Citizenship Construction and the Afterlife: Funeral rituals among Orisha devotees in Trinidad

…

Mortuary Rituals, Mourning, and the Concept of Afterlife: Differences and cohesion among sub-groups of Orisha devotees in Trinidad

Josiah O. Olubowale
(Cultural Studies Unit)
Dept. of Literary, Cultural & Communication Studies, Faculty of Humanities & Education,
University of the West Indies,
St. Augustine.
dada_jo@yahoo.com

5th European Conference on African Studies

African Dynamics in a Multipolar World

June 26 – 29, Lisbon, Portugal

Panel P171: Multipolar Religious Production: Old and new trends

Introduction

This paper discusses the interplay between three concepts: religion, citizenship and afterlife. This research utilizes rich ethnographic data of funeral rituals as conceived and practiced by different groups of Orisha practitioners in Trinidad. Although the ethnography that this paper relies on was conducted among Orisha devotees in Trinidad between 2009-2012. The analysis, however, serves as a template on which the understanding of the interplay between

race, perception and interpretation of history by different groups on the one hand, and on the other hand, the use of religion in individual and group agency in Trinidad and Tobago. The paper also discusses the context of agency that religion serves within a diverse society, in a post-colonial state. While Orisha as a religious entity can be broadly grouped together as one within a national space, I argue that such a general description needs to be peeled off in order to reveal the individualistic and sub-group specifics that agency is constructed to address through religion.

The substance of the discourse on identity formation is often constructed to pointedly address the condition of individuals while alive. In this paper, I suggest that death, which might seem to signify the end of the whole identity argument for the deceased, extends the discussion through funerals. Funeral rites and rituals have thus become instrumental in performing or asserting group preferences of identity definition and in fact, rejection of practices that might be preferred by other group or groups.

Two pitfalls that beset description and analysis of Orisha practices as a minority group culture, and thus need to be avoided are at the two ends of the same plane: the first is the assumption of unity in form and structure of religion as well as coherence necessary to assert group identity. This unravels with inherent contradictions that are usually left unmentioned. The single unifying designation, Orisha, that is broadly applied in referring to the practices and ways of lives of devotees, is challenged by the fractured, contradictory but permissible practices. One unifying factor that joins all these practices is the life conditions and realities that these practices jointly address. The expected implication of unified doctrine, dogma and beliefs in defining the religion is thus disappointed. On the other side of the plane is the attempt to explain away the complexities inherent in the practices, as well as the absence of a coherent simple narrative by grouping the whole set of practices under the same

designation as syncretic form. I point to the insufficiency of syncretism both as a theoretical instrument in describing practices such as Orisha in the New World or as an excuse for the advent of the structure of these practices.

Introduction

To characterize a mortuary rite an "Orisha funeral" in Trinidad and Tobago, is without a doubt, a recent occurrence, shaped by the lived realties of Orisha devotees and their continued efforts at making their religious practices visible as identity markers within the post-colonial social space.

In spite of the importance that history and anthropology attached to mortuary rites in recording traditional practices, the discourse on New World practices that are traced back to Africa has remained a sketchy and complex one. Of the whole spectrum of studies into Afro-New World practices, funeral or mortuary rituals stands out as lacking detailed account. The devotees of Orisha however continue to evolve their practices in order to accommodate their worldviews and aspirations, albeit within a contested social and theological contests. To achieve a distinction for Afro-American cultural practices, some measure of generalization have been utilized in the literature and the practice of generalizing continues at present. In order to win a voice for the powerless, one method widely utilized, both in writing and as a worldview, is such that group together as many of the diverse or similar rituals as possible and apply to them a workable label. Funeral is a good example of this generalization and labeling.

Although Orisha is now widely known to be a religious practice in contemporary Trinidad and Tobago, not much is known of any funeral ritual until very recently. The lack in details has always resulted in the generalized grouping of the religion as one of the African

heritage of the New World.

One of the earliest ethnographic records of funerals among Africans in the New World is the account given by William Beckford (388-390) of slave burials in Jamaica. Not only is the tone that of complete generalization of all Blacks in Jamaica at the time, Beckford reached extensive conclusion of what he sees as "negroes view" and attitudes towards death and afterlife, grieving, and the funeral rites. "As an evil" Beckford declares, "few negroes consider death in this light. I never knew one who did, or who either dreaded it by anticipation, or who was apprehensive when it was hovering near." (390) Apart from comparing the "negroes view" to civilized world, all that Beckford observed were written in tone to be representative of all Blacks. This is the tone that most expressed views on minority religious groups have taken and continues to build on within the post-colonial states that now exist. Regarding the rituals that Beckford observed, it is worth an extensive quote:

> Their principal festivals are their burials, upon which occasions they call forth all their magnificence, and display all their taste; and the expence (sic) with which the funerals of the better sort of negroes upon a plantation are attended, very often exceed the bounds of credulity; and of this position many instances might be given. Their bodies lie in state; an assemblage of slaves from neighbourhood appears: the body is ornamented with linen and other apparel, which has been previously purchased, as is often the custom, for this solemn occasion; and all the trinkets of the defunct are exposed in the coffin, and buried in the grave with the remains. The bier is lined with cambric and with lace; and when closed, it is covered with a quantity of expensive cloth, upon which are sometimes deposited wines and other liquors for the recreation of the guests, while a hog, poultry, and other viands, are offered up as an expiatory sacrifice. When the body is carried to the grave, they accompany the procession with

> a song; and when the earth is scattered over it, they send forth a shrill and noisy howl, which is no sooner re-echoed, in some cases, than forgotten. After this ceremony, which in civilized countries is considered as a melancholy one, but of which few traces can be found in the sepulture of a negro, the affected tear is soon dried, the pretended sigh is soon suppressed, and the face of sorrow becomes at once the emblem of joy (388-89).

Barbara Bush (156), in her strong description of the roles that enslaved women played in the slave society places funerals as such in which women play prominent roles, as well as citing Olaudah Equiano to make passionate defence of how enslaved Africans have "retained most of their native customs." She states:

> Slave funerals were viewed as riotous affairs by whites and were banned, ostensibly for their pagan and irreverent content but probably on account of the fact that they attracted large numbers of slaves and planters feared their potential for subversion. Nevertheless, the slaves clung tenaciously to their own way of death. Equiano, for instance, maintained that slaves retained 'most of their native customs' such as burying the dead with victuals and running with the corpse, as in Africa (157).

While conducting ethnography in Trinidad, I have come across such views regarding Orisha funerals.[1] It is interesting that Barbara Bush quoted Equiano (wrongly) that "running with the dead" was part of the customs that survived in the New World. In December 1771, Olaudah

[1]. A Catholic Trinidadian woman once told me that the reason she was not willing to attend an Orisha funeral was because she had learnt that "those people" leave their dead inside the house for several days before they decide on burial. When I asked further if she had witnessed such an instance, the response was No! Apart from the general label of "obeah" for Orisha practices and rituals, sentiments such as expressed above remain part of the generality of perception that Orisha devotees have to wrestle within the contemporary society, and for which the chosen funeral rite is supposed to engage.

Equiano serving as a steward on the *Jamaica* arrived from England in Nevis and then in Jamaica. He writes:

> When I came to Kingston, I was surprised to see the number of Africans who were assembled together on Sundays; particularly at a large commodious place, called Spring Path. Here each different nation of Africa meet and dance after the manner of their own country. They still retain most of their native customs: they bury their dead, and put victuals, pipes and tobacco, and other things, in the grave with the corpse, in the same manner as in Africa (278).

In Trinidad and Tobago, wake keeping is one practice where the general worldview of both the deceased and those participating at the burial are played out. Wake in itself, cannot be described as a religious ritual, rather, it is a form of visits paid by neighbours and friends to a bereaved family, where everyone in attendance is entertained, sometimes through the night. It is at such gatherings that the religious beliefs and general worldview of both the deceased and those in attendance are played out through jokes, music, story-telling and drinking. In Tobago, a unique wake practice evolved known as Bongo. Wake, as well as Bongo are generally considered as folk practice among Trinidadians and Tobagonians of African decent with “religious overtones”, in the words of Rawle Titus (32) it is not a Eric Williams, while asserting this sentiment, writes: The shouters and the shango, the latter the God of Thunder of the Yoruba people, have come to Trinidad straight from Africa. So have the traditions of burials, especially in respect of wakes, with which the Bongo is traditionally associated - as it is in the well-known calypso, ‘Tonight is the bongo night’” (39).

Although the label "Orisha shrine" can be applied to the four venues where the four funeral rituals took place, two general groups can still be observed into which they both fall

into: the two shrines where the first two funeral rituals took place fall into the first group; they were built in the typical Trinidadian style to building shrines in general – comprising a *palaís* (a general area where rituals are performed in before everyone present), a *chappelle* (an inner room, entrance into which is only permitted by authorized persons), and finally perogun (offering spots for different deities with flags of corresponding colours). In the case of the third funeral, there are marked differences. First of all, the shrine is one example of practices in Trinidad where the cosmology, belief systems and rituals are designed to be Yoruba-inclined although there are wide spaces constructed for meetings of devotees as well as ritual spots for different deities, flags for deities are conspicuously absent. Furthermore, ritual spots to deities are referred to as *ojubo* (ritual/offering spot in Yoruba), rather than using either of the words "stool" or "*peregun*" as is the practice in Trinidad.

A distinct one with a striking significance is the pan yard-workshop where the wake as well as the post-funeral celebration took place for Odingo Horse, in the case of the fourth funeral. While the term shrine cannot be loosely applied to the space and in fact, Ellie Mannette Park, where the funeral rituals took place, by design, is of emphasized significance in projecting the revolutionary and the activist leaning of the deceased, rather than serving as a designated Orisha shrine. However, Odingo during his lifetime, kept a shrine within the sanctum of the pan yard-workshop as a nexus for his lived reality. Just as his name Odingo was supposed to represent the Kikuyu warrior from the pre-colonial Kenya,1 the significance of the Trinidadian "revolutionary" gathering place was not going to be lost at his burial. Thus, the symbol of his creativity as a *mas man*, his revolutionary and pan-African bent were celebrated in an Orisha ritual within the precinct of a public park secured with permission from the City Council of Port of Spain. The celebration of pan playing, drinking and *limin*

[1.]. As I was told during conversation with Chief Erinfolami at the pan yard.

within the pan yard-workshop that contain a shrine to Ogun and Oshosi (Odingo's deity for war and creativity) was the only way to express the overlap of religion, the creative industry, entertainment and activism as shown by Odingo life.

