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Reading Worlds Seen and Unseen:

The Role of Literacy in Diasporic African Spiritual Traditions in the United States

By

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Reading Worlds Seen and Unseen:

The Role of Literacy in Diasporic African Spiritual Traditions in the United States

By

Tiffany D. Pogue

M.A., Florida International University, 2008

B.A., Fort Valley State University, 2005

Advisor: Maisha T. Winn, Ph.D.

An abstract of

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the

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Abstract

Reading Worlds Seen and Unseen:
The Role of Literacy in Diasporic African Spiritual Traditions in the United States

By Tiffany D. Pogue

Despite literacy scholars' clarion call for moving beyond limited, and limiting, understandings of the literacy construct, contemporary educational research still tends toward studies based on mainstream literacy practices and traditional school settings. Meanwhile, those Black cultural and literacy traditions that (1) lie beyond the typical in-school setting and (2) furthest away from White dominant cultural practices are so severely marginalized in literacy research that educators presently have difficulty locating them in the literature. As a result, one also finds it extremely difficult to locate literature related to the role of literacy in the practices of Diasporic African Spiritual Traditions (DASTs) in the United States. To respond to this gap in educational literature, this dissertation employs the ethnography of communication and New Literacy Studies as twinned theoretical frameworks to answer the following research questions:

1) In what ways has literacy been used in the practice of DASTs in the United States?
2) How do practitioners of DASTs in the US define and understand literacy within the context of these traditions?
3) In what ways might DAST communities constitute African Diaspora Participatory Literacy Communities (ADPLCs) (Fisher, 2003)?

Semi-structured qualitative interviews, general historical methods including archival work, and instrument-based participant observation have been employed to engage these questions and reveal that DAST communities both record and decode information through a variety of forms including color, rhythm, liturgical structure, syllabic text, and material culture in order to transmit ideas about cultural themes and ontology. The strategies for such literacy are by design ambiguous in nature and interpreted only through an informed consideration of context.

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Chapter One
Remembering, Reordering, and Rewriting History

"Because of the experience of diaspora, the fragments that contain the traces of a coherent system of order must be reassembled." (Gates, 1988, p. xxiv).

Despite the legislated denial of elements necessary for rituals and practice and notwithstanding the requirements of a new natural environment, enslaved people in the European's New World were able to preserve, protect, and transmit their spiritual and philosophical knowledge to subsequent generations. Descendants of these enslaved Africans now living throughout the African Diaspora still have access to the traditions and beliefs of their ancestors because of the efforts of enslaved people to endure hundreds of years of political, physical, and social terrorism that sought to strip them of their cultural memories and identities. To honor their work, the names of these ancestors are continually invoked in ritual, their practices are employed in the nourishment and protection of their descendants, and their spiritual traditions themselves stand as monument to them as human beings seeking to live as men and women armed with spiritual agency and commitment. But how were these people able to, despite political and physical oppression, transmit their traditions to subsequent generations for hundreds of years? What educative processes were employed to transmit their knowledge to younger generations? How have differences between and among the descendants been overcome in the maintenance of New World practices? And how were/are the texts related to these strategies recorded? Unfortunately, the answers to these questions remain widely unknown.

Despite the many contributions of enslaved Africans in the West, their spiritual traditions have largely been ignored as sources of educational thought and practice for

contemporary educators. Even less examined are the literacy practices embedded within Diasporic African spiritual traditions (DASTs). One can scarcely find studies that center the intellectual loam provided by these spiritual traditions in major educational research and literacy journals. A search of all articles published in the premiere research journal *American Educational Research Journal* since 1964[1] yields no results for the following keyword combinations: "Literacy and Santeria", "Literacy and Lucumi", Literacy and Lukumi", "Literacy and Voodoo", "Literacy and Vodun", "Literacy and Vodou", "Literacy and Conjure", nor "Literacy and Palo". Similarly, a search of *Written Communication* articles since 1997, *College Composition and Communication* articles since 1950, *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* articles since 1989, the *Journal of Visual Literacy* articles since 2003, and *Written Language and Literacy* articles since 2003 reveal no results for any of these keyword combinations.

Nonetheless, anthropologists (Gomez, 1998; Harding, 2003; Matory, 2005; Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert, 2003;), historians (Anderson, 1988; Diouf, 1998; Hahn, 2003), and religious studies scholars (Frey & Wood; 1998; Raboteau, 1991/2001; 2004; Smith, 1994) have examined DASTs for what they can tell us about the cosmologies of Black people, the botanical prowess of priests and other ritual specialists in the treatment of psycho-, social, spiritual, and physical disorders, and how different ethnic groups made and protected cross-cultural bonds that generated a new Black identity (Levine, 2007). The ability of DAST devotees and ritual specialists to transfer their knowledge and skills to others ensured that their knowledge lasted for generations. But where is the story of their pedagogical efforts in the literature? So far, it is seemingly missing.

[1] The dates included in this description of patterns of publication are based on the issues of journals available digitally. I assert that contemporary researchers are most likely to refer to articles readily accessible and more current.

Purpose of the Study

In response, this study explores the existing relationships between literacy and DASTs in the United States in order to examine the ways in which DAST devotees have worked with literacy to reclaim, restore, and recreate the spiritual traditions of their ancestors while transmitting that knowledge to subsequent generations. This study might be considered a work of postcolonial memory. It is an exploration of the culture of those once oppressed physically, mentally, and spiritually. Further, it is a deliberate reclaiming of that which has been ignored and isolated from mainstream academic scholarly publication. It is intended to spurn dialogue among those who would see themselves in these pages and those who would argue that such an endeavor is either unnecessary or far beyond its usefulness. This study is about situating the truth of the common folk into a narrative about the literacy traditions of Blacks in the United States in such a way that commonly held beliefs about Black (il)literacies are challenged; It is aimed towards extending existing understandings of Black literacy and its role in Black folks' negotiation of power. Because it undertakes the study of lived religion, it is concerned with the "negotiations of power and identity in ordinary life" (Griffith & Savage, 2006, p. xvi) as well as how devotees have worked to shape their participation in the world.

This study, in its design and its intent, remains an effort for the people, by a person belonging to the people, to offer some glimpse into the ways Black people in the U.S. have used literacy to maintain their humanities in whatever ways they could. As such, I have designed the study to privilege the educational philosophies and practices employed to do so.

