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COVER: The photograph on the softcover volume is of Queen Eson N'Erie (Erediavwa) of the Royal Court of Benin, Nigeria. (Photograph by Flora E.S. Kaplan, 1989.)

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Queens, Queen Mothers, Priestesses, *and* Power

Case Studies in African Gender

Editor Flora *Edouwaye* S. Kaplan

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THE KING'S MALE-ORDER BRIDE
The Modern Making of a Yorùbá Priest

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IGBÒHO, NIGERIA, is the site of a display that has recurred many times over the centuries in towns under the dominion of the Ọyọ́ kingdom. It may be seen virtually wherever Ọyọ́'s influence has been felt—including metropolitan Ìbàdàn, the People's Republic of Bénin, and the *òrìṣà*-worshiping houses of Brazil and Cuba. A god has descended to earth in Ìgbòho. The *òrìṣà* Ṣàngó rushes fiery-eyed through crowds of women and children—"traditionalists," Muslims and Christians—whose screams project both fear and exhilaration. The god's presence declares itself through the violent dartings of his possessed "horse," through the anomalous costume of the mount, and through the crowd's gestures of obeisance and supplication: the people kneel, doff their headdresses, and await the touch of his hand. Come into this world—modern, rural and economically marginal—is the apotheosis of an early king of Ọyọ́, one of the larger empires in West African history. Though the Ọyọ́ Empire lapsed long ago from military dominance, Ṣàngó remains for the Yorùbá the paradigmatic king—authoritarian and virile.

Yet he wears the hairstyle, jewelry and make-up of a woman!

Once we recover from the shock, it might be tempting to explain the well-established Ṣàngó ritual complex as African "traditional" religion—as an unchanging relic of the distant past. I hope to show instead that these priests of Ṣàngó display an image of women shaped not only by the strategies of a specific and historic kingdom, but by the *changing* experience of women and the *changing* aspirations of male and female priests in a modern, religiously plural society.[a]

[a] This essay is based upon a variety of 19th- and 20th-century documents on Ọyọ́-Yorùbá life, as well as 26 months of field research across the span of the 1980s in Ìgbòho,

The Ṣàngó priesthood acquires much of its symbolic power from its past administrative links to the ancient Ọ̀yọ́ empire. However, those links lapsed long ago. This priesthood creates and describes its possession priests through a vocabulary and iconography with counterparts in non-priestly institutions, such as Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá child-care, marriage, folk biology, kinship ideology, animal husbandry, capitalist exchanged, and horsemanship. Below, I pursue the hypothesis that the initiation transforms people by redefining them in terms of metaphors from these various realms of worldly life. Moreover, those realms of worldly life have changed radically in the 20th century. So, then, have the pre-conditions, the meanings, and the functions of the Ṣàngó priestly initiation.

I have discussed elsewhere the historical relation of Ṣàngó's possession priesthood to the Ọ̀yọ́ palace, as well as the overlapping roles of wives, transvestite male possession priests and messengers, eunuchs, and horses as royal delegates (Matory 1994). Old Ọ̀yọ́ was the northernmost of the kingdoms now called Yorùbá. It intervened in the trade between the Sahel and the forest. With the aid of Hausa veterinarians, Ọ̀yọ́ maintained a cavalry that, in the forest kingdoms farther south would have died of trypanosomiasis. From the late 16th century onward, Ọ̀yọ́ owed much of its imperial expansion over the southern savannah to its unique access to horses from the north (Johnson 1921: 161; Smith 1965: 67–68). Ọ̀yọ́'s cavalry conquered Ẹ̀gbá, Ẹ̀gbádò, Òwu and Dahomey. Surely the military and political importance of cavalry in the Empire contributed to the prominence of equestrian symbolism of the post-imperial religion.

Territorial expansion presented non-royal military chiefs with the means to enhance their own power over the king. Thus, only an extended and efficient palace organization could assure continued royal control. As blood-kinsmen, other royals could be loyal staffers in the palace administration. However, royal kinsmen also posed a special threat to any reigning king: they could usurp the throne. Therefore, an implicit concern throughout Ọ̀yọ́ royal ritual and policy was the palace's mistrust of the royal family. For some time prior to King Atiba's 1858 reform, the eldest son of a king was killed upon the death of that king in order to deter parricide. Despite his reform, even Atiba kept the princes away from the palace (Johnson 1921: 41–42; Abraham 1962: 63; Babayẹmi 1979: 151–152). Apparently for similar reasons,

Ṣẹ̀pẹ̀tẹ̀rí, Ṣakí, Ọ̀yọ́ Town, Ìbàdàn, Abẹ́ọ̀kúta, Ìgèdè-Èkìtì and Kétu. My foremost informants have been the priests of Yemọja, Ṣàngó and Ògún. I wish to thank the *Ẹlẹ́gùn* Ṣàngó Ṣangodara of Ìgbòho, the late *Bàbá Onífyemọja* Ogunnikẹ Moṣadogun of Ìbàdàn, and the King of Ọ̀yọ́, Aláàfin Adéyẹmí III. This essay is dedicated to the late *Mógbà Yemọja* Ìyá Elégbo of Ìgbòho.

the king's royal kin were excluded from the highest military office—the Baṣọ̀run.

