

8 Strategic Collaborations between Nigerians and Germans

The Making of a Yorùbá Culture Movement

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BACKGROUND

Èrìn-Òṣun, a developing town in Òṣun State renowned for its traditional culture, is home to families of practicing *bàtá* and *dùndún* drummers and masquerade dancers. Since the 1960s, Èrìn-Òṣun artists have collaborated artistically and intellectually with European and American artists and scholars. This chapter illustrates the concept of strategic collaboration: the art of occupying and performing one's status position to facilitate a common project. In Yorùbá culture, one's position can shift from patron to client and back again, but the involved parties must be willing to acknowledge such shifts. When Westerners have collaborated with Èrìn-Òṣun artists, dynamics of status have often gone unspoken and have led to tense relationships and unfinished projects. Drawing upon three years of ethnographic fieldwork in the 1990s, this chapter documents and analyzes Èrìn-Òṣun artists' collaborations with an ethnofusion band, drumming students from Germany and Yorùbá business entrepreneurs. The culminating example illustrates how the desperation of Nigeria in the late 1990s fueled an era of creative and elaborate visa scams. Viewing collaborations through the lens of status-shifting strategies allows us to assess the motivations for aesthetic choices and material realities that constitute the reinventions of Yorùbá culture.

STRATEGIC COLLABORATIONS

When I met Làmidì Àyánkúnlé and his family in 1990, I had unknowingly joined the proliferating cast of locally storied foreign collaborators that preceded me. As charismatic as his reputation, promotional literature and photos attested, Làmidì lured me into the unfolding production of a Yorùbá culture movement with the charm and enthusiasm of a professional culture broker. Not only had I come to the right place to learn about Yorùbá *bàtá*, I had met a self-styled representative of Yorùbá traditional culture, *àṣà ibílẹ̀*. As evidence that he was also a



Figure 8.1 Yorùbá drum workshop with Lámídi Àyánkúnlé, 1987. Promotional pamphlet for a performance in Bayreuth, Germany.

professional purveyor of *àṣà ibílẹ̀* overseas, Lámídi has narrated his trajectory of countless contact moments and collaborations over the past fifteen years. Well known for his career of cross-cultural encounters and travel, he would come to be respected throughout his part of the world as Bábá Ìlú Òyìnbó, Father of Foreign Lands. Indeed, I quickly learned that Lámídi had cultivated a vast, circuitous and expanding network of overseas collaborators in the production of traditional culture—patrons, clients, friends, co-performers, anthropologists, fans, students and business entrepreneurs. Upon my arrival, I too became incorporated as the newest, and thus most promising, collaborator. As talking drummers are also professional praise singers, invoking the names of those foreigners whom I had followed was almost a daily practice among Lámídi and his family during my fieldwork years. Chief Muraina, Christian and Gerald Embryo, Andy Frankel, Ulli and Georgina Beier—these coproducers of Yorùbá culture had become Lámídi’s key collaborators as well as coauthors of a Yorùbá culture movement.

“Performance” and “performativity” have been central themes in the analysis of Yorùbá cultures.¹ Focusing on collaborative relationships as performances of status distinction, I also find it useful to think of performance

as a mode of inquiry on several different levels: first, in the analysis of formal events in which artists “perform” for audiences; second, in informal contexts in which one can observe the enactment of social categories; and third, as a way in which to analyze scholarly modes of inquiry.²

Attending to the first two levels, I analyze the interplay of power and difference within events, relationships and networks.³ Since the 1990s, scholars have been exploring histories and events of cross-cultural encounter, contact and collaboration; they have been urged to detail and assess what kinds of interactions happen during moments of contact among differently situated actors, “for what exceeds the apparatus of coercion and stereotype in contact relations may perhaps be reclaimed for current practice in movements to expand and democratize what can happen in museums and related sites of ethnomimesis.”⁴ I am interested in marking how historical relationships of power are reproduced and challenged through the processes of contact and collaboration. Làmídi Àyánkúnlé exemplified the possibilities of turning contact relationships into collaborative ventures in networking and culture production. I use the term “collaboration” to uncover the kinds of “friction”—those moments of productive and unproductive tension—inherent in the process of coming together across difference. This kind of difference is a “model of the most culturally productive kinds of collaboration.”⁵ Difference becomes a necessary ingredient for developing a project’s vision and ambition; misunderstandings are the “stuff of global ties.”⁶ Because of misunderstandings across difference, new possibilities emerge all the time.