The question then is how to define a shrine. How simplistic or all-inclusive should a definition of what constitutes a shrine be? Can a public park that is of great symbolism to working class activist and a park named by the government after Elliot Mannette, a man generally regarded as the father of the modern steel pan musical instrument be regarded as a shrine? For Odingo not to have aligned himself to any organized Orisha shrine in Trinidad, Odingo stood out as are many Trinidadians and Tobagonians who may not be easily counted as Orisha devotees. However, the shrine he keeps1 within the pan yard-workshop aligns with a sentiment among a segment of pan-Africanist in Trinidad and Tobago that the steel pan is an Orisha instrument, inspired by Ogun; that pan music is an Orisha music and that any pan yard is an Orisha shrine. Chief Erinfolami, who was among the officiating priest at Odingo funeral expresses this strongly.2 This is coupled with the general idea, even among secularists that the steel pan as a musical instrument and the narratives around it are a strong testament for resistance.

Elaborate funeral rituals among Orisha devotees can, therefore be seen to owe their past not only to Africa as a mythical and ancestral homeland but also to sets of practices that evolved over a long period within the milieu of the New World. Just as the name Orisha is generic, the assumption that Orisha funeral or that Orisha people bury their dead in a

---

[1.]. The shrines to Ogun and Oshosi are situated in two spots in a corner without the usual flags that are commonly used in Trinidad and Tobago. Looking at the shrine spots from a distance of six feet, the most discernible items on the two spots that effect an appearance of shrine in traditional Trinidadian or Tobagonian sense, are the two ceramic containers called goblets used in pouring water to shrines or during prayers.

[2.]. Interview:16 October 2012.

particular way, or an Orisha devotee will choose to be buried in an "Orisha way" can both be misleading, in the least, or meaningless at most. Orisha devotees have never and are not likely to have that assumed, unified method of burying the dead, that going by the literature or any popular media for recording history, is what would be expected.

Not only is the choice of the dying or the dead circumspect on the way he or she should or can be buried, the choices before those that are organizing the burial and the mortuary rituals are also certain to be subjected to intra-Trinidadian theological leanings on the one hand, as well as a transnational expansion of theological implications on the other hand. My point here is that how anyone of Orisha persuasion is buried presents an intra-Orisha form of analysis of what theological leanings the person has lived by, or in fact, a combination of leanings. The afterlife choices and aspirations are also of serious concern and thus, organized accordingly by those on earth.

The Four Funerals

1. Iya'lorisa Melvina Rodney[1]

On the morning of 18 March 2009 at around 9 A.M., mourners started arriving at the Orisha yard situated within the compound of the home of the deceased, Iya'lorisha Melvina Rodney

[1] The title for Madam Rodney is an example where religious titles and designations as well as hierarchy among Orisha devotees in Trinidad and Tobago require detailed explanation. *Iya* (Yoruba word for mother) assumes a religious connotation while *Olorisa*, Yoruba word for anyone who practices Orisha (usually, an Orisa Nla/Obatala worshiper). The two words can be combined in Yorubaland to designate an elderly woman who worships Obatala, Iyal'orisa in Trinidad signified the highest hierarchical order which Madam Rodney held, especially after the visit of the Ooni of Ife in 1989. For more on the leadership role that Iyal'orisa Rodney assumed and played among Orisha devotees in Trinidad and Tobago, and the relation this had with the visit of Ooni of Ife, see: Henry, Frances (2003:14, 78-85).

in Marabella, south-central Trinidad. At 10 A.M., while the attendees were organized for the commencement of the funeral service which involved singing, as well as readings from the Bible as well as chanting to different Orisha deities, the hearse arrived and the coffin containing the body of the deceased was wheeled across the courtyard into the *palais*. The funeral service began with the distribution to everyone in attendance of the printed funeral programme which contained all the chosen Christian hymns for the funeral service.1 Prayers were offered to God in the name of Jesus and a lesson was read from the Bible. Songs were rendered, as well as more hymns and readings from the Psalms from the Bible and the recitation of the "Confession of Faith". After initial Biblical readings, singing and praying, Orisha rituals began. Attendees were led in chants and danced around the Orisha palais in circles while libations and offerings were made to the four corners of the palais as well as the occasional ritual visits to deities' ritual spots, *peregun*. The chants and singing were accompanied by typical Orisha drumming to all the deities that were being honoured. Mid-way into the funeral rituals, the coffin was opened up for attendees to pay their last respects to the departed matriarch. Each attendee stopped in front of the opened coffin and placed their cut flowers that many had brought, on the body inside the coffin. After approximately two hours, the coffin was shut with everyone in attendance forming a procession out of the Orisha yard, while the staff of the funeral home wheeled the coffin back to the hearse. The drumming, as well as chanting which included the blowing of a conch shell (known to be used as a musical instrument in Hinduism and Buddhism)2 continued on the street in front of

[1.] Examples include W. B. Stevens' *Father along*; William Williams Pantycelyn's *Guide me o thou great Jehovah*; Augustus Montague Toplady's *Rock of ages*; etc. The programme also had, printed in them, a picture of the Holy Bible, a single-face *bata* drum, as well as a picture depicting a procession of Orisha devotees, along with various pictures of the deceased while she was alive.

[2.] For the use of conch shell in Hinduism and Buddhism, see: Tucci, (119) and Bhala, (215 & 267).

the compound. Subsequently, with the hearse leading, a long convoy of cars was formed for the journey to Mosquito Creek, further south of the island. Of significance is the chicken1 held by one of those who led the hearse and plucking the feathers off the chicken all the way to Mosquito Creek. There another funeral service and rituals were organized and held before the final cremation of the body on a pre-arranged wooden pyre.

A funeral pyre had previously been arranged, along with a plastic canopy already set up in Pyre 7 before the arrival of the hearse and the funeral procession. Being a public facility for cremation, other cremations were already taking place in different pyres at Mosquito Creek before the funeral procession for Iya Rodney arrived; the tent was therefore shifted to one side of Pyre 7 for drummers and other attendees to sit while the children and family members moved to the already-set pyre and prepared the coffin along with other ritual materials for the final set of rituals and then, the cremation. The elaborate funeral rites that commenced included singing and chanting to Orisha deities along with intensive drumming,

---

Winer (citing Alleyne-Pilgrim) describes conch shell as "a relic of the Amerindian heritage of Tobago." Its use, among others include: a single sound to signal the availability of big fish, as opposed to double sounds for 'jacks' (small fish)for sale; christening a new boat; to summon villagers before dawn "to dance in reverence of the ancestors, and [to awaken and placate familiar spirits]"; and in cases of lost or missing seamen, it is blown during vigils to guide these seamen back to shore. At present, across the Caribbean generally, and in Trinidad in particular, conch shell blowing is now common during cricket matches(238-39).

[1.] Known as *adie irana* in traditional Yoruba funeral ritual. Although Hastings *et al* in their encyclopaedic entry for adie irana (6) defined it as a Yoruba psychopomp, the literal translation, however, is: *the chicken that is used to buy the road* – for the dead. The purpose of the ritual is therefore to secure the road for the dead to embark on it journey into afterlife. This is the same definition that Matory (125) uses in describing his observation of such ritual in Igboho, Nigeria. Both the importance as well as the commonplace of this ritual is expressed in the proverb: *Ka ku l'omode ko y'eni, o san ju k'a dagba k'a ma ni adie irana* – To die young and be honoured is better than growing old and be [buried] without *adie irana*.

dancing and the pouring of libations on the deceased's body as well as into the funeral pyre. The typical "four-corners" rituals that take place in Orisha shrines and which had taken place earlier in the day at the *palaís* were repeated around the four corners of the pyre while all the children and family members danced around it. Above all, different deities began to appear and dance around the space while the drumming, singing, chanting and dancing intensified both among the group under and around the plastic canopy where the drummers and other attendees assembled as well as around the pyre of wood. As these chanting and rituals proceeded, different ritual materials ranging from cornmeal, a mixture of peas (split peas, brown peas), as well as rice, clove, palm oil, lard, frankincense, olive oil, and items such as candles, square camphor, rum, Nestle-branded whole fat milk in paper boxes, were deposited on the body inside the coffin. After a while, the coffin was placed inside the planks of wood used for the pyre while the cover of the coffin was placed at the top of the pyre.

When the chanting and rituals had been made to all the deities, the children and family members joined hands together to light up the pyre. All members of the family continued to dance around the burning pyre. The rest of the mourners continued with the dancing, drumming while different deities manifested on others until the whole pyre and the body burned out to ashes which was collected by the children of the deceased.

2. Ms. Samantha Pierre

A wake was held at the house of Ms. Pierre on Friday, 17 September 2010 after most of her properties: books, furniture etc., had been vacated from the house. Left behind were items easily recognized to the deceased and used in her professional story-writing and as an actress. The wake included prayers, singing, dancing and sharing of foods and drinks to mourners in attendance.

The funeral service and burial of Ms. Pierre on Saturday18 September 2010 began with the arrival of the hearse at the Ile Eko Sango/Osun Mil'Osa (IESOM) shrine, in Gasparilo Road, Santa Cruz. A white tent decorated with palm fronds and flowers had been prepared with seats around a centred table while the coffin was carried by six male members of her family and close friends.

