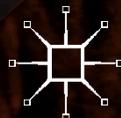


**AFRICAN HISTORIES AND MODERNITIES**

# **THE SYMBOLISM AND COMMUNICATIVE CONTENTS OF DREADLOCKS IN YORUBALAND**

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**Augustine Agwuele**



# African Histories and Modernities

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*For*

*Lena Adama*

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*Pieter Amechi*

*Helga Nneka*

*Gewidmet unserer Greta Ungonma und Franka, ruhe sanft*



# CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Trivial Behaviors as Valuable Data</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>The Yoruba Universe</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Diachronic Study of Yoruba Hairstyles</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>The Underpinning of the Yoruba View of Hairstyle</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Dynamics of Culture and Visual Profiling</b>	<b>151</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>189</b>
	<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>195</b>
	<b>Index</b>	<b>207</b>



## LIST OF FIGURES

- Fig. 6.1 Dele Jegede: Art History Professor at Miami University (Ohio), painter, art critic, cartoonist, and curator. Image used with the permission of Prof. Dele Jegede and Professor Falola. To the left is Dr. Toyin Falola, the Jacob and Frances Sanger Mossiker Chair Professor in the humanities and a distinguished Teaching Professor at the University of Texas at Austin. To the right is Dr. Jegede who could be said to have a 'deviant' howbeit acceptable iconic appearance by virtue of accomplishment.

167

## Introduction

This book explains and describes popular actions and thoughts of Yoruba people. When dealing with human behavior, making abstract generalizations about the motivation for action, as done within laboratory-based studies, evinces certain limitations. As a result, anthropological studies proffer interpretations of cultures on the basis of the uniqueness of their symbolism, their actions, the contextual meanings of events, and social relations. This approach to understanding a people's views and thoughts, not in the abstract, but in relation to habitual interactions within their settings, often derives from an experiential and ethnographic perspective. On this basis, and using emic and etic perspectives, this work provides an ontological and epistemological explanation for the way that Yoruba people are observed to treat other Yoruba—males in particular—with hairstyles that they consider to be deviant. As an explanation of data obtained from an experiential fieldwork, there are by default personal meanings and attributions to the variously collected moments of interaction that generated the different rich points that this work accepts as data.

Postmodernists do not shy away from the injection of self into the study of cultures and of humans in interactions; neither do they wish away individual position in relation to their subject matter. This book provides epistemological interpretation for the Yoruba perception of a Yoruba male with hair that has been styled as cornrows or dreadlocks. It locates the basis of their visual perception of people in the cosmology of

Yoruba people. The veracity of any proposition, with respect to the epistemology advanced by Francis Bacon, is a function of the data provided in support of it. On this basis, information obtained from real-life situations, especially events, responses, and activities that occur frequently, even if trivial, circumstantial, and anecdotal, is accorded significance. When such observations are pervasive, prevalent, and cut across stratum of the population, then according it such significance is obviously not misplaced. With roots in experience gleaned from interactions with owners of the culture, this work describes these observations, links them to the formative history of the people, and suggests a relationship between ideas, beliefs, values, and action. Thus, notions that produce actions *produce* culture. The source of the knowledge that guides Yoruba people is traceable to their cosmology; this not only defines their worldview (that belief of a people about the origins of the universe and their place in it), it informs their earthly pursuits, it guides their organization of their society—in both senses, political as well as social—and it delineates their cultural observances. The integrative that is contained within this cosmology establishes the milieu out of which resulted the Yoruba nation, the primacy of *Ori-inu* (inner-head) as the most prized possession of this nation, and the individual's earthly sojourn, starting from the spiritual realm. The physical manifestation of inner-head, the *Ori-ode* (head) contagiously and analogously links with its essence; as such, the grooming of the physical head implicates the care and nurture of the spiritual head. This work, relying on actual deeds, shows—following Haraway—that this knowledge is not passive and merely abstract; rather, it is always an engaged material practice and never a disembodied set of ideas. Knowledge is embedded in projects; knowledge is always for some things and not others, and knowers are always formed by their projects, which shape what they can know.<sup>1</sup> The consciousness or source of this knowledge, similar to the knowledge of a language, may be elusive; however, being in possession of this knowledge places one in a 'certain state' that ultimately generates culturally appropriate responses cloaked with specific frames of reference.

Furthermore, this book offers a parsimonious clarification of the complex interactions that yield knowledge of that which informs, among Yoruba people, the specific feelings that dreadlocks induce among them and the specific actions that they take in response to someone with this hairstyle, as a consequence of these feelings, which are themselves predicated upon the cultural knowledge that Yoruba people share. It does so

under the view that the explication of the symbolism of the hair of the head and how it assumes its significations within Yoruba culture requires a clarification of the coreferentiality of the physical and the spiritual within the context of the Yoruba world, spiritual and historical, whence the hair ideology that informs politics of hair. It also requires a description of the various male hairstyles from the diachronic to the synchronic context, together with a description of the religious and social underpinnings of these variously attested hairstyles. The different disciplinary excursions make it possible to trace, to its roots, the trope that informs the Yoruba politics of perceiving hairstyles, their adoptions, their retention, and their modification in response to cultural change.

Concisely stated, this book brings together the results of ten years of experiential data collection, observation, and reflection as a cornrows- and dreadlocks-wearing Yoruba male. The purpose of this data collection, and, indeed this book, is to make sense of Yoruba attitudes toward male hairstyles by untangling the meaning attached to hair in Yoruba society<sup>2</sup> and the existence of a precursor, a worldview, which informs the social fact of perception<sup>3</sup> among Yoruba people. This interpretative work provides meaning to the collected data. It does so by providing structure to the fragments of Yoruba everyday interaction with dreadlocks, and by the following techniques.

- (1) This work makes use of the author's personal hairstyle as a site from which to explore the issues surrounding the ontological<sup>4</sup> (as has been done by many scholars<sup>5</sup>) and epistemological underpinnings of actions induced by apprehension of hairstyles from an axiological perspective.
- (2) It makes use of sociocultural phenomena such as language, belief system, class, and popular culture to situate hairstyle as a site of the manifestation of cultural production and identity politics<sup>6</sup> and the maintenance of prized symbolic value.
- (3) It examines the collusion of socially learned<sup>7</sup> Yoruba responses to, and perceptions of, male hairstyles, with features of modernism and globalization in addition to the concept of power within the Yoruba worldview.
- (4) It codifies personal experiences from interactions with Yoruba people across three continents relative to others and provides cross-cultural comparisons of attitudes, expectations, and feelings toward particular male hairstyles (dreadlocks and cornrows).

This work does not offer a taxonomy of hairstyles worn by Yoruba people, it is not a study of Yoruba religion, and it is not a history of the people or any other subject that readers may consider valuable or would have wished to be the focus of its discussion. Rather, this work is particularly focused on explaining why Yoruba people hold particular notions about non-normative, deviant hairstyles and treat Yoruba males with such hairstyles the way they do. To accomplish this task, the book documents real-life, everyday encounters; from there, it traces the Yoruba philosophy to the formation of the nation and to cultural foundations, which inform this specific culture's perception. It is only in the context of this excursion that the various appeals to other disciplines become necessary. These include appeals to history, to religious studies, to the handful of social institutions referenced, to power dynamics, to language, and to psychology. While the quest to understand just one leitmotif rests on these interdisciplinary pillars, this work should be understood only within its true context—the study of Yoruba reactions to an adult Yoruba male wearing a hairstyle considered to be deviant. The analyses that are involved in this work mainly consist in deciphering the roots of the signification of hair—indicated by the provided data—through the lens of the cohesive message encoded within the philosophical underpinnings of the various social institutions in which these occurrences take place. Since the aforementioned worldview colors a people's perception and influences their responses to situations, it becomes necessary to understand their worldview in order to explain their responses to hairstyles they consider deviant. The documentation, description, and explication of the Yoruba worldview with respect to how it informs their perception of reality and effects their responses—to deviant hairstyles, in particular—are therefore the focus of this work. There are seven chapters in the book.

Chapter 2 argues for the theoretical import and adequacy of the “trivial” as means of studying the habits of a people. In our daily interactions, we find subtle manifestations of our innermost beliefs. These beliefs and associated habitual practices are so internalized they seem natural and inevitable. Invariably, they are generated by a cultural identity. This chapter argues for the viability of what people actually say and do, which, for explicative purposes, are termed “trivial.” It defines the specific use of the term trivial and gives examples, including anecdotal or circumstantial evidence as a valuable basis for conjecture in a scholarly work, especially when looking at shared practices.

Chapter 3 details the Yoruba world and their environment, including economic activities and subsistence strategies. The discussion assumes that the contemporary Yoruba worldview, with its particular understanding of reality and approach to life, results from the circumstances of their creation as a people, and their formation as a nation. It notes that the milieu surrounding the origin of the worldview was marked by insecurity and inequality that together created a habitus. To the extent that the punishing and toilsome economic, social, and political situation that was foundational to this formation has persisted and intensified, so also those solutions will persist, as they are instituted in response to this particular stressor. These solutions or responses, into which everyone is socialized, continue as means of societal organization, interpersonal relations, and views of the self relative to Others. The context, provided by the description of the Yoruba world, allows a semiotic approach, such as that which was privileged by Geertz,<sup>8</sup> which sees humans as beings suspended in the webs of significance that they have spun.

The interpretation of this web of significance requires the explanation of the worldview of Yoruba people, and this is the focus of Chap. 4. In their worldview are located the various crucial roles that hair plays for ancient and modern Yoruba people. It illustrates, based on thick description,<sup>9</sup> the various traditional male Yoruba hairstyles and the reasons for their existence. Since hair grooming is an invaluable part of normality for the society, this chapter shows from a diachronic perspective how the Yoruba view of uncultivated hair as a sign of madness evolved out of their cosmology. The discussion focuses on describing, in historical perspective, hairstyles that are worn for particular religious, political, and professional purposes, the traditional institution of dreadlocks (Dada), and the social use of hairstyles to adorn and express the self.

Chapter 5 discusses the Yoruba cosmology and its assumed orderliness. It shows the beliefs of Yoruba people about *Ori* and the course of *Ori* during its earthly sojourn. It shows the susceptibility of *Ori* to certain forces of *aye*, the fear of which implicates such appearances as dreadlocks. It demonstrates that careful obeisance and disposition to the gods, Orisa and Esu, in proper balance, can ward off evil. Efforts to placate evil include the fear shown at the appearance of evil, as seen to be contained in dreadlocks. The continuity of the belief in *Ori* is demonstrated in the people's way of practicing such received confessions as Christianity and Islam. Furthermore, the chapter explicates the multiple layers of the conceptual structure to uncover the *raison d'être* for the people's responses

to deviant hairstyles, thereby reaffirming the Geertz view of culture as “acted document.”<sup>10</sup> By attending to social actions and real behaviors of native Yoruba people, chapter five offers a summative explanation for the meaning and import of dreadlocks to the Yoruba nation and provides insight into the shared psychological perspective that allows a collective understanding as well as attitude to the same phenomenon.

Chapter 6 focuses on the extant Yoruba view of hair; it argues that the socialization experience of Yoruba people, their worldview, and the configuration of their environment all aid the sustenance of the traditional views on, and projections unto, dreadlocks. It illustrates how the socioeconomic and cultural provenances dictate the Yoruba world. Furthermore, it provides information on the contemporary identity and socioeconomic politics of hairstyling across various genres including films, literature, and sports. Finally, from a comparative analytic standpoint, it documents cross-cultural differences in the perception of dreadlocks using experiential information from three continents: North America, Europe, and Africa. Noteworthy is the differing historical and experiential points of origin from which African Americans who practice Yoruba lifestyle and continental African Yoruba people depart in their responses to, and views of, dreadlocks.

While there is no dearth of books on the various components of the chapters of this book, as a whole the book is an invaluable addition to existing works, but differs remarkably from them by its focus on the foundation of cultural perception. As an examination of a previously unexplored topic in the historiography and ethnographic study of Yoruba people, it makes a unique contribution also in its methodology. It uses experiential ethnography and scholarly sources to explore the response to “deviant” hairstyles exhibited by the Yoruba people. Consequently, it narrowly offers insight into the habitus of a people and their culture. Essentially, this work examines a previously unexplored theme using novel methodology in Yoruba ethnography.

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Researchers conduct fieldwork in order to obtain data that reveal what people actually do relative to what they say they do. The everyday interaction of a people yields evidence that shows the unexamined but social facts that imbue any given appearance with a particular meaning and determines the signification of this appearance. From these everyday

experiences emerge the appropriate way to perceive such an appearance. Since “culture is localized in concrete, publicly accessible signs, the most of which are actually occurring instances of discourse,”<sup>11</sup> the discussion presented in this work gives great credence to the shared deeds, communications, history, philosophy, and outlook of a people as contained in aphorisms, sayings, proverbs, and panegyrics, even when they are labeled as trivial because they show up in signs and symbols such as dreadlocks.<sup>12</sup> The quintessentially religious, communal, mystical, and oral are no less consequential than well-founded, academically certified conclusions when they affect the conduct and passage of a person on Earth. To paraphrase Hallen, “establishment, mainstream, paradigm-based-data scholars had taken on the trappings of culturally exclusive sect in whose shrine or temple true and serious scholarship reposed.”<sup>13</sup> Every non-conforming approach is already prejudged as some form of deviance that must be excluded, just as the Yoruba nation excludes or expunges deviant hairstyles. Furthermore, the presented discussion has profited from emic and etic understandings. I am not just privy to the sounds of the language, or to the immediately observable presence of the dreadlocks, in which case, I could be said *to* suffer from Quine’s<sup>14</sup> indeterminacy and inaccuracy in translation and interpretation. Rather, I am a native with indigenous insight as well as a natural understanding of the culture and its logic. As a result, the metamessages of verbal and other interactions do not elude me. The experiences I am herein reporting are verifiable and consequential, captured by the narrated encounters rather than by simple conjectures. Thus, from a true Yoruba perspective, I am reporting the truth and not belief, because “in Yoruba discourse, ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’ can arise only from firsthand experience. Information that is obtained on the basis of secondhand sources, such as other persons, the media, and so forth, only qualifies as ‘belief’ and as possibly true or possibly false.”<sup>15</sup> Finally, the different interactions that are documented in this work are obvious to all Yoruba people; they are everyday occurrences. My goal is to provide previously unexplored thoughts and perspectives to explain the origin of the views that inform the habitual actions of Yoruba people when they see an adult male with dreadlocks. Furthermore, I suggest reasons for the continuity of the particular response of Yoruba that is espoused in the following pages. Worldview and culture generate values. These values continue due to the symbols that the culture and worldview create in order to codify the values, as well as associated practices that sustain and assure their transfer intergenerationally.

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8. Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The interpretation of cultures: Selected Essays*. NY. Basic Books.
9. Ibid 10. For Geertz, thick description provides for the understanding of the ascription of meaning within a culture for the data ethnographically obtained. The observations are considered as codes that need to be uncovered and the meaning retrieved from the point of view of the owners of the culture.
10. Due to the public, yet individual, nature of culture, Geertz defined culture as acted document, as it is required to be exhibited in a discursive environment. Given this definition, it becomes necessary to provide explanation to the psychological structure that informs a collective behavior.
11. Urban, G. 1991. *A Discourse-Centered Approach to Culture*. Austin, The University of Texas Press.
12. A charge (from Hountondji, Paulin J. 1996. African philosophy: Myth and reality, 2nd ed. Bloomington, Indiana University Press) against collective folks' specific form of knowledge is his description of them as ethnophilosophy, because they depict pristine, precolonial, and premodern sources of knowing and not the pure and rigorous erudition of an individual. Ethnolinguistic is static and opposed to innovation.

13. Hallen, Barry. 2002. *A Short History of African Philosophy*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
14. Quine, W. V. O. 1960. *Word and Object*. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press.
15. Hallen. 2002. *A Short History of African* (38–39) includes a discussion on Yoruba idea of knowing relative to belief.

## Trivial Behaviors as Valuable Data

I cannot now visualize myself without my dreadlocks. My hairstyle has become a significant defining feature of me, earning me in some quarters the name Rasta. At Shashamane, Ethiopia, and in Trinidad, I received Rastafarian greetings from practicing Rastafarians. On each occasion, I was embarrassed not knowing how to respond. In Ibadan, elderly women, who are neighbors and around my mother's age, call me "Dada." Younger people preferred "boda Dada" as a term of address. Most, however, maintain their distance, mouthing *onirun were* (one with the hair of lunatics), ever ready to treat me as such; the others who for whatever reason are unable to avoid me never cease to ask, "Why is your hair like that?" This book is about the different and mostly contrary responses that my hairstyle has induced primarily among Yoruba people and relative to other people. These differences point to different politics and cultures of visual perception. A reviewer commenting on an initial discussion of my encounters with Yoruba people as a result of my hairstyle and their language use said it was based on "trivial and anecdotal evidence"; however, this description misses its mark. Those mundane words, actions, and feelings are an offshoot of certain values.

The word "trivial" has not ceased to fascinate me, especially in connection with Noam Chomsky, who, in heralding his so-called revolution<sup>1</sup> in linguistic theory, astutely saw the overwhelming respect in which languages are fundamentally similar, and was said to have used the word

“trivial”<sup>2</sup> to describe the superficial differences between them.<sup>3</sup> Within this view, the end state of the competence that a native speaker of a language arrives upon reaching adulthood is presumed to not be influenced by any social factor. This observation that raised a superficial distinction between theoretical and sociocultural linguistics dissociated the study of language from the study of culture and privileged introspection and formalism as a way of conducting scientific research. For scholars to not focus on universal principles or mental phenomena and, instead, study the social and cultural use of language, that is, mere performance, was considered to be an unnecessary expenditure of vital intellectual resources on a less rewarding enterprise. This was considered trivial. Also, to study those so-called artificial differences between languages, or any other cultural phenomena that are immediately socially apparent, was to engage in a trivial pursuit. At that time, Chomsky likened fieldwork, especially the collection of cross-cultural data, to the collecting of butterflies.<sup>4</sup> This critique was aimed at the centerpiece of structuralism, the then reigning theoretical paradigm that focused on studying languages in their situational contexts. In addition, it sought to understand causality and relationship between societal phenomena, especially social organization, and therefore, it favored cross-cultural data collection. The Chomskyan approach cautioned against reading too much into those overt differences that, like noise, very easily obscure fundamental similarities between languages (humans). To some extent, the Chomskyan perspective doused feelings about the superiority of one language relative to another and reined in the ethnocentric notion that causes some languages and cultures to be considered “civilized” and others to be seen as “primitive.” As Chomsky’s view made new research perspectives available, informed new scholarly disciplines, and generated new knowledge and principles, it also produced its own extremes. It marginalized, for instance, those who were cautious of innatism and universalism, those who saw the value in making sense of contextual variations, and those who saw language as a sociocultural object and, therefore, preferred to study language in its social context. These scholars favored the study of the social and historical experiences that condition the use of language as well as the ideological meaning that defines a community, and the relation of language to all social categories and institutions, the so-called trivial pursuits. Just as Chomsky argued and showed that no amount of data collection will reveal the lawfulness and underlying universal principle of language acquisition, no amount of introspection and conjecture could order and reveal the extent to which human behavior is influenced and

channeled by aspects of their environment and material world without a careful integrative investigation of their worldview, their physical world, and their sociocultural environment. Furthermore, innatism is incapable of revealing socially significant and culturally constructed meaning (e.g., the notion of indexicality or metapragmatics function as found in the works of Silverstein<sup>5</sup>). It also neglects to make apparent the sociohistorical conditions as well as the interactive forces in the relationship between hearers and speakers, both of whom are participants in a community with its own values in generating meanings and significance. As William Labov<sup>6</sup> noted, because language is the means of establishing contact between people, it is inherently social, and linguistics is therefore social. Thusly Labov underscored the importance of studying variation in order to understand the many internal differences observed among groups in light of the specific norms that curtail these differences, such that denizens of a culture behave alike and communicate meaningfully. When it comes to those nuanced habitual responses, each culture will have to be examined on its own; behaviors of individuals are then understandable only in the context of the knowledge of their sociocultural rootedness.

In contrast with the hard sciences that adopt as their research approach experimentation which is supposedly verifiable, replicable, and falsifiable, the charge of trivialness is often lodged against the empiricism and discursive approach of the humanities. The critique from the hard sciences is that to just “have conversations” about any matter is insufficient. Instead, there ought to be concrete and visible actions. We want to invent, innovate, and discover ways and means to save and enhance the quality of life in reality. According to this view, the humanities expend much time in endless and sometimes trivial discussions without proffering practical solutions. However, in documenting behaviors that are common responses of members of a society (i.e., responses with a high probability of being elicited by a specific appearance), and in volunteering analyses that suggest the reason why the observed behaviors are favored responses, an institutionalized system of perception emerges. Within this structure, individuals, groups, and cultures are defined and recognized. For instance, in examining the symbolism and signification of hair among Yoruba people, it is possible to obtain insight into an aspect of the philosophy guiding the organization of their society and directing their life’s quests.

This book provides an ontological and epistemological underpinning for the treatment of a Yoruba male based on his hairstyle, using as evidence observable and pervasive “trivial” and “anecdotal” behaviors gleaned

from popular sources and interpersonal interactions. The ontological perspective shows Yoruba people's view of the beings, entities that exist in the different spheres of their reality. It explicates the source of their ontological knowledge, locating it within their cosmology. Additionally, it shows the role that this knowledge plays in their politics of representation and how they explain causalities. Furthermore, it describes how both the ontology and cosmological view fit with the people's values and inform their existential goals in an axiological sense. Essentially, this is an exemplification of peoples' worldviews and thought in relation to habitual interactions from an experiential, ethnographic perspective.

Every society attributes certain significance to appearance. Hairstyles, like clothes,<sup>7</sup> are seen as symbolic<sup>8</sup> expressions of sociopolitical identity and personal expression. They serve as cues for making judgments about a person. As a non-verbal signal, the views, the uses, the meanings, and the interpretations of hairstyles are culturally rooted and specific while reflecting varied, and sometimes ambiguous, approaches to cultural globalization. In the same way, peoples' attire may elicit such descriptions as professional, modest, shabby, or slutty. The presence or absence of hair, as well as hairstyles in general, may serve to typecast individuals as athlete, religious or political, marginal or integrated, and mad or sane. Our hairstyles frame our interactions and influence the decisions that others make about us.

African hairstyles<sup>9</sup> and bodily adornments have received substantial cross-disciplinary, theoretical, and popular attention. Lacking, however, is a systematic study of the judgments a society makes about people based on the hairstyles that an individual sports. Scholarly work is needed to focus on those internalized values that trigger individual or group reactions, decisions, treatments, and verbal actions directed at others primarily as a result of the hairstyle that the person wears at that time. By studying positive and negative sociocultural profiling as a function of dreadlocks, this book fills this academic gap. Dreadlocks (or Rasta, as the hairstyle is known among Nigerians) is a hairstyle popularized by Bob Marley and Peter Tosh. It has its roots in Rastafarianism, adherents of which wash their hair but do not comb it. They allow their hair to grow as it will in order to engender dread for non-believers.<sup>10</sup>

For the discussion presented in this book, I adopt a cross-disciplinary approach that makes use of linguistic, anthropological, and social theories, in addition to semiotics and discourse analysis. The discourse is a comparative study that uses hairstyles as a point of departure to examine the ideological basis for the inescapable cultural politics of hairstyling,<sup>11</sup>

visual profiling, culture change, global identity formation, and individual representation.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, it focuses on verbal and non-verbal communicative signals that actively partake in the functioning of the mind when it interprets incoming visual data.<sup>13</sup> Analogous to the question posed by McNeill<sup>14</sup>: “How are human thoughts disclosed in gestures?”, this book asks, What do Yoruba people’s reactions to dreadlocks and males with cornrows hairstyles reveal about their culture of signification, their symbolism, their cosmology, and their identity? This work sees as significant those chanced encounters, those “I don’t mean it” utterances made within one’s social circle at unguarded moments and in informal situations. Taken together, these behaviors hint at deep-seated folk conceptions that guide individual and group relationships. Trivial words, actions, and views which people display without much reflection can be devastating in their effects, and they will be shown to be less trivial than they are often made to appear. They will be shown to be an internalized, naturalized, and instinctive guiding principle that informs the habitual responses of a group to the end of self-preservation and collective survival.

This work is also a form of response to the complaint that “the future of Yoruba people, the young, are decreasingly active in Yoruba culture and are far more exposed to western culture, which serve to disconnect their intellectual interests from indigenous ideals.”<sup>15</sup> As a study of such a Yoruba ideal, this work is an ethnographic description of Yoruba people and their culture, another form of Yoruba historiography. Different from other works, this book focuses on the description and discussion of Yoruba peoples’ apprehensions of another Yoruba (male) person based on the person’s hairstyle, with the intent of uncovering the cultural meanings associated with dreadlocks. It is in the context of the preceding explanations that the work is a discourse. As noted by Hall, the concept of discourse is not about whether things exist but about where meaning comes from.<sup>16</sup> Those real, and often discountenanced, interactions among Yoruba people are taken as social facts to illustrate the root and significance of trivialities such as a nod of acceptance, a frown of rejection, a comment of disparage, a gaze of avoidance, a shirk due to angst, a motion of protection, and a push, blow, or kick of defense in reaction to a person’s appearance. It describes how these unquestioned reactions implicate the quality of an individual’s life, if not immediately determine the continuity of that very life. Ultimately, this discussion further affirms that there exists in every culture a norm for viewing and receiving a person. Then, it situates individual and group behaviors within the context of this norm for Yoruba people.

To illustrate, here are some examples that inform my personal interest in things trivial.<sup>17</sup> I phoned my brother who was studying in Leipzig. As we were talking about this and that, he suddenly remembered an acquaintance, also in Leipzig, who had been arrested and pending prosecution. This person had a German girlfriend who owned a cat. For this man, cats are allowed in the house, they can come and go, but they are not cuddled, petted, or allowed on the sofa or in the bedroom. He does not own a pet, and has nothing against his girlfriend having a pet, as long as he is not required to offer those attentions designed for humans to a pet. One day he woke up to find that the cat was lying on the bed snuggled up against him. The horror of it! He picked up the cat by the scruff of its neck, opened the window, and let it out. Well, such things never happen without the prying eyes of those German *Omas*, who always at such times were to be found peeping out their windows. (Apropos looking out the window, once I observed as the grandmother of my friend in Jena told her granddaughter that if she would not come for lunch the following weekend, then she [the Oma] would not look out the window to follow her with her gaze when she [granddaughter] left or open the window of her apartment to wave goodbye.<sup>18</sup>) The Oma behind her glass window in Leipzig saw the cat flying down. Horrified, she called the police. After his citation, the accused man was now grief-stricken, extremely offended, and amazed. He called together his kin-fellows in Leipzig to narrate his ordeal and to recriminate the abominable evil that had befallen him. He wailed that he had never been arrested in his life, he had never been to court, and now, on the account of a mere cat, he—the descendant of great hunters and warriors, who sacrificed dogs to the gods to obtain their favors—would have to stand trial, and for what? Letting out a cat! Who does not know that cats break their falls? How was he to explain this evil when people back home heard that he was arrested? The treatment of cats, dogs, and other pets kept in the Western world is a serious source of amusement for most African observers. This ordinary story illustrates different societal attitudes toward pets and different categorization systems. To a large extent, the story shows that individual and group identities transcend obvious demographic identifiers of skin color, ethnic affiliation, sex, and age to include a psychological aspect that is brought forth by a complex and nuanced series of interactions.

In one of my introductory classes, I use an exaggerated version of this cat story to illustrate the fact that culture subsumes our feelings, and our sense of rightness and wrongness. So, when I get to the part where the

man lets the cat out of the window, I say that it was from a two-story building. In response, there are often loud gasps in the class; students drop their jaws in disbelief. With pained facial expressions, they express their utter objection to this horrific and dastardly act. Most of the students condemn this “deplorable” deed rather than respond to the question that I pose as follow-up to the story, “How is it that all of you show similar emotional reactions to the act of letting out the cat?” They voice their support for the man’s arrest, suggesting various severe punishments. It is this socialized and instinctive response to an act that I find interesting and worthy of examination. To me, it is a worthwhile venture to understand that which informs collective attitude. Doing so will not only serve academic interests, it will promote cross-cultural understanding and mitigate inter-cultural miscommunications.

For years, I have documented and kept notes on Westerners and their pets. Leona Helmsley, who died in 2007, reportedly bequeathed \$12 million to her Maltese dog while disinheriting two of her own grandchildren. Lucie Conchita left \$3 million to her three Chihuahuas, in addition to diamond dog accessories and a mansion in Miami worth \$8 million. Maria Asunta, in November 2009, bequeathed her entire estate and \$13 million to a stray cat rescued from the streets of Rome. On August 21, 2008, CNN, during their 2 p.m. news, carried a report about a police officer with the San Marcos Police Department and a speeding incident involving a Texas State University student. The student was stopped on highway I-35 going nearly 100 mph. His excuse for speeding and endangering other motorists was that his girlfriend’s dog, Missy, needed emergency medical attention. The video of his agitated and comic display, as he wailed about the nearing death of the dog, generated diverse, but interesting, commentaries from concerned citizens. Of the over 4000 responses, practically none was sympathetic to the officer. The majority “nicer” responses called for him to be fired. A sizeable number who equated their pets to their children sought more extreme punishment, including some calling for his demise. In their opinion, the officer was insensitive to have said to the young student to “chill out, it’s just a dog,” while reminding him that “you can buy another one” and cautioning him that at the speed he was going, he was going to kill someone.<sup>19</sup> After winning the 2008 Presidential Election of the USA, President-elect Barack Obama spoke at a rally in Grant Park in Chicago, and said to his daughters, “Sasha and Malia, I love you more than you can imagine and you have earned a new puppy that will be coming with us to the White House.” A day later, on Friday,

November 7, CNN American morning news anchor John Robert posed to the nation the question: “What kind of dog do you think the president-elect should get for the White House?” He asked viewers to “email us the type of puppy the Obamas should bring to the White House.” That these are newsworthy in the first place is to people of other cultures, especially Africans, amusing. On September 30, 2013, former president G.W. Bush posted on Facebook the picture of himself with arms widespread, walking toward a dog as if to embrace it. The image was supported with the text: “Today would have been the lad's 13th birthday. Here's to Barney, a great pal.” The *Huffington Post* carried this image of the president on the front page of its website, writing “President George W. Bush reflected on the life of his beloved dog Barney Monday by sharing a photo of the president and his former pup on Facebook.”<sup>20</sup> This news item shared the same front page with the apparently very important stalemate in Congress that was to lead to the shutdown of the US government.

Often, I take a census in my class to determine how many students currently own a pet or grew up with pets. In my 2015 summer class, 100% of the students did. For each one of them, a pet is considered a member of the family. A good friend of mine who did her fieldwork in the state of Israel came back to the USA with a dog that she got as a puppy while in Israel.<sup>21</sup> This dog, which grew up to be very large, lived for 14 human years in the States, traveling with her everywhere. I had accompanied her to the vet for emergency surgery while we were in graduate school and watched her spend an enormous amount of money for the upkeep of this dog. At first, it was irritating when she spoke of Ginger, because it did not occur to me that she was referring to a dog. No matter how much I tried, I never could get past the use of any pronouns other than the neutral “it” for this dog or any other pet, neither could I relate to the ascription of human attributes to it. In the city of San Marcos, Texas, there are people who are very dedicated to trapping cats and neutering them. Some of them whose great civil engagements with respect to pets I have observed for years will go out at midnight, expending many hours to trap these feral cats. Others work tirelessly to provide homes for them. On the campus of the university, dedicated individuals show up as early as 6 a.m. to feed these cats. The wife of an emeritus professor of archaeology cried for days when she had to put down some of the cats she had rescued and taken into her home. To use the verb “kill” instead of “put down” would have earned stern rebuke and, perhaps, a check on our friendship. Michael Vick, the American football player, was sentenced to prison for

running a dogfighting ring. After completing 23 months imprisonment in a federal penitentiary in Leavenworth, Kansas, and working to rehabilitate his image, Vick received so many threats that he was compelled to cancel a book tour in March 26, 2013. What underscores the judicial perception of this act in America such that he was sent to prison, and what would be the societal view of the same act, say, in Bali?

Discussing some of these observations and the *umgang* of Europeans with their pets, the most prolific and prominent contemporary African historian said that when he reincarnates, he would prefer to come back as “*aja oyinbo*,” the dog of a European, as he would be showered with lots of attention and care and would have more rights than are accorded some human beings. The different relational attitudes between aforementioned Africans and Europeans with regard to pets are systemic and revealing. Accounting for these differences, these trivialities, is a worthy venture. Perhaps it is possible, but I doubt that an African would bequeath an estate to a dog, any dog. Perhaps it is possible, but I cannot conceive of any Yoruba man walking a dog, not to mention cleaning after it. It would be difficult to see the pets of any African president as newsworthy, not to mention the video of any president of an African country messing with animals in the presidential villa.<sup>22</sup> The position of a pet in Yoruba culture is reflected in their saying: *eniyan o ri ibi sun, aja nbanrun* (“a human being cannot be looking for a place to sleep while a dog snores”).

In order to contrast the aforementioned collective “Western” sentiments toward pets, let’s consider a set of events that surrounded a sight-seeing expedition as part of the 2013 Africa Berlin conference in Germany. The tour bus was a double-decker vehicle with an open roof. Sitting high up were a group of participants from Nigeria. They were enjoying the trip and listening to the tour guide’s description of the various landmarks and associated history. They passed the Brandenburger Tor and headed toward Tiergarten. This area includes a nudist park. Suddenly, one of the women on top of the bus was heard screaming “*Oluwa o, e gba mi, ihobo omoluabi!*” (“O my god, somebody help! A normal human being in complete nudity!”). This instinctive outburst generated discussions that continued until they got to the Naturkundemuseum, one of the destinations listed in the program. As they were about to alight from the bus and go inside, one of the participants who visited the same museum a year before recognized it and said, “*na so so skeleton dey dis museum, make we no go inside.*”<sup>23</sup> Another person responded, “Skeletons! Why would I come here to spend my time looking at some skeletons that may be possessed by

demons, these are not things that people should be seeing, these skeletons may start appearing to people in their dreams.” Another prolonged argument ensued; eventually, one of the conference organizers suggested that those who did not want to go into the museum could continue onto the boat ride, while those who would like to visit the museum should do so and catch the next boat ride. A majority of the participants left for the boat ride. When the group got to the river, another conference participant snapped his thumb and middle fingers, after making a circle over his head with his arm.<sup>24</sup> This is a quotable communicative gesture among Yoruba people that is used to ward off evil. He said, “*I no die for water for Nigeria, no be here I go come die for water.*”<sup>25</sup> The sentiment found immediate support from another voice that interjected, “*if dey program me to die for water, e no go work, in Jesus name.*”<sup>26</sup> This was the end of the tour for this group, who resorted to going to the shopping complex instead.

All of these trivial observations point to a conclusion: different perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors are the consequences of mental facts which are not trivial for those involved. In each of these different dispositions are projections that are endowed with significance. As such, of the two groups of people in the aforementioned anecdotes, neither can be said to have been deserted by reason. It was actually their reasoning that resulted in the diverged behaviors. The logic of the reasoning that informed the actions of the two groups in the story is of interest to the discussion of the ethnographic data. A mere documentation of these responses (stories) might be entertaining, but utterly unremarkable, were that to be its end. The explication of the root of the lawfulness of the expressed behaviors, the explanation of the nature of the interdependence of notion and action as shared practice and its relatedness to other elements in the culture, as part of the plot of the conceptualization which induced or forced the displayed behaviors in the first place, will yield insights into the Yoruba nation as a community of practice.<sup>27</sup> Thus, this book ceases to view anecdotes, circumstantial events, stories, narratives, jokes, and responses as trash. Instead, it accepts them as operational manifestations of a cultured mind, and evidential data the analyses of which will illuminate the logic informing them. This emic and “Afrocentric”<sup>28</sup> paradigm à la Asante explores a Yoruba non-verbal signal as a reflection of Yoruba cultural experience in such a way as to reflectively provide a description of it. As such, it validates this experience, pulling it away from the marginal. As a reflection of Yoruba heritage, mores, and style, it meets Asante’s criteria for the designation of Afrocentrism. The attitudes, motives, and responses of Yoruba

people, which will be described in Chap. 3, developed as a corollary to the history of their origin and their experiences through their formative years. Consequently, all these became a cultural heritage woven into the fabric of their culture, customs, and identity.

The triviality that one could read into the preceding narrative ends when one begins to inquire into the factors that conditioned these collective behaviors: how these intellectuals, these scholars who make their living based on rational examination of issues, seem to have suddenly become irrational. How is it that these people perceive the same phenomenon differently and are led to act remarkably different from other observers with different ethnic, historical, and cultural affiliations? As fictional as these real events may sound, to the people who display them, these issues are real, and the resulting expressions are genuine. Rather than merely academic or theoretical, the funny events are significant and consequential. Anyone who considers these things trivial or overlooks their import does so at his or her own peril. Consequently, there is a need for the real-world orientation of scholarship toward discursive interactions in order to obtain meaningful interpretation of them. On the basis of the preceding, my interest is to explore the way in which deep-seated cultural views and norms structure perceptions. I also intend to examine actions and reactions that are produced as responses to the appearance of a person, in this case the person's hairstyle. This deep-seated, action-inducing way of conceptualization is akin to Wiredu's "category of thought," which he describes as a fundamental way of conceptualizing experiences of the world and own identity.<sup>29</sup> Due, in part, to their repetitiveness and constancy, certain views and behaviors have become so automated that they appear natural; in such cases, they often seem to lie outside of the reach of reflection and social control. Outsiders are quick to observe these behaviors, which will be described and explained in this work.

Peoples, regardless of where they reside, share perspectives and assumptions about the world in which they live in order to make sense of it. Everyone has certain views, certain mental facts, through which they explicate life's persistent issues including causality, correlation, life, and death, and their own place in the universe relative to that of animals, forest, and physical and spiritual beings. In response to mental facts, social facts emerge to portray how societies resolve issues pertaining to the management and distribution of resources as well as how they develop certain institutions to aid the process. Culture, in this sense, mainly consists of ideas acted upon, notions turned into practice, and habits informed

by certain underlying worldviews. Just as culture is manifested in those products that humans litter the Earth with, artifacts, it also shows up in behaviors, feelings, thinking, and unexamined assumptions that are codified symbolically, as will be shown in this book. This book foregrounds behaviors as actually observed, regardless of any sort of valuation offered by the subjects. This approach is contingent on the assumption that pervasive and uniform behaviors are culturally informed, that is, they occur in societal contexts and are an outcrop of fundamental core belief principles. The intent is not to make judgments about the rightness, or lack thereof, of the observed behaviors, but to offer a description of them and explain the principles that inform them. The focus on a group's (the Yoruba) conceptual framework only underscores its relativity, and is far removed from being branded as infelicitous. Thus seen, this is a journey in unpacking the significations contained in the head and head hairstyle of adult males, in this instance, dreadlocks.

### TRIVIAL RESEARCH

“What mighty contests arise from trivial things.”<sup>30</sup> The most theoretical question or abstract pursuit is often instigated by a trivial observation of social consequence. “Trivial” has become a valuable scholastic device that uses those mundane observations with existential consequences and real day-to-day implications as starting points for the study of cultural phenomena. It is useful to make statistical approximations, but they will yield a similitude of the facts, and we will continue to know only in parts. It is not enough to mainly consider the various underlying factors or principles that are core to the organization of a phenomenon while allowing for different manifestations, although this will offer insight to the phenomenon; however, when it concerns humans who do not live a-socioculturally, then it will be important to not overlook the real-life consequences of the various manifestations of the phenomenon being examined. As such, an aspect of the study of the organizing principles must occur within historical context, political dynamics, and social history. Through this combinatorial approach, conjecture will become meaningful, the abstract will acquire reality, and the theoretical will obtain practicality. “Trivial” speaks to (the triviality of) any abstract study that lacks direct relevance to an individual's aspirations for a good life. “Trivial” speaks to how the most insignificant things of life are the most devastating in their effects, especially when they are neglected; it pertains to how those issues to which we bequeath the

least importance have more dire consequences, matters of life and death as well as the quality of life a given person can expect.

Trivial is taken as a theoretical rubric that can explicate complex phenomena. Both in my 2011 Africa Distinguished Lecture Series at the University of Texas at Austin entitled “Trivial Linguistics of a Mental Program” and in my 2012 publication,<sup>31</sup> I explored the negotiation of identity, respect, and place among Yoruba transmigrants on the Listserv USA Africa Dialogue and showed how the Listserv has become a place for the reproduction of customary (Nigerian) practices. Participants of the Listserv have reduced the Web to a social-cultural formation in which to live their lives as if they were in a physical Yoruba or Nigerian society. The normative gerontocracy, sexism, and ethnicity, which dominate social interaction rather than recede to the background, actually became influential in moderating the conversations on the Listserv. Individual transnationals whose estates and seniority have been leveled by the somewhat class-based, informal, and opposing values of American society are active on the Listserv. They have sought to reclaim from this virtual community the esteem that their home community would ordinarily have conferred on their person, both by ascription and by achievement. Thus, the wrath of a male, who believes that he has been denied the deference due his age, will be incurred in the form of abusive language. Others sought not only to impose gerontocracy but to receive privileges for their achievements, and, as such, they insist on being called, for example, Chief, Dr., Professor, or Engineer. The feud engendered by a violation of these customary protocols is real and not limited to the virtual space. Ken Harrow recently wrote a book *Trash*, through which he attempted to see the world from below. According to Harrow, “The trash was always there, only we never noticed it.”<sup>32</sup> By exploring the metaphor and reality of trash heaps, squalor, and poverty pervasively depicted in African films, Harrow provides a discourse of the sociopolitical and artistic themes in African cinema as well as the cultural challenges confronting the continent. Harrow uses seemingly innocuous depictions across films to illustrate dire human conditions. When properly articulated, the use of trivialities to study a society avoids the position of arrogance, especially, the estrangement of the isolated thinker who occupies that world of ideals and perfection and is unencumbered by the vicissitudes of ordinary existence. Rather, it makes real those daily encounters of daily existence. Just as Harrow noted for trash, the murals, paintings, and signs that dotted Onitsha were always there. We see them, look at them, and walk away, but their importance in revealing social conditions and personal desires

was not quite appreciated. Ulli Beier<sup>33</sup> was quick to realize the scholarly importance of the inscriptions popularly found in the city of Onitsha—the hub of the popular Onitsha Market Literature—in the projection of freedom from communal and cultural impositions, showcasing individuals’ escape from traditional lifestyles and their optimism for the modern. Thus, these sign writers, in transitioning from the traditional to globally modern, were able to envision new realities, indulging their fantasies and romantic dreams. Additionally, they offered admonition against the care-free life in the faceless cities to which people were migrating from the rural areas, and critiqued ensuing social ills. The focus on “trivials” places people in their sociocultural world, where they are humbled by the ordinary, the discarded, and the overlooked. This humbling experience is comparable to a scene in the children’s movie *Ratatouille* (2007). In it was Anton Ego, food critique, nicknamed “the grim eater.” His ferocious evaluations have resulted in the deaths of many restaurants, the elimination of many jobs, and the destruction of many lives, and yet he becomes humanized by the cooking of a rat. This is not merely *sichtwechsel*, the changing of perspective; rather, it is to enter into the experience of the ordinary. Through this process that which seems lowly, uncomely, and trivial becomes transformed and transformational in deconstructing existing tropes and offering new insights to old studies. By exploring that which is deemed common, obvious, and habitual, vigorous debate might ensue, and the field will be better for it. Performance studies are specially known to privilege the theatricality of daily living. Another significant study of trivialities was by Lawuyi,<sup>34</sup> who studied the world of Yoruba taxi drivers and focused on the slogans inscribed on their vehicles. The goal was to make sense of the beliefs and ethical values underlying the identity constructions in economic relationships. In the process, he found evidence of the use of juju by most drivers, regardless of religious confession, to prevent accidents, attract passengers, and keep the thieving police at bay. Similar studies were also conducted by Guseh<sup>35</sup> to explore how slogans and mottos on commercial vehicles reflect Liberian philosophy and culture.

