Dreaming the Barrio: Afrolatinos and the Shaping of Public Space in Africa

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On the 10th of August, 2001, at the Requiem Mass of Navy Commander Oliver Abiodun Shotayo Cardozo, held in the Holy Cross Cathedral, in Lagos, Nigeria, a lengthy pamphlet was distributed to guests in tribute of the young officer. Inside it reads:

> **The Extended Family**
>
> With a vivid Brazilian Assimilado surname like CARDOZO it is pertinent, at this juncture, to delve, just a little bit, into some of [Commander] Shotayo's extended family antecedents…
>
> Inspite [sic] of Shotayo's young age, he had been playing a very pivotal and prominent role in the activities of the Extended Family who are descendents of our great PATRIARCH PAPAE JOAO, PEDRO, LAUNDRESS DO SANGRONHO. Papae and his Late Sister MADAM OLOKU[N] MACARA were among the Brazilian and Cuban Yoruba Assimilado freedmen, and women, who returned to their homeland [Lagos, Nigeria?] in the 1840's and 1850's after the abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Slavery in the Western World.
>
> On arrival and after receiving the approval of the Oba [king] of Lagos they set about reclaiming the swamp land of Lagos and established their settlement which was known as POPO AGUDA . . . Papae SANGRONHO built and bequeathed the more than century old SANGRONE'S (SANGROSS) Market at Lewis Street, Lagos to the people of Lagos in order to immortalise his name and exhibit his Craftsmanship as a MASTER STONE MASON and BUILDER. PAPAE AKANDE SANGRONHO and his sister, MADAM OLOKUN MACARA built their homestead . . .which all Lagosians at that period [mid to late Nineteenth Century] knew as ATENDA, ATENDA is a Local Corruption of the Spanish/Portuguese word LA TIEND[A] which means WORKSHOP. And what a veritable Workshop it was, from his ATENDA SANGRONHO trained many generations of artisans . . . Relics of the nineteenth Century hand operated machine which SANGRONHO brought [from Brazil?] are still at that location.
>
> Suffice to say, that the great BRAZILIAN and CUBAN repatriates who returned in teh [sic] nineteenth Century with their hard earned money, skills, craft, knowledge of the modern world, burning fervour, love and dogged devotion to uplift the standard

> of life in the African homeland from which they had been uprooted, contributed in no small measure in laying the foundation of modernization which set Lagos apart and permeated to other parts of Nigeria and West Africa (Requiem Missal in author's possession, 2001: 23 - 24). (See Figure 1, Popo Aguda Community Center, Lagos, Nigeria)

The rhetoric of this tribute is telling in many respects, but above all it assumes the agency of emancipated slaves who are described in passing, and the ironic acceptance of the mores of 'modernity' that are implicit and explicit in its language. This tense and fragile marriage of tropes provides the fertile spaces that create communities such as the Popo Aguda described in the above tribute.

This essay examines another kind of equally unstable but fertile alliance; that between the reshaping of urban space by Latinos in the Americas and of self-proclaimed Afrolatinos in Africa. My intent is to speculate upon some of the ways that such communities move into spaces and visibly mark and change them as their own. In this manner, the correlations made between 'Latinos,' (loosely defined), changing and 'dreaming' their neighborhoods in urban America and urban Africa are not meant to be historical in nature, but, rather, they point to a semiotics of domestication of intimate and sacred spaces in 'public places.'

I will explore African and Latino "imaginary" urban scapes in literature, and their contiguous existence in the lived spaces of Lagos and New York. Yoruba and Latino concepts of the road, the journey, and the neighborhood are central tropes for understanding the affinities that shape public space for these communities. Their shared aesthetics are based on historically shared diasporas in the Americas and in Africa; they are contested domains in which Afrolatinos have fought to live and work together.

Introduction: people, places, and history

Afrolatinos of 'Yoruba' descent like Papae Pedro Joao da Costa, Madam Oloku[n] Macara, Madame Do Sangronho, and Hilario Campos traversed the Atlantic back to Lagos, Nigeria after living a long time in nineteenth century Brazil and Cuba. The titles of Papae and Mamae were bestowed upon these early founders of repatriate Afrolatino communities in the Bight of Benin (Laotan 1943:6; Yai 2001:72), whereas the Nigerian-born descendents of these influential families took on the honorific titles of Tata and Yaya, respectively, demarcating their lineage as springing forth from these 'South American' and 'Caribbean' roots. The repatriates from the Americas created a unique community in Lagos known as the Aguda, a name which refers to the Catholic faith and New World mannerisms which the returning Yoruba introduced into the burgeoning African urban enclave that the city embodied in the nineteenth century and endures today.