The ritual conducted involved the two senior shrine officials1: a priest and a priestess, who read most of the prayers in Yoruba language from a book. All mourners present, including the deceased family members were invited to share their memories of the deceased as well as lead prayers. On the completion of the prayers and rituals, the body was taken to

[1.] The term priest is hardly used by Orisha devotees in Trinidad and Tobago. Although Trinidad and Tobago is an English-speaking country, and only very few Orisha devotees have a working knowledge of Yoruba language (or any African language), Orisha devotees in Trinidad use the Yoruba words: *baba/iya* (father/mother) for their ritual specialists as well as any respected person within the religious community, even if such a person does not own or manage a shrine, or conduct any ritual. A ritual specialist who officiates during the annual feast of a shrine however is called *mongba* (from the Yoruba term for a Sango priest, *Onamogba*). Futhermore, any member who had achieved some level of initiation into the practice of Ifa are called *awo* – a Yoruba term that signify a member of a secret society. In chapter one I have provided an extensive explanation of the challenges that present ethnographic writings face in providing accurate terms for rituals/sacrifices/offerings, ritual materials and roles of every participants in such rituals. For simplicity and clarity, I have stuck to the English language term "priest" as a functional term for any devotee who conducts an Orisha ritual at any event, and or occupy a leadership position – since such a designation primarily involves ritual duties. A good example of the difficulty of expressing designations and hierarchy among Orisha devotees and the use of the word "priest" is: "Final rites for Baba Forde already done" Newsday, 18 July 2012; used by some children of a deceased who referred to themselves as priests, perhaps, in order to make their points clear while addressing the press. Legally speaking, Section 5(1) of the Orisha Marriage Act 1999 (the only law that recognizes the religion in the country) empowers the president to grant a licence to a priest or priestess as a marriage officer.

the Mucurapo Cemetery, St. James in the western part of Trinidad. There, prayers were also read from the book in Yoruba while the workmen finished digging the grave. On the completion of the digging, the prayer was completed and the coffin was lowered into the grave while family members and friends were asked to cast cut flowers and earth on the coffin in the grave to complete the funeral ritual.

3. Mother Doreen Alvarez

The funeral rituals for Mother Doreen Alvarez were split between days between her death on 29 June 2012 and the post-cremation rituals. Each rituals for different purposes. It started with a special prayer organized at St. Michael's Shrine, the shrine of her husband, Mr. Alvarez, also a priest. This shrine is located along the Southern Main Road, Curepe, the main east-west corridor of the island of Trinidad. The night's prayer described to me by Mr. Alvarez as an "Orisha-Baptist" prayer was organized in two-parts, separated by a break in-between. The first part of the prayer service began around 8pm with what was generally acknowledged as a Spiritual Baptist service, devoid of any form of Orisha chanting, prayers or rituals.

The husband of the deceased was seated at the table in front of the palais with the officiating Spiritual Baptist priest. Placed on the table directly in front of the husband to the deceased was a glass of water, a lit white candle, a bell, and an opened Bible. The Bible was read during the sermon for the evening. Various members of the congregation the bell rang at intervals, while the candle remained lit throughout the evening. Sometimes into the evening ritual, another white candle was lit and placed inside the glass of water. At the pre-determined time, the glass of water containing the candle was handed over to every member of the congregation with a close relationship to the deceased, who were willing to come

forward and lead the congregation in prayer. The service followed along the design and execution of a typical Spiritual Baptist1 organized prayer session, thanksgiving or service in Trinidad and Tobago, with the officiating clergy and some members elaborately dressed in their customized prayer garments.

Apart from recited hymns and reading from the Bible, a sermon was delivered by a Baptist clergy amid much incense-burning within the palais and intense ringing of the bell. Candles were lit and placed at the four corners of the palais as well as the entrance from the main courtyard into the palais. After the sermon had been delivered, anyone with a personal connection to the deceased was invited to pray and lead the audience in prayers on behalf of the family, as well as offer words of encouragement and exhortation to the family, especially the deceased's husband who was seated separately behind the two Baptist clergy who officiated at the prayer service. Towards the end of the prayer service, some members of a different Spiritual Baptist church arrived and entered the palais with greetings to everyone present. The officiating ministers welcomed and granted them an audience to offer a sermon-like "message" to the gathering, as well as words of encouragement to the deceased's family. In both sermons, emphases were placed on the "home" that Jesus had prepared for believers in Heaven and which everyone must strive not to miss. At a point, a woman came out of the audience to lead a special prayer and repeated the need to avoid mourning the deceased. She expressed this repeatedly with passion because, she believes, the deceased had accomplished her duty and job here on earth. The woman leading the prayer expressed her personal knowledge and relationship with the deceased and her leadership at the *Church of The Holly Nazarene* (the name of the Spiritual Baptist church organizing the funeral service). It should

[1.] For more on Spiritual Baptist pattern of rituals and prayers in Trinidad and Tobago, see: De Peza, (1999); Laitinen, (2002).

be noted that a distinguished image that shows the connection between the deceased and the Spiritual Baptist church may be seen in the framed "Certificate of Commendation" hanging on the wall behind the husband of the deceased and the officiating priests. Obviously, the certificate, bearing the name of the church was previously awarded to the deceased and had become brown with age.

Throughout the time of the service, burning incense and water were occasionally visited to the four corners of the palais as well as the main entrance. At the completion of the Spritual Baptist prayers around 10 P.M., Orisha drums were brought into the palais and it was announced that the Orisha prayers would follow. Subsequently, cheese sandwiches along with coffee and tea were served in the outer yard of the house while most of the Spiritual Baptist members left without participating in the Orisha prayers which started around 11:30 pm. The Orisha rituals began in a typical fashion with chants to different deities, drumming, libations and other rituals. This only lasted for less than one hour, and all mourners and participants returned to their homes.

a.) The main funeral and cremation

On the final day of the funeral when the deceased was cremated, the funeral service was organized inside the same palais of Mr. Alvarez. Funeral service started at 11 am, with the arrival of the hearse with the deceased's body. A programme of service was printed containing all the Christian hymns selected for the funeral service.1 While a portrait picture of the deceased was used as a watermark on the cover page of the programme, the order of service listed only events associated with the Spiritual Baptist such as the "first reading," "the

[1.] The programme included six hymns chosen for the service such as; Isaac Williams' *Be thou my guidance and my guide*; William Cowper's *God moves in a mysterious way*; etc.

Gospel reading", "Homily," "The creed," as well as the order of rending the chosen hymns. There was no mention of the Orisha aspect of the funeral service. Interestingly however, the page for the "order of service" had included a photograph of the deceased as a watermark. The photograph of the deceased was taken while she was standing inside the *chappelle*, the innermost part of the shrine, standing beside some Orisha paraphernalia. The most obvious of the paraphernalia is the *shepherd rod*,1 known for its use during Shango manifestation, as well as the Shango axes and water goblets that are used during Orisha rituals. The programme also included the contact address for the funeral home, in whose facility the cremation, the final aspect of the funeral ritual for the day, will be held. The final service was organized in a similar pattern as the prayer night – first aspect organized by the Holly Nazarene, the Spiritual Baptist church, with its concluding Orisha rituals under the leadership of an Orisha priest and accompanied by intense Orisha drumming and rituals.

b.) Orisha rituals

On the completion of the Baptist Christian service for the departed, the three Orisha drums were brought into the palais while the coffin containing the deceased's body remained at the centre of the palais. Although the Orisha service and ritual started with the well-known singing and chanting offered to the different Orisha deities, the service took a turn towards rituals that placed the deceased body at the focal point of the rites and prayers. At the beginning of the Orisha rituals, a broad red cotton cloth was draped over the closed coffin,

[1.] The Shepherd rod (sometimes referred to as crook) is one of the ritual items used both within the Spiritual Baptist and Orisha in Trinidad and Tobago (Henry, 156). For its various use among the Spiritual Baptist, see: Laitinen,(126, 136-139). For its use, along with the axe as a Shango symbol among the Orisha (referred to as shepherd's crook), see: Houk, (6) and Lum, (86, 123), (also referred to as shepherd's crook and an instrument of St. John the Good – a version of Shango).

replacing a vase of cut flowers, and lit candle that had been placed on it during the Spiritual Baptist rituals. The end of the coffin where the head of the deceased lay, corresponded with the spot, towards the front of the shrine, which is traditionally used as the focal point of libations and the pouring of other ritual offerings within the palais. At this spot, a lit white candle was placed on the floor while other ritual materials were poured and offered in an arranged sequence. At one point, the burning flame resulting from the use of puncheon rum, square camphor tablets, and olive oil glowed strongly enough to illuminate the whole palais space which initially was difficult to see due to the heavy smoke from the incense burning.

Apart from the candle, the square camphor tablet, and the incense pot, other items selected for the spot below the head of the deceased was a hammer, (used eventually at the crematorium to firmly nail the coffin shut), two whiskey glasses and, a coffee mug and a white saucer.1 Rather than singing to different Orisha as it would have been in a typical Trinidadian Orisha service or rituals, the officiating priest read out special prayers and songs in Yoruba with English language versions to express their meanings. The readings were followed by instructed response from the attendees, as well as the pouring of libations on the ritual points (the focal point in the middle, the four corners, as well as the entrance to the palais). Most importantly, all rituals, offerings and libations were also made on the red cloth with which the coffin was draped. Towards the end of the rituals within the palais, palm fronds were brought into the palais and shared out to people who were then asked to form a circle around the coffin for the last rites inside the palais.

Before leaving the shrine, the red cloth with which the coffin had been draped had become drenched from the pouring of offerings and libations and covered with the corn meal-

[1.] Items such as coffee mugs an whiskey glasses are a strong reflection or a reminder of a setting for the *Kabbalah* banquet.

peas mixture used as part of the offerings. At the completion of singing and chanting within the palais, a peeled coconut was broken at the centre spot of the palais and tied up in another piece of red cloth and then placed on the coffin, along with a sword with a piece of red cloth tied around its handle). Right in front of the house, the ritual of breaking the coconut was repeated as well as at intervals between the house and the main road before the coffin was loaded back into the hearse. The coffin, removed was removed from the bier and carried waist-high by six men, was placed on the ground in the middle of the road at intervals, for the ritual to be performed all the way to the end of the street. To break the coconut, a square camphor tablet was lit and placed on the ground. The officiating Orisha priest then took a coconut and struck it forcefully on the burning square camphor. The blow put out the flame. This performance is repeated at intervals whenever the priest instructed the procession to stop. The procession continued down the road until the end of the point where the side road connects with the main road. This ritual performance was repeated along with other ritual materials: cornmeal, peas, olive oil, water and cut lime (which was squeezed on the ground to accompany camphor tablet right before it is struck out).

