Religion Crossing Boundaries

Transnational Religious and Social Dynamics in Africa and the New African Diaspora

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CHAPTER SEVEN

"WHEN YOU MAKE SACRIFICE, NO ONE IS A STRANGER": DIVINATION, SACRIFICE AND IDENTITY AMONG TRANSLOCALS IN THE WEST AFRICAN URBAN DIASPORA

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For more than a decade, the "African Diaspora" has been conceived as an epistemological community, a shared consciousness activating a sense of transnational affiliation across political boundaries. I maintain that this consciousness, and the self-conscious communities it fosters, has its basis in an overarching religious worldview, and more particularly, in the principles and values encoded in and transmitted through the practice of divination and its culminating ritual sacrifice. In fact, the surge of interest in the concept of the African diaspora was aroused first by the increasing visibility of such burgeoning religious practices in metropolitan centers in the Americas.

Meanwhile, on the African continent itself, those foundational traditions were adapting to the shifting social realities of "modernity," especially multiple migrations. Under the pressure of globalization and the promise of development economics, Africans left villages and rural life for urban centers. More recently, in the wake of Africa's collapsing economies, civil wars, ethnic conflicts and genocidal assaults, African refugee populations have fled across national boundaries in every region. The critical upheaval and consequent waves of displacement on the continent lend new meaning to the term "African diaspora."

Today, African cities reflect the complex social dynamics resulting from "transnationalism," here understood not just as the influx of migrant populations across state borders, but also as the growth of a global economy and as the result of cultural homogenization. In the city, competition for allegiance to the "world religions" of Christianity and Islam becomes acute, and here the adaptation and innovation of religious institutions and traditions are in ready evidence. The notable plethora of Christian churches with a particular African inflection, targeting problems of "witchcraft" and focusing on healing, is one example (Newell 2007). But the shifting social landscape is also rapidly

changing the ways in which *indigenous* religions are being lived out. The situation is especially relevant to the study of African traditional religions, whose practices are synonymous with ethnicity. In the face of this increasing globalization and urbanization, studies of African traditional religions on the continent must shift from a characteristically narrow focus on the idiosyncratic customs of an ethnic group in its bounded local situation to a broader consideration of their innovation and vitality in today's heterogeneous world. We must account for the continued persuasive appeal of indigenous practices that have become loosed from the moorings of their cultural canons, yet continue to flourish in the cities, making their own unique contribution to the shape of and commentary on "modernity." One such practice is divination, which we will consider here, along with its visible correlate, sacrifice.

In the transnational and ethnically heterogeneous mix of the contemporary African city, identity is necessarily more fluid and encompassing than ethnic allegiance alone. Yet the traditional practices of divination, so pivotal to African traditional religions, are still very much in evidence in cities like Abidjan, the economic capital of Côte d'Ivoire. How do they address the new transnational dynamics of contemporary urban life, and how have these transnational dynamics shaped them in turn?

This chapter draws on original field research on divination and sacrifice in Côte d'Ivoire. It aims at more than a portrait of the phenomena in the complex postmodern situation; it shows these practices to be vital resources for Africans struggling to contend with the vicissitudes of life in the urban situation. Moreover, it argues that the ongoing practice of divination is influencing the emergent shape of social reality and is itself constitutive of modernity. Ultimately, it aims to show that the prominence of divination on the contemporary scene is a moral response to the very real structural inequalities generated by globalization. Together, divination and sacrifice foster a sense of community based on "Africanity," one that transcends the perilous appeal to citizenship but does not fall back on the divisive conceptions of ethnicity.

Religion Crossing Boundaries: Divination in Abidjan

In the modern West African metropolis of Abidjan, amidst skyscrapers and traffic jams, diviners practice their art. They operate in recessed

courtyards off bustling streets, out of apartments in city project buildings, or ensconced by wealthy patrons in luxury villas. Many diviners are Ivoirians who have come to the city from remote villages to make a better living, but most are immigrants and refugees from other countries.

From the time of independence in 1960 through the early 1980s, Côte d'Ivoire enjoyed relative political stability under the dictatorship of its first president, Félix Houphouët-Boigny. Its thriving economy attracted widespread immigration, but this remained unregulated by the state. Besides drawing traders and laborers from Mali, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Mauritania, and Niger, it opened its borders to refugees fleeing political unrest and economic deprivation in neighboring countries. Among other places, they came from Ghana after the coup that deposed Nkrumah, from Nigeria during the Biafra War, from Benin during Mathieu Kérékou's embrace of Marxism-Leninism, from Guinea under the brutal dictatorship of Sékou Touré, and from Liberia under the ruinous civil wars of Doe and Taylor. In 1997, I also encountered refugees fleeing the turmoil in the more distant francophone countries of Congo and Rwanda. By the 1990s, "foreigners" officially made up over 25 percent of the Ivoirian population (Collett 2006: 625). Meanwhile, continual internal migration reshaped the social landscape as well, as Ivoirian youth migrated from rural to urban areas to pursue educational opportunities and jobs. The proportion of Ivoirian citizens residing in cities increased from 32 percent in 1975 to 43 percent in 1998 (Bossart 2003: 343). As a result, Abidjan has become by far the country's largest urban center. One might argue that it is also one of the most heterogeneous urban populations on the continent.