I am interested in these moments of “friction” in which “stuff” moves: alliances are forged or broken, international tours are produced or stifled, visas come through or fall through. In order to understand the specificity of collaboration in Yorùbá context, I would like to propose the concept of “strategy” as a modifier of “collaboration.” “Strategic collaboration”⁷ is thus the art of occupying and performing one’s status position to facilitate a common project. Depending on the collaboration, in Yorùbá culture, while status is flexible the involved parties must be aware of and willing to acknowledge such status shifts. Although Yorùbá collaborators find familiarity, comfort and motivation as they assess and perform their appropriate status positions in collaborative relationships, they also find limitations, frustration and tension. Their strategies involve assessing what possibilities exist for occupying *x* position in a relationship. However, once the collaborators figure out who is who—who’s got the money and who’s doing the labor in the most reductionist sense—the

process of collaboration advances. From a generalized western perspective this way of collaborating can be disappointing because it calls attention to dynamics of inequality.

Social status, wealth and individual differences remain critical in understanding the dynamics of Yorùbá culture. Every individual develops a different character, *ìwà*, and has a different “head,” *orí*, destiny. Everyone is born into a particular lineage in a particular town or city. In addition to these ascribed status positions, Yorùbá men and women are expected to spend their lives building their names by participating in and cultivating networks of supporters. Inequalities are inherent in, and thus tend to shape, relationships. To someone born and raised in the United States such as myself, Yorùbá peoples’ openness about status differences and inequalities can seem jolting. Once the positions are defined, it is almost a cultural imperative that the junior person will “work” the status gap to curry favor with the senior person.

In detailing collaborative relationships among Yorùbá artists, their European counterparts and Yorùbá business entrepreneurs, I argue that a successful collaboration is one in which each of the parties involved achieves something satisfying, even if unintended or new. In the small-town Yorùbá context, I have found that the concept of equality is not applied to social relationships. Rather, *relationships are defined as culturally appropriate by the extent to which each party occupies and acts swiftly from his or her status position.*

For example, I asked one of Làmídi’s key collaborators and patrons, Chief Muraina, to explain to me why one of Làmídi’s important collaborative relationships with one of his primary and renowned European sponsors, Ulli Beier,⁸ went awry in the early 1990s. Làmídi’s side of the story was that he had been gravely disappointed by his sponsor and thus felt betrayed. My original interpretation was that his European patron did not see the need to apologize for his behavior because he did not see Làmídi as an equal partner. To me, this reproduced the inequality inherent in neocolonial relationships between cosmopolitan Europeans and small-town Africans.

Deploying the concept of strategic collaboration, I have come to interpret the tension between Làmídi and Beier as a situation that might have been avoided had Làmídi been willing to collaborate strategically. According to Chief Muraina, it was not the place of the patron to step outside his (mutually agreed upon) status position to apologize to Làmídi: the misunderstanding was an instance in which Làmídi did not assume his culturally appropriate role—acting from his junior status position—and thus suffered the consequences of having developed unrealistic expectations.

During an interview, Chief Muraina emphasized the fact that there had been “no rapport” between Beier and Làmídi; thus, Làmídi was one of Beier’s many patrons with whom he did not have an interpersonal relationship. To Làmídi, however, Beier was a key patron whose loyalty Làmídi

grew to respect and expect. In Chief Muraina's analysis, it was the responsibility of Làmídi, *because* he occupied the junior position of a younger man and client, to approach his patron and find resolution. Had Làmídi been strategically collaborating, he would have acted from his status position and perhaps saved himself years of grief. Rather, Làmídi transgressed his position by expecting Beier to treat him like a status equal.

Is there room for transgression in strategic collaboration? Are status positions always fixed by cultural, historical and political structures of inequality? In this case, it was a social fact that Beier, an elder European sponsor, had not cultivated a personal relationship with Làmídi. Thus, it was up to Làmídi to act strategically to further their collaboration, but instead he held his sponsor accountable for betraying him. Làmídi's collaborative style was transgressive and not strategic. His sponsor, Beier, did not owe Làmídi an explanation or apology. That was reality.

Acknowledging and playing with the inherent inequality in every collaborative relationship or project requires strategy, wit and flexibility. Furthermore, the most successful collaborations (in which all parties are satisfied) involve status shifting, during which transgressions—challenges to historically and culturally defined expectations—may even become part of one's strategy. Those who have been able to transgress seem to have engaged in relationships based on spending lots of time together. Chief Muraina distinguished between a relationship in which a patron would “sit together” with a client and a more typical one in which a patron would not take the time to “sit together” with a client. When patrons and clients forge their relationships in a variety of contexts in which they shift statuses, the patron-client dynamic becomes complicated. The Èrìn-Òṣun artists have sustained their careers as traditional artists by collaborating strategically, and this chapter aims to unfurl the story of their networking.

