,” this violence exploded a cornucopia of already diasporized Africans and people of European descent on the Island.

The making of the Caribbean diaspora was violent, but as Fanon would frame it that violence has its own revolutionary property and ability to overthrow the very oppression that oppressed it. Our people, our diaspora – walked through the fires of hope and prayer and the violence continued. First there was a violent “dis-COVERy” with Columbus and his thieves and later a greater, longer-term violence was committed to prevent the captives from wanting to flee their prison. In a push to “populate” Trinidad the people who were \textit{invited} were Creoles\textsuperscript{67} and other Europeans who came from the French Antilles, and brought with them already \textit{creolized} Africans.

A diaspora, connected like branches of the same tree. Our roots lie beneath the earth and are bit by bit being uncovered – we still become confused at times through years of growth from the mangled branches that overlap, like Orisa. Orisa is a spiritual system that spung from Ile-Ife, Nigeria and reached the New World in different forms such as Afro-Cuban \textit{Santeria}, Brazilian \textit{Candomble}, or the African-American \textit{Oyotunji} tradition. Yet none of these spiritual practices

\textsuperscript{66} The original name of Trinidad
\textsuperscript{67} Whites born in the Caribbean
survived without a struggle, without secret, and without defending those secrets like warriors. Even through a systemic means of suppression and a continuous “throwing of nails” or the road to self-discovery/self-definition, the diaspora’s children continue ever to strive and roll through the devastation without tire.

As a person who is connected to and part of this same African diaspora as well as connected to the various waves of Orisa that have traveled throughout the New World, this thesis is not a distant subject to be observed, prodded, and tucked away on a bookshelf. I am after all, through this thesis writing a few pages of my own narrative. Our own narrative. Through these pages I hope to have accomplished a number of things. On one hand I hope I have provided a response to those who have been digging flags in the sand claiming that they are spreading the real Africa in Trinidad. This thesis paints a picture of the complexity that reveals that not only did Africa never move from Trinidad once it reached, but those who were taken to the Island amid the fires of enslavement and colonization took that fire and created, they in many ways formed a society within the larger society, with its own language, codes, and symbols. Just because Trinidad Orisa does not look entirely like Ile-Ife Orisa or Ode Remo Orisa, it is Trinidad Orisa nonetheless. Ile-Ife Orisa does not even look like Ode Remo Orisa and they both are in Nigeria so the comparison and tape of authenticity is unrealistic.

Secondly, Trinidad Orisa is a diasporan spirituality that is comprised of Yoruba, Hausa, Congo, and other ethnic group’s contributions as the conditions of enslavement forced a “pulling together” of peoples of diverse backgrounds. Later migrations included African-Americans who would populate the Company Villages in the South, spreading the Baptist faith in Trinidad, which combined with some of the African practices.
Finally, recognition of the fires that our people have come through that provided a condition for this form of creation lets us know that it is not something that we should voluntarily elect. That enforcing a unilateral “normative” as the standard for the “authentic” is just as oppressive, silencing, and audacious as Cecil Rhodes declaring that he wanted to paint red flags from Capetown to Cairo. Some Yoruba are entering the Caribbean, Venezuela, Mexico, Cuba, and the United States ready to plant flags, not in exchange, but declaring territory. Some even come in the name of their high priest Arabas and charge exorbant fees – in US dollars yet there are willing participants.

We must stand up in the diaspora and recognize that what the Ancestors passed on is not all rubbish. We could benefit from an exchange of ideas, songs, and rituals or seek clarity about things we always wondered about – like how people in Nigeria prepare Osain medicine, or how to properly throw Obi. The problem is, this debate over authenticity is not only causing tensions between Nigerians and Trinidadians, but it is also dividing Trinidadian communities. It has happened on an individual level with people like Molly Ahye, and on a larger scale as the question of which Orisa Yard is more authentic than the other and which one is too Christianized.

In conversations with people who were students of JD Elder, such as Kambiri Desuza and Osun priestess and Ifa practitioner, one of the things they pointed out to me is that Elder encouraged the scholarship to come from the people themselves. That Trinidadians write about Trinidad. Therefore, in line with that train of thought, I would hope that in the future more Trinidadians would follow Elder’s lead and write about the changes in Orisa from a perspective that no other person would understand. They would have a particular eye for the sensibilities and nuances that only a Trinidadian would
know. So that is my greatest hope that others will be inspired to continue this work.