This dissertation strives to expand existing notions of Black literacy and to center the DAST practices that make use of them and is not meant to be an extensive documentation of the rituals and practices of DASTs in the United States. Specifically, the work contends with the following research questions:

1) In what ways has literacy been used in the practice of DASTs in the United States?
2) How do practitioners of DASTs in the US define and understand literacy within the context of these traditions?
3) In what ways might DAST communities constitute African Diaspora Participatory Literacy Communities (Fisher, 2003)?

Significance of the Study

Findings generated by this study contribute to a growing body of literature that seeks to expand existing notions of literacy. The findings suggest alternative ways of thinking about the pedagogical philosophies and practices embedded within Black spiritual traditions. In addition to these research-related contributions, the study also has the potential to inform current classroom practice by describing pedagogical techniques and strategies employed for hundreds of years that heretofore have been previously unexamined-- strategies that have served to transmit tremendously large bodies of information within multiethnic and multi-racial communities. Teachers in a contemporary classroom where similar conditions of marginalization, economic and social oppression, and intergroup tensions could very well benefit from knowledge of DAST pedagogies and practices.

93 Brian Street (1993) lamented that literacy acquisition research often fails to
94 consider how people think about literacy and also fails in its consideration of how people
95 apply their literacies in everyday life. The present research not only explores how DAST
96 devotees articulate their understandings of literacy, but also how literacy is
97 operationalized in their day-to-day practices. Specifically, findings indicate that while
98 DAST practitioners view their practices as predominately oral, when pushed to consider
99 their specific traditions they find that written literacies are also crucial in DAST work.
100 What was uncovered, as a result of this research, is an interesting mix of written and oral
101 strategies that forms the foundation of DAST literacy.

102 Street (2005) also argues that some literacy research fails to offer implications for
103 practical school implementation. When Street (1997) offered a checklist for how New
104 Literacy Studies (NLS) research could be interpreted for application in practice, his
105 fourth requirement stated:

106 In order to develop rich and complex curricula and assessments for literacy, we
107 need models of literacy and of pedagogy that capture the richness and complexity
108 of actual literacy practice. (p. 53)

109 In exploring the literacy practices of spiritual devotees, this study reveals the DAST
110 model of literacy and pedagogy. In so doing, this work offers information that can be
111 used to inform curricula and pedagogical approaches to literacy instruction.

112 Consequently, this study reveals specific pedagogical practices that can be used
113 in contemporary classrooms. For example, the practice of *slow absorption* in which
114 students are slowly exposed to increasing degrees of information based on their
115 knowledge, can readily be applied by teachers of contemporary students.

116 More than providing information on the DAST balance of written and oral
117 strategies in literacy practice, this study also addresses the growing diversity in U.S.
118 public school classrooms. Specifically, as the world and our classrooms become
119 increasingly more diverse (Castells, 2001; Jewitt, 2008), the communication practices
120 employed by students in schools also grows in diversity (Luke & Carrington, 2002). In
121 fact, the diversity in schools contributes to a complex sociocultural context that must be
122 considered in literacy instruction. Teachers, required to address a population of students
123 from different indigenous languages, varying cultural worldviews, and ethnic
124 backgrounds must find ways to offer lessons that are culturally relevant and authentic for
125 a number of different students. Because of the unique history of DASTs in the United
126 States, devotees have also had to provide culturally-relevant instruction and training for
127 people from various ethnic, racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. This study
128 explicates the philosophies and strategies that they have employed in an effort to offer
129 them for possible application in classrooms.
130 In addition, while scholars' interest increases in exploring the impact of different
131 semiotic and sign systems in classroom communication (Marquez et al., 2005; Prain &
132 Waldrup, 2006; Scott & Jewitt, 2003), this study contributes by offering information on
133 DAST sign systems. Specifically DAST literacies reveal a longstanding, complex use of
134 material culture, songs, and other sign referents to communicate history, norms and
135 mores, and other cultural information. Through an understanding of how these signs are
136 interpreted by DAST devotees—through specific ritual and community contexts--
137 educators may gain a deeper understanding of the importance of the community in their
138 students' learning processes. Moreover, as scholars' present attention increases in focus

139 on students' multimodal and digital literacies (Black, 2007; Buckingham, 2007; Domico,
140 2006; Siegal, 2006), an exploration of DAST literacy practice reveals the ways in which
141 multiple, and multimodal, literacies are employed by diverse communities in ways that
142 can bridge racial and ethnic differences to unite a population through a shared
143 communicative practice.

144 **Theoretical Frameworks**

145 This study is informed by twinned[2] theoretical frameworks: the ethnography of
146 communication and New Literacy Studies. The twinning of these two distinct theories
147 has allowed me to tease out those components of each that lend themselves most
148 appropriately to responding to the above research questions. This section will provide a
149 description of each theory and conclude with an explanation of how they, together, form
150 the lens for this study.

151 In the 1960s and the 1970s scholars—especially linguists and anthropologists--
152 interested in the ways in which culture affected the schooling experience of children of
153 color began to conduct studies that moved beyond the prevailing notions of cultural
154 deficiency to an interrogation of language and literacy in schools (Hull & Schultz, 2001).
155 In an effort to understand the patterns of success and failures of students from
156 marginalized groups, scholars like Hymes (1964) began to call for a study of language
157 and its use in the description of various cultures. In an address at the American
158 Anthropology Association, Hymes introduced what he described as the "ethnography of
159 communication" approach that could be used to compare patterns of communicative
160 practice, including literacy, between and among various communities. Particularly

[2] Twinning is a concept introduced by VèVè A. Clark (2009) that describes the manner in which two texts are juxtaposed in an effort to deepen one's understandings of each.

161 important to Hymes, was that the community itself—and its communicative habits as a
162 whole-- be privileged in the work of anthropologists and linguists.

163 In 1965, the US Office of Education, responding to constituent pressures,
164 sponsored empirical research in an effort to determine why public schools appeared to be
165 failing poor and minority children. The research identified a disconnect between
166 students' home languages and the language valued by the schools themselves (Cazden,
167 1981). Years later, Heath's (1983) seminal ethnography *Ways With Words* intimated that
168 educators did not know enough about the literacy practices of specific groups. Likewise,
169 Hymes (1981) and a team of researchers working with classroom teachers determined
170 that there needed to be more research attention given to the investigations of students'
171 homes and communities. The influence of Hymes, Heath, and others (see for example
172 Cochran-Smith, 1986; Gilmore & Glatthorn, 1982;) gave rise to other projects designed
173 to document the forms and functions of literacy in various communities (Fishman, 1988;
174 Jacobs & Jordan, 1993; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988).