Any form of discrimination and typecasting that yields unequal treatment of people cannot be described as trivial, as will be shown by the various experiences that resulted from the experimentation that is part of the fieldwork for this work. Indeed, there is nothing more profound than to look at the unconscious patterned conduct of a society in real time as found among real people, and there is nothing more useful than to examine actual interactions of a people in which a manifested behavior

has a definite configured position in the context of the society's habitus. I consider these so-called trivialities to be facts indistinguishable from any other empirical data. They are part of the communicative repertoire of a people that meaningfully convey messages, the imports of which become clear when placed in their social factors and cultural contexts. This will be illustrated for Yoruba people.

Nothing compels the writing of this book or the explication of the sentiments expressed earlier other than the interest of a scholar in cultural dynamics. Additionally, I and my dreadlocks have lived for a long time now with the expressions of negative feelings toward my person and have contended with occasional dangerous behavioral responses from people of my own socialization. During some of these encounters, there were chances that I could have lost my life in the process. In places such as Trinidad and Tobago and some places in Ethiopia and Senegal, I found instant acceptance and camaraderie. Yet, in other places, I was greeted with polite restraint and telling indifference, perhaps induced by the prevailing legal system and political atmosphere that curbed the instincts of the people. For me, the fascination with the triumph of the cultural logic of one's primary socialization, even above all reasoning, is enduring. Part of the examination of "trivialities" was the study of the interaction of language and culture.<sup>36</sup> This essay examined the mental image aroused for native speakers of Yoruba by the third-person pronoun *wón*, they, in order to locate aspects of significance and of emotive culture that are implicated in how certain societal values are ordered. The essay shows that despite education, urbanization, Westernization, and their exposure to science, elite Yoruba people, just as other people, are not rid of the so-called illogicalities of tradition. Rather, they persist in the culturally ingrained attitudes that imbue the presumed entity indexed by *wón* with mystical forces; they hold this entity, also known as *aye*, to be responsible for all ills that chance upon individuals. The persistence of this "irrational, spiritistic" explanation was attributed to the active force of culture, in this case, the Yoruba worldview. For instance, during an international conference, one of the participants who heard my talk on *wón* shared his experience from the previous night. According to him, he was preparing for his presentation at midnight. First, the mouse attached to his laptop failed to respond; then, the laptop froze and then crashed. He turned off everything to reboot the laptop, and then discovered that the draft of his presentation could not be retrieved. In the ensuing confusion, his wife called him and he told her his dilemma, to which she responded, "*ko*

*ma je pe wón tun tele e de conference*” (I hope *they* did not follow you to the conference). The man at the conference right then, over the phone, joined his wife in faith and they “agreed in prayers” as they proceeded to bind and cast out the demon.<sup>37</sup> The prayer over the phone was followed by a day of fasting. The reaction to this otherwise insignificant utterance underscores its importance. It is doubtful that the same mental image would have been elicited in the mind of a monolingual English speaker, or that it could generate a similar response. In another instance, an angry woman screamed at her neighbor with whom there was a fight, “*Ti wón ba ran e simi, lo so fun wón pe oo ba mi nile*” (If they sent you to me, go and tell them that you did find me). This reaction suggested a spiritual dimension to their conflict. This pronoun (*wón*) was shown in that essay to pack more meaning than its English equivalent, *they*. It was shown to have more functionality than its passive correlate, *it*, as in “it was said that.” And it was shown to reveal a deep-seated belief that conditions Yoruba world outlook and informs their action. Yoruba *wón* in this context has a univocal semantics with religious coloration. The essay concluded that “*wón*” in Yoruba language use and thoughts reminds Yoruba people of the lurking presence of the unknown. It forces them to pay attention to the power of the hidden, and consequently, the need to always be protected. Yoruba people are constantly at war—they fight enemies in order to fulfill their destiny; they battle the world to wrestle from it a place of honor and dignity. Ever on the alert, suspicious, and distrustful of others, Yoruba people insist that “*isora/ifura ni oogun agba*” (vigilance/personal armament is the mark of an adult). One cannot grow up and achieve the status of an elder “*agba*” without having discovered the means with which to outwit these many attacking negative forces. *Wón* is the euphemism for these nefarious forces and enemies against which Yoruba people contend. Pursuing the same approach, Agwuele (2016)<sup>38</sup> sought to understand how, despite their education and their exposure to the scientific definition and meaning of race, American elites, such as scholars, justices, journalists, and politicians, prefer the habitual linguistic usage, which gives credence to the layperson’s biases. Every textbook in cultural anthropology, for instance, and every scholarly discourse, less fringed ones, accept race as lacking biological validity and as a mere social construct. Nevertheless, the language of the elites negates their training and is more in tune with the expectations of their neighbors. Race is at the same time color, ethnicity, and nationality; in essence, it is nothing other than the biologization of a social creed. The specific use of the word “race” in America illuminates the

present, but elusive, flaws between what we cognize to be false and how we, “truthfully”, portend falsehood to be the truth. It emphasizes the strong grip of culture, the essence of a people, over the individual’s mind to the detriment of reason and rationality. It illustrates how every iteration of the word “race” in the social context evokes and reinforces those deeply internalized images of whiteness and associated ills with respect to dominance, bigotry, and racism across all social institutions. For both Yoruba and the Americans, the issues are real. The consequences in the form of actions that result from the perception of the relevant issues are also real. There is no convincing the native Yoruba that there is no *aye*, nefarious entities, out to stymie their earthly progress. It is equally difficult to persuade Americans to conceive of “race” as mere differences in skin pigmentation or ethnicity. The many individuals who have lost their lives to racism and those who have been rendered hopeless and placed outside of the possibilities of their society as a result of the feelings and thinking that are subsumed by the concept of “race” in the mind of the dominant group cannot be persuaded that the issue of “race” is trivial, even though the discourse is based on data of everyday interaction. Thus, it is important to also examine the linguistic accompaniments to action in order to further clarify the behaviors documented in this work.

To use those apparently innocuous emanations from the drudgery of daily existence as important social data is to take seriously those examples not from an ideal laboratory situation, but from the actual realities that individuals contend with on a daily basis and which implicate the quality of their lives in measurable ways. These trivial observations thus lead the way to the social actualities that guide social practices. No doubt, many have reflected on the issues that are of concern to me in this book, and like these people, I feel compelled to find understanding—to obtain knowledge about the persistence of inscribed mental fact, with respect to the underlying context of our cultural interpretation of objects of visual perception and concomitant actions. In so doing, I hope that the result will yield an ethnography of intellectual value that will advance the studies of the peoples and cultures of Africa.

### SCOPE AND CONTEXT

Perhaps irrational are certain human behaviors. More irrational, however, are the institutions that have evolved to influence, if not determine, the lives of individuals and to legitimize, to sustain, and to continue irrational

behaviors. As already stated, my intent is to explore how deep-seated cultural views structure perception using hairstyles as the point of departure. Traditionally, the Efiks of Calabar considered twins to be evil; consequently, when twins were born, they left them in the evil forest to die. Mary Slessor, a Scottish missionary, has often been credited with helping to end this practice. Recently, albinos were thrust into the news. Known in Tanzania as “zeru zeru” or ghost, they are increasingly being killed under the assumption that parts of their body are laden with magical power that can be harvested. These deeds, as nefarious as they were and are, are sustained by a cultural base, a logic.

In August 2011, there was a torrential rainfall in Ibadan, Nigeria, that lasted over seven hours. More than 102 people perished in the flooding that resulted from it. The extensive flooding and immeasurable damage were exacerbated by large population, structures that blocked the water’s path, indiscriminate dumping of refuse into the Ogunpa River, and huge piles of debris overwhelming the ancient city. This flooding quickly reminded people of a similar event exactly 20 years earlier, which was popularly termed “*omi yale, agbara ya shobu*” (water flooded homes, deluge overran stores/shops) to capture the extensive destruction to affected homes and businesses. At that time, in 1980, lives were lost and properties were damaged, so much so that the attention of the international communities and organizations was attracted. Monies were donated for the cleanup as well as for the channelization of the Ogunpa River. The government embarked on a campaign to remove structures in the path of the river. Despite the extensive loss of lives, the most persistent and memorable activity associated with this disaster was the quest to find “a short celebrity with a hunched back,” who was to be offered as sacrifice to the Ogunpa River goddess in order to appease her and forestall future occurrences. At the time, the most famous man in Nigeria with a hunched back was Jakobu. This household name, a well-liked and extremely popular sitcom comedian, was rumored to have gone into hiding, as he was popularly seen as the oracle’s choice for sacrifice. Whether real or not, perhaps his rumored disappearance precluded a discussion of human sacrifice and instead a different academic debate about the event ensued, with the focus on finding out the whereabouts of the celebrated comedian.

There are several interesting ways in which the preceding examples link with the apprehension of a person, explicate causality, and propose amelioration. Underlying these examples, however, is that the immediately apparent and compelling actions are closely linked, and perhaps that they

were informed by a series of preceding ideas, notions, and percepts. The various examples, that is, data that will inform the discourse of this book are varying evidence of presumably certain lawful cultural operations of the mind and organizational principle(s) that by themselves are not the focus of attention. Rather, they are clues pointing to the existence of principles directing the mind and informing habitual attitudes and overt behaviors. David Armstrong<sup>39</sup> suggested that perceptual experience can be equated with belief; this suggestion eschews any form of correlation with the sensuous nature of the object of perception. For Thomas Reid,<sup>40</sup> the perceptual experience includes sensation and a conception of some external object together with a belief in the immediacy of existence. Both positions seem to illustrate and underscore the presence of belief in perception. Consequently, Smith argues that “belief cannot be simply omitted from an acceptable philosophical account of perception.”<sup>41</sup> The connection of beliefs, ideas, and actions to an object of perception will be illustrated with respect to Yoruba people using a trove of information and comments that I have gathered over a ten-year period of observation.

The Yoruba’s view of a person has its *raison d’être*. While the casual observer may see in it certain perplexing contradictions, for those who are socialized and acquainted with it, the cultural views are most consistent, and a meeting of these two different perspectives potentially generates a rich point.<sup>42</sup> This book is about visual discrimination; it is not about people with some form of physiological deformity or biological situation. Rather, it is about normal people presumed deviant mainly on the account of their hairstyles. It is about actions that are directed toward them and the understanding of these actions along with its societal *gegebenheiten*. It is a quest to understand how instinct compels the pronouncement of certainty at the expense of reason and reflection that hold sway in other matters.

Social facts<sup>43</sup> remain significant in the study of human behavior, especially those related to things that are real and meaningful to a culture. Civic responsibility requires that an individual within a society acts to the benefit of one and all. To the extent that the individuals will want to remain and function within a culture, the coercive force of the customs of the society imposes certain observances that at times nullify individuality and personal will. Such social facts and realities are neglected to the detriment of any individual. The origin of the rules that determine and shape the behaviors of members of a community is often difficult to ascertain, although their manifestations, effects, and consequences are easily observable. The specific view of, and treatment of, males with dreadlocks and other deviant

hairstyles occurs among Yoruba of all estates, regardless of their education, religious profession, or place of residence. This behavior is thus considered a social fact because its roots are in the socialization of Yoruba children and the enculturation of assimilated adults. The aesthetic judgment of Yoruba people concerning hairstyle is not an expression of personal taste in fashion; rather, it is the outpouring of a deep-seated religious worldview whose fulcrum will be shown to be fear. This fear is motivated by the individual's role in the survival of the nation. There is no doubt that individual Yoruba, like every other individual within any society regardless of place and time, differ in their dispositions, overt or covert, toward dreadlocks. However, there is nonetheless a collective negativity which frequently manifests in these dispositions.

This monograph documents a distinctive Yoruba social fact that is characterized by peculiar ways of not only viewing and treating a person of certain appearance but feeling toward the person and of rationalization of the treatment meted out. It is about the judgment that stems from the visual apprehension of a person; it is based on a case study of Yoruba people with respect to how they view Yoruba males with hairstyles considered culturally deviant. It deals with how perception informs actions and the form of treatments meted out to an individual by observers who interpret that which is visually cognized as aided by their cultural logic. Essentially, it is a correlation of societal ideas about how to be with societal actions considered just; as such every cognition was declared by Pierce<sup>44</sup> to be a judgment. The ultimate goal is to understand the organizational principles that lead to diverse and observable cross-cultural treatments of peoples due to their appearance.

A challenge, the question "to what end?" is a persistent question that has to be confronted by every scholar who embarks on a study of any phenomenon. For scholars who seek knowledge for its own sake, altruistically, this work provides an important historiography of male hair in Yorubaland. It goes beyond historical documentation to shed light on human perception in general, and in particular. With respect to the case study of this work, it is a crucial study in understanding dichotomous perception that occurs when one admires in others those things that one repudiates in the self. It is a study that implicates the continuity of a belief, culture, and sustenance of habitual practices. For non-scholars, this study provides a means toward the understanding of the self. Further, it allows individuals, regardless of ethnicity, to understand their culture, community, and their own individuality. It does so by excavating a historical

past through which the contemporary can be elucidated. For the Yoruba people, this implicates the issue of identity, as well as their philosophical perspective and its influence on the conduct of their affairs. Essentially, this study takes hair, a matter and theme relegated to the level of inconsequentiality,<sup>45</sup> and elevates it to an important means of social analysis. The study also functions as a research rubric in the explication of culture of representation and identity politics, consequently providing discourse that addresses issues about culture groups, their identity and the relatedness of both in the pursuit of life.

The semiotic analytical study of perception, which includes narratives, parables, sayings, allegories, and images, provides the means of understanding the present in the context of the past. This is a means of making sense of the attitudes and responses that are elicited from individuals and groups based on percept. According to Armstrong,

Belief is a dispositional state of mind which endures for a greater or lesser length of time, and that may or may not manifest itself (either in consciousness or in behavior) during that time. But perceptions are definite events that take place at definite instants and are then over. How, then, can perceptions be belief? The answer is that perceptions are not beliefs, and so not dispositional states, because they are acquirings of belief.<sup>46</sup>

Armstrong separates belief from perception, which makes it possible to explore the link between that which is immediately present (perception) and that which is simmering somewhere in the mind (belief). Belief presupposes certain forms of “pre-existing” before “perception.” In this case, visual perception is active. If Yoruba people meted out certain reactions or displayed certain behavioral traits, then, such could not have been immediately induced by the objects being cognized. As such, it is not simply the immediately apparent behavior that is of most concern, but a host of extraordinarily complex and powerful historical and social institutions that entrench, enforce, and sustain beliefs, attitudes, and consequently actions. These categories circumscribe the scope of social consciousness out of which individuals are formed.

A study that involves the observation of culture and cultural practices, including the subjective deeds of individuals, cannot be wholly objective. This fact was noted nearly 300 years ago when David Hume pointed out the two fallacies of selectivity and of objectivity. Fallacy of selectivity pertains to the process of attending to some data and not to others based

on the goal of the research. While presuming observational consensus, it is nevertheless obvious that personal bias finds its way into scholars' description and interpretation of reality. Invariably, there is a projection of our experiences, identity, personality, views, and values, including those of our socialization, into our understanding and description of reality. Nevertheless, these subjectivities do not in any way expurgate accumulated scientific facts and experiences that are violable. Being a participant in the culture of reference makes it necessary to state the conditions that informed the collected data, which some qualified as circumstantial or anecdotal, but which, to my mind, constitutes a matched-guise experiment.<sup>47</sup> This is an experimental technique that is designed to gauge unexpressed attitudes of listeners by requiring them to judge various speech samples produced by the same speaker. Speakers were rated on social traits and qualities like intelligence, friendliness, humor, kindness, dependability, leadership, and sincerity. However, the listeners were not aware they were rating and judging the same speakers speaking with different dialects of a language. The result is that the experimenter obtained surreptitiously how the use of a particular language elicited the assumptions that the hearers have internalized about that language. By knowingly wearing cornrows and dreadlocks, it was possible to obtain and gauge unexpressed sentiments and attitudes harbored by Yoruba people toward these hairstyles. The adopted approach is also empiricist to the extent that it mainly deals with actual real-life issues rather than abstractions. The focus on the behavior that we find on a daily basis seems to me to require documentation, description, and adequate explanation. Indeed, there is nothing more amusing and informative than when the intimate, uncensored views of the most cultivated, educated, and critically minded individuals are revealed to be primarily influenced not by the rationality of their training or guided by the scientific sophistication and the precision of their profession, but by the folk "philosophy" of their neighborhood and banalities from their childhood. This folk philosophy is a system of valuation that is a-scientific and culturally informed.

My conviction, the main thesis for the discourse of this book, is analogous to Piaget's. Essentially, individuals develop a somewhat permanent sociocultural structure that can be influenced to respond to external circumstances in creative ways. However, in order for them to be able to select new responses out of consonance with their habitus, it takes the arduous task of alienation from the primary orientation. This alienation serves to help people to cognize the set ways and principles of the organi-

zation of information, as well as habitual responses (areas of influence of their primary cultures). It will be ultimately shown that there is a tendency for one to persist in the language, culture, and habit of one's socialization, and for one to think that such system of conceptualization must remain operational regardless of attainment and place of residence. Africans, in this case Yoruba people, are not necessarily debited with a worldview in which almost everything is spiritual. There is, however, a certain spirituality attached to the conceptualization of causality in relation to the interdependence of the different realms of existence.<sup>48</sup>

We cannot explicate a phenomenon without contextualizing it within its center of existence. The import of any utterance, and the interpretation of a response (whether verbal or non-verbal), can only be meaningful when it is viewed against its historically particular conceptual and cultural framework. The Yoruba *umwelt* provides the necessary background information to understand what the Yoruba person means when she or he utters "*irun mere*" for dreadlocks, and enables the decoding of the frame of reference that motivates such utterance and, perhaps, the violence she or he felt necessary as a justifiable response. The question why the Yoruba person acts the way she or he does when confronted by a dreadlock-wearing Yoruba person cannot be answered in any serious way if a frame of reference or a conceptual framework that is alien to the Yoruba world is employed. To enter into the Yoruba consciousness in this regard will be to know experientially what a Yoruba person feels and thinks at the immediate sight of another Yoruba (male) person with dreadlocks. Such an entering into the world of the other enables an understanding of a culture's conceptualization of a phenomenon, thereby separating the object visually cognized from the idea surrounding the mode of cognizing said object. Dreadlocks suggest something to the looking eyes, and the suggested is retrieved using specific lenses that are culturally informed. Finding out what is informed, for Yoruba people, and the reason they are thusly informed is the ultimate goal of this work. For only then is it possible to understand the behaviors that the people produce. The Yoruba responses to cornrows and dreadlocks that are documented in this work point to a cohesive worldview that is both embedded and internalized. It will be shown that the custom governing the interpretation of certain objects is an African ontological perspective that makes a separation between realms of existence. This separation is not unique to Africa; indeed, when the customary grabs hold of the mind, it rarely lets go. In this sense, both Africans and non-Africans alike are steeped in traditional thought and valuation patterns in their daily

lives. As will be shown, the spiritistic argument that is proffered in this book to explain visual perception is not the same as that criticized by Wiredu.<sup>49</sup> It is not a symbolic pouring of libation to the spirits of ancestors by elite Africans to show their faith in African culture; the tradition and cultural institutions that will be explicated in connection with the specific Yoruba visual perception of concern are also not the same as the regularly termed superstition, that is, “belief, lacking rational support, in entities of any sort.”<sup>50</sup> Rather, it is a real and active belief in the efficacy of the power of spiritual forces that inhabit the realm between the Earth and sky. The belief system, as will be shown, is backed by evidence, and not “unargued conceptions about gods, ghosts, and witches” à la Wiredu.<sup>51</sup> Instead, they are daily realities of people’s lives, often popularly depicted in Yoruba films of Nollywood, and they explain why “a person can move from the village to Lagos and, weeks later, be on his or her way to London only to be forced back home soon afterward from the effects of powerful juju or witchcraft obtained from a diviner who lives in a nice house and drives a jeep.”<sup>52</sup> With reference to the power that caused this person to return home, many stories abound, and the conclusion remains the same: “many people, including the educated one, did not see spirit stories as fantasies, neither do they consider them the imaginative creations of fertile minds, but as events, episodes, histories, and realities.”<sup>53</sup>

## NOTES

1. Newmeyer, Frederick, J. 1986. “Has There Been a ‘Chomskyan Revolution’ in Linguistics?” *Language*, Vol. 62 (No.1):1–18, characterized Chomsky’s approach as a revolution because it engineered a formal and non-empiricist theory of a human attribute.
2. Interestingly, Greenberg (1984:14), in response to the innatists’ (Chomskyan) view that all languages are broadly similar in their syntax and lexicon, said either language universals are trivial, or they are conditional generalizations with statistical generality. Greenberg, J. 1986. “On being a linguistic anthropologist.” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 15, 1–24.
3. See Gleitman Lilian in “Human Language Series #1: Discovering the Human Language: “Colorless Green Ideas.”
4. “You can also collect butterflies and make many observations. If you like butterflies, that’s fine; but such work must not be confounded with research...” (Chomsky, N & M. Ronat, 1979. *Language and Responsibility*. Pantheon, Hassocks).

5. Silverstein M. 2003. "Indexical order and the dialectics of sociolinguistic life." *Language & Communication* (23): 193–229; Silverstein M. 1976. "Shifters, linguistic categories and cultural description." In Basso K H & Selby H A (eds.) *Meaning in anthropology*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press. 11–55; Silverstein, M. 1993. "Metapragmatic discourse and meta-pragmatic function." In Lucy J.A. (ed.), *Reflexive Language: Reported Speech and Metapragmatics*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press" 33–57.
6. Labov, William. 1966. *The Social Stratification of English in New York*. Washington DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
7. See Hansen, Karen Tranberg. 2004 "The World in Dress: Anthropological Perspectives on Clothing, Fashion, and Culture." *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 33: pp. 369–392.
8. Charles Peirce. 1955. "Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs." *Philosophic Writings of Peirce*. (Ed.), Justus Buchler. New York: Dover Publications: 98–119.
9. Bong, Ima. 2001. *Black Hair: Art, Style and Culture*. New York: Universe.
10. Caldwell, Paulette M. 1995. "Dread heads: roles, models, and the Black voice in mainstream news." *Practices of Hybridity*. Vol. 18. No. 1: 13–24.
11. Dash, Paul. 2006. "Black hair, culture, politics & change" *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 10(1):27–37.
12. Hall, Stuart. 1997. "The Work of Representation." In *Representation: Cultural Representations & Signifying Practices*. Ed. Stuart Hall. London: SAGE Publications: 13–74.
13. McNeill, David (1992) *Hand and Mind: What Gestures Reveal about Thought*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
14. McNeill, D. Hand and Mind. (11).
15. Falola, Toyin. 2013. *The African Diaspora: Slavery, Modernity and Globalization*. NY. University of Rochester Press. (p. 159).
16. Hall. The Work of Representation (p. 45).
17. The idea of going to ordinary folks to obtain the significance of a cultural item is not new; it informed and guided Martin Luther in his translation of the Bible to German (*Dem Volk aufs Maul schauen*), and it informed discourse about hair as undertaken by Banks (in *Hair Matter*), who interviewed women to obtain their definition of black beauty and personal hairstyle choices among many other works. We engage in fieldwork in order to obtain authentic material; consequently, due diligence requires the sampling of those real situational manifestations with real consequences regardless of how banal and trivial they appear on paper.
18. Yes, it is a trivial story, but an invaluable common cultural component of life and interaction across generations among Germans.

19. <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/1/fire-san-marcos-police-officer-paul-stephens/>.
20. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/30/george-w-bush-barney\\_n\\_4019159.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/30/george-w-bush-barney_n_4019159.html).
21. With a deliberate challenge to all observers to prove me wrong, I state that there will never be a Nigerian (Yoruba or Igbo) who will go out of the continent and come back with a dog as a pet.
22. The exception will be cases like the political and spiritual projections of power as was exhibited by Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, the conquering lion of the tribe of Judah, for whom keeping a lion is not only part of the royal personae, but an aspect of its essence. There are also rumors of those who keep pets to whom they fed their political opponents; if these are true, then the reasons for them are still different.
23. "This place is filled with skeletons, we should not go in."
24. See Agwuele, Augustine. 2014. "Repertoire of Yoruba hand and facial Gestures" *Gesture*, 14 (1): 1–17.
25. I did not drown in Nigeria, I am not going to drown in a foreign land.
26. "If the enemy has spiritually engineered my demise to be by drowning, such spiritual contrivance will not actualize."
27. Community of practice is defined as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly." Wenger, Etienne. 1998. *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
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29. Wiredu, Kwasi. 2009. "An Oral Philosophy of Personhood: Comments on Philosophy and Orality" *Research in African Literatures*, Vol 40. (No 1): 8–18.
30. Alexander Pope, The rape of the lock, 1.2.
31. Augustine Agwuele. 2012. "From Village Square to Internet Square: Language and Culture at the USA Africa Dialogue Series." In, *Development, Modernism and Modernity in Africa*, ed. Augustine Agwuele, NY Routledge.
32. Harrow, Kenneth, 2013. *Trash: African Cinema from Below*. Indiana. Indiana University Press.
33. Beier, Ulli. 1972. "Signwriters Art in Nigeria." *African Arts* Vol. 4, (No. 3): 22–27.
34. Lawuyi, Olatunji Bayo. 1988. "The World of the Taxi Driver: An Interpretive Approach to Vehicle Slogans." *Journal of the International African Institute*. Vol. 58, No. 1: 1–13.

35. Guseh, James S. 2008. "Slogans and Mottos on Commercial Vehicles: A Reflection of Liberian Philosophy and Culture." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*. Vol. 20. No.2: 159–171.
36. Agwuele, Agwuele. 2012. "Indexicality of Wõn: Yoruba Language and Culture." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*. Volume 24, Issue 2: 1–13.
37. This act of joining one in faith, agreeing on a thing, and then proceeding to prayer is a contemporary protestant Christian practice that derives from the interpretation of Mathew 18: 18 "Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven..." Verse 19 of the same chapter says, "Again, I say unto you, that if two of you should agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." (King James Version: 1611) Consequent to these verses, many of the so-called born-again Christians in Nigeria will agree on an issue with someone of the same faith, because their combined faith makes the request stronger, and then proceed to ask God of it.
38. Illustrating the triumph of culture over educated mind, the paper explores the egregious disconnect between scientific education and culture, and illustrates the near irrelevance of educationally acquired knowledge in habitual interactions among Americans based on the use of "race" in language of 1-19 Americans. Agwuele, A. "Culture trumps." *Social Analysis* 60 (2). 2016.
39. Armstrong, David. 1968. *A Materialist Theory of the Mind*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
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43. Emile Durkheim 1858–1917.
44. Pierce S. Charles. 1868. "Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man." *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 2: 103–114.
45. Lesnik-Oberstein, Karin. 2006. "The last taboo: women, body hair and feminism". In, *The Last Taboo: Women and Body Hair*. Karin Lesnik-Oberstein (ed.). NY. Manchester University Press.
46. Armstrong, David M. 1968. *A Materialist Theory of Mind*. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul (p. 213).
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50. Wiredu, 1997: "How Not to Compare African Traditional Thought (p. 321).
51. Wiredu, Kwasi. 1980. *Philosophy and an African Culture*. NY. Cambridge University Press. (p. 45).
52. Falola, Toyin. 2013. *The power of African cultures*. NY. University of Rochester Press (p. 283).
53. Falola, Toyin. 2005. *A mouth sweeter than Salt*. Michigan. University of Michigan Press (p. 168).

## The Yoruba Universe

*It was at an international conference on Africa at the University of Texas at Austin, six months into my wearing cornrow hairstyle. We were observing a mini-break. Five of us, well acquainted, sat around a table drinking coffee and eating pastries. We conversed animatedly in English and in Yoruba as is often the case when Yoruba people gather. Suddenly, a middle-aged man walked boldly up to our table. He positioned himself directly opposite from me. His facial expression was stern and his body language unfriendly. He pointed authoritatively at me with his index finger and asked in an unsociable voice, “Where are you from?” Since I had never seen him before, I was quite taken aback at his impudence. Noticing my hesitation, he shouted his question again: “Where are you from?” I responded in Yoruba with a familiar and joking phrase: “Se oju yi o gun rege to ni” (Is this appearance not indicative enough?). Everyone at the table laughed, but he stood there unperturbed. He repeated his question this time more forcefully and quite irritated. One of the people at the table, a former colleague of his at Obafemi Awolowo University at Ile Ife, who was then teaching at the University of Texas at Austin, in a rebuking manner said to this stranger in Yoruba, “Ibadan bi ti e ni, ki lo de gaan?” (Like you, he is from Ibadan. What exactly is the problem?). Just as abruptly as he had come, the man turned around and walked away without another word. He had not only broken every Yoruba code of public conduct, politeness and “*iwa omoluabi*” (good manners), he had inadvertently pointed at a deep-seated reservation against “what” he saw and, perhaps as a crusader, questioned the permissiveness of those who sat and interacted with me.*

It is easy to observe that neither an appeal to reason nor a rationalized factual exegesis will explain his reaction or dissuade the displayed customary response.



## THE YORUBA WORLD

The regularity of the relationship between appearance and the feelings that it generates as well as the resultant actions that they inform are displayed against a socio cultural background, the history of which is necessary to understanding the collective behaviors here identified. It is perhaps difficult to understand a culture and a people without recourse to the history of their formation. There is no doubt history is great, history is important, and history is valuable. Most certainly, there is a great value in looking at the past in order to understand the current path. In the case of Africa, the influential role of history in the study of the continent, in reclaiming Africa and Africanness, and in resolving persistent existential questions cannot be over-emphasized. However, as Professor Dele Jedge is fond of saying, I am a scholar of here and now; the past is valuable, but the present is most important to me as a scholar. The deeds of old ascribe authenticity and groundedness, but the behavior of people whose actions I see, observe, and feel is of greater importance to me in understanding how actions reveal aspects of the people, and who they are. Actions demonstrate the actor's identity, including supplying means of understanding the basis of these actions. The automatic, anonymous apparatus of social cohesion, known as institutional control, is a system of knowledge that instills conformity to communal order, and as suggested by Foucault, this includes power. The said power, according to him, is not possessed as a thing or transferred as property; it functions like a piece of machinery. It does not need to operate by explicit proscription or by violent physical compulsion, but uses an equally forceful spectacular system of regulatory looking, worked through the social body<sup>1</sup>.

Underlying this work is culture. In accounting for it, it is important to describe the knowledge of culture and how it is acquired; through this, it is possible to understand how culture forms a communal and shared good, such that it conscripts adherence and forms a social order.<sup>2</sup> My goal in this chapter is to detail the Yoruba world, their environment, their economic

activities, and their subsistence strategies. The instinctual drive to action owes its origin to the provisions of the governing environment that formed the Yoruba nation. The nation in reference is of a valorized past.<sup>3</sup> In this context, it is an absolute, closed, unchanging, and essentialized past. To understand the performance of the resulting, and now consummatory, acts requires a careful description of the foundational basis of the people. By drawing from sources across disciplines, consequently, the following discussion sheds light on the earlier social, economic, and political systems that make it possible to uncover the backbone of the collective that became integrated into modern Nigeria as the Yoruba nation. It also shows the foundational bases as crucial factors implicated in the development of the nation's own defining system of perceptual organization. Accounts of life and living conditions in Yorubaland can only be derived via conjecture that upstreams from older written documents, observation, and sometimes European exaggerations that span over 400 years of commerce in persons. The internal affairs, demographic situations, and political economy that immediately preceded the British pacification of Nigeria can only be used to speculate about the formative years of the Yoruba nation.

Miss Tucker's Christianity-influenced account published in 1854 stated that Africa had indeed become "one universal den of desolation, and crime."<sup>4</sup> With reference to West Africa, even during the abolition period, when Sierra Leone provided a safe haven for rescued enslaved persons, she said: "The whole of this part of Africa ... was in apparently hopeless darkness; liberty, whether bodily, mental, or spiritual, was unknown, and the eye of pity sought in vain for any gleam of better things."<sup>5</sup> Sir Moloney, writing in 1890, viewed the Yoruba as a people who owe their origin to a community of language (tongue), communal interests, and the necessity of self-protection. Robert Campbell (1861) spoke of the Egbas and Yorubas of Central Africa, thereby suggesting that which today is unthinkable, that is, that Egba people were different from Yoruba people. Data of these kinds incited popular perception and informed more serious works of historians, linguists, and humanities scholars that elucidate the people and their cultures. For instance, until the 1800s, the different Yoruba states were feuding nations that somehow succeeded in creating a narrative of common ancestorship and ethnicity. These states fashioned common political, religious, and economic practices, and invariably became unified as a nation<sup>6</sup> with a shared outlook.

All Yoruba states trace their origin to the city of Ile Ife and to Oduduwa, who was acclaimed the first king of Ile Ife. There are several

verbal accounts regarding the origin of the people, two of which play on the meaning and significance of Ile Ife in unifying the Yoruba peoples. Ile Ife (i.e., place whence dispersion emanated), in the creation myth, is suggested as the cradle of humanity from where the people spread out into all parts of the world. It has been further suggested that Oduduwa descended here from heaven using a chain. The Earth was covered with water. He carried with him a shell, which contained loose earth, and a rooster. He created the solid earth by pouring the sand in the shell on the water. Then he set the rooster on it. Wherever the rooster scratched, the loose sand became solid ground. Oduduwa became the first king of Ife. After the death of Oduduwa, his son Okanbi and his own six children (or 16 of his grandchildren, depending on the version of the story) spread out from Ile Ife to form the so-called original seven Yoruba states (Benin, Illa, Ketu, Oyo, Owu, Popo, Sabe). These were the progenitors of the various Yoruba states that make up the Yoruba nation. Thus, the dynastic claim of each state lies in their linkage to Ile Ife. This linkage assures filiality and guarantees that the beaded crown worn by the king of each constituent kingdom not only receives the benediction of Ile Ife but includes in it paraphernalia from Ile Ife.

The Yoruba nation is defined by the operation of an elaborate monarchical system of government, with the king at the head, and a supporting cast of chiefs and lords who wield power over their different offices. Operation of township has been shown to correlate with the existence of monarchy.<sup>7</sup> It is not clear whether the towns developed round the palaces of the royal kings<sup>8</sup> or whether the kingship developed out of the need to administer heterogeneous urban communities.<sup>9</sup> It is clear in the case of the Yoruba state that their monarchical system, with differentiated power structures, combined with an agrarian economy to yield a hierarchical form of societal organization. The hierarchical pyramidal structure of the nation consists of the crown-wearing king (*ilu alade*) at the apex, followed by subordinate towns (*ilu ereko*). Beneath this is the market town (*ilu oloja*), under which is the village (*ileto*) that subsumes the hamlet (*abule*), and, finally, the settlements (*aba*). At the core of this constellation is power, the ability to assert influence, to conscript resources to one's own purpose, and to elicit allegiance to incorporated goals. However, this structure is ameliorated by the narrative of consanguinity, specifically, the father-son relationship with attending duties.

These assertions can be further clarified by looking at the 1800s, the century in which the modern Yoruba nation evolved out of many king-

doms, which included empires such as the one that was formed by the Oyo Yoruba, provincial systems, as typified by Ile Ife, and the federal system, as found among the Egba people.<sup>10</sup> The Yoruba nation rose through warfare in the fifteenth century, and for about 150 years, it expanded and secured its frontiers, bringing large areas that spanned from the Niger River in the north to the Atlantic in the south, under strict political control in a system of vassalage.<sup>11</sup> Forming the nation were vastly independent and tributarized groups that traced their origin to a common founder. By the 1840s, there were at least eight independent states, namely, Oyo, Egba, Ketu, Ijebu, Ibadan, Ijesha, Ekiti, and Ife, together with Ilorin, a former Yoruba province under the occupation of Fulani, Bornu, and Hausas.<sup>12</sup> Characterizing the various systems is a monarchical system that is hierarchically constituted. These different entities operated monarchical systems with different levels of power separations: a principle of succession to the throne based on blood and age, and a system of balances and checks, often operating on the basis of self-interest. The senior chiefs wielded political power. Their powers did not derive from their titles, but were based on “the control of resources, on the allegiance of followers, and on the accumulation of wealth.”<sup>13</sup> For instance, the Oyo Empire, at the height of its greatness under the king Alaafin Majeogbe, was terrorized by Basorun Gaha. This military commandant installed his children at every one of the satellite towns of the kingdom and collected the tributes that were due to the Alaafin. The kingdom accommodated big and powerful men who were able to command loyalty for their own interest, and such men were influential in the formation and establishment of Ibadan, whose history continued to be defined by brigandry. As suggested by Falola, Ibadan’s modernity in the nineteenth century was defined by knives and guns.<sup>14</sup>

Given what was going on in the nineteenth century, the social order of the eighteenth century would have primarily consisted of dynamics of enslavement and the fight for survival along the hierarchical dimensions already described. The social milieu pervading the growth and expansion of the Yoruba nation could be intuited from that which was obtained in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. It would not be exactly an exaggeration to describe the social order of the formative period of the nation as resembling that of Hobbes’ state of nature, where life was short and extremely nasty within the brutish war-torn zone of what is now known as Western Nigeria. There, each individual mostly sought his or her own good and was ever ready to war for it. Historical accounts of this era and the chronicles of many travelers, as well as the records of mis-

sionaries and colonizers, suggest that the 1800s was a continuous period of war intermittently interrupted by uncertain truces. It was characterized as a century of warfare<sup>15</sup> and as a period of turmoil, disaster, and shaky reconstruction.<sup>16</sup> During this period, each of the different kingdoms, due to feud, operated in a military fashion, either to defend their territories from other kingdoms or to invade others for the booty of war. The period witnessed the enslavement of others in order to obtain labor, wife, and personnel, in addition to gaining access to resources and to market. In fear of being disposed, each kingdom lurked to dispose the others.

As Falola suggested, conventional representation of the Yoruba people as a nation, a united people with a common progenitor, may not be sustainable, at least not in the light of the circumstances that dominated the 1800s. The wars and cut-throat rivalries among the subgroups during that time weaken the theory of Yoruba unity. “The states never pretended to belong to a single political community during the nineteenth century.”<sup>17</sup> The lack of a unified political organization is, however, not the absence of a political structure. Rather, it mainly speaks to instability and to the absence of the structures that allow the accumulation of surplus wealth to generate a bourgeois middle class that has time for curiosity and learning not immediately tied to survival. This discord also fails to imply the absence of a culturally unified group of people. The Yoruba realm of the nineteenth century looked a lot like the German realm of the same period. Just as the *Deutsche Reich* was made up of several independent units under a royal family before the unification embarked upon by Wilhelm von Bismarck, the Yoruba nation too consisted of many independent monarchical units. While some “states” were already in existence, some, like Ibadan, were emerging. First set up as a satellite military camp, Ibadan grew rapidly, and its war chief, Basorun, seized on its military strength to gradually exert independence from the Royal Oyo Kingdom. These units, like the Germans’, were bounded religiously by some mythology of creation and descent, cultural observances, language, and other interests. Depending on how one factors in certain units such as the Ilorin, Benin, and the areas north and east of the core, 98% of the population spoke the Yoruba language. Invariably, the myth of Oduduwa, à la Falola (1988), which assigned common ancestry to the people, became prevalent. Yoruba people of Nigeria are thus a conglomerate of nations who claim common descendants and are bound by geography, language, and traditions of culture, customs, and religion.

Consider the Yoruba kingdom, sometimes synonymous with the famed Oyo Empire that reached the height of its domination in the 1780s. The kingdom was defeated by its northern neighbor, the Bariba of Nupe, and it started paying tribute to it. The capitulation was precipitated by the rebellion of Ilorin, a provincial Yoruba town, headed by Afonja, who was intent on assuming the royal seat of the empire, and thus rule over the kingdom and its provinces. Since the king of each province is “a son,” a prince, he is in line to succeed to the Oyo throne by virtue of primogeniture. At times, the ambition of these princes or the quest for greater power and influence by the kingmakers (i.e., Oyo mesì, the council of chiefs that advise the king), among many other reasons, caused revolts and insurrections, which not only dominated the Yoruba kingdom but led to the rise and fall of many provinces as well as the creation of new states such as Ibadan.<sup>18</sup> The first inhabitants of Ibadan state, which, as already mentioned, began as a temporary military camp,<sup>19</sup> were made up of “refugees and hardened soldiers of fortune from the major areas and centers of disturbances in the Yoruba country....”<sup>20</sup> Ibadan housed refugees and soldiers of fortune from Ile Ife, Ijebu, Oyo, and other Yoruba ethnicities, including bandits and refugees who had escaped the old Yoruba cities after the fall of the Oyo Empire. From its initial organization as a military state, Ibadan evolved to civil administration, and when it became large, settled, and economically prosperous, it aspired to become a monarchy. To do this, Ibadan created a narrative that linked it to Oduduwa so as to be given a royal crown from Ile Ife. Ijaye, a rival state to Ibadan, also developed as a war camp; it emerged under the military and civil leadership of the autocrat, Kurunmi. Whereas Ibadan had resident officers in its satellite towns who collected tributes on its behalf, Ijaye did not operate residents; it collected the tributes directly. The fight for supremacy and ascendancy resulted in a devastating war between the two states that began in 1860.<sup>21</sup> The war lasted for over 30 years. This was the Ijaye war. These were tough times, which produced various autocrats and powerful military lords, including Somoye of Abeokuta, Ogedengbe of Ilesa, and Kosoko of Lagos. Kosoko made Lagos (a tributary to Benin even until 1845) insecure by contesting the crown against its legitimate king, Akintoye. The war, engineered by Kosoko, continued with Dosumu, Akintoye’s successor. The battle between Dosumu and Kosoko for succession to the throne of Lagos engulfed Lagos and its satellite states, and even foreign interests including the British, who aided Dosumu to eventually oust Kosoko and keep him at bay.

Southwest of Ibadan and North of Lagos is Abeokuta, a town that also developed from the collection of warriors. Abeokuta boasted of strong kings that engaged neighboring states such as Dahomey. It had warlords who vied for power and influence, and conducted continuous raids even all the way to Ouidah. The Kingdoms of Dahomey and Abeokuta were rarely at peace due to raids and counter-raids. In this southern part that bordered the Atlantic, one of the consequences of these wars was an increase in trading enslaved individuals from the war to Europeans. Thus, most raids and soldiering were preoccupied with capturing chiefs to be held for ransom at high prices.<sup>22</sup> Along with the capturing of people for sale, elites were specifically targeted for capture and were then threatened with sale in order to exact higher ransom. Even European missionaries were sometimes seized and ransomed. Ogunmola, the Ibadan military leader, once seized Roper and eventually ransomed him for the value of one hundred slaves. As a result, Bowen<sup>23</sup> said:

“all prisoners taken in [Yoruba] war were slaves; and if not redeemed by their countrymen, were set to work by the captors, or sold to dealers. Also, being averse to capital punishment, criminals were equally sold as slaves. To the most, including hunters, danger was not in nature, rather, it was the kidnapping slave-traders.”<sup>24</sup>

With regard to the social situation, Barber concluded that “everywhere else, we see them living, either under foreign institutions, or under the curse of slavery, or as an oppressed and degraded people.”<sup>25</sup> Johnson, in describing the prevalent social situation of the time, said, “[N]o young man or youth could be seen out of doors unarmed without some weapons...a young man did not consider himself fully dressed without a short sword or knife girded to his side... to spend a good day out without wounds and bruises to show for it was not considered manly.”<sup>26</sup> He further noted that Basorun “Ogunmola [the military leader of Ibadan] put a stop to all that because the innocent often suffered at the hands of brute force.”<sup>27</sup> This was around 1860. Ultimately, these wars caused not only attrition but the implosion of the kingdom. As a result of its weakness and out of necessity, the kingdom yielded to subjugation even to foreign religion. For instance, Yoruba people practice African Traditional Religion (ATR); however, due to the ambition of Prince Afonja (the Yoruba leader of its northernmost state) to succeed to the throne of Oyo, the preeminent of all Yoruba kingdoms, Afonja brought in the Hausa people as mercenar-

ies. The Hausa mercenaries proceeded to take advantage of the situation to not only impose Islam but depose Afonja from the throne and thence wage war in the South.