Outsiders without any natal claim to the throne, the *ayaba*—wives of the reigning king and his predecessors—were entrusted somewhat more safely with administrative functions and prerogatives. They served as the heads of Empire-wide priesthoods, as royal advisers, as intermediaries between the king and subject chiefs, as commercial agents of the palace, and as provincial viceroys. Among these *ayaba* were the male wives of Ṣàngó (Biobaku 1952: 40; Babayẹmi 1982: 6; Clapperton 1829: 21; Lander and Lander 1832: 122). In the days that the Ọ̀yọ́ kings ruled from Ìgbòho, cavalry was introduced into the Ọ̀yọ́ army, and two other gender transformations were introduced into the politico-religious order. For one, castration became a requirement for the highest palace officials—the *iwẹfa* (Johnson 1921: 163). It reflected far more than concern over the paternity of royal children, for certain high-ranking officials had only *one* testicle removed (*ibid.*: 30). Symbolic concerns about the *wifeliness* of royal auxiliaries seem to be the unifying theme. The third revealing gender transformation is said to have taken place in the very person of the king who introduced the other two gender transformations into the 16th-century Ọ̀yọ́ kingdom. This king is said either to have been the first and last *woman* to rule Ọ̀yọ́, or to have turned from a woman into a man on the day of her coronation (Matory 1994: 79; Smith 1965: 68).

In the last quarter of the 18th century, King Abiọdun countered the expanding power of non-royal chiefs by vastly expanding the number and functions of wifely delegates known as the *ìlàrí*. They served as diplomatic observers, toll-collectors, messengers, cavaliers, royal guards and priests. Female *ìlàrí* were explicitly called "wives of the king," and at least some male *ìlàrí* cross-dressed and declared themselves "wives of the king" (Atanda 1979: 203; Aderele 1982: 163; Smith 1965: 60). Thus, in an ingenious answer to the palace's changing needs, well-precedented ritual manipulations of gender were used to expand a corps of male wives who were free to move around the country at a time when, in principle, the king's female wives were secluded.

Despite the lapse of Ọ̀yọ́ royal hegemony in the 19th century, British indirect rule in the 20th century resurrected many of these ritual forms and thus restored the foundations of the Ṣàngó priesthood's claims to power. Well into the 1950s, female and male palace wives remained symbols and agents *par excellence* of Ọ̀yọ́ royal authority.[b] The most famous Ọ̀yọ́ king of the colonial era was credited

[b] See Ọ̀yọ́ Prof 1, File No. 1048/13, pp.39, 93, Nigerian National Archives, Ìbàdàn; also Atanda 1979: 203; Atanda 1970: 227).

with almost being able to "turn a man into a woman" and vice-versa (Atanda 1970: 227). Modifying still other gendered foundations of Ọyọ́ royalism, the British encouraged local authorities to guarantee and codify women's rights of divorce, diminishing the hierarchical quality and stability of Yorùbá marriage. Importantly, the new divorce codes fixed the monetary values of bridewealth that women requesting divorce would have to refund. British policy thereby contributed to an unprecedented monetization of bridewealth generally.

Equally important to understanding this religious complex is the fact that, although most Nigerian Yorùbá are Christian or Muslim, they are also loyal to ancestral towns and cities (Laitin 1986) of which the *òrìṣà* remain important emblems. Most of these gods are regarded as the founders or saviors of a particular town or of the families in the town that chiefly worships them. Thus, the *òrìṣà* are often the subject of a local "civil religion" (Olupọna 1991; Bellah 1970) that transcends the exclusivist demands of the evangelical faiths. In Ìgbòho, some few people despise gods like Yemọja, but such gods, nonetheless, attract the sentimental attention of many urban emigrés returning for the holidays, as well as the sponsorship of those aspiring to local chieftaincies. A step beyond the other gods, the Ṣàngó priesthood evokes fear among its detractors, embodies the authority of the town's Ọyọ́ rulers, and carries the brightest beacon of hope and healing for neglected, poor or infertile women. What power do such women perceive in a man dressed like them? What is it in their experience of the male Muslim- and Christian-dominated nation-state that makes them turn instead to Ṣàngó's transvestite bride? In order to fathom his power, let us consider the process by which this marvel is made.

THE INITIATION

The worship of the imperial *òrìṣà* Ṣàngó is no longer subject to the administrative overview of the Ọyọ́ palace. Initiations, festivities, and the feeding of the gods now occur exclusively under the authority of local groups. No ritual in the worship of Ṣàngó exceeds the initiation of a new priest in its cost and grandeur. It schematically dramatizes the reproduction of a counter-hegemonic empire within modern Nigeria. Various age-old elements of this rite—from the ram sacrifice to the constituent metaphors of marriage and blood—re-deploy the symbols and techniques of Ọyọ́ imperialism to fulfill the hopes and needs of modern rural and female supplicants. The initiation procedure is called *ìdóṣù*, or "tying *òṣù*"—that is, applying a ball of sacred substances to, and thereby planting the *òrìṣà* in the initiand's head. All Ọyọ́-Yorùbá possession religions—including the worship of Ṣàngó, Yemọja, Ọ̀ṣun, Ọbàtálá and Oya—have similar initiatory rites for their

possession priests. In the following analysis of initiation, I interpret the rituals of the Ṣàngó priesthood not simply as a repetition of "tradition" but as a counter-hegemonic play for power by a rural and predominantly female priesthood in a religiously plural state. Moreover, it realizes its power only through the recognition and sponsorship of its largely female body of supplicants.