Yet the mere fact that this urban population is so varied does not necessarily mean that it is a reflection of "globalism." Globalization implies not only migration and assimilation but usually also refers to an at least implicit subscription to Western cultural hegemony. Similarly, the fact that so many Africans have crossed borders to take up residence in other countries on the continent is not sufficient to consider this diaspora to be "transnational" in nature, to the extent that this term implies that they are culturally cosmopolitan—that is, that they are equally at home outside the parameters of their native situation as they are within it. Nor should the dispersed populations that make up the African continent's urban diaspora be defined in terms that suggest that their self-definitions were fixed by identification with nationality, or with the concerns of the states whose policies they are

often fleeing. I argue that immigrants and refugees as well as Ivoirians from other regions who have taken up residence in Abidjan are not transnationals, so much as *translocals*: displaced persons firmly rooted in the *habitus* of their culture of origin and more concerned with quotidian hardships and concrete predicaments. Yet translocals do not remain rigidly defined by or encapsulated in the circumscribed conventions of a local culture or its idiosyncratic beliefs. In the "relatively neutral context in which almost everyone is a foreigner" such as Abidjan, they obtain new kinds of cultural knowledge and forge social networks that redefine identity (Werbner 1999: 23).

The term translocal underscores the fact that even this emergent identity is anchored in more parochial concerns. For African translocals, their traditional "belief system and ritual practices remain a constitutive part, within the familial context, of their affects, habitual predispositions, unspoken injunctions to sociability and solidarity, corporeal expression and movement (*habitus* ...), as well as of their mental structures, modes of perception, and value judgment" (Devisch 1995: 594). This is not to say that migrants on the continent are uninterested in assimilation within their respective host countries, nor that they are immune from adopting the artifices of Western conventions so prevalent in the city. Translocals are characterized here both by loyalties to non-national identity and by commitments to common African constructs that are deeply rooted in traditional local realities. While their allegiances may continue to be to local, indigenous values, their experiences in the city are necessarily multicultural, and the transnational dynamics of the metropolis and its marketplace are imposed nevertheless. The city itself is an active crossroad of intercultural communication, competition and convergence, and there is no avoiding the transformative impact of globalization. "We are all transnationals now, but some more than others, and certainly in different ways." (R. Grillo 2007: 205).

Appeal to the indigenous practices of divination and sacrifice, and adherence to beliefs inherent in them, are not abandoned in the "modern" metropolis, despite the fact that Africans are well aware of the modernist construal of such traditional practices as "backward" and at odds with development, progress and urbanity. As I have shown elsewhere (1995), divination and sacrifice are pivotal features of African traditional religions. I contend here that their ongoing practices in the city reflect a means by which "non-elite actors are responding to the same global and hegemonic forces" (Davies 2007: 68), and that they

serve to reconfigure communal identity among translocal residents and indigenous Ivoirians alike. Therefore, the ongoing practices of African traditional religions, usually seen as parochial in nature and scope of influence, continue to play a vital part in contemporary urban social dynamics.

Multiple Forms and Features of Divination in Abidjan

In the past 20 years, Abidjan has mushroomed to an alarming degree. Sprawling neighborhoods still under construction are springing up where once there was only "bush." The city is saturated with people, taxing the impossibly inadequate infrastructure. Buses are full to overflowing. Affordable housing is hard to come by. Poorly paved roads are lined with bustling street vendors, makeshift garages, tailor shops, mini-buses, and sheepherders. Every sector of Abidjan still retains its singular character, but all bear the signs of recent economic hardship and change. Plateau, for example, the once-stylish commercial center known as the "jewel of Africa," has lost its glitter; the mosaic facade of a government building is drab, the front windows broken, the stairway crumbled; the majestic sculpted doors of the national bank's headquarters are gray and feathered with neglect. But from the distance, its proud skyscrapers and flashing neon billboards still present an imposing testimony to the economic achievement of the 1970s and early '80s.

In Abidjan, diviners are found in every sector of the city, offering insight and solutions to the myriad problems that plague the daily lives of Abidjan's inhabitants. Treichville, a quarter notorious for its lively ambiance, is still among the most "African" of neighborhoods. Here the makeshift stalls of the marketplace distend into the streets' already busy traffic. This market bears witness to an active trade in ritual accoutrements sustained by diviners' prescriptions: herbal charms and "medicines" to ward off witches and their spells, cowries and kola nuts for sacrificial offerings. A tenement building in the adjacent quarter of Adjamé is home to a diviner who gazes into a calabash of water for his inspiration. In Koumassi, a neighborhood of comfortable villas, I visited an Abouré diviner-healer who consults her "fetish" when possessed by her personal genies to determine her diagnoses. Just across the bridge named for Charles de Gaulle lies Marcory, where the "cadres"—the few urban professionals—have comfortable apartments

above cafés. Here a cowrie thrower received me in her living room and consulted for me at her coffee table. Even in Cocody, an older enclave of the well-to-do, a hand-painted road sign advertising the famous talents of a great divining consultant who promises to solve all problems stands strategically between the entrance to the École de Gendarmes and the road leading to the University Hospital.