At this point in my studies I am inhibited by a number of limitations, both due to the restraints of time as well as the fact that I am yet at the tip of my ice burg of knowledge. There are a number of things that I was unable to cover in this research that could benefit from future studies.

One of the most noticeable changes for me as an outsider was observing the gender shifts. Whereas a Mother or women were the primary figures of a spiritual house, now people are coming and asking for the baba or the Father of the house. I have even witnessed times when women priests were present and invisibilized as it was declared that no priests were available to perform ceremonies. This is an issue to be covered in great detail as in a short time there has already been an effect.

Also the differences between the traditional practices of Trinidad need updating. The most detailed accounts were written before the 1970s and while some things are similar, things have and are continuing to change. My research covered mostly the East-West Corridor from Sangre Grande to Diego Martin, I did have the opportunity to spend some time in South at places such as Claxton Bay, Pointe, Ciparia, and Fyzabad and the style of the feasts and ceremonies, as well as the “energy” of the area was very different. Since the point of this research was moreso to show the environment that created the exigency for a “Trinidad Orisa” to form, the historical formation and whys were the focus of this research. It would be interesting to read a perspective about what is happening in the South of Trinidad or perhaps at a future date in time to return and do a more thorough study with a number of very detailed case studies.
Finally, music, visual arts, theatre and the performing arts has a long relationship with Orisa and African based spiritualities. More work should cover that area especially singers like chantuelle Ella Andall who combines Orisa with popular music and in a way is preserving local Trinadian music through her CDs. In addition, a form of music called RAPSO should be included in a major study, within the realm of Orisa or outside of it as well. The father of Rapso, Lancelot Layne was a known practitioner and brought many other people into the tradition. He was instrumental in acquiring the ancestral grounds at Lopinot and was very active in the community. This research also revealed other people part of Trinidad and Tobago’s history such as Uriah Butler who were involved in African-Based spiritual practices. It is fascinating work that should be continued.

More specifically, here are a few suggested research questions for future works on African-Trinidadian spiritual systems:

1. What would an updated study of the various related African-Trinidadian spiritual communities reveal?
2. How has the intervention of the Continental Yoruba in the Trinidadian Orisa practice affected gender relations?
3. How have mass priesthood initiations affected the functioning of Trinidadian Orisa society?
4. How do Orisa practices in Latin America and the Caribbean differ or repeat cultural patterns of diaspora and creolization?

In the meanwhile, we the people of the diaspora have to keep our eyes open and carry on dialogue between each other. There is much to share as we “dig up” our past like Schomburg (1925), but this digging should be an exchange not a throwing of dirt. We have been through enough fire to know not to hold the torch in our own hands. Yet my hopes and prayers lead me to believe that we will
one day realize that we are just branches of the same tree, shedding our leaves at different moments, exposed to varying gradations of the sun, but connected nonetheless.
APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Trinidad Timeline of Population/Colonization
(Lum 2000: 194-198)

Amerindians
1498 when Colombus claimed island for Spain already inhabited by the Arawaks and Caribs who had a combined population of between 30,000 and 40,000. Harshly treated which caused their numbers to drop in 1777 to 1,827. By 1831 the population was 762 in 1838 it was 520. Supposedly completely vanished now.

Europeans

Spanish
1498 . The first Europeans to colonize Trinidad, but were not interested in the island...ignored for the first 300 years of Spanish rule. 1783 = 126 Spainards on the Island slight increase in the early 19th century but that number quickly decreased and they eventually intermarried with the regular population. “The 1806 census reported 1,386 Spanish Free Coloureds in Trinidad” (194)

English

1797 the English captured Trinidad. By 1803 there were 663 Brits on the Island and this increased to 938 in 1826. In 1806 there were 1,568 English Free Coloureds in Trinidad. African Slave Trade was abolished in 1807 and the enslaved were freed in 1834.

Trinidad was a British colony until 1962.