FUSIONS: THE WORLD MUSIC MOVEMENT

In order to understand the German/US/Èrìn-Òṣun alliances, I situate Làmídi's collaborations with a German ethnofusion⁹ band within a broader history and discourse of musical collaborations between so-called first- and third-world artists. The closing narrative—the story of Rúkà's project—adds layers of ironic twists to the trajectory of Èrìn-Òṣun artists' collaborations over time and overseas. This collaboration between Èrìn-Òṣun artists, foreigners and Yorùbá business entrepreneurs shows ways in which differently located participants have strategically worked dominant global imaginaries of “The Africa.” Falling under the rubric of “world music” or “world beat,” such collaborative projects are the subjects of many researchers.¹⁰ I find it useful to think about world music as a global social movement with a self-conscious politics for hopeful vision that is still in the process of

articulation. At the same time, this movement reproduces persisting relations of inequality despite its best efforts not to do so.

Discussions about world music and world beat tend to focus upon these terms as commodities themselves; they have been strategically marketed by the transnational music industry to create a whole new category of music for consumption.¹¹ The term “world beat” was coined by DJ Dan Del Santo from Austin, Texas, in the 1980s to refer to an array of “ethnic-pop mixings, fusion-dance musics and emerging syncretic populist musical hybrids from around the world.”¹² Some of the more popular and well-marketed examples of world beat collaborations between Western pop stars and African groups include Paul Simon’s *Graceland*, Talking Heads’ *Remain in Light* and Kate Bush’s *Sensual World*.¹³ In an effort to discuss the German-Èrìn-Òṣun overseas alliance, I draw out some insights from the world music movement’s critics.

Although we might think of the “world” in “world beat” as a reference to collaborative musical projects between musicians from different parts of the world, specifically, between first- and third-world musicians, the phrase “beat” further evokes some of the movement’s cultural politics. The white pop-stars’ quests for “the beat,” stemming from a history of essentializing and racializing African bodies, contribute to a growing transnational dialogue about the meaning of “The Africa.”¹⁴ Such a politics and global imaginary propelled Western pop stars to reach out across borders, and the cultural politics of personal relationships of collaboration over time are complicated, varied and instructive. By agreeing to join such a movement, African artists are also informed by and complicit in a global imaginary of “The Africa” that represents the decolonizing tactics of building relationships of mutual respect and equality through artistic collaborations. Although collaboration opens possibilities for all involved, as a process, it is rarely smooth or mutual. Rather than look at the transnational music industry or commodified products of collaboration (cassette tapes, CDs, videos, etc.), I consider the process and discourse of the collaboration itself critical and underexamined objects of analysis. What happens at that moment of artistic merging and creation, and how do its participants narrate the process?

A derivative of world beat, world music has come to stand for musical diversity as opposed to the implied Eurocentrism of the term “music.”¹⁵ Like the politics behind Tunji Beier’s group, Okuta Percussion, the politics of this world music movement are liberal and relativist: all musics are good, equal and deserving of global recognition. The most cynical critics of the term “world music” consider it a useless marketing scheme.¹⁶ Not only does world music include music from all over the world arbitrarily divided by country, region or ethnic genre, the term lumps such diverse musical styles into one category. Reproducing neocolonial relations of power in which the West controls the markets, the term could be considered an “attempt to banalize difference by placing all these non-Anglo-

American musics under the same rubric.”¹⁷ Furthermore, the term has expanded to include the musical collaborations once categorized as world beat—alliances between non-Western artists and international elite avant-gardes. To me the expansiveness of the term world music does not suggest its meaninglessness; rather, world music as a movement could be seen as an effort to expand possibilities for new types of strategic alliances and internally generated critique.