Finally, the Yoruba nation, in general, has cities and states situated in locations with natural protection from formations such as mountain ridges. These cities that are often walled are made up of enclosed residential compounds and homesteads that are constructed as forts. All these portray the defensive posture of the kingdoms and their quest for security. In the 1800s, all the Yoruba states, including Ibadan, Owo, and Abeokuta, all the centers of power at that time, were engulfed in civil wars. These wars were primarily concerned with enslavement and resistance against the Muslim caliphate that had conquered their northern territories. Essentially, war and pacification defined the social, political, economic, and religious milieu on which rests the contemporary Yoruba society, the society that emerged following the peace treaty of 1893.

Shaped by historical forces, the Yoruba are traditionally town dwellers. The major cities often had protective walls of defense. The town-dwelling characteristics of the Yoruba nation are symbolic of the nation's attention to the care that it gives to physical orderliness, which also pertains to the nurture and care of the head. "The [Yoruba] village or town denotes the ordered, cultured and predictable, and the jungle (igbo) the unordered, uncultivated, and unpredictable... by the same token, unkempt hair is likened to a jungle and the individual concerned is easily mistaken for a psychopath."<sup>28</sup> The years and generations of township dwelling produced a hierarchical political system of monarchical governance. The vast majority of denizens of this area eked out survival under a strenuous system of agriculture and supporting subsistence strategies. Having a developed city, state, and urban existence, the Yoruba nation is attended by inequalities. Like the kingship system, the society too is hierarchically structured, and the people are classified in vertical dimensions.

Further, the 1800s was the period in which Islam was making its own expansion southward from the north and beginning to infiltrate Yorubaland. Invariably, by the twentieth century, Yorubaland would have become greatly Islamized, and most became Muslims.<sup>29</sup> Islamization in Yorubaland included Qur'anic education, and its integration into the fabric of Yoruba social and cultural life was made easy due to the tolerance of Islam for indigenous Yoruba practices, customary laws, and leadership system. As Islam was gaining ground southward, Christianity, Western education, and colonial influence were also gaining ground northward from

the coastal regions of Lagos, Badagry, and Cotonou. The Europeans' presence and expansion were, in part, considered beneficial, as they offered military support to create stability; they also facilitated commerce. This period brought about the codification of Yoruba religion, myth, and culture under Western influence. Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther, the first African to gain this position, translated the English Bible into Yoruba and preached across Yoruba country. Rev. Ajayi Crowther was persuaded of the benefits of European presence, religion, lifestyle, and culture, and he championed their course. He was also a beneficiary of European benevolence, having through them escaped enslavement and gained Christian education. Also helping to spread European views at this time was Dr. Africanus Horton of Sierra Leone, who was convinced of the importance of Western medicine and Western style of schooling. Christianity and Islam were indigenized in the continent and acquired their own independent dynamism among Yoruba people, because the Yoruba Kingdom continued to be based on indigenous customs and traditions rather than on precepts of these received confessions. Consequently, the people are in all things first Yoruba. The other religions are mostly conduits for the expression of Yorubanness, that is, customs, cultural orientation, and realities.

## THE ECONOMIC ORDER OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

*During a field trip to Ibadan to collect acoustic data, I got out of the taxi at Ekotedo where I grew up to look at how the place has changed. I walked on through to Adamasingba, turned left along the Lekan Salami stadium (former race course) to Sabo. I could not find the popular Odeon Cinema. Thereon I walked to Mokola roundabout and walked to the neighborhood where relatives lived. There I lost my hearing. I walked from one street to the other and unable to find my way out, I approached first this young man who was apparently waiting for transportation to ask how and where the bus is going to University of Ibadan (UI). With eyes glued on me, he continued to walk backwards, turned around and hastened his steps. An elderly woman, mother-like in appearance, with shopping bags came by. E jo ma (excuse ma'am), mama... she walked on without the slightest hint of having heard or noticed me. After the third person began to plead the blood of Jesus, I knew not to ask anymore.*

Before its decline, the Oyo kingdom expanded and its territory spanned all the way from the boundary of the River Niger, to the north, to the

coastal areas of the Atlantic in the south, including Dahomey. The spread covered arable land and pastures with seasonal rainfall as well as thick mangrove forests. It included freshwater swamps as well as lowlands that formed the base of the peoples' economic activities, and political and religious formation. To ensure their cohesion, the preservation of their economic interests, and the maintenance of their territorial integrity, as well as subsume future expansion, narratives of divine ordination were constructed. As already described, Yoruba people are the children of *Olorun* (eni + ti + o + ni + orun), that is, the one who owns the heaven, or (Olu + orun), the ruler of heaven. *Olorun* is aided by the various deities that he fashioned to help his theocratic administration of the world. These deities and divinities inhabit the space between heaven and Earth and others beneath the Earth.

Two of the chief Yoruba gods from Yoruba mythology are Oduduwa and Obatala. These gods had two offspring: the first was Aganju, a male child (whose name means uninhabited tract of land), and the second, Yemoja, a female child (whose name means mother of all fishes). Thus, per Yoruba myth of origin, land and sea are the offspring of heaven and Earth. They encompass the subsistence of the Yoruba people and define their world. These two deities, through an incestuous marriage, gave birth to the equivalence of the space between the Earth and sky. Thus, situated in areas of abundance of fertile and arable land with flowing rivers, Yoruba people were primarily farmers, hunters, and fishers, and secondarily, they engaged in crafts that directly serviced these agrarian pre-occupations and those that aided an agrarian state of a hierarchical order.

Different from mere profession and an abstract system, the indigenous Yoruba religious vision of the universe is existentially defined. This Yoruba religious perspective postulates a picture of reality as a complex whole and an intricate network of thoughts that form the base of the nation. Within this complex whole are the various categories of deities, spiritual beings, and nature forces that do not occur in speculative terms. Rather, they are beings that emanated from the supreme deity, who has assigned to them specific responsibilities and areas of influence. Consequently, each of these deities exercises influence inextricably linked to those aspects that are integral to the continuity of the people, such as fertility, health, hunting, agriculture, warfare, and security, among many others. There are legions of these gods, numerically referenced as 401, charged with ministering to the needs of the people. These gods, deities, and divinities, based on their names and spheres of influence, reflect the preoccupation of the Yoruba people and the condition of their existence. The observances for each god

provide insight into their value system, including the organization of their society. These include, for instance, Shango (god of lightning or current), Ogun (god of iron and patron deity of hunters and soldiers), Olokun (the goddess of the sea), Osun (the goddess of fertility), Esu (the mediator god), and Ifa (the oracle). There is interdependency between the heavens, sky, Earth, and the people. The spirits, the fathers, or deified kings need the people. The people need the backing of the gods, because the gods could cause a cessation of the life of the people. The people depend on the spirits for the acquisition of supernatural powers. The body of Oni of Ife (king of Ife), for instance, upon installation on the throne, is taken over by the gods. The Alaafin (king of Ife) was considered to be the vessel for some of the powers of Shango.<sup>30</sup>

Yoruba people operated subsistence farming on their arable land. Always agrarian people, they dwelled mostly in large homesteads with surrounding farmlands known as *oko-ile* (home-farm). They also journeyed to their main farm (*oko*), mostly outside the city limit. The system of agriculture that the people practiced increased their food production, which enabled the growth in population and aided state formation. Associated with the rise of a state is the development of specialization in different areas to complement their primary occupation as farmers. Thus, the men were also builders, blacksmiths, iron-smelters, tanner and leather-workers, tailors, carpenters, calabash-carvers, weavers, basket, and hat and mat-makers. The women would weave, spin, dye, and brew; make pots, oils, and soap; and traded in the market.

Just as the Yoruba people were exposed to violence of fellow humans who invaded for gain, their lives were endangered by the destructive forces of their gods. Though benevolently sustaining the people, the gods would act quickly to punish them if neglected or offended. The gods would plague the people with various forms of illnesses, including severe ones that endangered their survival by withholding those provisions charged to their different offices. Shango would cause fire, Ogun would cause war, Osun would cause infertility and famine, Yemoja would effect deluge,<sup>31</sup> and Sopona would visit them with chicken pox, and so on. Thus, the Yoruba people live in covenant with the creator, with their sky, water, and land gods, and with their forbears, all of whom oblige them to observe hundreds of laws, cohering on one singular purpose—continuity. Nevertheless, the people are also individuals, each of whom actively pursued the “good life,” the content of which is inextricably tied to their individual covenant with their head and guiding deity. Thus, they could be fiercely independent but within bounds.

In sum, it is worth noting and repeating that the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Yoruba nation subsisted on agriculture and ironworks, with supplements coming from fishing, hunting, and pottery. These sedentary activities tally with their city-dwelling character and the formation of kingship under strong patrilineality, hierarchical structures, and social stratification of people. The Yoruba economy, during the 100 years before British pacification, was under a ceaseless warfare. There was excessive violence, which one can even elevate to the principle of societal organization. The powerful peoples devoured the weak, while suspicious of, and in conflict with, one another. With the rise of militarism and trade in human cargo, made profitable by the Europeans who needed agriculturalists and experts growers for their tobacco, cotton, and sugarcane plantations, some powerful elites arose and were able to translate their warfare and raids into economic and even political successes. These people obtained many wives and increased reproductively. However, during the 100 years of war between Yoruba groups, sieges were laid, which cut off supplies and created famine, causing a drastic increase in the rate of mortality. Eko or Lagos was recorded by observers at that time to be very volatile. It was a hub of slave trade; its “turbulent chiefs and people paid little regard even to their own king who was frequently deposed and banished.”<sup>32</sup> Not too far from Lagos are the Egba Yoruba, whose major cities, especially Abeokuta, were constantly under siege and attack from the people of Ibadan, Ijebu, Ilorin, Ota, and Dahomey, but were secured by their leader Sodeke. Ilorin seceded from the Oyo Empire and became independent in the very early part of 1800. Ilorin was responsible for the destruction of the old Oyo, and in turn was defeated by Ibadan warriors, who profited from wars and sought war for its lucrativeness. It was common to see once thriving places in ruins as a result of wars. Nevertheless, the mindset guiding this agrarian era, based on the rate of mortality, famine, and insecurity, was also a religious philosophy of increase as the solution to these perennial issues. Different from European communities where a transition from the Malthusian economy coupled with technological advancement resulted in decline in population, the Yoruba nation retains the Malthusian economic principles and cultural practices without its base. As such, population increase is not only unmatched by economic increase, it is actually tied with economic retardation compounded by modern market economy problems and principles. The lack of consonance between modernization and population, on the one hand, and between modernization and worldview, on the other, is as intriguing as it is interesting, especially in the

manner of its divergence relative to the “cultural” transformation that followed the industrial and technological development that emanated from agrarian practices in the Western societies. However, when seen purely within the Yoruba worldview, the apparent dissonance gives way to a logic, with roots in Yoruba origin and philosophy to life (cosmology).

### *Yoruba Filiality*

Yoruba people are known traditionally to be fiercely independent; servility, according to Ellis, is rare among them. Nevertheless, they are found to be nationalistic and patriotic. As seen by the enduring wars of succession and the economic feud between peoples and their environment in their different subsistence engagements, the people evince a collective outlook that compels the individuals within Yoruba society to carry out group-oriented activities that, more often than not, overlook their individuality. That the fiercely independent people assume a collective outlook owes to the collective fight for survival. Cosmologically, this struggle takes place across the three plains that encapsulate the Yoruba world. Having created a common origin, common ancestorship, and common customary practices whence their common religious view emanated, the Yoruba see their fate with respect to survival as common. Therefore, they became united and are guided by common earthly goals and injunctions, the observance of which is to assure the attainment of the earthly goals. The community or family functions as the custodian of these communal ideas as well as the ideas of individual members within the cosmology of Yoruba. The community sanctions or disapproves certain ideas such that life without the community is not possible; just as the gods continue as ancestors, a person without a family, a lineage, or the gods is like a river disconnected from its source.

The social-cultural, political, and religious history of the Yoruba people are interlinked and traced to Ile Ife. One of the Yoruba sayings describes Ile Ife as: *ife on' daye, ibi ojumo ti nmo wa* (Ife, the creator of the world, from where the sun rises). By producing children that outlived him, Oduduwa founded a people; by producing children who became founders of satellite states, thus continuing the tradition of their father, Oduduwa produced a nation that perpetuates its origination creed by spreading outward (Ife). Politically, Oduduwa founded a kingdom that carries his kingship legacy by having descendants who operate the monarchy wherever they reach, thereby entrenching it as a defining feature of their social existence. Just as the father (Oduduwa) became immortal, the children sought exploits and

produced offspring who continue the nation indefinitely. By placing flags of their homeland on a new territory, modern states proclaim ownership and show continuity. Similarly, each emerging Yoruba state shows affinity to Ile Ife and proclaims descendancy from Oduduwa by the sword of state and calabash of divination that are sent from Ile Ife for the consecration of a new Yoruba king. Religiously, Oduduwa instituted a worldview that tied together the three spheres of Yoruba's existence, making them interdependent. Economically, the various constituent units across the cadre formed a production and consumption unit within a larger formation. The political economy of Yoruba functions as would a monarch–retainer liaison. Against this background, Yoruba nationhood is a corporate body, a large, socially coherent body, and a nation of practice. It consists of people with a shared outlook and shared communicative patterns. The Yoruba's outward migration from Ife was to prospect for continuity—the survival of them as a people. Their institutions, both cultural and political, were devised to insure and ensure their continuing existence and boundless expansion.

Altogether, the goal of the Yoruba nation is the production and reproduction of the material basis of its own existence,<sup>33</sup> as well as the maintenance of the requisite social and organizational structures that are necessary to achieve this goal.<sup>34</sup> In this, social hegemony trumps every other considerations. The aforementioned concept of social hegemony<sup>35</sup> is invoked in order to frame the ways in which Yoruba people portray themselves, their ideas, beliefs, and conception of the purpose of their earthly existence. This frame encompasses the power, values, and identity to which individuals are expected to subscribe. Within this conceptualization is their social control mechanism through which the Yoruba nation maintains itself. It does so by exacting compliance. Socially, Yoruba people are extremely polite, jealously guarding their position and status. It is worth reiterating that there is a strong bond of interdependence engendered by their mode of subsistence, kingship, and religion, and that this bond occurs starting within the family and percolates upward, first to the homestead, then the community, and finally to the state under the imperial king. One of the marks of this bond is conformity: unflinching adherence to established codes of conduct and societal injunctions. Yoruba peoples' view of hairstyles and deviant appearances draws its reference from the conceptualization of a society in which conformity and cohesion are fundamental factors of societal organization. Conformity is assured by the internalization of the nation's ideals, norms, and values that are anchored in their cosmology. Compliance is achieved mostly through a continuous process of

socialization and is enhanced by the integrative power of cohesion and the harmonization of individual behaviors. The Yoruba word for civilization according to Lawal is “*olaju*,” that is, “to give the earth a human face.” It also means to brighten up the face, essentially, to open up the eyes, to light up, that is, a physical act, and is thus part of enlightenment (a psychological act). This concept speaks to the Yoruba aesthetics that links the care of the spiritual to that of the physical. To further explicate this perspective, Lawal noted that “the Yoruba have not only redesigned their habitat, they have personified the earth as a beauty conscious goddess whose cognomen is ‘*ile Ogere, A f’oko yeri*’ (Earth, the goddess who combs her hair with a hoe), an allusion to the farming and building activities that continually shape and reshape the human environment.”<sup>36</sup>

Membership in the Yoruba community or kinship group (*omo Yoruba*, Yoruba child) is through a unilineal relation to the ancestor. Patrilineal descent consists of uterine descendants of the founding ancestor, that is, Oduduwa. Given the growth in the number of descendants, that is, children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, the singular household unit cannot be maintained as one entity. As such, the unit expands and spreads far and wide, devolving into segments, which, in time, also fragmented into smaller segments. These resultant segments continue without losing affinity and strong ties with the source, Oduduwa. As a result, they maintain a certain unity that culminates into a corporate existence, in which the continuity of the people as a nation becomes paramount and in which its unity never ceases to exist. Thus, the structure of this unit is analogous to that of the relationship between a father and his son, or sons. Just as a father is the biological source of life for his son, he is also the head of the lineage segment.<sup>37</sup> The sons have their duties toward the father. This filial piety was aptly captured by Fortes, when he described it as “complex of reverent regard, moral norms, ritual observances and material duty in the relationship between parent and child, more particularly of son to father, both during the lifetime and after the death of the parents.”<sup>38</sup> So, “ancestorhood is fatherhood made immortal.”<sup>39</sup> The ancestors remain watchful, always ready to punish the son who neglects his duties toward the ancestors. The lineage structure, which underscores ancestral reverence and the observation of their injunctions, underlies the Yoruba nation as a whole.

Capturing this “paternal” relationship that traverses the heavens, the sky, and the Earth, on the one hand, and the ancestors, royalty, and parent, on the other, is the notion of filiality. This is an ideology that sustains the lineage by requiring unquestionable loyalty to the hierarchical line of

descent and adherence to socially sanctioned injunctions or ethics. Filiality as a philosophical concept and distinctive feature of Chinese culture<sup>40</sup> has common grounds with Yoruba practices. These commonalities include the veneration of their source, including the head, *Ori*. Filiality in its original sense is kinship ethics. It is obedience to the authority of lineage that operates in a society that is based on lineage structure. The guiding principle and structure of filiality is self-preservation and obedience to social norms. The life of Yoruba people derives from the creator god who sent Oduduwa to descend from heaven. The location of Yoruba people was ordained by god who dropped Oduduwa in Ile Ife. The earthly Yoruba people are children of Oduduwa, who was not only their progenitor but also the institutor of their political and social values, which have been passed down right from the creation time (through the father) to the contemporary times. Thus, they should be preserved without compromise. Within this context, it is perhaps understandable that filiality had to evolve to retain unity of the descendants of Oduduwa (*Omo oduduwa*), and to avoid an absolute monarchy (through the domination of Oyo or Ile Ife) while allowing for ever-widening autonomous units (e.g., Abeokuta, Benin, Ibadan, Ijaye, Ilorin, Ogbomoso). The ultimate aim of the Yoruba nation is the perpetuation of itself, to grow and to remain large; therefore, the nation needs increase in the form of human capital, *omo ilu* (citizens). This same principle has been shown to correspond with the idea that an individual, man or woman, aspiring to bigness as an owner of wealth and power (i.e., a patron) must have people as clients: *Omo chin*.<sup>41</sup> This patron–client relation cuts across the spectrum of the society and fits into the Yoruba worldview. Kinship, as well as political relations, is also couched in terms of a parent–child metaphor, such as *omo ile Yooba* (a Yoruba child), *omo agbo ile e...* (a child from the homestead of...), and *omo...* (the son or daughter of). The worth of any person is dependent on the attention and acknowledgement of other people.<sup>42</sup> Thus, Akinjogbin describes the Yoruba as “*ebi*,” family or kin group. The kingship institution presumes the Ooni (king of Ile Ife) as the father of the Yoruba nation, as well as father to the heads of each homestead, the homestead. *In addition*, each of the family units that constitute the homestead, which make up the nation, exists under the leadership and guardianship of the father, the family head. In the spiritual realm, Olodumare is the supreme deity. The other deities and divinities owe their existence to him and do his bidding. The social role of authority traces back to fatherhood; thus filial piety becomes the philosophical principle that assures adherence to, and

operation of, the family relations. The interplay of filiality with insecurities in religious, economic, and political spheres creates fear that pervades the lives of people and invariably informs the injunctions that become the social laws of conduct geared toward the sustenance of the corporate existence of the nation. In this elaborate system, the gods and the supporting cast of the cult of ancestors have to be pacified.

The principle of seniority, which pervades the Yoruba social interaction, also functions within the ideology of filiality. There is the duty of the children in their childhood, and there are responsibilities of individuals to family, between families in the agnatic line of descent, and to kin at all times. Filiality operates under unity of the living and the dead, which, in concert, assures the corporate character of the nation. Filial reverence and duty are not unique to Yoruba people, as already mentioned. It is professed in Confucianism where it informs respect for parents, elders, and ancestors among the Chinese. For the Greeks of old, it required the son to support his aged parents. This obligation was as necessary as duties to the Greek gods and ancestors were. Irreverence to Greek parents, where established, was punishable by death. The Hebrew society codified the same sentiment when it urged children to honor their parents as a condition for longevity and fruitfulness.

The Yoruba people fashioned out indigenous philosophy or worldview that has influenced their interaction with the environment and guided their interpersonal, intra-group, and social relations, including the visual perception of individuals. Given the uncertainties of life, the hope for survival is dependent on the intervention of the supernatural, whose presence and power are mediated by the many powerful gods found among the people. The social circumstances in which the people conducted their existence, the political climate that dominated their lives, and the vagaries surrounding their subsistence all serve to tie the spiritual outlook of the people to their earthly search, guiding the reasons and goals for their existence. The Yoruba identity, like those of many traditional groups, is an amalgam of various ascriptions and duty-informed acquisitions working themselves out through and within a defined worldview, set of norms, and social system.

Collectively, the circumscribed historical (oral and written) narrative sheds light on the logic of Yoruba view and the guiding principles for their aspirations. Against this background, one can understand how the agrarian economy operated traditionally by Yoruba people produced in the fashion of Malthus, whereby production necessitated increase in

family size and interdependence between members. The principle of the Malthusian economy, however, is carried into the capitalist economy of the modern Yoruba-Nigerian State with an opposing requirement. The retention of the Malthusian base and the forces of market economy are irreconcilable. Industrialization requires maximization of output with smaller capital investment (e.g., people and land) and, altogether, have different goals, such as individualism and individual pleasure. These are contrary to what is suggested by the agrarian economy under Malthusian principles. The economic argument illustrates one of the reasons for the persistence of the religious philosophy of a past era in a contemporary Yoruba world. It seems that one can claim with less controversy that contemporary Yoruba society has succeeded in increasing its population while retaining, to some extent, the inequality documented during the nineteenth century. Yoruba people know just as much security, emancipation, and access to the good life as before the 1893 peace accord. They are still guided by the religious philosophy of that era, they are tethered to the psychology of the milieu of the time, and their angst carries over to the contemporary. The Yoruba people still desire health, wealth, and long life, but none of these are truly guaranteed by the modern state. The principle that guides them in achieving these ideals, regardless of the affordances provided by technology, industrialization, and modern education, continues to be the tested, trusted, and reliable pre-twentieth-century ideology. This includes not only the placation of the pantheon of deities but also maintaining a constant war-like posture, *ile aye yi ogun ni* (life on Earth is war). This life requires circuitousness, guile, and charming wit, which allow for the infiltration of enemies without detection.

According to Chief Obafemi Awolowo, writing in 1947,<sup>43</sup> “As for the remaining masses, they are ignorant and will not be bothered by politics. Their sole preoccupation is to search for food, clothing and shelter of a wretched type. To them, it does not seem to matter who rules the country, so long as in the process they are allowed to live their lives in peace and crude comfort. If they bestir themselves at all, as they do occasionally, it is because they have been unduly oppressed by a tribal chieftain, or outraged by the blunders of an Administration Officer.” The sentiment expressed by Chief Awolowo captures the very continuation of the living condition of the Yoruba people, although he feigned to have spoken of Nigeria.

## NOTES

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5. Ibid. 6.
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31. The deluge and flooding in Ibadan that caused the death of many was explained as resulting from the wrath of the river goddess, who would have been appeased by the offering of a celebrity with a hunched back. Following the 2005 tsunami in Indonesia, diaspora Yoruba people at different locations offered sacrifices to the river deity at the different coasts of the Atlantic Ocean, for example, Corpus Christi, Florida, and Trinidad.

- The Yoruba belief system continues to provide a socially structured meaning to life and life's vicissitudes regardless of time and geography.
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  35. Gramsci, Antonio. 1971. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
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  37. Fortes 1969. *Kinship and the Social Order*. NY. Routledge (p. 170ff).
  38. Ibid (p. 182).
  39. Ibid (p. 189).
  40. Ikezawa, Masaru. 1994. *The Philosophy of Filiality in Ancient China: Ideological Development of Ancestor Worship in the Zhanguo Period*. PhD Dissertation. The University of British Columbia.
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## Diachronic Study of Yoruba Hairstyles

### AT THE SCRIPTURE UNION HOUSE IN IBADAN

*After many years of absence from the country, I had the opportunity to visit Ibadan in 2007 after attending an international conference in Quidah. A colleague happened to be visiting the University of Ibadan (UI) at the same time. I took the popular and cheap means of transportation, a motorbike called Okada. On the road to UI, at Sango, located opposite the old airport is the Scripture Union Nigeria. SU House as it is popularly called is the headquarters of the Nigerian branch of the Scripture Union. From the Okada I saw the building and memories rushed back. I spent virtually all of my teenage years with the Scripture Union and most of my time in that building. I worked and worshipped there in the 70s and through to the 80s. From outside the changes were noticeable. The compound is massively gated and manned by professional uniformed security personnel rather than by the usual old man known in Yorubaland as meegad. Meegad is a calque from Hausa. It is the appellation for Hausa people who worked in those days as guards and was eventually generalized to anyone who manned a gate.*

*Since my arrival in Ibadan, I had been intrigued by various structural changes at familiar places. At the sight of the SU House, I was immediately struck by how different it appeared. Serenity and tranquility which I associated with the place have deserted it. The hustling and quick-paced search for money and the intense suspicion of others have caught up with it. I remember seeking quietness at the SU House. It was a place of escape; the breeze in the complex was sooth-*

*ing, the flowers were comforting, and the people, in spite of their piety, were welcoming. Strangers sought and found refuge at the SU House.*

*Nevertheless, I went in through the small gate that leads directly to the bookstore and was immediately accosted by one of the guards. He proceeded to question me as if I was in police custody. "Who are you, who did you come to see, and why?" The barrage of questions left me wondering. I felt attacked and I insisted that my mission was none of his business. I told him that if there were official protocols for visitors to go through, he should present such to me or leave me alone. He apologized for his intrusiveness and sent me to the other entrance. He instructed me to be sure to sign in as a visitor, to collect a visitor's badge, and to wear it visibly on my person. In compliance, I went over to the other gate, the main gate, signed in, and was given badge 001. The guard quizzed me about my mission, to which I replied that I was there just out of nostalgia. I had no prior appointment and I did not want to disturb the people since I probably may not know them anyway. The guard in his gentle voice but with an uncertain tone permitted me to go in. His discomfort was clearly visible.*

*I walked through and entered, as I have done an uncountable number of times, into the first floor. The auditorium had served as the place for fellowship on Sundays, prayer meetings on Thursdays, and Bible study on Tuesdays. It was littered with boxes, lots of boxes, and there were no chairs. It appeared more like a storage space than a place of worship. There was not a single soul in sight. So, I went upstairs to where the offices are located. I greeted the people and they were polite, each asking if they could be of help, and I said, "No." "Do you need anything?" they asked. "No," I responded. "Are you looking for someone?" someone else inquired. "No, thank you. I think I know my way around here," I replied, still thrilled. Pointing to a walled section, I asked: "There used to be a door here leading to the bookstore," I said, "What happened?" One of the workers looking at me curiously and suspiciously told me that I should go downstairs and out in order to get to the bookstore. I went downstairs, this time to the bookstore, a place that is open to the general public. There was a salesperson in the store and another woman, whom I presumed was browsing, but later, it turned out that she was an ex-worker.*

*I walked past the salesperson, who asked if I was looking for something in particular. I said no, that I only wanted to browse. The woman that I presumed was browsing walked carefully behind me, keeping me in view at all times. I thought this was unnecessary as most of the books were locked up behind glass on their shelves. Less than three minutes after walking into the bookstore, three men showed up. A man in a yellow T-shirt, who appeared older than*

*the other two, was the spokesperson. The men approached me, and the man, the eldest of the three, greeted me. I responded and carried on browsing. He followed me.*

*“Excuse me,” he said.*

*“Yes,” I replied.*

*“Who are you looking for?” the man asked.*

*“I am not looking for anyone,” I responded.*

*The man continued: “Well, you have to be looking for someone. People cannot go to places without looking for or asking for someone.”*

*“Oh,” I said, “I am sorry, I am not looking for anyone. I am just browsing.”*

*Following up on his logic, the man continued: “You see, we don’t know you, and, you know, things are difficult. We have never seen you before. You come in here, you are looking at books, walking around. And you are not looking for anyone. You see the world is full of things, and as you may know, ‘country hard.’ I am sure you understand. If I know what you want...”*

*He rambled on and on for minutes. All of us, me, the woman, the salesperson, and his two companions, stood there looking at him while he gave his lecture. I am familiar with the circuitous manner of speaking common to Nigerian and Yoruba people in particular, but for the life of me, I could not make any sense out of what he was saying.*

*“So,” I asked, “is there a problem?”*

*“No, we don’t want any problem. We just want to know who you want, who invited you ...” the spokesman continued, while his companions surrounded me.*

*“I said before to you and to everyone, I am not looking for anybody. I only looked inside for old times’ sake. Now am browsing in the bookstore,” I responded.*

*I turned to the woman whom I thought was also shopping. She had the look of respectability and she was browsing freely. I thought I could appeal to her to ask them to leave me alone.*

*“Please, please, could you people just leave me alone! I have been involved in this illogical conversation for the past 10 minutes. You have hindered me from browsing and I don’t know exactly what you want from me. If there is anything you want from me or that you want me to do, please say it or leave me alone. I am feeling attacked and unfairly treated, and my patience is about run out.”* The woman continued to browse without intervening.

*Having had enough, and feeling annoyed, I walked out of the bookstore into the yard into an open space to regroup. The woman now intervened, “Leave him alone now. He said he is looking around.”* The woman walked out, following me and two other people. Someone called her Ms. Okafor and something to the effect of her work. She told me she used to work here, and I said that I also used to work here. Then she smiled. *“Nice to know. What is your name? When did you work here?”*

*“Whao, what a transformation!”* I said. *“Now, you smile at me, and want to treat me as a human being just because I worked here.”*

*“Well, it is because you told me about yourself and we had something in common,”* she answered as she walked on while I stood there looking at the new buildings in the yard. Some of them were uncompleted and all of them looked small and unimpressive.

*I was particularly surprised at what, in my mind’s eye, used to be a big building. It was the residence of Mr. Okafor, the former general secretary (GS). It had now lost its allure and dignity. Behind this residence was the printing press that the SU started in the 80s. I was still looking at it, and looking at another building that was started in the 80s. Although still uncompleted, it was now a two-story building and looked inhabited. In its earlier phase, it had housed the Youth Coppers (this was the title for graduates that were doing their one-year national youth service), and after that sister Essien had lived in it. She was, at that time, the quintessential model of Christianity. She was a pharmacist by training but gave up the profession to devote her life to missionary services through the SU. She was not married but had family members with her that she cared for. I was lost in the memory of those who had once resided in that building, and was wishing for one of them to come out and say hello, when I was approached by an elderly security personnel and rudely jolted back into reality.*

*I greeted him, and out of curiosity I asked, “Do you know if the printing press is still at the back over there?”*

*He evaded the question and said, “You know, you did not say who you are looking for, but I can tell that you used to know this place.”*

*I said “Yes” and asked, “Is Mr. Woranola still here?”*

*He politely responded: “The names you are mentioning are of people who used to be here but are no longer here.”*

*“Is sister Essien still here?” I inquired.*

*“Please tell me who you know here and want to see,” he persisted.*

*Suddenly, another guard showed up, young and strong. He was the man at the smaller gate who had sent me to the main entrance to sign in. This time, he grabbed me by the arm and said:*

*“You have seen enough, now you have to go.” He started to push me toward the gate.*

*I was offended at his rudeness and effrontery. I insisted that he should not touch me.*

*“Please, don’t touch me. Leave me alone. Do not lay your hands on me,” I said, but he did not listen.*

*“Who are you? What do you mean? Why should I not touch you? Who are you? You idiot. Get out of here,” he commanded.*

*An old man in rags and an old cap, the typical image of uneducated meegad, joined in and said: “We go beat you, carry you commot for outside.”*

*The young man had a look of disdain on his face. An observer would have assumed that I was not only odious but a criminal of the worst kind. Another man whom I had not encountered up until then appeared suddenly and suggested that they kill me.*

*The younger, stronger, and more vicious guard, an Igbo person based on his accent, took the utterance of the meegad as a command and told me that the bosses did not want me here and that I should leave. As he was speaking, he pushed me so hard I had to grab his shirt in order to keep myself from falling to the ground. This act infuriated him so much that he began to assault me physically. The old man egged him on with the support of the others.*

*The humiliation was gross. The injustice of it beyond description, I felt all human dignity wiped off of me. The construction workers working on an*

*adjoining building stopped working and I became a spectacle; they pointed, laughed, and amused themselves at my expense. The SU workers continued assaulting me as they shuffled me toward the gate.*

*Luckily, three other workers, perhaps coming from lunch, stopped them. One of them evidently has a position upstairs. He must have taken pity on me. He wanted to know what was going on.*

*I told him that I was only looking around ... I did not finish the sentence before he stopped me and said, "But this is not a museum. You cannot just come into a place and look around."*

*"Who did you want to see?" he inquired.*

*"Listen," I said, "I was only passing by. I used to know people in this building. And I did not tell anyone that I was coming. So, I cannot just show up and say I am looking for XYZ. Even if the people that I knew were still here, they may be working, rather than sitting there, expecting me to show up."*

*He started to lecture me on the importance of making an appointment before going to a place.*

*I stopped him. "Rather than lecture me on decorum, why don't you address the brutality done to me."*

*"What did I do? Why was I being physically assaulted and all you have to say and talk about is that I came in here without mentioning the name of a person. If I came here with a driver and wearing 'agbada' (flowing gown that shows status) all of you would be saying 'yes, sir.'" I said this in Yoruba.*

*"Oh," he lightened up, "so you are Yoruba," he said, now laughing. This time, he decided to play the ethnicity card. I already made my point and was not willing to accommodate him.*

*"Well, you are all born-again Christians, right?" I asked.*

*"Yes," he responded.*

*"Good. It means you have to always tell the truth, right?"*

*"Yes, as Christians we are honest," he answered.*

*“In that case, I want to let you know that I will expend every capital to get justice. I will leave the place and am coming back with the police. Now, all I want from you is that the three of you promise to testify to what you saw these people do to me.”*

*“Well, we don’t have to go that far. Please. Let’s talk about it. Come away from the sun,” he implored. I walked with him into the shade and he offered me a chair. “I am coming,” he continued. The three of them disappeared never to return.*

*The soft-spoken Yoruba guard came to me. He would like me to sign out and leave. I said, “But you heard that man say he was coming back. So, could you please call him so that I can obtain his response before I leave?” I said.*

*“Nobody is going to come to talk to you. He is gone.” The guard went to his booth, spoke into his walkie-talkie, then came back.*

*“Oga, no one is answering. This is only going to lead to more trouble. When you go, there will be trouble for us. Why don’t you just sign out and go.”*

*“OK. Can I speak with the GS?” I asked.*

*“Eh? Dey no get that here. They get General Director,” he replied.*

*“Who do you know? How about Ms. Essien? I asked.*

*“She is no dey around,” he responded.*

*“How about Mr. Woranola?” I asked further.*

*“All these people no dey here again. Na new new people dey here,” he replied.*

*“OK, who is the Director?” I asked.*

*“Oga, no be for my mouth you go hear am. E jo (please), go,” he begged.*

*“OK. You said I have to give the name of someone if I want to come in here again. I have told you the name of people I know and you said they are not here. Tell me the name of the boss so that I can request to see him the next time I come around. I would like to make an official complaint before I go to the police.”*

*“Enu mi ko le e ti gbo” (No such thing will come out of my mouth). “I cannot tell you,” he said, clearly afraid.*

*Evidently, no one would come out to talk to me. And I would not be allowed to see anyone. The guards were still waiting to finish me up.*

*So, I told the man, “Tell your boss that I will come back at 3 p.m. and that I would like to speak to him.”*

*I walked out and crossed the street, to flag down a bus or taxi. I saw other people waiting and one of them had come out from the SU House.*

*“Sir, are you a member of the SU?” I asked him.*

*“Yes,” he replied.*

*“Well, who is the GS?” I asked.*

*“No, they changed the title, it is now General Director,” he corrected me.*

*“What is the name of the new person? I was told that sister Essien is no longer the GS?” He looked at me for a while evasively, but I persisted.*

*“Yomi Adedeji,” he said. Finally.*



To recapitulate, the method that I have adopted to analyze what I have been calling trivial data, in the visual perception of a person with either dreadlocks or cornrow, has been to make associations by aligning events and pointing to commonality in the narratives. This procedure defines the cultural in a way analogous to Latour's<sup>1</sup> conceptualization of the social, and it exemplifies it by taking a presumed assemblage within the Yoruba nation with an equally assembled worldview to explore collective action. This approach suggests that an assembled mental program underlies the interpretation of physical appearance, which then ignites a studied response. My proposition is that the appearance of dreadlocks or cornrows excites an internalized and hidden perennial fear that, despite the façade of modernity, remains active. The goal is to show the collective mind-set that is at

work by uncovering the traces it leaves, and by tying these traces to their root cause. Thus, this work is an assemblage of the cultural, indeed of the social,<sup>2</sup> because it collects and connects commonalities to affirm a society of practice. Basically, what is being shown in this book is the performance of a people's way of seeing the world, a way of rationalizing causality, and of making sense of events. It traces the various societal outputs from seemingly trivial, mundane, yet persistent, occurrences. Consequently, the sociocultural approach of this discourse is not a mere collection of factual, historical data, but an interpretation of data that allows statements about a people and their way of life. For the scholarly community, this implicates the process of the generation of knowledge with respect to that which we deem significant and meaningful. Going beyond offering statements on the core belief system of people, the discussion digs deeper to uncover why the people react in the way they do when they come in contact with a "deviant" hairstyle.

The encounter at the Scripture Union House, and other related ones that will follow, easily affirms Broomberger's observation when he noted that hair "brutally remind us of their importance when we consider the passions, the polemics, the taboos, and the violence that they can arouse."<sup>3</sup> The worldview underpinning observable responses is ostensive. While its manifestations vary, it nevertheless remains. Worldview is one of the ways to construct "Yorubaism" and a tool of its expression. The sinister content of dreadlocks for Yoruba people would nevertheless have existed even if associated with some other socially selected items. Barring any intervention or unforeseen circumstance, good health is the normal condition and expectation for individuals; disease, disfigured appearance, and sudden death are perceived to be the works of malevolent and malevolent beings. The socially constructed representation of the angst of the people, associated with the terror of dreadlocks, would have existed and continued, despite the relative arbitrariness of the object to which it is projected. The ill omen conveyed by the presence of dreadlocks leads the people to become violent. Thus seen, the perspective reflected in the description of the people and their responses to dreadlocks takes into account not only the underlying worldview but also the beliefs and values that particularly organize, in this context, actions and utterances. Before looking at the foundation of the signification of dreadlocks for Yoruba and the reason for the responses that the hairstyle produces among them, it is vital to provide a cursory overview of scholarly attention to the symbolism of hair, focusing specifically on Yoruba hairstyles.

The scholarly preoccupation and fascination with hair, hairstyling, and personal adornment has a very long history that cuts across disciplines, and subsumes different societies and social institutions. Around the year 1900, there began the pacification of Yorubaland and its eventual emergence as a unified people within what eventually became Nigeria took place. Western anthropologists, steeped in the view that some people are superior to others, were preoccupied with the evaluation of differences between peoples and cultures. The goal of this enterprise was to document those “exotic” habits believed to be at the verge of extinction due to the onslaught of Western modernity. The Western anthropologists focused on social arrangements, on the origin of various practices such as marriage, kinship, taboos, language, and social actions. This epoch was dominated by the study of the totality of human endeavors at all times and at all places. Many novice scholars who were opportunistically stationed in various places for missionary, colonial, or commercial purposes obtained items (artifacts) and narratives. They also provided accounts and observations from their own travels. Where actual information was not available, some wrote their own imaginations.<sup>4</sup> These accounts were then employed to conduct comparisons between cultures, establish common traits, and suggest a possible evolutionary path as well as principles for their diffusion and/or retention.<sup>5</sup> Universal properties, or what appear as parallels across cultures, were explained as obtaining from mental processes common to human beings, that is, an integral mode of thinking that marks all humans as a species. Psychological or mental approach differentiated people; as such, they were presumed to be operating either of two mental capabilities: pre-logicality, attributed to so-called primitive people, and logicality, presumed to be employed by those termed “civilized” groups. Within this milieu, which consisted in the documenting of patterns of exotic thoughts, Frazer, from a comparative perspective, traced the basis of human thoughts to a common origin. In addition, he also theorized about head taboos. According to him,

[m]any peoples regard the head as peculiarly sacred; the special sanctity attributed to it is sometimes explained by a belief that it contains a spirit which is very sensitive to injury or disrespect. Thus the Yoruba hold that every man has three spiritual inmates, of whom the first, called Olori, dwells in the head and is the man’s protector, guardian, and guide. Offerings are made to his spirit.<sup>6</sup>

He noted that among the Siamese, the spirit must be carefully protected from injury of any kind. Consequently, cutting the hair on the head is

perilous, as it may disturb the spirit on the head that could be injured in the process. The hair is for the Greek the seat of life.<sup>7</sup> In his notes on Medusa's head, Sigmund Freud likened the cutting of hair to castration, thereby suggesting that unconscious sexuality underlies the symbolic meaning of hair.<sup>8</sup> Joining Freud in this interpretation of long hair is Berg,<sup>9</sup> for whom hair is a phallic symbol, hence the aversion to the cutting of it. He suggested long and visible hair as a metaphorical substitute for the genitals, which are mostly hidden under clothes. Edmund Leach,<sup>10</sup> who popularized the notion of magical hair, adopted Berg's psychoanalytical interpretation of the hair and infused it with symbolic meanings as informed by ethnographic data to suggest that the hair be seen as a communicative device that arose from the association of hair with sexuality. Based on this, he proposed that long hair signifies unrestricted sexuality, that short hair amounts to restricted sexuality, and that closely shaven hair indicates celibacy. His "magical hair" suggested that the head, cross-culturally, represents the phallus, and the hair of the head stands for semen; he concluded therefore that haircutting or removal represents castration. In essence, to cut the hair of a male is to cause the destruction of his potency. In view of the preceding works, there is no doubt the hair is universally a powerful symbol of the relationship between individuals and society.<sup>11</sup> However, disagreeing with the psychological proposal of Leach, his equation of hair with sexuality, and his likening of hair removal to castration is Hallpike.<sup>12</sup> Hallpike argued that women and men sometimes shave their head, for instance, when mourning; also, he argued, there are ascetics or celibates who, as part of their confessions, wear long hair. To him, haircutting is a form of mutilation; rather than equate haircutting with sexuality, Hallpike related it to social control. He suggested that the importance of hair is due to its vitality, which stems from its ability to grow and thereby constitute a wider extension of the person. Through hair, differences in ritual or social status can be expressed. To Hallpike, therefore, long hair mainly signifies being outside of society, and cutting it, reentering into it, or "living within a particular disciplinary regime within society."<sup>13</sup> Styling or dressing the hair, a form of social control, allows the hair to be tamed, to be transformed from its wild and natural state and made to fit a societal or cultural norm. Complementary to Leach and Hallpike, Synnott<sup>14</sup> used a theory of opposition and provided explanation for a range of hair patterns and symbols in popular North American cultures of the 1970s and the change to them over time. He proposed opposition between male and female hair norms as well as between head and body hair norms. To him, opposing ideologies endorse opposing hair norms. He suggested that hair may be manipulated

primarily in four different ways: length, color, quantity, and style. For his work, he relied on data from experimental studies, poetry, mythology, and popular sources such as magazines and television shows. Synnott noted that, with respect to hair ideology, there were different hairstyles used to express identity, which included the adoption of elaborate hairstyles by business people and non-traditional hairstyles by feminists or lesbians that showed deviance from the societal normative standard for females. Synnott also noted the sporting of hairstyles to indicate malcontent with the society, for example, long hair and beards worn by hippies, Afros donned by African Americans, or greasy hair worn by juvenile delinquents. Gananath Obeyesekere,<sup>15</sup> based on extensive interviews with Hindu dreadlocks ascetics, sought the symbolical meanings of hair. By combining psychoanalysis and anthropological perspectives, he ascribed an unconscious meaning to the dreadlocks which eluded even the ascetics that wore them.