The Aguda were renowned for economic savvy, religious tolerance, and ethnic mingling (Yai 2001:72-82; Verger 1960:113-123), a legacy that is most dramatically noted in the ways that they have shaped public space in the city. Among their ranks were notable architects responsible for erecting many of the 'characteristic' structures of urban Lagos, e.g., Senhor Francisco Nobre from Bahia, Brazil designed the ground plans for Holy Cross Cathedral in the 1830's (Laotan 1943:7). The Cathedral is now a grand building in the heart of the Cuban-Brazilian district of Lagos, and is a meeting place for descendents of this talented and well-to-do community. "Papae" Joao da Costa was the master mason responsible for designing and erecting the similarly notable Muslim Mosque in the city of Lagos.

The Aguda demarcated their territory by erecting edifices, painting murals, and by forming neighborhoods within some of the most central quarters of Lagos. Along with architects and masons, these repatriates brought master painters and skillful seamstresses to the city's resources. In fact, the British colonial officials were so impressed by this community's masonry skills that they were asked to join the Power and Water Division in building the urban infrastructure of the city for the colonial government in the nineteenth century (Laotan 1943:7). This allegiance notwithstanding, the Aguda saw themselves as both a Yoruba and Afrolatino community. Their skills and history were acquired from their experiences as emancipated slaves in Brazil and Cuba. In many ways, Bahia and Havana serve as second or primary 'homes' and points of reference despite the pain and difficulty of their personal histories (see Otero 2002:163-201). The contested nature of the spaces that Bahian and Havana Yoruba inhabited as urban, emancipated workers and slaves created a sense of community drawn from the necessity of unification for survival. Although the experience of slavery in the diaspora allowed for the Brazilian and Cuban communities to converge and emerge as the Aguda in Lagos, it came from a frame of reference grounded in their experiences as 'unified outsiders.' This kind of unique separateness led poignantly to the 'proud and loud' civic ancestry of Aguda public spaces.

Since their first arrival in Lagos in the mid nineteenth century, the Aguda families have commemorated the Bahian feast of Nossa Senhora de Bon Fin and the Brazilian Boa or Bull masquerade (Laotan 1943: 8). Among the Brazilian Aguda, they traditionally celebrated their Latin American culture with samba dancing, cooking of distinct Brazilian dishes with dende oil, and the parading of the carretas or Brazilian masquerade along city streets (Laotan 1943:8), i.e., the Brazilian masquerade of a bull, boa figurine in an annual Lagosian carnival. The distinctly Bahian carretas, or masques, are brought out with the bull figurine, Brazilian dance, song, and cuisine every year. Such heritage events reveal Candomble's traditions as a centrifugal force of their performance. Thus, the Latino concept of the 'homegrown,' or *lo criollo*, becomes one aesthetic that frames the historical demarcation of cognitive, cultural, and architectural scapes

along the streets of the quarter or barrio of the Popo Aguda in Lagos. As Mrs. Aderemi Gooding King, the current Aguda occupant of the Lagosian Cuban Lodge, indicates about the orisha practices surrounding the Boa masquerade:

> They do. Like Bo[a], they call it Bo[a]. They do it.. . .The Bo[a], yeah. . . .They do it in the, in the night. That Boa , sometimes, in the, with the sun-up, with the mother of the Yoruba, Italosha --I know that (Gooding-King quoted in Otero 2002: 216).

Mrs. Gooding-King is referring to an Iyalocha or a "Mother of the Orisha," a priestess of traditional Yoruba deities, as this title is known in Nigeria, Cuba, and Brazil. The Iyalocha she describes resides in Lagos, Nigeria but originates distinctly from the branch of Orisha worship of the Brazilian Candomble tradition in which her title in Bahia would properly be Mae de Santo. It is no accident that these religious titles continue to be observed in Lagos as Orisha worship from Bahia; it also works as a means to signal a Yoruba-centered identity in Brazilian nationalist contexts (see Matory 1999:72-103).