175 The ethnography of communication contributed by Hymes (1964) and informed
176 by these other scholars is concerned with three major themes: (1) the socially situated
177 meanings given to words and other communicative devices in a particular community; (2)
178 the comparison of various means of communication within a community; and (3) "the
179 way verbal and nonverbal signs create and reveal social codes of identity, relationships,
180 emotions, place, and communication itself" (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 2). According to
181 Hymes, the ethnography of communication approach consisted of four basic units: the
182 communication act, the communication event, the communication situation, and the
183 speech community. Consideration is given to not only the means of communication, but

184 also the setting, the participants, the norms involved, and the instrument of
185 communication itself.

186 The ethnography of communication's consideration of the broad range of
187 communicative practices utilized in a particular group allows me to consider the means of
188 communication that might otherwise by overlooked including, but not limited to,
189 elements of material culture, social hierarchy, and liturgical structure. The ethnography
190 of communication also privileges the consideration of the role of language in learning
191 (Hull & Schultz, 2001). Despite the appropriateness of the ethnography of
192 communication as a theoretical frame, it can be strengthened by coupling it with New
193 Literacy Studies as an accompanying frame of reference.

194 Hull and Schultz (2001) describe New Literacy Studies (NLS) as an intersection
195 between sociolinguistic and anthropological theories of language and schooling and
196 discourse analytic methodologies. Like sociolinguistics and ethnography of
197 communication, NLS emphasizes the study of literacy in out-of-school contexts. It
198 privileges the consideration of cultural context in analyses of communicative practices.
199 However, it differs from sociolinguistics by also seeking to interrogate the relationship(s)
200 between local cultural institutions and practices and a broader political network and
201 structure. Whereas the ethnography of communication can be used to compare the
202 practices of various communities, NLS also provides the added layer of structural
203 analysis of power and its structure that contextualize communication.

204 Parts of the ethnography of communication theory—namely, its privileging of
205 verbal and nonverbal social codes and signs and its attention to community as setting--
206 allowed me to examine the (un)written texts that revealed themselves during the study.

207 Concurrently, NLS enabled me to also consider the macrosystems affecting the DASTs
208 themselves. Taken together, the ethnography of communication and NLS have allowed
209 me to see what is often unseen and to do so with a nuanced understanding of the ways the
210 communities themselves define and practice literacy within the contexts of their
211 traditions.

212 **Organization of the Study**

213 I have organized the study as follows in able to elucidate the relationship between
214 literacy and DASTs. Chapter Two has a doubled role. First, it tells the story of Diasporic
215 African spiritual traditions in the United States. Next, I juxtapose this history with what
216 we know about the development of Black literacy in the United States. The chapter
217 reveals a general exclusion of DAST communities from the dominant narrative revolving
218 around Black literacy and its practices in the United States. The chapter concludes by
219 offering a rationale for the entire study. I use Chapter Three to describe the qualitative
220 research methods employed to collect and analyze the data that inform the other chapters
221 of this study. Participants and their levels of initiation and participation in DASTs are
222 also described in the third chapter. Chapter Four is offered to complicate existing
223 understandings of literacy in Black settings. Specifically, I have found that the written,
224 while critical in the practice of DASTs in the United States, is still very much dependent
225 upon "the oral." In short, much of what is written in DASTs can be understood as
226 "speakerly texts" (Gates, 1988) that are described in greater detail in Chapter Four. Data
227 presented in Chapter Five create a more tangible explanation of how literacy is practiced
228 in DAST ritual settings. Turner's concept of ritual symbols is invoked as I offer
229 examples of entextualized messages I observed in contemporary and historical DAST

230 ritual settings. I compare Fisher's (2003) study of African Diaspora Participatory
231 Literacy Communities (ADPLCs) with my DAST data in Chapter Six. I discuss the
232 striking comparisons between the types of ADPLCs with an explanation of my completed
233 analysis. I also provide an extended discussion of the role of Spirit in the DAST
234 communities I explored. Within Chapter Six, I describe the specific pedagogical
235 philosophies and practices of DAST devotees and offer suggestions of how they may be
236 useful in contemporary U.S. classrooms. Chapter Seven concludes this study by offering
237 a critical discussion of the findings and offers my ideas about the next steps needed to
238 further the research trajectory extending from these particular research questions.
239 I have approached my research questions specifically, and the exploration of
240 DASTs generally, from a very personal position. As such, Chapter Two includes an
241 explanation of my particular researcher stance. While the stance granted me a certain
242 amount of access into DAST communities, it also raised a number of issues—both
243 negative and positive—that are far too extensive to address in a methodology chapter.
244 Because I believe my position and the experiences I encountered are critical lenses
245 through which I viewed and understood the data, I have chosen to include details of these
246 experiences, and what I learned as a result of them, in the Notes on Methodology (see
247 Appendix C). I intend for this additional chapter to be read in its entirety so that my
248 positionality and its effects on this study are made transparent.
249

250 # Chapter Two

251 ## Literature Review: Establishing the Context of Literacy and DASTs in the United
252 ## States

253 *The spiritual is an aesthetic of resistance, the most consistent and concentrated in world*
254 *history.*
255 *~Ngugi wa Thiong'o*
256

257 When enslaved Africans arrived in the West, they brought with them cultural
258 memories of their people's indigenous thoughts, rituals, and practices. Despite attempts
259 to eradicate all evidence of their African-ness, these people fought to maintain ties to
260 their past and their humanity (Ani, 2004). In this chapter, I will review literature that
261 describes the spiritual traditions of these New World Africans and the nature of their
262 practices. Secondly, I will review literature on the development of Black literacy in the
263 United States. Through the juxtaposition of these two review strands, I present an
264 argument regarding a critical need to address a more nuanced understanding of Black
265 literacy in the US. Further, I hope to demonstrate the potential of this study to address
266 educational issues facing children of African descent in the United States.

267 Articles, books, and chapters reviewed for these purposes were chosen through
268 key word searches related to African spirituality and education and African spirituality
269 and literacy. The specific names of spiritual traditions, including Vodun and Lukumi, for
270 example, were used in these searches. When texts were identified as relevant to DAST
271 practice and education and/or literacy, I consulted their bibliographies and works cited to
272 identify other possible texts for review. Additionally, I petitioned the guidance of several
273 research participants in identifying texts essential to understanding DASTs.