These and other studies, now classical in their approaches and theories, bequeathed to the scholarly world those familiar and invaluable phrases often invoked in the study of hair and its signification, such as “magical hair,” “social hair,” “personal symbol,” and “religious hair.” Based on these foundational studies, and in response to newer paradigms and social movements, other studies that derive from fieldwork have sought to provide culture-specific interpretations of hair, hairstyle, and hair treatment. There are numerous studies that focus on the symbolism of hair across cultures and the interpretation of different hairstyles of different groups at different periods. One such study is the comparative examination of hairstyles found in ancient Korea and Japan which showed that hairstyles were perceived by the people, both in ancient and modern times, as being able to fend off evil. In addition to this belief, hairstyles express social status and wealth, portray the marital status of women, and convey certain ideals of beauty.<sup>16</sup> In ancient Rome, hairstyles were a marker of female attractiveness. Similar observations were made from the study of the portraits of mummies (Fayum) and the associated interpretation of various symbols of the murals including hairstyles. Findings from this work reveal that certain hairdos portray not only a specific period but religious affiliation and class.<sup>17</sup> Other findings from ancient Egypt suggest that hair signals new life state and was used to establish gender identity.<sup>18</sup>

Whether cut or grown out, different cultures have different attributions to hair and to hairstyles. In most Western societies, shaving of bodily hair, other than the head hair, is a mark of beauty for females. However, women of Spanish origin in the ethnic border areas of Mexico refrain

from shaving their hair to separate themselves from their naturally hairless Native counterparts.<sup>19</sup> There is no doubt that, with hairstyles, people are stigmatized and distinguished. As such, hair and its various stylizations constitute an important marker for different expressions. Consequently, it is the aspect of Leach's study (that demonstrates the cultural significance of hair), as well as the invaluable thought of Hershman<sup>20</sup> (which suggests that hair conveys more local meaning), that informs the efforts to find the localized meaning of dreadlocks for Yoruba people. For instance, the study of hairstyling and culture shows that some common localized meanings of hair in Japan include the belief that hair can be haunted and the notion that disheveled and out-of-place hair signifies ghosts. This meaning is rooted in Japan's folkloric tales and sayings that arose from medieval times, but its effect, according to Miller, persists to the contemporary texts around the supernatural.<sup>21</sup> This observation compares to Yoruba's hair view.

Hair in Africa has always evoked admiration and awe. It was a source of curiosity for early travelers just as many diasporic Africans in Europe can testify with respect to the innocent requests like "Can I touch your hair?" and inquisitiveness like "How do you get it to be so curly?" In 2000, the Museum for African Art, New York, organized an exhibition and presented a book entitled *Hair in African Art and Culture*. This highly successful exhibition and associated book publication provided a very comprehensive collection of images, historical artworks, and philosophical underpinnings of hairstyles from the cultural areas whence came the exhibited works. In this insightful collection are some of the earliest images collected and photographed by early European travelers in Africa. The centeredness and extreme positioning of hair on the head gives it physical prominence analogous to spiritual prominence. Sylvia Boone<sup>22</sup> noted that hair has physical and metaphysical properties, and both are tied to the beauty of a woman. However, without cleanliness, this beauty is not beautiful. According to Siegmann, "disheveled hair is symbolic of being in a state of disharmony with society. The insane signal their alienation from cultural norms and social integration by leaving their hair unattended."<sup>23</sup> It is no less true of the subject of Siegmann's study, the Sowei of Liberia, than it is for Yoruba people. According to Lawal, "the apical position of the physical heads resonates in the traditional Yoruba system of government."<sup>24</sup> With reference to the indigenous Yoruba political setup presented in Chap. 3, in the same manner in which the head of the family (*Olori ebi*) lords over the agnatic family, and the king rules over the kingdom, the *Ori* (head) decides the affairs of humans and Olodumare con-

trols the universe. Thus, “the head is to an individual what Olodumare is to the cosmos and what a king is to the body politic—a source of power.”<sup>25</sup> Orilonise, by Lawal (2000), is a Yoruba sage aphorism that acknowledges the role of *Ori* in determining the success or failure of an individual. Thus, the Yoruba elders qualify the heads as *Ori apere asinwaye*,<sup>26</sup> *Ori* the creator, personal guide to the Earth.

Hair played important roles for ancient Yoruba women and men, both of whom adorned, styled, and treated their hair for various purposes. Grooming of the hair is an invaluable part of normality; uncultivated hair is a sign of madness. Pervasive in Yoruba society is the visual culture in which hairstyle features prominently in the arts and sculpture. Hairstyles are considered a popular art that reflects and interprets Yoruba contemporary lifestyles, and Houlberg<sup>27</sup> examined the form and function of hairstyle in traditional and contemporary Yoruba culture, underscoring hairstyles’ social significance. According to McLeod, among the Asantes, “priests’ hair was allowed to grow into long matted locks in the style known as mpesempese (a term sometimes translated as ‘I don’t know it’). Uncut hair is usually associated with dangerous behavior—madmen let their locks grow, and the same hair style was worn by royal executioners.”<sup>28</sup> This same understanding pervades the Yoruba world. Uncut, disheveled hair is associated with madness, with unruliness, and often accompanies mourning. This view of the hair is as true among Yoruba people as it is among Akan people. In essence, there is a communicative function of hair in line with Leach’s<sup>29</sup> argument that public and shared symbols such as the hair constitute a form of social communication that exists separate from private complexes and those unconscious motivations associated with these private complexes. This communicative function comes with a “manual” of interaction. Thus, a popular phrase used by Yoruba people to depict dreadlocks is *irun were*, “a crazy person’s hair.” Every Yoruba person knows the cure for craziness, which they have preserved linguistically; they ask, “*kini ogun were*,” and they respond, “*egba ni ogun were*”; that is, “What is the cure for madness?” “Whip is the medicine to cure madness.” There is no gainsaying this adage. People taunt mad people roaming the street. To get rid of them, the whip is judiciously used with righteous indignation.

### *Traditional Styles*

The appearance of a person carries significant premium, for better or for worse. Names, tags, and appellations often end up influencing the way their subject is viewed. The tag and the appellation, in addition to

suggesting the appropriate way to approach and value their bearer, also determine, to some extent, how to treat this person. Therefore, a designation becomes a code, a mnemonic symbol that elicits a specific response. This response by itself is informed by an existing worldview and the semantic focus of the people. In the same way that titles are labels created to make it easier to categorize and differentiate people from each other, certain behavioral patterns are chosen to characterize peoples. However, they should not serve as the sole way to identify, categorize, or distinguish a person, a people, or a culture. Even the simplest of personalities, living the simplest of lives, are too multidimensional and complex to fairly put into a one-dimensional box by choosing a simple word or item of identification for description or definition. Style is the most prominent way in which the hair of a Yoruba male and female differs. Hairstyling is a thing of beauty for females; it is part of the adornment to express their personage. This is not so for Yoruba males. Handsomeness or beauty is defined by other attributes, and hair plays a minimal role in it. The only time that styling comes into play traditionally is in service to any of the various Yoruba deities. Items of clothing (as well as children) are what a man presents to the world; based on them, men are judged by the society.<sup>30</sup> As a macrocosm of the society,<sup>31</sup> the symbolism of hair fluctuates. With modernity, different hairstyles began to emerge that transcend the previous crew cut or shorn head. The Yoruba attitude to hairstyle, as to any other social issue, is informed by life vicissitudes. This response cannot be separated from their values as defined by their religion. In this section, individual hairstyles are exemplified from a traditional perspective as well as from contemporary popular cultures. Just as is found in every art that signifies, there is a distinction between contemporary forms and those forms used contemporarily; both depict a situation, a reference, and a culture, either in the past or in a foreign place. While non-verbal signals are universal phenomena, their use is local and borne of the immediate sociohistorical circumstances and provisions of social convention. The various manifestations of signifying images coalesce over issues that are important to the people within their own discourse community.

Just like ornaments, Yoruba hairstyles are not without social significance, either attributively or representationally; they may symbolize achievement, indicate religious affiliation, express authority and power, or define some other status within the Yoruba nation. As shown by Lyndersay, “hairstyles not only change from region to region, but from age to age. They may indicate the age of a young boy, the marital status of a woman, the rank of priest

or priestess or the position of nobility.”<sup>32</sup> Each epoch has its own fashion-makers and its own defining outline that lend character and personality to its fashion. A mode of appearance, along with its accoutrement, assumes significance on the account of the personalities that are identified with it in each successive era. Distinctive hairstyles, often elaborate and outrageous, are emblematic of the wearer’s devotedness to a god or symbolic of a particular role within a cult or society. Aside from that which can be recalled from stories that elders still tell in parts of Yorubaland, information on Yoruba male hairstyles can only be gleaned and cobbled together from those photographs or descriptions from the various records of early times as found in archives and travelogues, or accounts produced by missionaries, explorers, and scholarly people. Through these, information can be obtained on the decorative culture of the Yoruba people during their formative years.

Barring ritual purposes, the hair of all Yoruba males is cut or shaved. At old age, the gray hair is allowed to stay on as a mark of old age, wisdom, and experience. Hence, the aphorism *ewu ni ogbo, irungbon ni agba, tubomu ni afojudi* (Gray in the hair is a sign of old age [wisdom, experience], beard is a sign of maturity, the mustache shows audacity). According to Campbell<sup>33</sup>:

“the [Yoruba] men universally shave, not only the beard, but the eye-brows, within the nostrils, (the native razors are adapted to this,) and frequently the entire head. Many leave a strip of hair from the forehead, over the crown of the head, down to the back of the neck.”

In addition to these are the following traditional hairstyles that have been attested historically.

*Jongori* This hairstyle is defined by a strip of hair that stretches from the front to the back of the head. Each side of the head is shorn clean. This male hairstyle is similar to a Mohawk. It is worn by priests. Special devotees of Shango are recognized by “a tuft of hair allowed to remain in the place of an Indian’s scalp-lock.”<sup>34</sup> Traditionally, Jongori is recognized as a youth hairstyle.

*Osu* In general, this hairstyle is simply a patch of hair on the crown of the head. Most often it is also a patch of hair that grows on the crown of the head of a priest where an incision has been made. Within the Yoruba worldview, vital force is present in medicinal preparations that can be ingested,

rubbed on the body, or administered via incisions through which the medicine passes into the bloodstream. When this happens, the spirit of the god in the preparation takes hold of the person and the person assumes the personality of the said god. A person with such incisions on the head, and who allows hair to grow over the incision and nowhere else on the head is called “adosu”(a person that has received Osu). Osu by itself is “a ball of the size of knot made of the elements constituting the ashe [force] of the gods, reduced to powder and amalgams.”<sup>35</sup> Essentially, Osu is a patch of hair in the middle of the head, more like a tuft that is often worn by Esu priests.

*Ààso* This hairstyle consists of three round patches located in the front, center, and back of the head. Ààso is mainly worn by princes, but it is also worn by hunters to showcase their spiritual powers. For the people of Benin, specifically Quidah, who are arguably related to the Yoruba people, Astley said that “the men content themselves with letting their hair grow in its natural forms except buckling it in two or three places, in order to hang a great coral...”<sup>36</sup>

*Ààso oluode* For this hairstyle, the head is completely shorn except for a patch that is left to grow right in the middle of the head. Worn mainly by the chief hunter, potent medicine is woven into the knots that it forms. Following the principle of gerontocracy common to the people, the chief hunter is the oldest male in the agnatic line of hunters. He is expected to be bold, distinguished, and fortified with powerful charms. The hunters are also, by default, the security personnel for the state. Because they are charged with the defense of the state, they are responsible for leading the state forces to wars against others. The chief hunter is known as Eso, that is, the lead guard or general.

*Ifari apakan* This is the half-shaved head. This hairstyle involves only one side of the head being shaved. This style is typical for the Aresa household, especially those that have been initiated into the cult of medicine and herbs. Aside from this household, the king’s messengers also sport it.

*Illari* The name literally means “the parting on the head through incision.” It consists of a round patch. This is one of the hairstyles that the king’s messengers wear. It is also found among members of various cults.

The hairstyle of Illari is a cone of hair that is left at the summit of the cranium (head). The head of an Illari is completely shaved, save for this cone of hair. The process of shaving marks the covenant between the wearer and the king that fully consecrates the servant to the king's bidding and which allows the wearer to participate in the king's power. As such, when the messenger shows up, he is accorded kingly reception and granted kingly audience. Aside from the king's messenger, the ethnic Yoruba people called Aagberi, who are presumed to be related to one of the mythological Yoruba kings known as Aresa, also wear the hairstyle. For this group, Illari is the lineage's hairstyle.

*Ere* This is a mirror image of the Osu. It is a patch of hair that is left at the base (at the magnum foreman) of the head. Also described as a pigtail, this hair could grow to be long and then braided. This hairstyle is worn by the priests of Esu.

Another attested hairstyle consists of a ridge of hair across the head which allows the hair to grow from ear to ear. The forehead and back of the head are shaved completely.

The braiding of a male's hair is generally restricted to priests and kings, who, on special occasions and in deference to a historical event, have their hair braided. For instance, the Olowo (King of Owo), during the Igogo festival,<sup>37</sup> has his hair braided. Osun priests wear suku,<sup>38</sup> which is similar to a king's crown. Sango priests, regardless of gender, wear different styles such as agogo, suku or kolese, and bayanmi.<sup>39</sup>

Archaeological investigations have been invaluable in providing evidence of different hairstyles from uncovered artifacts. For instance, the sculptures found by archaeologists at Ile Ife evince hairstyles similar to those of the sculptors of the Nok civilization. The similarities affirm the antiquity of the illustrated hairstyles, which include the aforementioned ones, among others. Describing the various male hairstyles, hairstyling, and facial hair from these artifacts, Lyndersay notes:

The hairstyles used by males as seen on the Nok figurines. The bearded and moustached man who wears a headband and tresses down each cheek and on the back of his head. Above the headband the hair is coiffed in rings. Another male figure sports a moustache in the form of small tufts on each side of his mouth, while a cap-like coiffure tops tresses hanging down the sides of the full length of his face. A third figurine has the head closely shaved from ear to ear, leaving a single ridge of hair across the forehead; while a fourth figure wears three strings of beads and plaited fiber across the top of his forehead.<sup>40</sup>

Going by the various depictions that have been presented, there can be no doubt that the male hairstyles among Yoruba people have religious themes. Aside from these denotative hairstyles that communicate religiously sanctioned services and sociopolitical roles, Yoruba males generally wear their hair either very short or shaved. This ubiquitous appearance fulfills hygienic needs. The native mode of attire requires males to wear caps to complement their various gowns as well as to express different status, age, and personal taste. Long hair is not quite amenable to the wearing of the different elaborate *fila* (caps) in practical terms.

### *Dada*

Reverence for hair within the Yoruba community is observed early in the life of a child. Specifically on the eighth day, when the newborn baby is officially named, there is a ritual of hair shaving for the newborn that is meant to dissociate it from the spirit world, thereby marking its belongingness to its community and the Earth (*aiye*). However, not all hair is shaved. Hair that is dreaded from birth is accorded respect. Considered the blessing of the gods, such hair is maintained and the wearer is called Dada. Dada in Yoruba mythology is one of the offspring of the goddess of the sea, Yemoja. "As a deity, Dada has as its representation calabash ornamented with cowries and decorated with indigo."<sup>41</sup> As a nature deity, Dada is one of the Yoruba gods and is related to Shango, the god of thunder.

Dada, or Ekine, as they are called, are children born with knotted hair. They are considered to be special children of blessings, and the gifts of the gods. Dada is one of the children who are believed to come from heaven with their name due to the circumstance of their birth. From the Yoruba viewpoint, Dada already have their hair braided from heaven. Until the 1800s, the currency across most Yorubaland was the cowry. It was legal tender for all transactions. European travelers used them as well. The knotted hair of these children is reminiscent of the cowry, that is, riches and wealth. Cowrie shells are tied to the hair of Dada as a symbol of the wealth that they bring to the host family, their parents, and the community. Having or attracting these children is to attract wealth; thus, their heads are not shaved as other children's heads are.<sup>42</sup> Dada children bring good luck in the form of money and wealth to their parents. Furthermore, they are believed to have supernatural power in their hair. Yoruba legend provides several conceptualizations and descriptions of Dada, for instance,

Dada is said to be one of the deified Yoruba kings. His younger brother is believed to be Shango, the god of thunder who reigned as king in Oyo. According to the myth, Dada is one of the children of Yemoja, the goddess of the sea, the mother of fishes. Her other offspring include Shopona, who is the deity of illness (e.g., smallpox) as well as Shango, deity of electrical current. These gods are the grandsons of Aganju, described as the desert and the firmament. “Dada, or nature- is from the verb da, to create.” “Dada is the god of genius, of the newly born children.”<sup>43</sup> Dada was also described as the god of birth, of babies, and things created.<sup>44</sup> The parents of Dada pay ritual homage to them regularly by feeding them vegetables. As a result, another legend considers Dada to be the god of vegetables. Dada was said to mean natural production, that is, of anything produced or brought forth by a natural process.<sup>45</sup> Regularly, depending on the group, Dada is celebrated by offering a meal of beans to children in the neighborhood. In Ibadan, this is carried out monthly. In Abeokuta, it is weekly. Reverence for Dada is expressed in the different Yoruba panegyrics, that is, Oriki Dada; an example of such is:

Dada Awuru

The one who wears a crown of money

The one who wears an embroidered dress

The one who carries a leaded staff of office

You carry a big crown of money to the market<sup>46</sup>

Dada is one of the type of children whose earthly existence is special and whose birth is ascribed to deities. As a result, the path of a Dada child is marked with special rites that mark different phases of life. This is especially true of the integration of these children into the communal life. In nearly all cases, the birth-locks of a Dada are removed before puberty or adulthood. The removal process is accomplished with a ritualized procedure that may include items specific to the child as revealed through divination. The shaving process takes place at a river, where the shaved head is washed. The shaved hair is kept in a pot infused with medicinal ingredients and water from the river. The pot is preserved by the parents and the contents are used as curative potion whenever the Dada falls ill. This use of hair further intensifies the mystery surrounding Dada and hair. After this shaving ceremony, which is sealed with a celebratory feast, the Dada children maintain their hair without the locks. While the community, on account of the circumstance of birth, may continue to call the now grown child Dada, the birth-locks are no longer present as a visible sign. The Dada now wears tamed hair like the other people in the community,

cutting it close in the case of a male child or observing typical fashion if female. The child is still recognized as a special and mysterious person. However, having been fully integrated into the society, into kinship, and into the culture of the commune, the visible sign of dread or fear is no longer present. Adults still wearing their birth-locks are rare. Those that continue to sport the locks do so under strict spiritual injunctions. This makes them all the more dreadful. One of the initial discussions of Dada was provided by Sowande and Ajanaku.<sup>47</sup> They provided the following oriki, panegyric, in praise of Dada and in recognition of Dada's spiritual estate:

*Dàdà awúrú*  
*Àwúrú ya-ilé ya igi-oko!*  
*Àwúrú on'imò tin de ade owo*  
*Àwúrú on'imò ti n'wo ewu okun*  
*Àwúrú on'imò ti n'te opa oje*  
*Ò gbe ade owó kekeke wo oja!*  
*Eni gbogbo ebi re nke*  
*Aládé owó ni a mo ni Dada!*  
*Dada ko tòsi, owó ni o fi nsiké ìbí*  
*Alade, Elémòsò*  
*A pa oko di yàrá*  
*Dada ko le jà*  
*Sugbon o ni aburo ti o gbóju*  
*Bi o ba yáju*  
*Oba nlá a fi osé gba won l'ènu*  
*Ejide Aro, ng o ya ki Dada*  
*Dada, omo siba li owo eyo!*  
*Dada Awuru, onisele*  
*Awuru ya ile ya ile owo*  
*Gbongbo l'ahoro*  
*Asiso 'o l'ara*  
*Otosi 'o n'iyekan*  
*Eran gbigbe o n'ijanja*  
*Alade-P'eye, Sambu P'eso*  
*A-b'isu j'oruko*  
*Olu maga ala, a-g'esin wo Oya*  
*Gbon ori ade*  
*Gbon ori osi si iwaju*  
*Gbon ori oro is odo mi*  
*Ade di meji, apankoro*

Dada Awuru

The one who wears a crown of money

The one who wears an embroidered dress

The one who carries a leaded staff of office

You carry a big crown of money to the market [From Lawal' Orilonise]

One pampered by kin

Dada is the one with the crown of money

Dada is not a pauper, Dada supplies kin with money

The owner of crown, the guarded celebrity

One who turns the woods to a living-room

Dada does not fight, but he has a warrior for a younger brother

Should you be rude to Dada, Oba Nla will deal with you

Ejide aro, I praise you

Dada, the child of wealth.

Dada Awuru

The one who wears a crown of money

Awuru who walks into a home and wealth walks in as well

Pillar in wilderness

The frivolous one is shunned by kinfolks

The poor lacks kin

A dried fish no longer needs to fight

The venerated crown-wearer, one endowed with wealth,

The famous and celebrated name

The king who rides into the ocean on a horse

Shake your head of crown

Shake off impoverished heads

Shake the head of wealth toward me

Wealth, riches multiplied [loosely interpreted by author]

The discussion of Dada illustrates the spirituality surrounding birthed dreadlocks. It points to the socialization of a Yoruba child into the mysteries surrounding the hair and the head. Dada as a mysterious child, a god, a king, and a powerful spiritual being is held in awe among the Yoruba people. The mystery of Dada is projected to any dreadlock-wearing person. Given that there are rarely adult Dada who retain their birth-locks, those that still do wear them are believed to be on some spiritual mission. To meet such a person in the daytime is to be suddenly confronted with a spiritual and, perhaps, diabolical being, whose intent one cannot discern. The instinct to protect one's own life, in this case *Ori*, leads to action: the familiar flight or fight response. Given that the traditional awe reserved for Dada is now imputed to dreadlocks of an adult Yoruba person, the conscious understanding of another Yoruba

person that now beholds the sight of the dread-head is that this is a person who could not be integrated, a wild person for whom the ritual that produces conformity and allows adherence to normal human existence either has not been performed or was ineffectual, in any case, a devious being. Dreadlocks suggest to the Yoruba observer the presence of the indefinite, and the undefined, the unknown; a dreadlock-wearing person is a dualized entity that manifests physically while in communion with the unseen. The indefinite nature of these beings has brought about the linguistic usage of the indefinite pronoun, *wón*, that is, they, or passivized it, as a term of reference when discussing them.

Unlike bodily adornment, the motivation of which has been variously attributed to the psychological need for human beings to cover their nakedness out of shame (biblical myth), or for a purely functional reason, that is, protection from the elements or insects, hairstyles do not perform these functions. Certain hairstyles are worn in service to the gods, or are adopted to ward off evil, or to attract good. However, these reasons cannot completely account for the elaborate hair designs that are attested cross-culturally as well as the careful and often arduous tasks involved in their making. One clear need that cannot be overlooked is the individual desire to attract attention and make himself or herself look good. By catching your eyes, you are channeled to a specific form of information that the producer is interested in having you glean about them.

### *Personal Styles and Identity*

*“Fashion does not and cannot exist in seclusion, it wants the world for its stage. It needs to see and be seen; it has an indisputable trait of exhibitionism.”<sup>48</sup>*

Change is the only permanence; with time, every cultural item changes. Global interactions and exchange results in the creation of popular expressive cultures which have brought transformation to existing male hairstyles, introduced previously unattested ones, and informed novel others for aesthetic purposes. These styles also satisfy the need to express the self. This functional perspective informs the various contemporary hairstyles among Yoruba people and shows how hairstyle is used to reflect and interpret events and personal identities. Popular hairstyles of Yoruba women and the different methods for the adornment and beautification of hair have received greater scholarly attention. This is, in part, due to the fact

that they are a more visible aspect of the expression of beauty and very visible social preoccupation of women. Attention to hair is closely linked to the Yoruba notion of *ima*, that is, character. Male hairstyles remain bland once the religious and social roles have been identified, except in the contemporary.

A documentation of contemporary African fashion<sup>49</sup> that covers textiles, bodily adornment, and hair design, among others, suggests that within the variously documented fashionable expressions thrive despair, anger, and resistance, as well as utopia and reinvention. Furthermore, in the domain of fashion there are links with some of the fundamental transformations in the society as generated by commodification, urbanization, and globalization. There are hairstyles named after significant events such as when Nigeria transitioned from driving on the right to the left: “Nigeria drive right.” There is the James Brown hairstyle, named after the hairstyle of the American musician of the same name. There are the hairstyles that express the aspirations of young men such as “girls follow me.” Popular among the people who assist drivers of public transport in scouting for passengers and collecting fares, commonly called conductors, is the “conductor style.” The Afro style became popular in the late 1960s and early 1970s, having been adopted from the black power movement. Also, there were styles to reflect popular American and British cultures of blacks, like “American Negro and British Negro” styles. There are hairstyles that reflect political movements such as the “Republic style,” which was worn in honor of Nigeria becoming a Federal Republic on October 3, 1963. Among the different hairstyles that Houlberg<sup>50</sup> listed from barbershop billboards in Ibadan is one called “Ibadan style.” This hairstyle is worn as a tribute to the city of Ibadan, arguably the capital city of Yoruba states. Those who have traveled to Europe or the USA announce this “been to” status with the hairstyle of the same name. The responses of hairstyle to changing social, political, and global influences are documented in many works (e.g., Esi Sagay, Mariama Ross, among others).<sup>51</sup>

When teaching became one of the professions accessible to Yoruba natives, it came with an expected mode of appearance. A teacher is expected to have a short Afro that is neatly trimmed and well groomed. For the Afro to be longer is to be judged eccentric which borders on malady. The realm of public transportation, another form of profession due to the advent of motorized vehicles, especially the bus and car parks, produced touts whose credibility depended on their appearance, especially hairstyles. Unkempt hair, especially in the form of short nappy hair or complete baldness, defines the touts’ rowdiness, toughness, and a testament

to their rough existence often at the fringes of the society. These park guys are called *omo garage* (garage thugs). Their rugged appearance instills fear in people, distinguishing them as a subgroup considered to be outlaws and outcasts in the popular imagination.

Biaya, describing the social phenomenon of hair in Africa, used this subtitle: “The beauty, the mystic and the madman.” Each of these terms is meant to qualify the different hairstyles designated by their meticulously styled hair, their long braids, and their shaved heads or unruly mops, respectively. While many hairstyles were informed by the disco and the bar scenes of nightlife, by musicians, and by political ideologies such as negritude, there were others instituted by religious injunctions such as the dreadlocks worn by the Peul of Senegal. To the Peul, the dreadlock hairstyle expresses Mourid mysticism and is a marker of identity. Yoruba people’s modernity did not include dreadlocks, not even as a symbol of subversion of established cultures. Even the aims of the very few students who, in response to fashion, sport dreadlocks on campus were questioned when Adeola asked, “Are they invoking the spirit of Dada or madness?”<sup>52</sup> Her conclusion was that this dreadlock hairstyle is nothing more than the celebration of madness. Unkempt and unruly hairstyles from the Yoruba viewpoint are an affront, an unabashed assault, and a brazen threat to the society. Dreadlocks are an affirmation of unleashed force, the danger of which is comparable to that of a wild beast let loose among humans. The dreadlock is a sign of the diabolical, a reminder of the veiled, but powerful, force of the malevolent, and the danger that the hairstyle portends for the innocents whose good fortunes are threatened.



*I came back to the SU House at 3.00pm as I had told the guard. The guard who was physically abusive to me now manned the main gate. Accompanying me was one of my colleagues who was visiting UI. She was of a Canadian and Dutch heritage with many years of residence teaching at different universities in Nigeria. Seeing us approaching, the guard quickly closed the gate and ran inside. I knocked and waited. After several minutes, a car drove up towards the gate. The car stopped for the gate to be opened. The driver got out and through the crack of the gate, I saw the guard walk to the occupant of the vehicle. They spoke and then the driver gesticulated towards me and beckoned to me to come to him. I went and he instantly acted accusatory. Without any exchange of pleasantries, he spoke with aggression:*

*“I am not impressed, in fact I was disappointed by the way and manner that you have conducted yourself. I am the Director here. Who are you?” He paused. “I am on my way to an important meeting. It is the will of God for us to meet, otherwise, this meeting would not have been possible.”*

*I introduced myself this time with my professional title. The abusive guard who was standing by was listening to our exchanges. Hearing how I introduced myself, and seeing me produce identification, changed his demeanor. He stood reverentially, his hands clasped together behind him, and his head and gaze were lowered.*

*The driver continued “I heard you refused to sign in when you came here before. You refused to follow any instructions that the workers gave to you. We are not against anybody,” he continued. “But we are careful. Not long ago, a major donor came here, it was in the afternoon in broad daylight. Someone went into his car and removed several hundreds of thousands of Naira. Well, I saw the guy who did this last week and I could only pray for him. So, there is a need for us to beware and careful. Now what do you want and why are you here?”*

*“Well,” I responded, “I am extremely shocked by your conclusions?”*

*Given his name, the clothes he was wearing and his speech pattern, I continued in Yoruba. “First of all, agba osika lo ngbo ejo enikan dajo.” (It is the wicked elder that judges a case based on the testimony of only one of the parties involved”) His face lightened up in surprise and his wife stepped out of the car. Seeing that I had his attention and could appeal to a different set of values within a cultural context, I continued undeterred. Secondly, I said, “It is not true that I did not sign in when I came here, neither is it accurate that I refused to follow instructions”.*

*At my request, the guard went to the gate and retrieved the register for us to verify if I signed in or not. He looked in the book and he saw that I had signed in and that I was allocated a badge with a number I had worn visibly on my person during my visit.*

*“Thirdly,” I said to him, “it is apparent that the Scripture Union is now for certain people. Some people, no doubt, are more welcome than others. It is a shame that you are now speaking with me, now that you see that I am here with a white person. You suddenly consider it important to speak with me.”*

*“No, no, no,” he protested. “I was upstairs, and I did not want to have anything to do with the whole situation. As you can see, I am actually on my way to a meeting and I am late. So, I cannot talk long. It is the will of god that is why he made it so that we meet. Left to me, I did not want to have anything to do with this issue.” His wife, now standing by his side with a pious face, looked at me with a worried expression.*

*“Ok, so, what can I do for you?” he asked.*

*“Well, I have come back here because I am a returnee. This place and institution is like a home to me. I worked here,” I explained.*

*“You mean in the USA?” he asked.*

*“No, here, right here. I worked and virtually grew up right here. When Okafor was the GS,” I said.*

*“Venerable Okafor is not here anymore,” he corrected and explained.*

*I said, “So, I was on my way for an appointment at UI when I could not resist the urge to look in seeing that it was my last day in Ibadan. Well I have no appointment with anybody and there is no need for me to drop anyone’s name. After all, this is the Scripture Union. It is a place for all. But that seems no longer to be the case. Rather than being left alone, I have been humiliated and assaulted. Even if I looked lost and out of place, should I not find succor in a missionary house whose sole purpose for existence and the collection of money is to save souls?”*

*I had touched a nerve with my words. He went into a lecture. “You see, this is what happens when you people leave the country and do not maintain contact with the SU. When you return, nobody recognizes you.”*

*“Well, that is not a reason for your guards to beat me up,” I interrupted. “According to you, you were in your office. In spite of the fact that you were in there, your workers, all Christians, refused to let me make a complaint to you. Even right now, you saw that your guard was not going to let me in, even though I had followed your policy by asking for an appointment to see the GS at 3pm before I left.”*

*Our positions remained oppositional. He persisted in giving me all sorts of lectures on the importance of where he was going, of me remaining in touch with*

*the SU and other Christians, the need to make an appointment before I come to the SU House or any other office in Nigeria, and the importance of security for them. His story continued.*

*“You see, I have fired the man who let you into the premise for not following protocols. You must understand that I do not tolerate disobedience. In fact because of how important security has become, I contracted a professional security firm. This way, I don’t have any reason to even have any discussion with the actual worker that they send to my premise. They are way too far below me in scale. I deal directly with their bosses. If there is anything wrong with them, I talk to their boss and they respond to me immediately.”*

*“Whao,” I said. “You fired the innocent. This man whom you have retained was the vicious and the brutal one. Nevertheless, none of the stories you have been telling me justify the treatment given to me by your workers, and I want to understand why.”*

*“I am sorry, I truly am. Please accept our apologies. I take the responsibility and I offer you my apology.” His wife joined him supportively in tendering apologies...*

*By this time we had spoken for at least 30 minutes. The violent guard joined, kneeling, begging, as he tendered his apologies. This time, he did not forget the ‘sir’ at the end of every utterance.*

*“Because you have displayed remarkable persistence in asking me for a reason, I will answer you. You see, unlike others, I have been to Kenya and Tanzania, I am familiar with your hair. But it is against our culture. We do not consider this hair appropriate. It is not the normal hairstyle. You see, if your hair was normal, nobody would suspect you of anything. Our culture does not have room for this hair. Our culture and our people do not tolerate this hairstyle. It is your hair, it is an abomination.”*



The preceding has shown that the Yoruba hairstyling reflects the three social categories symbolized by the beauty, the mystique, and the mad-man. Each of these archetypes as previously cited corresponds to, and is recognizable by, meticulously styled hair, by their long braids or tresses, and by their unshaved, unruly mops.<sup>53</sup> The appellation “*Omo adaribun-run*” (species with head hair),<sup>54</sup> used by Yoruba people to qualify human

beings, is thusly inspired because the head is the part of the human body with the most hair. The tuft of hair on the head is unparalleled by the hair on any other part of the body, but it is also the most groomed and visible. In most cases, the rest of the body is shielded and covered by articles of clothing. According to Lawal,<sup>55</sup> civilization to the Yoruba people is cultivation. The Yoruba redesign their habitat, of course, but more significantly, their consciousness for grooming, forming, and reshaping the hair is personified by seeing the Earth as a beauty-conscious goddess “*ile, ogere, a foko yeri*” (Earth, the goddess that combs the hair with a hoe). Thus, their mode of subsistence is not only encapsulated by, but also reflected within, their cosmology. The uncultivated part of the Earth is the jungle. It is wild, unwieldy, and void of human influence and presence. The jungle is the dwelling place of evil spirits that possess, it is the abode of the rejected (e.g., lepers), and it is the place for bodies not worthy of internment and burial rites within the city limit. To have uncultivated hair is therefore to be part of *igbo* (jungle). It is to be possessed of the evil; it is to become *ara oko* (a creature of the forest), and indeed to become a gnome and a conduit for nefarious activities. A person with such a hairstyle is assumed, as the result of these associations, to wreak havoc on unsuspecting, unfortified persons. This point is discussed in Chap. 5.

In accord with the approach adopted for this work, it is necessary to appeal to popular cultures, in this case the popular Yoruba genre in Nigerian Nollywood. In scene 4 of *Onome*, a Yoruba Nollywood movie, a landlord saw his wife learning some new dance steps from a much younger woman with dreadlocks. Perplexed, he turned to the younger woman and said:

“**were orun**, se o mo pe lati ijo ti o ti de ibi yi, mi o wo oju re ri. O mu iya oniya o wa nko ni sangalo, **ijo were**, ti o ba ...san lule ....were meta lo wa ni ilu yi...; a ni dada gangan, ti Olorun da ni **were orun gangan** lati orun wa. Won so fun iya dada won ni se o ri were, o ni oun o ri were, dada re nko, ki se **were orun** ni? A ni woli, kerub and serafu, a wa ni were isinyi. ...Ti **were ori re** un ba ti wo inu opoplo ti o moo un ti o nse. Se o le ni iru eleyi ni iya, ko ni ki o wa ma jo kolabo?

“**Lunatic from heaven**, you know that we have never had any problem since you became my tenant. But now, we have a problem. You are teaching this old woman hip-hop...**crazy dance**, what if she loses her balance and falls...We have three kinds of lunatics in this city. We have dada whom God legitimately created as a **lunatic straight from heaven**. We have priests of

the Cherubim and Seraphim, and we have modern crazies who are in vogue. ...Were it not that the **madness on your head** had worked itself into your brain, would you be teaching hip-hop to this woman who is old enough to be your mother?"

The Yoruba view expressed in this scene identified a natural dread-head (Dada) as a lunatic purposely created by God; it also identified as lunatics the priest of Cherubim and Seraphim Cherubim Church (see Chap. 5) and those who wear dreadlocks as items of fashion. Furthermore, it assumes that the madness believed to be inherent in the hair could seep into the brain of the person with dreadlocks and cause malady.

As the "species that grows hair mainly on the head," the cultivation and nurture of hair is integral to the ability of Yoruba people to carry on a meaningful existence on Earth, to their prosperity, and eventual continuity that is assured through procreation and reincarnation. Collectively, the different hairstyles attested among Yoruba people, therefore, were created to reflect their belief in the primacy and the supremacy of *Ori* (head = destiny) in all their undertakings.<sup>56</sup> The "trivial" story at the onset of the sections shows that the reactions of these Yoruba people reveal their subconscious feelings and judgments about a person based on his hairstyle. This subconscious feeling informs initial assumptions about a male with dreadlocks, including his intentions, character, and possible existence as a conduit for nefarious spirits. The Yoruba nation as already described is a cohesive community and, in a sense, a community of practice<sup>57</sup> with integrated individuals whose identities and actions are shaped by participating in this shared belief system. However, this system also circumscribes their actions. According to Heller, "identity is a heuristic device which captures some elements of how we organize ourselves, but which have to be understood as a social construct."<sup>58</sup>

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## The Underpinning of the Yoruba View of Hairstyle

*June 8: a highly educated friend with a PhD in engineering, and whose wife holds a master's degree in linguistics, invited me to his house for dinner. It was in honor of his friend from Nigeria whose son had just graduated from The University of Texas at Austin. This Nigerian family could be described as belonging to the Nigerian elite. They frequent the USA on vacation and they have two children going to college in the USA (one of whom on whose account we gathered). The couple were said to work for the oil industry in Nigeria. Their occupation and the fact that they are able to afford international student tuition and related expenditures indicate that they are not only highly educated but also well off. In attendance were other invitees, including a professor and his wife, who also holds a doctorate degree. When I arrived at the house of the host, I greeted everyone in Yoruba. The woman from Nigeria whose son had just graduated from UT walked up to me with enthusiasm and said hello. Introducing herself, she asked me, "Are you from Jamaica?" This was in spite of my greeting her and other guests in Yoruba. "You understand Yoruba," she said. To this, everyone except her husband began to laugh. As we talked and joked, her husband remained friendly but suspicious. The conversation continued during the dinner. It covered different themes. Among Yoruba people, the use of proverbs during conversation is highly regarded. Spicing one's statement with sayings, proverbs, and tales of didactic content signifies maturity, wisdom, and experience. These rhetorical devices are an apt conveyance of certain cultural knowledge and mode of argumentation that elude immediate English reference. As a result, conversation among educated Yoruba people includes rampant code-switching. The highly respected professor spoke a proverb and I responded with another. However, the woman from Nigeria did not under-*

*stand what we had just said. So I proceeded to explain, in plain words, some of the concepts that featured in the proverbs, the cultural basis for their use, and the meaning of the proverbs in the context of our discussion. Suddenly, her friendly demeanor changed radically. It finally dawned on her that I was not an exotic and interesting foreigner who spoke Yoruba. I became in her mind a Yoruba man with irun-were (the hair of a lunatic, a mad person), perhaps a diabolical person. In place of the friendliness, walls and distance were built up as her non-verbal signals reflected. In place of the niceties and kind words, she started offering prayers of protection for herself and for her family in addition to asking God for deliverance. Along with these, she started singing spiritual songs, covering herself with the blood of Jesus and begging God to intervene. Finally, she looked at me, reassuring me that she would be intervening religiously on my behalf to quell the demonic influences that are on me.*



It is important to reiterate that the discussion of this book is mainly centered on the everyday lives of the Yoruba people. It is concerned with the way in which their views of a mature male Yoruba person with cornrows and dreadlocks hairstyles, though mere hairstyles, are revealed in casual interactions to be ominous. The Yoruba view of the hair is tied to their view of the head as particularly sacred,<sup>1</sup> particularly deterministic of an individual's earthly existence, and requiring particularly protections by all means.

The ontology of Yoruba is conveyed not only by its unique language but also by the complex interaction of its cultural institutions as suggested by Quine.<sup>2</sup> The notion of dynamic permanence, in this case the teleological perspective that a society exists to perpetuate itself, was suggested for Yoruba people and exemplified for them in the nature of their corporate existence. This section provides an ontological and epistemological underpinning for the treatment of a person based on hairstyles, specifically, deviant hairstyle. The ontological perspective shows Yoruba views of the beings, the entities that are found in the different spheres of Yoruba existence; it explicates how this knowledge is derived and the role that it plays in addition to how these fit with Yoruba values and existential goals in an axiological sense. For those readers concerned with labels, this is a practical exemplification of the views and thoughts of a people in relation to habitual interactions. It will be shown that there is an interdependence and interinfluence between the visually apparent object and the invisible essence. Both, through words, are co-referentially intertwined. Thus, the connection between *Ori-inu* and the physical entities that implicate it has

its roots, as already suggested, in the origin of the nation. This origin inscribes the socio religious polity of the nation and prescribes the goals of life on Earth. By examining forms of interactions against ethnographic and cultural knowledge, it is possible to obtain insight into the social realities that inform the various decisions at different points in these interactions. What follows is a description of the basis of Yoruba ideology. This ideology is situated within the ontology of the Yoruba nation. It also shows the sacredness of the head, underscoring it as the abode of an individual's destiny, guiding force, and creativity.

Yoruba ascriptions to deviant hairstyles can be deduced from the background information provided in Chap. 3, in which the Yoruba was depicted as a people united by tropes of creation myths and by their language. This language reinforced their ethnonym and became standardized through the introduced Western system of writing along with its style of historiography. These new systems further fostered a commonality of history, the notion of homeland, and of cultures. The context of these ascriptions coalesces around the knowledge of the people, their belief, their formative environment, and time. A Yoruba's visual ideology is an outward projection, a physical instantiation of a deeply rooted belief system that is contained within the people's cosmology. The content of this cosmology not only showcases the spirituality of the people and their religious ideology, it encapsulates the mechanism responsible for the discourse, focus, and drive of a people from their inception through to the present.