No full account of the initiation is available from any single source: the Ṣàngó priesthood is hedged in with *àṣírí awo*, or "religious secrets."[c] Yet certain things may be witnessed by outsiders. In fact, the spirit of secrecy goes along with the priests' desire to show others that there *is* a secret and to make clear *who is privileged to know it.*[d] On one day of the initiation, for example, the initiand is seated outdoors where a crowd has gathered. The Ṣàngó priests use their bodies and an improvised curtain of clothes to conceal the activities going on inside. Why, one wonders, do they not perform the ceremony indoors or in a less populated area, where no crowd would have taken notice? To some extent, curious onlookers like myself are expected to attend the initiation. On the other hand, some phases of the initiation exclude the initiates' kin, neighbors, friends, and wives, as well as any outside investigator. Yet many community residents reported knowledge of what took place out of their sight.

I witnessed substantial parts of two Ṣàngó initiations in Ìgbòho, one for a man and one for a woman. The initiand, regardless of his or her sex, is called an *ìyàwó*, or "bride," of the god. In the following synopsis, I will use the English pronouns appropriate to the *man's* initiation, but, as far as I know, the initiation of a woman is identical. The important phases of the *ìdóṣù* initiation of priests may take place over more than a year, but the main events occur during a period of 14 days, during which the initiand sleeps with his or her female caretaker. These events take place in the Ṣàngó shrine of a *mọ́gbà Ṣàngó*'s house, that is, in the house of the non-possession priest officially responsible for the initiation. The initiand takes up residence in the shrine on the eve of what is called the "first day" and returns home ideally on the "fourteenth day." Various public displays follow intermittently, but

[c] Verger published an extensive account of one Ṣàngó initiation in Sakete (in present-day People's Republic of Bénin) in the mid-20th century (1957: 36–43). It differs in some important details from what I witnessed in Ìgbòho in 1988, although the similarities are far greater. Johnson published a brief account of the Ṣàngó initiation based on late-19th-century testimony in Ọyọ́ town (1921: 34–35). I know of no documentation of Ṣàngó initiation procedures in Ọyọ́ town or Ọyọ́ North other than Johnson's. His account differs radically from what I have observed and heard in Ìgbòho, although he mentions a variety of plants still in use among Yemọja-worshipers in the town.

[d] See also Karin Barber's exegesis of the Yorùbá concept of *awo*, or "secret" (1981: 739–740, fn. 31).

years may pass before the initiand becomes a full-fledged *ẹlẹ́gùn Ṣàngó* (that is, a "mount" of the god), responsible for a residential quarter of his or her own.

The following discussion concerns rites that occurred in September 1988, early in the dry season, about two months after the yam harvest, and in the midst of the corn harvest. It was a time of the year when money and food were locally plentiful, and in which (due to structural adjustments in the import market) the profits from the indigenous cultivation of corn, millet, cassava and yams had become exceptionally robust.[e] The co-occurrence of the two initiations I witnessed and of preparations for a third in the same three-month period, is probably unusual, in part, for economic reasons.

Ṣàngó kìí kú; ẹ̀ṣin rẹ̀ ló ń lọ sọ́run—"Ṣàngó does not die; his horse is the one who goes to heaven"—said one possession priest of another's death. Most Ṣàngó priests are recruited from within the bilateral kindred of a retiring or recently deceased possession priest. When a horse prepares to go to heaven, a sacred and intangible "headload" must be withdrawn from his head and "tied on the head" (*di nǹkan rù*) of his successor. Ṣàngó's approval of the successor is established through cowry-shell divination. If the priest's successor has not been prepared before her or his death, the priests remove the "load" from the head of the deceased and delay the burial of the corpse until the dead person's family has chosen a suitable successor. Delaying the burial is a highly feared form of blackmail. Ideally, the successor is a young adult. However, the fear that one's children will have adopted other religions before they reach the proper age for initiation has persuaded some priests nowadays to initiate pre-pubescent children. Recruitment may sometimes work independently of heredity. Diviners may interpret a person's illness, misfortune, or infantile distress as a "calling" and, therefore, prescribe initiation.

The *mọ́gbà*'s shrine room is called the *gbọ̀ngán* (FIG. 1). The candidate enters this room on the eve of "the first day," after offerings have been made to the grave of the dead predecessor. Offerings are applied to various points on the body of the "bride," or initiand, in order to feed the god inside him and to strengthen those body parts. The bride and all the Ṣàngó priests remain awake all night. The bride drinks millet beer containing special herbs and bathes in herbal infusions. An age-mate of the deceased predecessor will then shave the bride's head. Some informants report that the bride swallows certain

[e] The Nigerian naira had recently been devalued in relation to major foreign currencies, with which Nigerians had previously purchased large quantities of foreign grain. After the devaluation, foreign food became expensive in naira terms, making the crops of domestic farmers more competitive.