The names of the newest and most desolate neighborhoods betray a typically wry and humorous commentary on the bleak situation in which their residents find themselves: a quarter of Youpougon is known as *Mon-mari-m'a-laissée* ("My-husband-left-me"), while a provisional ghetto nestled between old highways and notoriously populated by brigands, was called "Washington." At the outskirts of one such slum, I was led to a geomancer from Burkina Faso, who consulted amidst the rubble of an unfinished building where he had installed himself as a squatter. Diviners are like other itinerant entrepreneurs and tradesmen in the city, all vigorously exercising their own brand of Ivoirian know-how and economic resourcefulness that the locals call the *système D* or *système débrouillard*, roughly translatable as "the make-do and manage-on-your-own system."

The techniques of urban divination are as varied as are the neighborhoods: tossing of cowries; sand-cutting (reading the marks the diviner spontaneously draws in sand); manipulation and random selection of leather cordelettes on which beads and other symbolic emblems are strung; casting of the classic Ifa okpele chain (strung with eight pieces of calabash whose random fall constructs a visual ideogram correlating with interpretive verses); interpretation of spontaneous cryptic writing on paper or a diviner's induced dreams; mirror-gazing (in which a solution to a client's concern "appears" in the diviner's reflection); reading of the gnawed grains left by a mouse enclosed in a diviner's carved vessel; use of Arabic writing in amulets and as palimpsests; and hand-clasping (in which the rise and fall of a client and diviner's linked arms indicate a spirit's yes/no response to a question posed). While traditional practices flourish, signs advertizing clairvoyants and "consultants" who use palmistry, numerology, astrology, and tarot also lure the urban clientele.

One can see in this depiction the facile commodification of divination, in keeping with the capitalist marketplace of the city and its "predatory economy of the street" (Devisch 1995: 609). The traditional practice in the urban context becomes a trade bartered in the marketplace as much as a "religious" expression. As a result, as the authors of

a sociological study of sacrifice in urban Côte d'Ivoire noted, "city dwellers are the first to recognize that diviners are not what they once were. The interrogators of the spirits prefer to count bank bills than dialogue with genies.... In the minds of a number of urban Africans, money and the quality of divination are irreconcilable" (Touré and Konaté 1990: 176, my translation).

Yet, diviners themselves reiterated that those who enjoy a strong reputation and most benefit from their craft neither advertize nor charge fees. "Reputable" diviners scorn obvious entrepreneurial tactics, such as billboards advertizing services, and insist that only incompetent amateurs or unscrupulous frauds resort to them. A diviner from Niger practicing in Abidjan, Karamongo Abdoulayé, categorically declared, "I don't advertize with road-signs. Those who do are swindlers. Even if I were to live in a hole, clients would find me."[1] Despite such admissions to the existence of mercenary impostors, diviners generally do not scorn other practitioners or their techniques and emphasize their own sincerity and reliability. As Cissé Amadou, a seer residing in Treicheville put it, "If I work well, [the client] will send someone else to me. If he isn't happy with my work, he won't return. I don't have to look for clients." Scrupulous diviners do not charge a fee, but follow the tradition that requires only that a symbolic sum be paid as an offering to the spirits at work in the consultation. If the diagnosis is correct, and the prescriptive sacrifice has its positive effect, the client returns with gifts of gratitude, and these constitute the diviner's wealth even as they establish a visible emblem of his or her prestige. Karamongo explained the dynamics of this moral economy simply: "If you are cheated at the market, you don't return there." In fact, this material attestation of power was very much in evidence in the tiny one-room apartment of Bâ Oumar, a "sand-caster" from Mali. His humble quarters shared with his wife and baby contained only a foam mattress, but the corner was piled high with valuable wares—a television, a VCR, bolts of ceremonial cloth. Bâ made it a point to say to me that these gifts were the signs of his efficacy.

The impressive array of alternative divinatory techniques also reinforces the impression of Abidjan as a kaleidoscope of cultural patterns in creative flux and recombination. The forms of divination multiply and change as cultures converge and divinatory types combine.

[1] Unless otherwise noted, quoted statements from diviners and other practitioners are extracted from personal interviews conducted by the author.

Some diviners have begun to incorporate Western divinatory techniques into their repertoire: the calling card of Torgbui Agbezoly Tay, a Togolese diviner of Fâ practicing in Abidjan reads, "Fâ divination – Specialist in African Pharmacopoeia – Numerology – Astrology." Other forms reflect an incorporation of Western ethnography into the canons of practice: Guédou's "sacred book of Fâ" turns out to be Bernard Maupoil's classic study, *La Géomancie à l'Ancienne Côte des Esclaves* (1943). Such divinatory bricolages exemplify the mutual gaze and self-consciousness that is characteristic of the contemporary moment. They are unpredictable permutations that, like the random cast of the diviner's accoutrements, challenge city dwellers to find coherence in complexity and fragmentation.

Despite—or perhaps especially because of—this kaleidoscopic mix, divination continues to operate as a meaningful strategy for urban Africans trying to navigate the contingencies of everyday existence. What clients of divination in Abidjan are seeking is not a systematically coherent doctrine to live by, but a pragmatic means of addressing the immediate contingencies of everyday life in meaningful ways.