On leaving the *palais*, the palm fronds were used to form an archway in front of the coffin. The archway extended from within the shrine, to the road in front of the house. Everyone passing through the archway was expected to wash his/her hand from the sweet water (a mixture of sugar and water) in a bucket placed by the gate at the entrance to the shrine. Once on the street, however the palm fronds archway was formed at the back with the coffin and the priest leading the procession – all the way to the Southern Main Road, from where the coffin was placed back into the hearse. The hearse was followed by few vehicles of family members, as well as a maxi taxi bus provided to transport willing mourners and participants to the crematorium. On getting to the crematorium in Arouca, everyone in

attendance were made to gather outside the gate of the compound housing the crematorium. With the palm fronds archway formed again behind the coffin, the Orisha priest as well as the Baptist clergy led the procession into the compound with intense drumming. The coffin, again without the bier, was rested on the floor at the entrance to the main building before being taken into the hall provided within the crematorium for the congregants and for the last rites before cremation.

c.) At the crematorium

When the small hall allotted to the family was ready, the staff of the crematorium invited family and attendees at the funeral inside and then, the procession with the palm fronds archway was re-assembled with the drumming and singing from the entrance into the building and then, into the hall. The singing and chanting in the hall tended more towards Orisha practice while every member of the family was invited to come to view the open coffin and offer prayers for the departed and for oneself. Different sweet smelling items such as stick incense and square camphor as well as candles were shared to members of the family, starting with the husband of the deceased, including little children who were lifted up to pay homage and offer a prayer to the departed. Apart from these ritual items, different denominations of Trinidadian currency were dropped into the coffin specifically around the face of the deceased.

At the completion of the procession and offering, prayers were then offered, beginning again with the Spiritual Baptist clergy who, along with other members, had joined the funeral procession at the crematorium. He read again from the Bible and offered a short sermon to those in attendance. At the completion of his sermon, he offered a prayer for the departed and led the congregation in reciting Psalm 23. With very loud slaps on the coffin, it

was shut for the last time. Following this, and “based on the power invested on him as the servant of God” the man ordered (as well as pronouncing the order of God) to the departed to “rest in peace” and to “answer no one” until the “day the trumpet sounds.” Following this, the Orisha priest who had been officiating all along took over and bid the departed his own farewell while nailing the coffin shut with the hammer that had been displayed at the palais. At the completion, the whole congregation waited until the staff of the crematorium came for the coffin and wheeled it away for the cremation.

4. Odingo Horse

The funeral for Russell Charles Saunders, popularly called *Odingo Horse*, plays out a reflection or a re-performance for the life that he had led: activism, creativity in profession, as well as creativity as a *mas man*. All of the above re-enactments however, were placed under one overarching label - an Orisha funeral. Odingo had died on 10 October 2012 and he was buried on 16 October 2012.

The first ritual, as is common across Trinidad, is the wake after the passing of the deceased. In the evening of 12 October 2012, the wake for Odingo, rather than being celebrated in his house, was organized at the Freedom Pan Yard along Bournes Road, St. James, which had doubled as Odingo's workshop as a cobbler and cabinet maker, and a *mas camp* where he produced *mas* characters for Trinidad carnival. Above all, set deep inside at a corner of the pan yard/workshop is a shrine for two Orisha deities: Ogun and Oshosi - a point to which I will return later. The wake involved the playing of pan music, drinking, and hanging out -generally referred to as *liming* in Trinidad and Tobago colloquial.

The funeral ritual itself was organized at the Ellie Mannette Park, west of St. James at the foot of the mountain. The park is regarded as the major gathering point for activists-

revolutionaries during the uprising of the popular Black Power "revolution" of 1970. With a single wide tent placed at the centre of the small park, the last mas character created by Odingo was placed hanging from the pole in front of the tent with the open coffin containing the body in front of it for all attending the Orisha funeral to see with three men in front to lead the prayer and rituals, as well as six drummers. Prayers were offered to various Orisha, as well as to departed ancestors.

Following the prayers and rituals, the deceased's body was taken to the Mucurapo Cemetery for interment. Apart from the rituals and prayers at the grave side, a significant ritual was the plucking of live chicken1 on the way to the cemetery and at the grave site as well. On the completion of the prayers, the body with the coffin was lowered into the grave and family members and friends were invited to throw earth on to the coffin as a form of farewell. In the evening, mourners, friends and the family gathered again at the pan yard for a long post-funeral session of pan playing, dancing, drinking and occasional intermissions. This celebration signaled the end of the burial rites and funeral.

Choosing a passage: Asserting meaning through mortuary rites

Although funeral rites are generally regarded as a rites of passage that traditional groups engage in, in order to make sense of their existence in relation to the experience of the death of a member (van Gennep, Binford, and Turner), funeral rites among Orisha devotees in Trinidad address more than this. Rather than serving as mere rites of passage as envisaged in the literature, fragmented Orisha groups have a rather more overlapping subjectivity in sight which their rites address. Apart from death and behaviours towards death, the role played by mortuary rites has been one of the key instrument that anthropologists have used in

[1.] The same *adie irana* ritual that was observed during Iya Rodney's funeral.

understanding or defining group identity among traditional cultures. I challenge the assumption of death and behaviours towards death being important only to pre-nation state societies by asking for a re-evaluation of lived realities within post-colonial states. I insist that changes in human societies of all ages necessitate how they form their agency based on their judgement of self efficacy (Bandura, 165). Modes of Orisha funeral in Trinidad show how self efficacy is rather defined from individual and small groups levels; and finally, how broad collective group is also "contribute to the transactional dynamics that promote group attainments" in spite of the variance among individuals and within sub-groups (166). From Malinowski's study of Trobriand Islanders (1954), to Radcliffe-Brown's (1922) psyco-physical analysis of the expression of emotion and grief among the Andamanese; as well as Evans-Pritchard's study of socio-economic system among the Azande based on belief in witchcraft – all present the importance of death to anthropology and the narratives surrounding the reaction of people to the loss, as important to understanding human society.

Malinowski's focus is on the contradiction between acts of mourning: expressions of love for the dead and loathing of the corpse, and the mode of the disposal of the body, all forming a meaningful way to understanding how humans spin though, contradictory reactions towards death, but in the long-run, a whole meaningful cultural practice when considered with all aspects of the same society. In his earlier study, Malinowski (1916) also narrates how Baloma, the spirit of the dead, plays a central in how the Trobrianders have woven a meaningful and logical narrative (when considered as a whole) of how the society reproduces itself in spite of their "ignorance of the physiology of reproduction" and the societal mourning of the dead (406). Radcliffe-Brown's thesis on grief as being the central emotion that human society use in bonding, as well as Evans-Pritchard's view that death could also form the basis of an economic system, where witchcraft is evil and the cause of all death,

while revenge could also be good and based on profit – all go in a long way to explaining anthropology's fascination with death.

In spite of this central fascination, mortuary ritual choices among minority groups in a diverse post-colonial state or society, such as Trinidad, presents a special challenge to existing anthropological theories. Kroeber's view (1927) for example, in spite of the wide coverage that it succeeded in focusing on, that the choice of means of disposal of the human body among traditional groups across the world had been nothing more than fashion, is one that needs to be restricted to the period of the study. Having made a strong observation that almost all forms of disposal of human body exist in Australia, due to human migration, he continues to a conclusion that:

> Standing apart, therefore, both from the basic type of activities which mostly regulate themselves unconsciously, and from those which largely involve relations of persons and therefore become socially conscious and systematized, disposal of the dead falls rather into a class with fashions, than with either customs or folkways on the one hand, or institutions on the other. It does not readily enter intrinsically into the inevitable integrations of the bases of life nor into attempts at wider systems (314).

The post-colonial nation state of Trinidad has thrown a valid challenge at Kroeber's conclusion. To insist on the certainty of its temporal and spatial universal application would, in the case of Orisha in Trinidad be faulty and elicit strong disagreement from participants from the four funerals described above. It is also certain to unite the four groups described above in the way they would have responded as a matter of offence.

The choice of burial rites, among Orisha devotees in Trinidad, their choice of place to perform these rites bring to fore an interplay of two fundamental factors: the lifestyle and choices of the deceased and the leanings of the group or groups that are organizing the

funeral rites, on the one side and the form of agency that these two sub-factors desire to present to the larger society in general. Key decisions such as internment or cremation or forms of burial rites that are performed are therefore, determined by a strong theological statement that respective groups prefer to assert or reject – a point strongly made by Platvoet and van der Toorn as "Ritual responses to plurality and pluralism" (3). The various cases of Orisha funerals, through the way they assert their chosen form of mortuary rites to be utilized for their departed member shows a clear case of each group's attempt to survive and not be sub-summed into other Orisha groups' identity, in spite of the gross generalization of the "Orisha" label. The struggle for group survival also bring to mind, Karl Marx' assertion that:

> "Death appears as the harsh victory of the species over the particular individual, and seemingly contradicts their unity; but the particular individual is only a particular species-being, and, as such, mortal" (3).

In the long run therefore, death, in spite of mourning and the misfortune of loss embedded in it is utilized to the group's advantage.

The contradiction between the love felt by the family for the deceased, on the one hand, and the loathing of death, represented by the corpse on the other hand becomes obvious due to attempts to separate the living family members and groups from the departed. The ritual performance, however brings back the contradiction inherent in the attempt. In the case of Mother Alvarez for example, clear instructions were passed to the family members, including the husband not to refer to the deceased in affectionate terms previously used while she was alive. To achieve this, coconuts, that have the mesocarp already peeled off with the hard endocarp shell intact were violently struck on the ground to put out a lit camphor tablet, thereby releasing the spirit of the dead to depart. The nut symbolized the skull of an adult human (with the fontanels already ossified) and in this case, that of the deceased. Once

broken, the three spots on top of the coconut allow the spirit of the dead to depart and begin its journey of afterlife.1 This ritual was performed first, within the compound and then repeated along the street in front of the house, all the way to the main road. The separation between the living and the dead is achieved by referring to her as "the deceased", as well as "instruction" to the spirit of the deceased, just before the cremation of the body, not to answer anyone. All previous expressions of affection were expected to cease, both from the deceased as well as from the living. The living and the dead, thus have roles to play to maintain the "instructed" separation. The contradiction embodied by the corpse cannot be more, when the injunction of the Spiritual Baptist leader from *The Holy Nazarene Church*, is brought to mind. She had stood up in the middle of the service to give exhortation to everyone present; she had particularly addressed the husband of the deceased "not to mourn Mother Doreen" because she had fulfilled her duty on earth. Within the same funeral group, contradictory ideas of grief, mourning, and group duty are both tolerated and experienced. While the Spiritual Baptist viewed the body as being buried as a result of physical death, the Orisha considered death itself a misfortune and a negativity. A form of evil2 that does not only require help from the living to engage in sacrifice, it also requires strong instructions: both to the living as well as the dead – to be obeyed.