The significance and place of hair is contained within the spiritual philosophy of *Ori-inu*. Along with its location on the head, which is the center of physical existence, a person may continue to live with the removal of many parts of the body below the head; however, when the head is excised, death is definite. Hair is atop the head. As the apex of the body, it occupies a central position to which several mystical views are attributed. As a liminal matter, hair is supposed to mediate the communication between the soul and the spirits.<sup>3</sup> Within this concept, Yoruba people see hair as part of a medium to effect evil or achieve good. An individual's destiny, or soul, could be accessed. Just as smoke may indicate fire, and to stay clear of it is to avoid its consummative force, maintaining watchfulness and avoiding all appearances, similitudes, and other indicators of the forces of evil provide some distance and safety from it. To not do so would be to become an innocent or willing victim. When this occurs, the culprit is considered not guilty for preying on the victim. The race, seen from this perspective, is thus to the swiftest. Hair is a sign system, an item of great

symbolism. To cultivate the hair is to tend the *Ori-innu*; to leave it wild is to turn it into a wilderness and allow it to become a place of abode for the *aye*, nefarious forces, who thence affect other human beings. The symbolism of the hair is captured by the Yoruba hunter, the fortified warrior who is able to venture into the dangerous world of the forest to hunt. Others may set traps on their farmlands, but they dare not walk in the shadow of death by going into the forest world to challenge its dwellers. Essentially, there is not only a social<sup>4</sup> meaning to hair, there is a semiotic interpretation with an indexical component to it. Hair is a metaphoric messaging device, and what it conveys can be inferred from a culture's reactions to it. Hair and the power attributed to it within Yoruba cosmology is not particular; in European civilization, witches are presumed to have powers in their hair, which are described as tousled or spread out like flames.<sup>5</sup>

The spiritual significance of hair for the Yoruba child begins shortly after birth. On the third day, *Imori*, "knowing the head ceremony," is performed. This is a religious ceremony of divination performed in order to ascertain the destiny of the child and to find ways to secure their good fortune or to amend unfortunate lots in life.<sup>6</sup> On the eighth day, the hair of the newborn is cut. The cut hair is not thrown away; rather, it is kept and jealously guarded because it could be useful in the future to make medicines. This practice attests to the belief in the possibility of using hair to influence the course of the child's life on Earth. Just as the head of a child is shaved to mark their entrance to earthly existence, the head is shorn at death to mark their exit. Cornrow braids are used among the Yoruba as important cultural markers such as ethnicity, social status, religion, and age.<sup>7</sup> Against this background, the next section explicates the various significations imputed unto Yoruba hair and how this religious philosophy has continued to influence contemporary attitudes toward hair. In addition, it must be noted that for an individual to be socially acceptable, he or she will have to be well groomed and display attention to personal conduct (*ima*), clothes, and hair.<sup>8</sup>

### YORUBA TRADITIONAL RELIGION: ORI

As discussed in Chap. 4, the Yoruba cosmology includes three spheres of existence with different inhabitants of differing powers and influence: the physical world of human beings; the underworld, which includes the sea and its inhabitants; and the sky with its spiritual forces of good and evil. Another way to say this is that there is a physical realm and there

is a spiritual realm. Between these two, mortals carry out their earthly existence. There is a hierarchy with interconnected and interactive spheres. The first level of existence is that of the gods that were not fashioned by other gods. Regardless of differences in regional appellations, the gods in this plane include Olodumare, Ifa, and Esu. Beneath this plane is the sphere (sky or air) inhabited by created forces with different areas of influences and powers, which include the 600 + 1 or 400 + 1 gods.<sup>9</sup> Below this sphere is the physical world that is inhabited by land and water creatures, and finally there is the world of the ancestors. The Yoruba conception of the cosmos ties with its creation myth. The creation stories show a tripartite interconnected structure that parallels the tripartite structure observed in the creation of human beings. The creation of both the Earth and the human beings includes a preexistence where actual living is ongoing. The created is just a similitude, the shadow of the spiritual existence. This belief is captured by the saying that “*eefin ina ni a n’da laye, ina mbe lorun*” (It is the smoke of fire that is observed on Earth, the real fire is been stoked in the heavens).

As previously described in Chap. 4, the creator god existed with his emissaries beyond the sky from where he sent the world-maker, Oduduwa, to descend into the body of water below, carrying with him the instruments of creation. He poured on the body of water the sand that he carried in a shell and set upon it a chicken that spreads the sand by scratching it with its feet. Wherever the sand touches becomes habitable Earth. In this version of the creation story, the place where the Earth-maker Oduduwa commenced his work is Ile Ife, the mythological homeland of all Yoruba, and also the founding city of kingship in the Yoruba nation. Analogous is the creation of human beings. There is a premade *Ori* “head” independent of a prefashioned body with the head-maker Ajala. There is *ile-aye*, “the created world or Earth.” When the time comes for a person to go to *ile-aye*, the torso picks *Ori-inu* (internal head). In the spiritual world this is the content of the body’s prospects on Earth.<sup>10</sup> In the physical, it is the head atop the neck. Thus, the world is a place for the manifestation of the content of the chosen *Ori-inu*, a stage to play out the script composed in heaven. A place where the smoke of the substantial fire that is made in heaven streams out. The actualization of this *Ori-inu* remains under contestation.

*Ori* for Yoruba people constitutes a powerful symbol that represents the crucial aspects of their belief in the interaction between the spiritual and physical. The creation myth of the Yoruba was retold because it orientates

us to their belief concerning the origin, meaning, and purpose of life. It also reveals the place of humans and other beings within the cosmos. In addition, the narration makes clear that the Yoruba cosmos, broadly speaking, consists of the two hemispheres, the sky (heaven) and the Earth (*aye*). These two correspond to the spiritual and the physical hemispheres; they are interconnected, interdependent, and interacting. This cosmology is analogous to the brain, with its left and right hemispheres conjoined by the corpus callosum. Describing the Yoruba cosmos based on Ifa corpus, Abimbola<sup>11</sup> explained that to the right are 400 + 1 primordial benevolent powers. To the left are 200 + malevolent primordial powers that war against humans and the benevolent powers. These forces that are in the left hemisphere are also known as *Ajogun* (warriors). There are eight war lords: death, disease, loss, paralysis, tribulation, curse, imprisonment, and affliction. Traversing between the left and the right hemispheres are *Aje* and *Esu*, both practically allies of the principalities of the left. They are believed to “suck human blood, eat human flesh, and can afflict humans with various types of diseases.”<sup>12</sup> The separation of these forces to the right (good forces)- and left (evil forces)-hand sides is captured by the Yoruba saying: the evils that will befall one on Earth are inscribed into the palm of the left hand, and those good things that one will achieve are found on the palm of the right hand.

*Aye* (physical world or Earth) is a concept with wide-ranging spiritual meanings and physical dimensions. It includes the mystical, spiritual, and physical beings. *Aye* is populated by humans, of course, but also by unseen spirits who are often nefarious. Heaven is the dwelling place of the gods.

Akosile ni adaye ba;

(The prewritten is established on Earth)

A de ile *aye* tan, a gbagbe akosile

(Arriving on the Earth we forget the prewritten)

Ayanmo eda ko ni tase eda

(The predestination of a person is indubitable)

According to this verse from the sayings of the elders, the individual’s knowledge of the content of his or her head is immediately lost at birth. For this reason, a person errs through life, and searches, as if blind, for his or her true destiny. It is for this reason that a person may engage

in a profession or trade different from the prechosen one, only to fail. Failure in a sense is thus seen by Yoruba people as embarking on things not sanctioned or not in consonance with one's own *Ori*.<sup>13</sup> In such cases, however, individuals can be aided, through divination (Ifa), to uncover their true essence and learn those injunctions required by their *Ori* or patron deity to secure their success on Earth. Failure does not occur only as a result of acting contrary to the *Ori*; it could happen because one has forgotten to observe the laws of different patron deities. Such omissions will invariably draw the anger of these gods, who then afflict their wards with destruction and cause their eventual demise.<sup>14</sup> These laws are spiritual laws; they have become institutionalized by ritualizing them as a set of observances found in traditional religion, formalized communal worship of diverse divinities, and codes of conduct for different professional guilds. Disseminated across various spheres to avoid their loss, they are contained in the reverential duties and offerings to the Earth, water, and sky gods. They are also enshrined in the sociopolitical polity of the nation to ensure their perpetual presence via the institution of the royal kingship. This institution supplies its officers with palaces and with elaborate residence and offices, which, together, form interconnected departments in the vast repository and archival system that includes regalia, ceremonies, arts, effigies, customs, and other mnemonic devices contrived to inspire awe and to remind. Not least are the various linguistic codifications in the form of sayings, proverbs, parables, value judgments, injunctions, taboos, and praise songs as well as indexing images and non-verbal signals. All these are deeply internalized during socialization to give the appearance of naturalness and set truths, the singular purpose of which was, and is, to conscript reverence and obeisance, assure the accepted established order, and implement the crucial religious percepts. Collectively, these elaborate, complex memory devices and artifacts are layered with meaning, and, like uncovered treasures of antiquity, they reveal their significance upon closer scrutiny.

The sacredness of the *Ori*, especially the secrets about the physical existence on Earth that it contains, makes it a most prized possession that is to be defended and sought as bounty. The battle for *Ori-innu* is the fight for the actualization of a prechosen destiny on Earth. The successful defense of *Ori-innu* against pillage amounts to the survival of the individual, the nation, and the gods. For where there are no humans, there can be no nation and certainly no divinities.<sup>15</sup> *Ori-innu*, the inner head, is the originator of all things. It is the essence that predates dawn, *Ori apere*, the ruler, or

*Ori akoko*, the very first head. All these terms conceptualize and designate the various positions of the head with the Yoruba pantheon. According to Jerome Bruner,<sup>16</sup> stories shape actions (of individuals and groups), in part, because stories embody compelling motives, strong feelings, and clearly defined goals. These stories remain effective in guiding human decisions across time despite the availability of a more workable theory. Bruner further suggests that these stories, when acted, make events and make history. Yoruba people tell stories, anecdotes, and proverbs to express who they are, define their world, and lay bare their cultural emphasis. These stories, collected from Yoruba elites, illustrate the mode of transmission of the worldview that informs and enables the semantic predispositions, mental images, and distinctive habitual responses generated by the mentioning of *wón*, they. They also show how extant and pervasive this belief is. The various sayings of the people, as illustrated in the following Ifa<sup>17</sup> verses, panegyrics, and popular sayings of the elders, allow us to uncover the meaning of *Ori-inu*, its position, and the role of the head in the life of the people:

(1) *Ori apere*

*A taa oja ileke*

*Ori ni i gbe ni ti a de ade owo*

*Ori ni i gbe ni ti a te opa ileke*

*Ori lo da Olu fun Alade sheshe ifun*

*Ori mi eleda mi, maa gba abode*

Ori, the ruler,

Ori with the beaded girdle

It is Ori that makes it possible for one to wear the crown of wealth

It is Ori that makes it possible for one to hold a staff decked with jewelry

Ori created the kingdom for the one who wears the glistering white crown

My head, my creator, do not let me down

This verse reaffirms the rulership of *Ori*, marking it as the fate that seals one's destiny. *Ori* causes an individual to conform to whatever was chosen before earthly existence. Understanding of the preeminence of this essence is provided by Abiodun,<sup>18</sup> who describes it as *Ori apere*, that is, the head;

the head that sits atop the throne, the one that occupies the apex of the cone of existence, *ibi sonso*, the very source of being in Yoruba thought. Recognizing the directorship and leadership position of *Ori*—it harboring a person’s preallotment, and it providing access to its knowledge—people offer to *Ori* the following adulations:

(2) *Ori, Onise, Adaaye*

*Ori, Apere, As’akaramotaa loja ejigbomekun*

*Ateleni mo pada lehin eni*

*Ori, baba (oko) ohun gbogbo*

*Ori labaki,*

*Gbogbo ara ko je nkankan*

*Bi ori ba kuro li ara,*

*Okutu lo ku,*

*Kukuruku ara ko reru.*

*Ori jowo dakun;*

*Ma pada lehin mi,*

*Ori oko ohun gbogbo*

Ori, cause and creator

Ori-Apere, who makes the bean-cakes but never sells at Ejigbonmekum market

Ori, the great companion who never deserts one

Ori, the master of all

It is the Ori we should praise.

The rest of the body comes to naught.

What remains is useless,

What remains is incapable of carrying any load

It is Ori which bears the load.

Ori, I praise you.

Do not desert me,

You, the lord of all things. (Abiodun 2014: 42)

It is uncontested that when the Yoruba speak of *Ori*, they refer to a multiplex of meaning that goes beyond its referential function to, literally, the physical head. The Yoruba subsume within their understanding of the head the personality-soul that is believed to be the actual spirit or force that governs and guides the course of human existence and activities on Earth. Success or failure depends on *Ori*, especially on its quality. This understanding is reflected in the following verses of the elders in praise of *Ori*.

(3) *Adani waye ni oruko a npe ori*  
*A difa fun sasore tin lo re bo ori elewi*  
*Sasore bo ori elewi tan,*  
*O sebe o deni oba*  
*Ifa loni so mi di eni ajiki*  
*Orunmila womi sunsunru ko somi di eni ajo ge*  
*Ko somi di ori a pe sin ni awujo*  
*Tori ori lo gbe Agbe ti o fi di oba adaro*  
*Ori lo gbe Aluko ti ofi je oba akosun*  
*Ifa leni ko somi di eni a jiki*  
*Orunmila so mi di eni a jige*

The creator is the appellation for Ori  
 Devined for Sasore who worshipped the Ori of Elewi  
 Sasore worshipped Ori of Elewi  
 He became a royal  
 Ifa make me a person of venerate  
 Orunmila make me a person that the community honors  
 Orunmila, purposefully make to a person that all cherish  
 Make me a person all venerate  
 Because Ori saved Agbe and he became king of Adaro  
 Ori aided Aluko to make him king of Akosun  
 Ifa says you should make me to a person of honor  
 Orunmila make me a venerated person

The third panegyrics underscored the place of *Ori-inu* in elevating individuals to a position of honor, to a place of veneration, and to wealth. Without *Ori*, the things that an individual achieves on Earth are not possible. Actually, the essence and the nature of all creations owe to the *Ori* that made them. This view is artfully captured and preserved in the poetic adoration offered to *Ori* as shown in (4). The *Oriki* further underscores the leadership of *Ori* in all human endeavors.

(4) *Ori Aja ni Aja fi n la igbo*  
*Ori ni Apaara fi n la Iroko*  
*Ori ni otooto Agbonrin fi n la iwo*  
*Ori Eja lo n ba Eja a la ibu*  
*Ori Akasa lo n ba Akasa la odo*  
*Ori l' Owaawa fi n la iperee*  
*Ori eni ni isaju eni,*  
*Oun naa ni isamona eni*  
*Ori eni ni iba ni gbero ohun rere*

The dog's Ori helps it to cut through the bush  
 Thunder uses Ori to split the iroko tree'  
 Every antelope grows a pair of horn through Ori  
 With its Ori, fish splits the deep  
 Owaawa, rat's Ori splits the cave  
 Ori precedes and guides a person  
 Ori plans good things for its owner (Abiodun 2014: 43–44)<sup>19</sup>

(5) *Ese ni sini lo si ibi ti Ori fe gbe ni de*  
*Sebi owo genge ni siwaju ijo*  
*Orin ni alayanmo eni, a kunle yan*  
*Ro fun ori e, ma se ro fun eniyan*  
*Nitori ori ni elejo*

*Gbe mi ja agbo olori ire o*  
*e rogba yi mi ka*  
*Ori ko so mi so ire.*

The legs walk the head to its destination  
 The raised arms precede dance  
 The head is destiny, is predestination  
 Tell it to your head, not to humans  
 Because the head is the advocate  
 Place me in the company of people of good fortune  
 People of good fortune, surround me  
 Ori, cause me to have good fortune

In (5), we see reaffirmed the leadership, the guidance of *Ori* in human affairs. We also see the notions of predestination or preallotment attributed to *Ori* as well as the qualification of *Ori* as the savior, the answerer of prayers, and the advocate on behalf of humans. The Yoruba believe in *Ayanmo* (preallotment), *Ipin* (predestined share), *Kadara* (divine share for man), *Ipori* (inner head), *Akunleyan* (prechosen), or *Akunlegba* (pre-accepted). Each of these Yoruba concepts translates to predestination.<sup>20</sup> The *Ori* is prefilled with certain possibilities, the actualization of which drive the earthly journey. *Ori* is not empty. Because of the valuable content of *Ori*, it is heavily sought after on Earth; hence, the following verse of admonition.

(6) *Olooto ile aye yi ko p'ogun*  
*Sikasika ibe ko mo ni iwon egbefa*  
*Ojo esan ko lo titi*  
*Ko je k'oro o dun ni*  
*A difa fun oro gbogbo tin dun Akapo ti ko dun ifa*  
*Akapo wa lo so fun orunmila*  
*Oriire gbogbo ni oun nwa*  
*Orunmila ni ki akapo lo so fun esu*

*Esu ni ki akapo ro fun ori*

*Akapo ro fun ori*

*Ni oro akapo ba ndi ire*

*Ohun lo fi je pe oro gbogbo ti mba ndun'ni ka ro fun ori*

*Nitoripe ori eni ni awure eni*

*Orilonise*

*Ori laaba bo ka fi orisa sile*

*Nitori ngbati ori nso ni, nibo lorisa wa?*

*E je ki a gba fun ori*

Honest person in the world is less than twenty

Evil doers in it exceed multiples of 1200

The day of reckoning is not eternal

This enhances forbearance

It was divined for the troubles of Akapo which did not bother ifa

Akapo said to Orunmila

He seeks all goodness

Orunmila instructed Akapo to make his requests to Esu

Esu asked Akapo to petition Ori

He petitioned Ori and began to receive all forms of goodness

This is why all our complaints must be brought before Ori

Because a person's Ori is their blessing

Ori is the maker

Ori should be worshipped in place of the gods

For where are the gods when Ori determines one's essence

Let us surrender to Ori

Per this panegyric rendition to *Ori-inu*, the head is the ultimate source of blessings to an individual. As such, *Ori-inu* deserves adulation and worship. The panegyric recognizes the existence of multiple evil forces that

seek to derail the blessings apportioned to the individual. Part of the said worship of *Ori-inu* is a form of personal exertion that is represented by *Ese* (the human feet/legs). This earthly duty requires that an individual take all possible precautions to assure that the content of *Ori-inu* is not compromised. The primordial fear of *Ota* (enemies), also called *awon-aye* or *aje* (witches) or *awón iya* (mothers), is carefully sustained within the consciousness of the people through verses from Ifa, panegyrics, sayings, aphorisms, and proverbs, which allow for their transfer between generations. These are not fanciful tales; rather, they are the products of mature minds, borne out of convictions deeply steeped in the aforementioned cosmology. Hence, seasoned and knowledgeable adults continue to recycle them to retain their significance.

(7) *Mo ji lowuro*

*Mo gba ori mu*

*Ori, ivoran olokun, abara bi ota*

*A difa fun ori apere*

*Onomo alakara se ola*

*Nje ibi ori ngbe nni owo*

*Akara ori ka temi mo won*

*Akara, ina ori ni ijo'le*

*Eeyan i'se ogun ewa*

*Ni ojo ti osupa ti 'nran titi*

*Ko kuku tani lara*

*Adifa fun eyin ni ojo igbaani*

*Ti nlo re kan ilekun ola ikeke ikeke*

*Ee si o ti nkan ilekun ola ilele ilele*

*Ee si o ti nkan ilekun ola igbangban igbangban*

*O ni oun ori apere,*

*idaa ma gbon mi*

*O waraja, o wo ajo*

*Iran baba re o ba Adeotu ife se odun ri*

*Ori so omo elekunmekun,  
o ya maa lo  
Ori ni ti omo kekere ba ko iyan ale  
Agbalagba a fi oro itan bale*

I wake up in the morning  
I hold unto my head  
Iworan Olokun, hard as bullet,  
It was divined for destiny  
Who will beat the child of the bean seller to make his fortune  
So when fate is making money,  
Destiny count me in.  
The fire from head lice cannot burn down a house  
Humans have no medicinal portion to induce beauty  
Since the light of the moon has been shinning  
It has never been found to scorch the skin  
As Ifa was divined for the palm kernel  
When he went to knock on the doors of fortune  
Who is it that knocks persistently on the door of fortune?  
Who is it that bangs hastily on the door of wealth?  
Who is it that bangs irreverently on the doors of wealth?  
He responded, he is fate  
He answered, he is predestination  
You have traveled far and wide  
Your lineage has never been elite members of the Ifa cult  
Ori protects Elekunmekun  
Ori says when the child refuses dinner  
The adult resorts to oral historiography

It is not just material things that are obtained through the intervention and consent of *Ori*. Intelligence, wisdom, and even foolishness are all traceable to *Ori*. For this reason, there has been serious and diverse scholarly discussion of fatalism and determinism in the Yoruba worldview.

(8) *Eni to gbon*

*Ori e l'o ni o' o gbon*

*Èeyan ti o gbon*

*Orii re lo ni o go j'usu lo*

He who is wise

Is made wise by his Ori

He who is not wise

Is made more foolish than a piece of yam by his Ori <sup>21</sup>.

The foremost position of *Ori* causes it to be the lord over all other 400 + 1 gods in Yorubaland. *Ori* influences divination, and assigns duties to Ajala, the molder of the human head, the physical index of the essence of a person, or if you will, the mediating exemplar. Interpreting the verse *Ogunda meji* in the Ifa corpus, Gbadegesin<sup>22</sup> showed the permanence and importance of *Ori*. According to these verses, the supreme gods asked each of the deities whether they were willing to accompany their devotees to their graves. Each refused, including Orunmila, the preeminence of the gods, who then concluded by saying that “it is only a person’s *Ori* that will go with him or her to the grave.”<sup>23</sup> As such, *Ori* is the paramount god of a person and is to be worshipped and venerated in place of the deities. *Ori* is the only companion that is constant in one’s life. The following Ifa verse shows that in all situations, *Ori* is the only permanence:

(9) It is Ori alone

Who can accompany its devotee to any place

Without turning back

If I have money,

It is my Ori I will praise  
 My Ori, it is you  
 If I have children on Earth,  
 It is my Ori to whom I will give praise  
 My Ori, it is you  
 All good things I have on earth,  
 It is Ori, I will praise  
 My Ori, it is you

This Ifa verse describes *Ori* as the creator, as the diviner, as the one that blesses, and as the one that gives honor. For all goods and blessings, *Ori* is invaluable. Orunmila, through divination, unlocks the door to the content of *Ori*. Just as earthly Yoruba existence is only for the actualization of the previously allotted or chosen destinies, the chosen destiny of the Yoruba, as a people, is continuous existence; hence, the corporate nature of its politics and societal organization becomes inevitable. The society is configured to ensure the preservation of this destiny and assure its continuity.

As an aggregate of individuals united by the same destiny, the Yoruba nation is an interconnection of *Ori*. To possess a good *Ori* and be a fortunate person is to be called *Olori ire*. The unfortunate one is known as the person who has a bad head, that is, *Olori buruku*. As aptly described by Dopamu,<sup>24</sup> the Yoruba prayer for a person going on a journey or undertaking a new venture is *Ki Ori ki o sin e lo o* (May *Ori* go with you) or *ki o yo'ri si rere* (May *Ori* prosper you). The admonition to a newly married woman who is being taken to her husband's house is for her to go with her *Ori* rather than just her physical beauty, which is ephemeral. Parents also pray for guidance and blessing for their children, saying, *Ori mi a sin o lo* (May my *Ori* go with you). If a person miraculously escapes from harm, he will say, *Ori mi yo mi* (My *Ori* has saved me). When something has been accomplished, the Yoruba say, *Ori mi ba mi se* (My head has enabled me to do it).<sup>25</sup> *Ori iya mi ma sun lorun* is an appeal to the *Ori* of a deceased mother to remain watchful.

According to Abimbola, “[t]he hallmarks of ‘Yoruba’ are to be found in a unique set of religio-philosophical beliefs on the basis of which the Yoruba organize, regulate and moderate their day-to-day lives.”<sup>26</sup> The Yoruba cosmology, and indeed the Yoruba culture, allows the randomness

of history<sup>27</sup> and events, which has been labeled “trivial” in this work or “circumstantial evidence” by others, to be ordered. *Ori* is to be propitiated and not the gods, because it is the essence of a person, *Ori ni eleda*, the creator.<sup>28</sup> However, the verb “*da*” is polymorphous; *da* is to create, to make, and also to fell, to defeat, thus to overcome by conquest. This second usage presumes a duel, in which one party, in this instance the head, comes out on top. There is an ongoing duel to not relinquish the control of an individual’s *Ori* to another. The war is to avoid becoming defeated, subjugated, and a manipulated person and to avoid becoming remade and recreated as a result of someone else assuming the lordship of one’s *Ori*. Herein comes another Yoruba verb, *da*, that is, “to deceive.” This verb features in the following sentence: *Ori mi ma da mi, ma gba abode* (My head do not connive against me, do not stymie me, do not work against me, keep to our accord; implement our agreement). The term *Orilonise* used as the title of Lawal’s (2000) discussion of Yoruba hermeneutics of the head and hairstyle is derived from a longer saying of the elders, “*Ori ni onise, eda ni ayanmo*” (The head determines one’s lot in life; human potentials are predetermined).

### THE GOOD LIFE AND ORI

In the verse “Eji Ogbe,” in Ifa<sup>29</sup> literary corpus, the body of knowledge on which divination is based, there is a distinction made to show the place of work, of physical exertion. This includes vigilance to ensure the fulfillment of the content of *Ori* on Earth. According to this verse, only a few people on Earth selected good fortune, or are destined for greatness. However, this destiny is not guaranteed, as it requires some exertions. For instance, the elders say, “*kadara ko le lo lai se pe eniyan gba*” (Fulfillment of the divine share will occur except the share is snatched away by someone else). The actualization of the good fortune, the content of *Ori-inu*, is made secure only with great efforts. Success on Earth requires ceaseless struggle and agility in overcoming and sidestepping the traps of the enemy. Because one has chosen a good *Ori* before coming to the Earth does not mean that the preallotted good fortune, success, and prosperity will automatically be realized. Neither does a chosen bad head automatically translate to earthly failure, poverty, and misfortune. Individuals are required to work, as indicated by the metaphor of *Ese* (the leg).

Coming to the Earth, a body picks up a head, its destiny, preallocation, and essence. Humans come into the world from the spiritual realm

and then return to it. The interconnectedness remains between both. Individuals, materials, and circumstances are believed to be susceptible to manipulations by tapping into their *ase*, their inhering vital force. Through the use of medicine, good and evil could be effected.<sup>30</sup> The three major aspirations and preoccupations of humans while on Earth could also be influenced. These aspirations are captured in the following Yoruba saying:

(10) *“Ire męta lawa' n wa'.*

*Awa' n wowo. Awa 'n womo.*

*Awa' n watubotan aye.*

We seek three good things:

We seek money.

We seek children.

We seek everlasting life<sup>31</sup>

The achievement of these life goals, including the realization of the preallotted destiny, is not certain. Owing to the ever-present malevolent forces that are constantly seeking to thwart the exertions of individuals, their earthly existence is fraught with dangers and it is a ceaseless contention against unseen, but present and effectual, forces. According to Karin Barber:

Yoruba cosmology presents a picture of man, a solitary individual, picking his way aided by his Ori or Destiny, (chosen by himself before coming to earth) between a variety of forces, some benign, some hostile, many ambivalent, seeking to placate them and ally himself with them in an attempt to checkmate his rivals and enemies in human society. Among the hostile powers are the eniyan or witches, and the Ajogun which are personified evils such as death, loss, sickness etc.<sup>32</sup>

*Aye* is a concept with wide-ranging spiritual meanings and physical dimensions. It includes the mystical, spiritual, and physical beings. The good fortune that an individual chose pre-Earth can be altered by the “nefarious activities of the *aye*, (the world), or by the witches and wizards.”<sup>33</sup>

“The consciousness that this could happen is reinforced ‘linguistically by such phrases as ‘*wón lo ori ẹ*’, ‘*wón gba ogo ẹ*’ (they used his\her head; they gypped his\her glory), ‘*wón pa kadara da*’ (they changed her\his good fortunes). *Wón* is a metaphor for spiritual forces that thwart an individual’s good fortune”.<sup>34</sup>

The intent of the enemy, that is, the *Ajogun*, is to thwart an individual’s destiny and to destroy it through one of the eight aforementioned means. However, it is clear by now that the reality consists in the unseen, and the physical is but the shadow of the invisible. As such, the physical and visible agents of *aye* that could cause evil or bring evil upon an individual include four groups. The first group, called *Ota-ile* or *Amoniseni*, consists of the enemies within the household, including the family. These are people who know a person, know the name of the person and of the person’s parents, and who can point to where the person’s afterbirth, the placenta, was buried. The people who know one’s name and the name of one’s parents can summon a person’s essence to snatch their good fortune from them. Escaping from *Ota-ile* requires extraordinary care and, of course, spiritual intervention. The second group, or *Aseni-bani-daro*, consists of diabolical people who afflict a person and then commiserate with the person. The third group includes *afaimoniseni*, those who inadvertently afflict a person. The fourth group, referred to as *adimajenigberu*, means someone who obviously supports a person but surreptitiously prevents the person from becoming successful. An *adimajenigberu* cooks for a person but prevents the person from eating the food. This person aids someone toward a purpose but frustrates that purpose. The *adimajenigberu* helps someone plan to buy a car, but a day before the purchase ensures that the funds disappear. The *adimajenigberu* helps one prepare for marriage but kills the spouse a night before the wedding day.

These types of hosts, which are susceptible to infestation by *Ajogun*, are not only mad or lunatics, they are people consumed by envy. They are able to observe an individual’s good fortune and are so consumed by envy and jealousy that their only thought is how to destroy and prevent the realization of these goods since they themselves do not have such luck. These jealous people could be anyone—friends, sibling, or a superior at work. Even parents who fear that their children would become so successful that they are no longer the center of their existence are susceptible to the machinations of the *Ajogun*. To the Yoruba, these four types of

enemies are always with us. In all of these, watchfulness and care start right from within the household; if people of our own household are to be treated with suspicion, how much more an individual with questionable and indicative appearance, for example, a person with dreadlocks, should be.

The war for *Ori* is also being waged in the spiritual realm between the gods. In *Ogunda Meji*, the ninth book of *Ifa*, we find further evidence for the quest to overturn *Ori*:

*“...On the day that all the malevolent supernatural powers*

*Were repeatedly haunting his [Orunmila’s] household*

*Death, disease, loss, paralysis, affliction*

*Were all glancing at Orunmila*

*They were saying that*

*One day they will succeed in killing him*

*Orunmila then set down his divination instruments to consult his Ori*

*Ogunda meji was divined*

*He was advised to offer sacrifice*

*After he had completed this sacrifice*

*His Ori provided protective shielding for him*

*Death could no longer kill him*

*Nor could disease harm him...” (Excerpted from *Abimbola 5004: 54*)*

The malevolent spirits war against other opposing spirits with the same intention as those that are active when they war against humans. The *Ajogun* are credited within Yoruba cosmology as creating imbalance between the four primordial components of the Yoruba person. A person consists of a body, formed by *Obatala*. Humans also have a soul or breath of life from *Olodumare*. There is *Ori*, the essence, and actualization, of a person, and the fourth is *Ese*, the individual exertions on Earth. There is also another feature, *iwa*, that is, character, which assures an individual’s free will. Without *Ese* (work), the will in *Ori* will not be actualized. Without working to protect and assure the full manifestation of *Ori*, it could be

thwarted. Failure to be vigilant by *Ese*, for example, creates the imbalance between the expected harmonious existence and relationship between *Ori* and the rest of the person. Divination is required to ascertain the source of this imbalance and to obtain appropriate remedies. When offered, these remedies are carried by Esu, who traverses between the left and right hemispheres as well as the spheres above and below to restore balance. There is no practical distinction between the spiritual and the non-spiritual planes of existence. In protecting the physical, one is preserving the spiritual, just as spiritual fortification assures physical continuity. Dreadlocks arouse the dread of spiritual interference to one's *Ori*. Dreadlocks personify, physically, the possibility that a good fortune could become stymied. Dreadlocks are not just the physical arousal of this consciousness, they amount to a brazen display of daringness. Malevolent spirits are believed to inhabit the dark places, and they conduct their nefarious activities in the dark. Against this norm, dreadlocks are "*aje to nfo losan*" (the witch that flies in the daytime). This violates the presumed separation of night from day, yielding feelings of insecurity. This then constitutes an affront to the society. Such an individual with dreadlocks is an "*abami eda*," a mysterious being that needs not only to be merely shunned but to be exterminated wherever possible.

In the film *Obelu Eru Aya* (2015),<sup>35</sup> the main character is a notorious street girl, a thug who hears voices, which are described as the spirit of God speaking through her. Whatever is told to her comes to pass. In scene three of the film, she is seen walking out of her house to join her friends so that they can hang out on the street corner as they often do. Suddenly, she hears the voice; it gives her a message for a young man innocently walking by. She calls him to deliver the message in the company of her friends:

*"Hello, what's up," the friends say to her.*

*"Hey guys, you will not understand, but the heavenly warriors have a message for this man passing by," Obelu responded.*

*"Here we go again, Obelu. What kind of message would they have for you? Why don't you leave the heavenly beings alone and let us enjoy ourselves on Earth?" friend #1 says in response.*

*"You can't understand," Obelu replies. Turning to the man, she hollers:*

*“Hello, brother, may I have a word with you?”*

*The man approaches, and she says, “You are going to your brother’s place, right?”*

*“Yes,” the passerby replies.*

*Obelu continues nonchalantly, “He invited you to come and hang out with him and his friends, to have fun, eat, and drink. Listen, it is better you turn back and go home. You see, the nice time that was promised you is mainly a ploy. When you get there, eat, and drink, it is your glory (ogo), your joy, good fortune, wealth, and virtues that you are surrendering. All will be taken from you and added to theirs. Are you listening! The heavenly beings are telling me that in a short time, you will have tremendous breakthrough. All you have to do to ensure your success is to turn around, turn off your phone, and go home. I assure you, actually, write it down. In two months, you will be so wealthy and famous that people will attribute your wealth to mysterious magical sources.”*

This scene could have come from innumerable Yoruba movies. To oversimplify, Yoruba people, conscious of the supernatural presence in their lives, do not shy away from such messages when they come. The supernatural can use anyone as an instrument to deliver their messages; as such, the character or the personality or the profession of the “messenger” is irrelevant and does not determine the veracity of the conveyed message.



This narrative and those similar are popular cultural expressions of the uninterrupted presence of the supernatural, whose unpredictable and ceaseless intervention in the mundane lives of the people is cited to illustrate the “trivial” source of data for this work and its active role in ordering the affairs of an individual. These daily encounters, easily dismissible as mere elements of entertainment in cinema, are on closer examination excerpted from the scene of lives of real people and are connected to the core belief system of Yoruba people. Such fictional depictions, in movies or standup comedies,<sup>36</sup> songs, proverbs, and anecdotes, reflect the real world of the Yoruba. Indeed, they frame their reality. Doubters should go to Ibadan, Abeokuta, Ife, Lagos, or any other Yoruba city to spend some time with Yoruba people or interact with Yoruba people in the diaspora to

find out. It is not uncommon to be accosted on the streets and to be told of a vision, message, or caution from God. In most cases, “*won ran mi si omo eniyan*” (Literally: They sent me to the human being; i.e., I was given a message for this human) is the phrase that is used to suggest a divine source of the message. This indefinite, in the sense of undefined, and un-antecedent pronoun, as well as the passive sentence structure in which it occurs, evokes the supernatural, the unnamed, and the mysterious world. That the people also readily accept such messages reveals their belief in them. In the examination of 50 Yoruba films produced and freely distributed between October 2014 and May 2015, and conveniently obtained from YouTube by typing Yoruba movies, more than 40 of them appeal to *Ori*. Where madness or mental illness was featured, the mad people appear in dreadlocks. They are mocked and violently treated. They are described as perfidious people whose head became antagonistic and therefore compromised their destiny. The cause of their psychosis is always spiritual. Nollywood could not have become the third largest film industry in the world, with production numbering in the thousands annually, were it not that the themes of the films resonate with the values and realities of the people.

The messaging of the sort narrated earlier is not peculiar to any specific confession. In the film, Obelu is not religious. The gods can convey their messages through any vessel. Yoruba traditional modes of education, for example, Elaloro, employ mythological stories that do not separate the worlds of animals from those of human beings. They do not distinguish between natural and supernatural spheres and do not subscribe to the opposition between land and sea, or city and forest. The interconnect-edness forms part of the socialization process that sensitizes the Yoruba child to accepting the physical manifestation of the supernatural. Hence, familiar to the people is theophany, the tangible appearance of God in human form, as contained in the Bible, for example, when God appeared to Abraham at Moreh in Shechem (Genesis 12), or when Jacob claimed that he saw God face-to-face (Genesis 32), or when Moses requested to see God in the Qu’ran and God manifested himself to him by flattening the mountain that God had instructed Moses to focus his gaze upon in order to see him (Q.7:143).

The evolving discussion situates the beliefs of Yoruba people about *Ori* within their ordered cosmology. It has been suggested that the fear surrounding the course of *Ori* during its earthly sojourn and the concern that is nursed by the people on its susceptibility to certain forces of *aye*

implicates such appearances like the dreadlocks. In fact, the many exertions of the people toward placating evil include the fear demonstrated at the appearance of evil as presumed to be embodied by dreadlocks; hence, the flight or fight responses documented in the experiences narrated in the different chapters of this book. This chapter has unfolded the psycho-spiritual genesis of the life of fear into which Yoruba people are socialized and the survival mechanisms that they have developed and maintained in the course of their social life. It has been presented with the view that the understanding of the internal cohesion in the belief system that binds individual's activities and responsibilities, including the predestination of the Yoruba nation, is invaluable to understanding the sojourn of a Yoruba individual on Earth. Additionally, it was presented in order to establish the basis of arguing that the threat to the head is the threat to the continuity, the social harmony, and the security of the Yoruba people, that is, the Yoruba nation. According to Yoruba elders, *Ibi ti eniyan o si, ko ni si imale* (where humans are absent, the divinities will be absent). The survival of the people assures the continuity of the gods. That the gods are untiringly present wherever there are Yoruba people was grasped by Mbiti (a Yoruba) when he suggested for Africans:

Traditional religions permeate all departments of life, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and the non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds...; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university.<sup>37</sup>

Although the Yoruba philosopher Oladipo<sup>38</sup> critiqued Mbiti's view as an exaggerated picture of the role of religion in African culture, he nevertheless did not suggest the absence of religion. Rather, he urges a proper contextualization of the African religion in the life of the people, especially in the manner in which belief influences action. The strong presence of the divine that pervades the ordinary lives of the Africans is undeniable because religious awareness is not separable from the mundane.<sup>39</sup> This pervasive religious awareness also amounts to the retention and application of existing indigenous solutions to intractable problems.

My central claims in the preceding discussions have been that (1) there is an interdependence between the spiritual and the non-spiritual, (2) the Yoruba conceives the person as living only within the interdependence of

the four different parts within different spheres of existence, (3) on Earth, work (physical and spiritual exertions) is required to maintain a balance between these components, (4) lack of or inadequate (3, i.e., work) work allows the *Ori* to be harvested, and (5) watchfulness to achieve (3, i.e., work) leads to the persecution of all appearances that remind them of the possibility of (4), hence the treatment meted to people with uncultivated hair (see Chap. 4). Writing about the Yoruba people, Campbell noted that “there is not a more affable people found anywhere than the Akus. Not even the French are more scrupulous in their attention to politeness than they are.”<sup>40</sup> One could rightly suspect that under the cover of this obvious politeness, pervasive spirituality, and wide-ranging, elaborate social conventions lies the fear for *aye*, which then, as a matter of caution, induces the piety (with reference to Elaloro) that carefully masks their mutual suspicions. However, the slightest disturbance, such as the presence of a male Yoruba with dreadlocks, unravels this piety and generates violence. This fear drives people to seek various forms of (spiritual) fortifications. Essentially, we find that the physical sign of the hair is a symbolic expression of the people’s belief. Their attributions to hairstyle are direct correlates and manifestations of their worldview, for instance, the belief that “taking good care of one’s hair is an indirect way of currying favor with one’s *Ori Inu*.”<sup>41</sup>



It was a birthday party for an ‘elderly’ Yoruba man in Austin Texas. The celebration of birthdays for elderly Yoruba people is not normative; however, for elites and elders, it is an important occasion to strengthen the relationship with one’s circle of friends and entourage (clientele or praise singers) through whom the ‘elder’ gains prominence as well as the opportunity for these friends to demonstrate their loyalty. A prominent Yoruba couple, who are devout Christians and well respected for their life of piety, were in attendance. I made the rounds to greet everyone as required by custom and gerontocracy. The Christian wife said, “*Ki Olorun ma je ki aa ri ogun esu o*” (May God protect us from the warfare of Esu). *E ma binu sir*, “*e e ti ge irun yin na*” (Pardon me, sir, you are yet to cut this your hair).



## ORI AND RECEIVED CONFESSIONS

As suggested by Ali Mazrui,<sup>42</sup> Africans have a tripartite heritage, which consists of tradition, Westernization, and Islamic influence. The basic ideas or tenets of these received confessions of Islam and Christianity and those of African tradition overlap considerably. This means that neither Islam nor Christianity is foreign in its essence to African traditional confession.<sup>43</sup> This section examines the confluence of the African traditional religion of *Ori* and its conceptualization within such received confession as Christianity. Whereas, there is a pronounced literature in religious syncretism especially the Yoruba religion which has informed some syncretic religions such as Santeria, Candomblé, and Orisa in the new world. The practical connection between *Ori* and Protestantism and Pentecostalism as reflected in the day-to-day lifestyle of the people, however, is less explored. Basically, contemporary Protestantism in Africa, and specifically among Yoruba people, is, in a sense, a translation of Yoruba tradition and religious worldview. “The unintended consequence of the conversion of Africans to Christianity was in the recovery of their existing religious heritage..., the values of Christianity and African religious life are complementary, if not congruent.”<sup>44</sup> Pentecostalism, whose presence in Africa dates back to the early 1920s,

represents a paradigm shift that unshackles theology from rationalistic\ scientific ways of thinking and expands the understanding of the spiritual dimensions of reality and the operation of the invisible world. The crux and drive of Yoruba Christianity is the primordial fear that is carried over from the traditional religion; it is their response to the insecurities of modern existence.<sup>45</sup>

The failure of modernity, “a confound in the conflict between traditional and modernism, a stark reality that betrays promises, if not the illusion and stigma of modernism,”<sup>46</sup> necessitates the retention of the customary practices for the people. Rapid technological and economic change, without any real impact in the life of the people, mainly exacerbates the previously known insecurities and hardships. With that, the desire of Africans in their religious observances is for a god whose presence is immediate, the reality of whom is instant, and whose power reaches far and wide. According to the Yoruba, *Ti ogun eni ba dani loju, a nfi gbari ni* (When one is certain of one’s own power, then one makes boasts of it). The emergence of Christianity and Islam in Africa reignited the power of

prophecy, the use of mysterious language such as speaking in tongues, and the laying on of hands, all of which were employed traditionally in warding off the enemy.

Pentecostalism in Yorubaland owes to the faction that broke away from the established Anglican Church; it could be called a deviant form of Christianity that privileges the prophetic and revival ministry through the efficacy of prayer, and hence is known as *Aladura* (those who pray). The churches include The Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) founded in 1923 by David Odubanjo and expanded together with evangelist Joseph Babalola. The Eternal Sacred Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim that was founded in 1925 by Moses Orimolade together with Abiodun Akinsowon was based on vision. The Assemblies of God Church was formed in 1939. The Celestial Church of Christ spread rapidly to cover the entire Yoruba nation after it was founded in 1947 by Samuel B.J. Oshoffa in Port Novo. Other influential Pentecostal movements that emerged in Yorubaland include The Redeemed Christian Church of God and The Foursquare Gospel Church formed in 1952 and 1954, respectively. In 1975, the Deeper Life Bible Church was founded by Kumuyi. The Scripture Union became very influential in the country and was particularly active in Yorubaland. With headquarters in Ibadan, the SU Nigeria achieved great presence through evangelism across high schools and working through interdenominational cooperation. The SU became the model of conduct as Christians, such that those who claimed to be born-again were derogatively called and still known as SU. Out of these various movements, many other prayer groups, healing ministries, and prosperity messages were to eventually emerge in the 1980s. Some of these include The Living Faith Tabernacle, the Sword of the Spirit Ministries, Living Faith Church World Wide (LFCWW) formed in 1981 in Kaduna but relocated to Lagos in 1989, and Kingsway International Christian Centre (KICC), which came to prominence around 1992. These different ministries emphasize salvation and holiness. They believe in the existence of invisible spiritual entities, and they promote the use of the right word similar to incantation, and reminiscent of Yoruba *ase*, spoken words that authoritatively compel invisible forces to act as commanded. They subscribe to the notion of God that punishes disobedience, that is, sins, with disease and misfortune, and that rewards the virtuous with health and success.<sup>47</sup>

The wave of Christian movement in the late 1970s and 1980s, as championed by such established institutions as the SU, Evangelical Church of West Africa, and related, but more radical, movements of the Deeper Life

Ministries, the Redeemed Church of God in the West, Assemblies of God in the East, the various campus fellowships, especially Ibadan Varsity Christian Union (IVCU-University of Ibadan), the Evangelical Christian Union (ECU-University of Ife), and Lagos the Varsity Christian Union (LVCU-University of Lagos), became the face of Christianity in Yorubaland and defined it in Nigeria. They laid down the ways to live as Christians, and preached behavioral standards including material possessions. The close interaction that defines Yoruba communal existence enables intrusion into the lives of fellow Christians. This is seen as being your brother's keeper. Consequently, everyone was kept in line in the display of Christian lifestyle. The Pentecostal and Evangelical movements share similar attitudes to appearance; they preach hair covering for females. Perhaps due to their education and elite status, or still suffering identity crisis inflicted by neo-colonialism and hegemony of the West, members of the Charismatic movements cultivated Western attire and encouraged the destruction of all ties to native customs which they described as idolatry. Until the early 1980s, the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements effectively preached modesty and simplicity in appearance, eschewing materialism. They affirm their belief in the power of God to grant them good life, as defined by Yoruba people. Women were taught to be conservative in appearance. They were to avoid all Jezebel-like appearances; attire that hugged the body, that was revealing, and that drew attention to the figure was considered sinful. It was prohibited to use lipstick, to paint the nails, or to wear jewels aside from wedding bands. These values were substantiated with the biblical verse that says no one should cause another to fall into sin, because "woe unto that man by whom offence cometh" (Mathew 18:7), and "whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea" (Mark 9:42). So, "sisters," as female believers were known, were taught to not tempt their "brothers," their male born-again counterparts. It was better to remove anything that would cause either oneself or another to miss the Kingdom of God. With respect to their hair, sisters covered their hair in honor of God and during prayers. The traditional headscarf is an effective head covering. Also, the long skirt or traditional wrap-around skirt ensures that modesty is maintained at all times. Males were also bound by the same spiritual injunctions to remain modest and to not cause others to fall off the path of faith. The Deeper Life Bible Church, under the leadership of Pastor Kumuyi, was particularly influential in this era with his very legalistic and prescriptive teachings. Kumuyi recommended the mode of dressing, the pattern of hair-

cuts,<sup>48</sup> and the manner of conduct. Professional appearance was required of the males. The SU members who were mostly educated were exemplary in the use of the Western form of attire, which became the standard dress code. Later on, as more of the population became Christianized, traditional attire became acceptable, especially through the influence of such preachers as Pastor Abiara and Pastor Obadare who attracted the masses. Their TV programs show thousands of local believers wearing traditional Yoruba forms of clothing and testifying to deliverances and healings. Men wore their hair mostly short or completely shaved. Long hair was unacceptable, and dreadlocks were not only an anathema, they were met with calls for deliverance, and indeed they were virtually unattested.