274

275 **Living Traditions that Refuse to Die**

276 By some estimates, roughly ten million Africans were forcibly removed from
277 their ancestral homelands to become chattel property in the Europeans' New World from
278 the 15th-19th centuries (Curtin, 1969). Plagued by death, disease, and acts of terrorism,
279 enslaved Africans shielded their most personal and powerful possessions-- their gods--
280 against the onslaught of forced cultural amnesia and forgetfulness. Whether through
281 folktales and stories or through song and ritual, these Diasporic people embarked on a
282 journey to (re)write themselves and their stories into history. As a result of their efforts,
283 evidence of African cultural tradition and practice in the United States is still evident
284 (Lefever, 1996; Matory, 2005; Murphy, 1994).
285 John Mbiti (1969/2008) has called Africans "notoriously religious" (p. 1). In fact,
286 African spiritual traditions so permeate all aspects of life that they are seldom
287 recognizable outside of the context of day-to-day existence. The philosophies
288 undergirding these traditions in the Old World were transported to the New World by
289 Africans accustomed to living in accordance with the ways of their people. Mbiti asserts
290 that there would have been no such thing as an "irreligious person" in traditional Africa;
291 as such, one could assume that there would have been no enslaved person brought to the
292 West unaware of the spiritual religious traditions and practices of his/her people.
293 Indeed, the vast number of contemporary Diasporic Africans living and practicing
294 the spiritual traditions of their ancestors supports Mbiti's assertion. These traditions are
295 now individually called by names such as Lukumí, Umbanda, Palo, Santería, Voodoo,
296 Vodun, Hoodoo, and conjure among others. Together, these spiritual traditions are
297 evidence of cultural carryovers and crossovers as various ethnic groups like the Fon,

298 Ewe, and Yorùbá were forced to establish new ties and communities to support the
299 people (Bastide, 1978/2007; Matory, 2005; Olmos-Paravisini-Gebert, 2000). J. Lorand
300 Matory (2005) terms the traditions collectively as “Black Atlantic Religions” and Joseph
301 Murphy (1994) calls them “Diasporan Religions”. For the purposes of this study, I have
302 termed the traditions Diasporic African Spiritual Traditions (DASTs) to (1) elevate the
303 African systems that inform the structural base for New World iterations and (2) to
304 acknowledge the permeation of “religion” in the lives of most DAST devotees. However
305 one may wish to designate DASTs, they are confirmation that enslaved Africans
306 possessed cultural memory from which they established and transformed their lives in the
307 West.

308 DASTs, like the Old World traditions before them, are dynamic and inclusive
309 systems that are embedded with rituals and ceremonies that hold the history and
310 philosophies of the people (Mbiti, 1969/2008). But how are/were these histories written?
311 In what ways does the literacy of them inform contemporary understandings of Black
312 literacy in the United States? Is it possible that by studying the counterstories created by
313 DAST devotees educators might find an even greater understanding of critical literacy in
314 Black communities?

315 **Holy Counterstories in (un)Written Text**

316 DASTs now practiced in the U.S. are most appropriately understood within the
317 context of resistance. In Lefever’s (1996) article on Santeria in the United States, the
318 author reported that:

319 in both the colonial and postcolonial worlds, slaves and their descendants
320 were/are faced with the problem of coming to terms with the fact that they

321 were/are existing in social, economic, and political worlds in which the
322 mechanisms of power and control were/are beyond their reach and which
323 were/are used directly or indirectly against them. (p. 324)

324 Lefever's point is especially true in the United States context. Already plagued by racial
325 and linguistic discrimination, Africans and their descendants in the U.S. have long been
326 confronted by a Judeo-Christian context that seeks to vilify African spiritual practices.
327 As such, DAST devotees have learned to cloak many of their beliefs in seemingly benign
328 ways. Elekes, or the beads of a devotee, were almost always worn under clothes and
329 conjure (wo)men marked their homes not with signs announcing their services, but with
330 iron vessels that only other believers would recognize (Gundaker, 1998). Their world
331 was one in which they were other-ed not only for their skin color and language but also
332 for their spiritual beliefs. In turn, they responded by cleverly writing (of) themselves in
333 secret. The cloaking practices they employed were acts of resistance to avoid the white
334 gaze and are also acts of literacy heretofore unimagined in Western literacy scholarship.

335 Lefever (1996) contends that Santeria devotees are agents involved in "rewriting
336 and revising of their personal and social 'texts' using their own principles of
337 interpretation, while, at the same time, challenging the hermeneutics of their oppressors"
338 (p. 324). The literature suggests that this was also the case for other DAST devotees
339 (Smith, 1994). Lefever believed that along with Santeria devotees, others "involved in
340 the [B]lack tradition" were involved in a sort of double-voicedness (Gates, 1988) that was
341 the result of a "'textual' revision, or revision of the biographies, the histories, and the
342 social contexts of the people who adhered to its beliefs and practices" (p. 319). Although
343 Lefever problematically contends that Santeria is not African, his work supports my

position that Diasporic African traditions do hold important information that requires a nuanced consideration of the many ways people understand themselves as they write themselves into history because traditions that can operate under such conditions are transmitted to others using complex educative strategies.

Education, Literacy, and DASTs

One of the most explicit studies of the relationship between DASTs and education is Claudine Michel's (1996) "Of Worlds Seen and Unseen: The Educational Character of Haitian Vodou[3]." In it, Michel explores the practices and worldview of Haitian Vodou in an effort to examine the intergenerational transmission it supports. What she found was that Vodou provides an opportunity for organization, resistance, and community revitalization for its practitioners. One factor affecting the educational impact of Vodou, according to Michel, is that it is not limited to a single setting. Rituals, ceremonies, and other events may take place in a practitioner's home, cemeteries, crossroads, or at other places with spiritual significance.

The tradition itself is all encompassing and is not bound to a prescriptive code. Vodou permeates all areas of human life. The setting for its education then, is as fluid and dynamic as the practice itself. Therefore, the needs of the community and of the specific ritual being performed are of extreme importance to the communicative act. Perhaps it is the nature of this fluidity that explains why there are no established texts or "doctrinal curricula" used in the education of practitioners.

[3] In honor of Michel's groundbreaking research, I have chosen to name this study similarly.