Appeal Beyond Ethnicity

Many urban clients know and consult diviners from their own ethnic groups, whose populations tend to cluster in distinct neighborhoods within the city. However, the most important criterion in selecting a diviner is not ethnicity but a reputation for efficacy and integrity. Touré and Konaté (1990: 176) also noted that among urbanites in Côte d'Ivoire "one chooses [a diviner] according to his reputation and independent of his ethnic origin." The technique used and the ethnic background of the diviner matter little. Rather, clients elicit the help of practitioners who specialize in resolving the kinds of problems that concern them. For example, one client, a Catholic and Abouré (one of the matrilineal ethnic groups in the southern lagoon region surrounding Abidjan) consults Traoré Sidi, a Sénoufo (a major northern ethnic group whose population spans national borders) and a geomancer, (a diviner using a technique of marking or "cutting" sand), because he is reputedly effective in solving employment problems. For problems in his love life, this client consults a Senegalese cowrie thrower. This case also reflects the ease with which many Christians and Moslems move between their professed religion and the indigenous traditions

that, for them, seem to address more immediate concerns of life in more pragmatic ways. One informant told me, "There are witches who are only too happy to have people burn their fetishes and pray in Church instead. Without protection, they make easy prey. I'm a Christian, but I will always consult."

Another reason clients readily subscribe to diviners outside a particular tradition is that, in the pluralist cultural milieu of Abidjan, the population is increasingly of mixed ethnic identity. A young Ivoirian informant whose father is Guéré and Catholic and whose mother is a Moslem of Moroccan origin frequents an "animist" cowrie thrower to counsel her in her romantic affairs. Ultimately, clients' choices are personal and distinctly pragmatic, not merely ideological. In this respect alone, the support that divination proffers also allows Africans to assert the validity of an indigenous way of viewing the world and to assert a trans-ethnic identification with it.

It is remarkable that divination, whose practices are grounded in the founding cosmologies of particular indigenous traditions and serve as the critical means for asserting those traditions' authority, should so readily appeal to clients who do not know the myths or identify with the ethnicities whose traditions they affirm. I suggest that this is possible because the indigenous conception of reality that underlies divination transcends any one particular ethnic variant of its practice. That there is such underlying coherence across traditions is especially significant in Côte d'Ivoire whose ethnic makeup is far from homogeneous: there are 60 officially registered ethnic groups indigenous to the country. The many distinct identities and definitive labeling of these groups began during the colonial period, and in some cases they "lack some of the essentials of ethnic coherence such as shared ancestry, history or religion" (Collett 2006: 618). These many Ivoirian ethnicities are generally categorized into four principal groupings based on common linguistic origins and cultural similarities as well as geographic proximity: Akan, Krou, Voltaic, and Mande. The history of all four groups involved migration to Côte d'Ivoire: the Voltaic and Mande came from what is now Burkina Faso and Mali, and the Akan are traced to the Ashanti empire in Ghana with their arrival in Ivoirian territory dating to the eighteenth century. The Krou inhabiting the southwestern territory are comprised of several distinct groups (notably the Bété, Dida, Guéré, and Wobé) thought to have originally come from Liberia. Moreover, evidence suggests that while the term Bété designates an important contemporary ethnic group, this group is actually a

conglomeration of peoples whose identity as such crystallized under the influence of the French colonial administration (cf. Dozon 1985: 55–62). Therefore, even prior to the instantiation of Côte d'Ivoire as a country, ethnicity was constituted as a strategic identity, and the "boundaries of ethnic groups shifted to incorporate newcomers" (Collett 2006: 617).

Although journalistic accounts and academic reviews of the recent civil war in Côte d'Ivoire depict ethnicity as the leading factor in the crisis, the situation is far more complex. In fact, as Collett (2006: 619) observes, the coup in 2002 was not "a case of ethnic groups coming into conflict for economic and political reasons, but of economic, political and regional identities beginning to constitute a new notion of ethnicity." Collett lucidly analyses the ways in which political leaders manipulated the definition of Ivoirian citizenship to favor their own agendas and in the process created a xenophobia that divided the country. Even before independence in 1960, the fertile and more densely populated southern region was favored with rapid development, while the arid north was left without prospects for economic advancement. The Akan groups that dominate the southeastern region controlled the cocoa and coffee plantations that are the backbone of the economy. As the post-independence economy expanded, these plantations drew Mande and Voltaic migrant laborers from the north. Waves of migration and settlement were encouraged by a government policy that established that "land belongs to the one who cultivates it" (Dozon 1985: 73). Meanwhile, Baoulé agriculturalists seeking to expand their cocoa production acquired land in Bété country to the west and settled in the region. As a result, the ethnic landscape in the southwestern zone was entirely recomposed; in certain areas the Bété population slowly became a minority, and land disputes arose (Dozon 1985: 71). The government settled claims over land in the Bété-inhabited southwest "in favor of the Baoulé, Voltaic and Burkinabé migrant farmers, whose cocoa production contributed significantly to government revenue" and so pitted Baoulé against Bété. Then, as cocoa prices dropped, "the Baoulé turned against settlers of Voltaic and foreign origin" in a bid to retain exclusive control over the land and secure the income from its crops that the government guarantees (Collett 2006: 616). A further manipulation of identity in the interest of the state exacerbated the tensions between North and South. Changes to the Electoral and Nationality Code in 1994 initiated by the Baoulé president, Henri Konan Bédié, created a "radical ethnicization of

Ivoirian politics" known as '*Ivoirité*,' 'true Ivoirianness' (Sorokobi 1999: 2). The policy narrowly defined qualification for Ivoirian citizenship and seemed designed to eliminate a northern Voltaic-speaking Muslim, Alassane Dramane Ouattara, from a presidential election bid. The election was boycotted, and a coup sent Bédié into exile. The subsequent election of Laurent Gbagbo, a Christian Bété, did not result in a reversal of the policy of *Ivoirité*. Instead, the former Bété-Baoulé divisions were surmounted in the south in the interest of protecting the region's privileges and interests, while the northern ethnicities fused to forge a new alliance against them (Collett 2006: 623). That situation gave rise to civil war.

