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Ọyọtùnjí Village: Making Africans in America

Antionette B. Brown-Waithe

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ABSTRACT
Öyötünjí: The Making of Africans in America examines the impact of self-identification with African culture and the impact it has on African identity within social and Black Nationalist movements. More so than the Civil Rights movement, the Black Nationalist movement has influenced the ways in which African Americans self identified as a group and as individuals. Comprised primarily of African nationalists, Öyötünjí Village was considered the vanguard in re-introducing the African ideology into Santeria, and giving birth to what is now considered the Ifa/Yoruba tradition. As the intentional community of Öyötünjí grew, the Ifa tradition spread as well because of its porous population. To explore the relationship between identity and social movements, this paper examines the motivation behind the formation of Öyötünjí Village and the formation of an independent community.

INDEX WORDS: Öyötünjí Village, Black nationalism, Identity, New social movement theory
OYOTUNJI VILLAGE: THE MAKING OF AFRICANS IN AMERICA

by

ANTIONETTE BROWN-WAITHE

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OYOTUNJI VILLAGE: THE MAKING OF AFRICANS IN AMERICA

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May all your roads be clear, your burdens light, and may you never lose your way. Finally, I want to thank the ancestors. I stand on all the sacrifices that you have made. May your names live on as honored memories. Ase

To the founders and early residents of Òyötùnjí Village, this project could not have been possible without your tireless sacrifices and vision. His Royal Majesty, King Adefunmi I, Baba Medahochi, Omilade, Ayobunmi, Shaki Shaki Ajamu, Chief Adeyemi, Chief Ifalade, Chief Ogunseye, for creation of Òyötùnjí Village and bringing the Yoruba-Fon tradition to millions. For that, I thank you. To the past and present residents of Òyötùnjí Village, thank you for inviting me into your homes, your rituals, your ceremonies, your sacred spaces and your lives. I am truly honored by the wisdom and love that you have shared with me. Last but definitely not least, I would like to acknowledge the sacrifices and dedication of men and women who fought for equality for all African people. It is on your shoulders that I stand. Ase.
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VOCABULARY

Ase – (also ashe)- The force of creation. Power (personal and collective). An action inspired by a supernatural force.

Bárákú Ori- Habits of the head. Africanisms that create dispositions toward social movements.

Cultural Nationalism – Participants self identify based on the notion of a shared culture and identity.

Egungun- Ancient Yoruba ancestors, often celebrated with bright colorful masquerades.

Dokpwes- Organized gendered work units at Òyötùnjí Village.

Ifa- The Yoruba God of wisdom that speaks through the divination.

Oba- Yoruba word for King.

Ôgbóni Society – A secret society of landholders at Òyötùnjí Village.

Ori- The spirit of the head.

Orisha-Vodou- a neo-syncretic style of worship Yoruba worship in which the Yoruba (Orisha) and Fon(Vodou) deities are combined in one cosmological system.

Odun Egungun Festival- Annual festival held at Òyötùnjí Village to honor African ancestors.

Shango- Yoruba deity of thunder and lightning.
AUTHOR’S NOTE:

Although Òyötùnjí Village is an actual site, I have changed the names of people and collective groups interviewed to protect their identity. I have also changed the names of the interview sites as well. Brief biographies of the interviewees are featured in the appendix.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

The bus was packed. A chorus of languages floated on the air and wrapped around my body like a warm caress. The guttural language of Arabic furnished the baseline. The nasal language of France added the harmony. The tonal language of The Wolof people from Senegal provided the rhythm, and the singsong tone of our Southern host provided the melody. The year was 1996 and we were on our way to one of the Sea Islands off the coast of South Carolina. Along for the ride and scattered throughout the bus, were Native American medicine men and women from all across the United States. North African Islamic Raabs, or traditional priests, armed with their koras, taugelmoust (indigo dyed turban) and bright colorful flowing robes sat in the front of the bus. Atlanta University Center (AUC) students from Clark Atlanta University, Morris Brown College, Spelman College, and Morehouse College sat in the middle, craning their necks in all directions to try to make sense of the various cultural exchanges and to converse among their peers. More notably, sitting in the back of the bus, were the lively traditional Senegalese healers called ndepkots.

I had the fortune of riding on the bus from Atlanta, Georgia to St. Helena’s island with the renowned Senegalese healer, Maam Adji Fatou Seck and her daughters. We were on our way to Penn Center to participate in the first annual Coumba Lamba, USA ceremony. Maam Coumba Lamba is the Senegalese deity that is considered the Mother of the waters for which the eight-day healing ceremony was named. The ceremony was designed to foster spiritual healing to the groups largely marginalized by western imperialism: continental Africans, African
Americans, and Native Americans. Participants had come from Hawaii, Canada, Nigeria, and Senegal (just to name a few places) to conduct lectures, healing rituals, dance and drumming workshops. Dr. Charles Finch, who was the director of Morehouse School of Medicine at the time, was one of the co-sponsors of the event. I was one of the students recruited by Dr. Finch from the AUC who volunteered for the conference. As a volunteer, I floated from post to post. I did everything from ‘womaning’ the registration table, helping coordinate divination schedules for Maam Fatou Seck and her many daughters, to getting food for drummers and dancers. On this particular day, I was assisting with coordinating a workshop on traditional healing. The panelists were all dressed in variegated traditional regalia, for something that could have been called an indigenous United Nations meeting. It was here in this traditional healing workshop that I first learned about Òyötùnjí Village. Òyötùnjí Village is an intentional community started in 1970 as a purposeful rejection of western values and cultures.

Oseijeman Adefunmi I, self-proclaimed King of Òyötùnjí Village, spoke passionately to the audience in regards to the importance of reclaiming their African heritage and culture. He alleged the loss of African identity to be the core of all the problems affecting African Americans. King Oseijeman Adefunmi I asserted that if African Americans would “Wake up and see themselves for who they are, the daughters and sons of Kings and Queens,” African Americans would be so drastically transformed that black on black crime, drug addiction, fractured relationships, and poverty would all be conquered. As he concluded, he invited us all to return home to Òyötùnjí Village, our Africa in America.
Although many volunteers and conference participants ventured “down the road” to Òyötùnjí Village, my duties as personal attaché to Maam Fatou Seck prohibited me from doing so. I was amazed by the descriptions of the village that were brought back to Penn Center. I was and even more amazed that even the Nigerian tourists were impressed as well. All of the African Americans and Africans described the experience as a sort of returning home. Some of my colleagues were so moved, they adopted Yoruba Culture, stayed at the village after Coumba Lamba was over or they returned later for academic research. Òyötùnjí Village was big news. Over the years, I heard less and less about the village. I wondered what happed to the dynamic man and African village in America that inspired changes in so many of my colleagues. I wanted to understand how the concept of re-identification changes the attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs of its adherents. Finally, I wanted to understand the motivations behind social, political, and cultural movements.

1.2 Research Question

Originally, this project started out as an exploration into cultural tourism at Òyötùnjí Village. Many years after Coumba Lamba Ceremony, I continued to encounter people who lived, visited and/or participated in religious ceremonies at Òyötùnjí Village. My intention was to explore the various ways in which authenticity, spectacle and self representation merge. However, during my various conversations with interlocutors, the theme of identity and identity transformation emerged. Many interviewees constantly talked about the marginalization they experienced that pushed them towards Òyötùnjí Village. Whether it was through roots readings, rituals or ceremonies performed, they expressed the ways in which
Òyötünji Village met their need to belong. It was also of interest how the conversations about identity changed throughout generations.

My research questions centers primarily on the interplay between power and identity. I wanted to know how the suppression of identity feeds iniquitous power, and how the reclamation of identity and social movements are related. In this sense, I wanted to know how identity is constructed or rather made. Simplify put, I wanted to understand what social factors contribute to the creation of imagined cultural identity and how is that identity then performed. The making and unmaking of African identity will be used to illustrate how power and identity are interrelated. The unmaking of African identity was an attempt to disempower and exploit the African (and later African American) politically, culturally, socially, and economically. However, I believe the remaking and reclaiming African identity works as a counterpower against hegemony by inspiring social movements. I focus on the aspect of cultural tethering, or rather aligning or realigning oneself with cultural beliefs as a form of resistance. Using Òyötünji as a test site for the exploration of African identity and resistance against hegemony, I will explore how intergenerational metaconversations contribute to social movements. I chose to focus on the Òyötünji Village’s formative years and the next generation of cultural nationalists. Since my research focuses on the how generational meta conversations contribute to social movements and how identity is made, I believe looking at the first two generations can illustrate the ways in which these conversations change.

1.3 Significance of Study

Power. Although many scholars believe that this concept has become one of the most over theorized in academia, I believe it can be a useful tool that can enhance the understanding
of hegemonic relationships. Exploring the replication of power and the replication of identity can also be useful in analyzing the complex multinational inter-relationships that are a fundamental characteristic of globalization. It is inconceivable to examine these relationships among the various peoples of the world without acknowledging the historical, economic, political, social, and cultural impact that has occurred as a result of years of political, economic, and cultural imperialism. The analysis of power can help to explain how some countries came to dominate others, and to what extent domination affected the citizen’s sense of selfhood and nationhood. The subject of power can be seen as a talking point in the ongoing dialogue of cultural identity. Although the exploration of African American identity seems tautological, the analysis of identity framed within the context of power can provide insight into the ways nations evolve, progress, and sustain themselves. In addition, understanding African American identity within the context of power relationships can further advance theoretical scholarship that can be useful in understanding class and gender oppression as well.

The subject of social movements has been a fertile field that sociologists, social theorists and historians have mined for theoretical gold with a few contributions made by anthropologists. The theories of Marx and Engels, Marcel Mauss, Antonio Gramsci and Michael Foucault focus on some aspects of the power of hegemony and how it inspires or dissuades social action. The sociological approach to social movements tended to focus on ideology, rationality, and organization that tended to focus on class and issues pertaining to social status (Johnson 1994:2). This is analysis is pragmatic as it does not take into account the contributions made by culture to social movements. For example, Classical social movement theory, which borrows some of its ideology from Marx and Engels, tends to equate social
movements to group pathology (McAdam 1982:20). Another popular social movement theory, the resource mobilization model, examines the role of organizations on social movements independent of external cultural contributions (Johnson 1994:5).

Historians have examined social movements in the context of people, places, and events. They examine the economic, structural, and political elements that contributed to past social movements comparatively throughout time. Although economics, social structure, and political organization are some components of culture, the historical approach with its emphasis on the interpretation of past events can be challenging when interpreting how human agency influenced those structures to create meaning and knowledge about the world in which people lived.

One novel approach to the analysis of social movements is the new social movement paradigm. Considered a paradigm rather than a theory, new social movement (NSM) is viewed primarily through other grand theories to explore modern day social phenomena. NSM explores the various ways that marginalized and disparate populations form grassroots networks that challenge hegemony in the era of neo-capitalism. However, the multifaceted issues African Americans face pre-dates the new era of capitalism and has deeper sociocultural roots.

1.4 Òyötùnjí Village as a microcosm of African Identity

My research focused on Òyötùnjí Village as a microcosm of African identity. Òyötùnjí Village served as an ideal location in which my research questions could be explored because the residents consciously re-made their environment and religion, as well as their national and
cultural identities. Located in Beaufort, South Carolina, Òyötùnjí Village is a modern day intentional community forged in the image of the 16th century Oyo State in Nigeria. Using early anthropological accounts of Oyo State as well as information from transmigrant Nigerian students, the founders of Òyötùnjí Village replicated every aspect of the government, religion, and culture (Clarke 2004:186; Hunt 1979: 53; Laitin 1986: 7). This was done as an attempt to reclaim their African identity, an identity cultural nationalists felt was compromised by those in power during the transatlantic slave trade and antebellum South who decided what language, religion and culture that the Africans could practice (Blassingame 1972: 35). As a result, there has been an ongoing debate in the United States concerning the level of African cultural retention and the amount American enculturation in regards to enslaved Africans in America (Holloway 2005:3). Anthropologists, sociologists, historians and the like, have all tried to refute or prove theories concerning African American identity and the influences on it (Holloway 2005:3). Examining the residents of Òyötùnjí Village and the scholarship in this area will enable me to examine how social, political and cultural identities are constructed and how those identities contribute to social movements.

The social construction of identity has always intrigued the anthropologist. In the groundbreaking book, *Patterns of Culture* (1934), Ruth Benedict argues that socialization creates distinct personality patterns that are repetitive. Although her use of the concepts of personality types is pragmatic as it tends to simplify the complex diversity of various cultural groups, Benedict’s analysis on the ways in which culture is repeated based on rewards is worth noting. Personality types influence their society as society rewards behavior that is beneficial while rejecting behavior that is detrimental (Benedict 1934: 255). Benedict also posits that
culture is the glue to holds society together. She states, “What really bind men together is their culture, - the ideas, and the standards they have in common” (Benedict 1934: 16). What was the glue that held African Americans together? Was it the shared experience of forced labor? What ideals and standards do they have in common? How does this translate into power and identity? Finally, how are these relationships of identity and power framed within the context of globalism and globalization?

The conceptualization and construction of Òyọtùunjí Village is possible because of globalization and globalism. Globalism is a process of creating one continuous economic market, open to players from various nations. Globalism allows industrialized nations to effect international policy that benefits their interests. This “dominant ideological paradigm of liberal economy and politics” combined with “adoption of market economy and principles” are the two main signifiers of globalism (Skilas 2010: 489). Whereas globalism is a process, globalization is as an act. Globalism occurs when ‘countries expand their borders” to other countries for importation and exportation of goods and services. As a result, the influx of transmigrational workers, foreign investors and the host country cultures and ideologies are constantly merging and diverging (Pourhassan 2011:1546).

David Laitin argues, in *Hegemony and Culture*, that globalism is not a new phenomenon. He posits the Yoruba people of Nigeria were an amalgamation of several Nigerian ethnic groups who have interacted with other ethnic groups through trade, war, and geographical proximity and disputes that there was a group called the Yoruba before Samuel Johnson asserted the image of a unified Yoruba nation (Laitin 1986:7). In her research, anthropologist
Kamari Clarke notes globalization and globalism inspires two main narratives associated with Black Nationalist ideology and identity. The ‘slave narrative’ and the ‘African Nobility’ narrative are rooted in the involuntary migration of Africans to America and are fundamental to the Black Nationalist identity (Clarke 2006:133). The process of knowledge production, which occurs because of globalization, allows for the rapid dispersal of knowledge and information from country to country (Clarke 2004:2). Globalism also fosters transnationalism as workers travel from country to country looking for work in this flexible neo-liberal economy.

Technology, the ease of travel, and migrant workers with economic and familial ties to their countries of origin contribute to large transnational communities (Glick-Schiller 1995). Transmigrations foster transnationalism because migrant workers still connected to their homeland interact with members of their host country, facilitating cultural diffusion (Glick-Schiller 1995). The availability of information allows for the dissemination of ideas, practices, and knowledge (Clarke 2004:7). This creates a mobile nation in which borders are not defined as clearly as they had been in the past.

1.5 Identity as Power

The Yoruba people of Nigeria associate personal power with a chi like force called Àṣẹ. For them and for some African Americans who identify with Yoruba ideologies, Àṣẹ is personal power. It is an identity. It is destiny. All rolled into one. Àṣẹ is the ability to enact change through personal power (Barnes 2008:181), a Yoruba form of agency. Using the concept of Àṣẹ as agency to examine Òyọtùnjí Village will provide insight into how reclaiming cultural, political, and social identities fosters what Graeber describes as counterpower, or a power in direct opposition to the state (Graeber 2004:24). He contends counterpower exists in the
“invisible spaces – invisible most of all to power- whence the potential for insurrection and extraordinary social creativity that seem to emerge” (Graeber 2004:35). Àṣe also exists in the form of habitus, Africanisms that exist within African American culture in the form of linguistic retentions, folkloric beliefs, and cultural practices (Herskovits 1941: 20) which enable some African Americans to identify more readily with Africa than America. Therefore, the Yoruba concept, Àṣe will be used to reflect the coupling of cultural power and cultural identity and how that inspires social movement.

1.6 Concepts and Theories

My research examines some aspects of habitus and hegemony by utilizing Yoruba concepts. The issue of African American identity is complex. The forced migration of Africans to the Americas was not confined to Yoruba people of Nigeria. Africans were taken from various parts of the continent, accounting for a diverse mixture of ethnicities. However, for consistency Yoruba terms and concepts will be utilized. The first concept is the Yoruba concept of Ori. For the Yoruba, the meaning of Ori has a multiplicity of meanings. But for our purposes here, I will incorporate the metaphysical meaning of Ori which centers around the head as a site for spiritual reproduction and personal life source. Building on the ideology of the New Social Movement (NSM) paradigm, I examine the ways in which imagined shared identity contributes to collective identity. In addition using my concept of Bàrakú Ori or habits of the head, I explore the ways in which group members self identify and connect based on symbols, values, beliefs, and meanings that are one aspect of social movement theory (Johnson 1994:7). Bàrakú Ori will also be applied to illustrate the “culture of resistance” within the Long Civil Rights movement.
thesis (LCRM) that I propose occurs because of the intergeneration meta-dialogues that occur in regards to social equity for African Americans.

One of the most insightful Italian activist scholars of the twentieth century, Antonio Gramsci’s ideas has inspired intellectuals across the disciplines to explore and explain various forms of oppression. In his seminal work, *The Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci explores various topics from civil society to folklore in popular songs (Forgacs and Nowell-Smith 1985). He observed many aspects of society and analyzed the complex relationships that helped to keep society functioning. The concept of hegemony has been used to describe everything from environmental degradation to mate selection. That is not to say that the concept is overused and irrelevant. In this thesis I will use the concept of hegemony here will be used two fold. First, I will explore the impact of hegemony expressed as institutionalized racism on African Americans feelings of liminality. In this sense, I will explore the concept of cultural tethering. The second I will examine is the impact of personal empowerment expressed as a social movement’s on hegemony.

I will utilize the Yoruba concept of Ase to describe how personal power and identity are inter-related. Àṣe, according to Yoruba belief, is the general accumulation of personal and filial power. Àṣe can be seen as personal will, or the power to effect personal, spiritual, community, and social change. Àṣe theory will explore the how the exclusion of African Americans from mainstream American society forced them into a liminal space and this how liminality contributed to the development cultural tethering. Through the process of cultural tethering, African Americans reconstruct their identity to break “free” of their docile bodies and exert
power. In this way, the Black Power movement for African Americans was in fact a way to reclaim *black power*.