[1.] It is of interest here that during interview, Teacher Nicholas preferred to call the spirit by other names *ori* (Yoruba term word for head as well as the concept of chosen destiny) and *chakra* (the Sanskrit term for the Hindu and Buddhist concept of the centres of the body that collect energy). In Teacher Nicholas' view, they all mean the same as the spirit of the deceased that is being assisted to begin her/his journey of afterlife (Interview: 20 September 2012).

[2.] As if to underscore this point, Teacher Nicholas, addressing anyone who might think it was easy for Mother Doreen to approach death, had declared at the beginning of the Orisha rituals on the day of the funeral: "I teacher Nicholas does say, let he go and die".

And as if in direct contradiction to this injunction and desire to truncate the living-dead relationship; on the 14th day after the cremation of the deceased, an elaborate ritual and ceremony was held at the family home, the conclusion of which was an instalment of a "stool" or shrine for the departed right within the precinct of the compound, behind the palais. With the installment of a shrine to the "head" of the departed, she then became an ancestor to whom prayers and propitiation could be made and her memory in the mind of the living is forever ensured. The ashes of the deceased however, were to be taken back to the island of Grenada where she was born; once again, establishing the right of the biological ancestry to the physical remains of the dead, while the nuclear family enshrined her spiritual and religious memory. A striking difference in enshrining memory and affection is that of Odingo, whose funeral while completed with the burial, the memory of his creative works are expected to remain permanently at the pan yard. In other words, for Odingo's memory, the physical burial in the cemetery was the only separation from the living that was needed.

The importance of sub-group identities and their quest for survival, or power to reproduce is emphasized in the mode of grief and mourning that each Orisha sub-group chooses and stipulates for its members. In the case of Mother Doreen Alvarez, the elderly husband of the deceased continues to switch from saying “my wife” to “the deceased”, in attempts to correct himself during conversation with me.[1] While Mr. Alvarez continues to mourn his departed wife, mourning as an act is shifted from the realm of privacy to that which is socially-sanctioned, irrespective of what others might be willing to do. Mr. Alvarez later told me that he never understood the reason for depositing money in the coffin to be cremated with the body. He quickly followed, however that the Orisha are wiser than us all, conceding to the authority of the officiating priest and the ritual creed he represents or

[1] At a point, he pursed and declared: “I’ve been told to stop saying that”.

instructs. Grieving, then, is structured to be performed within each sub-group, rather than for an individual. The line delineating the private, different from the public aspects of grieving is thus, to be carefully questioned. This point reiterates what Fowlkes referred to as "the social regulation of grief" (637). Loss or bereavement within each sub-group has its own governing morality that has been socially constructed to discern socially legitimate grief; thus, reifying the power of the (sub-)society.

In spite of the general description of Orisha funerals on the island of Trinidad, which are easily observed and described by the general public, or the performances that are aptly captured by the public as either an object of awe, fear or respect, different rituals that are performed are scrutinized within groups. Furthermore, in spite of the same broad belief system in the same set of deities and having a common doctrinal ancestral platitude, from which a generalized pattern can be drawn, different groups assert to different forms of correctness at the expense of the other even within the same religious ethos. For example, it is generally acknowledged among priests and ritual specialists in Trinidad that a sacrifice and obeisance to Eshu, the deity of crossroads is inevitable for a successful Orisha funeral ritual. During my fieldwork, however it emerged that a few priests, even within the archetypical Trinidadian style of Orisha practices, insist that rituals for Eshu during burial and funeral is erroneous.[1]

[1.] Aaron Jones in Arima, for example told me during that funeral ritual should always be to Shanpana, who is the deity of regeneration and bio-degradation. In his opinion, Trinidadian practitioners arrived at what he called "nonsense" because they have heard that Eshu is at the crossroad – (Interview: 10 August 2012). In the case of Mother Doreen, sacrifices were made to both Eshu and Shanpana for a completely different reason. The two Orisha were sacrificed to as a result of conversations and concessions between Teacher Nicholas, the officiating Orisha priest (who wanted to make a sacrifice to Eshu) and the husband of the deceased (who insisted that Shanpana was the guiding spirit of the deceased and the first Orisha deity to manifest on her). In

The unique identity and lived realities for which Odingo was renowned became clearly emphasized during the mortuary rituals for him at the Ellie Mannette Park. Prayers were made, not only to well-know Orisha deities but also the ancestors – who included a long list of steel pan pioneers and activists that have lived and died. More importantly, prayers and libations were made to the spirit of "ancestors" who died during the Middle Passage of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. All these prayers and rites were performed the same way it was conducted for the known Orisha who are represented in shrines. The prayers, libations and supplication to the spirit of departed ancestors, underscore the lived realities of Odingo, as an anti-establishment activist and a revolutionary. Furthermore, a redefinition of the term "ancestor" to transcend the biological or social lines is necessary. For Odingo and priests officiating at his funeral, ancestors do not only include those with biological ties, but also those who have "come and gone" in the creative world of pan and mas making, and activists: known and unknown. Above all, ancestors, whose spirits have to be propitiated include those who shared the same experience as the living. Those who died during the voyage to the New World are believed to have made themselves into the ultimate ritual and sacrifice that transcends the border of biological connections, and whose bodies have turned the Atlantic Ocean into a sacred shrine that has to be remembered even at a public park.

The extension of this narrative is the fact that the mortuary rites for Odingo were not conducted in an established shrine, but rather in a public park highly regarded by fellow activists. Officiating priests organizing the funeral rites who doubled as Odingo's contemporaries as well as friends, but with a leaning towards a self-discovery-Orisha

---

spite of this theological emphasis on Eshu however, most typical Trinidadian Orisha shrines do not keep shrines to the deity in the open. Whenever rituals are made to Eshu therefore, it is not publicly known. Shrines with leaning towards Yoruba (ideal) mode of worship and theology do keep a shrine to Eshu at the entrance to their courtyard to signify the importance of Eshu as the guardian of crossroads.

theology, one that seeks to find the "right way" to conduct Orisha in the traditional Yoruba form, displayed that leaning throughout the funeral sessions. Prayers were offered by a priest with a passing knowledge of the Yoruba language (and sometimes read in English from a book with an equivalent translation of *Ifa* corpus). In moving the body to the Mucurapo Cemetery, a chicken was held by one of the priest with its feathers being plucked off all the way to the cemetery. This ancient Yoruba ritual practice that accompanies a deceased's body as it is moved from the farm to the city, had to be re-enacted to emphasize the theology of self-discovery.

To emphasize the complexity of picking one's way through what is the ideal, or rather, what is the archetypical Trinidadian form of practice, as opposed to what can be described as in-line with Yoruba practice, the same chicken-plucking ritual was also performed at Iyal'Orisha Rodney's funeral (obviously to underscore the same reason) but with more interesting story emanating from the funeral itself. While Iyal'Orisha Rodney was cremated in what could be described as a typical Hindu form of cremation, both Odingo and Ms. Samantha Pierre were interred in the public cemetery. And although Iyal'Orisha Rodney and Mother Doreen Alvarez were both cremated, the attending rituals in the two cases were completely different. In each of the cases, the cremation rituals followed different theological trajectories and group leanings. In fact, the complexity of inter-group relations can be underscored in the fact that Mr. Erinfolami, (the priest who officiated at the funerals for Ms. Pierre and Odingo) told me he had to go to the shrine in Santa Cruz to conduct a proper ritual for "Iya's spirit to rest."[1] Mr. Erinfolami's assertion emphasizes two points: the importance of conducting the mortuary rites correctly; and secondly, the reverence in which Iya Rodney was held by all Orisha sub-groups, hence, the symbolism of proper funerals for her.

[1.] Interview:16 October 2012.

This is not the only case where “proper” mortuary rites have become a contested issue among Orisha devotees in Trinidad. Clarence Forde, an elderly Orisha priest in Trinidad and father of Teacher Nicholas Forde, (the priest who officiated at Mother Doreen’s funeral) died in 2010 and was buried in a Tunapuna cemetery after an elaborate ritual conducted within his shrine.

In 2012, however a notice was published in a local newspaper by Valerie Stephenson Lee Chee, announcing a festival that would also double as the final funeral rites for the departed patriarch, one “Asiwaju Ijo Orunmila Ifeola Wotunde Awoyemi of Ile Ife Nigeria would be officiating.”[1] As a counter-notice, the family addressed the local press discountenancing the earlier notice and the quarter from which it was emanating. It is of interest that both theological, as well as filial arguments were used in addressing the press, where the four siblings (one woman (a woman and three men) insisted that the proper funeral rites had been conducted. It is worth quoting both the daughter and the youngest son of the deceased. The daughter stated: "We didn't authorise it and we knew nothing about it. We saw it in the newspapers that someone from Nigeria was coming to perform final rights [sic] for our father and yet we were not informed. We find it disrespectful; we are disgusted; we find it a desecration to the Orisa community and to our father” while the last son, the aforementioned Nicholas Forde stated: “Last rites have already been conducted by us. We are all high priests and we are all capable.”[2]

To go back to the complexity in the factors that are at play in determining the choice of burial or funeral rites, Clarence Forde was himself buried in a cemetery while his son

[1.] This is a title for the leader of a church-like organization of an Ifa group, the type of organization that I addressed in [chapter 2]

[2.] "Final rites for Baba Forde already done" Newsday, 18 July 2012. Print.

(Nicholas), a reputable Orisha priest in Trinidad and Tobago, who often is contracted to officiate in feasts across the island of Trinidad, and also co-incidentally officiated at an elaborate funeral rites of Mother Alvarez (described earlier), offered to me during interviews, the strongest case regarding the orthodoxy of cremation in Orisha theology.[1] It is also worthy of note to look into the choice of words of the Priestess Mariam Forde, the daughter of the deceased, in defending the family's rights to dictate what form of funeral is right for their father. She cites Orisha community as a whole body or group, and by doing that, indicates her acknowledgment of the existence of such an entity. More importantly is her argument that it is indecent to desecrate the image of such a broad group by the action and intent of one person. The intent to utilize the mortuary rites of a personality regarded as an important member of the larger group seems, to all-involved, very important. In this very case however, it is important underscore the lack of consensus in recognizing the valid holder of power.