This history suggests that ethnic "identities are multi-layered, self imposed, as well as ascribed by others and as such require a critical analysis to avoid the essentialism that have bedeviled much of the discourse on African identity in the diaspora" (Korieh 2006: 91). So just as it is critical not to see ethnic identity in an essentialist way, as integral and fixed, it is equally important not to romanticize transnational identity or to hail all transcendence of traditional boundaries "as a way out of the quagmire of essentialism in which nationalism, multiculturalism, perhaps even anthropology itself, are stuck" (R. Grillo 2007: 212). Instead, especially as we explore African traditional religions and their practice in the urban diaspora, we must consider the real issues with which those border-crossers must contend.

The appeal to divination is one creative way by which Africans in the urban diaspora live out their commitment to their "local," indigenous ideologies, even within the globalized context of the ethnically heterogeneous city. I suggest that while national identity politics and economic compression have aggravated the opposition between various ethnic groups, between "citizens" and foreigners, and between urban and rural populations, the practices of divination and sacrifice do much to transcend these divisions, even as they respond to these same real and pressing problems.

Giving Shape to an Inchoate Situation

Even in the traditional sphere, divination is unique among ritual types in that it is the only ritual that can be instigated by the individual rather than either being fixed by a ritual calendar or mandated by the community. In this respect, its practice is well suited to the urban situation where people are necessarily more autonomous. Clients in the city

frequent diviners for a variety of reasons, but for the most part their reasons reflect the particular preoccupations of individuals struggling to negotiate the demands of contemporary city life alone. In Abidjan, schooling is not free and scholarships are hard to secure. A woefully inadequate health care system makes every illness a crisis, especially in the city where social support for managing illness is weak and sporadic (cf. Bossart 2003). Every bureaucratic exchange entails navigating a labyrinth of favors, greased palms, and nepotism. Often the most compelling interest is to find a job; employment is uncertain, and paychecks are erratic. Appeal to divination is a pragmatic effort to contend with these new kinds of problems that plague the urban dweller.

Beyond such banal aims, clients also perceive a need for protection and release from the tyranny of invisible forces. Diviners reveal the traps of witches that waste clients' health and corrupt their fortunes, and they identify the snares of jealousy and ill will that obstruct a client's success. Misfortune can also be ascribed to the nagging demands of personal genies, who provoke problems in order to draw attention to their desires. By reasserting such common etiologies of misfortune and suffering in the globalized space of the city, divination transcribes the dynamics of power into idioms that have currency across West Africa. It recasts the "misery and incoherence of life in the urban centers" (Devisch 1995: 595), and allows them to be seen in more familiar terms even as it renders them more coherent. Urban divination offers an opportunity to confront the inchoate situation of contemporary life and recast it into meaningful form with cultural significance. In so doing, it provides clients with a critical alternative to Western, materialist interpretations of the problems of modernity that plague them.

Moreover, by effectively shifting the locus of power from the human political arena to the supernatural realm, divination allows clients to wrest some measure of control over the otherwise bewildering forces that thwart them. In many ways, the invisible powers of witches and genies are more easily negotiated than equally overbearing and invisible forces like 'underdevelopment' or 'globalization'. In the words of another observer of urban divination, the "process confronts the irresolvable problems of the modern, inimical world by declaring them irrelevant or secondary" (Van Binsbergen 1995: 125). The pragmatic response to the urgent matters of living makes divination compelling, while its presentation of a permeable world of spiritual influence makes it persuasive.

This is not to say, however, that divination should be understood as a naïve "problem-solving process" (Masquelier 1993: 3). Urban Africans are well aware of the denigration of such practices as antithetical to rational scientific thought and an obstacle to 'development' and therefore, as Touré and Konaté note, "the sacrificer fears being seen as being backwards, a savage." Nevertheless, according to their survey conducted in urban Côte d'Ivoire, Touré and Konaté found that "the majority [82.8%] of those who perform sacrifice in the city felt no embarrassment or discomfort in its execution" (1990: 170). Moreover, their research indicated that someone with a degree in higher education was just as likely to perform sacrifice as was an illiterate (1990: 195). Consulting diviners and performing sacrifice therefore must provide for a more edifying engagement than the mere enactment of a kind of magical remedy. As I have demonstrated elsewhere (L. Grillo 1995, 2005), the ritual of divination is not just the unthinking repetition of a traditional custom or mandate. As a solitary undertaking, divination is first and foremost a deliberate and strategic act. It is designed to foster reflection about possibilities and to provide leverage over circumstance. In seeking out a consultation, the client is a self-conscious actor, not just an unconscious player in a pre-scripted routine. As fully engaged agents, clients are interested in effecting real change.

The ability to effect change is the very definition of power. In African traditions, ritual is the means to harness power and press it into the service of community and individual alike. The role of the diviner as diagnostician and prescriber of remedy through sacrifice is to channel and manipulate the forces that threaten both the individual and the social body. The efficacy of divination and its ongoing appeal in the city rely on ritual as a persuasive rhetorical medium.