EMBRYONIC CONCEPTIONS

In 1969, Embryo, the jazz-rock quartet of radical German musicians, had just been conceived. Of the band’s four members, Christian Burchard and Gerald Luciano were the front men. Christian was the visionary and vibraphonist; Gerald played an array of percussion and bass. Since meeting Lámídi in 1990, I have heard many stories about Christian and Gerald of Embryo. Like the names of the few foreigners who have spent time with Lámídi in Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun, Christian and Gerald are forever household names. After digesting years of stories and with the help of my yellowing photocopies, I write Embryo into the expansive Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun overseas network. Festival programs, tour schedules, invitations, newspaper reviews, album jackets, promotional materials, photos: these scraps excavated from Lámídi’s important-paper box, along with interviews and conversation, allow me to piece together a history of Embryo and the group’s pivotal role in Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun artists’ lives and careers. Burchard, reflecting on his group’s origin in a “Jubilee Tour 89” promotional pamphlet, said:

The riots of 1968 had reached Munich at last. Masses of people protested against state despotism such as emergency laws. There were Maoists and Trotskyists and others who refused a party-line—they were all called the “Underground.” One of our most important meeting places was in the Ungererstrasse just before the motorway entrance to Nurnberg. The cold steel and concrete of a computer firm stands there today. It was affectionately called “Paranoia Centre” and to this day I can’t remember how it came to be. There in a few barracks the first dropouts lived: specialized drug users, psychedelic freaks and amongst them musicians belonging to the music commune Amon Duul. There were regular underground film showings and we had our first sessions there. Rebellious art academy students held their meetings there, pamphlets were printed and even bands from far away like Guru Guru could be heard.¹⁸

Embryo grew out of a countercultural, antimainstream politics movement that had spread across the globe by 1969. Radical students and artists produced new forms of protest art. Always defining their music against the

grain, Embryo called their music “ethnomusic” because they looked to other cultures for inspiration and collaboration. In the late 1970s, they traveled extensively in India. In the 1980s, they traveled to Northern Africa and Nigeria. Not only was the band interested in learning and playing different kinds of music with artists of these countries, they wanted to experience how music was lived in different cultures. A progressive newsletter detailing Embryo’s journey quotes Charlie Parker to convey this sentiment: “Music is life. If you don’t live it, it’ll never come out of your instrument.” Embryo’s prolific recording career¹⁹ documents their collaborations with musicians from Europe, the United States, Korea, Egypt, Brazil, Australia, India and Nigeria. Through experimentation and collaboration across differences, Christian demanded a new politics: anticolonialist, antiracist, antiwar and anticapitalist.

TRADITION AND CULTURE AS COMMODITY: YORÙBÁ-YORÙBÁ COLLABORATIONS

The emergent class of Yorùbá entrepreneurs seeking to invest in a viable commodity provided a useful contrast to the proliferating network of foreign students who invested in the culture of *bàtá* as a lived tradition. Both the entrepreneurs and students gravitated toward the culture of *bàtá* to strive for better lives. For foreign students, the culture of *bàtá* itself represented a better life—an alternative to the alienating, industrialized, technologized, urban, fast-paced realities of life in Germany and the United States. For Yorùbá business people, the hope of investing in and selling *bàtá* provided them with an opportunity to join the assembly line of Western progress.

Rúkà is one such Yorùbá entrepreneur. In August of 1997, Rúkà began to solicit the services of the Èrìn-Òṣun drummers and masquerade dancers. Rúkà is one of the many children of a famous Òṣogbo artist. That summer, she had decided to reinvent herself as a traditional artist so she could travel to the United States. Rúkà also planned to carry her people with her, a culturally appropriate gesture of a responsible and considerate big (important) woman. She and her Cultural Heritage group were intent on doing whatever it took to secure their U.S. visas and to hire authentic artists to help them transform into representatives of Yorùbá traditional traveling theater. Their only setback: Rúkà and her people were not yet artists. These ambitious young ladies had grown up in urban settings of Ibadan and Lagos. Hailing from relatively well-off families, Rúkà and her entourage were quite confident in their plan to become capital-earning businesspeople. With roots in Òṣogbo, Rúkà and her group chose to tap one of their hometown’s most successful industries—the culture industry. With the hope of learning the art of *bàtá*, Rúkà headed for Èrìn-Òṣun in Òṣogbo, not really knowing what to expect. She gave herself no more than

a few months to learn and become a proficient and authentic performer of her own cultural heritage.

Upon their arrival in Èrìn-Òṣun, Rúkà and her friends were directed to Làmídi's compound. Eventually, they began to divulge pieces of their mission to Yẹkínì, Làmídi's junior brother. An appropriate broker for this project, Yẹkínì was a senior master drummer. Because the drummer brothers were not yet familiar with Rúkà or her family, they were skeptical of her plan and ability to compensate them fairly. However, Yẹkínì agreed to help Rúkà by setting up training workshops with his junior co-performers, but he chose not to participate in the sessions himself. This two-month series of negotiations with Rúkà thus fell into the hands of the most junior Àyàn and Òjẹ performers capable of training nonartists.