Chapter two’s literary review explores the making and unmaking of identity through various disciplines. I explore the ways in which various scholars have examined iniquitous power by exploring the construction of social, political, and cultural identities. This chapter also investigates the ways in which the construction and destruction of identity can be a tool of empowerment or disempowerment. Utilizing the “Rest of culture” framework to unite the concepts of social movements and identity, chapter three investigates the concept of what societal forces contributed to the development of Òyötùnjí Village. When people are alienated from their culture, how does that contribute to the continuation of hegemony? Understanding this question can prove useful in understanding the conception of national identity and statehood (with emphasis on sustainability). Chapter three will also address some of the issues that developed at Òyötùnjí Village as a result of structural, environmental, political, and institutional racism. Bárakú Ori, or habits of the head, is Bourdieu’s “dispositions” concept couched in the Yoruba concept of Ori. By examining narratives and intergenerational metacommunications in tandem with the long civil rights movement thesis, chapter four unpacks how personal power expressed as freedom has been articulated intergenerationally. Continuing with the Yoruba conceptual ideology, Ase Theory delves into cultural motivations for social movement participation. Chapter six explores the impact of globalization on the development of the Yoruba religion. It also details the far-reaching consequences of globalization on the core and periphery areas and how that creates individualized spirituality. Chapter six also unpacks the impact of globalization and globalism details the development of modern schemas overlaid
with traditional schemas at Òyọtúnjí village. Finally, Chapter seven investigates the powerful effects of globalism on peripheral areas and cultures economies and how people adapt to survive. Chapter seven also explores how bounded identities form in boundless spaces. We discuss to what extent these identities influence and are influenced by the process of globalization and globalism. In addition, how does the concept of identity and power contribute to social movements and acts of resistance to oppression.

1.7 Methods

One of the main components of ethnography is spending time with the people you would like to learn more about. I visited Òyọtúnjí Village on three occasions during 2011 and 2012 in various capacities. The first visit was undertaken in May 2011 with my family while I was still exploring the impact of cultural tourism. During this first visit, we took the cultural tour of Òyọtúnjí Village. I observed and took notes as members of my family and other tourist asked questions. I observed the questions. I returned later that month for the Odun Egungun festival. Again, I talked to tourists, Ifa practitioners and Òyọtúnjí residents. In May 2012, I returned for the Osun festival. My frequent visits to the village enabled me to meet and interview Ifa adherents outside the context of Òyọtúnjí village. These conversations were instrumental to my understanding the interworking of power, culture, and identity. I also spent extensive time in Tallahassee, Florida with former Òyọtúnjí residents, Ifa, Santeria, and Akan practitioners attending health workshops, rituals, dance practices, and a youth meetings.

Understanding the intersectionality of power, culture, nationhood, and identity is no small task. It is a complicated discussion with multiple perspectives, players, and approaches. However, the approach and analysis does not need to be unnecessarily complicated. One of the
easiest ways to learn about someone or something is direct engagement. This direct engagement can take the form of unstructured and semi-structured interviews. This approach is useful because it allows interlocutors to open up and talk about what is important to them, which is the basis of ethnographic interviewing (Bernard 2006:211). I conducted semi-structured, structured and informal interviews over several months and across several states.

1.8 Ethics

One of the challenges in working with people with divergent beliefs is the ability to suspend your personal reality enough to be receptive to the alternate reality of another. Although I am an African American, my personal beliefs, upbringing and ideology can influence the ways in which I interpret the information to create an ‘exoticized other’. The problem of ‘otherness’ can occur when the researcher does not feel a connection or bond with the interlocutors (Harrison 2010:9). Reflexive participant observation will limit that possibility by forcing a close examination of self as well as other (D’Amico-Samuels 2010: 76). Initially, I imagined the gender and class hierarchy embedded deeply in the socio-cultural fabric of Òyötünji Village would limit access to information, people, and places. However, most participants were eager and willing to talk about the Village.

1.9 Limitations

Although the residents of Òyötünji Village have shown enthusiasm for this project, I can identify time as a broad limitation that affected several areas. Beaufort, South Carolina is a four-hour drive from Atlanta, Georgia. Collecting the data from the residents of Òyötünji Village took place on site. Therefore, time as a general limitation compromises some aspects of the overall research plan. In addition, many of the founders lived in different states. In one instance I had
to travel to Tallahassee, Florida to meet with one of the original members of the Yoruba Temple of New York (a precursor to Òyötünjí Village. I found former residents and founders in Texas, Virginia, New York, and Ohio, just to name a few places. As a result, most of my interviews were over the phone.

This project, originally designed to take place over a ten-month period, but because of Institutional Review Board glitches, took place over the span of three months. Since the height of their tourist season is during the spring and summer months. I was severely limited in participant observation during the time of what would have been the peak tourist and festival months. Time constraints limited the exploration of topics that may present themselves during my analysis. Historical narratives of Òyötünjí residents that were collected by Kenja McCray during an extended stay at Òyötünjí Village in 1999 and 2000 were utilized as ethnographic narratives an analyzed in the context of anthropological framework.

1.10 Future implications and applications

The world is constantly changing. Infusion and diffusion of cultures are occurring simultaneously, creating a paradoxical mix of autonomy and allegiance. The non-localization of group identity creates a special challenge for the anthropologist, who is used to groups that were “tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically self-conscious and culturally homogeneous” (Appadurai 1997: 49). The knowledge of how groups self-identify will be useful in understanding how we see ourselves and how we see others as social, political, and cultural selves. This understanding is crucial to the elevation of the perception of the ‘other’ and could nurture cultural sensitivity and acceptance in the way D’Amico posits: “…to alter the global balance of power responsible for …poverty and oppression” (D’Amico 2010:83).
Decentralization, which is a corollary to globalization, creates inequitable distribution of power which affect disparate populations and classes globally. Öyötünjí Village can help illustrate how cultural, social, political and class alienation fosters social movements. Analysis can shed light on why some members of society want to diverge in the context of power relationships. This understanding can allow for the creation of a space that inspires cultures to converge on a plane where each cultural has an equal footing. This is especially salient in light of recent social movements in Libya, Egypt, and Occupy Wall Street here in the United States.

Research of Öyötünjí Village is instrumental to perceiving how identity and power aids in the construction of cultural selves. Careful exploration of Öyötünjí Village can also facilitate the understanding of how culturally constructed social movements inspire and motivate people to participate. Finally, Öyötünjí Village can provide insight into the impact that globalization and globalism has had community on formation, allegiance, and solidarity. Understanding the nexus between these forces creates a more concrete understanding of how globalism continues to grow and create global citizens.
“A child who knows how to wash his hands will keep company with the elders”

CHAPTER 2
IDENTITY AND POWER
LITERATURE REVIEW

“The bigger transition was to learn their (Öyötünji’s) customs. They tried to incorporate a lot of what you would call ‘traditional Yoruba’ customs. For instance, in the village in the village and Obalae Olumina’s compound, you do things like dobale, which is to lean down and tap the ground, put your head on the ground. Basically, like you would see in Asian cultures when people bow. You have to lightly touch the ground of people who were superior to you, in this kind of hierarchal setting. “ ---- Titilayo

2.1 Making the Yoruba Identity

It is nearly impossible to find any quintessential text on the Yoruba before 1800, as the collection of people who are now referred to as the Yoruba did not identify themselves as such. Although distinct cultural groupings existed along the eastward bend of the Niger River, Yoruba as a cultural identity would be one that would be forged by Muslim cultural assaults, colonial conflict and destabilization and the rise and fall of many West African empires. Until a former slave turned Christian wrote one of the first detailed accounts of Nigeria, the group of people, who are now identified as Yoruba, did not exist as a collective group. Samuel Crowther succeed in making the Yoruba a cohesive and unified group when he published the first history of Yourubaland in 1843 (Clarke 2004:170). Applying the oral histories of the then descendants of Òduduwa, Crowther helped craft the ethnic group that would become known as Yoruba. Although Crowther was from what is now known as Sierra Leone, he was also one of the major revolutionizing forces behind the development of a Yoruba orthography, which spurred the
standardization of the Yoruba language. The written orthography of descendants of Òdudùwà made a unified identity that was solidified by the language.

The creation of a unified language is one of the first steps in creating imagined nations. Imagined in the sense that common language and cultural practices affirm your identification with a specific group. The descendants of Òdudùwà recognized this linguistic connection, but each city-kingdom had their own myth of origins and independent rulers (Latin 1986:110). In *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, E. J. Hobsbawm theorizes that nationalism was epiphenomenal to the development of unified language. Although *Nations* historicalizes political evolution and identity through an analysis of Eastern Europe, his notions on identity construction within the context of nationbuilding could be useful when allied to the early formation of the Yoruba nation as well as Òyötùnjí Village. Benedict Anderson also cited the creation of a common language with the formation of a national identity. He credits the development of a unified language, a comprehensive orthography, as one of the inspirations to national consciousness (Anderson 1983: 45).

This form of cultural and social empowerment has been linked to beginning nationalism by scholars such as Hobsbawm and Anderson, who argue that communities and nations are a product of imaginations. In his tome, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson argues that the developments of nations are “distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (Anderson 1993:6). For David Graeber, the development of nations has traveled along the road of anarchist musings. He equates nationalism with revolution and defines it as:
‘...a matter of people resisting some form of power identified as oppressive, identifying some key aspect of that power as the source of what is fundamentally objectionable about it, and then trying to get rid of one’s oppressor in such a way as to eliminate that sort of power completely from daily life. (Graeber 2004:33).

2.2 The social and cultural construction of Yoruba identity

In this sense, one can examine how identity is made within the context of social, political, and cultural frameworks. How do the ways in which people perceive and are perceived constitute the construction of identity? How does the loss or reclamation of social, political and/or cultural identity empower its constituents? How does individual ‘power’ identity translate into a national identity? Social movement theories facilitate the understanding underlying social and political factors that lead to collective action. I find the resource mobilization model to be practically applicable to the residents of Òyötünji Village to help with understanding the circumstances that inspired the concept. The resource mobilization model suggests that African American used existing networks available to African Americans to counter hegemonic systems (Sales 1994:42). The newly founded Yoruba community and identity used the pre-existing Santeria religion as a template for Orisha-Vodou worship. The construction of neo-syncratic Yoruba identity was made possible through the “human resource” of the Nigerians living in Harlem who helped to reconstruct the missing pieces of Yoruba worship. In addition, the Yoruba movement utilized the resources from cultural nationalist who were leaving various nationalist organization for one reason or another.

In addition to commonality of language, these Niger-Congo speakers had a common myth of origin as progeny of Òduduwa who created the world out of chaos. The children of
Óduduwa are noted to have traveled in and out of their ancestral city, conquering distant lands while assimilating the culture of the conquered, introducing only the Yoruba iconography and in some cases theocracy (Afolayan 2004:33). Ile-Ife, one of the first kingdoms associated with the Yoruba, set the stage for a Yoruba theocracy that would later come to identify children of Óduduwa. The “ade-leke” (beaded crown), egbe imule (secret societies) and spacial organization of palaces and villages are the lasting legacies that the descendants of Óduduwa made in the form of a material culture to distinguish themselves from groups that were incorporated into the fold. These material aspects of culture were so distinctive, it continues to be associated with the Ile-Ife influence on Yoruba iconography (Afolayan 2004:33).

The visual culture of the Yorubas intrigued early anthropologists; as a result, the Yoruba became one of the most widely researched and written about nations in West Africa, further uniting the descendants of Óduduwa as one group. For example, John Olawumni pens one of the most popular books that promoted the group of people living in Oyo as a homogenous group, renamed the Yoruba in 1897. His book, along with Samuel Johnson’s History of the Yorubas (1897) would be the primary source of information for academics and nonacademics alike. William Bascom was one such scholar who was inspired by Johnson. Bascom’s tome, The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria (1984) proved useful for many other scholars gathering information of the Yoruba from an anthropological perspective. In these books, the story of the Yoruba as offspring of Óduduwa is repeated further concretizing the Yoruba imagined space and connectivity.
In analyzing the various ways in which the boundaries and borders have changed in Africa, Achille Mbembe mentions the importance of “calculability”, “spatiality”, and “temporality” in understanding how borders are defined and created in Africa (Mdembe 2001:24). We see that the children of Òduduwa occupied a particular temporal and spatial place in the development of early Niger River economy. They existed temporally because they (as heirs of Òduduwa) have always existed, since the beginning of time. They existed spatially because they are noted as occupying a particular space around the Niger River. The commonality of a fixed ancestry helped to create a group of people that although their mythical historicism united them were an amalgamation of divergent groups bound together in an imagined nation. This imagined space is often one wrought with the complexities of cultural flow and power.

The Yoruba traced their connectivity to a common ancestor and a commonplace, self-identification based on filial ties and not national ties. This filial identity was also useful in creating a cosmology and political system that often adjusted to different cultural settings. Since their cultural core was stable, when they met with other culturally stable communities, genuine connections were formed creating other hybrid cultures, sometimes with predominantly Yoruba components. The Yoruba proverb, “A child who knows how to wash his hands will eat with the elders,” encapsulates quite succinctly the Yoruba ethos. This idiom reflects the belief that strong filial connections, adherence to ancestral and local traditions in accordance with remembrance of mythical history will endow the Òduduwa’s children with Àṣe as they spread throughout the various regions through the natural migratory process; or later with the forced migration imposed by the transatlantic slave trade. The global exchange of
goods, services, and ideas is not a new phenomenon, as Eric Wolf has posited in his influential work *Europe and the People without History* (1982). With their exploration along the Niger river and beyond to the Middle East and Egypt, globalization and cultural bonding has long been the order of the day for the Yoruba (Laitin 1986).

The contraction and expansion experienced by the children of Òduduwa can be understood as a form of globalization; in as much they exchanged ideas, religious beliefs, food, and dress as Òduduwa’s progeny traveled back and forth to neighboring kingdoms. Ideology, cosmology, and worldviews were fluid and they viewed some of the other cultures that they came into contact with as family as well (Brandon 1997). The topic of globalization and the Yoruba people is not a new one. In fact, Yoruba belief and cultural dissemination within the context of globalization has been explored by authors Toyin Falola, Ann Genova, Jacob K. Olupona and Terry Rey. Olupona and Rey’s *Orisa Devotion as World Religion: The Globalization of Yoruba Religious Culture* (2008) offers a diverse set of voices exploring complex themes of globalization throughout Yoruba history up to the influence of the Internet in the dispersal of Yoruba culture. *Orisa Yoruba Gods and Spiritual Identity in Africa and the Diaspora* (2005), edited by Falola and Genova theorizes the effect of diasporic spiritual identities on culture, memory, and identity. Finally, *Santeria from Africa to the New World: The Dead Sell Memories* (1997) by George Brandon investigates the development of Yoruba religion within the context of the development of Santeria. He examines the routes of the tradition, charts the evolution of Yoruba religion in conjunction with Black Nationalism as well as providing a richly detailed historical account of cultural exchange, infusion and diffusion.
2.3 The making and unmaking of African American Identity

One cannot begin to have an honest dialogue concerning African American identity without first considering the ways in which they were affected by their forced migration to the Americas in the form of the Transatlantic slave trade. Africans were systematically stripped of their identity, language, and material culture in a process called ‘seasoning’ (Gomez 1998:168). This was in an effort to create what Michael Foucault terms ‘docile body’ (Foucault 1977). The enslaved African’s time was scrutinized and allocated, their activities were heavily monitored, and their bodies did not belong to themselves (Foucault 1997). The concept of docile bodies can be used to analyze the ways in which institutions developed to help ensure power over the African’s body. Plantation owners of the antebellum south created intuitions that executed and maintained power over the enslaved African’s body creating bodies that are still battle sites for the contention of power.

The fluidity and malleability of West African culture enabled some bits and pieces of ideology, worldview, language, and religion from the various ethnic groups to survive the seasoning process. These Africanisms can be seen as one of the primary reasons African American’s experience ‘cultural tethering’ towards Africa. John Blassingame’s The Slave Community (1972) and Africanisms in American Culture (1990) edited by Joseph Holloway both explore the life of enslaved Africans in the antebellum South and researches the concepts of Africanisms first posited by Herskovits in Myth of the Negro Past (1958). These authors highlight the complexity and adaptability of African/African American cultural concepts and the Africanisms that exist in African American culture.
2.4 The re-making through cultural connection

Although African Americans were not completely disconnected from African culture, their identity was compromised. The loss of identity is in a sense the loss of power. Some Nigerian descendants in America could no longer remembered Àše, no longer remember personal power. However, the concepts of Àše did not disappear but resurfaced in African American traditional folk belief. The folk beliefs and practices constantly reproduce themselves even though the original meaning and purpose are no longer known. In this sense, Africanisms or traditional folk beliefs can viewed through Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, or as Bourdieu posits, “The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions” (Bourdieu 1980:53).

These common cultural practices and beliefs tie members of the African American community together in much of the same way as the children of Òduduwa were united based on filial identity. Cultural tethering, the simultaneous of connection, and the assertion of independence is the continuation of the West African concept of the social bond.

Pierre Bourdieu contends there are aspects of our culture we reproduce unknowingly through cultural conditioning. He called this the habitus (Bourdieu 1980:53). This replication of manners, behaviors, and personality types plays an important role in enculturation. Habitus and personality type will be analyzed in relation to power and identity to access what unconscious habits were passed down and how those habits empowered or disempowered African Americans culturally. Melville Herskovits provides a substantial argument for a linkage between African American folkloric beliefs and African American cultural practices. As one of the first scholars to posit the concept of Africanisms (Holloway 2005:3), Herskovits states that
humans are carriers of culture; relocation does not erase cultural beliefs and the use of comparative analysis will expose the connections (Herskovits 1941:9). I will employ the technique of comparative analysis to examine the synthesis of African American traditional folk belief and Yoruba religious beliefs in an effort to understand how cultural domination and alienation can contribute to disempowerment. Residents of Òyọtúnjí Village believe that replacing their American culture for an African one would empower the residents individually as well as collectively (McCray 2002:91). Òyọtúnjí Village members re-imagined their cultural, social and political identities by taking African names, donning African attire, speaking Yoruba, and practicing Yoruba religion as a way of ‘reclaiming’ their African identity (Hunt 1979:1; McCray 2002: 59), by what Clarke calls ‘performing identity’ (Clarke 2004:224).

2.5 Cultural Tethering and Social Movements

Africans in America have always suffered from paradoxical spatiality in the United States. They were included and excluded in American society simultaneously, resulting in a group of people that exist on the periphery. This feeling of liminality created a desire for a space that fostered acceptance and belonging. Victor W. Turner’s concepts of liminality and communitas speaks to the amorphous existence many enslaved African Americans and their descendants experience; as they were in a space that was “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, customs, convention and ceremonial” (Turner 1969:81). This nebulous identity further compromised the early African American’s Àṣe that led to what historian Robin Kelly attributes as Black exodus.

Kelly’s Freedom Dreams is an historical analysis of African American’s conceptualized freedom in the United States. His chapter, ‘Dreams of the New Land’ lays a historical
foundation of African American maroonage within the context of various historical organizations and intellectual scholars. Kelly’s analysis is critical, as it connects preceding ideologies with contemporary ones. Eugene Genovese’s tome, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1974) may be utilized in the study of identity, as he gives an equitable account of how the enslaved and the enslavers viewed themselves. However, he also provides detailed records and narratives from enslaved Africans articulating a desire for a space of their own. The different methods that were utilized as an attempt to gain this space will be drawn from *The Political Process and the Development of the Black Insurgency, 1930 -1970* by Doug McAdam.