Rhetoric is usually thought of as the art of speaking or writing persuasively; however, even complex and abstract ideas can be articulated forcefully though other media. Oral traditions carry and transmit their philosophies through ritual. In African traditional religions, critical discourse about the nature of divinity, the dynamics of cosmos and the place of the person in it is embodied in the plastic arts and ritual practices such as masking, initiation, and divination. The inscriptions of divination, especially, constitute the "visual canon" of African traditional religions (L. Grillo 1995); its signs and patterns are the delimiting markers for all that holds significance. Divination reveals the forces

at work affecting the client even as it empowers that client as a moral agent.

In what follows, I will explore how the rhetoric of divination is essentially a "discourse about power" (Masquelier 1993: 3), expressed not in terms of a vociferous ideology, but as a mute yet eloquent assertion of the moral roots of identity. Its culmination in sacrifice extends that discourse into the public sphere. This powerful performative discourse reconfigures cultural identity in the urban diaspora.

The Rhetoric of Sacrifice and the Discourses of Power

Sacrifice is an integral aspect of divination. There is no divination without an opening sacrifice (in the form of a symbolic payment) and every divinatory consultation culminates with a prescription for sacrifice (which the client is free to perform or not). These often small, symbolic gestures and token alms are deceptively insignificant: cowrie shells, a few coins, a handful of kola nuts, a small measure of cloth. Determining the proper sacrificial prescription is so fundamental to the divinatory purpose that in Sierra Leone the Kuranko diviner "defines his task as one of 'seeing a sacrifice'" (Jackson 1989: 59–60). But sacrifice is also meant to be seen. Its very efficacy relies on the participatory witness of a recipient and the acknowledgement of the intention behind the act. A sacrificial offering is "a gift ... given in the name of a spirit category" (Jackson 1977: 124). As a gift it must be accepted and its symbolic value recognized by the recipient in order for it to bestow the blessings that it is meant to elicit.

Sacrifice is ubiquitous in Abidjan. "The presence of sacrifice in the urban milieu is apparent by the common congestion of crossroads with cakes, millet grain, kola nuts, palm wine, etc. It is confirmed by the extended hands of beggars at tri-colored stoplights, in the streets and along the mosques" (Touré and Konaté 1990: 169). In the city, sacrifices can take a decidedly "modernist" appearance: offerings of candles are prescribed, and "canned concentrated milk supplants fresh milk, ... coins substitute for cowries" (Touré and Konaté 1990: 177). In whatever form it takes, the gesture is readily recognized for what it is.

Urban divinatory prescriptions are usually more individual and therapeutic than the public and political sacrifices still performed in the traditional context of the rural village, where the ancestors and often the family are implicated in the act. In the city, rituals aim less at

propitiating the social body and more at enhancing personal agency. Guédou Joseph, a practitioner of Fâ divination from Benin living in Abidjan, puts it this way: "God says, 'get up and lift up your burden and I will help you load it onto your head' [where it can be carried]. When you make sacrifice, you lift your burden, and God places it on your head."

Urban diviners repeatedly assert that clients make sacrifices not to appease guardian spirits or the ancestors, but rather to empower themselves, their own souls, or their spiritual doubles. As the diviner from Niger, Karamongo Abdoulayé, said, "God doesn't need sacrifice. It is your own soul that demands it. It is to protect you, to give you long life, to guard against illness and anyone who would harm you. It is the key to happiness!" In the city, sacrifice is as individualistic as its milieu; there are "no more collective sacrifices. Each for himself and diviners for all. ... It no longer in any way involves a collectivity but individuals isolated in the face of their problems" (Touré and Konaté 1990: 177–178). These shifts reflect an adaptation to the more anonymous urban situation, where moral precepts can no longer be sustained by adherence to traditional roles, and where an individual must fend for himself or herself. Nevertheless, sacrifice turns the individual back onto the community, ultimately situating the solution to one's plight back in the collective realm.

Sacrifice in the Marketplace: A "Figurative Struggle over Domains"

Sacrifice usually takes place in the marketplace, clearly the locus of negotiation, economic and social exchange, but also the field in which the invisible forces are at play. In Côte d'Ivoire as elsewhere in West Africa, the marketplace is imagined as the crossroads of human and spiritual domains: "Spirits are thought to enjoy attending people's markets.... Spirits are attracted by fragrant smells and beauty, and they are said to be curious, envious, and sometimes greedy, just like humans.... Since the market is so full of spirits ... it is a potentially dangerous place" (Masquelier 1993: 17–18). The marketplace is a liminal space, where sacrifice can reach the spiritual realm it targets.

Traditionally, in sacrifice "protection is sought against forces with which there can be no reciprocity, no pact: ... witches, sorcerers, and the more intractable of the bush spirits" (Jackson 1977: 125). Sacrifice seeks to "tame or exorcise" the forces at work afflicting victims of misfortune. In the city, the abstractions of underdevelopment and the

economic climate (*la conjoncture*) are constantly invoked as the source of common misery, sometimes with wry humor. For example, in Abidjan in the late 1990s, in the wake of an abrupt and catastrophic devaluation of the national currency, the refrain of a popular song that regularly blared over the radios of *waro-waro* (renegade city taxis) wailed, "the CFA has been devalued-o; I am devalued-o." These economic forces deploy a "form of power [that] is opaque, diffuse, and multidirectional. It cannot be translated as a concrete quantum of agency or domination. Elusive, yet effective, it is not easily located and circumscribed in time or space" (Masquelier 1993: 4). Through what Fernandez (1986) calls an "argument of images," sacrifice in the urban marketplace associates these "intractable" forces of increasing impoverishment and social alienation with those more familiar sources.