One day I observed the Òjẹ and Àyàn artists as they scrambled for transport. When I asked them where they were going, they told me Rúkà was arranging a program for herself and them in the United States. With the right dose of skepticism, the artists also admitted that she promised to pay them in stages, which made the contract worthwhile. Although I maintained critical distance (to avoid being sucked into the visa-procuring process), I was interested in Rúkà's collaboration with the Èrìn-Òṣun brothers. Thus, I participated in some of the arranged sessions to glean some understanding of the situation.

Critical of Rúkà's plan, Làmídi knew that she and her group would not fool any U.S. audience or student once the amateurs started to drum, dance or sing. Làmídi and I have discussed the misconception that all Africans are drummers,²⁰ and Làmídi's twist on this theme emerges from his perspective as a professionally trained drummer. Many Africans, he argued, do not know anything about drumming but have learned to work such ignorance to their advantage. One of the main reasons Làmídi had little patience for untrained Nigerians who posed as professional drummers is that he has met so many foreigners who have worked long and hard for their knowledge and understanding of his culture. "They know Yorùbá history and have also learned to play *bàtá* rhythms from books or professional musicians," he said. Cynical about the emergent culture of quick-fix entrepreneurs, Làmídi was unimpressed with the schemes that took advantage of his family.

Yẹkínì's regular day job was driving a taxi. Like most taxi drivers, Yẹkínì owned his own vehicle. Rábíù loaned Yẹkínì the money to buy his station wagon taxi, imported from Benin upon their return from Germany in 1996. Although taxi driving was one of the most viable occupations in the Òṣogbo area, the cost of fuel and car maintenance prohibited much of a profit. Generously, Yẹkínì regularly offered his taxi services to transport the Òjẹtúndé group to their performances. However, Yẹkínì's dual role as driver and lead drummer meant that he often had to compromise one type of work for the other. Risking the financial loss, Yẹkínì often ended up transporting the crew to and from their sessions with Rúkà in

Òṣogbo. Although Rúkà did not reimburse Yẹ̀kínì or the others for their transport, she granted them a lump sum of *náírà* to cover costs just about every other session. The money was enough to keep Yẹ̀kínì and the other artists interested.

One rainy autumn evening, I spontaneously hopped into the car with Yẹ̀kínì as he drove to retrieve the crew at Rúkà's place in Òṣogbo. I was eager to meet Rúkà and hear about her plans firsthand. Her house was big, with a spacious front parlor meant for entertaining guests. She and her friends were big in stature as well as in status, evidence that they had been living comfortable lives. Rúkà's friends offered us boiled cassava and okra stew with fish. They went out to buy a Gulder beer for Yẹ̀kínì and a Pepsi for me. I was never formally introduced to Rúkà, although she immediately began to joke with me about knowing how to dance and sing *bàtá*. Rúkà freely demonstrated her new moves. Although Rúkà and her group seemed enthusiastic about and respectful of the complex *alàrìnjó* tradition and the Èrìn-Òṣun artists' expertise, they did not seem particularly worried about picking up the skills quickly.

Our brief conversation revealed to me Rúkà's next step: shooting a promotional video of her performance troupe, featuring her Cultural Heritage group and the Èrìn-Òṣun artists. This video would serve to convince the U.S. embassy that Rúkà and her group were legitimate, professional artists trained in the *alàrìnjó* tradition. Although Rúkà did not promise the Èrìn-Òṣun artists visas to the United States, she did promise to send them letters of invitation once she arrived. Meanwhile, she would pay the artists for their help in making the video. With precarious day jobs at best, the Èrìn-Òṣun artists considered their time with Rúkà to be good work experience.

The cast of participating characters from Èrìn-Òṣun included Múídínì on *iyáàlù*, Làmídi's most accomplished and versatile *bàtá*-playing son; he also apprenticed as a barber during weekdays. There was the twenty-year-old Túndé, Yẹ̀kínì's oldest son, who had mastered the sound and technique of the *omele mēta*, transforming the smallest drum into a solo, talking instrument. After he and his father returned from a trip to Germany, Túndé invested his earnings in a rented barbershop in town. Along with Yẹ̀kínì, both Múídínì and Túndé were regular drummers for the Òjẹ́túndé group. This team of drummers was highly respected for its talent and musicianship. The opportunity to negotiate and direct Rúkà's artistic project opened up new training ground for these junior performers.