Although McAdam tends to equate social movements as part and parcel of a collective pathology, his contribution to the rise and decline of black protest movements can be useful in creating a ‘political process model’ specific to the rise and decline of Òyọtùnjí Village membership. Finally, Akinyele Umoja’s contribution, *Searching for a Place: Nationalism, Separatism and Pan Africanism* links nationalist thought and the formation of Òyọtùnjí Village. In his article, he explores the interpretations of nationalist scholarship and the effects of those interpretations on how the dialogue of Black Nationalism is articulated through various paradigms. Umoja’s exploration of the historiographies couched in the rhetoric of Liberal interpretations and Black Nationalist sympathizers contextualizes the African American maroon ideology and explores that connection to the Republic of New Africa, for which Òyọtùnjí Village was first conceptualized.
South Carolina has a long history of maroonage activity dating back the early 1600s as a response to unique historical, geographical, and demographic elements (Lockley 2009:128). As a result, creating an independent intentional community in South Carolina did not seem like an unlikely idea. Members of Òyötünjí responded to the perceived status inconsistency by creating a nation within a nation. They sought inspiration from Nigeria, a country with which the residents felt a cultural affinity (Hunt 1974:36). Their vision was not unique; as Robin Kelly has noted, many African Americans have dreamt of an Afrotopia. This was conceptualized as a place where “‘black people’ exercised power, possessed essential knowledge, educated the West, built monuments, slept under the stars on the banks of the Nile, and never had to worry about the police or poverty or white people questioning our intelligence” (Kelly 2004:15).

Indeed, since Africans have landed in America, there has been a drive to forge their own identity in their own spaces. Black Power activist scholar, Akinyele Umoja states that there have been “indications of black advocacy and aspiration for political self-determination, independent statehood, and a developing national consciousness in every period of the Black Experience in the United States” (Umoja 2005:531).

Maroon communities are often classified as descendant communities, the members of Òyötünjí Village consider their community a maroon community consistent with their nationalist leanings (Hunt 1979:35). *I Sought My Brother: an Afro American Reunion* written by a neurobiologist, gives a very personal account of the socio-political organization of maroons in Suriname and explores their desire to reconstruct a society in which they could reproduce their traditional culture. The maroon community in this sense is coupled with border, borderlessness, and transnationalism. Maroon communities may be viewed as a transnational
Daphne Berdahl theorizes border zones and identity construction in her work *Where the World Ended: Re-unification and Identity in the German Borderland*. She states, as one of her main goals to explore “...border zones- both real and imagined- in a place where tangible, indeed concrete borders have been a powerful presence” (Berdahl 1999:8). Her use of border zones, boundlessness, and identity can also be applied to the construction of maroon communities (including Òyötünjí Village) which create their own self-imposed borders within the context of a broader society with more concrete borders. This separation is symbolic as the communities are still intertwined and function within the larger political structure, causing structural strain affecting the sustainability of the community.

Exploring spatial and temporal boundaries in relation to identity formation in *Where the World Ended*, Daphne Berdahl explores how boundaries shape culture and social life by effectively spatially ordering communities (Berdahl 1999:5). This reinforces the idea posited by Mark Gibson that the ways in which culture has been articulated in the past is changing because of boundless communities. According to Mark Gibson, the idea of ‘culture’ has been displaced by power and all of its implications (Gibson 2007: 2). Òyötünjí Village has created an anachronistic and exotic space in one of the most industrialized countries in the world. Much in the same vein of Black nationalist groups like the Nation of Islam and Republic of New Africa, this intentional community rejects what they consider to be western identities and ideology in favor of more traditional ones. The members of Òyötünjí Village reject modernity, western values, and government and create an alternative reality within self-imposed borders. Yet, it connects itself symbolically, culturally, and socially with a place millions of miles and thousands of years away. Understanding the process of imagined statehood sparked by Àše can
further the analysis of the effects of globalization, in the form of deterritorialization, on identity and personal power.

Although Òyötünjí Villagers perceive themselves within the context of a maroon community, the fact that it is a replication of Oyo State makes it more like an intentional community. Maroon communities are classified by their relative isolation, Oyotunji Village is secluded but not isolated. In addition, maroon communities are generational communities of people who escaped from chattel slavery. Although many residents claim they were mental slaves, they could not claim the more tangible aspect that was a part of chattel slavery. However, Òyötünjí Village suffered from both de facto and de jure racism and it provided outside structural challenges to an already challenged project. As a result, there were limitations imposed upon the community that compromised its sustainability. This raises salient questions in regards to the theoretical and practical wielding of power.

What happens when the community is no longer able to provide for the citizens of that area? How can the lifestyle be maintained in the face of collapse with no means of production and the only thing that can be reproduced is culture? The concept of cultural tourism as a form of income for disparate areas is a relatively new field of study. Edward Brunner has produced one of the leading ethnographies in cultural tourism in a number of locations across the globe. He examines how various actors in the cultural tourism field create a relationship based on perceptions and deceptions in his book, Culture on Tour: Ethnographies of Travel. His section on “Story Telling Rights” could provide a backdrop for Yoruba belief within the context of globalism and globalization. Bella Dicks’ Culture on Display: The Production of Contemporary Visibility
questions ethnicity, identity, authenticity and the other within in her chapter entitled ‘Out of the Glass’. Her observations on how authenticity and poverty are valued as a marker of ethnic cultures are worth noting.

Literature on Òyötùnjí Village is sparse and firsthand accounts from original members are virtually nonexistent. The three main tomes that will be used, are: Maxine Clarke’s *Mapping Yoruba Networks: Power and Agency in the Making of Transnational Communities; Òyötùnjí Village: The Yoruba Movement in America* by Carl M. Hunt; and *Black Gods, Black Power: Life at Òyötùnjí Village 1970-1990* by Georgia State PhD Candidate Kenja R. McCray. Hunt and McCray’s works come from the discipline of history and as such, give detailed analysis of the socio-political factors surrounding the development of Òyötùnjí Village. Hunt’s book is particularly valuable as it names some of the founding members of Òyötùnjí Village who are leaders in the Yoruba community in Atlanta. In addition, Hunt documents the difficulties and tragedies surrounding Òyötùnjí. McCray offers a much more contemporary analysis of Òyötùnjí Village. Her use of oral history, videotapes, and archival records helps to place Òyötùnjí Village on ‘the Black Nationalist continuum’ (McCray 2002:1).

Although both McCray’s and Hunt’s accounts offer rich and vivid histories, they are studies more concerned with the people, places, and things involved. Clarke’s *Mapping Yoruba Networks* can be used to answer that to an extent, in a sense. This detailed anthropological study and ethnography spanned over a decade and two continents. She lived with the residents of Òyötùnjí Village in Beaufort, South Carolina and accompanied the members of Òyötùnjí Village when they visited Nigeria. Clarke explores the cultural implications of the
reconstruction and reproduction of Yoruba culture in the framework of globalization and power. She deconstructs the rituals, prayers and language in an effort to understand how ‘deterritorialized institutions of knowledge and power link spatially disparate people’ (Clarke 2004:21). She also explores notions of identity, personhood, and nationhood against the backdrop of transnationalism. However, Clarke’s main weakness is that she loses sight Òyötùnjí of as a part of an ongoing ideological debate and cultural ideal among African Americans seeking to reclaim both identity and power. She also demonstrates marginal understanding of Yoruba cosmology that translates as inability to explore more than a superficial level in the theological beliefs of both the Yoruba and members of Òyötùnjí Village. In my study, I hope to fill some of the gaps left by previous researchers at Òyötùnjí Village.
It is a cold night in February, and I am frantically running through Wal-mart looking for some iced tea and Pepsi cola. I am still reeling from the hectic past three weeks of traveling. Three weeks ago, I was in Washington, DC. Two weeks ago, I was in Beaufort, South Carolina. Now I am in Tallahassee, Florida. Well, I am not exactly in Tallahassee. I am in Cedar Grove, Florida. I am on my way to visit one of the early residents of Òyötùnjí Village, Chief Adebesi and to observe a Yoruba ritual. As is customary, I was charged to bring something. Some type of offering to the shrine house, to the elders, to the Orisha. Earlier that day, I presented a paper at Florida State University Department of Religion graduate symposium. The symposium ran a little longer than I anticipated and I was desperate to get to the ritual to meet up with my informants. A little over an hour away from Tallahassee, the drive seemed to take forever. I was tired, hungry, and I wanted to go home. I was exhausted from attending the various activities of my informants during the weekend. I was worn out from hanging out with various informants. And frankly, I was tired of asking questions. Does that make me a bad ethnologist or someone who does ethnology badly? I do not know, and I cannot focus on that right now. I have to get some iced tea and Pepsi Cola for my entrance fee to the ritual to ask questions that seems to lead only to more questions. All I can think is, how did it come to this?

My research question sounded simple enough: how does the impact of cultural tourism encourage the confluence of sacred and mundane practices. My method was simple, to work as a cultural heritage worker at Òyötünjí village during the months of May and June. As for data
collection, I was going to interview tourists, workers, and residents of Beaufort, South Carolina. I would leisurely analyze my data between the months of July through December, and begin my write up in January. It was the ideal research process. However, in real life, things are hardly ideal. After an extended delay in acquiring Georgia State University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the height of the tourism season passed. The “living with the natives” part of the process was no longer feasible and I was now working with a severely compromised time line of my original research project. I was back to the drawing board. Since I had already made contact with some interlocutors, I continued to build relationships through conversations and short visits. It is through these conversations and brief visits that a new question emerged. I began to notice most of the conversations with interlocutors revolved around power and identity. I began to wonder how the two are connected, and what that meant for the residents of Òyötünjí Village and African Americans writ large. Armed with four one-gallon containers of sweet ice tea, three bags of popcorn, and three one-liter bottles of Pepsi Cola, I had planned to interview several families participating in the ritual on the five-acre community compound. I drive one and a half hours from Tallahassee to Cedar Grove, Florida to begin to answer my new research question: How does the suppression and reclamation of identity affect hegemonic systems?

3.1 Research Design

I was very much interested in the ways in which cultural nationalists in general (and Òyötünjí Village residents in particular) remade themselves and how the remaking of the self is seen as a form of political insurgency. The more I talked to informants, the more excited I became. I wanted to learn more. I needed to find out how I could get reliable results in the
three months I had left. Given the subjective nature of my research question, I employed a qualitative mixed method approach. This method included unstructured, semi structured and structured interviews, participant observation, and historical narrative analysis to complete a detailed ethnography. Since the population I was exploring was somewhat homogeneous, I used the ex post facto research design method. The ex post facto research design method is employed on a homogeneous population and measures the effects of a major intervention on that population (Bernard 2006:124). Working within the parameters of ex post facto, I explore some of the elements that contributed to the making and unmaking of African American identity and the impact that has on African American communities. The ex post facto research design is enhanced by the qualitative and mixed method approach that I believed would answer my research question.

For this study, I incorporated past and present residents of Òyọtùnjí Village, as well as practitioners who have had services performed at the Village. The ten interlocutors were between the ages of twenty to seventy years old. I was interested in exploring two broad categories of individuals: present and former residents and Ifa practitioners. The largest population for my survey were Yoruba/Ifa adherents. I chose a small target population of approximately ten interlocutors for one on one semi structured interviews as well as one focus group meeting. Cultural domain analysis allows an investigator to understand how groups of people’s thoughts align collectively and is an excellent tool to help deconstruct cognitive concepts and conceptual ideas and was used to get a broad understanding of Yoruba adherents conceptions of identity and power (Bernard 2006:299). Sentence framing is a form of cultural domain analysis in which interlocutors have to complete the sentence, which would elicit
subconscious thoughts and beliefs that will flesh out the Meta conversations in relation to identity and power (Bernard 2006:299).

The cultural, social, and political identities of the residents of Òyọtùnjí Village and Yoruba practitioners are another aspect to explore. Personal narratives and ethnographies are useful in understanding the motivation behind nationalism, cultural affinity, and collective identity. Personal narratives and in-depth ethnographic descriptions taken during my two trips to Òyọtùnjí Village helped to ascertain identity construction and conceptions of power on a micro scale. Personal narratives were also helpful in determining views on intellectual property rights, religious performances, and cultural heritage tourism to understand culture as a commodity. Participant observation, both direct and indirect, provided an insider’s view of life in Òyọtùnjí Village in the twenty first century.

3.2 Mixed Methods

Since the tourism season was over, and the number of residents actually living in the village has decreased significantly, I turned to Facebook in an effort to contact past, present, seasonal residents of Òyọtùnjí village. One interlocutor suggested I join the Yoruba study group. In an effort to avoid an ethical conundrum, I identified myself as an anthropology student conducting research on power and identity. Immediately after that post, I received some responses. Some of the feedback was encouraging, lauding the potential that such a study could bring. While others questioned my anthropology background and castigated me for continuing in what they saw as a tradition of manipulation and control. However, two weeks later I was emailing and calling a former resident who put me in contact with the current king of Òyọtùnjí village, Oba Adefunmi II. Since Oba Adefunmi II was traveling in Canada, I had to
conduct the interview over the phone. He was my first phone interview. Since many former village residents, cultural tourists and seasonal residents were dispersed throughout the United States, this method became the main method of talking with the interlocutors.

In addition to phone and face to face interviews, I also used the historical narratives collected by African American historian Kenja McCray. McCray interviewed almost a dozen residents from 1999 – 2000. By analyzing the narratives in Black Gods, Black Power: Life at Òyọtùnjí Village 1970-1990, I was able compare and contrast narratives over four decades. I was also able to identify reoccurring themes as well as emergent ones. I began to compare the categories to see how the concept of African-ness was thought about generationally. I began to organize exemplars from my interviews and from reading McCray’s work. As the data emerged, power, oppression, and isolation dominated the narratives.

Finally, I traveled to three states to conduct interviews, participate in activities, and meet former residents, current village attaches, and former clients. The longest of these visits was an entire weekend in Tallahassee, Florida winter of 2012 where I met with a group of families organized around cultural nationalism through a multifaceted adolescent rites of passage program. In addition to the rites program, members identified “traditional African religion” as a unifying factor for their community. Although community members confessed to not knowing their true genealogy, they adapted the culture and religion of the Yoruba, Akan, Afro-Cubans, and Fon. For ethical reasons, this community will be identified as the Kuumba Club. I also made several trips to Sheldon, South Carolina to Òyọtùnjí Village to observe rituals and festivals. I also conducted informal interviews with three cultural tourists and two cultural
tourist workers. The bulk of the interviews were with past and present village residents (three), and clients (seven). Usually I would stay the weekend, but I did not stay on the compound. In addition, I traveled to Virginia to meet with one of the early residents of the village.

3.3 Population and sampling

Ọyọtùnjí Village was an ideal site to explore the unmaking and remaking of African identity because it coincided with the inter-generational freedom narratives that focused on the reclamation of autonomous space. For many participants of the long civil rights movement, Ọyọtùnjí Village was the “forty acres and a mule.” For Yoruba worshipers, Ọyọtùnjí Village was the Promised Land. Moreover, for cultural nationalists, Ọyọtùnjí Village was home. The choice of Ọyọtùnjí Village as a research site was a logical choice to explore the intersectionality of identity and power.

Identifying informants to participate in this task was no easy matter. Many of the original residents of the Village have since dispersed to various parts of the country, making observation difficult at best. In addition, the number of Village residents and clients has decreased significantly since its inception in 1970’s. However, I was able to find nearly one dozen interlocutors located in various parts of the country. I interviewed six men and five women, ranging in age from thirty to seventy. They were from various socio-economic classes and different stages of Ifa worship. All of the men were priests and most of the women were initiated into the house of a particular Orisha. Most of the interlocutors had ties to the South, and all of them lived in the South at one point or other before their encounter with Ọyọtùnjí Village. In addition, all of the interlocutors were involved or participated in some form of cultural nationalism.
3.4 Final analysis

With over twenty-four hours of interviews with interlocutors and close to five hundred hours of participant observation, I began to look for common themes. The most common theme was the remaking and unmaking of African identity. All of the interlocutors believed enslavement of Africans in America was an attempt to “unmake” their cultural identity in order to create a docile servant. They viewed the reclamation or conscious “remaking” of their identity as an act of independence and personal empowerment. I compared these themes with the McCray’s narrative text to cross check for validity and possible confounds. One possible confound was the changes in the cultural milieu as early residents of Òyọtùnjì Village lived in a time where cultural awareness was just blossoming. Information about the history of Africa and African Americans was novel. Many cultural nationalist of the 1960s were trailblazers, introducing African culture and ideology to a population of people. However, by the 1990s, Kwanzaa was a widely celebration cultural holiday. African studies programs could now be found in many colleges and universities. African religion was easily assessable and prevalent. Still, many interviewees still perceived the same cultural isolation and rejection as their predecessors, which was the basis of my theory.

The making and unmaking of identity is an event that can be charted as a marked change in the interlocutor’s life. The ex post facto research design lends well with this approach. Since the time line of the project was altered, structured, semi structured and informal interviews became a major source of learning about the making and unmaking of identity. The ex post facto design was further enhanced by interviews. More often than not, the remaking of identity by African Americans was inspired by collective or individual cultural
nationalism. Òyötünjí Village, which was the ultimate example of “remaking” became the ideal site to explore the topic of identity and power. Meticulous analysis of historical narratives as well as observation and personal interviews helped to check for the ways that interlocutors discussed power. Although some generational confounds occurred, the feelings of isolation and oppression were still present in all the interlocutors. The intergenerational narratives addressed the feelings of isolation with designs of a separate community. This community would be a place where African Americans could find a sense of place and belonging that African Americans did not experience in American society writ large.

After picking up the items, I made a hasty retreat to the pickup point, an old one-pump, dimly lit gas station. It took forty-five minutes to get in contact person. After that, I had to wait another thirty minutes before the guide came to collect me to lead me to the compound. The dark road initiated unwanted images from Steven King novels and added to my uneasiness. However, my uneasiness subsided as soon as we reached the five-acre compound. Unlike Òyötünjí Village, these structures were very modern. The compound consisted of three large ranch styled houses that formed a large loose triangle. The main house, where the rituals are held, was surrounded by a combination of sand and soil. A huge shrine dedicated to Eshu dominated the entrance. Women, Children and men were milling about laughing talking and eating. I had come just in time to see families winding down and getting ready to go home.