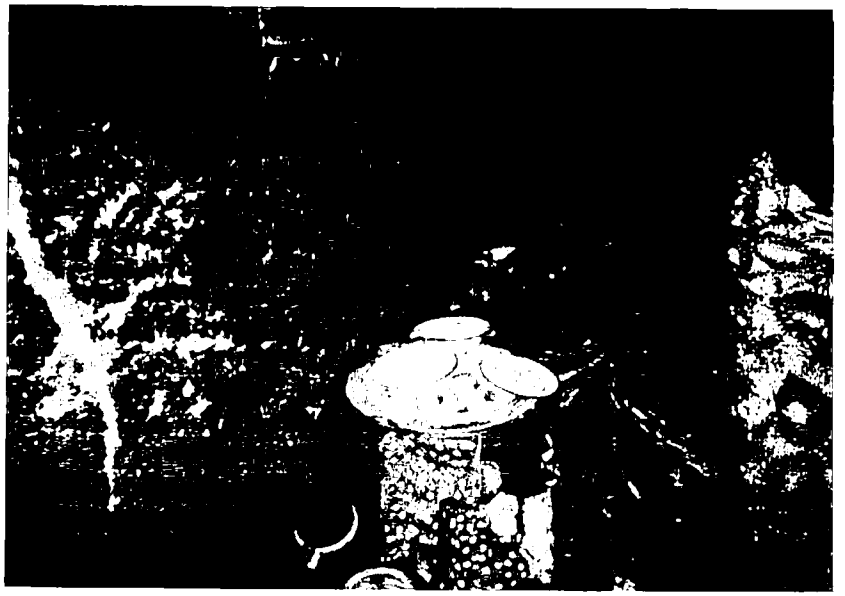


FIGURE 1 Ṣàngó altars in the *mọ́gbà*'s shrine room, where the male "bride" (*ìyàwó*) was initiated. Stones embodying Ṣàngó's power rest atop the second mortar (*odó*); the shells and stones of his mother Yemọja rest atop the first, Ìgbòho town. (Photograph by J. Lorand Matory, 1988.)

substances or objects formerly belonging to the dead priest.[f] Then the bride sits on an overturned mortar as the blood of numerous sacrificial animals is poured over his head in a rite called *afẹ̀jẹ̀wẹ̀*—"bathing in blood." The blood may be painted on with a feather as well. Ṣàngó then "mounts" his new bride.

The next morning, a combination of sacred substances chewed up by a priestess is applied in a ball called *òṣù* to the top of the bride's head, just above convergence of the sutures of the skull.[g] Using a vulture feather, that priestess paints lightning- and blood-like designs on the bride's head with ground red camwood and white chalk (see FIG. 2). The *òṣù* and painted designs will be washed off and re-applied to the bride's head at least twice a day for the balance of the first seven days in the shrine room. On the morning of the "first day," the bride

[f] Likewise, in passing on her witchcraft (*àjẹ́*), a retiring "witch" is said to vomit up the substance of her power in order to allow her successor or recruit to swallow it or part of it.

[g] As Drewal points out, the particle *ṣù* identifies the ball with other spherical objects (1986: 98, fn. 2), like the baskets in which market women carry headloads and the superstructure of the hairstyle that most Ìgbòho possession priests wear (*ṣùkú*). See also Abraham 1962: 625–626.



FIGURE 2. Initiand with his head fully painted on the morning preceding his "coming-out" (*ikó ọmọ jáde*). He is wearing the three *kélé* necklaces marking his marriage to Sàngó and, on his hands, a cosmetic application of henna, Ìgbòho town. (Photograph by J. Lorand Matory, 1988.)

carries an offering on his head outside to the crossroads, either for the *òrìṣà* Èṣù—divine messenger and trouble-maker—or, according to some reports, for the "witches" (*àjẹ́*). The bride's female ritual attendant, the *ìyálé* (lit., the "senior co-wife") always leads her or him to the crossroads. The bride, his senior co-wife, and the rest of the priests will dance in a circle at the crossroads, which is, in some cases, the location of the dead possession priest's grave as well.

On the eve of the "third day," the priests stay awake to divine Ṣàngó's will in relation to the bride and to determine the taboos the novice will follow in the future. They also tie the special bead necklaces called *kélé* on the bride. On the morning of the "third day" the bride bears one offering to the crossroads for the witches, and another to the river for Ṣàngó. At the river, the bride and the priests bathe naked—which is extremely intimate conduct in this society. Equally shocking to most people, on the afternoon of the "third day" the bride and the priests publicly perform ribald songs while dancing to the beat of *bàtá* drums. They then begin to dance soberly in a great circle. As the counter-clockwise motion of the circle speeds up, both senior co-wife and bride are possessed, or "mounted," by Ṣàngó. Male or female, the bride wears distinctly feminine cosmetics, jewelry and



FIGURE 3. Male initiand at the "coming-out" of the female initiand, some weeks after his own. Note his feminine or, to be precise, his *bridely* attire, Ìgbòho town. (Photograph by J. Lorand Matory, 1988.)

clothing—including, in both the initiations I witnessed, textiles covered with images of bank notes. The male bride in FIGURE 3 has henna on his feet; he also wears earrings, delicate bracelets, a blouse (*bùbá*), and a wrap-skirt (*ìró*). His brocade blouse is woven with images of the ₦20 note. The predominantly female audience contributes money to the manifest gods' attendants and to those holding important ritual implements.