French

After 1777 Came to Trinidad from Haiti, Martinique ,Dominica, Guadeloupe and St. Lucia. Carried enslaved Africans with them. Others were immigrants from
France. The French “initially came at the invitation of the Spanish who offered them land and help to set up plantations throughout the island under the 1783 Cedula of Population which offered land for cultivation to Roman Catholic settlers... The French came in great numbers, even after Britain had captured the island.” (195) After 1784 Trinidad was virtually a French colony. The French language and a French patois were the most widely spoken languages...[there was a heavy French influence] and this was when Trinidad was still a British colony.

Others
Irish, Scots, Germans, and Portuguese. Came throughout the 19th century with Palestinians, Syrians, and Lebanese arriving in the 1890's came as labourers but eventually moved into the clerical and business sectors

Asians

East Indians
Post-emancipation when Enslaved Africans left plantations there was a shortage in labour supply so the British government began an indentureship scheme whereby natives of India could come to Trinidad to work for five years. During the time they could either stay or return to India. Later they were offered land in Trinidad in exchange for their passage back to India.

Chinese
In 1806, 192 Chinese landed in Trinidad as part of an earlier indentureship scheme but it was not successful and most returned home by the end of 1807. In 1808 only 22 remained in Trinidad and in 1837 only 2 or 3. A second wave came between 1853 and 1866. There were 2,500 Chinese who came for indentureship
and became more successful than the first group. They moved off the plantations and established themselves in the grocery trade.

**Africans**

Author says that Enslaved Africans were not extensively used in Trinidad, that Amerindians provided most of the labour force. 1617 Spain was petitioned for Africans 300 – 200 of whom should be men. Most were sold to other parts of the West Indies. In 1778 the French brought 1,500 Africans from Grenada Tobago Dominica and St. Vincent. From then on the numbers grew and Trinidad became a “slave colony” with Africans numbering 6,009 (52.1%) of the population. In 1797 the population rose to 10,009 and during the abolition of 1807, there were 20,761 (69%) of the population. Enslaved were still brought from other parts of the Caribbean such as Grenada Dominica and Barbados to do domestic work.
Appendix 2: Additional Field Notes (Un-edited)

Orisha Family Day – Lopinot

April 22, 2007  2:30pm – 9:30pm

Figure 8 Orisa family Day, Lopinot

Iya Amoye was the emcee of the Family Day event. She noted that there was no Family Day for the past two years. She said that they have a family day because we are all family and family takes care of us. She continued that we as a people have to do what we need to do to bring family together. Our community is breaking up because of television and we have to begin to take care of our own.

She then explained Mother Earth Day and Onile. The Orisha Family Day is also called Mother Earth Day. Iya Amoye told the crowd that food, water, and air come from the Earth; that the sun shines on the Earth and houses are built on the Earth. So, the Earth is our mother and, Onile is the deity of the Earth (Mama
Lataa). Obaluaye is also the owner of the Crust of the Earth in the Trinidadian Orisha tradition. She says that Ogun is an aspect of Onile.

The audience was told that the Family Day was supposed to be in March. They then seated all of the newly appointed elders at the dais. Seated at the table was Babalorisa Clarence Forde, who along with Iya Rodney was appointed by the Oni of Ife as the head of the Orisha tradition in Trinidad and Tobago. He has spent 70 years in the Orisha tradition. The emcee said that some people do not want to acknowledge him as the spiritual head, but “just as in the Catholic Faith there is a pope, Babalorisha Clarence Forde is our spiritual head”.

Also seated at the table was Mother Jean Bob, Senior Councilor of Arie Village, Mother Marion Cummings, Baba Atama of Opa Orisha Sango, Barbara Depisa, Mother Joan Grant, Mother Theresa Jacobs, and there are more elders but this was the panel of those who are among the Council of Elders. The Archbishop was also in attendance.

Afterwards there were games and fun.

Observations

They could benefit from a restructuring of the event. Although the contests such as “best dressed,” “best music” and the “best organization” of the visiting shrines are great for networking and esteem building among its members, I was looking forward to more information and spiritually based entertainment.

There were also door prizes given away – cases of Shandy. But I was thinking that if this is Orisha Family Day, maybe they can give away books about the Orisha, Orisha dolls, or maybe even African Jewelry, something that reflects the theme and will continue the message after people return home.
At least this event keeps the celebration of Orisa in mind and people are encouraged in a way that brings various communities together. It was an enjoyable function but perhaps it will expand in years to come.