Cremation: A historical accident?

Cremation remains a theological divisive issue among groups of Orisha devotees in Trinidad. While there are groups who see no difference between the adoption of cremation or burying in the ground as a choice for resting the departed, there are Orisha groups who view cremation of the human body both as alien to Orisha practices and "African cultures" in general. There are also pockets of devotees who infuse some theological validation into the discourse on cremation. Buckey of La Brea told me in an interview that fire possesses a unique quality to "cleansing the soul" after death.[2] Outside of this acceptance or rejection of the practice of cremation is the unique history of Trinidad and Tobago and how the state

[1.] Interview: 20 September 2012. See Footnote 11.

[2.] Personal conversation: September 2012.

policed burial practices by sanctioning what burial practices were acceptable and what were not. Open air cremation, occupies that unique position of a practice that was outlawed and won acceptance through a long period of engagement of groups, mainly Hindu-Indian local groups.

The brief history of cremation on the island of Trinidad (a history that Tobago, on joining the Trinidad to form one nation state, shares) is such that is symmetrical with the history of the arrival of indentured migrant workers from India, many of whom were Hindus. Since the new Indian arrivals were brought to Nelson Island, although geographically separated from Trinidad, is one of the many smaller islands that is part of the territory of the mainland Trinidad, cremation of any deceased Indian was allowed on Nelson island according to the Hindu funeral rites of the new group.[1] While cremation was tolerated on Nelson island however, once the indentured workers moved to the mainland, burials and funeral rites were expected to follow the laws of the British Empire. Cremation therefore was treated as one of the "pagan" or "primitive" rites that could not be tolerated.[2]

Although there remains an assertion that cremation was carried out in clandestine manners among the rural indentured Hindu Indians, in spaces and environments where police could or would not go to enforce the law, there is no documented or official evidence that cremation took place until it was allowed by a promulgated ordinance a few years before the nation gained independence. With the existence of a law allowing cremation came stringent conditions relating to trails of documentation that has to be adhered to in order for cremation to be regarded as legal.

[1.] Nelson Island also served the purpose of quarantine for the newly-arrived indentured workers (Ottley, 1978). Perhaps, that explains why the colonial government did not have any problem with cremation being restricted to the island (Bridget Brereton, Personal communication: 15 November 2012).

[2.] For more on the social history of cremation and Hinduism in Trinidad, see Singh, (2005).

For an island country with very few natural sources of fresh water, the practice of throwing the remains of ashes in a flowing river, as would be expected from a traditional Hindu cremation ritual, coupled with the openness of the performance was considered intolerable.[1] In fact, all open-air cremation pyres, after the practice was legally allowed, were required to be of good distance from any major road or river. These conditions set by the law met with expressed disappointment among advocates of cremation. Furthermore, one of the places where cremation was first allowed was the Labass dump, making the argument for cremation to be made, as that of human dignity that has been infringed on by an established law. Since not all Indians were Hindu and many belonged to the dominant Catholic, Anglican and even Muslim faiths, the agitation for cremation became both complex and difficult, and yet, popular among the rural working class Trinidadians of Indian descent.

Interestingly, it would take Hon. Victor Bryan, a Trinidadian member of parliament of African descent who represented a constituency with a large population of Indian descent to raise the motion in parliament for legalizing cremation. Not only that, the cause of the workers' union and agitation for allowing cremation in a dignified way found the same voice in Cola Rienzi (born Krishna Deonarine). It is of particular importance to note the support of Rienzi (among many others) for two reasons: the first being the class-based agitation for acceptance for which he stood. Having studied in England to be a lawyer and working along with Uriah Butler for the cause of workers, Rienzi found the cause of workers, as well as the legalization and dignified cremation, as worthy causes to pursue. The second reason to note is even more ironical; for a nation with a serious cultural and political distrust between people of Indian and African descent, Rienzi was a distinct character with an enviable history of having won the trust of Trinidadian workers of both Indian and African descents. While there

[1] *Hansard* 8 May1953

remains no evidence to suggest that the roles played by characters in the trade unions made cremation to become appealing to citizens of African descent, in general or Orisha devotees in particular, there also remains no suggestion either in the literature or from a range of my interviews indicating how cremation became appealing to Orisha devotees or how the elaborate rituals around it develop. What is clear however, is that cremation is a very recent addition to Trinidadian Orisha funeral practice.

If there was no evidence of cremation as a form of burial ritual before the arrival of indentured workers from India in the 19th century; and if after the arrival of the indentured workers in Trinidad the practice of cremating human remains was banned, two questions that arise are: how did some Orisha devotees in Trinidad and Tobago find cremation as an acceptable form of funeral ritual? And, at what point did cremation become an acceptable practice or tradition to Orisha devotees? There remains no simple or clear answer to these questions. One strong point of departure was 2005 when the parliament passed the Orisha Marriage Act, stipulating the requirement for anyone to be recognized as an Orisha priest; allowed for the registration of private ritual spaces as Orisha shrines and the authority to conduct Orisha marriages granted to priests.

With the socio-historical context within which cremation has evolved in Trinidad and Tobago, the overlap of race, religion and politics has produced an interesting landscape within which specific theological teaching has emanated and then engaging that same space for voice. When I asked Teacher Nicholas about the historical trajectory of cremation in Trinidad and Tobago, he insisted that cremation has always been there within the history and theology of Orisha practice – “I do know that cremation was also in Africa.” To make his point clearer, he agrees that the practice of cremation came to Trinidad through the migration of Hindus to the island. Giving a broad concession that: “our tradition was something that

was helped" by Hinduism, Muslims and Christianity. Therefore:

> we have held unto Catholicism, and held on also to Hindu; there are many of us that are here in Trinidad and has various visitations, spiritual visitations from the Hindu deities, if by extension you walk within my home here, I have ashram for Lord Vishnu. Many of us through our migration and interaction have also integrated the ancestors in that way, through our spiritual journeys.

To unpack Teacher Nicholas' assertion of his belief, the journey that has been made impossible in the physical, can be actualized in the more important form of spiritual migration and trance, one of the hallmarks of Trinidadian practice of Orisha.

As regards the practice of cremation in Africa, Henry Callaway (109-110:cited in Chidester et al, 17), while collecting Zulu "medical magic" and "Kafir Tales" records the magical use of medicine in antiquity Zulu tales and the supposed use of cremation as a magic to achieve "resurrection." Meinulf Küsters (cited and reproduced in Kroeber, 312) also produced a map in1921 that shows patterns of burial or disposal of human remains across Africa, with fire appearing on some spots on the map. Reiterating this, Kroeber agrees that in most cases, while it occurs as a form of usual practice (Dumbrell, 190-191: cited in Chidester et al, 381)[1], fire, it appears, is a form of disposing human remains that seemed reserved for criminals (313).

Apart from cremation being a recent development in Trinidad and Tobago society, other social factors are regarded as also being responsible for its acceptance, by the society in general and its pervasive use as a mortuary ritual among Orisha devotees. Even among the Hindu community in Trinidad, Keith McNeal (1) says: "cremation was an innovation that

[1.] According to Dumbrell's colonial and Swazi informants, Maseko and Simelane groups in Swaziland (southern Africa) have practised cremation "at some point in their history".

took time to consolidate at the heart of orthodox Hindu ritual praxis, becoming standard and finally trumping burial only late in the 20th century"[1] The first legal open-air cremation in Trinidad and Tobago was that of Mehta Kirpalani, who was allowed to be cremated at the dump by a special permission of the governor in Port of Spain.[2] Not only was the Trinidad and Tobago burial law amended to create the Cremation Act in 1953,[3] one of the most famous cremation that attracted attention in Trinidad was that of the founding prime minister, Eric Eustace Williams. As at the time the sitting Prime Minister Williams died in 1981, there appeared to be no working or established crematorium on the island. In fact, news report indicated that the daughter of the prime minister flew in a portable crematorium from the United States for the exercise at a beach in Chaguaramas.[4] In commenting on the present popularity and acceptance that cremation has assumed within the wider Trinidad and Tobago society, Sat Maharaj, the secretary-general of the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha, the main Hindu interest group in Trinidad alluded to the fact that the first prime minister was cremated: "We suspect that the death and cremation of our first prime minister, Dr Eric Williams, in 1981, influenced authorities to fully accept cremation as a sensible method of disposal of the dead in a country that is fast running out of land space for burial. People of different faiths now perform even open pyre cremation in the style of the Hindu."[5] In a separate case but of a different twist, was that of Sir Patrick Hobson, a non-Hindu and also an ex-Queen Royal College alumni like the former prime minister. Sir Hobson participated in

---

[1.] McNeal, Keith "Death and the problem of orthopraxy in Caribbean Hinduism: Reconsidering the politics and poetics of Indo-Trinidadian mortuary ritual". Unfinished manuscript.

[2.] Kistow, Gietree "Hindu funerary beliefs and rituals" 225.

[3.] Cremation Act: Chap. 30: 51 Laws of Trinidad and Tobago. Act 16 of 1953.

[4.] *The Ledger*, 05 April 1981; 14A.

[5.] *The Trinidad Guardian,* 27 September 2007.

the West Indies Independence Conference in the UK, and served as a senator, as well as heading various boards of corporations in Trinidad and Tobago. When Sir Hobson died on 30 July 1970, an unnamed relative was reported to have announced that the deceased would be given a private burial following a service at Trinity Cathedral in Port of Spain.[1] No public announcement was made of the sort of burial he was given. Although unconfirmed, he was reported to have been cremated in an open air form at at the Caroni cremation site.[2] All these above cases have been cited in order to show the complicated historical background upon which cremation gained traction in Trinidad and Tobago.

Apart from the recent introduction of cremation into Trinidad and Tobago society and its acceptance, another challenge worth noting is the uneasy access to public cemetery plots by the working class in the society. While most wealthy families have burial plots within public cemeteries that are managed by regional governments, and established religious organizations such as dioceses of the Catholic church, Muslim and Hindu communities owned their cemeteries, Orisha communities do not have such. In the case of Ms. Samantha Pierre, although the theological leanings of the Orisha group organizing the funeral support burial in a cemetery and against cremation, it faced a challenge on how to gain access to a public cemetery since her family did not own a burial plot. Rather than purchase a burial plot for her (which would have been the last option), a student from the university, who was a personal friend and student of the deceased was reported to have lobbied her own family to accommodate Ms. Pierre's burial.