Until the eve of the "seventh day," the *ìyàwó* remains in or near the *mọ́gbà*'s room and continues to follow an infantilizing dietary and hygienic routine, which is administered by the senior co-wife. On the eve of the "seventh day" more animals are sacrificed and some of their blood is drunk. The bride's head is re-shaved to leave a skull-cap-shaped area of stubble, which is then darkened with indigo paint.

On the morning of the "seventh day," a ram and several chickens are decapitated two feet from the initiand's face. Each priest tastes a drop from a calabash full of blood. A tray of offerings is borne on the bride's head to the crossroads—for Èṣù, the witches or the dead priest. Then, the bride is seated outdoors on a mortar and is surrounded by the priests with their curtain of cloths. After two chickens are killed within the enclosure—probably by the teeth of the bride—he comes out staggering. Sometimes a second, similar ceremony is performed later the same day. The audience sings and signs with its hands that Ṣàngó should not kill anyone when he arrives from the other world.

On the afternoon of the "seventh day," another public performance takes place, in which the bride and senior co-wife are mounted, or possessed. Then, two senior possession priests are mounted—one male and one female—and they dance. Members of the crowd again give money to the gods' attendants and to the bearers of important ritual implements. Donors then bare their heads to receive the blessing of the god's touch. In the days that follow, the special *kélé* necklaces remain around the bride's neck, and his skull-cap of stubble is kept darkened with indigo dye. On the "twelfth day" of his initiation, the bride, followed by drummers and priestly attendants, parades around the town wearing women's clothing and jewelry, bearing in his hands a switch to do battle against the witches. The eve of the "thirteenth day" is the last night the initiand spends with his senior co-wife in the *mọ́gbà*'s room.

THE MODERN MAKINGS OF MEANING

The effectiveness of the Ṣàngó-worshipers' recruitment policy of blackmail notwithstanding, a number of questions remain unanswered: How does a corporation produce inter-generational continuity and redefine personal identity in such a way as to survive global social and

politico-religious change? Which signs and rhetorical strategies are, to paraphrase Geertz's indices of religion (1973), sufficiently flexible, powerful, pervasive and long-lasting in Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá society to produce continuity out of vast material change? On which indubitable realities does local contestation pivot, despite vast ideological diversification? The Ṣàngó cult has advanced a reasonably successful and interested *argument of images* (Fernandez 1982); it not only structures the priesthood's collective life but draws on the power of a sometimes-antagonistic society to do so.

What follows is one partial reading of the Ṣàngó initiation rites in modern Ìgbòho. The Ṣàngó ritual cycle, including the initiation, is a series of shows. The impressiveness of its shows and its display of secrecy are major constituents of priestly power. By publicly fixing signs of wifely identity onto male bodies, the priests subliminally call attention to the essence of feminine reproductive and productive capacities. Secrecy implies the priests' monopoly over the technology of feminization, of instilling the qualities of properly productive wifeliness, which includes the invisible stuff of uterine fertility.

Whereas historical documents attribute prominent governmental functions to Ṣàngó priests, modern Yorùbá audiences perceive the god primarily as a master of procreation. The Ṣàngó priesthood makes a profession of displaying the manufacture of proper brides and of selling access to the secret of fecundity. Metaphoric images are layered, literally like paint, on the body of the initiand. The technology of the Ṣàngó initiation creates a palimpsest of metaphors—each layer encoding a genealogy of biographical and historical significations.

Early in the initiation, there are *metaphors of birth and infancy*: the initiand is like a fetus or a newborn. He is rendered bald and appears nude in semi-public places. He sleeps in the shrine room with a woman who bathes him and attends to his excretory functions as well. The public presentation of the initiand on the "seventh day" is called *ìkó ọmọ jáde*—"the carrying-outdoors of the child"—after the first official public appearance of literal newborns.

On the other hand, there are *metaphors of sex and marriage*. Whereas the female ritual attendant is granted the responsibility and authority of a mother, the verbalized discourse demotes her to the role of a co-wife. Like a worldly bride on the night of her entry into her new husband's house, the initiand will have his feet washed by a senior co-wife in the affinal house. During public presentations, a male or female initiand wears not only a women's blouse and wrapper but an *ọ̀já*, or baby sling, used by mothers to carry infants on their backs (see FIG. 3). Most dramatically, Ṣàngó will mount the initiand bride, in an act that has clear sexual implications. Not only are gods said to *mount* priests, but males are said to mount females in the



FIGURE 4 Ṣàngó mounted on his female possession priestess (*ẹlẹ́gùn*) during the annual festival in Ọba Ago Quarter, Ìgbòho town. (Photograph by J. Lorand Matory, 1988.)

sexual act, and, in prayer, priests address Ṣàngó as their "husband and lord" (*ọkọ*) (FIG. 4). The symbolism of sexual penetration and reproduction is—in rites of both worldly marriage and spirit possession—displaced upward to the head. That is, the groom and his family pay "money for the *head* of the bride" (*owó orí ìyàwó*) in exchange for title to the children she will bring forth. The male priests who act as proxies of the initiand's divine husband mime the payment of such *head-money* by circulating bank notes around the bride's head, then placing them on the grave of the bride's predecessor and before the drums. Thus, the senior male priests appear to assert their own husbandly command over the bride.