The 1980s were particularly difficult for Nigerians due to Neoliberalism, an economic world order, introduced and enforced by the USA and Great Britain. The economic policy enforced free markets, free trade, free flow of capital, and the dismantling of regulations. Neoliberalism championed the Structural Adjustment Program as a new approach to development for the Third World. Under Neoliberalism, for instance, state investments in public institutions were discouraged. Nigeria obtained loans from the World Bank under stringent regulation and austerity programs, which caused enormous poverty as the existing subsidies on education, health, gasoline, kerosene, and social programs were removed.<sup>49</sup> Unemployment soared, infrastructure collapsed, and corruption became entrenched due to massive governmental failures. There arose a massive breakdown of social and cultural institutions. Failed by human and governmental institutions, people turned to the supernatural, to the gods, for salvation and relief. About this time, there came an influx of American preachers and televangelists, with colorful literatures, promising riches, deliverance, and salvation. Some of the most notable among these American missionaries are Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Reinhard Bonnke, Tim Lahaye, Robert Schuler, Benny Hinn, Jim Baker, Jimmy Swaggart, and Yonggi Cho. The 1980s was a period that witnessed a huge increase in revival meetings, with many of these American preachers traveling across the country in the company of local preachers. There were many weekly TV transmissions of live services from these ministries and from their base in the USA. Through these programs, American values and ideologies were transmitted to the viewers. From America came the prosperity message, backed by the affluence of their church buildings and the physical appearance of the preachers and church members, which appeared to align with their core message of prosperity. The images on TV showed American

female preachers with painted fingernails and uncovered heads. African American males, female preachers, and church members could be seen with straightened and treated hair, and many women wore not only skirts above their knees but pants too. All these visuals raised debates on the literal, spiritual, and practical interpretations of the biblical injunctions on hair, on women wearing male attire, and on existing Yoruba\Nigerian perspectives on personal appearance and adornment. These Americans preached, taught, and wrote that there is a demon of poverty and that God wants to heal people, including their finances. It became fashionable to cast out the demon of poverty, and to expect wholeness in the body and in the spirit. The believers were to showcase the glory of God, in a manner worthy of his estate, as would the sons and daughters of a rich and powerful person.

The reevaluation of the existing standards of appearance occasioned not only a radical change in bodily adornment within Nigerian Christianity, but also a redefinition of what it meant to portray true salvation and be the representative of God on Earth. Many pastors emerged who accepted the prosperity message. It became kosher to worship God with impeccable appearance, for God who owns all riches does not delight in the impoverishment of his children on Earth. Some of the local preachers who attracted large followings began to emulate their American counterparts in message and in appearance. After all, if the American Christians, despite their appearances, still displayed evidence of the power of God in the form of miracles, financial security, and large congregations, then God must not be displeased. Some of the Nigerian religious leaders could be seen with Jheri curls, and their spouses appeared in churches with straightened hair or wigs. The existing repudiation of the painting of fingernails and wearing of lipstick, which were said to characterize a Jezebel before this transformation, diminished in significance. While it was not completely accepted, there was some tolerance for women wearing pants, especially among educated elites who now vouched for their practicality in a fast-paced business world. In the same way they argued for European-type hairstyles, with some arguing that the traditional hairstyles were not modern. Dreadlocks, however, remained a taboo. The hairstyle continued to be viewed as evidence of a pact with the *aye*. This supposed bond has to be severed through the prayer of deliverance and exorcism, casting out the demons. Prayers began to be used actively to do things. When deliverance is successfully completed, the person shaves his head, and wears the hair normatively to show successful reintegration into the society and conformity to social norms.

Exorcisms, otherwise called deliverance services, relate to the Christians' fear of demons and possessive spirits. Deliverance from so-called ancestral spirits and generational bondage—both phrases are cover terms for the supposed alliance of the *Ori* with certain spiritual forces and the pliability of *Ori* to Manichean forces capable of stymieing the progress of *Ori*. Deliverance comes with spiritual fortification to overcome *aye* and protection against *aye*. The ritual sacrifices often prescribed by the traditional priests are now subsumed under the blood of Jesus. People become covered by the blood of Jesus. The belief in the efficacy of the blood remains unperturbed. The prayers in most Christian churches of the Pentecostal disposition, such as the Aladura, the CAC, Mountain of Fire, Deeper Life, and Apostolic Faith, are reminiscent of the incantations of old. Essentially, magic finds an outlet in biblical verses. The quest to overcome enemies and to lead a good and successful life became the preoccupation of Christianity. To all ills there is a spirit associated with it. So there is the spirit of unemployment, spirit of illness, spirit of poverty, and so on. In the view of a Yoruba Christian, this spirit has to be bound and cast out to solve problems associated with it. In connection with this, the traditional term *Ori* became subsumed under the English and biblical term “glory.” The devil is after the Christians. He wants to steal and take away their glory. According to the Bible, it is for this reason that the son of man was made manifest so that he can destroy the works of the devil. The prayer of deliverance, which relies heavily on the powerful incantation, vividly depicts the angst consuming the people; it is not different from the magical spell of traditional Yoruba warfare. The verbal duel causes the evil one to be consumed by fire, and asks the heavenly drone to descend and blast away every hindrance. Thereafter, the believer is fortified with the blood of Jesus.

The previously described cosmology encapsulates the Yoruba world. The cosmology dominates and prescribes the rule of existence and related sociocultural observances. The cosmology is like a mental program; it guides all ethical values, socialization processes, and earthly goals. It influences the organizational configuration of the society in general. Yoruba Christians are steeped in the belief that, in Jesus, there is a power greater than that of the *aye* and *ajogun*. Jesus is seen like a rock against whom the evil forces warring against humans are like eggs. Eggs that come against the rock will shatter. On these grounds, Christianity was accepted and is expected to provide a formidable fortification, a place of refuge that one runs into and is saved. One is first saved right here on Earth, and later on

eternally. To illustrate the deep-seated cultural source of the troubles of Yoruba Christians, a transcript of the deliverance message given by Dr. D.K. Olukoya, the general overseer of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries,<sup>50</sup> is presented. The sermon shows that the traditional Yoruba worldview actively continues in Christianity. The ultimate goals of the believers remain essentially the ones contained in the view of *Ori*, and the goal to overcome is unchanged. Within Christianity and Islam, *Ori* remains the “interpretive framework that enables individuals to make sense of fate-ful and of extraordinary events, and to assess the extent of the involvement of spiritual agency or whether they are the result of human agency.”<sup>51</sup>

*Today's service, beloved, is a deliverance service. ..*

*Power against mysterious oppression. It is going to be a blunt message so that you know what to do when the time comes. Revelation chapter 17 verse 5.*

*..A mysterious power, strong enough to even drink the blood of the saints*

*There are some powers and some satanic operations that are completely mysterious.*

*2nd Thessalonians chapter 2 verse 7*

*This kind of mystery is already at work*

*There is a mystery of iniquity already at work now*

*Daniel 2: 22*

*There are some deep and secret things that only god can reveal.*

*When we say mystery what do we mean.*

[DEFINITION] *We mean secret, something baffling, a concealed operation, something cryptic, dark, hidden, perplexing, strange, when we are talking about mystery, something occultist, unnatural, or magical, men call them mystery, something that is deep beyond the power of human brain to understand, we call them mystery. A man is fool if he believes that all his brain can understand is all that is available. There are realms that operate above the realm of human brain. A man is fool if he thinks he can put god in test tube and test him out. When we talk about mystery, we are talking about things that are*

*unrevealed. Something that eludes comprehension and explanation. It baffles the understanding, it cannot be explained. Deep dark secret. Deep dark secret, that is what is called mysteries.*

*Something peculiar, arousing wonder...*

*The calling of the gentiles is a mystery.*

[CONTEXT] *The first point is this. We live a very mysterious world. So you cannot expect to be here, and to live here as a natural man and expect to succeed. You cannot expect to be here, and to live here as a natural man and be an overcomer. It is not possible. Our world is full of mysteries. And it takes mysteries to tackle mysteries. You as a believer must lead a mysterious life to overcome the mysterious circumstances of life.*

*Everyone born of the spirit of god, they operate like the wind, you can catch them or capture them. Just as the wind is mysterious in action; that is how we are supposed to be as Christians. It takes a mysterious approach to have a mysterious triumph in a mysterious world like ours. The devil, who hates man with perfect hatred, has organized his weapon in many mysterious ways that has caged so many people. We are now going to examples of mysterious operations that we have seen that is common that is harassing some people now.*

[EX. 1] *There are some ladies who move about as if a male organ has been inserted in their womb and they are constantly sexually aroused without seeing who is causing it. It's a mysterious operation. What is happening in this case? The spirit husband is attached to the waist and goes around with the person like that. I pray that if you are here like that this morning, you shall be set free by fire and force in the name of Jesus. That is an example of a mysterious operation*

[EX. 2] *There are some people now, immediately those who follow masquerades begin to whistle, their heads will become light. Their heads will spring up, they will become excited. It is a mysterious operation. There is a covenant between you and that evil sound you are hearing.*

[EX.3] *There are some people, all their lives they are always filled with all kinds of sexual imaginations. What is happening in this case? The enemy has put a satanic video playing machine inside your soul which is playing terrible pictures, and as far as their minds, there are many break-throughs that you will never have. This is a mysterious oppression.*

[EX. 4] *There have been cases, there will be no problem, so they will be living a normal life until somebody proposes marriage. We find a case like that. The day somebody proposes to that sister, what will happen is that the next day some terrible large pimples will cover her face and then the person will run away.*

[EX.5] *There will be cases like this, the man has a job, the woman has a job, but immediately, they make marital contacts, the man loses his job, the woman loses her job, a mysterious oppression.*

[EX.6] *There are some people, they get pregnant and the pregnancy disappears. The enemy just takes the thing out.*

*There are mysterious oppressions.*

[EX.7] *There are people that when they go to the hospital, the enemy will go to the doctors and the pharmacies and they will give the wrong drugs and the wrong treatments.*

[EX.8] *We had a crusade somewhere in England and a woman came to complain that her son was in trouble. Because the son was arrested for sleeping with a goat until the goat died. Why should a man be sleeping with a goat? Mysterious oppression.*

[EX. 9] *There are some mysterious oppressions, anytime electrical appliances are on, the way that appliance is behaving is what their body will be reacting to. A mysterious oppression.*

[EX.10] *There have been cases, beloved, some people just hear strange voices and they listen to the strange voice.*

[EX.11] *We were at a place some years back, and this fellow was a medical doctor. They sat him down, but for the fact that some hefty men were standing by him. I said, "Why are you standing by him?" They said, "Sir, you will see now." All of a sudden this doctor jumped up and ran, ran out of the church, they ran after him to bring him back. They sat him down again. I said, "Doctor, why did you run?" He said, "I heard a voice saying 'run.'" And he stood up and started running. A serious oppression.*

[EX.12] *There are some people suffering from what is called insect invasion. They feel like insects is [sic] walking all over their body, whereas you can't see any insect. There was even the case of a man many years back. Anytime he slaps*

*his head, he brings out a live cockroach. That is as a result of an attack by a spirit called Belzebub. These are mysterious oppressions.*

[EX.13] *There are some, anytime they have a particular dream, there will be trouble. Any good thing they want to do will collapse immediately.*

*Before we leave this place, anyone who is under mysterious oppression will be delivered in the name of Jesus. You will be delivered. You will be delivered, ... in the name of Jesus.*

[EX.14] *Some dream of snakes, they feel that snakes are beside them in the bed. They can't see the thing. There are some, they are walking about, but there appear to be an invisible load on their head (eru aye). Nobody can see the load, but the load is there. How many people will they tell? You can't tell anybody. people will say they are crazy.*

[EX. 15] *There have been cases of blindness that has no medical reason; they look at the eyes, perfect; they look at the connection between the eyes and the brain, perfect, yet the eye cannot see.*

[EX. 16] *There are people who have peppery bodies. The enemy has programmed pepper into their body. It is a mysterious oppression.*

[EX.17] *Beloved, you may find this difficult to believe. There are people who have this feeling that somebody is pursuing them. Sometimes they look back, they can hear footsteps, but they can't see who is doing it. These are mysterious oppressions.*

[EX. 18] *There are some people, beloved, they sleepwalk. They, without opening their eyes, rise up from the bed, walk out of the bedroom, sometimes go to the fridge, take a drink, eyes closed! Still sleeping and snoring and they will go back to the bed and sleep again. Remote controlling power! Mysterious oppression.*

[EX.19] *There was a man that was having this sleepwalking problem. One night he woke up like that, without opening his eyes, he went into the kitchen, took a knife, walked back to his wife on the bed, and stabbed the wife to death and went back to the bed and slept off. Mysterious oppression.*

[EX. 20] *There are people who have what we call out of body experiences. They know they are not dreaming, but in a way it is as if their spirit is being pulled out. It's a mysterious oppression. There are some sisters, they are not breastfeed-*

*ing, some are not even married, and all medical test in their body is OK, yet they have milk coming out of their breast without any breastfeeding. These are mysterious oppressions.*

[EX. 21] *There are some people, they have what you call gentleman spirit husband. He doesn't harass them, they wake up in the morning, they find money under their pillow, put there by the spirit husband, they don't know where the money came from. There are some, they have rapist spirit husband, and by the time they wake up they feel that somebody has violated them and is very very painful. These are mysterious oppressions.*

[EX. 22] *There are some, things would be going well, but immediately they touch it, their touch destroys it, you employ that kind of person in your office, immediately you employ them, the place goes down. You may also find this difficult to believe, beloved. There are plenty of people with inner aquarium. It is like there are fishes swimming inside their body, but who can they tell? They can't tell anybody. They go and tell some pastors, they say, no, this is not normal.... There are plenty of cases of adult bed-wetting. These are mysterious oppressions.*

[EX. 23] *There are many examples of persona rain falling on people, personal sands being poured on people. All these are mysterious oppressions.*

[EX. 24] *Some hear drumbeats, they don't know who is beating the drum. There are plenty of people with satanic deposits in their body. These are mysterious oppressions.*

[EX. 25] *Some people's money, clothes will disappear without [having] been stolen by any physical thieves.*

[EX. 26] *Some have sores in the body that have refused to heal. These are examples of mysterious oppression.*

[SOLUTION] *For you to counter the mysterious, you have to become mysterious yourself. One way you can become mysterious as a Christian is first of all to become born again.*

[SOLUTION 2] *1 Corinthians 14:2. For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries: Did you find that place in your Bible. In the spirit he speaketh mysteries. The second way you can become mysterious is by praying aggressively in tongues. ... The Bible says, these signs shall follow them that believe, in my name they shall cast out devil, they shall speak with*

*new tongues. So you learn how to speak mysteries. ... Satan understands all languages, the only language he does not understand is when you begin to speak in tongues, when you begin to speak mysteries.... When you speak in tongues, you communicate mysteries.*



The Mountain of Fire Ministries bills itself as a full gospel ministry that is devoted to the revival of the apostolic signs, Holy Ghost fireworks, and the unlimited demonstration of the power of God to deliver to the uttermost. As a Pentecostal church, it subscribes to faith healing, prophecy, exorcism, speaking in tongues, spontaneous prayer, and exuberant liturgical expression. It stresses dreams, visions, and miracles.<sup>52</sup> The aforementioned sermon, typical of all Pentecostal movements among Yoruba people, illustrates the strong presence of the Yoruba worldview which attributes all untowardness, ills, and difficulties to the presence and workings of nefarious spiritual forces in the life of an individual. That this is the case is clearly exemplified in the definition, in which the evil forces and their workings are described as *a concealed operation, something cryptic, dark, hidden, perplexing, strange, when we are talking about mystery, something occultist, unnatural, or magical*. These mysterious forces, the Ajogun, have as their main goal the destruction of a person, the subversion of a fate through the eight means already listed. It is the Yoruba cultural mindset, the Yoruba view toward existence that we find clothed in English words and expressing itself in biblical verses and Christian observances. It is the Yoruba ontological perspective surrounding the presence of evil that creates and informs the Yoruba Christian message. The message is the outpouring of a mind nurtured in Yoruba cosmology and raised in its outlook.

The 26 examples of these “mysterious operations” in the sermon boil down to the three earthly aspirations of Yoruba people: “*ire owo, ire omo, ire aiku*”—wealth, procreation, and long, healthy life. “A man with a good *Ori* is able to achieve success in the world, provided he can ward off the dangers of witchcraft, sorcery, and other attacks by omo araiye.”<sup>53</sup> Even if a person has a ‘good’ destiny, there are still dangers to be avoided in order to achieve success in life. This good destiny, that is, good life, is measured in terms of wealth, peace, prosperity, longevity, and children.<sup>54</sup> Full happiness only comes with the birth of children who will be responsible for one’s burial. Hence, people say *Bi ina ba ku a fi eru boju; bi ogede ba ku*

*a fi omo re ropo* (When the fire dies out, it leaves ashes behind; the dead banana replaces itself with its fruits). They further say that just as the kola nuts are wrapped in leaves, we are shrouded by, and buried by, our children. It is only those who were buried by their children that actually were parents. The gain of earthly existence is children; a childless person is one whose earthly existence is without impact. In the same way that rainfall leaves its mark, children are the testimony of our existence. A house, an estate without children is but a meaningless and vain edifice. Wealth that is accumulated but not bequeathed to children as inheritance is emptiness and vanity. The elders conclude that the world belongs to those who gave birth to children, and the person with children not only lives, but has achieved immortality (by transference of names). These sentiments of the elders, derived from their worldview, are reflected in the Christian sermon as the birthrights of those who were born-again. Just as within traditional Yoruba conceptualization, these gains belong to the believers by predestination, for God knew them before he formed them in the womb, and before they were born, he already sanctified them (Jeremiah 1:4–5). The solution to keeping your blessings or inheritance is the same for both the pastor and the traditional herbalists or diviners; the individual must engage in spiritual warfare and obtain spiritual fortification. According to this sermon, one adopts mysterious means to fight the mysterious. The warfare unfolds through the power of the word with which the mysterious forces are authoritatively dislodged and cast out. For this exorcism, the Christian use of the words of power (generated through glossolalia—speaking in tongues—whereby mysteries are uttered to the consternation and confound of the enemy) is akin to the Yoruba use of *Ase*, which “is invisible and immaterial; when activated it flies like a mysterious bird.”<sup>55</sup> In the treatment of perceived evil, the use of Christian instrumentalities is complementary to those existing and familiar tropes within Yoruba culture.

The performative force of ritual speech and action is assumed to attract benevolent powers and repel malevolent ones. Prayers, offerings, and sacrifices therefore require the construction of sacred space, where the forces of the invisible ‘other’ world can be brought into this world and effectively controlled.<sup>56</sup>

According to a Yoruba saying, *Nibiti n’o pa o wa ni ibi ti n’ o gba o wa*. (Death and life are in the same place. The source of death is also the

source of life.) Health and life are ordained within the same space, the spiritual realm, where the heavenly intersects with the earthly.

Despite the cloak of Christianity, the signification of hair is conditioned by the cultural. In all cases, the subtext remains the same: *Ori* and its goods are prized possessions against which there are ongoing spiritual battles. In the physical realm, these equate to the many hindrances, misfortunes, illnesses, and distractions experienced by an individual. In both cases, victory is sought. Parrinder's observation made in 1968 remains apt today:

Educated people attribute to witchcraft their failures in work, or seek magical protection against new diseases. Many have recourse both to the medicine-man and to the European-trained doctor. The medicine-man serves as a link with the village ancestors. He may interpret a patient's sickness or nightmares as due to an angry ancestor who has been neglected and demands that money be sent home to make him offerings.<sup>57</sup>

The modification to this observation would be to say that educated people, regardless of class and religious confession, accept the primacy of *Ori* and connect all vicissitudes to the workings of the enemy in their efforts to derail or steal a person's *Ori*.

The narrated personal encounter at the headquarters of the SU Nigeria, Ibadan, at the beginning of this chapter is anything but trivial. It illustrates how the fear for *aye*, the mysterious, the dark, the perplexing, and the strange is projected to a person whose hairstyle suggests the presence of *aye*, if not immediately the agent of evil. Such an agent, believed to act like Esu,<sup>58</sup> by bestriding the spiritual and physical realms, facilitates communication between the worlds, and therefore is capable of facilitating a spiritual attack on those who remain unsuspecting. These people then are attacked or shunned with justifiable holy passion and hatred. As captured in the well-cited words of Barber:

Yoruba cosmology presents a picture of Man, a solitary individual, picking his way (aided by his *Ori* or Destiny, chosen by himself before coming to earth) between a variety of forces, some benign, some hostile, many ambivalent, seeking to placate them and ally himself with them in an attempt to thwart his rivals and enemies in human society.<sup>59</sup>

The symbolism that informs Freud's<sup>60</sup> interpretation of Medusa's hair derives from the myth of Medusa. Medusa's long, luxuriant hair, according to this myth, kindled jealousy from the beautiful goddess Minerva, a rival. Minerva turned Medusa's hair to snakes, cursing her so that any man

who looked at her would be struck by fear and terror and would be turned into stone. A person whose head is covered with live snakes will no doubt engender awe in onlookers. It is this awe that we find among Yoruba people at the sight of dreadlocks. Essentially, there persists in the minds of Yoruba Christians the underlying core belief about *Ori-innu*, and the requisite care for *Ori-ode* (physical head) as indicative of one's attentiveness to *Ori-innu*. This internalized outlook consequently induces the avoidance of anyone with unkempt hair because it symbolizes the diabolical neglect of one's own *Ori*.

All prayer confessions are not equal. The Aladura Movement is perceived to be closer to the grassroots, and within this, the Celestial Church is presumed to be closely aligned with Yoruba cultures and traditions. As such, born-again people hold certain reservations against the Cele as they are popularly called among Yoruba. This reservation is analogous to the one nursed by other Christian groups against the Mormons in North America. When it comes to hair, the Aladura Movement seems to differ from the conventional born-again Pentecostal movements. One of the earliest African indigenous churches, the Aladura, or The Church of The Lord,<sup>61</sup> accepts the doctrine of the Nazarene. For instance, the third primate of the church, Apostle Gabriel O. Ositelu, must have been a Nazarene; it was said that under divine instruction, his birth hair was not shaved until his seventh birthday. This was in opposition to traditional Yoruba practice, which requires that the head of an infant be shaved on the eighth day. Aladura people believe in the efficacy of prayers in dealing with evil forces. They are like other Pentecostal movements, ever aware of the activities of malevolent spirits and their human agents. There is also The Celestial Church of Christ that tolerates the use of traditional drums during worship and allows polygamy. It openly practices ritual bathing and the use of candles and incense to aid prayers. The long hair, similar to the Nazarene, represents the spiritual presence and power of God. This natural hair is untouched, unkempt, and uncut. It is presumed to signify purity, innocence, and truth. Samson, in the Bible, exemplifies the Nazarene. The long, unprocessed, and uncultivated hair contains mysterious powers, indicates spiritual presence, and as a consequence, is viewed with the same respect and awe culturally given to dreadlocks. Thus, in some cases, prophets in these ministries, specifically The Cherubim and Seraphim and The Celestial Church of Christ, may claim to be Nazarenes under the directive of God. Members accept these individuals, according to them respect for the forces that inhere in their hair.

The preceding discussions focused mainly on Christianity and hair, as well as the culture of fear, and the subsumption of Christianity under the traditional Yoruba worldview. Yoruba Christians, like most Africans, believe in the efficacy of the blood. The rituals of Christianity, the sacrificing of Christ, and the Sacrament all find significant reception within the Yoruba worldview, just as they are compatible with customary practice. Connected with this is the belief in Esu, one of the Yoruba deities who is associated with journeys, markets, crossroads, ferries, doors, and town-gates. Being often at the medial, indeed, the liminal places, including the hair, Esu facilitates communication between the worlds and states; within Christianity, Esu is known erroneously as the devil.



*He is a distinguished Yoruba person with extraordinary scholarly accomplishments. His generosity is well known, so also is his ability to relate with ease to all across class as well as his leadership in a lot of areas for the African community. Looking at me, he said:*

*“Wo, ma je n tan e, ti mi o ba mo e ki o to gbe irun yi sori, maa jina si e. Sugbon mo ti mo pe ori e pe dada, so, ko di mi lowo. Ewo ni o to sa fun ninu gbogbo eleyi, sugbon mo mo iru eniyan to o je.”*

*(Let me be frank with you, if I did not know you before you started with this your hairstyle, I will not have anything to do with you. I will avoid you. But I know that you are very sane. What is not scary enough to be avoided in all of these? But, I know you to be a responsible person.)*



## CULTURE OF FEAR

Yoruba people are socialized into fear. This includes both fear of the world that is not seen and, perhaps by association, fear of the physical representations of this unseen world. The Yoruba world is one of two dimensions: the spiritual and the physical. The physical manifests the spiritual. The physical not only provides a direct link to the spiritual; in fact, it is directly tied to it, such that a manipulation of the physical could affect the spiritual

and vice versa. Belief in magic, contagious and imitative, is all too real for the Yoruba person who spends his or her life wary of the many ways in which the ever lurking spiritual enemies could overwhelm him or her. Therefore, they say *Ehi ikunle ni ota wa, ile ni aseni ngbe*. (The enemy is without the borders\compound, the afflicter, evildoer resides within the home.) *Kokoro to nje efo, innu efo ni 'n igbe*. (The pests that feed on the vegetables reside on the vegetables.) Scared of the family, distrustful of strangers and the unfamiliar, the Yoruba spends his or life in search of protection from, or complete avoidance of, the spiritual, because *ti a ba fa gburu, gburu a fa igbo* (if one rouses the spirits, they will act but not without demands or extracting certain commitment).

Observations of everyday interaction among Yoruba people in the way they approach reality show, according to Cordell, that

no matter how homogenous the group may be, whether large or small, the individual interprets the cultural pattern he learns throughout his life in terms of his own personality or idiosyncratic needs, and in terms of his own experience and immediate social group.<sup>62</sup>

Consequently, there is no agnostic Yoruba person, at least none of those whose primary socialization was in Yorubaland. All claims to such is only for the purpose of discussion during one of the many “shouting” sessions that the people engage in when they meet or exchange visits. Basically, one is Yoruba in essence. This essence may clothe itself with Christianity, Islam, or secularism, with the certainty that such cloaks are mainly instruments that do not de-Yorubanize the person. This claim of near inviolable Yorubanness is evident when premised on the view that

Yoruba traditional religion with its orisa symbolized the links between man and his rural environment, links which are modified by rapid social change or dissolved by migration. When a man travelled to another town to trade he left his own town's peculiar cults behind him, and since there was no point in adopting the cults of another town, related to its traditional environment, he became liable to conversion to Islam or Christianity.<sup>63</sup>

Whether a given Yoruba resides at home as a sedentary farmer, in the city as an elite technocrat, or in the academy as a scholar or scientist, whether this person is on the continent or in the diaspora, the vagaries of life reignite the concept of *Ori*, its presumed content, and the con-

sciousness of enemies temporal and spiritual, that provides the template for contemplating and coping with perennial realities. As Wiredu<sup>64</sup> philosophized, a concept is only interesting to the extent that it deals with the reality of those who invented it.

To be born-again means, for the Yoruba person, to assume the outlook of Christianity in the expression of that core belief system. To be a devout Muslim is to find a way, congruent to existing lifestyle, to achieve life's purpose and to fulfill obligations. Where *ogede* or *ofo* (incantations or magical spells) would have been used, Bible verses and commands are now invoked. Rather than be decked traditionally with the paraphernalia of *oogun* (juju) in the form of *agbero* (freeze command), *ayeta* (ability to dodge bullets), *gbera* (incisions), *igbadi* (spiritual garter), and *onde* (spiritual waist-belt), individuals now seek the workings of these notions through deliverance, the blood of Christ, and power. Propelling Yoruba Christianity is not so much the belief, or quest for life, in the hereafter, something already encoded in the traditional core beliefs of the Yoruba. Instead, it is the assumption that the blood of Christ (as opposed to the blood of goats, rams, chickens, and cows) will be more efficacious than other means in waging spiritual warfare. This is because the ultimate sacrifice is a human sacrifice, even if that blood is, as in this case, that of a Palestinian. Now, the moment this promised efficacy is not made manifest, other solutions can be sought. One who is not a Yoruba can rarely conceive of the great disappointment when prayer, fasting, and deliverance fail to bring to the Yoruba Christian the requested items of supplication. Just so that we do not lose sight of the trivial undercurrent, imagine a situation where, all things being equal, a pedestrian is convinced to buy a horse only to find out that he is able to carry more load, walk faster, and endure longer distances than the horse. Or, perhaps, a horse owner is convinced to buy a car, only to discover his horse can travel faster, provide better shelter from the elements, and carry more than the car, and so on. To understand this is to begin to comprehend the expectation placed on these received confessions of Christianity and Islam. It is within the presumption of the value attached to Christianity, for instance, that born-again individuals, especially after undergoing deliverance from the generational curses and bondage believed to be encoded in their existing names, adopt new names to reflect their new source of strength and protection. Some born-again Christians in Ibadan give to their children such novel names as *Jesusegun* (Jesus is victorious), *Jesugbamila* (Jesus delivered me), *Adurayemi* (Prayer befits me), and *Ogojesu* (Glory of Jesus).

The dominant value system reflected within the metaphor of dreadlocks, as conceived by the Yoruba person, not only is the subject of discourse and perception but remains anchored as well in other commonplace activities. Thus, religious values and subcultures are reflective of the interactions that unfold from, and revolve around, them. The Yoruba use of prayers, as described by Olayiwola,<sup>65</sup> does not pertain only to the Aladura but to Yoruba people in general. The use of prayer derives, as already mentioned, from the traditional concept of *ase*, *agbara adura* (power of prayer) and *ase adura* (force of prayer). As such, it should overcome all ills. This prayer is also contained and expressed through song. A circuitous way to shield oneself from immediate danger or perceived agent of evil could be through songs ridden with *ase adura* and *agbara*. Both of these are used to call the Orisa, God or the Supreme Being, to make things happen. "Prayer is a place where the forces of darkness are put to flight and Satan's power disarmed."<sup>66</sup> The modern or Westernized Yoruba, often well educated, is the most astute in concealing Yorubanness (the suspicion of the ever lurking demons seeking to thwart individual exertions). These people use high-sounding words from their various disciplines and those gleaned from Europeans' representation to feign the rejection of their own selves. The more vicious they are in disavowing traditional ties, the more fervently they embrace them in deeds. This is especially true during the unguarded moments of uncertainty. Hence, appealing to their trivial pronouncements is quite appropriate in uncovering their fundamental world outlook.

### OLD WINE, NEW GOURD

In keeping up with the trivial and anecdotal data, the comedian Gbenga Adeboye satirized the place of spiritual adornment in urban cities when he narrated the story of Itu Baba-ita who was approached by a musician hired to perform at a function in his area. The musician shows good upbringing by his modesty, as he prostrates to greet him and asks for Itu Baba-ita's permission to play his music. With monetary gifts he also asks for his assurance that there will be no rainfall during his performance. Itu Baba-ita is impressed by the respect that the musician displays. When he later learns that the young man, who came all the way from Lagos to perform, is acquainted with one of his own relatives, Itu decides to fortify him. However, he notes that the man is wearing a gold tooth. He asks if he was already in Mecca on pilgrimage.<sup>67</sup> The young man says no, that he

had it fitted in place of a tooth that some hooligans had knocked out. Itu Baba-ita is surprised, so he asks the man,

*Oo ni agbero ni?* (Don't you have power to freeze a person or projectile?).  
No, the man answered.

*Ooni tude?* (You don't have the means to bind and loosen?) He said, he does not.

... *ki lo wa nwa leko?* (So what are you doing in Lagos?) Baba-ita asked rhetorically.

Just as the comedian portrayed the city of Lagos as a war zone to which one does not go without proper spiritual adornments, the world is a mystery-laden combat area requiring fortifications. The subtext of the comedy, an Elaloro device, helps us understand such Yoruba percept that sayss "*Alagbara nikan ni o le ba ni rin irin aye*" (It is only the powerful that will accompany a person through the journey of life). The need for mysteriousness to combat mysteriousness uncovers the power, attributed by Yoruba who accepted Christianity, to the blood of Jesus. Through this blood, each becomes a real man who is fortified with the power and enabled to speak mysteries. *Oro* (the word) exists in a spiritual plane; it is on Earth that it is understood, assimilated, and utilized by humans. *Oro* is clothed in proverbs to facilitate communications with the gods, deities, and invisible bodies in the other world.<sup>68</sup> Christians obtain power through the Holy Spirit; they manifest this power by speaking in tongues. Glossolalia involves a mysterious language that the evil forces do not understand. As noted by Verger, "If western medicine prioritizes a plant's scientific name and its pharmacological characteristics, then traditional societies prioritizes ofo... in traditional societies, it is the knowledge of *Ofo* (incantation) which is essential, as it contains the 'power-to-alter' the formula's pharmacological effect."<sup>69</sup>

The prophets and preachers of the African churches behave in ways similar to traditional Yoruba diviners (*babalawo*); they see visions (*iriran*), they obtain revelations (*isipaya*), and they interpret dreams (*tunmo ala*). In Yoruba custom, dreams are popular in Yoruba custom as a messaging system for communicating with the spiritual realm. Ancestors use dreams to inform, remind, or warn their earthly ones of significant events. The diviners are often possessed by spirits and are able to provide healing to

their clients by manipulating objects and symbols like holy water, ashes, incense, and oil. They profess the power to overcome witches and other spiritual enemies that could attach and inflict harm to their members and clients.<sup>70</sup> Received beliefs and confessions such as Islam and Christianity are mainly seen as practical adjustments made to augment the efficacy of traditional powers. These religions came boasting superior instruments of war, backed by powerful leaders who projected pomp and wealth. These religions showed how civic responsibilities contained within educational ideologies proved to be a more enduring and cost-effective means of pacifying a large population without apparently spilling blood. These gains all derive from *Oro*, the power of the spoken word. For Christianity, it consists of speaking in tongues, and for Islam it includes the recitations of Quranic verses in Arabic. The lifestyle of every spiritual leader in Yorubaland (Christian or Muslim) resembles that of any Yoruba military leader before the 1893 peace treaty. The semblance is reflected in social positions, material wealth, and the followership that these leaders command. These spiritual leaders display the accomplishment of those things most important in the life of Yoruba people: wealth, children, and longevity. Their messages, regardless of how they are parsed, suggest that they have overcome their enemies, secured their own *Ori*, and are now able to influence the destinies of others.

It has been shown that the spiritual and the material aspects of human existence are interconnected and bridged. The weaker of the two is the material, since it is pliable to the forces of the spiritual. According to the elders, “*Eni ti o we oju ni eru n’ba*” (Only the one with inner sights can be fearful); by this, it is meant that the physical is weak, naive, and oblivious to spiritual impingements. As shown by the sermon in the previous section, the preoccupation with spiritual powers is pervasive and integral to Christianity among the Yoruba people. Spiritual entities, similar to personified entities, are indexed by that which is visible. As noted by Ilesanmi, “reification turns spiritual ideas to material things and makes them behave as were they totally en fleshed.”<sup>71</sup> Yoruba people profess spiritual causation to the vicissitudes of life. Since they have always consulted *Ori* through the Babalawo (diviners) for discernment and solutions, they now consult priests, pastors, prophets, or so-called men or women of god who can, through their special relationship with god, provide solutions to their needs. For, indeed, our battles are not physical but spiritual (Eph: 6:12–13). So, instead of *opele ifa* (divination tray), Yoruba Christians and Muslims divine via the holy spirits, prayer beads, and religious books.

Suspicion, distrust, and fear are Yoruba rewards for being unconventional. Dreadlocks are unconventional as well as deviant. Their presence is an affront to the psyche of Yoruba people, who see it as a personified evil, as the abode of the nefarious spirits that will invariably hinder the Yoruba nation from self-preservation and perpetuation. The Yoruba gods exist because there are Yoruba people, and the people depend on the gods for their existence. As noted by Morton-Williams, “[t]he gods shields their worshipper, and provide to them the blessings most valued by them...”<sup>72</sup> This interdependence ensures the corporate nature of the nation and invariably the goals of life on Earth. All earthly assertions are therefore made in order to bring about the prechosen and the preallotted portions, as well as to guard them from being stymied, so as to obtain the good life and indefinite existence of the nation. The various trivial stories and anecdotes that have been presented thus far embody the subtext for the perception of an appearance. They provide the context that informs the verbal or physical actions directed toward an appearance that is considered deviant.

As suggested in Chap. 3, power is at the center of Yoruba life. This power is employed to conscript obeisance, to overcome obstacles and vicissitudes, and to triumph over one’s enemies. Verbal utterances are thus made due to the power believed to inhere in the spoken word. Utterances are, thus, a direct appeal to the spiritual for aid and fortification in dealing with another spiritual force disguised as human. A verbal utterance rests on the notion of *Ase*, that is, the capacity to invoke powers, appropriate fundamental essences, and influence the future.<sup>73</sup> According to Gleason, “*Ase* is a sacred power, an active essence which flows in varying intensities through plants ... animals, people and the Orisha.”<sup>74</sup> When a person, despite obstacles, overcomes them and becomes successful, he or she is often heard to say *oju ti awon ota mi* (My enemies are put to shame). For Verger,

*Ase*, is power itself in the absolute sense... It is the principle of all that lives or acts or moves. All life is *Ase*. So is everything which exhibits power, whether in action, or in the winds and drifting clouds, or in passive resistance like that of the boulders lying by the wayside.<sup>75</sup>

Of all the powers in existence, the notion of *agbara okunkun* (evil forces) is the most malevolent. There is *oogun* (magical power), the ability to manipulate people and circumstances through the use of herbs and

words or incantations (ofò). This is also the use of juju.<sup>76</sup> The consciousness of the presence of unseen spirits informs Yoruba responses to physical appearance.<sup>77</sup>

Even the Yoruba gods (e.g., Orunmila who has already been shown to be in awe of other diabolical spirits) are in contention for survival due to the fact that the various gods are jealous of the existence of one another. Given the internalized place of *Ori* in the Yoruba perception of life on Earth as well as the naturalized conceptualization of their cosmology, and the socialization process that ensures compliance, Christianity, modernity, and education are incorporated into existing structures and are used to further existing assumptions. The blood of Christ is meaningless if it is not an adequate sacrifice in the form of the ones offered to the gods through *Esu*. The Holy Spirit, analogous to the spoken word, should be just as efficacious. The use of *gbolohun* is continuously acknowledged. It is common knowledge among Yoruba people that an individual could be made to become mad, or be called to their death just by the words spoken by their adversaries. Hence, not to be fortified is unmanly (regardless of gender). Mountain of Fire Ministry, Cherubim and Seraphim, and many other Yoruba spiritual and prophetic ministries engage in violent prayers. The Christian community is analogous to the cult of elders to which only the initiated, in this case born-again, are admitted. In this place of refuge, the prayers that are offered are not intended to fulfill all righteousness, they are not plain communion with god; rather, they are to obtain the established goals of life in Yorubaland. Immediate response is expected, hence the attractiveness of the use of Christian and Muslim prayers that involve commanding the departure of evil spirits and releasing the blessings of individuals who might have been tied up by the enemies. For the Yoruba people, the power and efficacy of the spoken word remain indubitable. With words, an antagonist could be rendered speechless: “*gbolohun kan pere ni mo lo, mo ni o gbe mi, alanu Psoro ni ti pepeye*” (I spoke just one sentence, I said, swallow your words, when the duck opens its mouth it does not utter words. You must become mute).

The Muslim Yoruba, unlike his or her Christian counterpart, is more forthright with respect to the integration of traditional elements in his or her religion. Actually, some might find their separation is quite difficult.

The Aafa (name for Islamic priests) are consulted by Muslims instead of babalawo. Using their prayer beads, recitation of Qur’anic verses, the Aafa come up with *iran* (vision). For instance, in *Iriri*,<sup>78</sup> a Yoruba film, a woman consults an Aafa, who gives her prayer beads. The woman picks

one of the beads. The Aafa proceeds to count from the one that the woman held in her hands and to recite prayers. In the process of counting, the cleric is able to tell her the reason for her visit without asking her. He also provides her with the remedy to her problems. He explains, “The solution to your problems is to make personal changes to your character and to be patient. The person you want to harm is a special individual, a person under the protection of the gods, right from heaven. Any attempt to harm her will lead to your own death” (*ti e ba gbero lati sa si omobinrin you tabi si oko yin, o ni ewu pupo, emi yin le maa fi di tabi ti awon omo yin. Nitari omobinrin ti ansoro re yi, akanda eeyan kan ni lati ode orun wa*). The Aafa in Yoruba movies are constantly depicted as being able to recite Qur’anic verses to obtain insights concerning the cause of a person’s woes. These are revealed as vision on the pages of the Qu’ran. Often, the solution that the Aafa prescribes includes prayers, drinking of blessed water (e.g., medicine in traditional Yoruba religion), and the giving of alms (i.e., sacrifice in traditional Yoruba religion). When the prescription is carried out, the stolen content of the *Ori* is recuperated.

The Pentecostal movements conduct night vigils, also known as “watchnight service.” The reason for this is their belief that the evildoers work at night. Prayers through the night are required to disrupt these nocturnal activities. Night prayers involve exorcism. There are almost always intergenerational curses afflicting the people due to pacts presumed to have been made by an ancestor with the gods. As a result, the people are believed to suffer from *Ogun-idile*, household warfare. This is both the gods warring against the people for not upholding their own end of the pact and the members of one’s own household seeking to harvest one’s glory (*gba ogo*). None of these is new; salvation comes in the form of deliverance that involves the destruction of the force of that pact, and by extension all things traditional. Dreadlocks and deviant appearances are conduits that aid these forces to reach the humans. The goals of these prayer meetings are to obtain power, to get protection from evil forces, to gain victory over enemies, and to have spiritual protection that assures that the enemy will not block one’s success. In popular Yoruba perception and depiction of events in conversations, films, and the theater, the scriptural verse “whatever is bound in heaven is bound on earth and whatever is loosed in heaven is loosed on earth” is a truism. It is common to find *Awon Aye* traveling outside of their physical body to have their meeting in a spiritual plane. There they summon the *Ori* of their target; they ask this *Ori* to hand over its destiny. If susceptible, the *Ori* will hand over its own riches, preapportioned destiny, often in a calabash, to the interlocutor,

thereby relinquishing to the recipient and new owner his or her earthly favor. This transfer could be permanent, depending on the spiritual fortification of the recipient and on the recipient's ability to avoid certain taboos. Or it could be temporary, if another *babalawo* or mediciner, a priest (Muslim or Christian), is able to forcefully retrieve the pillaged *Ori*. The ability to do this is dependent on *agbara* (power), spiritual power. The *agbara* that transcends all other powers is the promise of the various religious movements; such power promises protection against this spiritual threat and insurance against the deeds in dark places. Dreadlocks are presumed to be constitutive of these demonic powers, and the wearer is considered an agent of evildoers against whom the power to subjugate is needed.