Regarding how cremation found acceptance among some sections of Orisha devotees, Burton Sankeralli opined that cremation became a popular among Orisha devotees who found

---

[1.] "Death of Sir Patrick Hobson" Trinidad Guardian, 31 July 1970; 1. Print.

[2.] Bridget Brereton: Personal communication, 15 November 2012.

the practice of Kabbalah acceptable.[1] Furthermore, Mr. Sankeralli thinks the adoption of cremation for the funeral ritual of Isaac Shepherd Lindsay in the 1980s was a historical watershed in the use of cremation among Orisha devotees in Trinidad.[2] The connection between cremation of Isaac Lindsay and his practice of Kabbalah, in Mr. Sankeralli's opinion, cannot be dissociated from the influence of the Masonic lodges.[3] Since both the Lodges and the Kabbalah are practices shrouded in secrecy, the connection of both to cremation as an Orisha mortuary ritual, if credible, makes ascertaining their historical influence to remain mysterious. On the one hand, Trinidadian Orisha devotees with Yoruba-inclined theology are known not to tolerate the Kabbalah practices in their teachings. On the other hand, they are also avowedly against the idea of cremating their dead. In spite of the general sentiment in the society that cremation comes in handy when burial plots are not easily accessible (such as in the case of Ms. Pierre), efforts are made to find ways and means to "do the funeral the right way" – by interment. It would be a stretch of the facts, however to reach such a conclusion that the Yoruba-inclined Orisha theology in Trinidad and Tobago is against cremation because of any connection to the Kabbalah practice. No such sentiment was expressed throughout the period of my ethnography in Trinidad and Tobago. Burial is rather seen, is an important ritual for a departing member who is beginning the journey of afterlife and it is ritual that should be conducted in the right way. It is also worthy of note that

[1.] For comments and expressed views on Isaac Lindsay as a well-known practitioner of both Kabbalah and Orisha, see: Henry, Frances (2003: 143-145). For more on Kabbalah practice in Trinidad and Tobago, see Houk, (169-80).

[2.] Personal communication: 31 October 2012.

[3.] For more on the practice of Masonic Lodges and other practices that can be grouped as European mysticism in Trinidad and Tobago and their association to Afro-Caribbean religions like Orisha, see: Laitinen, (30-31).

the cross-section of Orisha community in Trinidad and Tobago cuts across all these theological leanings, where religious and ritual relationships are not restricted to sub-groups.[1] This, perhaps, account for the reason why a priest like Mr. Erinfolami would attend the funeral and cremation of Iyal'orisa Rodney, in spite of his rejection of cremation.

The generalization that is applied to Orisha as an African-derived religion, therefore is a form of description held high both by devotees and non-devotees alike, and served one overriding purpose and continues to do so: it differentiates Orisha from other world religions. If that description was initiated by the colonial and post-colonial states to deny Orisha and other practices the highly-needed validation both in definition and practices, devotees also applied the description to themselves in order to win that validation. While the colonial and post-colonial states outlawed practices in their attempt to do what Diana Paton has broadly described as "producing and policing the boundaries religion" across the Caribbean (1), devotees of Orisha used the African label to explain their "unorthodoxy" and to assert their validity. However, the description remains grossly inadequate in accounting for the practices entailed in Orisha.

With funeral, along with burial, being an important end to human existence, it has turned out to be a medium through which the performance of identity is communicated both to group members as well as the larger society. In details therefore, funeral rituals explore the following: the lived experience of the deceased; the after-life that he or she faces, the perspectives of Olodumare (the Supreme One) on both the lived experience and the after-life,

[1.] I addressed this fluidity of devotees in what I described as the "common pool of attendees" from which all shrines, rituals and theologies draw their attendance. While many devotees express their reservation regarding "other" practices or theology, many devotees' attendance of shrines show a strong co-existence of sometimes, contrasting theological views. This overlap is often treated as a peculiar heritage of the practice of Orisha in Trinidad and Tobago.

the perspectives of deities involved in the lived experience and the after-life; the experience and living relatives of the living relatives the deceased has left behind; members of the religious groups that the deceased and the living associate with; and finally, the larger society – devotees and non-devotees as well as the state.

In spite of the assumption that Orisha is an Afro-Caribbean religion, the religious persuasion and belief system of the group of devotees are clearly expressed through the funeral and burial ritual performance. Funeral rituals are also performed in such ways they both assert the theological views of those carrying them out, as well as reject other views that might be related to Orisha, but a view to which the group is not subscribed to. Therefore, even if Orisha is viewed as one religion, and its highly-needed validity is one as a religion that can trace its roots back to the Yoruba people of south-western Nigeria of today (among others), the religious views and belief system of thousands of its adherents in a country of less than 1.5 million people is diverse, fragmented and in some cases contradictory, albeit grouped under one distinct name.

Conclusion

The history and the discourse on New World practices that are traced back to Africa has remained a sketchy and complex issue to discuss. Among them however, funeral stands out as lacking detailed account and continues to be one that suffers most of the putdowns that Afro-Caribbean practices suffer. To achieve a distinction for Afro-American cultural practices, some measure of generalization have been utilized in the literature and the practice of generalizing continues at present. In order to win a voice for the powerless, one method widely utilized, both in writing and as a worldview, is such that can group together as many of the diverse or similar rituals as possible and apply to them a workable label. Funeral is a

good example of this generalization and labeling.

One of the earliest ethnographic records of funerals among Africans in the New World is the account given by William Beckford (388-390) of slave burials in Jamaica. Not only is the tone that of complete generalization of all Blacks in Jamaica at the time, Beckford reached extensive conclusion of what he sees as "negroes" view on attitudes towards expectation of death, death itself, grieving, and the funeral rites when he declared: "As an evil, few negroes consider death in this light. I never knew one who did, or who either dreaded it by anticipation, or who was apprehensive when it was hovering near." (390) Apart from comparing the "negroes" view to civilized world, all that Beckford observed were written in tone to be representative of all Blacks. This is the tone that most expressed views on minority religious groups have taken and continues to build on it within the post-colonial state. Regarding the rituals that Beckford observed, it is worth an extensive quote:

> Their principal festivals are their burials, upon which occasions they call forth all their magnificence, and display all their taste; and the expence (sic) with which the funerals of the better sort of negroes upon a plantation are attended, very often exceed the bounds of credulity; and of this position many instances might be given. Their bodies lie in state; an assemblage of slaves from neighbourhood appears: the body is ornamented with linen and other apparel, which has been previously purchased, as is often the custom, for this solemn occasion; and all the trinkets of the defunct are exposed in the coffin, and buried in the grave with the remains. The bier is lined with cambric and with lace; and when closed, it is covered with a quantity of expensive cloth, upon which are sometimes deposited wines and other liquors for the recreation of the guests, while a hog, poultry, and other viands, are offered up as an expiatory sacrifice. When the body is carried to the grave, they accompany the procession with

> a song; and when the earth is scattered over it, they send forth a shrill and noisy howl, which is no sooner re-echoed, in some cases, than forgotten. After this ceremony, which in civilized countries is considered as a melancholy one, but of which few traces can be found in the sepulture of a negro, the affected tear is soon dried, the pretended sigh is soon suppressed, and the face of sorrow becomes at once the emblem of joy (388-89).

Barbara Bush (156), in her strong description of the roles that enslaved women played in the slave society places funerals as such in which women play prominent roles, as well as citing Olaudah Equiano to make passionate defence of how enslaved Africans have "retained most of their native customs." She states:

> Slave funerals were viewed as riotous affairs by whites and were banned, ostensibly for their pagan and irreverent content but probably on account of the fact that they attracted large numbers of slaves and planters feared their potential for subversion. Nevertheless, the slaves clung tenaciously to their own way of death. Equiano, for instance, maintained that slaves retained 'most of their native customs' such as burying the dead with victuals and running with the corpse, as in Africa (157).

While conducting ethnography in Trinidad, I have come across such views regarding Orisha funerals.[1] It is interesting that Barbara Bush quoted Equiano (wrongly) that "running with the dead" was part of the customs that survived in the New World. In December 1771, Olaudah

[1.] A Catholic Trinidadian woman once told me that the reason she was not willing to attend an Orisha funeral was because she had learnt that "those people" leave their dead inside the house for several days before they decide on burial. When I asked further if she had witnessed such an instance, the response was No! Apart from the general label of "obeah" for Orisha practices and rituals, sentiments such as expressed above remain part of the generality of perception that Orisha devotees have to wrestle within the contemporary society, and for which the chosen funeral rite is supposed to engage.

Equiano serving as a steward on the *Jamaica* arrived from England in Nevis and then in Jamaica. He writes:

> When I came to Kingston, I was surprised to see the number of Africans who were assembled together on Sundays; particularly at a large commodious place, called Spring Path. Here each different nation of Africa meet and dance after the manner of their own country. They still retain most of their native customs: they bury their dead, and put victuals, pipes and tobacco, and other things, in the grave with the corpse, in the same manner as in Africa (278).

Although the label "Orisha shrine" can be applied to the four venues where the four funeral rituals took place, two general groups can still be observed into which they both fall into: the two shrines where the first two funeral rituals took place fall into the first group; they were built in the typical Trinidadian style to building shrines in general – comprising a *palais* (a general area where rituals are performed in before everyone present), a *chappelle* (an inner room, entrance into which is only permitted by authorized persons), and finally perogun (offering spots for different deities with flags of corresponding colours). In the case of the third funeral, there are marked differences. First of all, the shrine is one example of practices in Trinidad where the cosmology, belief systems and rituals are designed to be Yoruba-inclined although there are wide spaces constructed for meetings of devotees as well as ritual spots for different deities, flags for deities are conspicuously absent. Furthermore, ritual spots to deities are referred to as *ojubo* (ritual/offering spot in Yoruba), rather than using either of the words “stool” or “*peregun*” as is the practice in Trinidad.