Some Aguda re-enforce the Brazilian assertion of Yoruba or Nago identity in Lagos (Bamgboshe Martins 1997:15, personal communication 1999 and 2001; Yai 2001:82). Indeed, in the nineteenth century, there occurred the reunion and resettlement of children to Lagos previously left in Bahia by their repatriated parents. During this era of re-population, Bahian Yoruba like Elydia Siffre, daughter of the prestigious da Silva family was "brought down [to Lagos] from Bahia" (Laotan 1943:10). This reflects a localized identity whose trajectory is not geographically concentric in terms of place, but experiential in terms of space. That is, the Nago-Aguda trajectory of identity for those returning as former slaves from Brazil points to a specific set of experiences that form the parameters for this branch of the Aguda community. Likewise, the Lucumi-Aguda constellation of individuals also share a frame of reference with each other vis-à-vis Cuba and especially an urban slavery past in Havana.

The Shango Egungun, or ancestor masquerade painted along Campos Square at the site of an Aguda family home, is an import from Candomble religious culture. (See Figures 2 and 3, Bamgboshe Family House, Ajolojo Compound, Lagos, Nigeria). This communal house of worship was originally established by one of the first Aguda families arriving from Bahia, Brazil in the 1830's, the Bamgboshe Family (Laotan 1943:8-10). The Bamgboshe 'dynasty' is associated with the great Temple Houses, or teirreros of Brazilian Candomble of the late nineteenth century (see Landes 1992:42; Carneiro 1948). The family claimed a spiritual lineage with Shango, the orisha of lightening and the great northern Kingdom of Oyo (Bamgboshe Martin 1997:15, and personal communication in 1999 and 2001). The Bamgboshes still see themselves as bi-costal, bi-cultural and thoroughly Lagosian.

The Ajolojo Compound, or *ode* Ajolojo, is an open living space where the semiotics of a family's history is portrayed for all to see. The area is both semi-public, diverse, and intimate in that children, women, the elderly, and the businessmen of the family, as well as friends and outside visitors, or *alejo*, saunter in and out of the courtyard. People are present, and the feeling is that 'something' is always just about to happen or someone will be arriving or leaving. This sense of expectancy make, the *ode* a center of traditionality and reinvention of culture and quotidian 'family values.' The extension between the intimate familiarity of the home compound and the external wonders of the road, the *ona*, is a foundational motif in Yoruba aesthetics. The world of the *ode* includes friends, rivals, neighbors and tenants. In an *ode*, personal politics and differential social networks combine with group living, making these sites interesting and rife with drama. The road, the *ona*, extends out of the *ode*, from the compound gates out into the world.

The journey, *iranjo*, into the world outside of the family homestead includes both the potential for wonderful opportunity and danger. Wondrous and strange people and beings are often found along the *ona*, with the crossroads or places by the *igbo* or forest, being especially full of extraordinary beings. Two examples illustrate this point. Contemporary Yoruba memoir and fiction has detailed the ways childhood is remembered, related, and constructed in this cultural milieu. Both Soyinka's *Aké: The Years of Childhood* (1981) and Okri's *The Famished Road* (1992) provide hauntingly similar accounts of a young Yoruba child embarking on 'the road.'

Soyinka writes:

> I could not climb the ladder [flanking the compound] by myself, but I already knew where it was. Simply by following the rush of feet, I knew where to go whenever the sounds carried into the house of Aké. . .Then one day Joseph relented and hoisted me up on his shoulders and I obtained my first look over the wall of our yard. I followed the group of dancers from the road which went past the cenotaph, behind the church, then disappeared in the direction, Joseph said, of the palace.
>
> . . .I understood then that the outer walls of the parsonage were joined continuously, giving way in places to gates or windows.
>
> . . .I noticed little boys following the band, some walked directly behind, imitating the march of the policemen, others walked alongside, at the extreme edges of the road. They seemed not much bigger than I, and I soon joined them.
>
> . . .We marched past the bookshop and I felt vindicated. The frontage was exactly where I had gauged it while seated on Joseph's shoulder. But then the curious thing happened: after the bookseller's, the wall rolled away into a different area I had

> never seen before. Soon it moved away altogether, was covered up by houses and shops and disappeared for ever. It upset my previous relationship between the parsonage and Ake.
> . . .There was a market before we got to Ibara. There, women were waiting by the road, more were flocking from their stalls by the time we got there. Their stalls stretched endlessly from the right side of the road, goods piled up on low stools or on specially laid trestles.