Although I had missed the ritual completely, listening and talking with many of the informants recharged my brain. Now I remember what drew me to this project. The desire to understand the relationship between hegemony and cultural identity is a problem that has not
yet been addressed in depth by anthropologist. So, with ice tea in my hands, curiosity in my heart and questions in my head and I set out to explore the reasons behind the cultural movement and the ways in which individual insurgency led to collective change. The next chapter explores some of the challenges with creating a space and place of belonging. *The Rest of Culture* sets the stage for a deeper exploration into Òyọtùnjí Village and the people who helped to create such a cultural milestone. It examines the impact of liminality (in the form of hegemonic systems) on a segment of the African American population. The rest of culture addresses some of the generational confounds and the ways that each generation viewed their identity.
CHAPTER 4
THE REST OF CULTURE

“That concept you talking about (having land) is not a new concept. We were talking about that in the early days, in the forties and fifties. Okay… the first place was called Paige’s Point. That was the beginning of concept of the Yoruba Village came from. From there they moved to Bray’s Island Road. The left there and moved to Sheldon. We got I think between ten to twelve acres of land. Òyötùnjí Village. Òyötùnjí means Oyo rises again or Oyo returns, because Oyo was the political capital for Yoruba people from way way back.” -----Yemi

A colorful rectangular sign appears along U.S. Route 17 in Sheldon, South Carolina. This sign, decorated with raffia and African iconography, reads: Welcome to Òyötùnjí African Village…As seen on TV. Situated just one half mile from the highway on ten acres of land (Clarke 2004:77), Òyötùnjí Village lies nestled among the flora and fauna of the coastal lowlands of South Carolina. Founded in 1970 by Oba Efuntola Oseijeman Adelabu Adefunmi I, Òyötùnjí Village was created as a response to the marginalization perceived by African Americans in the United States. Many of the founders were disillusioned with the treatment of African Americans in the United States and sought to escape the racially charged atmosphere of the late sixties and early seventies. They endeavored to make a place that they could call home. They envisioned a liberated space where they felt they could be truly free (Umoja 2005).

It was a slightly overcast day. The clouds were steely grey and whispered promises of a very wet and stormy afternoon. I turned off route 17 onto Bryant lane. The road was unpaved and filled with holes and large rocks that made my car rock back and forth, like I was on a boat at sea. The trees with thick emerald green leaves swallowed up the road as I drove further along. The Spanish moss that danced off the live oak trees created a sense of other worldly-ness. Scattered signs along the road continued to coax me into this strange land by imparting
soothing messages beckoning the weary traveler. After traveling the one half mile, I arrived at a
massive structure and greeted by a sign that reads: Notice: You are leaving the U.S. You are
entering the Yoruba Kingdom.

Similar to what one might expect while crossing the border to another country, the
unpaved road was littered with signs announcing your “arrival” to the village. After what
seemed like an eternity, I arrived at a massive concrete block gate, with the words Òyötùnjí
Village written in bold burgundy letters. At either side of archway, stood abandoned century
post. I was greeted at the gate by a stately gentleman with long grey locks that cascaded down
his back. His eyes were obscured by oval shaped sunglasses that seemed in stark contrast to
his megawatt white smile. He wore brilliantly colored African with a dominant red and white
motif. His gold earring seemed to twinkle along with what I imagined to be a twinkle in his eyes
as he said. “Don’t worry. I ain’t gonna rain. I am a child of Shango, and I tell you, my father ain’t
coming today. So welcome to Òyötùnjí Village.” That is how my first trip to Òyötùnjí village
began. Our gracious host took the visitors and me on a tour around the village. We were
amazed by the enormous replications of the Benin bronze statues, African huts and numerous
Orisha shrines. Many of the visitors could not believe that a place like this existed, a place that
celebrated the African aesthetic. They could not believe a place created by African Americans
as homage to African ancestry and respite for African Americans was possible.

4.1 Organization and Structure

Òyötùnjí Village is divided into five main districts consisting of shrines, public and private
housing, and market places. (Clarke 2004:82). The five districts are Ìgbálè, Ikabo, Igbóòsa,
Anágó and Àfin and is ruled by an egbe (civic society) or chief (Clarke 2004:82). The largest of
the districts is Aàfin, located in the southeastern part of the compound, it houses the royal compound, Obatala Shrine, the drum house and ancestor shrines. It also houses the Òyó horseman. Like most of the enclosures at Òyọtunjí Village, the Òyó horseman made of concrete made to imitate the look of adobe. The Horseman is located immediately after the entrance gate on the right. According to one informant, the Horseman was once a thriving night club where residents from as far away as Savannah would come and dance the night away to live bands, African drumming and rhythm and blues tunes. Although some of the Oba’s wives houses are located in the Aàfin district, the bulk of their residency is in the Anágó district in the northeastern part of the compound.

The Igbóòsa district, which is located in the southwestern part of the compound, is where the Traders bazaar is located. The Trader’s Bazaar is a quaint courtyard with five African styled storefronts that sell Òyọtunjí and African souvenirs, food, clothing, herbal remedies, and African instruments. On the other side of the Bazaar lies a huge blue stone statue dedicated to the God of the water, Olokun. This twelve-foot statue made in the Benin Bronze Age aesthetic was made entirely by hand by the original founders of the village. The religious procession most led from the Ikabo district pass the Yemonja and Oshun Shrines, through the Igbóòsa district and ended in the court yard at the Aàfin district. The Courtyard where most of the rituals took place was a vast square courtyard flanked by the Royal Academy (the onsite school), Baba Oseijeman’s ancestors shrines, the entrance to the Royal Household and Obatala shrine.
4.2 The Birth of African Identity

It was a celebratory day filled with excitement and joy. People moved around in hurried preparation of the day’s events. Laughter, shouting, and a sprinkling of Yoruba words can be heard among the din. Today was one of the twelve Orisha-Vodoun festivals held annually at Òyòtùnjí Village. Odun Egungun is a festival held in honor of the ancestors. Some visitors had come for the tour, unaware of the ritual, while others came to pay their respects to the ancient ones. Ifa worshipers from as far north as New York and as far south as Florida came to ask for blessings from the ancestors. According to the residents, the festival had no start and end time.

One visiting Orisha practitioner noting my impatience chided me by saying, “See, we are on African time. The Orisha come when they come. They don’t follow no white man’s clock.” When I looked puzzled she said, “Africans are more in tune with nature. When the time is right, the spirit will come.”

So while everyone waited around for the ritual to begin, I walked around the compound talking to visitors and residents. I wanted to know why and how Òyòtùnjí Village came to be. I was curious as to what would motivate people to choose this type of lifestyle. Why was it important for the members of Òyòtùnjí Village to remake and live an antiquated African culture? What does it mean to identify yourself as African. Nigrescence, or rather the process of becoming black, as conceptualized by William Cross, details the various stages that African American identity forms. The Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS) has been used by psychologist since Cross’ introduction of the concept in 1971. Although the CRIS scale details the four stages of African American identity (pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion,
internalization), it is based in psychoanalytic theory and the role of culture and society is deemphasized (Worrell and all 2001:202).

I began to wonder if anthropologist could create a scale similar to CRIS to explore the various ways marginal groups become empowered. Most of the stories followed the same narrative of rejection/isolation, cultural dissonance, enlightenment and finally rebellion that created a desire for an alternative connection. The simultaneous rejection and isolation many African Americans experienced as a result of living in American society created a counter culture based on a extended family mentality. Yemi, a sixty five year old Ifa Priest, served in the United States airforce and fought for the U.S. against Vietnam. However, he was still subjected to the sting of racism and discrimination during and after his service. To Yemi, this created a feeling of exclusion and isolation from the main society. This same discrimination and racialized violence created feelings of solidarity among many African Americans. Yemi, who has been practicing Ifa for over forty years describes the cultural milieu of New York in the late sixties:

After I got out of the air force, I became involved with the nationalist movement... In Brooklyn, New York. My first encounter with the nationalist was the Sons and Daughters of Africa. The pioneer of the group was a old Garveyite who carried on the Garvey vision in the New York area... we got more involved with the culture through Damballah Wedo which was started in New York by Baba Adefunmi Oseijeman... It was a time of resurgence of African people in this country...What many people refer to as “I'm black and I'm proud.” Everybody was in that mode of doing things and rediscovering their African identity and their culture.

Similarly, Obataiye recounts similarly about the relationships between African Americans in United States were solidified into ‘imaginary’ filial ties bounded by exploitation and isolation. “Man it was a different time. It was unreal. New York was a friendly place back then. Everybody was your ‘brother’ or your ‘sister’.” Most of the residents agreed that the
cultural milieu made the idea of Òyòtùnjì Village easier to be excogitated. Òyòtùnjì Village was a purposeful rejection of Western values and lifestyles. It was conceived as a re-creation of Yoruba culture, values and religious practices circa 16th century at the height of the Òyò Empire (Clarke 2004: xxiii). The Adefunmi and the other founders wanted to make a space where these relationships could continue to develop.

4.3 Separate and Equal

The desire to find a place experienced by the founders of Òyòtùnjì village was not a novel idea. In fact, history has shown various separatist movements throughout African American history. However, the subjectivity of history sometimes creates conflict and divergent schools of thought. One of the major sources of conflict between liberal historians and Black Nationalist sympathizers as identified by Dr. Umoja in Searching for a Place: Nationalism, Separatism and Pan-Africanisms (2005) was that liberal historians viewed society as a pluralist society. They believed that everyone had a chance to rise above their current socio-economic and political status and achieve the American dream. Liberal historians often compared the plight of African Americans to immigrants who settled in the United States. Therefore, liberal historians also underscored African American separatist activities, assuming the goal of all Africans in America is to assimilate. Umoja’s premise is “the black struggle in the United States has revolved around three basic ideological trends – assimilation, pluralism, and nationalism” (Umoja 2010:531). Of the three, assimilation into American society and change through reform, have been seen as the primary goals of Africans in America. Black separatist ideology is often times not considered as a deliberate and intended strategy. As a result, the main debates in Black Nationalist historiography occur between Black Nationalist sympathizers and neo-liberal
interpreters identified in four major periods: Classical Black Nationalism, Garvey Movement, Nation of Islam Nationalism, and Black Power scholarship (Umoja 2010).

Wilson Moses has coined nationalist ideology between the early 18th and early 20th century as “Classical Black Nationalism.” Moses’ two tomes, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism (1978)* and *Classical Black Nationalism (1996)* attributed western religious ideology as the motivating force behind the Black Nationalist struggle. Moses also posits the enslaved Africans identified with the cultural beliefs of Europeans. Black Nationalist sympathizer, Sterling Stuckey passionately repudiates Moses’ claim by investigating African cultural traditions and highlighting parallels. Stuckey also explored the contribution by traditional healers to Black Nationalist insurgency. The historiography of the Garvey Movement consisted of several neo-liberalist scholars who viewed Marcus Garvey and the United Negro Improvement Association’s (UNIA) Back to Africa Movement with skepticism. Neo liberal scholars such as John Hope Franklin, and E. David Cronon conspired to paint a picture of Garvey as a racist who ‘sought to raise high the walls of racial nationalism’ (Umoja 2010:536). However, the historiography of the Garvey movement contained Black Nationalist sympathizers as well. Most notably was Dr. John Henrik Clarke, who argued Marcus Garvey had a lasting impression on future generations of Black Nationalists Clarke also argues that Garvey was the inspiration for independence movements in Africa (Umoja 2010:536).

The scholarship on the Nation of Islam (NOI) has tended to focus on party leaders and classified them as demagogues and criminals, and the call for a separate place as ‘dysfunctional behavior’ (Umoja 2010:537). Many neo-liberal identifiers argued that Black Nationalist
organizations such as the NOI would undermine the significant gains being made by the Civil Rights Movement. Black Nationalist sympathizers responded to these claims by underscoring the NOI’s attempt to create racial pride or a reclamation of Black Manhood as a reaction to white oppression. The last area, Black Power scholarship is probably the most underserved in the historiography of Black Nationalism. The Black Power scholarship has always been treated as a corollary to the Civil Rights Movement. Umoja attributes these phenomena to four main factors: an unwillingness of the academy to recognize Black Power scholarship; the lack of research from academics on this topic; the stigma associated with Black Power; and finally the lack of material available (Umoja 2010:539).

Although many scholars have analyzed the social reasons behind political movements, very few have contemplated the socio-cultural aspects that drive movements. In addition, some scholars have tended to equate social movements with pathology, as with the classic model of social movements (McAdam 1982:20). The founders of Òyöttünjí Village were cultural nationalists who were former members of various Black Nationalists groups. When the groups disbanded or failed to satisfy their need to “be more African”, they turned to cultural nationalism. It was this spirit of cultural nationalism that infused the desire to remake Africa in America for the Villagers.

Although meticulous attention was given to the socio-cultural aspects of the Òyö Empire, activities linked to subsistence agriculture sustenance remained largely underdeveloped and led to self-sufficiency and sustainability challenges at the village. “We didn’t know nothing about farming.” Yemi said. As a result, many of the villagers struggled to
feed themselves. Even the structures were designed based on the architecture of sub-Saharan Africa, and although the South Carolina coastal islands may have more temperate weather, it is still not immune to harsh winter conditions. Villagers recalled some of their winter experiences at Òyötünjí. Yewande recalls her visit one winter with her young daughter in the late nineties:

“In the house there was no electricity just one kerosene space heater. And I remember thinking that it was so cold. I remember wondering if my baby would be alright. Would the heater topple over and burn us up or would we freeze to death. And I was staying in a special house because I had a baby. I couldn’t imagine what my husband was going through.”

4.4 Cultural Separatism

The residents of Òyötünjí Village are Americans who are descendents of Africans who were forced to relocate to the United States as unpaid laborers. This forced relocation severed enslaved Africans from their ethnic groups, leaving many African descendants in search of cultural and lineage ties (McCray 2002:2). The founding residents were practitioners of Ifa (the religion of the Yoruba people) that felt a strong ancestral connection to Nigeria. Òyötünjí literally means, “Õyö rises again” or “Ôyō wakes again” in the language of the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria (Hunt 1979:ii). The specific inspirations for their African intentional community came from the Fon people of Benin and the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria (Clarke 2004:13, McCray 2002: 1). Social organization (i.e. marriage and kinship structures) cultural practices (i.e. religious rituals and rites) and political organization (i.e. patriarchal hierarchy) were carefully reconstructed with meticulous attention to detail by the founders of Òyötünjí Village (McCray 2002: 5). The members of the village all followed similar daily rituals in accordance to established Yoruba cultural practices. Abeke recalls:
“Every morning when we woke up, the first thing we did was bathe. After we bathed, we said prayers to our ancestor shrines. Then we would say prayers to Elegba. If someone had any additional shrines, they would pray to that. Then the children would come up to us to get their blessings for the day.”

The acceptance and application of these daily rituals was a direct rejection of Western values and ideas and an embrace of “the rest of culture,” an embrace that reinforced the idea of freedom in the form of a land-based cultural separatism.

The land-based cultural separatism was dependent the rejection of western values and an acceptance of African values. This was done by establishing a provincial government at Òyọtúnjí Village was modeled after Oyo Empire proper. In Mapping Yoruba Networks: Power and agency in the making of transnational communities, Maxine Clarke has noted that, “They created a landscape that referenced the symbolic prestige of pre-colonial African Village life” (Clarke 2004:82). The ten acres are broken into five main districts, each governed by town chiefs or egbēs (civic and political societies). The five districts, ààfun, igbóòyà, iká gbó, ànàgo, and ìgbàlê are typical townships, each containing public and private buildings as well as private living quarters (Clarke 2004:82). In addition, each district has a patron Òrìshà (Yoruba deity) with a major shrine devoted to the worship of that Òrìshà. In traditional pre-colonial land use, as documented in 1843 by Yoruba historian Samuel Crowther, land is available for temporary use. Òyọtúnjí law specifies that land can be loaned but not sold. Land is considered to belong to Òlọrun (Thompson 1983:167), the supreme deity, and entrusted to the secret society of landholding elders called the Ògbóni Society for caretaking. Residents are able to use the land with an offering of one quart of gin to both the Ôba (King) and Ògbóni Society (Hunt 1979:59). Upon receipt of the offering, the residents are then given a fifty by fifty plot of land to the
family to be used “in perpetuity” (Hunt 1979:59). On that plot of land one resident recalls some of the vegetables his family grew. “I... think...We grew corn, squash, collards (greens)... but we didn’t have any way to store them. We grew only spring and summer vegetables. When the winter came it was rough.” Yemi recalls.

Prior to their relocation to Òyötùnjí Village, few residents have had experience with landownership or cultivation (Hunt 1979:59). As a result, an agrarian economy was never fully developed and villagers sustained their incomes by craft production, sewing African clothes, and holding religious ceremonies, and initiations. Obataiye held a job at one of the local gas stations to supplement his income, “You know, If you weren’t doing readings, then it was hard for you to make money. Some of the men worked on other farms helping harvesting crops and the farmers sometimes gave you food.” These endeavors provided a meager income and the residents still had to supplement their income with food stamps (Hunt 1979:63). Members who could not create a source of income worked as servants, or Iwofa, for the district chiefs or the King until they were able to generate income for Òyötùnjí’s local, state and shrine taxes (Hunt 1979:56). Many of the occupants were transient visitors that lived in the Village from the summer to fall months, but left when the weather became cold (Hunt 1979:55). The fluctuations in population created an unstable agricultural labor force and exacerbated sustainability issues.

Today, the impressive statues are in stark contrast to the favela styled houses on the property. Since the upkeep of each house depends on the wealth and skill of its owner, the village lacked aesthetic symmetry. Remnants of animal shelters, failed attempts at gardening
and a discarded trash laying in a huge heap helped concretize the impact of a unstable and inexperienced labor force on the sustainability of residents Òyötúnjí Village. The irony was not lost on the current Oba, one of eldest of Oba Adefunmi’s twenty three children, Oba Adefunmi II, talked about the importance of sustainability for the continuation of Òyötúnjí Village. I was there for one of his addresses to the ‘state’ where he spoke of the Africans natural connection to the earth. He talked about new farming techniques and the importance of reducing Òyötúnjí’s carbon footprint. Today, eight residents turned out to receive the young King’s address. Most of the residents nodded their heads in agreement. Others, possibly visitors who had come for the ritual, sat motionless with looks of disagreement etched across their faces. The talk of farming did not seem to appeal to them. I overheard someone whisper, “I ain’t keeping no goats.”

4.5 Òyötünjí Village and cultural ecology

Cultural ecology proves useful in examining some aspects of sustainability problems that later developed at Òyötünjí Village. The cultural ecology paradigm, as developed by Julian Steward’s seeks to “analyze certain aspects in which functionalities with the natural setting are most explicit, in which the interdependency between cultural patterns and organism-environment relationship is most apparent and crucial.” This is what Steward identifies as the cultural core (Geertz 1963:7). In his research regarding the Shoshone Native American cultural group, Steward observed how the Shoshonean society and culture developed as a corollary of environmental circumstances. Family size, religious worship, and community connections were all seen related to subsistence and economic activities (Steward 1955). Anything that was not related to these activities was coined ‘the rest of culture’ (Geertz 1963:7).
The founders of Òyötùnji Village were concerned with the spiritual, cultural, linguistical, social, and political aspects of Yoruba culture irrespective of subsistence activities. The aspects founders chose to focus on is what Julian steward referred to as ‘the rest of culture’ (Geertz 1963:7). As a result issues related to sustainability and self-sufficiency such as, land intensification, farming techniques, agricultural knowledge, and development of an agrarian economy are some of the ecological challenges the early members faced. For example, although members of the Ògbóni Society are initiated into the house of the earth deity, Babalúayé, their duties were primarily legislative and not agricultural (Clarke 2004:79). The official school at Òyötùnji was called the Yoruba Royal Academy. Its official curriculum included herbology, Yoruba language and grammar, African history and culture, the Afro-American Yoruba movement and the founding of Òyötùnji, family relations, animal husbandry, mathematics, ritual and worship, astrology, and arts and crafts (Hunt 1973:61). Intense instruction was given in respect to the rules, regulations, political structures and language training at the village, yet hardly any mention is made in reference to agricultural education. In fact, early childhood education focused on “business management skills” and not subsistence farming (Hunt 1973:61).