Following their fathers' leads, the Èrìn-Òṣun artists were learning the art of cultural brokerage—communicating specialized knowledge and skills with the twin goals of collaboration and commodification. Rúkà scheduled the video-making venue for a mid-September Monday. In order to uphold their end of the deal, the Èrìn-Òṣun artists had already compromised their work and family obligations. That morning, the artists were playing for a small family funeral ceremony. Not only did they leave the ceremony before

it was time, they left without Múidínì, who had yet to return from his weekend *fújì* gig in another town. The next obstacle was finding Yẹ́kínì and packing the drums and masquerade materials into his taxi. I had agreed to shoot a back-up video of the performance, a task that allowed me to collect research material and appear useful.

Rúkà and her entourage piled themselves into three cars: a Mercedes, Rúkà's Peugeot, and a chartered taxi. Upon our arrival, we were dismayed to learn that Rúkà still had not confirmed a site for the video shoot. Thus, we all loaded ourselves into our respective cars and traveled in caravan from one end of Òṣogbo to the other. We finally took our show to the famous Òṣun Grove where we could make noise, use the cement stage and be inspired by natural and spiritual forces. It turned out that the grove was the choicest site all along because our embassy audience would appreciate the natural backdrop.

Upon arrival, the Èrìn-Òṣun contingent was ready to go, except for the traditional costumes Rúkà had promised. After Rúkà and her group dressed and talked among themselves, she apologetically handed the artists their mismatched, haphazardly assembled costumes. Already losing patience, the artists simply put on their costumes so they could get to work. Fortunately, Múidínì showed up just in time, boosting our energy level up a notch.

The ensuing rehearsal-turned-performance unfolded awkwardly. The women dancers did not dance in step with the drum rhythms. The Cultural Heritage group struggled to execute the words of their songs with volume and confidence. However, the Àyàn drummers carried the show with the grace, composure and skill of veteran performers. The masquerade and acrobatic displays were also professional. Unfortunately, however, it is always the performers out of sync who stand out in an otherwise well-rehearsed and well-directed show. Because I had never observed an *alàrinjò* show with amateur performers, I was embarrassed.

Rúkà and her Cultural Heritage group tried to release their *ìwà l'ẹ̀wà* (inner beauty) through their performance: they smiled, interacted with each other and appeared to be having a good time—all important features of a good show. However, their aesthetic did not suffice. Due to their minimal training, Rúkà's group did not communicate with the drummers or their audience. The true trick of *bàtá*-style dancing and drumming is to anticipate or initiate rhythm changes and breaks. Minimally, an accomplished *bàtá* performer feels confident enough to interpret the main grooves of the dances, called *ijó oge* and *gbamù*, and to play the scripted breaks. Through this, a performer's inner beauty will emanate. Clearly, Rúkà's group had not dedicated enough time to experiencing and feeling *bàtá* in ceremonial context. In spite of it all, the Àyàn artists proved a lively threesome. Not only did they play the more popular *Bàtá Fújì* dance grooves of *ijó oge* and *gbamù*, they also played the range of *òrìshà*, Yorùbá gods, rhythms as a *dùndún* ensemble. Likewise, Kójè and Wálé gracefully pulled off a two-person masquerade and acrobatic display, a nearly impossible feat for two

artists. In the end, Rúkà and her group were pleased with their performance and with the artistry and professionalism of the Èrìn-Òṣun contingent.

And for the finale, German tourists happened upon the scene, their casual wanderings in nature interrupted by our bizarre display of culture. Before we knew it, the tall and complicit Germans were draped with Yorùbá cloth, poised to dance. I barely caught their story: they were stationed in southeastern Nigeria for a brief stint with an ongoing development project. With appropriate gusto and understated amusement, they accepted Rúkà's exuberant invitation to dance on camera. True masters of improvisation, the Àyàn drummers played their most danceable versions of *ijó oge*, accenting the downbeat of the four-four meter. The Germans loomed about a half foot taller than the rest of us, their movements stifled by their lack of familiarity with Yorùbá *bàtá*. Although the grove is a tourist attraction, tourists did not frequent Oshogbo or Nigeria during the 1990s. Their willingness to wander into our scene, dress in Yorùbá cloth, dance for a video project featuring Yorùbá *bàtá*, and bid a quick farewell—all without much fanfare—felt like a movie scene. The surprise climax would be the perfect selling point at the embassy. Those days, authentic Yorùbá performance troupes trained white people; the masquerade was complete.