Soyinka's child moves along the road, marching into market stalls, meeting policemen and getting thoroughly lost, but he does manage to come home, where he is received with joy and relief by both of his parents (1981:49-50). The sense of awe he encounters by wandering on the road, in the world, first-hand, is echoed by Okri in Azaro's repeated forays into urban and rural Nigeria from his homestead in Lagos.[1]

> The days were always long except when I played or wandered. The streets were long and convoluted. It took me hours to get lost and many more to find my way back again. I began to enjoy getting lost. In my wanderings, I left our area altogether, with its jumbled profusion of shacks and huts and bungalows, and followed the route of the buses that took the workers to the city center. At the roadsides, women roasted corn. In palm-wine bars and eating-houses, men swallowed fist-sized dollops of eba, gesticulating furiously, arguing about politics. At a barber's shop, I watched a man being shaved bald. Next to the barber's shop there was a pool office (Okri 1992: 144).

Both of these Nigerian writers focus on the experiential quality of knowledge. In our first example, young Soyinka takes Joseph's word about the road leading to the Oba's palace, as just that, a description. He embarks, at the peril of getting lost or being punished, on his own investigation of the world not only outside of but flowing from the compound of Ake. Likewise, Azaro, Okri's abiku youthful explorer, also ventures on his own journey where he loses his way. Both journeys bring the travelers back home, but the wanderings are foundational to their development as people.

The idea of the *alejo*, or guest, is a key concept here. The general greeting of "E ku *alejo*," is a common phrase heard throughout Yorubaland where hosts place a great importance on hospitality. Many times, families and guests prepare months in advance for their encounter at journeys' end. It is not uncommon to find both host and "stranger" amassing gifts, organizing correspondence, and setting up itineraries months in advance of travel. In the

above two accounts, young Soyinka and Azaro come back from their journeys as *alejo* in the sense that they have been changed, in foundational ways, by their journeys. I mean this almost as a pun in that it is understood that in instances of a family member's return, such as Afrolatino Aguda to Lagos, the *alejo* represent both strangers and families as individuals who always possess the potential to embark from and return home.

The risk factor embedded in these fictional sojourns highlight how social agency engenders both uncertainty and responsibility. Communities like the Aguda continue to cherish the complimentary values emanating from the *ode* and the *ona* in the ways that they make claims on the experience of both sides of the diaspora as their own. Cultural analyses of Yoruba intellectual life made by authors like 'Wande Abimbola, Olabiyi Yai, and Margaret Drewal note that the value placed on itinerancy in Yoruba creativity is tied to the idea of individual development (Abimbola 1994:142; Yai 1994:113-144; Drewal 1992:64-65). In the Yoruba's porous aesthetics of public space, like Compound Bamgboshe Ajolojo's Murals, one can see the wish to incorporate and claim distinct individuals as one's own (Drewal 1992:30-33). These productions are created to be seen openly because they mark where individuals are witnessed, *eti*, and to come together as individuals to be a part of each other as a group.

In Havana, Cuba and Lagos, a new set of Afrolatinos emerge from these itinerant historical and cultural contexts. Within the Aguda population, the rhetoric of Yoruba ethnic pride is cultivated from without, that is, in the urban enclaves of Bahia and Havana. That these new sensibilities of Yoruba-centered identity come into Lagos via nineteenth century repatriates layers new meaning onto the concept of the journey / *iranjo*/ *el viaje* (see Verger 1963:113-123). In Lagos, urban aesthetic life reveals successful 'signposts' of these communal and individual journeys, and the claiming of public space.

The Cuban Lodge built by a Cuban-Lucumi repatriate to Lagos, Hilario Campos, marks a place in the road where a successful journey begins, ends, and is re-embarked upon by this community, or *ode* (see Figures 3, and 4). Campos arrived in Lagos in the 1860's from London, but his life began in Havana, Cuba, where he and his sister, Mrs. Serafina Akitoyi, prepared to come to Lagos to re-settle (Mrs. Ola Vincent as quoted in Otero 2002: 294). Other family members included the son of Hilario, patriarch Papae Romao Campos, and grandsons Claudins, Joao, and Felix Campos (Laotan 1943:12). As the names of Hilario Campos' descendents indicate, intermarriage of Brazilian and Cuban Aguda was well under way by the turn of the twentieth century. In fact, Hilario Campos' youngest daughter, Quirina, married into the powerful da Silva clan, making an alliance that spread the Aguda influence over Lagos.

Thus, the outer realms of home or *ode*, is expandable, due to the nature of the emancipated slaves' exile and resettlement in the Americas and Africa as well. Structures like the Cuban Lodge, the Ajolojo Bamgboshe Shrine, and the Holy Cross Cathedral -- (all located in Popo Aguda)-- illustrate the tangible

presence of Brazilian and Cuban spaces of difference and spaces of merging in Lagos. The Aguda is a community that shares a history of enduring and thriving in contested spaces, be it as slaves in Havana or Bahia, or as "newcomers" to Lagos.