While the fluid and dynamic nature of Vodun education is similar to that of Cuban Santeria and Lukumí[4], the latter does have some texts that while not "standard" are indeed part of the usual training of younger practitioners. Dianteill & Swearingen (2003) found that Lydia Carbrera—famous for her anthropological work in Cuba—actually relied on preexisting written texts prepared by ritual specialists in Cuba. Ironically, Cabrera's texts, using information found in the original Cuban creations, have been re-embraced by Santeria and Lukumí communities as part of a body of knowledge commonly employed by practitioners. For example, Cabrera's *El Monte*, a text that like Brandon's (1991) examination of plant use in two DAST traditions, is frequently suggested to those interested in learning more about the DASTs.[5]

Cabrera's work mentions other written sources used by her study participants in their own DAST practice and says "Unfortunately, the oral tradition is disappearing and it is worth transcribing on paper the teachings of the elders for the one who will want to learn, and for rash people who are preyed upon charlatans and exploiters who ask them for fantastic amounts of money in order to initiation them, usually unnecessarily" (Cabrera, in Dianteill & Swearingen, p. 275). But other evidence contradicts Cabrera's sentiment that the oral tradition in DASTs is disappearing. Michel (1996) learned that one way that education is assessed by elders in Vodou is through verbal exchange. In Santeria/Lukumí, like Vodou, orality plays an essential role in the maintenance and practice of the traditions. For example, the ritual order of the deities, known as òrìşà, is kept constant in a way that represents the role, seniority, and expertise of the deity

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[4] Cosmologically, Lukumí and Santeria are virtually indistinguishable. In some communities, the terms are used interchangeably. However, those using the name Santeria, more often than those using the term Lucumí, incorporate the images and practices of Catholicism in their traditions.

[5] *El Monte* describes the use of plants in both the òrìşà traditions and Palo.

385 invoked. John Mason (1992) describes the liturgical structure of drummed rituals as
386 laying out a narrative—usually historical—in a specific sequence and serving as a
387 mnemonic device to aid practitioners in the remembrance of important historical events.
388 Orality, then, can never be completely lost if the traditions are to maintain themselves
389 historically. As such, orality continues to be of critical importance in the maintenance,
390 preservation, and practice of DASTs, and is as integral to the practice of DASTs as are
391 the use of written materials.

392 Brandon's (1991) ethnographic fieldwork in New York and New Jersey from
393 1979 to 1981 found that the usual means of traditional pedagogy among Santeria
394 practitioners tended to be performed orally, but he also found that notebooks were kept as
395 study aids by ritual specialists and general practitioners. Cabrera's work on Cuban
396 DASTs depended upon the notebooks of practitioners that she had copied while on the
397 island before her exile (Dianteill and Swearingen, 2003). In turn, her text *El Monte*, has
398 been embraced in Cuba and represents a reappropriation "by practitioners as a source of
399 religious information" (Dianteill & Swearingen, 2003, p. 274). Not only does this
400 reappropriation demonstrate the flexibility of DAST communicative practice, it also
401 demonstrates that DAST practitioners are literate participants actively and directly
402 involved in how their practices are recorded and transmitted.

403 The notebooks kept by devotees are valuable, living documents within DASTs. It
404 is not unusual for these notebooks—sometimes called *libretas*—to contain personal
405 information and beliefs alongside those more communal beliefs and practices.
406 Practitioners' notebooks hold particular significance in the preservation of DASTs
407 because they have been known to pass to subsequent generations upon a practitioner's

death (Wirtz, 2007). Ritual specialists may record general notes about a particular Odu[6] but may also contain their own personal insights and experiences relevant to their practices within a notebook. The notebooks used in the practice of DASTs have been described by León (1971) as "written oral tradition" that records that which would normally be transmitted orally. They are similar, then, to what have come to be called "speakerly texts" in literary criticism. Gates (1988) has defined speakerly texts as those texts "whose literary strategy is designed to represent an oral literary tradition (p. 181). In other words, speakerly texts in general, and *libretas* specifically, provide snapshots into the orally encoded information practitioners have chosen to record. It should therefore be noted that the dichotomy between the oral and written literacy modes employed within the practice of DASTs is largely imagined as both serve to support the other in the maintenance and preservation of the DASTs themselves.

Wirtz's (2007) ethnographic study conducted in Cuba from 1998 to 2002 explored language learning and socialization within Lukumí communities. Wirtz compared the spoken (and later textualized) forms of Lukumí against its Yorùbá counterparts and found that over time, Cubans were able to preserve some of the original African tongue of òrìşà reverence through an oral tradition. However, Wirtz also found that when textually encoded the two versions (the Lukumí and the Yorùbá) held identifiable orthographical difference. According to the researcher, the preservation of the original tongue was deliberately performed even as the language's ritual use began to change and lose detail relative to its original form. As a result, the knowledge of the traditions were primarily maintained in the practitioner's contemporary everyday language, Spanish, even as Lukumí was seen to preserve the ritual efficacy of the original

[6] An Odu is a chapter in the Yoruba sacred text, *Odu Ifa*.

431 form. Further, Wirtz found that practitioners sometimes recorded extensive Lukumí
432 vocabulary lists within their notebooks. In at least two cases Wirtz was able to review
433 the written notes of practitioners who explained how the lists were used and how
434 particular words appeared in ritual practice. She explains that her "formal study of
435 Lucumí with santeros illustrated to [her] the degree to which santeros rely on written
436 materials to learn and remember Lucumí" (p. 115). The bilingual practice of
437 practitioners described by Wirtz surely might inform the ways in which educators
438 perform and understand multilingual education, but again, the research is found in an
439 ethnography journal not geared towards educators or educational researchers. So though
440 Wirtz's (2003) research contains a great deal of information about how and why bilingual
441 pedagogy can be used to simultaneously sustain a culture of origin and adapt to a culture
442 of necessity, it currently lies beyond the normal purview of educational theorists and
443 policy makers including supporters of multicultural education and ethnic studies.

444 Wirtz found that at least some of her research participants felt the need to
445 surreptitiously record information in notebooks. In one case, a participant was
446 reprimanded for showing Wirtz his *libreta*. This kind of secrecy may not be as much
447 about the act of encoding information so much as it is to protect the kinds of information
448 recorded. It may also reflect the belief that practitioners should acquire information
449 about the traditions through activity rather than reading. Michael Mason (2002) found
450 that ritual elders tended to privilege bodily praxis over exegesis instruction. In this way,
451 the performance of some rituals serve as a embodied literacy transmitting information in
452 and about the traditions.