When the eight founders of Òyötùnji (four women and four men) located their intentional community to Sheldon, South Carolina, it was a daunting task. Yemi, one of the original founders recalls his thoughts as they first cleared the trees from route seventeen to the site: “I remember looking at all that land and all them trees and thinking, ‘I don’t know if we can do this.’” The land that was purchased was a heavily forested area without any permanent structures. After a quarter-mile road was cleared, residents chopped down trees and made
inroads into the forest. After three long months, houses were built, as well as temples and shrines (Hunt 1973:53). Again, attention was paid to the Yoruba system of social organization in the form of dokpwes. Dokpwes were gendered structured work units organized by the chiefs of the village. “After you said your prayers, you went to the workhouse to check your assignments for the day. You were assigned different task that had to be done.” Yemi recollects. The tasks varied according to need, gender, and availability of supplies and were always done collectively. Although envisioned as a respite where African Americans could live life divorced from the culture of the United States, residents of Òyötunjí were very much dependent on the outside world. Agriculture was used as a supplementary income. Instead of a staple income (Hunt 1973:63). Villagers raised various animals for rituals and ceremonies, not as a main dietary source. Òyötunjí Village contained one official two-acre farm plot. Although the number of village residents fluctuated, the official farm plot did not increase nor decrease. At one point, the population numbered two hundred and fifty during Òyötunjí’s high point. Residents grew pumpkins, sweet potatoes, corn, collard greens, cucumbers, and peanuts (Hunt 1979:63). Although the most of the residents of Òyötunjí village identified as an independent community, they were still very much linked to the federal and state governments. The lease on the land had to be paid, supplies were needed and food had to be purchased in the lean months. Most of the residents relied on outside sources to earn money for food, village taxes, and other incidentals.

The fluctuation of the population of the village hindered land development and hindered what Brookfield identified as land intensification. Land intensification occurs when productivity becomes efficient and high production can be achieved with minimal input of labor
The constant rise and fall of skilled laborers prevented the development of a permanent land use technology, irrigation system, or crop rotation system. The residents conceptualized distribution and ownership strategies irrespective of farming methods and strategies. For example, the land use did not change with the population changes. This inflexibility hinders the development of a stable agricultural output and efficiency (Brookfield 1972). Obataiye left the village after over two years of residency. He noted there were massive migrations and immigrations during various times. He left with several others and established another community during what was called the first great migration. They moved to Frogmore Island along route twenty-one in South Carolina coastal islands and started another compound under the guidance of a Yoruba man from Abeokuta, Nigeria named Ademeni Ademola. This new compound was called the Yoruba Ìgbàlê. This is just one example of how the fluid population contributed to the lack of sustainability at Òyötünjí Village.

This reliance on outside forces for income hindered self-sufficiency and prevented Òyötünjí from becoming the autonomous nation they envisioned. ‘Importation’ of food was commonplace, as the foods grown in the garden did not allow for complete sustainability. Sustainability, as described by Roy Rappaport, occurred when ‘management of cultivation is only slightly concerned, if at all, with the events in the outside world’ (Rappaport 1971:79). Òyötünjí Village was still very much linked to and dependent on the outside world for most of their basic needs. Without a seasonal variation of crops, members parceled out their labor to local farmers in exchange for some of their yield (Hunt 1979:63). The ‘importation’ of food from local farmers, the use of food stamps, and the reliance on outside sources for income hindered the Village from becoming the independent nation they conceptualized.
Membership was open to any one of African descent who lived in the Village for six consecutive months (Hunt 1979:56). Many residents came to Òyötùnjí because they possessed a romanticized vision of Africa. Although the African American narrative is a set of complex stories told from various African nations, an illusion exists that portrays the descendents of enslaved Africans as an homogeneous group (Clarke 2004). Frustrated with urban living, most of the early residents were from densely populated urban areas. Òyötùnjí Village was imagined as a rural utopia, a place where African Americans could live the life their African ancestors once led. Although they possessed little or no agricultural experience, many residents felt “a feeling of oneness with the soil and consider themselves to be in living harmony with nature” (Hunt 1979:59). “Most of us was from the north. We didn’t know that much about farming. But we knew we were African.” said Adebayo.

The identification with Africa plays into a larger phenomenon of the perceptions of indigeneity that exist in that equates “tradition” with static social practices. ‘Pure’ tradition is identified as a pre-industrialized time and space. It is often juxtaposed against industrialized society, a dichotomy that romantically praises the spiritual nature of primitive societies and denounces the material aspects of modern ones (Kuper 2003:390), accepting the idea of the “noble savage”, as one so naturally in tune with nature that land cultivation will be immediately understood. In fact, residents of Òyötùnjí Village faced some of the same issues Adam Kuper outlined in his article, The Return of the Native (2003), from local authorities, surrounding residents, and the village residents themselves. The formation of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve paralleled Òyötùnjí in some respects.
As the residents of Öyötünjí had done, Griqua politicians declared an identification with San and Khoi culture and ancestral heritage that prompted and demanded return of ‘ancestral’ space. (Kuper 2003: 394). The major difference between Öyötünjí and the Griqua was that the residents of Öyötünjí did not have a temporal connection to the land in which they claimed. The Griqua and the residents of Öyötünjí Village relocated to areas ‘untouched’ by modernization to be more in line with the perception of what constitutes a native environment. As a result, modern conveniences that could help improve the quality of life were not utilized. For example, both spaces were created to in an effort to preserve what was considered a ‘traditional life style of a people who felt they had an ancestral connection during a particular place and space in time. During their field studies, both Hunt (1979) and Clarke (2004) noted that the Village was without many modern conveniences. The main source of fuel for the Villagers was kerosene and wood. Hunt states that, “modern household conveniences such as the use of electricity and gas for cooking are prohibited” (Hunt 1979:58).

The anachronistic nature of both settlements created tension among local residents. The care of livestock became a source of tension in the San community. The tension arose from perceptions stemming from authenticity, as ‘real’ San are a nomadic people that did not keep livestock (Kuper 2003:394). Öyötünjí Village and Sheldon County residents’ tension was rooted in the legacy of enslavement. The residents of Öyötünjí were too authentic and too African. The majority of the Sheldon County residents living in proximity to the Village were African Americans who questioned the lifestyle choices and religious beliefs of the villagers. However, after interactions increased between Sheldon County residents and Öyötünjí residents, a mutual respect developed (Hunt 1979:60). Finally, both communities were living in spaces that
were “undeveloped” under the pretext of “practicing their culture” (Kuper 2003:393). This raises questions of how race, class, and culture are interconnected.

African Americans account for seventy-four percent of the population of Sheldon, South Carolina. The median income is 28 thousand dollars a year, while the average home cost over 100 thousand (city-data.com: 2011). Many of the jobs held by African American men and women exist in the service industry (hospitality and), an obvious carry over from enslavement. Checker identifies job discrimination, lack of access to jobs, and lower wages as the structural racism that affects African Americans (Checker 2008:175). Although the city of Sheldon is not a toxic waste site, members of Òyötünjí Village have been discriminated against. The city of Sheldon has employed structural policies against Òyötünjí Village that some would consider ecological racist tactics.

Òyötünjí Village in located in an area that constantly celebrates and revels in its antebellum past. Beaufort County is home to four major plantations that still are in existence today: Huspah, Clarendon, Tomotley and Myrtle Grove Plantations. The residual effects of the slave economy can be seen in the relationships between the black and white residents of the County. Òyötünjí’s acceptance by the community of Sheldon was a long, arduous process that members of the Village worked hard to gain. They were active in the Sheldon community; they attended local parties, weddings, and funerals. The Sheldon residents started to attend festivals at Òyötünjí and some local residents even were married at the Village (Hunt 1979:60). The Villager’s relationships with the county and state were not repaired as easily. Some of the
challenges between the Villagers and the state included homeschooling rights, building permits, and land use.

Residents of Òyötünjí Village accomplished a monumental task when they recreated a cultural system from centuries ago. They replicated a complex society, replete with social customs, gendered societies, rites, and rituals. Although their focus on ‘the rest of culture’ has posed challenges to their sustainability, bringing home their cultural gods provided a different type ‘cultural of core’ that spiritually sustained the residents of the Village. Despite challenges to their sustainability, residents were able to overcome environmental racism, transient residents, limited agricultural knowledge, and a whole host of obstacles that were threats to self-sustainability.

Anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, and historians have all examined the unique aspects of Òyötünjí Village as it relates to their field of study. Articles and books have been written on topics ranging from the formation of an independent African Village to the makings of transnational communities. Ironically, research in self-sustainability, the principal reason Òyötünjí was founded, remains an underdeveloped and unexplored area. Researchers, like the founders of Òyötünjí Village, tend to focus on the ‘rest of culture’ by examining the cultural aspects as isolated events, not connected to environmental circumstances. Examining challenges to sustainability at Òyötünjí Village will enable the villagers to create the lifestyle they imagined. By incorporating what they perceive as the ‘cultural core’ with the ‘rest of culture’ can help to create a self-sufficient and sustainable home for their gods. Failure to do so will further keep –their gods in exile.
CHAPTER 5
BÁRAKÚ ORI... HABITS OF THE HEAD

“If the head does not sell you, no one can buy you” ------Yoruba Proverb

“The reason I was interested in the Yoruba spiritual system because I was clear that I was an African. I was clear on things that I couldn’t see, like god and spirits and stuff like that. But I knew my ancestors had exited. That was concrete for me. Ifa fit for me... because being a practitioner of Ifa was an extension of our African identity” ------ Shiminege

Nigeria is home to a multitude of indigenous groups, with Yoruba being one of the largest. The Yoruba people have a complex set of cosmological beliefs, which regulates their every activity, transforming the mundane into the sacred (Afolayan 2004:190). This complicated worldview creates natural binaries that is expressed in the concept of twines that helps the Yoruba conceive and perceive their world. The Yoruba concept of identity is epiphenomenal to the ‘existential twinness’ that was so ingrained in their ontology. Encompassed in the identity are two terms central to Yoruba belief: the concepts of Àṣẹ, and Ori (Montgomery 2008:9). The intersectionality of these two concepts coupled with ancestral memory will be one of the ways to describe the motivating force of cultural nationalism among African Americans.

5.1 Bárakú Ori

The Yoruba concept of the head is a complex one that entails both physical and metaphysical explanations. The metaphysical or spiritual aspects of Orí is a concept that will be utilized to illustrate the affective and effective uses of power. Orí can be seen as a force that has positive and negative effects. In the positive, orí pipé is indicative of a healthy mental and emotional state. In this state, the Ase is able to lead its owner along the proper road of destiny.
In its destructive state, orí dídárú, or insanity blocks its owner from achieving their destiny thereby making the owner a danger to social cohesiveness (Lawal 1985:91). The dominant discourses in regards to the residual effect of enslavement of African Americans have normally revolved around the concept of mental slavery. Mental slavery manifests itself as the desire to subvert the ‘other’ by accepting the assigned role and adopting the behaviors of the oppressor (Fanon 1967:76). Although the residual effects of mental slaves have been lauded in countless sociological and historical narratives, the issue of power and identity has not yet been analyzed.

The concepts of orí dídárú can be modified to encapsulate the effects mental slavery within the context of Foucault’s docile body to explain agbára ijánu orí or a controlled head. Agbára ijánu orí is a form of orí dídárú as the Yoruba belief indicates “that nothing is possible in the universe without orí” (Lawal 1985:93).

If proverbs are a way of encapsulating a cultural belief into a brief idiom, the Yoruba proverb, “If the head does not sell you, no one can buy you.” is worth noting. This proverb is layered and complex, but for our purposes here, we will focus the proverb in relation to Ori. Ori is the Yoruba concept of the spirit that rules the head. It helps its owner to identify, define, and execute their destiny (Afolayan 2004:190). Simply put, if you do not consent fully to power, power cannot fully control you. Inasmuch as Africans brought to the Americas still practiced their traditions and beliefs, couched in stories, idioms and folkloric belief, African spiritual thought persisted in the form of Africanisms (Herskovits 1958:15). Pierre Bourdieu’s notions of habitus are instrumental in understanding the reproducible behaviors that govern the actions of some southern African Americans using folkloric beliefs. Folkloric beliefs sprang from the African ethos which sought to make meaningful connections between the sacred and the
mundane (Levine 2007). Based in metaphysical traditions, African American folkloric beliefs have been adapted and altered to explain the American milieu. These folkloric beliefs helped transmit cultural ideologies and ideas about identity without punishment during antebellum slavery. Bourdieu describes habitus as “The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures” (Bourdieu 1980:53). Folkloric beliefs are a way regulating behaviors that are primarily derived from forgotten spiritual beliefs. They are a way of instructing “Things to do or not to do, things to say or not to say” (Bourdieu 1980: 53) giving African American folkloric beliefs a decidedly teleological character imbued with ideas of Âše (personal agency) and Ori (personal destiny) that fostered ideas of freedom and independence, usually manifested as the idea of a maroon community. Bourdieu observes, that habitus is ‘a product of history...in accordance with the schemes generated by history’ (Bourdieu 1980:54). In this sense, the collective created what Robin Kelley investigated in his the chapter ‘Dreams of the New Land’ in his book Freedom Dreams. Kelley posited that African Americans ‘had a history of movement’ embedded in the desire to “rebel against the dominant culture” (Kelley 2002:17). In most cases African descendants believed it was their destiny (Ori) to leave and create a new land in which they could peacefully exist (Âše).

Many African American folkloric beliefs were residual beliefs associated with African religious cosmogony (Blassingame 1972; Levine 1977). These beliefs endowed African Americans with a sense of personal power and worldview that was consistent with the various West African groups that experienced the forced migration to the United States (Blassingame 1977). Folkloric beliefs provided a way for African Americans to behave and a way in which to
conceive the world that was a carryover from their original ethos. For example, one interlocutor spoke of the respect for” thunder and lightning” and the “respect for and remembrance of the dead” both can be traced back to West African beliefs or bárakú ọrí.

Folkloric beliefs in this capacity further provided an incubator for habitus, as it was a place where an ‘infinite capacity for generating products – thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions – whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production” (Bourdieu 1980:55). Folkloric beliefs were a way of reproducing the concepts of Àše and Ori reduced to idioms and stories imbued with double entendres. The creation of a ‘self-identical’ essence or the homologous habitus that underlie the life-style of a group or a class( Bourdieu 1980:55) can be identified in African Americans as group solidarity in a desire for a ‘home we never knew’ (Kelley 2002:14). Here the hidden concepts of Ori and Àše creates a group solidarity vis a vis collective space and ancestral identity. Onuwachi has been an Ifa worshiper for over forty years. He says that he realized that he was ‘different’ from the European Americans and “didn’t feel accepted”, but felt solidarity with Africans Americans because they “just knew what you were going through.” He recounts further about the Cultural Revolution that was going on in New York in the late sixties and early seventies and the new found affinity with Africa created novel filial ties where everyone was “your sister or your brother”. This is what Robin Kelley explains as “looking back in search of a better future” (Kelley 2002:15) was the impetus behind the formation of Òyötünji Village. The founders believed if they could revive the past glory of Africa, then future plight of Africans in America would change. Many residents felt a strong attachment to Africa that was consciously (Àše in the form of the ideology of self-determination) and unconsciously (Ori in the form of folkloric
beliefs and Idioms) imparted upon them since infancy. The coupling of these two ideals motivated adherents to question the identity they felt was forced upon them and to reassert their Âše by reclaiming the Yoruba religion and culture. Additionally, residents viewed the capture, transportation, and disruption of lineage as destiny. This destiny viewed within a larger framework was the preservation of Yoruba identity in the wake of colonization and occupation (Hunt 1979:36).

5.2 The habits of social movements

While the Classical, resource mobilization and new social movements models have all been useful in analyzing social movements, I believe the concept of habitus can be used to explore the cultural motivations behind social movements. Ori has been interpreted as personal destiny; or spiritual head (Balogun 2007:122). Bárakú Ori then can be seen as personal destiny that has been influenced by personal history, folkloric beliefs, and events. The Bárakú Ori contributes to the Long Civil Rights Movement (LCRM) events in as much as it replicates the re-occurring ideas of freedom, personal destiny, collective space, and identity embedded in the cultural idioms, folkloric beliefs, and metaphors (proverbs). Generational Bárakú Ori narratives reflected the “push” against oppression and rejection of assigned liminal spaces and a “pull” towards an autonomous space. The Bárakú Ori can be seen as a sort of cultural-ideological habitus or the unconscious actions that one engages in. Discovering the inspiration behind inter-generational drives for the reclamation of personal power is fundamental to understanding the cultural components of social movements. One of the ways we can see how cultural frames develop over time is by examining the Long Civil Rights Movement Thesis that
asserts Africans have been fighting for their civil rights since they first landed on the shores of North America.

The discourse surrounding the identity of African Americans has changed throughout the generations and highlights the subtle nuances of their various social categories and the social positions that they occupied. The identity of the forced migrants has emerged from African, Nigger, Negro, Colored, Black, Black American, African American and finally back to African. These labels denote specific periods in the historical identity of African Americans and the ways in which they self-identified in relation to the dominant society and reflected a particular worldview of that group’s milieu. In short, the desire for freedom meant different things during different times and was articulated in different ways. This continuous conversation in history has been identified as the LCRM.

After the publication of their book, *Freedom North: Black Freedom struggles outside the South 1940-1980* (2003), Jeanne F. Theoharis and Komozi Woodard emerged as two pioneers of the Long Civil Rights Movement thesis. This thesis represents an evolution away from distinct periods and regional boundaries for the Civil Rights Movement (CRM) and the Black Power Movement (BPM), instead proposing that the fight for African Americans’ civil and human rights represents one unbroken and unbounded Black Freedom struggle. Cha-Jua and Lang examine these distinct ‘generations’ and posit a fourth (Cha-Jua and Lang 2007:266). Some debate surrounds the beginnings of the classical period. Some scholars posit the CRM began in 1954 with the *Brown vs the Board of Education* ruling while others contest it began with Rosa Parks and the Montgomery bus boycott. However, most classical CRM scholars seem to agree the
movement was ‘spontaneous and discontinuous’ (Cha-Jua and Lang 2007:266). The next generation of CRM scholarship refuted the previous generations claims that the movement was spontaneous. Scholars such as Michael C. Dawson and Aldon D. Morris argued that the CRM was an extension of the pre-existing social networks (Cha-Jua and Lang 2007:267). These ideas were expanded further by scholars such as Manning Marable and Doug McAdam who examined the structural forces that helped propel the CRM in the third generation movement historiographies (Cha-Jua and Lang 2007:267). Finally, the fourth generation as posited by Cha-Jua and Lang challenged previous generations assessment of African American freedom struggles as a movement that was spatially and temporally contained (Cha-Jua and Lang 2007:267). It was during this generation that the Long Civil Rights Movement thesis was developed.