The public performance of sacrifice also involves what Durham and Fernandez (1991) call the "figurative struggle over domains." By deploying the traditional hermeneutics of ritual, sacrifice symbolically reworks the imagery of the marketplace, turning it upside-down. While capitalism is driven by individual competition, sacrifice is a gift freely given, and the designated human recipient is always one more socially vulnerable—babies, the elderly, the infirm, the desperately poor. In sacrifice, goods are not about acquisition but are the material of offering of blessing and an expression of hope for reciprocity. With sacrifice, "monetary law [operates] according to a totally different logic than that of *homo economicus*: ... [M]oney is no longer a medium of purchase, but rather a compensation or indemnification not for things, but for a gift of life" (Devisch 1995: 624). Sacrifice turns the each-for-oneself dynamics of the market and the rough-and-tumble life on the streets into offerings that honor reciprocity and elicit blessing. In this way, it inverts the order of the economic world, transforming the dynamics of the market economy into a moral economy. So, while the act is overtly a literal appeal for relief from distress, sacrifice also bears "inflections of irony and indirect discourse" (Jules-Rosette 2000: 46) about market forces in the city.

In the words of anthropologist James Fernandez, phenomena such as the persistence of divination in the city are, "strong responses to human malaise.... They are revelatory, though they may not be necessarily revolutionary in the political sense—determined to seek redistribution in the material goods and powers of this world. They are strong responses because ... they seek basic transformations in worldview: symbolic transformations of experience" (in Jules-Rosette

1979: xviii). While it would be too much to assert that active urban divinatory practices represent a protest or overt resistance to Western hegemony, their commentary shapes consciousness, and this is not to be underestimated as a social force in its own right. Symbolic acts have effective power to reshape conceptual reality, which is just as significant a driving social force. They "enter the domain of public discourse and shape political action" nevertheless (Jules-Rosette 2000: 40).

Divination, Sacrifice and the Negotiation of Communal Identity

Under a drizzle of rain, a woman makes her way through the muddy alleys between market stalls and approaches another with a baby strapped to her back. She asks if she may offer the baby a coin: "It's a sacrificial offering." Without a word, the mother lowers her pagne to free the baby's hand that grasps for it with plump fingers. "Ah, she took it. That's good," the mother says, "May your desire be fulfilled." On another occasion, a sacrificer approaches an old woman and hands the elder four kola nuts loosely wrapped in a banana leaf. The elder receives the package in her upturned palms and then, placing the package in her lap, she props her elbows on her knees, opens her palms, closes her eyes and prays, "May you be blessed." Such quiet exchanges are the stuff of daily sacrifice that I witnessed in Abidjan. They illustrate the unquestioning acknowledgement of the gestures as sacrifice and the ready willingness with which urbanites regularly participate in the ritual. The sacrificial act demands the sympathetic response of the witnessing community; it is orchestrated to arouse feelings of compassion and mutual regard. Extending sacrificial offerings, having them recognized and received as such by others in turn, is a negotiation of communal identity based not only on a mutual acknowledgement of need, but also on the affirmation of indigenous appraisals of it.

Describing life in Kinshasa, René Devisch refers to the disillusionment of Africans who emigrated to the city only to "discover that they have become foreigners to their original culture, family group, and traditional mode of life, education, and solidarity." He characterizes them as "displaced and nomadic persons, participating in urban life characterized by dislocation." Without any cultural referents to provide orientation and meaning, they become like the witch, conceived by African traditions as the antithesis of the human being, a nocturnal creature who frequents infernal domains. Cut loose from social structure and cultural standards, urban dwellers drift in the anonymous

currents of putative globalization, seeking camaraderie in "the bars and night clubs [that] obliterate all reference to the public and ethical order" (Devisch 1995: 602, 614). In Côte d'Ivoire, Sasha Newell observes a similar phenomenon among unemployed youth who cling to an illusory identification with the spectacle of urban chimera and the trappings of sophistication and wealth. They "practice *le bluff*, an ostentatious display of material success that they do not have ... [T]hey are performing for their peers, no one is fooled, as the very term to describe it implies" (Newell 2007: 464). However, even amidst such empty posturing, which is intended to mirror the opulence that the modern metropolis represents, Abidjan is not bereft of community or a sense of moral order. "Even though Abidjan youth described the city as a kind of jungle in which no one could be trusted and everyone must act in his or her own interest, their own social networks operated through a form of *moral economy* in which exchange and mutual support were necessary to survival" (Newell 2007: 464, emphasis mine). This moral economy is, at least in part, fostered by the visible presence of sacrifice in the city.