453 In addition to notebooks and embodied literacy, the divination process of some
454 DASTs results in an explicitly written description of the petitioner's concerns and/or
455 requests, the date of the divination session, the name of the petitioner, and specific
456 messages appropriate to the individual. The description would also contain prescriptions
457 to be performed by the petitioner or by the diviner (also sometimes referred to as the
458 reader) on behalf of the petitioner (Wirtz, 2007; Murphy, 1993). Love (2006; 2008)
459 suggests that the divination process is akin to reading one's Self and allows petitioners to
460 read the self—that is to undertake an act of self assessment and reflection. Despite the
461 important attention Love gives to the reading of the self as part of the divination process,
462 her texts are limited by her own assumption that "only the 'thick description' of an astute
463 ethnographer, a participant observer in *Orisha* ceremony, might give ear to [a voice
464 unheard by others]" (Love, 2006, p. 125). Love is centering herself in the ritual process,
465 as researcher, and contends that she as the ethnographer is critical to at least part of the
466 transmission of cultural memory through ritual prayer, song, and ceremony. Love skews
467 the divination process and suggests that the presence of an ethnographer is what allows
468 for a different "interpretive 'reading' of a cultural text…" (p. 125). But are these rituals
469 not (more) complete when outsiders are absent? One must wonder how Love's emphasis
470 on the role of the researcher in the completedness of rituals for òrìṣà communities shapes
471 her own interpretations of the data provided to her by participants. Despite Love's
472 overemphasis on the role of the outsider, her work is important because it is begins to
473 shift the researcher gaze from Caribbean sites of DAST practice to the United States
474 context. Her study and others are useful for considering how DASTs operate in another
475 geographic region of the African world.

476 Christopher Wilkinson's (1994) examination of New Orleans jazz musicians finds
477 a West African pedagogical influence affecting how musicians come to acquire their
478 skills. Identifying New Orleans' jazz pedagogies as distinctly African, Wilkinson finds
479 that these pedagogies share conceptual approaches with West African educational
480 strategies. One of the major strategies identified by the scholar is that of *slow absorption*
481 rather than formal teaching. During *slow absorption*, youth are continuously exposed to
482 music and increase their capacity for performance with age. It was through their repeated
483 embodied performance, similar to the idea espoused by Mason's (2002) research, that
484 young practitioners acquired knowledge about their traditions through embodied literacy.
485 What is most interesting about Wilkinson's work, is that it does not privilege the
486 formalized practice of DASTs; rather, it situates jazz pedagogy within an African cultural
487 continuum that may be embraced and preserved without a given name. In other words,
488 some DAST work may not specifically be designated by a particular term like Santeria,
489 Lukumí, or Vodou. Hans Baer's (1982) systematic typology of Black "folk healers" can
490 be used to illustrate this point. Baer was interested in examining the diversity of
491 ethnomedicine among Blacks in the US. What he identified was a four prong typology of
492 kinds of Black healers. According to Baer's research, Blacks in the US applied terms
493 including "conjure", "hoodoo," and "rootwork" to an incredibly dynamic set of beliefs in
494 magic, divination, and herbal medicines.
495 Setting his work apart from others examining these African-influenced traditions
496 in the US including, but not limited to, Hyatt (1970), Puckett (1936), and Hurston (1931),
497 Baer set out to differentiate between the kinds of folk healers he encountered. Despite his
498 efforts, Baer's admits that "a totally comprehensive typology of black folk healers" could

499 not be developed until more ethnographic information was gathered. And though he
500 sought to make distinctions between types of folk healers, his understanding of the
501 functions of these ritual specialists appears inappropriate. He says, “the most important
502 functions of the traditional conjurer are to cure persons who have been “conjured,”
503 “fixed,’ ‘crossed,’ or ‘hexed’ and to place a direct spell or counterspell upon clients’
504 enemies” (Hans Baer, 1982, p. 333). However, the accounts about conjure given by
505 others (Creel & Creel, 1988; Hurston, 1931; Puckett, 1936; Smith, 1994), suggests that
506 the strategies employed by ritual specialists were most often used to create balance in the
507 petitioner’s environment and to attack whatever obstruction to that balance that was
508 found. The distinction is subtle but important. Hans Baer’s perception places an
509 emphasis on confrontation; in reality, the emphasis is on balance.

510 To achieve balance, conjurers/root doctors/hoodoo people relied upon a number
511 of strategies including a significant, and complex, notion of literacy. In many cases,
512 these ritual specialists were like their other DAST counterparts in keeping written records
513 of various divination sessions and prescriptions offered to their clients. In some cases,
514 the Bible itself served as tool for these workers. Grey Gundaker’s (1998) work on
515 African Diaspora literacies elucidates this strategy. According to her, the Bible, and other
516 texts, serve as an alternative kind of literacy in which the written is not valued for its pure
517 merit, but as a kind of talisman itself. Theophus Smith’s (1994) work on conjure
518 similarly identifies the Bible as a tool employed by conjure workers both for its content
519 including stories of triumph over enslavement and oppression, but also as a source of
520 passages that could be invoked by petitioners for protection and/or power.

521 Other explicit use of textual encoding is evidenced in Hurston's (1931) popularly
522 referred to work on hoodoo. Her discussion of prescriptions given to clients includes
523 several that require a name or a phrase to be written a specified number of times.
524 Unfortunately, because Hurston's focus is on hoodoo, it does not reveal similarities or
525 differences between these southern Black performances of literacy and those
526 performances of other African Diaspora groups. For example, how does the use of
527 literacy in hoodoo converge or diverge with the practices of Vodun practitioners she had
528 also studied? One is left to wonder.

529 The literature reviewed evidence explicit pedagogical philosophies, beliefs, and
530 practices embedded within a number of DAST traditions including conjure,
531 Santeria/Lukumí, and Vodou. However, the deep knowledge embedded in DAST
532 methods of reading and writing reality are routinely overlooked in literacy research and
533 in many cases the generative interpretive practices that have been employed in the
534 context of Black cultural traditions continue to lie beyond the gaze of educators even
535 though a precedent for this kind of research has already been set.