The Long Civil Rights Movement thesis challenges previous historiographies in four major areas. It charged that black power movement (BPM) was indistinct from the civil rights movement and classified the movement within a broader framework. Secondly, the long civil rights movement thesis refutes the traditional CRM timeframe and argues that the civil right movement began earlier than 1954. The Long Civil Rights Movement thesis also localized struggles and removed them from a national context. Finally, the Long Civil Rights Movement thesis posited that racial oppression was the same in both the north and the south (Cha Jua and Lang 2007:265). Cha-Jua and Lang’s major critique of the long movement thesis is that it places BPM ‘outside of time and history’ regulating it to an ‘undead status’ ‘beyond life and death’. Thus the ambiguity of the long civil rights movement thesis creates an amorphous BPM with constantly shifting origins (Cha-Jua and Lang 2007:265). The LCRM suggest that “push/pull”
struggle was a continuous one. If that is the case, how were these struggles articulated in African American culture? How were parents talking to their children about these struggles and what values were being handed down? Obataiye recalls the activism of his mother and notes how she inspired that in him by attending rallies. “I remember my mom taking me to hear Dr. King speak when he came here to Hampton Roads. I remember her talking to me about what was going on with black folks, you know.” This illustrated that there was a continuous inter generational discourse in regards to the place/space issue.

Theoharis’ “I’d Rather Go to School in the South”: How Boston’s school desegregation complicates the civil rights paradigm (2003) argues segregation in Northern and Southern cities was essentially the same. The major difference has to do with the ways in which the separation was executed. Northern segregation was by fact (de facto), whereas in the South local and state governments created policies that produced segregated schools (de jure). In the South, segregation was a law created by the state that could be challenged (Theoharis 2003:129). Abele’s parents made a deliberate decision to move to the industrialized North were they believed they could lead a more egalitarian lifestyle. Abeke remembers the disappointment her family encountered when they found racism in the Northern state of Ohio. “Racism isn’t just being called a Nigger. Or being told your hair is nappy. They found out racism takes on many forms” says Abeke. She continues by stating:

Ohio didn’t have...uh.. what do you call it? Ohio didn’t have de jure segregation it was de facto. In other words, it wasn’t by law it was by fact. It was how it just happened. It wasn’t practiced legally, it was just installed (instilled?). In Ohio particularly, ....Cincinnati was one of the worst places (for racism) because it was right across the water from Kentucky. Cincinnati and Dayton aren’t that far apart... I mean maybe about fifty... fifty four miles. Something like that.
There is no denying the impact racism has had on the world, in addition to the northern and southern regions of the United States. However, there was a distinctive quality of Southern racism that was rooted in complex political and socio-cultural history that was bred in the antebellum South (Cha-Jua and Lang 2007:282). Cha-Jua and Lang argue that the social-cultural milieu of the South created a distinct form of ‘Southern racial etiquette’ (Cha-Jua and Lang 2007:282). They posit “not that the North was more racially enlightened, but that the structural and ideological elements in the South necessitated a more violent, virulent, and impoverishing form of racial oppression” (Cha-Jua 2007:283).

Robert Self, in his article *In Search of the Black Panther Party: New perspectives on a revolutionary movement*, Self uses the Long Civil Rights Movement tactic of re-periodization to place Black Power Militancy within the timeframe of 1930s and 1940s communism (Self 2006:18). Self theorizes that early BPM focused on civil rights and social welfare providing the framework for the later BPM (Self 2006:29). Cha-Jua and Lang disagree with this analysis citing re-periodization strips the BPM of a ‘strategic vision’ to paint a picture of movement born out of European discourses and philosophy (Cha-Jua 2007: 271). Suffice it to say, the treatment of communists and the treatment of BPM activists bore some similarities, but the intensity, scope and long movement theorist overlooks violence perpetrated on BPM. Cha-Jua and Lang assert that long civil rights movement theorists re-periodization elides BPM ideologies within older leftist forms and thus, minimalizes the BPM intellectual contributions. Dowd-Hall uses racial narratives as a form of de-periodization to situate the CRM within the ‘cultural and racial milieu of the 1930s’ (Dowd-Hall 2005: 1235). As with Self, Dowd-Hall’s arguments strip the CRM of any original intellectual contributions or strategies by black CRM activists. Her argument seems
to be virtually lifted by Self, who replaced the CRM with BPM. As a result, this creates an uninterrupted uniform historical narrative that is does not speak to the historical disruptions or generational participation.

The LCRM is a historical analysis of the various social movements that African Americans participated to gain equality. Each movement was made possible by the cultural and social milieu in which they were conceived. The NSM paradigm concept of master framing can be applied to the LCRM to connect social history to cultural facts. According to McAdam, a master frame is a “legitimating collective action” that occurs over “time and space” (McAdam 1994:41).

Like the LCRM thesis, the master frame paradigm suggests that movements are not independent of one another, but ways of mobilizing various resources and adapting tactics based on contemporary issues (McAdam 1994:42). The master frames serve as “cultural repositories” where “succeeding generations of activist can dip and fashion ideologically similar, but chronologically separate movements (McAdam 1994: 43).

5.3 The new habits, new heads

Life at Òyötúnji Village was challenging to say the least. The task of procuring food, establishing a steady income and obeying the strict rules and customs often times proved difficult for some residents. Many of the early founders and the children of early residents often left Òyötúnji Village to establish Yoruba houses and communities of their own. In addition, some former residents still kept their allegiances to Òyötúnji, while living apart from the compound. I encountered one such group in Tallahassee, Florida. The members were former founders and residents. They were current “godchildren” and former clients. They were also former visitors and future residents. Every member of the group has been influenced by Òyötúnji Village in
one way or the other. I spent time with this group in February 2011. I attended dance classes, rituals, study groups, and youth meetings. The purpose of this group was to live their lives as African cultural nationalist outside of a bounded space.

Early one Sunday morning I was invited to a youth meeting that was held in a Hindi yoga studio. The children were between the ages of five and fifteen. I could tell by the constant horseplay and teasing, that the member of the group were very close. The group, that met weekly, was part of a rites of passage group of cultural nationalist in Tallahassee. When the last family representative arrived, the children silently and organically formed a circle. The eldest of the group started the circle with the call and response of libations. The voices echoed off the walls as the children shouted “ashe” in unison. When the eldest finished libations, the child to his right started off with his ancestral litany, calling on the names of his ancestors as more shouts of Ashe were said. Then each child in the circle took turns and recited their family mission, explaining what lessons they are to learn in this life. The family mission is created based on past challenges and future aspirations. For example, if one person’s had a generational history of broken marriages, the family mission would be to create stable unions. I was pleasantly surprised to learn, through the recitation of their family mission, that some of the children were Ifa, Akan and Santeria. I asked one of the parents, a twenty-eight year old woman named Akanke, why each family had a family mission statement. She said:

“When I was growing up, my mom talked about all the stuff she faced when she was little. You know all the racism she faced. But she never went anywhere with it. It (the conversations) let me know we were black, but I didn’t know what that meant.”

Another parent chimed in. Adebambe, a thirty year old father stated:
“Yeah, I mean that was how it was with me too. I went around knowing that as a black person, I was different. I knew about slavery and racism, ‘cause of how my family talked about it. But, it wasn’t until I was in school at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) that I understood the importance of knowing who you are and where you are from. I want my son to know that now and not have to find out about it later in life like I did. I think that will save him a lot of heartache. “

After talking a little while more, I discovered the “heartache” that Adebambe mentioned was tied to the liminality many African Americans faced on a daily basis. The simultaneous inclusion/exclusion of Africans in America society and culture contributed to the “push against oppression” and the “pull towards autonomy.” The ways that Akanke and Adebambe’s families talked about their struggles during the sixties, instilled within them a particular “disposition” in relation to African American “push” for civil rights. This disposition then “pulled” Akanke and Adebambe towards cultural nationalism, which they saw as a place of empowerment. And they wanted to pass this empowerment down to their children.

After libations, the children went into practice mode. They had starred in, directed, and helped to write a play that underscored the dangers of cultural division that they hoped to perform during a cultural festival in Tallahassee. Two little boys, around the age of six took center stage and opened the play with the toss of cowrie shells. In unison, they tell about an impending fight between two families from the same womb. As the play progresses we learn that one family practices Ifa and the other practices Santeria. The family argues over which way the correct way. It is up to the youngest child from each family to show how the constant division between Ifa and Santeria disrupts family unity. This play speaks directly to the Ifa/Santeria debate that started over fifty-two years ago when Oba Oseijeman left the Santeria
based Shango Temple to started the Yoruba temple. The children, who were well versed on the issue, gave a clear impression of knowing who they are and what they were to achieve in life.

The concepts of power and cultural reproduction, articulated by Foucault and Bourdieu respectively, analyzed within the Yoruba concepts of Âše and Báarakú Ori can be instrumental in understanding how people are culturally motivated to enact social movements. Notions of power and destiny were not Ideas in which only the industrialized nations were privy to, but are part and parcel of an ontology forged into the collective psyche of people who were called Yoruba. Yor u ebo, or rather, one who remembers and makes offerings to the ancestors to maintain and enhance Âše and Báarakú Ori by remembering their cultural identity became those who refuse to ‘sell their head’.
CHAPTER 6

AȘE THEORY

“I was a part of the Black Power movement, the cultural movement that was taking place during the sixties. And I was part of several organizations at the time... one of the organizations disbanded and it left a vacuum in my consciousness... so I began to reread some of the speeches of Malcolm (X) and it identified African American people as being African and at that time it went beyond just wearing the dashikis and wearing African clothing and having an African name.” ------Obataiye

One of ways that some African Americans refused to sell their heads, or rather refused to relinquish their personal power, was through the formation of social movements. African Americans transformed the liminal spaces they occupied in two ways, by either pushing against or pulling on ‘the rest of culture’. The Africans who wished to be included, the integrationists, pulled towards the peripheral aspects of western culture that would enable them to achieve the cultural capital they needed in order to succeed. They sought to borrow aspects from the outer shell that would strengthen their own cultural core. The Africans who pushed against ‘the rest of culture’ believed that they could strengthen their core by ‘refusing to sell their heads’. This refusal was accomplished through the cultural tethering to Africa, or developing an African centered worldview. Thus, the “pullers” wanted to strengthen the African American community through the advocacy of civil rights. The “pushers” wanted to strengthen the African community through the advocacy of personal rights or personal power or the reclamation of Aṣe. For the Yoruba, Aṣe is the power that connects all things. Humans and non-humans, plants and animals are all connected to this animating universal life force (Brandon 1997:16). Aše is what connects humans to the divine (Olodumare, Orisha, ancestors).
It is almost impossible to discuss the formation of Òyòtùnjí Village without situating the founders within the proper historical and cultural milieu. In fact, the perception and utility of Òyòtùnjí village varies across generations. Research seems to suggest that the current milieu affects the ways cultural identity is interpreted and expressed. As the political climate evolves, it creates an ebb and flow as civil rights are granted and revoked. Although perceptions of Òyòtùnjí has changed over the years, many African American interlocutors still confessed to having feelings of marginalization and disassociation with the American culture, values, beliefs and ideology. As a result, Òyòtùnjí Village becomes a viable option. Based on conversations with interlocutors, I employ the Yoruba concept of Àše to illustrate the interrelationship between power and identity.

6.1 Àše Theory

I believe one possible way of interpreting this trend is by applying a new take on an old theory. Julian Steward, whom many consider the father of ecological anthropology, advanced the theory of a cultural core. According to Steward (1955), culture develops around sustenance activities like finding food, securing shelter, and protecting oneself against the elements. Since the pursuit of these activities can determine the relative success or failure of a society, they become fundamental or rather the "core" of that society. Anything else is considered secondary or "the rest of culture." However, the founders of Òyòtùnjí village believed cultural identity and affiliation to be a fundamental aspect of their survival. Most of the residents reported feelings of cultural, social, and political alienation. They yearned for a sense of belonging. Ironically, tethering themselves to an “African identity” helped ground interlocutors and fostered a connection that gave their lives new meaning and direction.
I believe Steward’s “cultural core” concept to be similar to the core of an atom or the nucleus. The nucleus of the culture can be seen as the norms and mores that give birth to the socio-political structures that hold society together or what gives that society its cultural properties, then we can imagine “the rest of culture” as the electrons that orbit the nucleus. The variation of the electrons is what gives the atom (or in this case, culture) its unique characteristics. We can construct a model that explains why the act of “cultural tethering” inspires social movements. Steward’s “rest of culture” are like electrons that orbit the core and are what is shared among cultures much like a covalent bond. When the exchange of electrons is equal, it forms strong socio-cultural bonds that allow cultures to interact. However, a damaged core creates an unstable or radioactive culture that seeks to stabilize itself by attaching to more stable cultures.

The intense demand for slave labor deeply affected the infrastructure of many West African countries destabilizing the “core” while conversely altering the socio-cultural and political landscape of the rest of culture. The pre-existing religion, gender organization, and social organization (African worldview), were severely altered often being replaced by the religion, gender ideology and social organization (Western worldview) propagated by the colonial government. The unstable “rest of culture” orbits the damaged core, constantly seeking ways to stabilize thus regenerating Åše. Many advocates of the BPM utilized the employment of African cultural roots and ideologies that served as a rejection of integrationist ideologies (Frederickson 1996:264).
6.2 Docile bodies and agile minds

To some, the forced migration of Africans to America is ancient history that is best forgotten. However, it is an essential element in the African American experience. This experience first, is an examination of power. How was power acquired? How was it subverted? What were the implications to cultural identity and memory in light of subjugation of power? Michael Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* is an excellent tool for understanding how some societies create and maintain institutions within the spectrum of power. Although Foucault’s work is a history of the modern prison system as a structural framework for other societal institutions, one would be remiss not include the institution of slavery. In the beginning of *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault paint a vivid scene of torture and violence inflicted upon one convicted of patricide. According to documents the punishment for the accused was “the flesh will be torn from his breast, arms, thighs and calves with red hot pincers” and “his right hand burnt with sulphur, and, on those places where the flesh will be torn away, poured molten lead” (Foucault 1997:3). Foucault maintains this was an overt act of power, used more as a deterrent rather than a penalty for crimes. In this way, what Foucault deems “the body of the condemned” was a canvas in which the monarchy could paint a very vivid picture of their sovereignty. To Foucault, the punishment of the condemned body was “a complex social function” in which “new tactics of power” were exerted (Foucault 1977:23).

Similarly, the southern slaveholder in the United States took liberties to exert ‘new tactics of power’ as well. In *Bullwhip Days: The Slaves remember, an oral history* a collection of oral narratives edited by James Mellon, an interlocutor recounts witnessing the death of his younger brother. “Teed would take him out and buckle him down to a log with a leather strap,
and then he would stand way back and then he would lay that cowhide down...He would split it open with every stroke, and the blood would run down.” (Mellon 1988:239). In this context, the Africans taken to the Americas can be perceived as a condemned body of sorts, inasmuch as the color of their skin was said to be a punishment from God because of biblical transgression. As corollary to being a condemned body, African Americans were exposed to extreme violence. In a vein similar to the European sovereigns, southern planters used fear, torture, and rape. This method was used to demonstrate the power of the enslaver over the enslaved in an effort to control mind/body and spirit... or rather Ori and Àṣẹ.

This method of physical intimidation or the construction of mental slaves/docile bodies lasted well beyond the institution of slavery. Many of the interlocutors in my study were born in the South and have vivid memories of institutionalized racism. Titilayo, a thirty eight year old professional born and raised in the south recounts her first encounter with racism:

When I went to elementary school, I went to the neighborhood elementary school...in an African American neighborhood... African American working class neighborhood. and I remember some of my earliest experiences of not liking the school. Liking the teachers for the most part but not liking the school. I remember my principal ranting in the hallway about the toilet tissue. How everything we had was inferior. And that segregation was supposed to be over. It was 1977 and everything we had was still inferior, right down to the toilet paper.

Other interlocutors recalled even more frightening forms of intimidation ranging from subtle insinuations to full blown physical attacks. Abeke is a sixty-seven year old woman whose family moved to Ohio from Mississippi during the great migration of the thirties and forties. This migration to the industrial North was an attempt to escape the racism of the south as well as seek better opportunities. Although she was in Ohio, she still experienced the bitter sting of racism. Abeke learned early in her life to fear European Americans through her experiences
with sexualized racism. After being raped at the age of twelve by a white man to put her in her place she says, “I had several encounters with white males that gave me the impression that I need to be afraid of them. I learned very early on in my life to fear white people. Especially white men.” This demonstration of power often left one feeling powerless. Both Titilayo and Abeke felt the effect of indirect and direct power and how it influenced their daily lives. The legacy of slavery has left lasting impacts to the ways on which power is defined and enforced that overlaps, or superpositioned, with racism, sexism and classism

6.3 Àṣe and Hegemony

Here it is useful to analyze how Foucault’s idea of the superposition of power meets with the Yoruba conception of power. For Foucault, one aspect of power was the way in which the body was engaged in power relations. For the Yoruba, Àṣe is the animating life force, the ability to affect change. The concept of Àṣe was central to Yoruba, as they believed that each person had the ability to change their own destiny with the help of their Orí. The connection to cultural beliefs of personal transformative power proved difficult for southern planters and merchants. In order to create a perfect worker, more violence was needed. As a result, it became illegal for the enslaved Africans to speak their languages, practice their cultures or religions, a crime that southern whites believed lead to violence, therefore, was punishable by torture and death (Stuckey 1987: 52). The institution of slavery depended on the allusion of power to maintain control over large number of people, thus the creation of docile bodies was paramount to that system. Stuckey notes, the aim of violence perpetrated against enslaved Africans was to ensure “that the descendants, born and bred in the country, may gradually become a docile, and in some degree a civilized people” (Stuckey 1987:52).
Abeke confesses that her parents and grandparents knew more about European culture than they did African culture and often times sought to replicate it to perfection. This leads to another aspect of Foucault’s concept of power; the idea of docile bodies that symbolizes illustrates the internalization of dominant ideologies. Foucault uses the image of soldiers who follow the orders of the command without question as the docile body that was “manipulated by authority, rather than imbued with animal spirits” (Foucault 1977:155) read Àše. This substitution of the power of southern planters for the Yoruba conception of personal power, Àše, was necessary for the exploitation of labor for profit. Obataiye, a seventy four year old Yoruba practitioner, was born eighty years after the emancipation proclamation. His grandparents could have been children of enslaved Africans or enslaved themselves. Obataiye recalls how many of his southern relatives rejected their African beliefs based on the stigma that was attached to it. He recalls most of the Africanisms he learned while growing up were in the form of folkloric beliefs. Practicing traditional beliefs was discouraged. Many African religious beliefs were able to survive in the form of folkloric beliefs. These beliefs carried some of the African’s worldview and cosmology and were remade into idioms and metaphors (Herskovits 1958:75; Blassingame 1972:21). This subversive act was one of many acts that enslaved Africans employed to maintain control of their own head. For instance, the belief that one should not sweep another’s feet was a common among many African American informants. During the Odun Egungun festival, I saw priest sweeping the feet of the masquerade dancers with the Irukere Ileke (beaded fly whisk). Obataiye said this was done to make way for the ancestors and to call to the dancers.
It was common for an overseer, one who supervised the workers in the field, to patrol the area on horseback. From this elevated position, one could see as well be seen by all of the laborers in the field. Although the overseer may not be what Foucault had in mind in the discussion of panopticonism, his function was similar. For enslaved laborers in the antebellum south, the overseer represented “a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault 1977:201). Here the divergence is clear, because the overseer sees as well as is seen. In addition, the main house on the plantation is a panopticon of sorts. Everything from its positioning to its “fortress like” architecture creates a “constraining force” which housed power (Foucault 1977:202). The visibility of these two forces coupled with the extreme brutality of enslavement created large populations of condemned docile bodies, with vague memories of a self-animating force from long ago. Most interlocutors express a disconnection and conflict with western ideology, stating that the ways in which the world was explained. Abeke says that even as a child, Christianity “it didn’t make sense” to her or as in the case of Obataiye reported that he felt a difference that he couldn’t explain. All interlocutors reported a strong connection to generational folkloric beliefs, that although they could not explain it, it made sense.