'Magical urbanism,' 'casitas,' and the 'intimate city'

Mountain Building
"The mountains have changed to buildings
Is this hallway the inside of a stem
That has a rattling flower for a head,
Immense tree bark with roots made out of
Mailboxes?
In the vertical village moons fly out of
Apartment windows and though what you
See is a modern city
The mountain's guitars pluck inside
It's agriculture taking an elevator
Through urban caves which lead to
Paths underground They say Camuy
To Hutuado[2]
Taíno subground like the IRT in
Constant motion

The streets take walks in your dark eyes
Seashell necklaces make music in the
Origin of silence
What are we stepping on? Pineapple
Fields frozen with snow
Concrete dirt later the rocks of the
Atlantic . . .
(Cruz 2001: 121).

Diasporas as contested domains continue to shape Afrolatino spheres in the "Big City," represented by places like Lagos and New York. The fight over symbolic terrain of the public face is one adopted by many immigrant and exile groups settling in a new territory. In second or third diasporas and relocations Afrolatinos, from Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic, physically shape their new environs into livable habitats. This means re-imagining and building spaces in familiar ways. As the above excerpt from Cruz's poem, "Mountain Building" shows, this kind of transformative work for immigrants is conceptual and physical, cultural and historical.

In *Magical Urbanism*, Mike Davis charts the transformation of U.S. cities into ports of entry for a transnational 'Latino' nation (2000:13-15). These diasporic cities, like Havana and Lagos before them, become mutable and porous as Latinos reinvent cosmopolitanism in literal and symbolic ways. Davis asserts that Latinos in the United States negotiate their new identities in their new homes through economic, transnational, and political forums. 'Magical urbanism,' within the milieu of the United States, becomes a trope that pinpoints the unbounded, conceptual, and shifting nature of the multi-national Latino presence on a city's landscape. The physicality of demarcation of Latino public space in the U.S. is reflected in the flourishing of mural art, bilingual advertisements, and bodegas along city streets.

In speaking about the construction of Nuyorican vernacular bungalows, or casitas, in East Harlem and for the Smithsonian exhibit, "Las Casitas: An Urban Cultural Alternative," Juan Flores highlights the community-centeredness of such structures (Flores 2000: 63). The 'familiar' porches, Caribbean aesthetic of tiled or tin roofs, open salas and meeting spaces that branch out from within, or vice a versa, are all generated from an aesthetic of re-union (Flores 2000:63-64). That is, the focus is bringing people together.

> In this homegrown performance space, the front porch is a stage, or rather a bandshell as the formal and spontaneous dance presentations take place among the public in the yard directly in front of the porch. . . .The front yard, or batey, gradually started filling with people . . .The human atmosphere, despite the forbidding location and the expressed urgency of the occasion, was consistently relaxed, congenial, and respectful. . . .Architectural shape and detail, extemporaneous and crafted décor, spatial arrangement and location conspire to lead the casita and its environs a unifying emblematic weight, to convert the easy ambience of the scene into an occasion of community history (Flores 2000:65 – 67).

'Praise-naming' traditions also occur in the casita gathering that Flores describes. Singers of the Puerto Rican song-style of the *plena* call upon and praise the architects, other musicians, and community leaders present and past (Flores 2000:68). As with Yoruba praise-naming traditions, known as *oriki*, those gathered on the porch of the casita are public allies celebrated for their contributions; thus, ancestors are remembered, and verbal play and boasting of linguistic competency pepper the performance. Flores stresses how song and structure merge in a similar range of the aesthetics of style and performance. The use of nicknames and musical-sounding epitaphs to pun, play, and honor also resonates with Yoruba aesthetics of performance (Drewal 1992: 62-67),

artistic affinities well-rooted in the historical legacy that centers on the presence of African slaves in the Caribbean.

Similarly, the aesthetics of performance and architecture merge as one in the murals painted on the Bamgboshe family house. On it, performance is depicted by the color, size and motion represented in the painted masqueraders on the façade outside of the Ajolojo Egungun House. These Brazilian / Yoruba ancestors are transnationally present in the ancestral *ile* home itself. Similarly, Flores identifies how the performance of the *plena* and the building of the casitas in New York marks a semiotics of domesticity and home that hinges on shared "affinities" between performance and place.