536 Consider Geneva Smitherman's *Talkin' and Testifyin'* published in 1985. In the
537 seminal work, Smitherman challenges ideas that suggest that Black English is merely
538 incorrect American English. Instead, she asserts that Black English is born from
539 Diasporic Africans' purposeful adaptation of West African rhetorical structures and to the
540 horrific oppressions they faced in the U.S. context. Smitherman contends that Black
541 English is adaptive and flexible-- accounting for its ability to communicate complex
542 thoughts in as few words as possible—in part because those people responsible for
543 creating it had a need to also be flexible and adaptive. The resulting efficient

544 communication is marked by the language's inherent elasticity accounting for the
545 meanings of words changing as a product of use and context. For example the word
546 "bad" can be used as a negative adjective in "standard" English, but in Black English
547 may also be used with positive connotations as in "that is a bad (meaning nice) car."
548 Such flexibility also accounts for the ability of Black English to communicate ideas on
549 multiple layers based on the linguistic fluency of the listeners.

550 Black language is a carrier of culture through which African cosmological and
551 ontological concepts including ideas surrounding time, interconnectedness, and the power
552 of sound (nommo) are transmitted intergenerationally throughout a community despite
553 oppressive conditions (Smitherman, 1985). The ability to respond to external and
554 internal power dynamics with desired fluidity and multivocality is evidence of how U.S.
555 Blacks have used and (re)created their language as a tool through which discipline, verbal
556 fluency, and culture is negotiated and managed. As Ani (2004) articulates, Blacks
557 "create and change [their] language according to the needs and circumstances of the
558 Black ethos". She suggests that Blacks have had to learn the language of the dominant
559 group as a tool of survival in a "literate white dominant culture" but have been able to
560 "make up words" "use them out of ordinary context and place them in new ones" (p. 41).
561 In so doing, generating a new reality.

562 Unfortunately, as Elizabeth McHenry (2007) laments, a "singular identification
563 of African American culture as 'oral in nature' has helped to marginalize what is known
564 about other language uses—especially those related to reading and writing" (p. 5).
565 According to her, there is a problematic tendency among literacy scholars studying Black
566 culture to center orality in ways that cause many Black readers to be forgotten. The

567 above discussion of communicative fluidity demonstrates how the privileging almost
568 eliminates literacy from the center of discussion. But not because Blacks do not perform
569 literacy.

570 **Black Literacy in the United Sates: A Review of the Literature**

571 Black people in the US value literacy. For many, literacy has been viewed as
572 inherently linked to emancipation and freedom. For others, it has been a tool that
573 guaranteed one's ability to sustain one's self economically. Sometimes learning in
574 secret—sometimes in private, and frequently under the risk of punishment,
575 dismemberment, and death, Blacks in early U.S. history aligned literacy with their ability
576 to assert themselves and their humanity during the period of chattel slavery. Once their
577 resistance and moral arguments threatened the plantation way of life, emancipation
578 allowed them the opportunity to move their literacy learning above ground and Blacks
579 created their own schools—some of which they populated and taught themselves
580 (Williams, 2005). During the period of Reconstruction, Black people relied on literacy to
581 negotiate working arrangements and contracts with landowners to ensure their right to
582 work and to be fairly compensated (Hahn, 2003). Black churches, even before the Civil
583 War and definitely after, sponsored literacy instruction and served as community centers
584 where needs of Black life could be met (Raboteau, 2004). Literary societies flourished as
585 Blacks sought to create for themselves and their people a new life in a New World
586 (McHenry, 2007). And although the prevailing narrative on Black literacy makes denial
587 of literacy and a few instances where this denial was overcome apparent, it continues to
588 marginalize the role of literacy in common Black folks' ability to negotiate their
589 spirituality in these conditions.

590 Violet Harris' (1992) work on Black conceptions of literacy suggests that for
591 almost all Blacks in the US, literacy has been viewed as synonymous with education and
592 schooling. According to Harris, literacy exists as far "more than the ability to read and
593 write at some specified grade level, but rather as an indication of the efforts of a
594 marginalized group that attempted to participate in all cultural institutions through the
595 attainment of literacy" (p. 278). In her study, she found that most scholars writing about
596 Black literacy between the 18th century and 1992, focused on broad issues of access and
597 philosophy rather than solely on specific teaching strategies. Harris argues that educators
598 seeing to help Black students must begin to acquire knowledge of the development of
599 Black literacy.

600 Although Harris' work provides a comprehensive review of what the author
601 suggests is the "historical development of literacy among African Americans", her review
602 remains firmly grounded in a textual notion of literacy. Further, the author fails to
603 consider literacy developments that occur in, and around, DAST practice partially
604 because much of the work she reviews is linked to formal education. Literacy
605 archeologist Elizabeth McHenry (1999) applauds new directions in the study of reading
606 and readers, but also argues for a need to "decenter" formal education as the primary
607 focus.

608 Currently, literacy scholars are beginning to move in this direction as more out-
609 of-school settings are being explored (Dyson, 2003; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Fisher, 2003;
610 Majiri, 2004). Fisher (2003) notes the importance of out-of-school settings as alternative
611 knowledge spaces where learning is authentic and intergenerational. She, and others,
612 have demonstrated the critical nature of such spaces. Perhaps one of earlier important

613 works in the study of out-of-school literacies is Heath's *Ways with Words* in which the
614 scholar examines the difference in two rural communities' literacy practices.

615 Relying on field notes as well implementing and testing curricula led Heath to
616 conclude that the cultural differences between communities were as different from one
617 another as the words they used when in their own communities. While mainstream
618 communication styles were valued in schools Heath's work demonstrated that Black
619 communities deliberately socialized children to communication according to their
620 cultural ideals. Making use of ethnography of communication as both conceptual
621 framework and methodological approach allowed Heath to determine the importance of
622 communities in literacy acquisition and practice by examining both in-school and out-of-
623 school settings.

624 Growing out of a tradition established by Heath and others, Fisher's (2003) work
625 on open mic events and literacy elucidates the means by which out-of-school settings
626 serve as fertile ground for examining multiple literacies. During her study, Fisher finds
627 that open mic settings may be best understood as ADPLCs—African Diasporic
628 Participatory Literacy Communities. She defines ADPLCs as groups "made up
629 predominately of people of African descent who participate in literacy or literary-events
630 outside of traditional school and work settings" (p. 363).