6.4 Black Power

The Black Cultural Nationalist Movement (BCNM) was born out of the Black Power Movement. The BCNM was teleological as it sought the full re-connection of African Americans to their cultural legacy. The BCNM believed that cultural identification was a form of personal freedom that could also create economic and political autonomy. This power, Black Power or Àṣe, would come about through the African American’s acceptance of their African heritage
and culture. Many BPM and BCNM adherents believed that this would stabilize the African American’s cultural core. Inspired by family and friends, the majority the interlocutors were involved in different cultural political movements that came out of the BPM, such as Association for the Study of Classical African Civilization (ASCAC), The Sons and Daughters of Africa, The Black Liberation Army (BLA), Republic of New Africa (RNA), and some chapters of the Black Panther Party (BPP). In my interview with him, Obataiye recounts, “I remember dogs being {siced} on my friends at that time and people getting knocked down by water hoses. I had served in the military and coming back home it didn’t seem right.” He continues about his transformation after the acceptance of an African ideology, “I mean it changed the way I viewed the world. Uh.. It changed the way..uh..My own life style. I mean a deep desire to correct the injustices that happened, and I had to start within.” This desire was brought on by Obatayie’s interaction and development within the BPP, as the members were encouraged to “find out where they came from.” In this way, many cultural nationalists tethered themselves to Africa as a way to escape the liminality they experienced in the United States. Many of the interlocutors reported a sense of clarity that accompanied their new outlook. “I believe I found something that was missing in my life. Identity wise and spiritual wise, and I wanted to preserve that particular tradition and culture.” And “Western ideology just never made sense to me. I was always questioning everything. Even as a little girl. This made sense to me.” One of the reasons why it made sense was because there were glaring similarities between the folkloric beliefs and the African culture and religion.

The relationship between gender and militancy is one of the most under studied areas in Black Power scholarship. Major narratives advanced by BPM scholars highlight armed
resistance as a major ideological component. As a result, the BPM and armed resistance are oftentimes portrayed as masculine contrasted against the effeminate CRM. Crosby’s critique contextualizes this issue as she states, “It overlooks the coercive and positive elements of nonviolence, obscures activism that was essentially ‘unviolent’ and largely ignores women’s experiences, while distorting those of many men” (Crosby 2012: 207). She illustrates how BPM scholars like Simon Wendt and Christopher Strain tend to focus on male narratives to argue their thesis that BPM was about “maintaining their concept of male honor and dignity” (Crosby 2012:208).

Crosby charges that the idea central in arguments of Wendt and Strain is often that black men could not find manhood through ‘nonviolence’, hence the CRM did not allow men to be men. She also analyzes the line of reasoning in historiographies that seem to suggest that African American women were able to adapt the ‘passivity’ of CRM easier than African American men were. As a result, Black Power Nationalists were portrayed as violent males that wanted to kill all white people. Since the CRM was associated with women, it was seen as less threatening and therefore more acceptable. Read: less threatening. However, many Black Nationalist Organizations did not seek out violence, but wanted to carve out a place for themselves where they could feel accepted. “As a part of the group we had been studying traditional African religions, as a kinda monolithic way of looking at Africa. In that process I learned that African cultural groups had different spiritual systems.” Adebayo, who had been a part of the BLA said their focus were primarily in self-defense. “I mean we weren’t gonna to beat nobody up, but we weren’t gonna let them beat us up any more either.” Still stereotypes persisted.
Crosby states that a ‘more nuanced, and complex assessment’ is needed. In exploring fringe historiographies, she cites scholars such as Dittimer and Payne who explored both men and women’s views on self-defense, and she found that their analysis provided alternatives to the stereotypes dominant in the majority of historiographies. Crosby cites Payne’s “differential-reprisal theory” that states the women were less likely than men to experience the backlash associated with movement participation (Crosby 2012:211). She also explores Timothy Tyson’s analysis on the Monroe Movement that highlights the complexity of the gender and militancy issue. Tyson charges that in Monroe, women not only asked to be defended, but actively defended themselves as well. Crosby also explores the theories asserted by historian Steve Estes. Estes challenges the theory that African Americans viewed the philosophy of the CRM as ‘unmanly’. Estes claims that new modes of manhood were created through both armed and non-violent resistance (Crosby 2012: 211). In addition, Crosby explores this concept of gender and militancy through her own research. Narratives from women, like Bernice Johnson Reagon, shows that her experience in active resistance was anything but nonviolent.

Perhaps one of the most provocative arguments that focus on gender and militancy is posited by Simon Wendt. Wendt argues ‘self defense remained most confined to militant rhetoric and represented a psychological rather than a practical necessity” (Wendt 2007:154). Wendt proposes that the ideas put forth by African American leaders, like Malcolm X, and not the realities of the constant threats of violence, imbued the idea of militancy and manhood among both Northern and Southern activists. Additionally, Wendt implies that the Nation of Islam’s (NOI) gender rhetoric directly influences and underscores armed resistance ideologies. He also argues that militancy was solely an attempt to reclaim manhood, the participants were
mainly male (Wendt 2007: 159-160). Umoja highlights the different ways in which African American women participated in the struggles that were classified as ‘nonviolent’ to show that women, like men had various roles and responsibilities. Women’s participation ranged from hosting meetings in their homes to organized demonstrations where “women and men armed themselves...everybody was armed” (Umoja 2011: 29). The Black Governmental Conference that was organized by the Malcolm X society attracted African nationalists from all over the United States (Umoja 2011:25). African American women figured prominently among those more than five hundred participants. These women were active in creating a proposal for a provisional African American government, the Republic of New Africa. They also helped contribute to the vision of RNA as well as hold major positions within the organization (Umoja 2011:26). Oseijeman Adefunmi was also a member of the RNA, along with Maulana Karenga (the founder of Kwanzaa) and Amiri Baraka (Lee Roi Jones).

This engendering of the BPM creates a power politic that portrays the members of the BPM as dangerous and violent men while overlooking the other components to the movement that stressed self-sufficiency, family cohesion, and economic independence. For instance, the Black Panther Party (BPP) not only collaborated with young Hispanics, Native Americans but European American groups as well. They collectively targeted issues such as equal opportunity employment and an end to the exploitation of labor for all people (Seale 2006:11). Another group, Revolutionary Action Group (RAM) was a grassroots organization dedicated to the education of low income inner city African Americans (Ahmad 2006:257). Members of RAM believed that many African Americans were still enslaved mentally and the reclamation of an African centered worldview could break those mental chains (Ahmad 2006:259). This type of
mental slavery can be seen as a residual effect of the creation of docile bodies that occurred during the periods of enslavement. By and large the supporters of the BPM advocated for the ‘reclamation of the head’ by way of cultural acceptance and re-identification. This contributed to ‘cultural tethering’ that many African Americans experienced but is often overlooked in historical, sociological, and anthropological dialogues of social movements.
“African culture was very prevalent with all the movements going on around New York. This was also the time when a lot of African students were coming to this country to get an education. And they would all come down to Harlem, because Damballa Wedo was located at 125\textsuperscript{th} Street and St. Nicholas Avenue. And um we were on the third floor and in that same building we had a writer... and had a club that we called the African club. We dealt with a lot of dance. The culture movements of arts and dance, what have you. And we would all come upstairs...Oseijeman went to Cuba to be initialed and when he came back he was one of the first African Americans to be initiated in the priesthood.” ---Adebayo

This chapter will explore the ways flexible capitalism, a byproduct of globalism, creates a phenomenon of personal uncertainty which people ‘try to change themselves’ and exercise personal agency by connecting to alternative methods of spiritually. It will explore the narrative of the effect of disempowerment that accompanies financial instability. This chapter will also discuss how transmigrants, aided by neoliberal policies, contribute to the dialogue of alternative perspectives and the impact of transnational communities in the lives of transmigrants. The effect of the Internet on postmodern globalism and how it facilitates transmigration, transnationalism, cyber ethnoscapes and dissemination of spiritually will also be discussed. A brief history of the Yoruba migrations and African Americans desire to reconnect will explore some of the more salient aspects of personal empowerment and development. The conflation of traditional Yoruba practices and modern Yoruba practices produces what McCray describes as “neo-syncretism”. Neo-syncretism can be seen as a contemporary interpretation of the Yoruba religion (McCray 2002:75). The members of Òyọtúnjí Village created a new style of Ifa worship by separating and re-imagining the Catholic influences that were so dominant in the Cuban Santeria. The influence of the Internet, media, communication, and travel technologies made it easier for women and men to ‘become the
active initiator in self development’ and re-imagine a new religion based on traditional Yoruba concepts.

7.1 Globalism and Yoruba Religion

Although globalism is relatively a new term, trade relationships between various nations have always existed in various forms and degrees. Some scholars even argue the exchanges of ideas, material goods and food (just to name a few) has existed as since human kind first migrated out of Africa (Wolf 2010). However, the stark difference between globalism in a pre-industrialized society and globalism in a post-industrial technological society is the speed at which information can be sent and received (Clarke 2010). In a pre-industrialized society, information was for the privileged and communication was leisurely at best (Clark 2010). Today’s technological advances allow for ease of access to information, via the World Wide Web. Computers are available to nearly anyone, regardless of their educational or economic background, thanks to local libraries. Information is no longer a privilege of the elite, but anyone with a library card can travel virtually to distant lands, find recipes for exotic dishes and communicate with relatives in a different hemisphere.

The internet has also improved the speed of communication, allowing for people of different countries to transcend physical boundaries and borders with ease - what Gomez-Pena calls a New World Border (Foster 2002). In his article, Cyber-Aztecs and Cholo Punks: Guillermo Gomez-Pena and Five Worlds Theory, Foster explores Mexican performance artist Gomez-Pena’s book, The New World Border. The New World Border is a transnationalistic paradigm conceptualized by Gomez-Pena as five worlds or rather Five Worlds Theory. Gomez-Pena’s mapping of the world space is consistent with the widely accepted Bandung Conference global
mapping of the first, second and third worlds (Foster 2002). However, the divergence of this concept of global space occurs with the addition of two new worlds which focus on the temporal aspects of transnationalism, thus creating the Five Worlds Theory. While Gomez-Pena’s Fourth World is comprised of both indigenous and migrant peoples who communicate and live across borders, the Fifth World is where technology and the media meet to help create “ethnoscapes”. Through cyberspace transnationals can continue their connection to their country of origin (Foster 2002).

Excogitated years before the development of the Internet, Òyótùnjí Village was able to attract residents and cultural tourist by word of mouth. Many of the services that were offered at Òyótùnjí Village were found exclusively at the Village. Before the inception of Òyótùnjí Village, most of the high-level initiations were held in Cuba. Yemi recalls when Oba Oseijeman was first initiated: “Baba Oseijeman left with a Cuban brother, Chris Oliana. They left New York to go to Cuba to get initiated. And this was the beginning of the Africa Yoruba movement the United States...He (Oseijeman) was the first African American to be initiated into the priesthood, at that time you didn’t have too many African Americans involved in what they called the Santeria.” Originally, the focus of Òyótùnjí village was the reclamation of space and not initiation. This particular advantage began to wane amid the spread of the internet. The internet transformed the global geography, creating a type of deterritorialization that reflected the deviations in borders, distances and places (Clarke 2004:34). This shift made it possible for the production of Yoruba knowledge to be created outside of Òyótùnjí’s sphere of influence. This was done with the help of transmigrant Nigerian students.
In the past (and currently), immigrants migrated to various countries in search of economic opportunities. Often times migrants would bring their entire family resulting in of costly travel fare. For some immigrants, limited resources restricted travel, prompting labor migrants from different countries to establish new roots in the host country. This resulted in the formation of communities, business and neighborhoods which benefited the host country’s economy and political institutions. Often times labor migrants adopted the culture and identity of its host country (Schiller 199). Today’s communication technology allows for the divestment of labor migrants from the host country. Transmigrants, or rather transnationals, maintain a connection with their mother country. Transnationals often times send money and material goods back home to their family, adding to the economy of their country of origin while living in another. This complex action of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of borders which allows for the intersectionality of identities, allegiances and loyalties among transnationalists (Schiller 1995).

7.2 Neo-syncretic: Combining the old and the new

The Shango Temple (the precursor to Òyọtùnjí Village) was founded in Harlem, New York by Oseijeman (then known as Serge King) and Oliana. The temple disbanded shortly after when Oseijeman advocated for the replacement of the catholic saints with the original Yoruba Orishas. “Although they had some black Cubans, they still didn’t think of themselves as being African or from the Yoruba perspective. And if they didn’t invite you to the spiritual things that we called the bembes, a lot of the African Americans at the time didn’t know anything about it (bembes).” Yemi remembers. The Shango temple was disbanded and the Yoruba Temple opened in 1960. Since Harlem was a cultural hotspot members of the Yoruba temple met many
transmigrant students from Nigeria. “There were a lot of African students from the various
countries and they were coming uptown because at that time a lot of them who were in this
country going to school tended to live in the black community. When they began to
understand (Nigerian students) what we were trying to do, we began to get a lot of input.” This
input is an example of the cultural exchange that occurs between transmigrants and residents
of their host countries. This exchange provided valuable information to the members of the
Yoruba temple and helped them to reshape Santeria. This “anti syncretic” approach enabled
Oseijeman to “significantly reshape” Orisha worship in accordance to the growing cultural
nationalist beliefs. (McCray 2002:74).

The result was a new type of Yoruba that was called Orisha-Vodoun. The Orisha-Vodoun
is what McCray dubs as “neo-syncretic”, that is a combination of traditional Yoruba practices
infused with black nationalist separatist ideology (McCray 2002:76). This “neo- syncretism”
concretizes the African American experiences and legitimizes it among traditional African
practices. One of the most profound “neo-syncretic” applications was the creation of the roots
reading. Clarke refers to the Roots reading as the “national and racial order being subverted in
Òyötùnjì divinatory practices (Clarke 2004:238). The Roots reading is a “neo-syncretic” practice
that identifies one’s African heritage through divination. This is practices contributes to
cultural tethering as it fosters a connection between the recipient of the reading with a
concrete African identity that transposes borders. Titilayo remembers her experience with the
Roots reading,

“At Òyötùnjì they did Roots readings. Which the purpose was to tell you more about
your lineage. Sort of to bridge the gap that people hit if they are doing genealogy.
Everybody that does genealogy in African American communities, who descend from enslaved people would say that you hit a wall. When you get to that 1860 census and people, become things in the records. So usually for most people except Alex Hailey, right, you don’t actually find that village in west Africa where you are from. Think of how many villages there will be to find. I mean think about all the possible combinations of ancestors you could have. “

Clarke suggests that Yoruba people conceptualize identity differently because of the unbroken lineage history. Since many Yoruba people are aware of their lineage history, the roots reading is a neo-syncretic tool that empowers African Americans with a distinct cultural legacy. A cultural legacy that makes re-enculturation possible through the learning of languages, foods, dances and religious beliefs. These conflations of ideas are exacerbated by the overarching presence of internet.

**7.3 African and African American borderless communities**

The unique combination of transnational communities with ease of access to information and seeking relief from the anxiety associated with flexible employment creates a new phenomenon of Americans seeking alternative religions (Levitt 2007). The reshaping of political boundaries also influences religious boundaries as well. Citing the ways in which culture and religion are intricately linked Levitt underscores the ways in which transnational communities import their belief systems into their host country. Transmigrants bring with them their particular cultural and religious expressions. In the past, immigrants settling in the United States adapted the culture and religion of the host country. However, the new wave of transnational migrants are now able to maintain connections with their families abroad and no longer have to disconnect with their cultural identity. Through communication technology, transmigrants can be a part of religious communities both virtually and physically (Clarke 2010; Levitt 2007).
This proximity with alternative spirituality often times sparks the curiosity and interest of laborers seeking to alleviate the anxiety associated with social and political liminality. Religion is no longer an exclusionary sphere. Intimate interactions within transnational communities and Americans often times operate within one of the most important realms of social capital in the United States – the realm of spirituality and faith (Levitt 2007). With transmigrant populations, Americans can learn about and practice alternative religious practices by way of cultural tethering. Although many African American who sought out Roots readings were satisfied with the outcome, despite the complexities associated with the forced migrations of a myriad of African ethnicities. Titilayo voices some of her concerns with the Roots readings, by suggesting as such. “I have an idea of how they do the Roots readings. ..it’s what is perceived as an African cultural practice. They use divination in a way that I don’t know of any Yorubas to have to use it to discover their lineage. So at Oyotunji you can go and pay like at the time it was fifty or one hundred dollars to have this Roots readings done. And to have your lineage divined and they tell you what it is. Then you can then develop a family mission that was directed around your true lineage.” In this way new national identities are formed irrespective of borders and boundaries where one can identify with a country that they have never personally visited or lived. New inter-generational narratives and conversations are developed that re-define identity and space in the context of the newly found lineage.

These exploratory relationships are not confined to American’s interaction with members of transnational communities. In fact, they are boundaryless and borderless as many Americans travel to foreign destinations in search of spiritual nirvana (Clarke 2010). Tourism is one of the ways in which poverty stricken, non industrialized Third World countries accumulate
revenue. Tourism is double edged sword; although it provides revenue and employment for local laborers, it also displaces the native population from their homelands –creating unsustainability among the native population (Scheyvens 2011). Chronic poverty has led some people in impoverished areas to sell souvenirs to tourist in hopes of earning some money, thus leading to an over saturated market of native kitsch. The over saturation of kitsch leads many tourism laborers to seek new and inventive ways to earn income, hence the commodification of religion in the form of spiritual tourism.