Thirdly, there is the metaphor of *blood*. "Blood" is a prominent trope of vitality, kinship and reproduction in Yorùbá language. "He has blood in his body"—*Ó lójẹ́ lára*—means that the referent is healthy and robust. Reified as blood, that vitality can be transferred through sacrifice to the altars of the gods and to the bodies of possession priests. *Ẹ̀jẹ́ kannáà ni wọ́n*—"they are the same blood"—is a phrase that priests and Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá generally use to describe consanguineal kin. Nurses at the Baptist Hospital in the nearby town of Sakí say that many of their patients attribute infertility to *ẹ̀jẹ́ burúkú*—"bad blood." In the light of these verbal usages, the abundance of blood in the *mọ́gbà*'s room appears to be an act of compensation for the absence of literal "blood" ties in the priesthood. Ṣàngó initiations expend vast quantities of animal blood in order to ratify a priestly social bond unsubstantiated by the kind of "blood" ties that characterize the canonical site of Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá social order—the patrilineal house. Indeed, the *ẹgbẹ́ Ṣàngó*—the "association of Ṣàngó priests"—adopts a third crucial index of Yorùbá consanguineal kinship—exogamy.

The Ṣàngó priesthood must struggle against the rival demands of other rightful claimants to the bride's head—especially those of worldly husbands and fathers, many of whom are either Muslim or Christian. Indeed, sacred poetry (*Ṣàngó pípè*) describes the sacred house of Ṣàngó as the nemesis of worldly patrilineages, whose offspring are his *prey*. I recorded the following recitation on the third day of a Ṣàngó initiation:

> When Ṣàngó was living at Wánrà he was a hunter
> Tẹ̀là Àfọ̀njá[b] used to hunt with a chain.
> He put it in the bathing room to catch the children of the family-head.
>
> *Nígbàtí Ṣàngó ṁbẹ̀ ní Wánrà, ọdẹ ni ń ṣe.*
> *Ẹ̀wọ̀n ni Tẹ̀là Àfọ̀njá ń dẹ́ ta.*
> *Báluwẹ̀ ní i dẹ́ sí ọmọ bálé ní í fi mú.*

[b] This is a compound of names peculiar to the Ọ̀yọ́ royal family (see Johnson 1921: 83). "Tela Afonja" therefore probably refers to Ṣàngó.

The mixing of birth, marriage and "blood" metaphors in Ṣàngó initiation rituals serves to create systems of solidarity independent of reigning patrilineal arrangements. This set of metaphoric predications once served the Ọ̀yọ́ palace, much in the same way that it now serves a modern, rural counter-hegemony. Ṣàngó himself is male, but, not being a man in this world, he belongs to no patrilineage—at least not since his priesthood achieved autonomy from the Ọ̀yọ́ royal dynasty, probably in the mid-20th century. Thus, the Ṣàngó initiation has come to imitate the models and redress the problems perceived by 20th-century, non-royal actors. First, a "bride" need not marry a patrilineage and labor for it in order to wed Ṣàngó or be empowered as his agent and ward. Second, in the Ṣàngó initiation, "blood" appears to amend the inescapable weakness of 20th-century marriage as a basis of social solidarity. Neither in worldly marriage nor in marriage to the god can nuptial rites alone erase the knowledge that wives are the most transferable and least motivated participants in a patricentric order.

However, through a striking *organic metaphor*, the ram sacrifice dramatizes precisely such a transference. One key to the logic of this initiatic sacrifice is that it partitions the animal's body in such a way that the rite appears to dramatize the partitioning and re-deployment of *social* groups, as well. Ṣàngó's re-alignment of the local social order depends first on the hierarchical differentiation between two sorts of blood—the blood of the womb and the blood of the neck. Menstrual blood, for many Yorùbá, is explicitly defiling to all things living and sacred. Blood from an animal's neck is, by contrast, the source of *exemplary* sacred power. *Òrìṣà*-worship, thus, de-naturalizes the link between the womb and the blood of kinship and vitality. Indeed, the commander of the womb—the god Ọbàtálá—is male rather than female; and he is represented as white rather than red, the color of blood.

Thus, the social context of the Ṣàngó initiation implies the effort to strip not only motherhood but biological parenthood altogether of its monopoly over the binding symbolism of "blood." Male-arbitrated sacrifice disrupts that monopoly and shifts blood into a meta-reproductive realm equally concerned with the control and coordination of human consciousness. The same divine power that periodically takes over the priest's head and displaces his or her consciousness also grants powers of fecundation. With the capacity to marshall surplus *blood* and transfer it from one vessel to another, Ṣàngó priests empower themselves to render barren women fertile. Thus, in the priesthood's argument of images, wifely heads and wombs are coordinated in the cure of infertility, and the priesthood is credited with mastering society's most important means of production. This claim of mastery effectively wrests authority away from various coeval social groups.

The ritual preparation of the Ṣàngó possession priest involves an elaborate metaphorical and iconographic reading of the *head*. Although a rival to the patrilineage in the recruitment of personnel, the Ṣàngó priesthood rests on the shared premise that the "head" (*orí*) simultaneously embodies personal consciousness, will, group membership, identity, behavioral disposition, and the potential for good fortune. These elements constitute the "inner head" (*orí inú*), which is distinct from but is symbolized by the physical and visible, or "outer," head (*orí òde*). Indigenous views vary as to whether it is freely chosen by the individual, or is inherited. In either case, possession dislocates the inner head, installing the will and consciousness of a divine Other. *Òrìṣà* rites introduce a powerful agency linked to the priesthood into a person's physical head. At certain exemplary moments, that agency takes over from an entity commonly linked to the patrilineage. For those Ọ̀yọ́ people who identify the inner head with *individual* will, the nature of that take-over must seem even more extreme.