The dream (day or night dream) has always been a realm where nefarious spiritual operations are conducted. In popular Yoruba movies as well as popular traditional Yoruba sayings and narratives are often found parodies of a person suddenly rising from a nightmare with the question: "Who did I offend? What is my offence? I will not die but live?" What was seen in the dream is taken seriously, especially if negative, in which case the dream is indicative of evil intent against the person. Often, these deeply meaningful phrases are accompanied with the non-verbal gesture that is habitually used to reject and ward off evil with supplication to the *Ori* to remain strong and uncompromising. Furthermore, when Yoruba people are in trouble, they fasten their *Ori* (head); when they make supplications for mercy, they appeal to the *Ori*; and when parents pray for their children, they entreat the *Ori* on their behalf. When someone misbehaves, the person is described as someone whose head is faulty. A friendly piece of advice to someone with a multitude of problems might be to tell the person to go home and have his or her head washed with *kainkain* (sponge), and, in the spirit of trivial facts, remorse is expressed by grabbing the head. To thus be confronted by "*onirun were*" (mad person) is to be confronted by the diabolical, the agents of witches and wizards with whom there is no reasoning. To attack them is to follow the cultural prescription that says, *egba ni ogun were* ("the whip is the cure for madness"). Following this injunction is to protect oneself. The preservation of the self is the preservation of the nation; hence, the duty is not condemned, it receives the tacit support of the community.

The hair for Yoruba people remain a site for perception of a person and a site for communicating spiritual identity. At any rate, the head must be groomed to sacralize the inner head and venerate it as a sanctuary.

Traditionally, an altar dedicated to the *Ori* is kept in the family. Regular and appropriate propitiation is provided to the *Ori* at the altar.



*Among our circle of friends in Austin, Texas, is an older Yoruba friend, a religious person, whose wife treats me with suspicion. She keeps her distance, maintaining on her face that look of uncertainty. This woman, who has never given me a direct gaze or spoken directly to me, suddenly looked at me directly, rather than from the side of her face as she has always done. And then she spoke to me, "You said that your hairstyle is a sociological experiment. When will the experiment be over?" She continued, "You know, if you cut your hair, your good looks will become pronounced and people will like you." Surprised that she spoke to me for the first time, I could only respond, "Very soon. Actually, I am about to complete the experiment."*

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67. Nigerian Yoruba Muslims, as a sign of having performed religious pilgrimage to Mecca, wear a gold dental grill that is popularly called *eyin meka* (Mecca's teeth). Without this, the arrogation of the popular title of Alhaji or Alhaja for a male or female, respectively, will be questioned.
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70. For an extensive discussion, see Falola, T. Falola 2003. *The Power of African Cultures*. Rochester. Rochester University Press (p. 208–209).
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72. Morton-William, Peter, 1960. "Yoruba Responses to the fear of death." *Journal of the International African Institute*. Vol 39. No (1): 34–40 (p. 35).
73. Apter, Andrew 1992. *Black Critics and Kings: Hermeneutics of Power in Yoruba Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (p. 117).
74. Gleason, Judith. 1973. *A Recitation of Ifa, Oracle of the Yoruba*. NY. Grossman Publishers (p. 300).
75. Verger, Pierre. 1966. "Yoruba High God-a review of the sources." *Odu* 2; 2. 19–40 (p. 36–37).
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77. It must be clear that this is not a surreptitious reintroduction of the rejected views perpetuated by Tempels (1959) in which Africans are seen as conducting their lives mainly through rituals and symbols as a result of their inability to articulate the philosophical basis of their worldviews and of their perception of the world (Tempels, Placide. 1959 *Bantu Philosophy*. Paris: Presence Africaine).
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## Dynamics of Culture and Visual Profiling

*In Europe, where a different social situation obtains for most Africans, wearing dreadlocks does not immediately raise rejection or disapproval. For most (Nigerian) male migrants who wear dreads, there is a sense that such is pragmatically motivated, as it is assumed to be attractive to ladies. Fellow Africans knowingly make no comment about it. At a party in Berlin, Mr. Bode—an otherwise conservative Yoruba man with a clean-shaven head—watched the success of his friend with ladies. He said to him in Yoruba, “I swear to god, I will grow my hair to rasta.” However, beyond this, Yoruba and Nigerians express reservations to friends or acquaintances with cornrows or dreadlocks.*

*While shopping at an African shop in Mitte, Berlin, the proprietor struck a chord of friendship and familiarity by addressing me as “rasta.” This was followed by jokes, and finally a discussion of social and political barriers that makes the importation of African goods from Nigeria difficult. The current political and economic progress in Ghana have made Ghana his country of choice for trade. This discussion was enough to break the barrier of formality, and he asked:*

*“How long you make your hair so?”*

*“Two and a half years,” I responded.*

*“Your hair dey grow fast [Your hair grows really fast]. But you never go home since then,” he asked indirectly.*

“No,” I said. “But, I wan go next year.” [I want to go next year.]

“But you no go go so. [But you won’t go the way you are.] Sometime you go cut this hair before now.”

“No way, this is my hair,” I replied.

“I know say na your hair; for here, e go get you wetin we dey look for, but you no carry am go home now” [I know that it is your hair. In this country, it will be instrumental to getting you what we want, but you won’t go home wearing it], he replied.

“No, nothing like that, my brother. When I go, I will go so,” I said.

“Na wah o. Sometime, e get as e bi” [There must be more to it than is apparent], he concluded.



When one speaks of the cultivated way of perceiving and explicating such appearances as dreadlocks, then one speaks to, “the forms of things that people have in mind, their models for perceiving, relating and otherwise interpreting them.”<sup>1</sup> This work has been primarily focused on the description and explanation of the form of things that Yoruba people have in mind and their rationale, specifically focusing on their long-sustained core belief system and worldview, which prominently influence their perception of deviant hairstyles. In doing so, it has relied on the manifest behaviors from different contexts of interactions, suggesting connections between “trivial” displays and layered societal cosmology. The approach is based on the assumption that the entire cultural system of a society is best understood by studying symbols, especially their constitutive power, through which the system is not only structured but also motivated. Thus, the symbolism of (normative, as well as deviant) hairstyle is related to sociocultural structures, including, at its base, a cosmologically informed worldview, that is, a people’s view of the way things actually are, as well as their concepts of nature, self, society.<sup>2</sup> Sign is anything that stands for something else; words, objects, and gestures are also signifying elements. The arbitrariness of the relationship between sign and what is signified ensures that the relationship receives peculiar interpretation across cultures. According to Peirce,<sup>3</sup> there are three different types of non-exclu-

sive signs: iconic signs resemble what is represented directly, indexical signs imply the signified and directly connect to other experiences, and symbolic signs offer an arbitrary relationship. *Aye* is reified in dreadlocks, whereas nefarious activities are indexed by dreadlocks. Yoruba males who wear these hairstyles violate social order, subvert gender roles, and transgress against established norms and mores. Thus, they are the very symbol of the diabolical, walking around in search of whom to destroy.



*“Augustine, yes, sir.”*

*He said, “Irun e yi maa fayin gaan” (your hair is quite fine).*

*“Ese” (Thank you), I replied.*

*He continued, “Ti e wa naa Augustine, ewo gaan lo nse e?” (Come, Augustine, what exactly is your orientation?)*

*“Ti yin naa ni” (I orientate myself toward you), I said.*

*Very quickly, he replied, “Ah, iro o, ma koba mi, mo ni iyawo nle” (What! No way, don’t get me in trouble. I have a wife at home.)*

*I turned around to get my food and drink, and heard him say, “Won o ti ba eyin jee” (Am sure that they have destroyed that backside).*

*This elderly friend of ours made these remarks spruced with innuendos with respect to my cornrow. Because he is of an affable nature, funny, and always the life of any gathering, I initially discountenanced his suggestive utterance, accepting it as a friendly jest. From thence, I have not been able to say or do anything to change his view of me as gay. Rather, his conviction persisted and intensified, especially with my long dreadlocks. Seeing him, I am always prepared to parry his innuendos, which the circle of friends laugh at. Although I did not like this development, among Yoruba people, because of gerontocracy, a younger person (in age, status) endures whatever an elder does or says without reprimanding them, until they cross the line of decency. At this point, even the community will judge him/her as agbaiya, a useless fellow. At that stage the younger person is at liberty to reprimand this older person and insult him or her with the adjective agbaiya. This line of decency was eventually crossed, not*

by this jocular man who does not work in the university, but by an older scholar. For whatever reason, this scholar told a colleague and a mutual friend that she or he knew for a fact that I was gay. When the colleague mentioned this to me, I was surprised and exceedingly offended by this slanderous remark. However, the colleague made it clear that the intention was to damage my person based on this scholar's dislike of me. Educational attainment does not prohibit cultural logic in perception of events and in the evaluation of individuals.<sup>4</sup> Was it the hairstyle that induced this slanderous statement or was it something else? The only time that Yoruba people attach sexual orientation to hairstyle is in connection with Esu and Shango priests in their roles as the wives of their respective gods. Hair, in such cases, is an element of the sexual role reversal that occurs in the cults when priests become transvestites, the wives of the gods. It has been noted that, aside from the fear induced by the unknown, human feelings such as dislike, hatred, jealousy, or inadequacy can engender the hate speech or ill will.



According to the elders, “*Oruko ti o wu ni, ni an’je leyin odi*” (We assume whatever identity pleases us behind the borders). This Yoruba saying illustrates the essentialized nature of Yorubanness. Within Yoruba cosmology, *Ori ire* (good head) and *Ori buruku* (bad head) mean good or bad fortune, respectively. Perhaps, with this distinction at the back of their minds, the Yoruba say, “*ise o kan ori ire*”<sup>5</sup> (Profession and exertion do not pertain to success). If one has chosen wealth with his *Ori*, type of earthly occupation will neither hinder the individual from achieving, nor accelerate the individual toward becoming wealthy. However, there is ease when the person engages in his or her preallotted profession. For Butler, “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender, identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its result.”<sup>6</sup> The goal, for Butler, was to show that identities are not fixed to who we are; that is, identity is not who one is in some abstract sense but what one does in a very concrete way. This might very well be the case, but for Yoruba it is arguably not. Yorubanness as identity seems fixed, secured, and inviolable. Out of this certainty, one can perform in whatever way necessary in response to the exigency of the moment. Those markers of Yorubanness remain, regardless. For instance, a Yoruba man who is very nurturing to his children and engages in domestic works could be described as *okurin bi obirin* (a man seeming like a woman), and a woman with masculine deeds either in the political or in the economic realm, or who has power (*agbara*), could be likened to a man, described as *obirin bi*

*okurin* (a woman like a man). In both cases, they remain essentially man and woman, respectively, but performing deeds that cause them to be likened to the other. However, a look into the formative years of the Yoruba people shows two significant traits: conformity to socially established norms, and notoriety, through which individuals with power can violate these norms, impose themselves on the community, and receive admiration. The former is permanent, the latter is mainly transient, whether the said impact is positive or negative.

The infamy of Bashorun Gaha, a Yoruba warrior and military leader described in Chap. 3, is an example. After Bashorun Gaha, there have been successive cases of men who transcended state laws, if not outrightly subverting them, then most certainly conscripting them to own or personal services. The exploits of Chief Lamidi Adedibu, who died on June 11, 2008, illustrate this case most pertinently. Chief Adedibu was a king-maker. He had tens of thousands of foot soldiers, and every day he fed thousands of individuals at his residence (in Molete, Ibadan). The residence, a sprawl, reminiscent of the traditional homestead, contained a mosque and multiple houses that were home to many. Here, the chief was consulted, and he dispensed justice and favors. The chief was an institution. He had, in the state house of Assembly, members who were loyal to him rather than to the constitution. At his bidding, these members impeached the governor, Mr. Ladoja, at a meeting conducted not in the legislative Chambers but in a hotel. This was because the Governor was not paying him his monthly due of the amount voted for security purpose. When this was challenged in the court of law, it led to unrest, which culminated in the Mace of the State House being seized and brought to the house of Chief Adedibu. When he was quizzed about his politics, he said: "When people do something wrong and you want to fight for your right, they will say you are a thug. The day Awolowo was made Premier of the Western Region, we applied to use Mapo Hall and we paid two pounds. They gave us receipt and approval to make use of Mapo and Adelabu was Chairman of the council and at the same time, member of the House of Assembly. Awolowo was coming from John Rankin, where he was sworn-in. But before we got to Mapo, Adelabu had locked the hall. Was it legal for him to have done that? Awolowo said we should leave it but we said no. He had taken the laws into his hands and we had to react. So I broke down the door. So I don't understand when they say 'thuggery, thuggery.' What is thuggery in that? They didn't say anything about the man locking the door illegally."<sup>7</sup>The chief, during an interview with Gbola Oba,

did not shy away from saying that when it comes to politics in the state of Oyo, he has the last say.<sup>8</sup> The bravery that individuals can display places them above sanctions within the Yoruba nation. The Yoruba's chosen way of life yielded a culture of signification for perceiving personal appearance and the ethics of responding to life's persistent problems. Nevertheless, the communal existence that has resulted from the shared values and communal lifestyle of Yoruba people, although very influential, can still be subverted by the very few based on who are able, through their own individual and personal exploit, to transcend them.

### SYNCHRONIC YORUBA BODY IMAGE AND PERCEPTION OF HAIRSTYLES

*It was 2010. I was at the University of Ibadan to collect data. Rather than taking a taxi from the main gate to the Faculty of Arts, where I was to meet the Director of General Studies and a professor in the English Department, I walked the distance. I cut through Amina Way to Staff Club, the Chapel of the Resurrection, and past the student dorm, Tedder Hall, from where I heard many calls of Rastaman, Bob Marley, and Jah man. The Jamaican-accented English directed at me was impressive. Finally, I got to the General Studies office, and the professor I had an appointment to see was in a meeting at the Department of English. He left words that I should come over there and let the secretary inform him when I arrive. I walked over to the Department of English and greeted the secretary. She looked up and responded. I asked for the professor.*

*"He is in a meeting," she said.*

*"I know. Please let him know that I am here," I said.*

*"He is in a meeting. Please go outside."*

*A little taken aback, I asked, "Is there a problem?"*

*Turning to a young man who was also present, she said, "ti o ba bota ko bami tii sita" (If he does not leave, please push him out).*

*So, I walked out of the office and leaned on the pillar of the balcony to wait. After about 30 minutes, I went back inside and asked if the woman could now let the professor know that I am waiting for him.*

*She refused. "Why do you want to see him?" she inquired.*

*"I have an appointment with him and he is expecting me," I said. "Madam, may I ask what your name is?" I asked her.*

*"What is your own name?" she replied.*

*"My name is Augustine," I responded. "How about you?"*

*"Nle o (greetings) Augustine. I have no name. A o mo nkan ti o fe fi oruko eyan se. O o ri irun e." (Who knows what he plans to do with one's name. Look at his hair.)*

*She turned to say something to the young man, when the door opened and the professor with his other colleagues came out of their meeting. The professor screamed, saying, "Prof!" He hugged me, asking, "How are you, igba wo le de?" (How are you? When did you arrive?). He spoke to me using an honorific pronoun, a mark of respect. The demeanor of the lady and the young man changed from antagonistic to reverence. The young man prostrated. He offered his "e ma binu sir" (Don't be annoyed, sir). He continued with his apologies on his behalf and that of the secretary. They did not know who I was, they did not expect that I would be somebody that the professor would know, and it is so rare to meet responsible people interacting with rasta persons.*



The established symbolic function of hair among the Yoruba is operationalized to maintain and enforce social boundaries. The following sections will illustrate contemporary identity and socioeconomic politics of hairstyling across various genres, audio-visual, literature, and sports, and, finally, provide a cross-cultural perspective that compares Yoruba hair perception to the meanings of hair as seen by Africans from other cultures. Perhaps, one way to conceptualize and contextualize the various hairstyles that are found among artists, musicians, and athletes is found in the carnivalesque of Bakhtin<sup>9</sup> with which he describes European carnival tradition of the medieval time. According to Bakhtin, the folk way of celebration allows for free interaction and expression, makes possible eccentric behavior whereby otherwise repudiated behaviors become acceptable and legitimate, and provides a space for the sacrilegious: within this space, profanity and parody are used to subvert things that are sacred and to debase

dominant cultural conventions. Here, things are done contrary to the convention, and the defilement of the everyday regulation is accepted; it is a mockery of the seriousness which constricts everyday life. Dressing up to play a role, carnival goers cause laughter and make a mockery of established mores and values by subverting them. Forbes-Erickson explores the cultural attitudes conveyed through carnivalesque performances in Jamaica, focusing specifically on homoeroticism.<sup>10</sup> Yoruba people, who are used to theater as a means of social commentary and critique, could adopt various appearances during the sanctioned performances, and it is clear to all that each assumed representation is intended for a purpose.

### *Contemporary Popular Perceptions*

Traditional Yoruba male hairstyles express religious injunction and compliance with gendered social expectations or norms. Thus, short hair for Yoruba males expresses normalcy and masculinity. This view is almost universal; as such, females who have short hair are historically considered masculine and thus stigmatized.<sup>11</sup> The theater is a depiction, a reflection of life. The traditional Yoruba theater transformed from its itinerant nature to stage performance. When the television began to transmit in Ibadan in the 1960s, Ola Balogun and Herbert Ogunde popularized Yoruba theater with historical and cultural plays. With roots in cultural traditions, the Yoruba movies within the popular Nollywood became almost synonymous with dramatization of themes ranging from comedy, legends, myths, witchcraft, and indigenous contents. The various Yoruba films of Nollywood reflect different functional perspectives to hair, as well as a changing perspective on dreadlocks, cornrows, and other previously deviant hairstyles. Artists across the Yoruba entertainment industry have used appearance in different ways and continue to manipulate the hair for a variety of reasons and in the exploration of a range of sociocultural issues.

The initial popular depiction of hairstyles in the transmitted programs parodied modernity from a traditional viewpoint and derided the traditional from the view of educated and Westernized individuals. Hair and clothing are defining in these theatrical representations. In place of shorn hair is the bushy head, and in place of the traditional *buba* and *sokoto*, there are now shirts and pants and suspenders. In the schools, the teachers, at the time of Nigerian independence, changed their appearance to conform to the Western standard of neatness and modeled this to the students. The existence of professional hair-care providers across the Yoruba nation has served to assure the introduction of competing hairstyles and popular

cultures of hair; the many billboards of these barbershops or hair salons show these professionals as trained in London or Paris, appealing to these places as centers of fashion, but more significantly, attesting that these professionals were accredited and validated by the capital city of the colonial powers most prominent on the continent.<sup>12</sup> Through these businesses, European values and cultural standards of good and bad hair are established and promoted. Deviation from any of these hairstyles is presented as such, an aberration with a cause.

An example of popular imaginations about crazy people is presented in the Yoruba movie *Ayanmo Eda*; it was produced by Lagelu Akinbola, and starred Yinka Quadri, who played a madman that was sent as a visitor to reveal a secret to a family. In this film, the madman who is portrayed with dreadlocks and shabby clothing, relays a message from the other world; he is thus a conduit for the spiritual and he traverses the spheres. The depiction of the crazy man and the role he played in the film are in consonance with the way the Yoruba cosmology defines them and delineates their duties, place, and abilities. (This popular depiction serves to reinforce the belief and habits concerning dreadlocks in the popular imagination).

In the frame, referenced above, the wife of the chief can be seen holding some whips with which she purposed to chase away the madman. As previously mentioned, this is the standard Yoruba response to mad people. The tangled hair and knotted hairstyle of the crazy man suggest the wilderness.

Common to these images is the presumed presence of the supernatural. The dreadlocks serve as the catalyst in producing a form of disturbance to social relation. Whereas contemporary Nollywood actors are mainly playing a part, portraying a view, and depicting events that mirror popular imagination, there are artists whose lifestyles eschew this description because they do not assume a different persona away from the stage. These artists are surrounded with mystery and viewed mysteriously. For me, there is no artist in Yorubaland who personifies the mysterious, evoking awe and excitement, more effectively than Twins Seven Seven. He is a composite of multiple interacting spheres of Yoruba imaginations; he appears with his long cornrow hairstyle, and is a painter, a sculptor, a dancer, a drummer, a poet; in short, he is a prominent, unusually talented, and distinguished embodiment of Yoruba cultural representations. His art work focuses on Yoruba mythology and fanciful, fear-inducing stories of classical Yoruba narratives as told by D.O. Fagunwa, among others. He is surrounded by myths; for instance, he is said to be the only surviving child of his parents out of the seven sets of twins that they had, hence his adopted name: Twins

Seven Seven. The number seven itself adds another layer of mystery. The awe of him was already solidified in my mind, as with the mind of any youth in Ibadan in the 1970s, before I met him. He was developing a new site in Osogbo around 1992, deep in what appeared as a forest at that time. The forest is the abode of the spirits, the same fearful creatures that adorn his art works. This place was partially accessible by road. Having shown us around his home in Osogbo town, we were a bit apprehensive when he chose to take us out to this isolated place. He described the project, his motivation, and the expansive cultural outreach that he was going to be undertaking there. It was a strange place: the darkness, the ponds with fish, the circular objects, the carvings, the various paths lit by native lamps, the structures in various phases of construction, the many trees in which spirits could comfortably inhabit; the place itself and darkness of the night that provided cover for God knows what, the environment, and the surroundings received more of our attention than his “distracting” narratives. Given the configuration of our surroundings, the ambience, the myth that surrounded our host, who was now making a meal of beans and fish for us, accompanied with palm wine, I expected nothing more than for an *imwin* (gnome) to emerge from the dark. The popular perception of Prince, as he was also known, was cloaked with fantastic projections, and exaggerated by urban Yoruba legend of the 1970s. I present this narration because, by the time I met Prince, I was no longer in my formative years, I was already a transmigrant; actually, I was in Osogbo with friends who accompanied me from Germany. Yet, my friend, also of Yoruba origin, who also was a returnee from Germany, remained in awe and in fear of Prince on account of those mysterious stories that we were fed during our early years.

Prince emerged at a time when the mysticism in the culture and tradition of Yoruba people was beginning to find popular depictions and wide broadcast in the visual and print media. This was a period following independence, an era closely aligned with the traditional, indigenous legends that closely tied the people to their more immediate needs, connecting them, in a sense, to their presumed origin.<sup>13</sup> This village world was becoming unraveled via expositions. This was at the time when there was only one TV station in the western region of Nigeria, and any show transmitted was viewed by everyone with access to television. This was also the time when the props and costumes of Herbert Ogunde’s theater and productions, more than anything, reinforced the presence of the diabolical, the force of secret societies, and the power in herbs with lasting images, peculiar verbal expressions, and captivating captions. All those images of gnomes that we could only imagine were now being shown to us on TV, and we believed them to be real.

Titles of Ogunde's dramas on Nigerian Television Authority included *Igba to de* and *ayanmo*, among others, which succinctly surmise and reference the occult, cementing them in the popular imagination. All of these offered the context through which Prince, with his peculiar appearance, was perceived. Prince lived in Osogbo, known for the Osun grove, a ritualistic place, the only surviving child out of seven consecutive twin births. Twins are spiritual beings, and since he was from a series of consecutive births, he was an *abiku*, a child who was born, then died to be reborn, thereby torturing his mother. In essence, he has multiple lives. He works with the elders, an innuendo for being steeped in esoteric knowledge gained from the wise ones, otherwise he could not have participated in the restoration of the Osun shrines to the goddess with Aduni Olorisa, Susan Wenger. He wears dreadlocks, an indication that he was possessed of certain spirits; after all, it was common knowledge that he appropriated the spirit of his twin sister who did not make it; thus, he embodies maleness and femaleness. There was therefore no doubt he was an *abami*, a mystical being. He was Shango and Osun combined. He walked around wearing white clothing: pants, shirts, and shoes—even underpants! His hairstyle had a negative impact, juxtaposed with facial marks and other fanciful tales told to the young susceptible minds that were still undergoing their socialization.

The import of the works and thoughts of many geniuses, and their rightful place in the advancement of the society, which should ideally have excited intellectual curiosity and exploration, mainly produced stifling silence and paralysis resulting from the distancing of the self and mind for protective purposes. In the popular consciousness of the 1970s, *Twins Seven Seven* was a man who embodied different tormenting spirits, and the various vicissitudes that marked the course of his life attest to this fact. In one instance, he was reported to be dead, only to then be said to have miraculously escaped a near-death experience. Sometimes, he leads a settled family life filled with fame and riches; at other times he is destitute and desolate—a cycle of life revealing the peacefulness of Osun and the turbulence of Shango as they fight for dominance within him. Were it not for the initial instigation of non-Yoruba scholars and promoters of Yoruba cultures, few of the now acclaimed traditional artists with unusual insights would have any significant part in the contemporary cultural life of Yoruba. The 1970s ascribed spiritual powers, if not expressly unsettling dark forces, to the hairstyle of Prince. The popular view held that people of such likeness are in communion with the other world. Possessed by this other world, he captured, with precision, the images of the deities and spirits and produced vivid expression of those forces that were invisible to normal people but

visible to him. He was, at one point, said to have been catapulted into their midst by *egbe* for a period of seven years; they revealed to him certain mysteries, and this was how he successfully painted “the dream of abiku the child.” At any rate, Prince and his dreadlocks attracted endless stories; unto him was projected in different guises the persistent angst of Yoruba people. This angst pertains to the dangers lurking in dark places and is symbolized by knotted hair. He and others like him are judged to be outside of the mainstream society; they are to be avoided or cautiously approached.

By the 1980s, another artist, this time a musician, busted into the fortune and fame while sporting long knotted hair. This was Majek Fashek with his popular tune “Send Down the Rain.” By this time, Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Bunny Wailer, I-Roy, U-Roy, and others, with their dreads, were already very popular in Nigeria. Their albums, with their images, had captured the youth. They influenced many local bands, and inspired guitar-touting school dropouts who played at different beer joints such as the Bamboo Corner at Bodija, Ibadan, and on many campuses across the nation. Thus, when Majek Fashek emerged, handsome and creative, he became our version of these Caribbean stars. He sang Reggae; therefore it was natural, or so it seemed, that he emulate the appearances and mannerisms that we have all come to associate with Reggae lifestyle. The popular imagination did not attribute any significance to his hair beyond its instrumentality. The stereotype was “He was a rascal, he must be smoking *igbo* [pot], which has turned his head [da ori e ru].” His hairstyle allowed him to play a convincing role and conferred authenticity on him in his musical genre. Thus, as paraphernalia of his profession, his dreadlocks are a means to an end and not who he is. Although Majek Fashek, even now, old, haggard, and in penury, still wears his dreads, the fame that he acquired in his younger days as an artist makes people see beyond the hairstyle. The course of his life, however, eventually affirmed the popular beliefs of the people that dreadlocks attract demons. In 2013, he was reported<sup>14</sup> to have responded to an altar call at Christ Miracle Church Mission to accept Jesus as his savior. It was popularly thought that becoming born again would pave the way for the exorcism of the demons that have held him in captivity.

Money, according to the Bible, is the root of all problems and the solution to all problems. Analogously, power, wealth, and prestige are the elements of stratification, the bedrock of inequality, and the inevitable consequences of a capitalist mode of subsistence. These are factors largely implicated in instigating exceptions to the perception of appearance, rather than change in public perception. The public spaces that confer

pecuniary benefits allow for the assumption of different personas and the performance of different identities. Management of hair in this space differs from those found within more private settings and close familial interactions. For instance, popular Yoruba sayings show the triumph of money, wealth, and its entailment, power.

- *Eni ti o ba ju ni lo, o le ju ni nu*
- One so highly placed as to make a person can also destroy that person

The saying suggests the rich and powerful are lords, so they can trample on those beneath them at will.

- *Olowo se oun gbogbo tan, olowo se oun gbogbo ti, iya ni o je omo talala*
- The rich does all things, nothing is beyond the rich, it is the poor that will suffer

The rich and powerful can do whatever pleases them, for their acts, the poor will be the ones that suffer the consequences.

- *Olowo dun ba tan, borokini dun ba lo igba*
- Everyone is a relative to the rich and everyone is associated to the wealthy

When you are rich, you are famous and everyone will become a relative. They will depend on you for favors and will be proud to be associated with you regardless of your character. However, to be poor is to choose loneliness, to lead a life of isolation, pining away in insignificance, as expressed in the following saying:

- *Osi ni ije tani mo o, ape kanuko ni ije mobowo tan*
- Money answers all things, poverty is plague

One of the ways the rich and powerful make boasts is to say:

- *Obun kobun ti mo ba gbe ile aye yi se, ase gbe ni*
- Whatever I do in this world is a done deed, no human can hold me liable for them

Success, a very powerful capital among Yoruba, provides strong leverage against social stigma and vice within Yoruba settings. Historically and

contemporarily, the powerful are above certain societal norms. Actually, power (brawn or influence) is the governing principle in Nigeria. If you are able to beat up your neighbor, you can do so with impunity. If, however, your neighbor is highly connected, say to a minister who can influence the police department, you can be arrested and forgotten in prison. Yet, if you have access to *oogun* (spiritual power), you can exert your vengeance right from the corner of your room, using *afose* (word of command), through which your antagonist could be made to walk right out of their house and never stop walking until they have erred their way to Kumasi and back. *Obun enu* (the spoken word) is also called *ofo* (incantation). It involves using words imbued with power to forcefully enter into the spirit world to duel with the spirits; it also means invoking spiritual forces to affirm or bring into being what the person chanting the incantation is demanding.<sup>15</sup> Power, as found in the status that success and riches can buy, and the influence that fame and riches confer, is capable of turning stigma into praise and otherwise aberrant appearance into fashion statement. This is exemplified by the exceptional acceptance accorded to elite athletes, musicians, and celebrities even when their appearances violate local sensibilities. In the same way that the investitures of the rulers and people of substance differ according to their means and estates, the elites, the successful, and the young socialites engage in the culture of elegance, self-display, and ostentatiousness. The obsession with beauty and elegance is internally motivated and externally induced. The internal dynamic, as already mentioned, involves the dynamics of local tropes, the unstoppable culture change—which, in part is attested by the proliferation of barbershops and beauty parlors—evincing the refinement and adaptations of existing practices.

Cultures are made by human beings, and as human creations, they may retain great influence over individuals' lives; however, they could also be subverted by people, they could be used to define people, and they could be remade. Yoruba culture pertaining to male hairstyle has traditionally been religiously, politically, or professionally defined and characterized, and in principle, it remains so. These encumbered balances of styles are newer forms of the same tradition with outside influence due to culture contacts. There are also different forms of modifications and adaptations in response to the imagination of the youth, especially artists and fashion makers, as well as the powerful who need the expressivity that hair manipulation offers. Nevertheless, the Yoruba cosmology that remains almost inviolable in determining the extent to which hair is manipulated continues to emphasize a high level of personal responsibility on the part

of the individuals to safeguard the interests of the religious community to which they belong, even as they dynamically respond to existential needs.

### *Adaptive Practices: Elite Athletes and Artists*

*During a wake ceremony at the house of a couple, one of whom had lost a parent in Nigeria, other hairstyle-induced encounters occurred. Since they are from Ibadan, almost all of the people in attendance were of Yoruba origin and many were from their church. This time, the first encounter was with an older person who knew me prior to my dreadlock days. As often is the case, Nigerians who do not know me keep away from me, thinking I am a foreigner (Jamaican or African American). After all, Nigerians do not walk around with such hairstyle. To the surprise of many—as indicated by the looks that I kept getting—this older friend and his spouse, both well respected within the community, greeted me cheerfully, with familiarity, and told jokes. There are several ways in which one can acquire respect and command followership from among Nigerians in general and Yoruba in particular. These include leading an obvious moral lifestyle, which may involve practicing a religion or providing wise counsel to all. Having an advanced professional degree, being a professor, or working in the medical, law, or engineering profession earns one respect. These professions become appended to their name. So, one is Engineer or Dr. or Barrister so-and-so. It also involves being rich, such that all can see the evidence of it in the form of material possessions and titles. Other ways of acquiring respectability and deference include being aged and wise, and being adroit in the use of Yoruba language, including its proverbs and sayings. Once someone has achieved this high status, they maintain a certain distance of respectability from others. Thus, for any respected personality to interact familiarly and in a friendly way with someone who appears not to belong to their league is to imbue this person with respect. Thus, until more information is available, there is a transfer of respect to this unknown person. I watched, bemused, the whole evening as people worked at finding out who I was and how come I wear my hair the way I do. A greater confusion resulted when I conversed with close friends in Yoruba. As usual, this calls up two things: the use of honorific until age is absolutely determined, and the apparent “right” of a male person who, by virtue of age, makes use of age to ask the one question in the mind of most. “I have been watching you for a while but I am not sure. Usually, we do not engage a musician for an occasion like this. Are you a musician?*



*Some moments later, another acquaintance and his wife came in. Both profess Christianity. I have known them for a while. However, at no time has the wife ever given me a direct gaze or spoken directly to me. Her husband rarely misses*

*an opportunity to talk about my hair or joke about how offering me as sacrifice will pacify the god Shango. I finally told him that I am wearing my hair the way I do as a social experiment. This was a year before the evening in reference. His wife for the first time looked at me, smiled and said, “igba wo ni e ma pari experiment pelu irun yin yi? (When will you end the experiment with your hair?) Surprised, and before I could find anything to say, she continued, “Once you cut your hair, people will see that you are handsome, and people will like you.”*



Modernization and interaction with Western cultures have produced other perspectives regarding the personal adornment of hair, changing the view and place of hairstyles in the society. There is a subversion of the notion of good hair. As a result, we find that musicians and soccer players, especially those who play in Europe, having acquired international stardom, become icons of fashion. By virtue of their success, these people are able to subvert and question norms at will. Whatever their acts are, be they acts of omission or commission, they set new standards. To locals, these are imported styles, and as such they become that fashion that is in vogue.

Students of affluence at Nigerian universities, essentially those able to travel abroad, in addition to those who stand out by virtue of their personality and creativity, are able to become influential in creating new fashions. One of the means of achieving popularity is often notoriety, including non-conforming appearances. Other leaders of contemporary popular culture include creative personalities in show business. It should be noted that above a certain age, say, 50 years, Yoruba males rarely concern themselves much with head hair to create fashion. The focus for that age group, when it involves hair, is the beard, except for those personalities who have cultivated a professional persona that profits from their peculiar appearance. Examples of this include Wole Soyinka and Dele Jegede. Middle-aged males shift their focus to properties, clothes, spending cash, and automobiles. This shift, therefore, relegates hairstyles to be a preoccupation of the youth (Fig. 6.1).

The preceding chapters described the socioeconomic and cultural provenances of the Yoruba world within which their worldview and cosmology were formed; they described the religious philosophy around which the Yoruba orient their earthly sojourn and desires. These factors, in addition to the Yoruba view of causality, and of the configuration of the environment, all aid the sustenance of the traditional views and they



**Fig. 6.1** To the left is Dr. Toyin Falola, the Jacob and Frances Sanger Mossiker Chair Professor in the humanities and a distinguished Teaching Professor at the University of Texas at Austin. To the right is Dr. Dele Jegede, Art History Professor at Miami University (Ohio), painter, art critic, cartoonist, and curator. Dr. Falola sports a normative appearance for an accomplished Yoruba male while Dr. Jegede could be said to have a ‘deviant’ howbeit acceptable iconic appearance by virtue of accomplishment. Image used with the permission of Prof. Dele Jegede and Professor Falola.

project unto dreadlocks. The visual reading, interpretation, or perceptual process is beneath the radar of our daily awareness. It is so internalized and automatic as to reach the point of naturalness.

### *Iyalorisa and the Pastor: A Case of Two Yoruba*

*In the fall of 2002, two senior scholars and I, all three of Yoruba background, were talking on the campus of the University of Texas at Austin (UT). A young African American male student, recognizing us, came over to exchange pleasantries. He was sporting a nicely done cornrow hairstyle which we all admired. The two other scholars were quite effusive with their compliments and expressions of interest in the young man’s hairstyle. As soon as he left, the conversation turned to African hairstyles for men. The two scholars who had*

*eagerly complimented the young man and his hairstyle, in a sudden, dramatic about-face, began to make derogatory remarks about cornrow braids, describing them as inauthentic, un-cultural, and inappropriate. When they turned to dreadlocks, they promptly labeled this hairstyle as “irun were,” the Yoruba phrase that means a mad person’s hair. I was amazed by the ease with which they admired certain appearances in others but condemned and disparaged the same for themselves. Especially interesting was how oblivious they were to the glaring contradictions in their attitudes to the same hairstyle depending on the one who sports it. Equally obvious were the different views to what constitute authentic African hairstyle. I could not help wondering about the logic underlying this discrepancy in perceiving a hairstyle. After all, when is a hairstyle good or bad? I wondered if the unanimity in their aesthetic judgments was not accidental, but perhaps indicative of a social fact.<sup>16</sup>*



Being separated by continents, environment, differing histories and experiences, Africans of Africa and their recent transmigrant descendants scattered variously across the West are differently shaped compared to their relatives in the Americas. There appear to be no other group of people more united by pigmentation, but more distinct, culturally speaking, than Africans and African Americans. One of the major complaints of continental Africans is the terse knowledge of Africa among the majority of African Americans. Sometimes, African American celebrities and elites reveal shocking ignorance about Africa. To Africans, however, this should no longer be shocking were Africans to transcend the skin-color line and focus on their heritage, being Americans. For they, like the majority of Americans, are informationally fed or not, about Africa, from the same sources. These two groups, continental Africans (including transmigrants) and African Americans, could never be farther apart even when sharing a geographical space. They may go to the same church for a while, they may be neighborly, and they may be colleagues at work, but it is rare to find a continental African and an African American who are best friends. Perhaps, the same could be said for European Americans and transmigrant Africans, but that is not the focus of this discussion. Each has their own view, including stereotypes, for the other. For instance, African Americans rightfully complain about the apathy of transmigrant Africans to civil rights issues, as well as their political disengagement. A most defining issue of dissonance is their separate experiences with slavery. Since then, the differences in their socialization, culture, socioeconomic background, and

political exposure have all become relevant factors in the furthering of this schism. These factors, in addition, have all produced incongruent outlooks and worldviews, which are implicated in their separate perceptions of hairstyles and body images.

Falola wrote an essay entitled "Iyalorisa and Pastor,"<sup>17</sup> triggered by his experience at the church service he attended in Austin, Texas, in 2004. In it, he describes the differences in religious attitudes between Nigerian Yoruba and American Yoruba. By American Yoruba, I mean those Africans who subscribe to traditional Yoruba religion, culture, and lifestyle. While the majority of these Americans are African Americans, there are some practitioners who are European Americans. As I shall presently illustrate, no two groups of Yoruba people could be more at odds than American and Nigerian Yoruba people. In his essay, Falola focused mainly on the difference between Nigerian transmigrant practices of Christianity that evince Yoruba cultural elements, as described in the preceding chapter. He contrasted the American Yoruba embrace of those features repudiated by Yoruba Christians. According to Falola, the pastor was Yoruba, his sermon was replete with Yoruba imagery, landscape, cultural reference, and even the accent of delivery was Yoruba. In his sermon, he "warned the congregation of the power of evil and witchcraft. As if standing before a diviner, the pastor asked the listeners to wish away illnesses, deny the reality of cancer, and the affliction of poverty, even if evidences to the contrary were there. The mere denial was more than magic, as the words became the talisman to ward off all evils."<sup>18</sup> Falola further noted that the Yoruba people who received Christianity in the nineteenth century are now transporting it back to the Western world where it originated, but not without "the witches and wicked agents." While the Yoruba pastor was wailing against the wicked, evil people in dark places and against witches, 20 miles away from their Church is the Ile-Olukun. Falola referred to this as "a religious organization" headed by an African American Priestess, Oloye Noliwe Aina Olomo. This "religious organization" openly professes belief in Yoruba Orisa (deities). They perform the masquerade and, in general, affirm the survival of Yoruba religion in America. Because his goal was to place Christianity and its various representations in the context of history, development, and pluralism, Falola minimally focused on the similarities and differences between these two Yoruba groups. However, he clearly noted that the pastor in his sermon was not Afrocentric; he was not connected with the larger concerns of the African American churches. The Iyalorisa and her followers, he noted, were more Afrocentric, seeking to

find a way to create an identity that is not derived from Christianity and the Western world. He concluded, “The Pastor wants to be more ‘Western,’ the Iyalorisa wants to be more ‘African.’”<sup>19</sup> This conclusion, apt as it was, is a very good anchor point for my discussion of these two Yoruba peoples. However, far more valuable is the line that followed the one cited. Falola asked, “And did I remember to say that Iyalorisa is not Yoruba?” One can debate whether this question was posed by the exceptional scholar that Falola is, or if it was an “oops” moment that revealed the bias of a very traditional Yoruba man and—by extension—a subconscious formulation of Yoruba people’s view pertaining to the difference between being Yoruba and authentic Yoruba or African.

Based on the two years of close friendship with the Ile, I know that the Ile-Olokun is not “a religious organization” as Falola suggested. Rather, it is homestead reminiscent of traditional Nigerian Yoruba homesteads, the bedrock of their civilization. Whereas the Nigeria Yoruba homestead is a patrilineage and practices a patrilocal form of residence, the Ile (home) in this case is a matrilineage and is headed by a female, who is called *Yeye* (mother) by her children. Over the years, some of her (spiritual) children have adopted her name, Olomo. In Nigeria, the name of the patriarch is passed down intergenerationally. In the ile, an increasing number of people practice facial scarification, contrary to Nigeria where the practice has dwindled to the point of drawing curious glances, especially among young people. Members of the Ile, like their traditional Nigerian counterparts, are not against polygyny. Both groups adorn themselves flamboyantly in traditional Yoruba attire, especially on formal occasions and for social gatherings. Both groups privilege Yoruba meals of sauce and carbohydrate. To every Yoruba lineage, there is *Oriki* ile (lineage praise that traces the history and recants the significance and achievements of the lineage), and the Ile in Austin, Texas, has its own *Oriki*, substantiating its pedigree and marking a link to Ile ife. The deities (Orisa) feature prominently in the lives of both groups.

However, as observed by Falola, “The pastor may be avoiding the orisa, but the worldview that makes the Orisa relevant still supplies some philosophy to the pastor... Indigenous worldviews and various aspects of traditional values have become so resilient that Christianity has to make use of them to sustain its appeal to follower..., The Iyalorisa and the pastor believe in the power of benevolent and malevolent forces; although they differ on how to deal with them.” In these various observations are features that keep widening the gulf between the two peoples. To the Ile,

modern Yoruba has lost ties to the Orisa and their powers. Rather than draw closer to the gods, they have insulted them by calling them diabolical, malfasant, and evil. As such, the mysteries of the world (*aiye*), as kept by the iyami (Earth mothers) who are derogatorily described and defined as witches (evil) rather than enlightened, wise, and powerful ones who have been granted access to hidden secrets hidden, have been removed from them and now they are empty, stuck in old mysticisms. The Ile in the new world see Yorubaland in Nigeria as theirs indeed, the crucible of their creation, the land from where they spread out, fulfilling the Yoruba destiny as defined by the name of its source, Ile ife. Consequently, most return to some place in Yorubaland to be initiated, for the laying of hands, and to obtain a staff of office that assures connection to motherland. Through this staff of office, a significant portion of their oral history and continuity is firmly established and enhanced. The Ile in America claim to be the present and future, while they regard the Nigerian Yoruba as the historical. So, they not only take offense at the slightest claim of superiority by Nigerian Yoruba, they take severe umbrage to the questioning of their identity and authenticity. Much argument and consternation followed Falola's question: "And did I remember to say that Iyalorisa is not Yoruba?"