Assessing a gig's worth often comes down to the *náírà* (money), Yẹkìní the senior-most broker asked Rúkà for their money. She handed over 2,000 *náírà* (about \$25), an amount that satisfied the group. Observing the ethics of respect, hierarchy and family, the artists then gave cuts of their pay to their fathers (and maybe their brothers and mothers) upon returning home. The next morning, I checked the quality of the video. Transfixed by the performance, the curious fathers gathered round to watch their sons in action. This was a new experience for the fathers; they had never seen their sons emulate a full-scale *alárìnjó* show without them. Impressed and amused, they proudly accepted that their sons had become their own masters.

TRANSGRESSING AND SUSTAINING STRATEGIC COLLABORATIONS

Participating in a discourse of “The Africa” as home to drummers and dancers, Rúkà and her Cultural Heritage group chose to study and emulate “the traditional artist” role. Traditional performers, they reasoned, were able to travel abroad with relative ease; the required transformation was worth the trouble. As mere business entrepreneurs, they didn't stand a chance; the discourse of Nigeria as the global seat of corrupt business would not work in their favor. Lámídì and his family were models for Rúkà's Cultural Heritage group: the Èrìn-Òṣun artists had passports that affirmed their overseas travel and subsequent returns. Sandwiched between the Èrìn-Òṣun passports, the passports of Rúkà's group would be well poised for stamping.

The outcome of Rúkà's efforts to transform herself and her group into *bàtá* dancers was shaky but telling: shaky because their dancing and singing laid bare their amateur status, telling because the hastily trained Cultural Heritage group performed like beginners instead of "naturals." The fact that Rúkà's best attempt to find her way into this discourse of "The Africa" was an awkward fit proves the specificity, while uncovering the power, of such a homogenizing imaginary. As Lámídi argued, playing the drums well is about studying a set of skills over time, not a "natural" trait of African-ness or blackness. Because the Èrìn-Òṣun artists apprentice to the art of drumming since they are old enough to carry a drum, by the time they reach their teens, they may seem like natural musicians. Although Rúkà did not actually believe that she merely had to stir up her inherited ability to dance and sing Yorùbá *bàtá*, she strove to access an imaginary that would affirm her self-portrayed rootedness in a naturalized Yorùbá traditional culture. Furthermore, showing off her foreign apprentices was strategic: the evidence of white students would prove Rúkà's validity.

The German tourists swiftly entered, performed and then left the scene of Rúkà's video without missing a beat because such a possibility was already an item on the itinerary of their imaginations. It was as though they had bought their cultural experience ticket and cashed it in for a ride on Rúkà's Cultural Heritage set. The tourists had discovered "The Africa" that satiated their spirit of adventure.

Given that my telling of Rúkà's project was informed by Lámídi's cynicism, this version of the narrative reveals the dynamic tensions inherent in a world music movement. The unfulfilled promises of the Yorùbá business entrepreneurs reproduced a familiar dynamic of marginalization. Likewise, the unfulfilled promises of foreign students, including myself, perhaps provoked a colonial dynamic of appropriation. Thus, an antipolitics strategy requires a constant effort to address and reshape these histories through collaborative projects.

An enterprising businesswoman, Rúkà rose to the occasion of learning and then performing her Cultural Heritage. Unable to distinguish Rúkà's performance of Yorùbá tradition from any other such attempt, U.S. embassy officials were sufficiently dazzled by the signposts of a familiar narrative: village-based group of authentic artists who had traveled as such; video in the grove with foreign apprentices in tow; shows lined up for Black History Month. The U.S. embassy granted Rúkà and her Cultural Heritage group its stamp of approval. The mimetic exercise was complete. All passports were blessed with visas, and Rúkà was poised to make her first overseas journey, group members to join her in turn.

Such accounts of innovative entrepreneurship not only illustrate the collaborative ventures that fuel a culture movement, but they also testify to the limits of and potential for opportunity during the late 1990s. The rise and fall of Nigeria's petrostate that boomed and busted in the 1970s made "illusion" become the "basis for survival" in a post-1970s Nigeria.²¹ Because opportunities for survival were so few, a pervasive underground culture called "419"

emerged in which thugs and scam artists calculated acts of deception and thievery to earn money. Within this context, Rúkà's Cultural Heritage group represents an above-ground attempt to create the illusion of a traditional performing troupe. Embellishing upon the group's inherited skills, supplementing skilled performers where necessary and using the video camera as authenticating technology, Rúkà was able to conjure visas out of staged portrayals of cultural heritage.