In sacrifice, Ṣàngó receives not only blood but heads—literally and symbolically. Before the ram is killed for Ṣàngó, the sacrificers press its forehead together with that of the *iyàwó*, apparently establishing an link or identification between victim and initiand. Then, they slip a stone, called a "thunder-axe" (*ẹ̀dùn àrá*), into the animal's mouth before severing its head. Having been exhumed from the earth after lightning struck, the stone evokes Ṣàngó's penetrating power. The severed head, containing the stone icon of his power, is then placed on Ṣàngó's altar, which is already piled high with round, *head-shaped* sacred stones.[f] After being used to mop up stray blood from the floor, the ram's limp body is demonstratively swung and thrown out the door. While the head rests inside the holy of holies, the body has been cast outdoors in an apparent act of expiation.

Through the display of animal dismemberment, the priests engineer the bride's own bodily and social reconstruction. The sacrificial appropriation of the ram's head appears to mime the initiatory appropriation of the initiand's head. The appropriation of the ram's head is underlined by the insertion of the thunder-axe. During the initiation, possession is repeatedly induced, while the camwood and chalk paintings on the scalp of the initiand suggest what is being inserted there. The vulture-feather paintbrush is called *ìyẹ́ igún*—recalling the verb for spirit possession (*gùn*). Visually, the criss-crossing of designs recalls lightning, while the combination of red and white recalls fire, both phenomena ascribed to Ṣàngó in his sacred poetry.

[f] Note in the background of FIGURE 1 that most of the stones on the second mortar are not the oblong thunder-axes for which Ṣàngó is famous but the round *okúta Ṣàngó*.

In FIGURE 2, the bride undergoes a redesign not only of his head but of his eyes and face—embodiments of his consciousness and public identity, as well as the chief portals of his perception—amidst the guided invasion of Ṣàngó's power. Metaphorically, Ṣàngó's thunderstone has entered the initiand's head too, and, by proxy, his head has been severed from its physical and social body. The painting on the eve of the "seventh day" appears to seal in what has been deposited there earlier. That night the priests shave and dye the initiand's head with indigo. The darkening of the head seems to imply a feminine containment and sealing-in of what has, for several days, been inscribed on the initiand's head in red and white.

These colors (indigo, red and white) invoke the structural contrast between, on the one hand, the *òrìṣà* and other wild, powerful foreigners—widely conceived of as light-skinned (*pupa*) or white (*funfun*)—and, on the other, the dark vessels of the gods. Blackness is an ancient ideal of feminine beauty (see Baudin 1885: 66–67). Moreover, not only are the shrine pots used to contain the god's power usually glazed dark brown, but they are sometimes dyed with indigo to accentuate their dark hue. By contrast, the stones and shells *inside* the gods' pots are typically light. The consistency of the ritual metaphor becomes obvious when we realize that human heads are likened to pots and calabashes. Heads are made in heaven by the potter known as *Ajàlá Amọ̀nkòkò*—"Ajala the Molder of Pots." In Yorùbá, the skull is called *akotorí*—"the calabash of the head."

The initiand's hair is allowed to grow again in the indigo-dyed area, recalling, again, the verses of Ṣàngó's descriptive poetry:

> In a place that sprouts hair,
> And also encloses like a tiny farm hut,
> Fire . . . is there with my husband and lord [Ṣàngó]

Thus, the initiand's head is assimilated to other potential containers of Ṣàngó's power—the farm hut and the vagina.

Across classes, *children* are the main incentive for women's cooperation with the patrilineage, the main objects of women's investment, the main repository of their hopes, and the most valued rewards of Ṣàngó-worship. Therefore, in Ṣàngó-worship, divine male action potentially liberates women, insofar as the Ṣàngó priesthood and the female supplicant (rather than her worldly affines) secure the loyalty of the children that Ṣàngó gives her.

Until the possession priest renounces the sacred "head-load"—at retirement or in death—his or her hair will never be cut again. Only after the sacred "head-load" has been fixed in the head of the successor and initiand are the tight necklaces called *kélé* put on, visually separating the initiand's head from his body. Identified with Ṣàngó's mythic wives, these necklaces appear to finalize the marital transfer of the *ritual* bride's head into the house of Ṣàngó. Again on the eve of retirement, a possession priest giving up his or her sacred head-load first dons a *kélé* necklace and then replaces it with a length of red necklace yarn at the same place on his neck, indicating another symbolic decapitation and a further re-alignment of personal identity in the bodies physical and social.

MONEY, MONEY, MONEY: POST-IMPERIAL PREDICATIONS OF GENDER AND HIERARCHY

The rites of initiation described here belong to the 20th century, and must be interpreted ultimately in light of 20th-century experience in the village. In the 20th century a vast number of laborers and traders have emigrated out of Ìgbòho. By itself, the absence of so many worldly husbands from the affinal homes of their rural wives has transformed the expectations surrounding worldly marriage. Two phenomena during the colonial period, from the 1890s to 1960, accelerated the monetization of bridewealth. The first was the British-sponsored effort to systematize women's rights of divorce. The second was the income gap between resident fathers-in-law and emigrant sons-in-law, which expanded as young men found unprecedented opportunities to earn money in railroad construction and urban employment. These phenomena resulted in both the rapid monetization of bridewealth and inflationary tendencies that continued throughout the colonial era (Matory 1994: 39–51).