**Visit to Ile Awon Osun – Arima**

**April 23, 2007  2:30pm – 9:30pm**

Present at the meeting was Iya Omo Taiwo, Iya Esuseke, Iya Cynthia, Baba Opakunle, and one of the young male devotees. The name of the house is Ile Awon Osun and the head of the Shrine is Iya OmoTaiwo.

They said that there are three levels of practice in Trinidad: (1) **Syncretic** – because of slavery and Christianity people combine traditions. This is what some people refer to as Sango Baptist. It has Sango for the Orisa side and Baptist for the Christian infused portions.; (2) **Orisha** – without overt Christian practice, but the members of Awon Ile say that this group lacks an Ifa understanding. Lastly, (3) **Ifa** – not syncretic; includes Ancestral worship that sometimes resembles the prior two categories.

This group says that they do not Anglicize the spelling of “Osun” because they are practicing the Nigerian way.

**Relentless Jumbie**

The group was asked how each of them came into the tradition. Iya Omotaiwo says that she has both Ghanian and Nigerian roots. The first religion she knew was Hindu, she also was a practicing Catholic, Anglican, Adventist and others. She traveled far spiritually before finally coming to the Ifa tradition.

She told the story of a jumbie that followed her from young. Her parents tried to get rid of it for a long time taking her to the church, the obeah man, to all kinds of healers and consulters. The jumbie would pelt people out of places or tell
people about what was going on in their personal lives. The woman always questioned the information that was in the bible and why the jumbie that was on her would never leave.

She went for mourning at a river and the Jumbie told her to initiate. The jumbie was Osun.

**Description of Osun**

Baba Opakunle gave his interpretation of Osun where he says “she looks like you....the women have not too small and not too big boobs”. He says Osun woman will cuss you and that they have a posture and a way they talk. They are caring and they love good times, fete, and laughter.

Esuseke says that they have a certain character about them but one may not be able to determine that a person is a child of Osun straight away since people have different ways of showing their Orisa characteristics. She wanted people to know that there are men children of Osun as well. Osun people love themselves, she says, but it is not vanity. They like to keep themselves up. Osun people always “decorize” even for small situations. They are not tolerant of certain people or certain types of behaviors; may be due to the emotional make up of Osun people. She says that Osun is a loyal friend, but once she turns she will not go back. Osun takes time to beautify, which is a Sango energy too.

Iya Omotaiwo (who seemed to be holding a manifestation of Osun) says that Osun is water, refreshing, stern, no nonsense, no connery. She is beauty. You don’t “drink your people’s blood”. Osun is cleanliness and nastiness as well, she will expose you. At one point in time people would be beat for worshipping the Orisa in Trinidad.
We had a long conversation about Osun and I was invited to return on Sunday April 29, 2007 to attend one of their services.

_**Ile Osun Obatala – Petit Valley**_

**March 21, 2007       3:00pm – 7:30pm**

Visited the Orisha house of Iya Louise Oshunyemi Ifakolade. On the way I asked questions about her involvement with the Orisha tradition and Oshun. She was initiated in Ode Remo. Her godfather is Ifa Karade, she is a priestess of Ifa. She has her personal Orisha altars and ones outside. The ones on the outside are lined up in the traditional Trinidadian style, one after the other in/on cement blocks. She dressed her Orisa up in clothing corresponding with their attributes.

She has a large following and her godchildren come in from time to time to help her with the functioning of the shrine as well as to care for the Orisha. Sections of her shrine are not open to the public, but she invited me to salute her personal shrine. I greeted each of the Orisha and said a prayer, in Yoruba and in English.

Iya Louise invited me to come back on the last Sunday of the month for their Sunday service. I agreed to come back.

_**Meeting with Burton Sankoralli – St. Augustine**_

**March 23, 2007       1:00pm – 1:45pm**

In this brief meeting with Burton Sankoralli, he provided some basic information about African religions in Trinidad. He says that there are three main theories about the origins of the Spiritual Baptist/Shouter traditions in Trinidad: (1) That it is an Africanized version of the Baptist religion that the protestants brought to Trinidad. (2) The Company Villages of the Deep South – that people
may have carried variations of these traditions with them and (3) the Caribbean migrants from St. Vincent who were called “Shakers”. There was a ban on them practicing their religion, but the ban was lifted in 1951.