Performers of Yorùbá tradition, Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun artists were willing to forge alliances with Rúkà and her group. Hoping to get some quick cash while expanding their networks, the artists legitimized Rúkà's venture so that it could compete in the flooded market of Nigerian survival schemes. Rúkà's product may have been an illusion, but the collaborative relationships among its participants were real. Although building upon a culture of illusions for survival may seem inherently unstable, its foundation of committed collaborators continues to sustain Nigeria's popular economy. While Rúkà's Cultural Heritage group crafted the illusion of a traditional performing troupe, it produced real opportunities—out of strategic collaborations—for its members.

The examined dynamics of cross-cultural and intercultural collaborations help us understand how relationships of power have infused collaborative projects with the common focus of teaching, learning, producing and performing Yorùbá culture. The foreign scholars and artists who chose to spend extended periods of time as apprentices to Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun artists came to understand that Yorùbá *bàtá* is a living tradition that still thrives and changes in local Nigerian contexts. By going against the grain of a global quick-fix imperative and by challenging status expectations, the German ethnofusion band, German drum students, and U.S. anthropologists engaged in an anti-politics of collaboration, spurred on by the transgressive style and expectations of our teacher and primary collaborator, Làmídì Àyánkúnlé.

NOTES

1. Christopher Waterman, *Juju: A Social History and Ethnography of an African Popular Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Karin Barber, *I Could Speak until Tomorrow: Oríkì, Women and the Past in a Yorùbá Town* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 1991); Andrew Apter, *Black Critics and Kings: The Hermeneutics of Power in Yorùbá Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); J. Lorand Matory, *Sex and the Empire That Is No More: Gender and Politics of Metaphor in Oyo Yorùbá Religion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).
2. Paulla Ebron, *Performing Africa* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 1.
3. I turned to anthropological and cultural studies literature to explore the theoretical question of how concepts of “performativity” and “performance” open discussions of power and identity. Cf. Debra Klein, *Yorùbá Bātá Goes Global: Artists, Culture Brokers and Fans* (University of Chicago Press, 2007).
4. James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 200.

5. Anna Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 246.
6. *Ibid.*, 247.
7. The concept of strategic collaboration has emerged from conversations with colleagues since the 1990s. Lisa Bunin and Annie Lorrie Anderson have developed concepts of collaboration in their discussions of organic cotton production in India and Garifuna peoples' political process in Guatemala, respectively.
8. Ulli Beier is a world-renowned scholar and culture broker from Germany who has been dedicated to the study and promotion of Yorubá culture since his first trip to Nigeria in 1950.
9. In their promotional literature and album jackets, Embryo described their music as "ethnomusic" and "fusion." I have conjoined the two terms to characterize their artistic endeavors. Embryo explained that they had been playing ethnomusic twenty years before the term "ethno" became popular. Embryo used "fusion" to describe their syncretic musical style—fusing together the "old" (Africa) the "new" (Europe) and other musical genres such as jazz and rock.
10. Veit Erlman, "The Aesthetics of the Global Imagination: Reflections on World Music in the 1990s," *Public Culture* 8 (1996): 467–87; Reebee Garofalo, "Whose World, What Beat: The Transnational Music Industry, Identity, and Cultural Imperialism," *World of Music* 35, no. 2 (1993): 16–32; Bob W. White, *Rumba Rules: The Politics of Dance Music in Mobutu's Zaire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).
11. Steven Feld, "Voices of the Rainforest: Politics of Music," *Arena* 99/100 (1994): 164–77; and Garofalo, "Whose World, What Beat."
12. Steven Feld, "From Schizophonia to Schismogenesis: On the Discourses and Commodification Practices of 'World Music' and 'World Beat,'" in *Music Grooves: Essays and Dialogues*, ed. Charles Keil and Steven Feld (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 266.
13. Louise Meintjes, "Paul Simon's Graceland, South Africa, and the Mediation of Musical Meaning," *Ethnomusicology* 34.1 (1990): 37–73.
14. Ebron, *Performing Africa*.
15. Feld, "Schizophonia to Schismogenesis," 266.
16. Hopkins in Jocelyn Guilbault, "On Redefining the 'Local' through World Music," *World of Music* 35.2 (1993): 33–47.
17. *Ibid.*, 41.
18. Christian Burchard, "Twenty Years Ago: An Embryo Musician Looks Back," in *20 Years Embryo Jubilee Tour '89*. 1989. Tour Program.
19. Embryo still enjoys a prolific and diverse recording and performance career. Updated frequently, Embryo's homepage (<http://www.embryo.de>) includes a thorough documentation of their history: biographies, photos, a discography and interviews.
20. Ebron, *Performing Africa*.
21. Andrew Apter, *The Pan-African Nation: Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 249–50.