In the postcolonial period, the sale of labor and loyalty generally has superseded the more socially integrative idioms of heredity, kinship and marriage. Business leaders and politicians accumulate followings independently of kinship and hereditary office, based on wealth and patronage. Colonially rationalized patrilineages have denied the rights of once-valued daughters and matrilateral kinsmen. Indeed, marriage itself begins to acquire the tint of commercial exchange. Bumperstickers read, *Owó l'óbìnrin mọ̀*—"Money is what women know." Women, it is asserted, will not hesitate to desert a poor husband in favor of a rich man.

Naira have superseded cowry shells and pounds sterling as the currency of bridewealth and purchase. The face of the late President Murtala Muhammed, at the center of the twenty-naira note, festoons the clothing of Ṣàngó initiands. Not only are bank notes rotated around the head of the initiand and given by proxy to his dead predecessor, but the sacrificial sequence itself depends on the availability and affordability of certain animal species, most of which must be

bought in the market. The fact that cowries (*owó ẹyọ*—literally "pieces of money") continue to appear on altars and ritual clothing suggests that money has long been an important attribute of Ṣàngó's earthly presence. But it also suggests a re-valuation of old money. Precisely because they are ancient and out of circulation, cowries have become something like the essence of money, a meta-currency. They are the "money of the gods" (*owó òòsà*), as a Ṣàngó priest in Kétu put it—the apotheosis of money (*cf.* Bloch 1989).

At the heart of these representations is an economic theory of signification. It takes money and labor to settle the meaning of the polysemic sign, to compel the human conduct so prescribed, and to fulfill the expectations of the interlocutors. It must be remembered that the sacrificial production of animal blood is a capital-intensive commercial project, just as its ritual transformation into "blood"—the reified form of human kinship and vitality—is a labor-intensive project.

Whatever financial contribution or managerial guidance the Ọ̀yọ́ palace may once have lent to provincial Ṣàngó initiations is no longer forthcoming. The Ṣàngó priesthood now has to seek replacements for the former husbandly financial role of the palace. Supplicants and visitors to public *òrìṣà* rites now provide considerable revenues, giving bank notes to the manifest god's attendants in order to seek his blessings. Thus, initiation depends on an ideologically inspired redirection of funds from a national economic system and their careful management in the local market—toward fuelling an alternative, royalist polity and local ritual economy.

So, what is it that is expiated with the throwing-out of the ram's body on the "seventh day" of the initiation? The late Nancy Jay (1992) argued that much blood sacrifice around the globe is directed toward creating patrilineal groups by expiating the contagion of matrilateral social kinship. Patrilineal groups thereby affirm their boundaries through the commensality of the sacrificial group, which excludes wives and matrilines. Members of the patrilineage affirm their unity and boundedness by eating the sacrificial victim together. The Ṣàngó priesthood is not a patrilineage (though it may once have been commanded by a royal patrilineage). Therefore, what its initiatic sacrifice expiates must be different from matrilateral social identity. In the proxy of the ram's body, *the body of self and natal family* is ultimately skewered in bits, roasted in Ṣàngó's fire, and ingested by the gathered priesthood. This symbolic nutrition empowers the Ṣàngó priests to reshape consciousness, fecundate wombs, and change fortunres with a touch to the supplicant's head.

The Ṣàngó priesthood promulgates rituals that make "blood" and fertility into a transferable substance. The initiand's body and the

bodies of a series of sacrificial animals are the instruments of this process of extracting the substance of life and fertility from the patricentric social body, which appears to be drained and thrown out the door in the proxy of the ram's body. Wearing the ***kélé*** necklaces that visually separate the head from the body, the initiand becomes a walking sign of alienation through purchase—through the monetary purchase and transfer of blood and of heads. These necklaces mark the place between the human head and body, as well as the successful transfer of heads *from* their natal social bodies and *into* the royal body of the priesthood. Also upon his retirement, a possession priest wears the ***kélé*** necklaces, this time to mark the transfer of his head *out* of Ṣàngó's service.

However unpleasant the idea of having been bought and sold might seem, the *ìyàwó*'s condition has its advantages: he is supported by others' surplus cash and is exempt from labor. As long as he serves Ṣàngó, he is marked out as a professional manager of others' production and reproduction, a trader of futures in "blood" and money.

Thus, in the late 1980s, the initiation rites of Ìgbòho's Ṣàngó priesthood mobilized not only signs of its proud association with a past royal empire but the late-20th-century norms of marriage, kinship ideology, and capitalist exchange to empower a counter-hegemony. In contrast to a nation-state dominated by Muslim and Christian men, the Ṣàngó priesthood has created forms of authority potenitally empowering to rural women of all religions. It is a form of authority not given by heredity, tradition, election, purchase, or biological sex alone. Rather, it arises from the coordinated and contentious design of a new divine subject, nowhere more powerfully manifest than in his human mount—a male bride who wears the hairstyle, jewelry, and make-up of a woman.

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