Sankoralli said that there is no “initiation” in the Baptist tradition, but they do have a mourning ritual/mourning ground. The Orisha have corresponding saints like St. Philomen is Oshun, Ogun is St. Michael and his color is red, and Sango is St. John.

The Orisha devotees in Trinidad use a drum with two faces that is played with a stick. The name of the drum is an Omelía. He says that the Orisha are located in the earth so they plant the flags of the Orisha in the earth. There is a line of flags called a Peregun.

When asked about the role of women in the Orisha tradition, Sankoralli says that women would host the feast but the men would do most of the work. One knows they have to do a feast either from Ancestral messages or from the mourning ground, although people generally have one feast per year.

Instead of initiation, sometimes they do a headwashing or Arara which is a tradition similar to what one will find in Dahomey. There are incisions made on the head. When one accumulates sacred knowledge, one can begin to hold feasts and do the “work”.
Appendix 3: Photos, Articles, and Events

Figure 9 Baba Clarence Forde (Appointed Leader of Orisa in Trinidad), Lopinot

Figure 11 Sister's Shrine - St Helena (Sister seated holding flower)
T&T Shouter Baptists celebrate with US clan

A four-member delegation from Trinidad, comprising Archbishop Barbara Conroy, Archbishop Leslie Warner and Mrs. Monica Randoc, attended the event.

The event, held in New York, was hosted by Convener Dr. Kendall Street. The chief celebrant, Archbishop Norris V. Ashton, made proclamations to 13 pioneers of the faith, including Trinidadian Milliscott Joseph and Stella Adams.

Guest speaker, Rev. Augustus John, also noted all of the people—both past and present—who took up the cause to fight for the right to allow the Spiritual Baptist faith to be recognised.

The same four-member delegation was also part of a conference hosted by The Children’s Spiritual Baptist Church in Boston, from May 30 to 31.

The purpose of the gathering was to pray, study and work together for unity and development of the faith.

Randoc also spoke during the conference on the church’s growing concern with homelessness.

The conference was hosted by Rev. Peter D. Dayo, his wife, Maureen, of the St. Ana’s church, and Bishop M. Adonis of the Jehovah in Emmanuel Spiritual Baptist Church, who accommodated them in New York.

T&T prepares to host Spiritual Baptist convention

THE T&T Convention Team of The Universal Ecumenical Order of Spiritual Baptists has issued an invitation to all local Spiritual Baptist organisations to participate in the convention, scheduled to commence next Wednesday, with a meeting of the College of Bishops.

There will be scheduled daily events until July 27, culminating with a ‘Thanksgiving in the Queen’s Park Savannah, July 23, will be devoted to prayer for the nation.

This is the fourth convention of Spiritual Baptists and it will comprise delegations from the USA, Canada, the UK, Grenada, Jamaica and T&T.

In 2001, the congregation of the Mt. Emmanuel Spiritual Baptist Church hosted the first convention at their Carson City, Long Beach, California church. At that time, the participants agreed that the strength of the Spiritual Baptist faith be consolidated to galvanise the movement internationally, with a view to creating better conditions for all Spiritual Baptists worldwide.

A Constitution was drafted and ratified at the second convention, held in Grenada in July 2002.

The third convention in 2003 was held in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

The T&T Convention Team has adopted a policy of inclusion of all Spiritual Baptist organisations, since the broad aim of the convention is the unification of Spiritual Baptists.

The theme is “Spiritual Baptist Leaders in the Transformation and Development of the Society.” It indicates that the movement is above all spiritual, generative, and, through gatherings such as this convention, will be able to provide direction for the challenges of our time.

The conferences are intended to provide direction for the group “to develop socio-economic plans for the spiritual Baptist Community” and to activate the regional network as a supporting structure for unification of Caribbean people in the region and beyond.

The Secretariat for the convention is being managed by The Rose Foundation, 15 Romeo Street, St. James.

Further information can be obtained by calling 629-9348.
What Else Would You Do

By Anthony Malone

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