Some theorists argue that historically, tourism originated around the start of the industrial revolution. They further insist that the early form of tourism was in fact pilgrimages to sites of spiritual significance (Vukonic 1996). In examining the motives and reasons behind tourism, Vukonic links religious reasons to psychosociological motivations for tourists of sacred spaces (Vukonic 1996). In fact, he traces the etymology of the word, tornus, to the obligation of pilgrims to “make the rounds in the shrines in Rome” (Vukonic 1996). Digance states spiritual tourism developed from the spiritual pilgrimages of medieval European society which were often taken as an escape from life’s daily drudgery (Digance 2006). She identifies the root of the word pilgrimage as peregrine-um – meaning: “one that comes from foreign parts” indicating a person who has traveled a great distance (Digance 2006).

The rise in the flexible economy has been parallel to the rise of sacred tourism, which is deliberate tourism to religious places and spaces (Vukonic 1996) The spiritual tourists of today seek to associate their spiritual destination in terms of space rather than place. The former being more of an abstract concept and the later being a concrete destination (Bremer 2006).
They venture to external sacred sites in search in an effort to connect with internal peace, enlightenment and meaning (Digance 2006; Singh 2009). Spiritual tourists seek participation in religious rites, acquisition of sacred objects, and visitation to places of spiritual significance (Clarke 2010; Singh 2009; Vukonic 1996). Capitalism’s ever expanding tentacles prompts the purchase of spirituality, seeing religion as another thing which can be purchased. In this respect the spiritual tourist is at once pious and profane, by purchasing inner peace and spiritual enlightenment (Digance 2006).

7.4 The connection

African Americans have a unique immigrant status, where as their migration to the Americas was not voluntary. The people who managed the trafficking of human beings believed that disconnecting West Africans from their culture and heritage would create a more passive laborer (Stuckey 1987). Although the penalties were harsh for any expression of native culture, many enslaved Africans held on to their cultural beliefs. These beliefs which developed into African cultural continuities; residual aspects of African culture embedded within the dominant culture (Holloway 1991; Stuckey 1987). As a result, some African Americans felt as if something was missing from their lives, as if nebulous cloud was hanging over their heads – they wanted to re-connect with their motherland (Schramm 2010).

One of the impacts of the forced migration of Africans to America during the trans-Atlantic slave trade was a profound and deeply felt connection that exists between some of the descendants of African Americans and the West Africans who share interrelated history (Cohen 2002). It has been estimated that almost forty percent of enslaved Africans came from the country of Nigeria (Cohen 2002). Ironically, one the largest African transmigrant
populations in the United States come from the West African country of Nigeria. Today’s technology makes travel easier and (in some cases) affordable. As a result, the Yoruba religion is rapidly becoming one of the most transnational native traditions in the world. It is practiced in some form or fashion in countries such as Cuba, Brazil, Trinidad and the United States just to name a few. Various ethnicities and nationalities follow the traditions of the Yoruba religion (Clarke 2010; Cohen 2002).

Not all migrants from Nigeria were forced. In fact, the heavily documented Yoruba migrations between the late 18th and mid 19th centuries from the places like Bahia and Cuba to Africa and South America created a constant exchange of ideas, autonomy and organization that supersede the scope of organized chattel slavery (Cohen 2002). Practitioners of the Yoruba religion were organized, highly mobile and usually self contained within transmigrant communities (Cohen 2002). This history of interaction among various ethnicities who adopted Yoruba practices and beliefs distinguished Yoruba from other West African religious traditions because of its ease of accessibility, adaptability and inclusion. This adaptation of various ethnicities into the Yoruba tradition is not new, as the Yoruba people were historically an amalgamation of several different African nations bounded together by space (Schramm 2010).

Today’s flexible economy has inspired a new wave of Nigerian migrant workers. Like most migrant workers, many Yoruba people came to the United States in search of better economic opportunities. The new wave of Yoruba migrants are spurned on as a result of two competing forces: the flexible economy (which makes living abroad more attractive) and neoliberal policies (which makes earning a living in Africa difficult) (Clarke 2008; Mains 2007).
Proximity of Yoruba transnational migrants to the descendants of enslaved Africans sparked a renewed interest during the 1960’s (Yai 2008). Yoruba transnationals have the new found ability to import food, clothing and religious items which helps them to stay connected with their cultural heritage, and African Americans practicing the religion can have ease of access as well.

African Americans are also searching for stability and certainty in today’s flexible economy. The desire for escape from the monotony of daily life is often coupled with the desire to reconnect culturally and spiritually to their African heritage. Schramm states, “...the pilgrim is the ultimate metaphor for the modern subject, constantly preoccupied with the building and maintenance of an identity through which he can give meaning to the confusing world surrounding him.” (Schramm 2010). The reasons African Americans have for partaking in spiritual tours are legion. Some African Americans view spiritual and cultural journeys to Africa as a way to connect with a collective cultural center. Many scholars have theorized about spiritual tourism, most notably Victor Turner. Schramm uses turner’s conception of remoteness and ex-territoriality to clarify her argument that the further away a spiritual site is, the more powerful it becomes and the effect of the pilgrimage becomes more profound and existentialized (Schamm 2010). This could account for the waves of African Americans’ pilgrimages to Africa.

However, it is no longer necessary to travel long distances to engage in alternative traditions. The internet has accommodated the growth of the Yoruba tradition passing information instantaneously to Yoruba practitioners around the globe (Murphy 2010). These
online ‘ethnoscapes’ provide a conundrum for traditionalists in the Yoruba tradition, for the internet encourages the dispersal of the tradition. However, much of the information is often not sanctioned by trained practitioners. Still, anyone who is seeking an alternative to culturally dominant spiritual traditions can find events, counseling and divination services, online museum tours and art (Murphy 2010).

Many of the people who seek spiritual journeys today do so as a result of the uncertainty which exist in their daily lives. This economic uncertainty is a result of flexible capitalism, with constant downsizing and out sourcing of human resources resulting in a state of liminality (Senett 1998; Schramm 2010). The flexible employee feels loss and confusion, and some look to an alternative spiritual lifestyle. Transnational communities have introduced disparate cultures, food and religious beliefs to their host countries. Modern advances in travel communication and access to information have empowered transmigrants with the ability to stay connected to their culture and homeland. Additionally, the use of modern communication technology, media and the World Wide Web can have an impact on the lives of transnational as well as people interested in other cultures. The advent of this technology allows for the constant connection and reconnection and with the transmigrant’s homeland, culture and family (Foster 2002). It creates a new space where information is attainable and readily available, providing spiritual alternatives. It also allows one to take cyber spiritual pilgrimages and connect with people virtually in a sea of diversity. These ethnoscapes provide a space for counter cultural representations, ideas and voices (Foster 2002).
Through spiritual tourism, women and men are able to connect achieve a form of spiritual enlightenment which fosters growth and development. This enlightenment gives one the feeling of empowerment, stability and control in the otherwise unstable and uncontrollable flexible economy (Vukonic 1996). The World Wide Web and new communication technologies has aided flexible capitalism which spawns neoliberalist policies that inspire transmigrants who settle in transnational communities. Neoliberal policies continue to promote transmigration from non industrialized, poorer countries to countries of wealth where transmigrants seek improved economic opportunities. Transmigrants form transnational communities, communities where immigrants support their countries of birth as well as their host country. The influx of Nigerian Americans to the United States has created a huge Yoruba transnational community to which African Americans seeking stability as well as cultural affirmations can connect. Thereby helping African Americans change themselves by engaging in spiritual tourism which helps to strengthen their bonds between God and Country by finding their own personal Jesus.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

For many African American cultural nationalists, Òyötünjí Village was the apex of a decades long struggle to escape liminality. Despite structural, political and institutionalized racism, the residents of Òyötünjí Village managed to create a space that met their needs to culturally bind themselves to a fixed place. The residents discovered cultural tethering offered the “push” against hegemony that was necessary to create a certain degree of sovereignty. Cultural tethering provided members with tools to explain their lives and provided a sense of
belonging. Cultural tethering was also instrumental in restoring Ase, or personal power to the practitioners. Ase gave the members purpose and direction, and particularly as with the Roots readings, provided a African cultural template that could replace the Western cultural template. The rejection of the Western cultural template and the subsequent land-based African re-enculturation was their victory over liminality.

The construction and destruction of identity is closely related to the destruction the self. During antebellum slavery, it was necessary for those in power to reconstruct African identity as a justification for enslavement and to exert control. This reconstruction of African identity was comprised of, but not limited to, the attempted deconstruction of African physical and material culture. However, by examining the historical interplay between power and identity that developed over time through the development of the Yoruba and African American identities, filial connectivity emerged as one of the dominant narratives describing nationhood. The “imagined” nations of people that connected through filial social obligations, created relationships that in turn created solidarity. In the Yoruba, this was manifested in the children of Òduduwa becoming an identifiable homogeneous nation. As in the case of African Americans, this solidarity created a cultural revolution that sought to create a homogenous African nation, with Òyötùnjí Village being one of the first attempts for a nation within a nation.

Although Òyötùnjí Village created a nation within a nation, structural challenges created a cycle of poverty that would be a challenge to some of the residents. While the villagers focused on “Rest of Culture” framework, many of the “core” aspects related to substance were underdeveloped. In addition, power evoked in the form of environmental and structural
racism created a situation where the exotic aspects of culture had to be commoditized to sustain their residents. The personal power the residents discovered was challenged by the same influences of hegemony that they were seeking to escape. Òyọtunjí Village’s attempts to stabilize their core was challenged due to the instability of population that was constantly encroached upon by the laws and policies of the United States.

Residents of Òyọtunjí Village sought out a space that they could call their own, a place where they could practice their cultural traditions unencumbered. The rejection of Western values and the alignment with African cultural values was seen as form of personal empowerment. Ase theory focused on the ways that liminality affected the descendants of enslaved Africans. Liminality, the space that is neither here nor there, because Africans in America were not seen as people but things. With the abolishment of slavery, African Americans danced in and out of social spaces, oftentimes without their desire or consent. Frequently excluded from social, political, economic, and cultural spheres, African Americans have pushed into American society or pulled away from it. Although several historians and sociologists have noted this push/pull notion, the impact on culture has never been fully explored.

One of the ways in which personal power was retained and replicated throughout generations occurred through “dispositions.” Building upon Bourdieu’s notion of habitus, Bárákú Ori illustrated how Africanisms and cultural affinity were reproduced and disseminated through generations as well as how generational narratives of separatism were culturally replicated with the long civil rights movement framework. The political, social, economical,
cultural, and political liminality that African Americans encountered was reinforced through idioms, metaphors, and Africanisms that tied them to the *imagined* African cultural heritage. In this way, cultural tethering produced *Black Power* metaconversations of freedom, acceptance, and belonging that were passed down generationally and subsequently inspired a land based cultural revolution that manifested in the form of Ôyötunji Village.

The creation of Ôyötunji village was a monumental task. Although the founders sought to create a nation within a nation, outside structural forces had very real impact on the community. Globalization impacted the community in three ways. First, the spread of the Yoruba religion to the New World produced a tradition that African Americans could reference. Secondly, the influx of transmigrant Nigerian students to the United States helped the founders of Ôyötunji Village create a more in-depth picture after the rejection of Santeria that gave rise to the “neo-syncretic” Orisha–Vodoun religion. Finally, the economic effects of globalism created situations that fostered the necessity for cultural tourism at Ôyötunji Village. Globalism and the flexible economy often left many feeling powerless. This feeling of powerlessness resulted in a personal search for spiritual enlightenment. This search for enlightenment and cultural affinity is what drew many to cultural tours at Ôyötunji Village.

The intersectionality of power and identity is an undermined resource in the field of anthropology. Understanding the ways that they at once both reinforce and challenge hegemony could create a better understanding of how successful social change is attained. The infusion of culture into social movement theory can deeply expand discussions and analysis of social movements. Ôyötunji Village has faced various challenges in the past causing their
position as an African American Mecca to wane and wax. The relevancy of Òyötùnji Village changes as the intergenerational narratives change, as Oyo continues to rise and rise again. As long as the hegemonic systems continue to create spaces of liminality, cultural tethering will always serve as tool of power for those disempowered and the call for Òyötùnji to make Africans in America will still exist.

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APPENDIX

Abeke’s (Female, 74) parents were from Jackson, Mississippi, but she grew up in Gary, Indiana.

Abeke was in her late teens and early twenties during the civil rights era, but she did not participate in any marches or sit ins. Abeke became a member of the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations (ASCAC) study group in Denver when she was in her late forties. When the members of the group began studying about traditional systems and religions, she realized that she needed it sparked a curiosity in Abeke about the various African religions.

Realizing that Africa was ‘not a monolith’, Abeke started to study specific cultural and spiritual
systems. She developed a need to discover where she “came from” and she heard about the Yoruba at Òyọtùnjí Village roots readings. The roots reading borrowed its name and concept from Alex Hailey’s book *Roots*. The roots reading was a divination process that identified the African nation that a person’s ancestors originated.

**Adebambe** (male, 30) is an Ifa practitioner and member of the Kuumba Collective in Tallahassee, Florida in 2007. The Kuumba Collective is a rites of passage program facilitated by parents. The program is comprised of African language classes, cooking seminars, African cosmology workshops, African drumming and dancing class as well as community service. The initiates, as they are called, enter into the program at the age of thirteen and continue through the program for two years. Adebambe recounts how his transition into “African consciousness “ (and Cross speculates as stages of nigrescence) was particularly disorienting. He wanted to shield his son from that, so along with other parents he formed the Collective. He was introduced to Yoruba religion through the BSU at his college. Upon graduation he went back home to Tallahassee. It is through his work with the collective that introduced Adebambe was introduced to members of Òyọtùnjí Village.

**Adebayo** (male, 62) was a member of the Black Liberation Army (BLA) in Philadelphia. Adebayo left the BLA when the police attacks and COINTELPRO weakened the organization. Adebayo learned about the Yoruba temple from his Cuban associate who was in a Marxist organization that often collaborated with the BLA in Harlem. He studied with at the Yoruba temple off and on until the group moved to South Carolina. Years later, Adebayo would move to the Village with his family.
Akanke (female, 28) joined the Kuumba Collective last year to obtain a male mentor for her estranged teenage son. The Collective introduced her to African traditions and religion. It is through the collective that she became aware of the Yoruba tradition and Ôyötünjí Village. Although she has had services performed at Ôyötünjí Village, she considers herself a part of a Yoruba house in Orlando, Florida. She was introduced to African religion through the collective.

Chief Adebesi (male, 73) was born in South Carolina but grew up in the Bronx, New York. His introduction to African culture came on a chance outing with his mother at the Palladium in Harlem, New York when he was fourteen. Chief Adebesi remembers a man with a red black and green lapel pin came over to ask his mother to dance. The man was a Garveyite who left some pamphlets with Adebesi and his mother. He remembers the messages that spoke of pride and heritage, but at fourteen he felt he wasn’t ready to act upon the information. In the early sixties when he left the army, he met an African dancer at a nightclub in Harlem. The dancer convinced him to go to the Yoruba temple. Adebesi was associated with various Black Nationalist Groups (NOI and BPP) but did not consider himself “cultural”. He admits he went to the temple because he was attracted to the young woman and wanted to know if all the women at the Yoruba temple looked like she did. When he went to the temple, instead of the dancer he found Chief Oseijeman. The two engaged in a heated cultural conversation that challenged all of Adebesi’s beliefs. Adebesi began to question his worldview and later opted an African worldview. He and Oseijeman later became good friends.

Chief Obataiye (male, 74) was a part of several Black Power organizations during the sixties. One of the organizations disbanded and left a void in his life. Obataiye was confused as to
where he should go and he began to re-read old speeches from El-Hajii Malik El Shabazz that identified African Americans as being from Africa. The challenge became more than wearing African clothing and having an African name. The speeches created a desire in Obataiye to develop and maintain an African worldview. Although he self identified as African, he felt that he did not know what Africans thought about the concept of life, love or morality. So he began to research the spiritual aspect of being African. His search led him to the Yoruba Temple in New York. Although Obataiye was able to meet a few people who were associated with the temple, Oba Oseijeman and the majority of the practitioners had already moved to South Carolina. He traveled down to Òyòtùnji Village for a roots reading and ended up staying in the village for three years. He later became a Babalawo in the Ifa tradition and opened up his own temple.

Ogunfemi (male, 35) heard about Òyòtùnji Village in 1990 when he was a student at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) from one of his associates from a black studies group who went to a sacrifice at Òyòtùnji Village. Later, another one of his associates introduced him to a priestess of Oya. Ogunfemi received a reading from this former village resident. He was very impressed by the accuracy of her divination. His association with the Oya priestess led to his having services and reading performed by priest at Òyòtùnji Village. He has been a student of Ifa since 1990 and he began training as a Babalawo in 2003. Ogunfemi was raised in the South and had experienced racial and class trauma that reinforced the perceptions of liminality. Ogunfemi admits it is through his association with African study groups that created the desire to know more about African culture and religion.
Shiminege’s (female, 36) father and mother were both active in the Nation of Islam (NOI). She was raised in an African nationalist household although her parents were not African centered. She had a good friend named Consuela that she met at community college in Seattle, Washington. Consuela was an Argentinean American who was really into Marxism and Che Guevara. According to Shiminege, she was “doing the multicultural thing” and did not have a clear cultural identity. She was into Latin American culture and politics. Consuela challenged Shiminege to find out more about African culture and politics. She said Consuela, who was very adamant about practicing one’s own culture and heritage, chided her for her multicultural idealism. Shiminege then began to focus on herself as an African and began to go through the process of Nigrescence, which lead her to join African study groups in the Black Student Alliance (BSA). Through her studies at the BSA, she was introduced to Yoruba belief and cosmology. When she later moved to Atlanta, she met former residents of Òyötunjí Village who introduced her to priests who performed spiritual services.

Titilayo (female, 38) was a member of an Akan family collective in Atlanta named Nyansapo in around 1996. This group worked together to create an African centered network dedicated to rebuilding families and African tradition and culture. Nyansapo encouraged researching family genealogies, premarital counseling, and the development of a personal, family, and generational purpose statement. As a result, many members contacted Oba Oseijeman to schedule a roots reading. It is through this initial contact that Titilayo learned about the village. After having roots readings performed, Titilayo returned to the village several times for spiritual services. She often experienced extended stays at the village as well as the nearby compound of a Village founder.
Yemi (male, 71) came in contact with black nationalist groups in New York after he left the Airforce in the late fifties and early sixties. The racism he experienced which culminated with his military service spurred his interest in nationalist movements. His first encounter with nationalist movements was the Sons and Daughters of Africa in Brooklyn. The Sons and Daughters of Africa was a group that was founded on Garveyism, or following the works and philosophy of Marcus Garvey. His involvement with Sons and Daughters of Africa created a desire to learn more about African culture. In Harlem, he was introduced to the order of Damballah- Wedo, the creator of all life in Haitian voodoo. Yemi, seventy-one, has been a Yoruba practitioner for over forty-four years and a Babalawo (Priest of Ifa) for over twenty.