To be called *aje* (witch) is a badge of honor in the Ile. To be called *aje* by Nigerian Yoruba is to elicit feelings reminiscent of Salem. If the hearers are Yoruba Christians, they scurry to the protection of the blood of Jesus; they break out speaking in tongues, and the spiritual warfare ensues. Both groups strongly subscribe to the head. The physical head is sacred in the Ile, and they protect it even from touch. In opposition to Nigerian Yoruba, the majority of the people in the Ile wear dreadlocks as a sign of naturalness, as respect to the Ori that precludes shaving, except for religious purposes, for example, initiation, and they avoid chemical treatment of their hair as a way of not only affirming the spirituality of Ori but asserting their pride in their own beauty, disavowing Western cultural impositions, and embracing their roots. The Yoruba adherents at the Ile use *Ose dudu* ("native Yoruba soap") for bodily care. While some Nigerian Yoruba people see the benefits of this indigenous soap, to others, its role in medicine (magic) trumps its effect on the skin. The use of Yoruba fragrance is also privileged among people of the Ile, as opposed to the perfumes that are preferred by Nigerian Yoruba people. Thus, to wear Nubian knots, braids, or dreadlocks is to proclaim truthfulness to one's own culture. Perhaps, the distancing of the youth from these cultural practices is what

Falola bemoaned, as presented in the Introduction. The Ile, as represented by its settlement in Austin, sees itself as having been sent forth by the Orisa out of Yorubaland to the West, that is, into the future, in order to assure the continuity of Yoruba—corporate nature—and the gods. Ori predestined them to their current settlement, and they constantly receive visitation from the Iyami. For instance, shortly before a major initiation for the Iyalorisa in 2004, the Ile claimed a visit from the deity Osun in the form of thousands of egrets that swarmed the woods close to the physical location of the Ile in Bastrop. These birds, snowy white as the goddess Osun, attracted local news reports and remained until after the initiation. Iyalorisa means mother to the Orisas, that is, one who cares for the Orisa. The crux of the above discussion is the differences in perception between two groups who base their Yorubanness on the “same” set of facts. Additionally, while continental Yoruba are coming from the traditional Yoruba religion to different received confessions, the people of the Ile are coming to the Yoruba tradition from different confessions.

### *Other Perspectives: African American and Natural Hairstyles*

*Downtown Seoul. I was in the square doing what tourists do with my friend. Suddenly, two Korean women in traditional attire came up to me and rubbed my head vigorously, before walking on, continuing their conversation as if nothing has happened. After the shock of it had passed, I ran after them, and rubbed their heads in retaliation.*



*In the business center of our local assistant in Addis Ababa, I was using the Internet, drinking coffee, and chatting with him and his friends. One of them said, “I am happy to see that you are a professor. You know, we have a lot of Rastafarians here in Ethiopia, but if you were here, you cannot be a professor because you have dreadlocks.”*



Wherever one looks, hair in its various stylizations is not mere coverage for the head. It has spiritual, social, and aesthetic significance, as well as value for different peoples and societies. The complex interaction of hair adornment, hairstyle, and symbolic meaning attributed to hair provides insight into the inner workings of a community, of social control, and of

personal situation in terms of affiliation and consciousness with respect to social institutions such as religion and politics. While members of the Ile claim Yoruba and practice some form of traditional Yoruba lifestyles, they are American nationals. Their sociocultural formulation and their responses to societal issues are dependent on the context of their history in America. To these larger American populations, the nasty history of slavery, segregation, and racism is defining. The marks of the ills visited on Africans in America and their struggle for equality are inscribed in their bodies and their perceptions of their bodies, in which the hair has played an enduring role. Discourse on the topic of hair has had a very long history as various pejorative terms, such as nappy-head, show the cultural preoccupations surrounding hair.

Scholarship on African American hair or hairstyling has a long and vibrant history that aligns with the turbulent twists and turns of African lives on the continent. Therefore, there are myriad scholarly publications (journal articles, dissertations, books, and magazines) on African American bodies, especially hair. Using a very generous brush stroke, the publications span different scholarly disciplines, including such works as Flinker's *Hip Hair*,<sup>20</sup> Biebuyck's *Power of Headdresses*,<sup>21</sup> and Morrow's 400 years *Without a Comb*,<sup>22</sup> which offered a historical overview of hair and hairstyles of African peoples. The key observation is that, through hair and styling, African Americans reconnect with the people of the continent. Another historical account with focus on African American women and their ideas concerning their hair, in addition to providing historical context for modern African American hairstyles, owes to Tyler<sup>23</sup>; those that focus on discriminatory practices based on hair, such as Obiagele Lake, Byrd, and Tharps,<sup>24</sup> considered hair in relation to power and hegemony. Sybil Rosaldo's dissertation examined hair texture and hairstyle choice, along with the meaning of hair for African American women. Other dissertations that explored black consciousness through natural hair include those by Teri Varner and Orathai Northern,<sup>25</sup> which explore the trope of black hair in its intersection with race and gender, as explored by artists and writers in addition to her own personal narrative. There are those works that study the economics of hairstyling and hair products, such as Rook's "Raising Hair,"<sup>26</sup> as well as Bonner; then there are those that examine the politics of identity, for example, *Ingrid Bank's Hair Matters*, to name just a few, and many others that provide a cross-continental explication of hair, such as undertaken by Noliwe<sup>27</sup> and by Michael Cunningham et al.<sup>28</sup> The study of Hair and African Americans, as well as the study of hair and other

peoples in general, has been an ongoing activity spanning over 100 years. For African Americans, suffice it to say that hair remains a defining feature of their consciousness. Being narrowly concerned with the hairstyles of cornrows and dreadlocks that induce a Yoruba person's specific view of its wearer, this discussion is constrained to a similar trope in the Americas, that is, how these two hairstyles are viewed.

The idea is not new that in American and Yoruba societies, individuals operate solely on the level of common sense in their daily interactions, the theoretical import of their world remaining unfamiliar.<sup>29</sup> This common sense furnishes the user with a set of blinders, which severely limit the directions in which the person is able to look.<sup>30</sup> However, the common sense that I am referencing mainly applies to the lack of attention to the theoretical foundation of the daily handling of the mundane. In both cases, the immediacy of the causal link between the behavior and its fulcrum eludes them, yet they are retained in their consciousness and reinforced by certain societal configurations, which, like mnemonic devices, continue to establish tradition. For example, "race" became for Americans a guiding principle of societal organization; it functionally regulates the distribution of resources, and access to power, wealth, justice, and prestige. The concept of race was manufactured in the formative years of the Americas; it is the story that America told itself to build a nation, to achieve a kind of cohesion, and to maintain a certain core outlook. This is, in a sense, its own cosmology, which is not entirely different from the manner in which the Yoruba people evolved homogeneity through a synthesis of previously diverse elements.<sup>31</sup>

The course of African American consciousness that partly informs attitudes toward hair is tied to their quest for equality, self-actualization, and complete emancipation from the concerted efforts to break and subjugate transplanted Africans. Various African peoples attach different meanings to hair and hairstyle for different historical and cultural reasons. However, those Africans who were enslaved, when slavery became an American institution, received similarly purposed treatments involving the hair. The singular purpose of these treatments was to debase, break, and subjugate the enslaved people. For instance, the various hair adornments used by Africans, including braiding and weaving, were ridiculed; some Africans experienced the forceful shaving of their hair. This treatment has been documented for Ayuba Diallo, a noble who was captured and enslaved. To make him undignified, his hair and beard were shaved, which made him seem like a prisoner.<sup>32</sup> Other, non-nobilities, who wore their hair long,

also had their hair cut; their long hair was seen as alluring, and the way to make them less so was to cut it.<sup>33</sup> During this period of enslavement, the hair color of enslaved Africans was also tampered with. For instance, the enslavers often dyed the hair of enslaved individuals to obtain better prices for them at their auctioning. Altogether, we conclude that the bodies of African Americans, in this case their hair, were inscribed with different social projections intended to demean and devalue them in order to effect an inferior classification of them in the social scalar. Thus, their hair, hair texture, and hairstyle were denigrated.

This denigration has been explored by Lake, who showed the enduring presence of race in Western culture and its use to devalue African cultures and African beauty ideals. In some instances, city ordinances in places such as New Orleans prohibited African American women from wearing their hair without covering in public.<sup>34</sup> Certainly, these treatments dished out to Africans, as already mentioned, convey certain meanings, and a shared understanding within the culture. Under such harsh conditions, African American women accepted the notion that “all hair is bad if it isn’t well styled and groomed.”<sup>35</sup> Long, processed hair became prevalent among women, for whom this was not only sexually alluring but ascribed a positive value judgment; good hair,<sup>36</sup> good grooming, and femininity were represented by it. Unprocessed, natural hair, on the other hand, was viewed as bad hair. Having treated hair became an accepted method to beautify the self.<sup>37</sup> The use of “hair” to dehumanize peoples of African descent in the USA was prevalent across different institutions of the society, and this persisted beyond slavery, lasting even after the civil rights movement. There is a history of the incarceration of African Americans in the US Military for not having the proper hairstyle. There was also the identification of certain hairstyles with the black power movements, in addition to the view that they were instruments of identity. The Afro hairstyle, for instance, became a legal battle for some African Americans who sought the right to wear it in the workplace; some were incarcerated for defying orders to cut their Afro. A county attorney in Lincoln, Nebraska, was reported to have refused a male student entry into his office unless he cut his dreadlocks, and as a consequence, the student lost the opportunity to argue misdemeanor cases in the court. There are also cases of refused services, including entry into a discotheque, on account of dreadlocks of workers who were fired.

Under American racism, people of African descent were constrained and imposed on heavily; their freedom to personal taste in adornment was

censored, and they were required to conform to prescribed dress code and hairstyle.<sup>38</sup> The skin was also abused, especially under the pyramid of skin pigmentation that was set up, that became pervasive, and that still determines the availability of life opportunities across the Western world. People with European-type skin color are at the apex; those whose hair color is described as blond sit at the top, if they are female. At the base of the color scalar is black pigmentation and coarse hair. Consequently, darker skin color is marginalized globally.<sup>39</sup> The politics of hair, as depicted by Mercer, underscores the racism imbued to hairstyle by the assigned negative social and psychological meanings. The malleability and stylization of hair, to which the hair of Africans is the most attuned, has raised for most African Americans the possibility of revalorizing the ethnic signifier.

Despite their differences, Africans either in Africa or in the Americas, especially the USA, have in common foreign impositions that radically altered every aspect of their lives. Thus, while in Africa, the educated elites were fighting against colonialism, cultural domination, and other impositions, their descendants in the Americas were fighting to overturn cultural defamation, overthrow segregation, end the supremacy of a particular skin color (racism), and reclaim “blackness” with all its beauty and power. Importantly, African Americans sought to assert their own agency with respect to personal choices. The height of these efforts to obtain independence and freedom could be pegged to the 1960s. This was the time when many African countries threw away colonialism, as well as the time when the civil rights movement garnered irrevocable success in ending segregation and paving the way toward an ongoing breakdown of inhibitory barriers across social institutions. In both cases, the different movements rejected domination in all forms, including not only psychological, but political, economic, and cultural as well. The concerted efforts were multifaceted; they included the quest to restore dignity, reclaim pride in self, and reconnect with history. Hair was, and is, integral to these endeavors, especially given the historical role it has played in the subjugation of the body, the mind, and the person. Along with the fight for complete emancipation arose a consciousness for the reclaiming, redefining, and repositioning of the body and physical appearance. Thus, the different politics of hair in Africa and in the Americas show that hair in the Americas acquired certain symbols pertaining to servility and slavery,<sup>40</sup> yet in the rise of ethnic pride and “black consciousness,” it provides a link to Africa.<sup>41</sup> Therefore the significance of hair is apparent; how an African American chooses to style his or her hair says everything there is to be said about

that individual's black consciousness, socioeconomic class, and probable lifestyle. Consequently, determining who is an "authentic" black or who keeps it real or who is qualified to make this call<sup>42</sup> becomes an important component of the struggle as well as an issue of vigorous debate among scholars and within the African American community.

The problematics surrounding the notion of blackness and authenticity, as suggested by Favor in his work, *Authentic Blackness*, when it is considered from the perspective of a shared history, will inevitably exclude certain "blacks" from alternative historical viewpoints. However, when it is viewed as a function of biology, it will mainly reproduce and validate difference.<sup>43</sup> This is one of the problematics tackled by Northern. In her dissertation, Northern narrated her own experience as she waded into the world of a beauty store to buy synthetic hair in order to braid her hair.

The glance at the beauty supply store secretly asking, 'why is she shopping for hair,' is akin to when someone asks 'how can you be black?' The visual fact is that I am read as Asian because I'm eligible to be Asian. But, as I was adopted from Thailand a few months after birth by a black American family and raised as such culturally, I am black. This creates quite a conundrum for any common inquiry into my racial or ethnic identification... The disjuncture that occurs between the perceiver and the perceived regards the visual fact of my hair and its relationship to my skin and eyes.<sup>44</sup>

However, different from this is the other question of what it means to keep it real, to embrace one's roots, and to proclaim pride in one's skin color, and specifically, which or what ought to be the reference or model for this desired authenticity.

In the context of civil rights movement, "black" consciousness, and quest for complete emancipation from what Bob Marley called mental slavery, hair stylization among African Americans suggests something of significance and not purely trivial aesthetic expression. Hairstyles are not personal flavors but instruments of political agitation, identity, and cultural politics. According to Mercer, "hair functions as a key ethnic signifier because, compared with bodily shape or facial features, it can be changed more easily by cultural practices such as straightening. Cut on the cusp between self and society, nature and culture, the malleability of hair makes it a sensitive area of expression."<sup>45</sup> Hair became perhaps the most powerful index to measure the level of one's consciousness and freedom from Western-imposed ideals of being; it became an instrument that separated the non-conformist from the conformists. According to Wade-Gayles,<sup>46</sup>

an activist with straight hair was a contradiction, a lie. Without doubt, the dissonance between nationalists and assimilationists includes their view of hair. To the assimilationist, mob violence is caused, in part, by the appearance of blacks; nationalists, on the other hand, favored the development of a unique hairstyle. According to Wade-Gayles's personal encounter, an activist with straightened hair really was a joke.

The right to tout the movement gospel of self-esteem carried with it the obligation to accept and love one's self naturally. Our appearance had to speak the truth before our lips stretched to sing the songs. Never again, I decided, would I alter my hair. In its natural state, my hair would be a badge, a symbol of my self-esteem and racial pride. An act of genuine bonding with black women who were incarcerated in jails all across America and those who were in psychological jails.<sup>47</sup>

The issue of naturalness pertains to maintaining an appearance that eschews cultural hegemony. Black is beautiful is thus in opposition to every cultural imposition and subjugation; black is opposed to white, natural hair is in opposition to straightened hair, wearing hairstyles as found across different cultures in Africa is a mark of authenticity rather than a sign that one is adapting to Western hairstyles. Thus, those areas of the body that suffered serious abuse became vital sites for the contestation of values. In this context emerged the adoption of natural, rather than treated, hair, the Afro hairstyle, braids, cornrows, and dreadlocks. To paraphrase Brody-Johansen, the language of appearance—hair and clothing—has its own principles of beauty that are independent of simple reasoning; an idea is expressed, and sometimes these express some things they dare not put into words.<sup>48</sup> Remember, this discussion is not about the history of hair or hair stylization, but about the meanings attached to hairstyle. Our question could be phrased like this: "What does a hairstyle connote to beholders?" In other words, we ask what natural hairstyles, including dreadlocks, symbolize for different peoples. Against the aforementioned, to wear the hair natural was to resist the existing social order; it was to challenge the hegemonic notion that the value of an African American woman depends on approximating the looks of European women.<sup>49</sup> However, while the notion of authenticity became very important to the liberation movement and was articulated with respect to appearance, in which hairstyle played a great role, this was never really part of the independence movement, although there was a quest for the reintegration of existing communal

existence as an economic and political strategy, such as was the case in Ghana and Tanzania.

The issue of natural versus unnatural hair did not escape Yoruba people, as was shown by the 1963 “debate” between Theresa Ogunbiyi, a *Lagos Times* columnist in Nigeria, and Helen King, a former *Jet* editor in the USA and Osho.<sup>50</sup> The debate includes the “conversion” of King from straightening her hair to going au naturel. This was related to Ogunbiyi, who was reacting to a Lagos firm that instructed its workers to plait their hair. For King, to whom hairstyle conversion was not motivated by political or cultural consciousness, to go into her office with nappy hair would be to make her boss and colleagues flip. However, when she saw how beautiful, comfortable, and shapely her own natural hair could be, she stopped treating it. The health and the beauty of her natural hair gave to her much more confidence and relieved her from her so-called hair problem. Theresa, on her part, did not like to plait her hair and she had been instructing her female readers to “burn” (straighten) their hair. Shameful. How beautiful was my mother when I saw her last in her onidodo hair plaits! To Ogunbiyi, traditional Yoruba female hairstyles are not quite practical, and are signs of retrogression.

The 1960s and 1970s, as previously suggested, were an era of importance for Africans on both continents (America and Africa). For America, it was identified with black consciousness and the black power movement; for Africa, it was time for a political break with colonialism. These two groups were in interaction; they exchanged ideas and influenced each other. As such, African Americans orient themselves toward Africa to recuperate their standard of beauty after being influenced by the ones imposed by the West. They adopt or emulate not only what they consider authentic African hairstyles, but also copy such practices as facial scarification, marital rites, and religious views. Africans orient themselves toward America for intellectual, social, and political ideas to help advance them in various areas, especially the democratic and egalitarian outlook that America projects. As noted by Biaya, traditional African hairstyles have migrated to the West to become instruments of identity politics. The hairstyles of Marley, Tupac, Rodman, and Tyson found on the continent have been described as decontextualized borrowing that links African youth to the rest of the world.<sup>51</sup> For the youth of Africa, there is not only a use and manipulation of the hair to communicate certain social and political messages, there are aesthetic values that are adopted, copied, and explored as well. In general, youth cultures challenge traditional and dominant perspectives to

hairstyling. For example, at Woodstock, the long hair of the hippies signified freedom. This switch, whereby Africans adopt more European hairstyles and some in the West adopt African hairstyles or hairstyles perceived to be African, has led to the discourse on what is authentic African hairstyle. Mariama Ross's experience on arriving in Ghana is a case in point.

In addition to the quest for authenticity was the fight against what has often been termed self-hatred. This is the fight against the use of skin bleaching creams, the use of chemicals to process the hair, and general conformity to Western ideals of beauty, in which the taming of the hair played a huge role. Authentic blackness was thus an escape from degradation, whereas conformity to Western ideals appears to be indicative of modernity and sophistication for colonized Africans. Hairstyle is one area that indicates conformity to colonial ideals, and consequently it is accorded tolerance in the form of employment and conferment of certain privileges, while for African Americans, rejection of these ideals is a mark of embracing oneself and one's roots. As Africans sanitize their cultural heritage to become acceptable, Africans in the Americas embrace them as emblem of freedom, of liberation. Thus, hairstyle for African Americans is implicated in the liberation movement. Liberation from societal oppression, individual liberation from effaced identity that seeks compliance with the so-called professional appearance, liberation from religious injunctions that uphold the creeds and preferences of one culture and ethnic group against another, and the quest to be free psychologically are all African American goals which are moved toward, identified with, and given voice by hairstyle. Not so for Africans, who suffered different forms of indignity under colonialism, but did not experience mass deprecation and subjugation of their cultures. This was largely because they continued to occupy their own lands, where they remained the majority, even throughout the duration of colonialism. Emulation of the West became, for them, an escape from the ills of their own traditions and an opportunity to participate in the modernity and civilization sold to them by the West.

The adoption of a pan-African image—often shown by a change of name, natural or African-inspired hairstyle, African inspired form of attire—becomes a mark of informed, liberated, and uncompromising African Americans. African Americans, therefore, embraced dreadlocks, Afros, and cornrows, among others, and renamed themselves after those deities that their African counterparts are in awe of. The growth and popularity of these hairstyles to some Americans has led to a change in its name from dreadlocks, to dreads, to locks, the more recent names signifying total separation from religious practice.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, the dreadlocks

style has been described as African-centered hairstyle, which is different from the views expressed by Yoruba people. That Afros and dreadlocks have little to do with Africa but much to do with an imaginary Africa was also suggested by Mercer, who wrote:

These styles sought to 'liberate' the materiality of black hair from the burdens bequeathed by racist ideology. But their respective logics of signification, positing links between the 'natural', Africa, and the goal of freedom, depended on what was only a tactical inversion of the chain of equivalences that structured the Eurocentric system of white bias.<sup>53</sup>

What is perhaps common to some extent between Yoruba people and mainstream America is the negative perception toward some hairstyles, although this does not manifest itself similarly; in the USA, there is an association of dreadlocks with drugs, fast living, and, perhaps, militancy due to experience with the resistance movements of the 1960s. The militancy associated with the Afro by mainstream America is the same attributed by the Yoruba to dreadlocks in the workings of nefarious spirits; in the same way, mainstream America strove to forcefully exterminate this militancy, and Yoruba people work to rid themselves of every manifestation of this diabolical presence. The institution thus informs the act; it sustains belief and justifies actions. To Africans of the Caribbean, dreadlocks are not only an expression of pride in one's own skin color and ethnic identity; it was a style that conveyed political empowerment. The cultural Yoruba contempt of "unkempt" hair, that is, dreadlocks, cannot be dissociated from their religious views.

Different from the Yoruba view of unruly and unkempt hair, there was a wide acceptance of the Afro in the early 1970s, and afterward across Nigeria. The Afro, which predated the black power movement, is a well-manicured, short, natural, and unprocessed hairstyle. As an American hairstyle, the Afro was worn by those African Americans at the fringes, such as avant-garde artists, urban elites, and intellectuals.<sup>54</sup> The various adaptations of this hairstyle in Yorubaland have been documented by Sagay and discussed in Chap. 5. Perhaps seen as closer to the existing traditional hairstyle, the Afro was worn by those who led the fight for independence in Africa as well as by the elites. The hairstyles of Wole Soyinka, Dele Jegede, and Fela Anikulapo Kuti could be described as Afro.

In certain Western views, hairstyles are overlaid with sexuality and gender. As such, it is not uncommon to find that hairstyle is in some instances associated with the phallus. This phallus view has even been suggested

for the Esu hairstyle, especially his hair tail, which symbolizes, for Yoruba people, his mysterious power in bridging the two spheres.<sup>55</sup> It is also in a sense similar to the hairstyle that the Shango priests wear. The corn-row hairstyle worn by Shango priests that resembles the female hairstyle, kolese, rather than allude to the phallus or invoke sexual connotation, unveils the role of Shango priests as the symbolic wife of the deity. The phallocentrism is purely Western and, in this case, American, but certainly not Yoruba. This view is partly due to the hypersexualization and condemnation of the African body. This sexual attribution to hair informed Freud's interpretation of Medusa's hair in which Freud equated the fear for matted hair with castration. Freud<sup>56</sup> associated the snake protruding from Medusa's hair with a phallic symbol. For Medusa's hair or head to be cut thus amounted to castration. Relying on Freud, Berg<sup>57</sup> argued that the hair is a universal symbol for genitals, the cutting of which amounts not only to castration but to the denial of sexual freedom. Wendy Cooper<sup>58</sup> also argued that symbolic sexual powers inhere in the hair. Speaking as a Yoruba, one can only describe the attribution of libido to hair as utter nonsense. Europeans may see in dreadlocks sexual permissiveness and project their own wishful erotic desires to the wearer, but such thoughts are not in the very least present in the mind of Africans. I recall in this connection my travel in Trinidad and Tobago. I was in the company of my host, an older, female European professor. As we explored the countryside, we walked in our summer/beach attire to the ocean front. I called her attention to some structures, and she looked up to where I was pointing and quickly averted her gaze. Then she said to me, "Please don't point, there are several people where you are pointing. Those eyes of theirs are looking at us, and they are thinking that I rented a dread." She explained that there are cases of European women who come to the island seeking sexual adventures, and because of that, to see an older woman with a younger man with dreadlocks is to assume that he is a paid escort. More closely akin to the Yoruba understanding would be the claim by Hallpike<sup>59</sup> that wearing long hair is symbolic of antisocial behavior and that the cutting of hair symbolizes social control and reentrance into the society.<sup>60</sup> Hallpike's view finds support from Molloy, who suggested that any man who wears shoulder-length hair, beads, or bracelets is antiestablishment.<sup>61</sup>

The social meaning of braids in America also runs counter to African culture: "[s]till an essentially feminine feature in Africa, young men in America have adopted it as a symbol of masculinity."<sup>62</sup> Unlike in Africa, this conveyed a false sense of sexual equality by helping the male-dominated

American rap culture to triumph in Africa. As has been noted, every society has its own regiment of truth, that is, the society's general truth, the types of discourse it harbors, and causes to function as true.<sup>63</sup> It has been argued thus far that Yoruba truth, the Yoruba view, and perspective to hair are to be understood within its own specific history and cultural context, including its cosmology. Thus, the American view of hair has to be understood within the context of its history.

The Yoruba-centric behavior displayed by the two scholars who derided the student's hairstyle as un-African reveals a certain dissonance between what different peoples in Africa consider to be African and those arbitrarily selected features or customs that African American describe as African without appropriately contextualizing them or tying them to a specific group in Africa. This popular American view of Africa as a unitary cultural entity and a homogenous group has been noted by several scholars and found to be a sore point of distinction between the two groups. Continuity with African past, in some instances, is reflected in the way the African Americans recollect that past and the way they use it in their current positioning. The Yoruba way of interpreting hairstyle reinforces and fosters a shared sense of history, a sense of belongingness and identity. There is no quandary whatsoever for Yoruba people in reconciling their ethnicity and traditional religious outlook to foreign ideals (religion and culture). Yoruba identity is essential in nature. There is no "two thoughts, two unreconciled striving; two warring ideals in one dark body."<sup>64</sup>

Finally, "hair is a performance, one that happens at the boundary of self-expression and social identity, of creativity and conformity, and of production and consumption."<sup>65</sup> Ill-clad or naked, unwashed, unkempt hair, and aimlessly roaming about are features that define a mad person in Yorubaland. The mad one that walks naked into the forest is the ultimate mad person, who is irredeemable, a total outcast who has joined the other forces of the wild, and cohabits with gnomes. The mannerism displayed is often based on their propensities; if they are learned, they will often be found picking up printed materials and reading them out loud as they roam about. However, different from these popular views and depictions of a mad person there is also *were alaso* (the nicely clad lunatic).



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## Conclusion

From a semiotic standpoint, there are certain things to consider when reflecting on the relationship between sign and representation. Intrinsically, the subject is that of cognition, the individual or agent, and the social, that is, the communal (which ultimately implicates the nature of knowledge), and the individual intuition versus social. The question “What is the relation of perception with the externally manifested object of immediate perception?” has been the central one around which the discussion revolved. The discursive approach has been in the form of a diachronic integration of creation myths with worldviews that have been shown as having been evolved to sustain and give meaning to life as defined by the same worldview. Whether we lie in the bed as we have made it or we exist in a web of meaning that we have spun, à la Geertz, existence is local, and so also are meaning and significance.

During the various encounters that have been differently presented and described earlier in the text, the same pattern has been shown to obtain with reference to how a male Yoruba person with dreadlocks is perceived, viewed, and treated. This shared practice has been traced to the origin of the Yoruba nation, both in terms of its creation (spiritual) and in terms of its spatial, physical, and material origin. This interlaced religious and political perspective evolved a defining worldview and cultural observances that have been argued to be the determining factors in the perception of male hairstyles. Yoruba religion, political ideology, communal injunctions, and principles guiding the relationship between the

physical and the natural that envelope the individual offer rich signs and symbols that communicate meanings. This code, in this instance, raises the image of the familiar and the dreadful in the imagination of the people. Thus, barring the exceptions already presented, the aesthetic judgments of a Yoruba people concerning male hairstyling is not an expression of personal taste in fashion; rather, it is the outpouring of a deep-seated religious worldview. Just as every sign acquires a history and certain connotations of its own, in which the owners of the culture are schooled, so also the symbolism of dreadlocks. The manifested responses and behavior are coded by the use of certain lexicons such as *onirun mere*, appeal to the blood of Jesus for protection. Language, as has been suggested, is used to cut up our world to distinguish different realities. In order to delineate and label realities, there are no natural concepts that only require linguistic label to be reflected; rather, groups lexiconize naturalized concepts and elements; pivotal to this linguistic encoding of notions are customs and worldview, both of which have been located within the Yoruba cosmology.

The point of departure for the discussion of Yoruba people's view of dreadlocks is the idea that, based on the manner in which a group constructs its realities, members of the community conduct their life and channel attention to those meaningful elements that implicate their existence through the use of signs. The signs, interpreted writ large, extend from the configuration of their world, such as their residence and material structures, to the structuring of their lives, the use of language, and organization of their ideals. Based on this, the cosmology of the Yoruba people was outlined to underscore the interconnection of their three planes of existence: the preexistence, the primeval sky, and the residential Earth; these three form an interlocking and unbroken chain of connectivity with reciprocal influences.

The lexical item *aiye* or *aye* or *ile aiye*, which translates to the residential Earth in English, connotes much more than the world to the Yoruba people. A specific sense of the habitable Earth, that is, the world, for Yoruba people that has been explored as means of uncovering attitude to appearance includes its meaning as the cultivated, civilized, and ordered world. This orderliness has its roots in the spiritually ordered preexistence. The physical, observable space in which humans conduct their existence has to be equally ordered; thus, there is the hierarchical organization of the nation under its royal kingship into different cadres that are structured with care. Individuals carve out for themselves cultivated spaces. Their lands must reflect cultivation, just as their own hair is to show careful grooming, both of which reflect attentiveness to spiritual injunctions and

watchfulness against weeds, speaking in gardening terms. Hence, people are on Earth to tend their heads as much as their environment. Neglect is an invitation to encroachment; it is the abdication of one's duty, and constitutes a return to the wilderness. The forest (*agiju*) and bush (*igbo*), as untamed vegetated areas are called, are overrun with wild animals, spirits, and lawless forces of destructions. Just as the city is defined by well-maintained pathways and structures, which together ensure comfortable living and indicate conformity to societal orderliness and solidarity with statehood, the care of the body, especially the cultivation of the hair of the head, indicates good relationship with the different *orisas*, spiritual forces, that ensure unbroken accord with the goals established before earthly existence. To be neglectful of the hair is to decouple oneself from one's predestination, in other words, to remove one's lifeline, to become purposeless, and therefore to roam the earth aimlessly, just as mad people do. Such people, therefore, are no longer human beings but marginal creatures; they are now forest dwellers (*ara igbe*), they are beings that are now easy couriers for all forces that are able to use them to achieve the destruction of otherwise normal human beings, especially in surreptitiously swindling them of their good heads. The dreaded head becomes a physical sign that defines such a person. Thus, to be a true Yoruba is to be properly raised with this awareness. The various diachronic excursions of this discussion allow us to see how each and every indigenous Yoruba is socialized into this very worldview and culture.

Within this described worldview and guiding principles emanate the Yoruba idea and ideals for what constitute natural and authentic hairstyle. The natural and authentic hairstyle for the Yoruba male is that which aligns the physical head with the inner head. Through cultivation, the forest becomes habitable, and through continuous maintenance (spiritual vigilance), a form of ongoing pyrrhic victory is maintained over jealous spirits of the wilderness ever lying in wait, as do weeds, seeking to overrun one's destiny. Thus, the need to be watchful, which is the sentiment expressed in the Christian sermon previously presented. Given the informing Yoruba worldview, inauthentic or fake hairstyles for males are those that resemble the original, but are devoid of enervating power that requires it been constantly manicured. They are mere Schablonen (sterile pattern or masks) and are easily assumed by nefarious forces. The operation of "Yorubanness" (culture, including worldview) lives and continues to thrive in the deepest recess of the people's life even when submerged within multilayered practices like different forms of clothing, language, music, and significantly religion, in this case, Christianity. These overt

manifestations are but of the superficial self—indeed, acts put forward as evidence of modernity. Consequently, regardless of their social and cultural removal from continental Yorubaland, the Yoruba attitude, fear, and undifferentiated response to another Yoruba person in a stigmatized appearance remain consistent.

There is a complete unanimity in the minds of all speakers-hearers of Yoruba language, through which their attitude toward dreadlocks are configured. Uniformly represented and displayed are understandings that are manifested in their reaction to the presumed “provocation” induced by the presence of dreadlocks. To be Yoruba, therefore, is to be extremely conscious of the value of well-tended head hair relative to head hair that runs amok. Obviously, images are most often filtered through culture, customs, worldview, and, of course, through even such things as personal quirks, which probably are the result of experiences. I have also made the point before that names, tags, descriptors, or appellations often end up influencing perception of the person so tagged, and suggest ways of treating the person.

The Yoruba disposition to dread is not autonomous; it unfolds within values, ideals, and norms that have religious, social, and cultural bases inevitable to their existence (spiritual and temporal). Thus, their rejection of dreadlocks is cast, by default, legalistically with appeal to the norms and values encased in their cosmology. Consequently, Yoruba view of dreads is not transient; it is enduring, regardless of space and time. Seen from this perspective, the logic that underlay the admiration of dreadlocks in others but not in the self becomes not a contradiction, but an appropriate procedure. Dreads is nice, as long as it is not worn by one of us.

As Appiah<sup>1</sup> has vigorously argued, there are no objective values, as there is no natural science of right and wrong; rather, intimacy breeds amity. Yoruba people do not conduct their affairs or perceive people out of ignorance or irrationally; their beliefs, as described in Chaps. 3, 4, and 5, give meaning to their deeds and imbue legitimacy to their treatment of a Yoruba male with dreadlocks. With clear conscience and a sense of duty, they differentiate between city and forest, civilized and uncivilized, Yoruba (informed) and aliens (uninformed), and they mete out to each according to how they are classified. The dispositions of Yoruba people and, perhaps, their moral claim no doubt reflect local realities and, if you wish, local preferences. The Yoruba people, therefore, act out their worldview, their belief about their earthly purpose, their understanding of things that exist in the world, their place in it, and actively seek to forestall those things that could adversely impinge on their ability to eventually lead a good and successful life.

The various observations about the perception of a person, the resultant treatment of that person as a result of his hairstyle, and the discussion of both that I have offered thus far show the following attitudes and processes:

- There is an initial accommodation of me as a stranger, in which case I receive the exotic specimen treatment.
- When seen as a Nigerian, then, I am seen only as a non-Yoruba, hence an ignoramus, however, with a potential of being dangerous.
- When seen as a Yoruba, then I am viewed as either a musician or an artist, but more significantly, I am seen as a deviant, misfit, and a *were* (lunatic) that requires immediate intervention, one that is not worthy of any respect. As such, people maintain careful social distance; they avoid any form of contact until there is a mediation
- A change in attitude from rejection to acceptance occurs the moment I am seen associating with those they consider to be honorable, respected, and high-status individuals (for instance, when the professor, an elder, born-again, and director each hugged me publicly). The higher the status of the person with whom I am associated, the more relaxed and accommodating those in that environment become toward me. By association they transfer to me the same respect and deference due those respectable persons with whom I am now associated, the logic being that if this person who is their superior relates to me as peer, then I have to be of the same status and social standing.
- When I have been “certified normal” by people of higher standing, who thus reaffirm me through their interaction with me, there is an immediate change in attitude from avoidance and suspicion to wondering and, in some rare instances, playful inquisitiveness: *Ogaa, irun yin gun gaan* (boss, your hair is quite long).
- Having been deemed fit, there are conjectures concerning my person. For instance, realizing that I am a returnee, they conclude that I must be one of those eccentric professors or individuals who have spent way too much time outside Africa and therefore have lost touch with culture, and perhaps, reality.
- Where I am seen as a resident inland Yoruba, then mysticism is attributed to me. Juju (mysterious power) has to be at play. After all, no adult Yoruba male walks around like that. So, they conclude, if something is not after me, then I am certainly after something. Mysterious!
- And when they learn my name, there is an outright reevaluation of me, as by nomenclature, I cannot possibly be a Yoruba; in this case, I am now relegated and granted the grace accorded an alien.

Communication has never been and will never be mere conveyance, or transmission, of referential meaning. Rather, it is geared toward the transmission of certain proposition against shared meaning, value, or, in general, culture. Existence creates a socializing expectation in the mind of Yoruba people that conjoins Rasta locks with evils, with foreignness; therefore, the designation *alaimokan* (ignorant) is used to reference the person with the dreadlocks. This linguistic designation, a sorting device, serves not only to distinguish a cultural native from an outsider but also defines a cultural insider as one who understands the workings of the spiritual and the physical, their interdependence, and how the effect of perturbing one implicates, and is coterminous with, the other, and such an informed person cannot simply assume an uncultivated hairdo. If and when an unkempt hairdo is found on a native, then it is ominous, a telling sign of a pact with the evil world (sorcery) or the definite sign of possession, of being under witchcraft. Sorcerers are purposeful actors, and wishes of a witch come to pass without their active consent. Since both have come to steal or to destroy, self and communal preservation instincts require either flight or fight. Kobena Mercer was quite optimistic in suggesting that dreadlocks and Afro have disappeared into the mainstream. If by this he meant that in the early 1980s, they were popular, fashionable, and were instruments for self-expression and for Anglo-Americans to rebel against establishments and depict themselves as hip, then yes, but if he meant that they have found acceptance and have removed individuals from being stereotyped with respect to their abilities and what they are able to aspire for, and the extent to which they are acceptable to parents of partners, then he is dead wrong.



## NOTE

1. I use Appiah, K. Anthony. 2006. *Cosmopolitan*, as the basis for some of the thoughts offered in this concluding paragraph. Although Appiah believes that there are certain values that ought to be universal, he nevertheless strongly argued that each is rooted, attached to a home, their home, with their own particularities while taking pleasure from the presence of others. Essentially, each nurtures the culture that has formed them. He suggests that values might be similar to taste of which there is no accounting for.

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# INDEX

## A

Aafa, 143–4  
Abami eda, 116  
Abule, 42  
Adimajenigberu, 114  
Aesthetic  
    expression, 177  
    judgement, 168, 190  
    significance, 172  
    values, 179  
Afaimoniseni, 114  
Afose, 164  
Africans of the Caribbean, 181  
African Traditional religion, 46, 120  
Agbara (power), 54, 144  
    adura (prayer), 138  
    okunkun (darkness), 142  
Agrarian economy, 42, 57  
Aja oyinbo, 19  
Aje, 100, 107, 116, 171  
Ajogun, 100, 113–15, 126, 132  
Amoniseni, 114  
Ase, 112, 122, 133  
Asen-bani-daro, 114

Awon aye, 107, 144  
Ayanmo (predestination), 106, 112,  
    159–60

## B

Babalawo, 140–1, 143, 144  
Basorun Gaha, 43  
Basorun Ogunmola, 46  
Belief system, 137–8, 152  
Birthed dreadlocks, 82  
Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther, 48  
Born-Again, 37, 66, 122–3, 132, 134,  
    137, 138, 142, 193

## C

Charismatic churches  
    Aladura Movement, 134  
    The Celestial Church of Christ, 121,  
        135  
    The Deeper Life Ministries, 122  
    The Eternal Sacred Order of the  
        Cherubim and Seraphim, 121

Charismatic churches (*cont.*)

- The Foursquare Gospel Church, 122
- Kingsway International Christian Centre, 122
- Living Faith Church World Wide, 122
- The Living Faith Tabernacle, 122
- The Mountain of Fire & Miracles Ministries, 122, 125–6, 131–42
- The Redeemed Christian Church of God, 122
- The Scripture Union, 122
- The Sword of the Spirit Ministries, 122
- Chief Lamidi Adedibu, 155
- Communication, 7, 74, 97, 134, 135, 139, 194
- Communicative gesture, 20
- Contemporary Popular Perceptions (of hairstyle), 158–65
- Cultural framework, 38
- Culture of fear, 135–138

**D**

- Dada, 5, 11, 79–83
- Dele Jegede, 166–7, 181

**E**

- Egba (people), 41, 43, 51
- Egba (whip), 74, 145
- Elaloro, 118, 120, 139, 147–8
- Esu, 134, 135, 142, 154, 182
- Evangelical Christian Union, 122

**F**

- Fear, 5, 30, 44, 56, 68, 81, 84, 107, 114, 118, 125, 133, 134, 192
- Filiality, 42
  - Yoruba filialiy, 52–7

**G**

- Gbolohun, 142–3
- Gerontocracy, 23, 77, 120, 153
- Goal of yoruba nation, 53

**I**

- Ibadan, 43–7, 51, 59, 61, 80, 119
  - style, 84
- Ibadan Varsity Christian Union, 122
- Ifari apakan, 77
- Ile aye, 57, 99, 100, 106, 163
- Ile-ife, 78, 99, 170
- Ile-olokun, 170
- Illari, 77–8
- Imori, 98
- Indigenous worldview or philosophy, 98, 166, 170
- Irun were, 11, 33, 74, 96, 145, 168, 190
- Itu Baba-ita, 139
- Iyalorisa and pastor, 167–9

**L**

- Lagos Varsity Christian Union, 122
- Lineage, 52, 54–5, 78, 170
- Listserve USA Africa Dialogue, 23, 36
- Lunatic from heaven, 89

**M**

- Majek Fashek, 162–3
- Malthusian economy, 51, 57
- Mental facts, 20–1, 122
- Moustached, 78

**N**

- The Nazarene, 134–5
- Nonverbal signal, 96

**O**

- Oduduwa, 41–2, 44–5, 49, 52–5,  
78, 99
- Ogunda meji, 110, 114–15
- Ogun idile, 143
- Ogunpa River, 28
- Ohun enu, 164
- Old Wine, New Gourd, 139–45
- Olori buruku, 111
- Olori ire, 105, 111
- Ori, 98–112
- Ori and Receive Confessions,  
120–35
- Ori and the good life-, 112–20
- Ori-inu, 134
- Oriki dada, 112
- Orilonise, 60, 82, 107, 112
- Ori ni eleda, 111
- Ori ode, 134
- Ota-ile, 114

**P**

- Pan African image, 180–1
- Paternal relationship, 55
- Pentecostal and Charismatic  
Movements, 123
- Pentecostalism in Yoruba land,  
121–2
- perennial fear, 68
- Personal adornment, 70, 166
- Personal Styles and Identity,  
83–5
- Politics of hair, 157, 176
- Predestination, 100, 106, 109, 118,  
182, 191
- Primordial powers, 100
- Principle of seniority, 56
- Psychoanalytical interpretation of hair,  
71
- Pyramidal structure of Yoruba nation,  
42

**R**

- Religio-philosophical beliefs, 111
- Religious history, 52

**S**

- Scripture Union House in Ibadan,  
61–8
- Semiotic analytic study of perception,  
31
- Settlements  
aba, 42  
abule, 42  
Ileto, 42  
Ilu alade, 42  
Ilu ereko, 42  
Ilu oloja, 42
- Signs, 7, 131, 152–3, 179, 190
- Symbolism of hair across cultures, 72
- Synchronic Yoruba Body Image and  
Perception of Hairstyles, 156–158

**T**

- Traditional (hair) Styles, 74–9  
Ààso, 77  
Ààso oluode, 77  
Jongori, 76  
Osu, 76–7
- Transmigrant, 23, 160, 168–9
- Trash, 20, 23
- Treatment of cats and dogs, 16–18, 74
- Trivial Research, 22–7
- Twins Seven Seven, 159–61

**U**

- Unnatural hair, 179

**V**

- Virtual community, 23

**W**

Watchnight service, 143

Were orun, 89

Won, 102, 113, 117

**Y**

Yoruba Aesthetic, 54

    purposes, 83

    Yoruba cosmology, 5, 98, 111, 154,  
    164, 190

    Yoruba deities, 75, 135

    Yoruba disposition to dread, 192

    Yoruba kingdom, 44–8

    Yoruba mythology, 49, 79, 159

    Yoruba Traditional religion,  
    98–112, 137

    Yoruba World, 3, 4, 6, 26, 33,  
    40–8, 122, 131, 136, 166

    Yoruba worldview, 5, 25, 126,  
    199

    Yorubaism, 69

    Yorubanness, 48, 137–8, 154, 172,  
    191