> It seems that this affinity between architectural and musical expression goes back a long way, to the origins of both practices at the beginning of the century [twentieth]. Old photos of Barrio San Antón in the southern coastal city of Ponce, considered the birthplace of the *plena*, show unpaved streets lined with casitas. . . .Despite their conscious adherence to early traditions, both casita and *plena* practice evidence inevitable adjustments in their contemporary New York setting (Flores: 69).

The Aguda's remembering of Bahia in Lagos parallels the Nuyorican memories of the Barrio San Anton. History and home are reconstructed in visual ways that concretize longing for communities in motion. Similar conceptual work is required for imagining the form of domestic space. Thus, Brazilians, Cubans, Nuyoricans, and Agudas share foundational values and preconceptions about the relationship of semi-public living spaces and their community use. Not unlike the original and 'current' focus of Campos' Cuban Lodge, Flores' casita brings people in the Latino neighborhood together within a larger population that is both civically similar and dissimilar. Flores observes that Latino cognitive spaces focus on the expression of difference in ways that are not oppositional [to 'dominant' society]. . . .[The] Latino imaginary, like that of other oppressed groups, harbors the elements of an alternative ethos, an ensemble of cultural values and practices created in its own right and to its own ends." He stresses that Latinos listen to "their own kinds of music, eat their own kinds of food, dream their dreams and snap their photos" as self expression not only in "opposition to the ways 'gringos' do it." (Flores: 200).

Rather, an [Afro]Latino ethos emerges that creates claims to its own space simply by being. The markers of the Lodges' and the Casitas' difference, or of unification, is in their assertion of a Latino/Caribbean aesthetic that itself took its cues from Mediterranean neo-colonial architectural style. Small, single-story bungalows firmly made out of concrete that donned adobe or tin shingled roofs, broad porches, and open salas appeals to both Nuyoricans and Aguda living in their respective cities. They are made less "outsiders" by kitchens that

cook fried plantains, as well as smooth, tiled floors, open windows that hint at vegetation planted by inhabitants to remind them of their islands and barrios left behind in other 'homes.'

The physical markers of this "island - in - the - 'hood" aesthetic speak to the ways that inter -'liminal' yet intra- 'centralized' communities claim intimate, yet public spheres as their own in public spaces. In urban enclaves like Lagos and New York City, the dichotomous language of public and intimate spaces poorly reflects reality. It makes more sense to speak of degrees of separation of spheres of shared experience, especially as these different communities have a great trust and belief in the redeeming quality of family life and shared communal experiences.

Sacred streets, open homes

In *Santería Garments and Altars*, Ysamur Flores-Peña and Robin Evanchuck aptly demonstrate how the semiotics of altar making in Cuban Santeria is both an intimate and public affair (1994). The *oju aiye* or the "face to the world" that makes the Yoruba religious altar laden with symbolic properties, is created simultaneously to shield and draw in different magical elements and people.

The logic of the "altar" brings together those in one's spiritual family and spiritual genealogy, including the beings and spirits represented by the ancestors, or egun. By the same token, it must be potent enough to ward off enemies and unintended energies from its physical space. Thus, altars, sacred spaces, *oju aiyes*, are open sufficiently and public to draw in the vital forces needed to bring communities together.

Altars and sacred objects are densely coded to prevent any misanthropic or misleading beings from trickling into where they do not belong. Afroatlantic spaces, e.g., the "casita" or the "Cuban lodge" work on the conceptual level of belonging and resonate as symbolic markers. As a result, the idea of intimate and public have less to do with physical domains imparted by institutional frameworks and more to do with accessing the knowledge with which to create the ability to read when you are "in" or "out." This is a project that mediates the changing of scapes, urban and rural, inside and outside dwellings, in ways that are collaborative for communities and knowledgeable individuals. This is what Margaret Drewal observed about the practitioner and intellectual Ositola making a "sacred grove at home," an "igbo ile" in his own backyard:

> In Ositola's backyard is a grove made of tin sheeting, an enclosure for the deity Odu . . . a sacred, exclusive space that the diviners constructed themselves. Before the initiates could enter the grove there was a prolonged sequence of actions outside in full view of everyone (Drewal 1992:65).

And, Ositola remarked to Drewal about the *igbodu*:

> If you were to see it [the inside of the grove] you would know it is a strange place. It is not common. It is not the gate to Mecca or the barracks, but to the holy land igbodu. I have my own igbodu. You can prepare your own igbodu at your place as well (as quoted in Drewal 1992:66, emphasis mine).