At least until very recently, when the Ivoirian government deployed its forces in the city and for a brief period allowed a youth militia to arouse xenophobia in the population (Human Rights Watch 2006), Abidjan was unlike the Kinshasa of the late 1990s, where Devisch (1995: 613) described a community that had lost its moral compass: "The economic crisis and the harsh struggle to survive force upon the individual a *disenchantment* with one's circumstances, *the loss of* one's militant or entrepreneurial spirit, and ultimately the sense of *any ethical responsibility for the public good.* Streets and public spaces become increasingly *mute*" (emphasis mine). So long as sacrifice remains a visible feature of daily life, the streets and marketplaces of Abidjan are neither mute nor devoid of ethical affirmation. Rather they furnish a vital discursive space in which a moral community is forged. The concrete act of sacrifice makes such a community visible and therefore serves as a means of "social figuration and re-figuration" (Fernandez 2008: 655). While it certainly cannot redress the inequities of capitalism or counter the spell of modernity, sacrifice does enjoin Africans to reconfigure identity along moral lines.

In Abidjan, diviners and clients alike repeatedly made the disconcerting assertion that "there is no difference" among various West African indigenous beliefs and that West Africans from Senegal to Benin "are the same." Kabou Mbow, a Senegalese trader residing in

Côte d'Ivoire, who accompanied me to visit Muslim marabout and indigenous practitioners alike, once put it most succinctly: "We're all the same, we West Africans. We all believe the same. Like when you make sacrifice; no one is a stranger when it comes to that." When pressed, informants qualified this "sameness" as a common commitment to the same fundamental tenets and values that underlie African traditional religions: belief in God and the spirits, a reliance on the blessings of the invisible forces that guide destiny, and the mutual recognition of human frailty and dependence on reciprocal relations. These are what constitute the "local" component of the term "translocal" as it applies to Africans in the continental diaspora. "Local" does not refer to geography but to rootedness in the values that binds the individual to the community. By making a tangible appeal to fundamental values through public acts of sacrifice in the city, transmigrants and Ivoirian nationals alike are called to assert a kind of common "Africanity."

I would differentiate this emergent kind of identity, however, from "hybridity," a concept introduced by the contemporary critical theorist Homi Bhabha, who means it to indicate "a celebration of polyphony and creativity, of 'mongrelisation', and appeals to a social, cultural and physical postmodernist melting pot, as it were, from which would emerge new forms, and new persons." The critical difference between displaced Africans in the post-colonial urban mix and cosmopolitan hybrids is the degree to which they operate within "the global ecumene," the organization of the world in which connections are primarily economic and technological (R. Grillo 2007: 203). It is also one of class. The migration of Africans across borders on the continent is comprised of laborers and refugees, ordinary people concerned with basic matters of immediate survival.

In this respect, the African diaspora communities on the continent are also often quite different from those configured by African intellectuals in expatriate communities in the West. An early instance of identity discourse in the African diaspora was the *Négritude* movement, an intellectual and aesthetic activism that renewed pride in Black Africa's cultural values. The African and Antillean students in Paris in the 1930s and 1940s who generated the movement were operating at the epicenter of a trans-national space, the European metropolis, and they in turn embraced metropolitan ideals. Their discourse on identity was philosophical and literary, and its interest was to "create a space for difference within a dominant culture without turning away from, or

completely rejecting, Europe." Even while seeming to throw off the clothing of assimilation and affirm a transnational African identity, *Négritude* aimed at providing "a wedge of entry for marginalized populations into the panoply of world civilizations" (Jules-Rosette 2000: 42–43).

One might argue that the very concept of the "African Diaspora" is indebted to the *Négritude* movement, with its essentializing of African culture. "Certain diasporic constituencies have disconnected entirely from any notion of a formal diasporic grouping, but remain connected to a subjective understanding of 'Africanness'" (Davies 2007: 69). While *Négritude* was critiqued for its romantic appeal to an idealized conception of Africa, contemporary intellectuals still hope to "recuperate Africa as a model and emblem for transnational diasporic communities" (Jules-Rosette 2000: 46). However, in important respects, the discourse of identity that I am suggesting is taking place within translocal African communities on the continent is quite different in form and substance. It is not informed by a top-down ideology articulated from the privileged vantage point of an elite. Instead, the poetic discourse of sacrifice is inscribed in the concrete practices of those at the bottom as well as the margins of society. Its argument is made in the discrete gesture of sacrifice in the marketplace and at crossroads. It does not invoke nostalgia for tradition, nor does it seek recognition from the West; instead, it draws its authority from the vital indigenous practices that, by virtue of their ongoing presence and appeal on the urban scene, must themselves be understood as an integral feature of globalization.

Sacrifice is often a mute enactment but is nevertheless an eloquent and powerful rhetorical device, and it is wrought just as self-consciously and deliberately as the artistic expressions of the fashioners of *Négritude*. Both are persuasive articulations of resistance to dominant appraisals of experience. Both make appeal to an indigenous world of meaning and acknowledge its values as orienting markers of communal identity. But sacrifice has persuasive appeal among African translocals; its rituals have currency—both literal and figurative—among many who have been displaced in the urban diaspora.

Together, divination and sacrifice constitute a powerful vehicle of this "new amalgam identity" that some have postulated must necessarily emerge in light of contemporary social and political upheavals in Africa (Jules-Rosette 1978). In the contemporary Ivoirian situation, where the interests of the state have manipulated the definitions of

both ethnicity and citizenship, participation in sacrifice may allow participants to rise above rival interests, cross social boundaries, and affirm a transcendent transnational identity, one fixed in 'local' values. Such an identity does not fall back on the dangerously exclusivist understanding of ethnicity or the largely bankrupt but nevertheless perilous notion of citizenship. Neither does it efface the distinct features of local African realities in the face of globalization.

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