A distinct one with a striking significance is the pan yard-workshop where the wake as well as the post-funeral celebration took place for Odingo Horse, in the case of the fourth funeral. While the term shrine cannot be loosely applied to the space and in fact, Ellie

Mannette Park, where the funeral rituals took place, by design, is of emphasized significance in projecting the revolutionary and the activist leaning of the deceased, rather than serving as a designated Orisha shrine. However, Odingo during his lifetime, kept a shrine within the sanctum of the pan yard-workshop as a nexus for his lived reality. Just as his name Odingo was supposed to represent the Kikuyu warrior from the pre-colonial Kenya,[1] the significance of the Trinidadian "revolutionary" gathering place was not going to be lost at his burial. Thus, the symbol of his creativity as a *mas man*, his revolutionary and pan-African bent were celebrated in an Orisha ritual within the precinct of a public park secured with permission from the City Council of Port of Spain. The celebration of pan playing, drinking and *limin* within the pan yard-workshop that contain a shrine to Ogun and Oshosi (Odingo's deity for war and creativity) was the only way to express the overlap of religion, the creative industry, entertainment and activism as shown by Odingo life.

The question then is how to define a shrine. How simplistic or all-inclusive should a definition of what constitutes a shrine be? Can a public park that is of great symbolism to working class activist and a park named by the government after Elliot Mannette, a man generally regarded as the father of the modern steel pan musical instrument be regarded as a shrine? For Odingo not to have aligned himself to any organized Orisha shrine in Trinidad, Odingo stood out as are many Trinidadians and Tobagonians who may not be easily counted as Orisha devotees. However, the shrine he keeps[2] within the pan yard-workshop aligns with a sentiment among a segment of pan-Africanist in Trinidad and Tobago that the steel pan is

[1.] As I was told during conversation with Chief Erinfolami at the pan yard.

[2.] The shrines to Ogun and Oshosi are situated in two spots in a corner without the usual flags that are commonly used in Trinidad and Tobago. Looking at the shrine spots from a distance of six feet, the most discernible items on the two spots that effect an appearance of shrine in traditional Trinidadian or Tobagonian sense, are the two ceramic containers called goblets used in pouring water to shrines or during prayers.

an Orisha instrument, inspired by Ogun; that pan music is an Orisha music and that any pan yard is an Orisha shrine. Chief Erinfolami, who was among the officiating priest at Odingo funeral expresses this strongly.[1] This is coupled with the general idea, even among secularists that the steel pan as a musical instrument and the narratives around it are a strong testament for resistance.

Elaborate funeral rituals among Orisha devotees can, therefore be seen to owe their past not only to Africa as a mythical and ancestral homeland but also to sets of practices that evolved over a long period within the milieu of the New World. Just as the name Orisha is generic, the assumption that Orisha funeral or that Orisha people bury their dead in a particular way, or an Orisha devotee will choose to be buried in an "Orisha way" can both be misleading, in the least, or meaningless at most. Orisha devotees have never and are not likely to have that assumed, unified method of burying the dead, that going by the literature or any popular media for recording history, is what would be expected.

Not only is the choice of the dying or the dead circumspect on the way he or she should or can be buried, the choices before those that are organizing the burial and the mortuary rituals are also certain to be subjected to intra-Trinidadian theological leanings on the one hand, as well as a transnational expansion of theological implications on the other hand. My point here is that how anyone of Orisha persuasion is buried presents an intra-Orisha form of analysis of what theological leanings the person has lived by, or in fact, a combination of leanings. The afterlife choices and aspirations are also of serious concern and thus, organized accordingly by those on earth.

[1.] Interview:16 October 2012.

Cited Texts

“Cremation in Trinidad” *Port of Spain Gazette*, 28 August 1938: 6. Print.

"Final rites for Baba Forde already done" *Newsday*, 18 July 2012. Print.

"Trinidad cremation postponed when microwave unit malfunctions" *The Ledger*, 05 April 1981; 14A. Print.

Beckford, William *A descriptive account of the island of Jamaica: with remarks upon the cultivation of the sugar-cane, throughout the different seasons of the year, and chiefly considered in a picturesque point of view; also observations and reflections upon what would probably be the consequences of an abolition of the slave-trade, and of the emancipation of the slaves Vol. II*, London: T. and J. Egerton, 1790. Print.

Bhalla, Prem P. *Hindu Rites, Rituals, Customs and Traditions: A to Z on the Hindu way of life*, Delhi: Hindoology Books, 2009. Print.

Bush, Barbara. *Slave Women in Caribbean Society 1650-1838*, Kingston: Ian Randle, 1990. Print.

Callaway, Henry. "South African folk-lore" Cape Monthly Magazine (N.S.), 16.94: 109-10, 1878. Print.

Chidester, David; Chirevo Kwenda, Robert Petty, Judy Tobler, Darrel Wratten, *African Traditional Religion in South Africa: An Annotated Bibliography*, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1997. Print.

Christopher J. Johnson, and Holly L. Wilson, “Eschatology in major religious traditions” Dennis L. Peck, and Clifton D. Bryant, (Eds.) *Encyclopedia of Death and the Human Experience*, Thousand Oaks and London: Sage, 2009; 420-426. Print.

Cremation Act: Chap. 30: 51 Laws of Trinidad and Tobago. Act 16 of 1953, Amended by 1970, 1976 & 1986. Print.

De Peza, Hazel Ann Gibbs *My faith: Spiritual Baptist Christian*, St. Augustine: University of the West Indies, 1999. Print.

Dumbrell, H. J. E. "Pyre burning in Swaziland" *African Studies*, 11. 4: 190-91, 1952. Print.

Equiano, Olaudah. *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa, The African: Written By Himself*, London: Printed and sold by the author, 1789. Print.

Evans–Pritchard, E. E. *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937. Print.

Fowlkes, Martha R. "The social regulation of grief" *Sociological Forum*, 5.4 (Dec., 1990); 635-652. Print.

Hastings, James; Selbie, John Alexander; Gray, Louis H. (Eds.) *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908. Print.

Henry, Frances *Reclaiming African Religions in Trinidad: The Socio Political Legitimation of the Orisha and Spiritual Baptist Faith*, Mona, Kingston: U West Indies Press, 2003. Print.

Houk, James *Spirits, Blood and Drums: The Orisha Religion in Trinidad*, Philadelphia: Temple U Press, 1995

Jha, J. C. 1974. "The Indian Heritage in Trinidad." Pp. 1-24 in Calcutta To Caroni, edited byJohn La Guerre. London: Longman Caribbean Limited.

Khan, Aisha. "Islam, Vodou, and the making of the Afro-Atlantic" *New West Indian Guide*, Vol. 86: 1-2; 2012. 29-54. Print.

Kistow, Gietree "Hindu funerary beliefs and rituals" Samaroo, Brinsley & Ann Marie Bissessar, The Construction of an Indo-Caribbean Diaspora, St. Augustine: University of the West Indies School of Continuing Studies, 2004; 239-264. Print.

Kroeber, A. L. “Disposal of the dead” *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 29: 3, (July 1927); 308-315. Print.

Küsters, P. Meinulf “Das Grab der Afrikaner” *Anthropos*, 16-17: [639-728, 183-229, 913-959]183-229/913-959, 1921. Print.

Laitinen, Maarit Marching to Zion: *Creolisation in Spiritual Baptist rituals and cosmology*, Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2002. Print.

Malinowski, Bronislaw “Magic, science and religion” *Magic, Science and Religion and other essays*, New York: Free Press, 1948; 10-87. Print.

Maharaj, Sat "Hindu funeral rites are solemn" *The Trinidad Guardian*, 27th September 2007.

Matory, James Lorand *Sex and the Empire That Is No More: Gender and the Politics of Metaphor in Oyo Yoruba religion*, Minnesota: Regent University, 2005. Print.

Marx, Karl "Private property and communism" Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, 1844.http://marx.eserver.org/1844-ep.manuscripts/3rd.manuscript/2-property.commu.txt [accessed: 20 November 2012].

McNeal, Keith E. “Death and the Problem of Orthopraxy in Caribbean Hinduism: Reconsidering the Politics and Poetics of Indo-Trinidadian Mortuary Ritual” Hume, Y & M. Forde, (eds) *Passages and Afterworlds*, Unfinished manuscript. Print.

Ottley, Carlton Robert *The Trinidad Callaloo: Life in Trinidad from 1851-1900*, Diego Martin, Trinidad: Crusoe Pub. House, 1978. Print.

Paton, Diana. “Obeah Acts: Producing and policing the boundaries of religion in the Caribbean” *Small Axe*, 13: 1, March 2009: 1-18. Print.

Platvoet, Jan and Karel van der Toorn, "Ritual responses to plurality and pluralism" Platvoet, Jan and Karel van der Toorn, (Eds.) *Pluralism and Identity: Studies in Ritual Behaviour*, Leiden: Brill, 1995; 3-21. Print.

Platvoet, Jan "Rituals in plural and pluralist societies: Instruments for analysis" Platvoet, Jan and Karel van der Toorn, (eds.) *Pluralism and Identity: Studies in Ritual Behaviour*, Leiden: Brill, 1995; 25-52. Print.

Radcliffe-Brown, Alfred R. *The Andaman Islanders: A study in social anthropology* Cambridge: Cambridge UPress, 1922. Print.

Singh, Sherry-Ann "Hinduism and the state in Trinidad" *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 6:3, 2005; 353-365. Print.

Tucci, Giuseppe *The Religions of Tibet*, translated into English by Geoffrey Samuel, London: Routledge and Kagan Paul, 1980. Print.

Vertovec, Steven *Hindu Trinidad: Religion, ethnicity and socio-economic change*, Oxford: Macmillan Caribbean (Warwick University Caribbean Studies Series), 1992. Print.

Alleyne-Pilgrim, Vernella "Ethnological dimensions of the Tobago Heritage Festival" *OPRP*, 30: 1-2, 1995.

Winer, Lise (ed.) *Dictionary of the English/Creole of Trinidad & Tobago*, Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's U Press, 2009. Print.

Malinowski, Bronislaw "Baloma; The spirits of the dead in the Trobriand Islands" *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 46 (Jul. - Dec.), 1916; 353-430. Print.

The Orisa Marriage Act, 1999. Print.

Titus, Rawle Winston *Wake People Wake. The sacred and the profane*, London: Hansib, 2008. Print.