Ositola affirms the conceptual aspect of boundaries in restricted zones such as *igbodu*. Most important, people can create their own *igbodu* or sacred spaces to use for communal regeneration and remembrance. Flores too notes that there are faces attached to these domesticated public spaces (Flores 64) when he speaks about individuals like Jose Rivera and his brother Ramon, "Papo Chin," the original builders of the Rincón Criollo. It takes "builders" like Ositola, Papae Joao, Hilario Campos, and the Rivera Brothers to design and create the spaces needed by their communities.

"Community-ship" is a concept adapted to Yoruba traditional religion by Joseph Olupona (Olupona 2001:48-49). Originally used by Gerald Lawson to describe quotidian Indian communities, "community-ship" allows for affiliation within particular yet highly heterogeneous populations. Within Yoruba religious communities, Olupona's adaptation of this framework is especially apt. He speaks of Oshogbo, but it might as well be any cosmopolitan center of the Yoruba, like Lagos. The idea is that traditional religion acts as an adhesive for diverse and conflicting communities. Places like the *igbodu*, the casita, or the Santeria Altar reflects the concretization of a space for "community-ship." The existence of these habitats announces that people are here to do their daily living from the most glamorous to the most mundane activities.

As we have seen with Flores' and my own examples of intimate public spaces, these domesticated zones are where people are buried, baptized, gather, feast, dance, argue, fall in love, make music, build, paint, be outside, be inside, be an ancestor, be a god, be themselves--together. In essence, the social value of such places for living cannot be underestimated. In Lagos these negotiations are displayed as tributes to ancestors through murals on the walls of the Bamgboshe Ajolojo Egungun House. In contemporary Nuyorican fiction, Barrios are rebuilt and remembered, as a Latino imaginary built on the diasporic aesthetics from both Caribbean and African shores. The ultimate tribute to urban ancestors in neighborhoods all over America, the mural R.I.P., paints dreams and histories of the Egungun of the barrio. In Quiñonez's *Bodega Dreams*, protagonist Chino envisions this tribute to Young Lord Willie Bodega, and the 'ancestors,' great and small, of Spanish Harlem:

> Alone on the fire escape, I looked out to the neighborhood below. Bodega was right, it was alive. Its music and people had

> taken off their mourning clothes. The neighborhood had turned into a maraca, with men and women transformed into seeds, shaking with love and desire for one another. Children had opened fire hydrants, and danced, laughing and splashing water on themselves. Old men were sitting on milk crates and playing dominoes. Young men left their car doors wide open, stereos playing full blast. Young girls strutted their stuff, shaking it like Jell-O, proud to be voluptuous and not some bony Ford models. Old women gossiped and laughed as they sat on project benches or tenement stoops, where they once played as children with no backyards—yes, they were happy too. Murals had been painted in memory of Bodega. The entire graffiti hall of fame was covered with tributes. Some had him as a Young Lord, . . .Others had painted him among the greats: Zapata, Albizu Campos, Sandino, Martí, and Malcolm, along with a million Adelitas. But they were all saying the same thing: 'Here once walked Bodega; these were the things he left for us' (Quiñonez 2000: 212-213).

Here, like with the Egungun murals of the Ajolojo Compound, community history is a public affair. However, like Quiñonez's community heroes, there is a level of competency needed in terms of information about the community, needed to understand the ways that such places signify what to do and to whom. In this way, the very public tribute may also be privately consumed because their semiotics are locked right into a local understanding of history that is not static as these very walls are re-painted, contested, and reinterpreted.

Finally, Quiñonez's visual images of shared streets echo those of Soyinka's and Okri's. The road again becomes a palette for experiencing a kind of existential and experiential awakening based on witnessing *eti*, one's surroundings. The maracas here recall the *igba* or the gourd of the Yoruba. The use of this allegory reveals how people can merge together in a physical way that semiotically recalls the performance of Afrolatino song and celebration. Again, African and Latino novelists use an aesthetic of family and hope, through the images of children and the busy streets, that prevails in the midst of despair. Like Soyinka, and Okri, Quiñonez paints a street teaming with activity.

Conclusion

Afroatlantic and Afrolatino intra-ethics of gathering have always allowed for a space for virtuosity within the clearly defined values of the "family." In urban scapes, the location of space is contested, congested, and quickly claimed. For Latinos living in America and Afrolatinos living in Africa, individuals and communities work to stay distinct and stay together in public in clearly demarcated ways. The central idea of an intimate public sphere is the

appreciation of the uniqueness of the individual, and his or her talents, in creating the foundation for a cohesive, thriving communal life.

Figure 1 Community Center for the 'Popo Aguda,' the Afrolatino neighborhood in Lagos, Nigeria. Photo taken in Lagos, 2001.

Figure 2 The Bamgbose Martins House, historical site of the Songo Egungun Masquerade brought from Bahia, Brazil to Lagos, Nigeria in the late nineteenth century.

The above mural depicts the Afro-Brazilian and Yoruba ancestors, the egun, of the shrine, 2001.

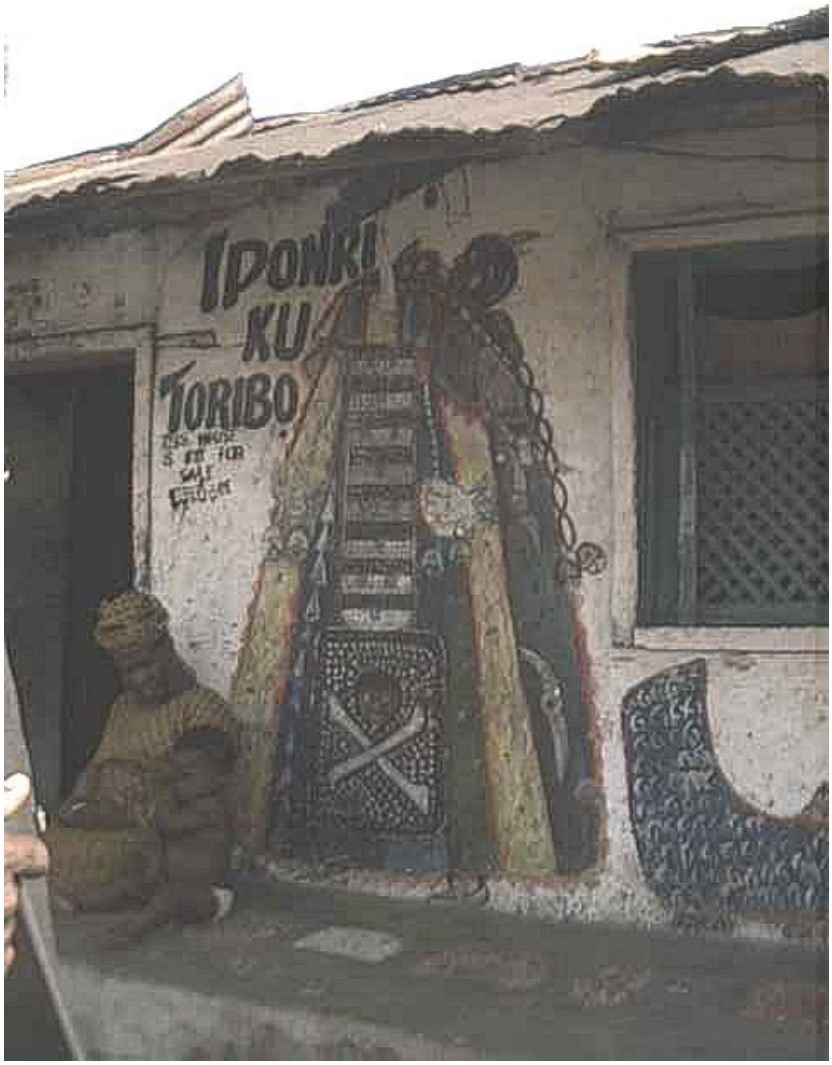

Figure 3 Egungun Shrine in Lagos, Nigeria, 2001. Here, facing Balogun Street, the street façade celebrates the masquerade ancestors of the Bamgboshe family from Bahia, Brazil.

Figure 4 Hilario Campos, Afrolatino repatriate to Lagos. Campos was the founder of the Cuban Lodge and Campos Square in Lagos, Nigeria. Photo taken in late 1890's, courtesy of Mrs. Ola Vincent's personal collection.

Figure 5 (Left to Right) Research Assistant Tope Osho, Solimar Otero and Mrs. Aderemi Gooding-King, Cuban Lodge at Campos Square, Lagos, Nigeria, 2001.

Figure 6 Yoruba-Cuban Mrs. Aderemi Gooding-King (far Left) and Neighbors Inside of the Cuban Lodge, Lagos, Nigeria, 2001.

Figure 7 “Brazilian Mosque” in Lagos built by Yoruba repatriates from the Americas, Nigeria, 2001.

End Notes

1. It is important to note that Okri's main character is an *abiku*, or child with special ties to the spirit world that makes him susceptible to a cycle of consecutive death and reincarnation.
2. Towns on the island of Puerto Rico.

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