631 Literacy, as a "linguistic thinking process" (Belt-Beyan, 2004) can be mined for
632 potentially powerful pedagogical philosophy and clues for how reality transformation
633 occurs as a result of power, agency, and necessity. This study addresses the gaps
634 between the two bodies of existing literature reviewed above to begin to do just that.
635

636 **Chapter Three**

637 **Methods: Towards a Holistic Collection and Analysis of Data**

638 *How do you raise buried memory from the grave when the means of raising it are*
639 *themselves buried in the grave or suffocated to the level of whispering ghosts?*
640 *~Ngugi wa Thiongo*
641
642 To elucidate the relationship between literacy and Diasporic African Spiritual
643 Traditions (DASTs) in the United States, I conducted semi-structured qualitative
644 interviews, general historical method including archival work, and instrument-based
645 participant observation. Within this section, I will describe my research setting, my study
646 participants, and the data sources mined by the selected methods. I will also describe the
647 ways in which the methods were chosen to answer the following research questions:

648 1. In what ways has Literacy been used in the practice of Diasporic African
649 Spiritual Traditions in the United States?
650 2. How do practitioners of these traditions define and understand literacy within the
651 context of these traditions?
652 3. In what ways might these practitioners constitute an African Diaspora
653 Participatory Learning Communities (ADPLC) (Fisher, 2003)?

654 **Definition of Key Term: Literacy**

655 I have aimed for this study to generate a definition of literacy based on both what
656 DAST devotees say that literacy is and an examination of how they perform their
657 literacies. For that reason, I embarked on a grounded theory approach (Patton, 2002) that
658 resulted in a more nuanced understanding of literacy which I describe in Chapter Seven.
659 I did, however, approach the study with a particular definition of literacy as a guiding
660 principle.

661 Freire and Macedo (1987) articulated that "reading does not consist merely of
662 decoding the written word or language, it is preceded by and intertwined with knowledge
663 of the world" (p. 29). Further, the two suggested that it is critical that literacy not be
664 limited to the "treatment of letters and words." Perry (2003) contends that literacy is
665 "enmeshed in beliefs and values" and that "cultures differ in what they believe constitutes
666 texts and literate behaviors as well as the values they attribute to such texts and
667 behaviors" (p. 59). Indeed, literacy is culturally defined (Ferdman, 1990; Gee, 2001).
668 Prior to the study I agreed with these sentiments and did not believe that literacy
669 consisted of a universally defined set of skills. The data collected support this stance but
670 did challenge my initial assumptions regarding the kinds of literacy I would encounter. I
671 have found that communities establish, disseminate, and operate with their own
672 definitions and understandings of the construct, even when their language surrounding
673 the construct remains similar.

674 Because the language employed by DASTs devotees was important to the scope
675 of this study I have chosen to use their terms when and where appropriate. To ensure
676 clarity within the text, I have chosen to define words related to DASTs when they are
677 used within the text itself. However, readers may choose to refer to Appendix B for a
678 glossary of DAST-related terms.

679 **Setting and Scope of the Study**

680 I have examined data collected in the United States. As demonstrated in the
681 literature review, there is an apparent lack of scholarly attention exploring the
682 relationships between education and DASTs outside of the Caribbean and South
683 America. Therefore, the U.S. exists as a currently underutilized setting from which one

684 can explore the practices and communities of DAST devotees and the education and
685 literacy practices employed by them. I believe that by centering this study in the U.S., I
686 was able to provide heretofore unconsidered information in the treatment of literacy
687 research and the treatment of DAST populations. My study participants were located in
688 Philadelphia, Atlanta, Miami, and New York with the majority residing in Atlanta. I
689 intentionally sought devotees in different cities to obtain data from sources unrelated to
690 one another but quickly found that many houses were interrelated and most participants
691 knew of one another or of their houses of affiliation. It should be noted, that because
692 most DAST work does not depend on a fixed worship or religious setting, the actual
693 location of rituals, ceremonies, and other events moves as dictated by the context for the
694 DAST work. I discuss this fluidity in greater detail in Chapter Five. The setting
695 therefore enabled me to explore out-of-school literacies in accordance with NLS and
696 ethnography of communication influences.

697 **Participants**

698 The participants selected to inform this study consisted of a judgment sample
699 (Marshall, 1996) chosen in two ways. First, I identified three key informants—heretofore
700 referred to as the elder council, chosen for their experience, initiation level, and
701 knowledge of the Òrìṣà and other DAST communities. Second, through the
702 recommendations of this elder council, eleven participants, including the members of the
703 council, were selected to be interviewed. The choice to use eleven participants was based
704 on Creswell's (1998) suggestion that for phenomenological studies, a sample size
705 between five and twenty-five participants is sufficient. The phenomenological
706 perspective, as described by Welman and Kruger (1999), allowed me to understand a

707 phenomenon—in this case the relationship between literacy and DASTs—from the
708 perspective of the people involved in them. In some cases, recruitment letters were
709 emailed to potential study participants. In others, I initiated introductory phone calls to
710 invite study participation. In others, members of the elder council made introductions. In
711 all cases, once participants agreed, they were asked to sign a statement of consent. When
712 distance required that I interviewed participants over the telephone, statements of consent
713 were electronically signed via the Survey Monkey website.

714 Members of the recruited sample were purposely chosen from the pool identified
715 by the key informants in an effort to replicate the various levels of involvement possible
716 within DASTs including conjure (wo)men, aleyos, aborishas, paleros, and initiated
717 priests. The purpose of this judgment sampling technique, also called purposeful
718 sampling, was to generate information-rich cases and to elicit information from
719 participants based on their special experience (Merriam, 1998). There were seven
720 initiated priests—two of whom were also paleros, one aleyo, one aborisha, and two
721 conjure (wo)men that participated in this study. I interviewed six people who had
722 participated in at least two different DASTs, eight of the participants were currently
723 involved in Òrìṣà communities, one was currently involved in an Akan community but
724 had formerly been involved in Òrìṣà communities, and one described her DAST work as
725 without name. There were two male participants and nine female participants. All
726 participants identified themselves as African descendants. Five participants were also
727 members of the Caribbean Diaspora. A table outlining this information is found below.
728
729

730 *Table 2*. Study Participants

Name	Self-Identified Tradition(s)	Initiation Level
Yaba Blay	Lukumí, Akan	Aleyo
Georgene Bess Montgomery	Ifa	Iyalòrìşà
Chief Tifase	Yorùbá	Iyanifa
Oshunfunmi	Lukumí	Iyalòrìşà
Omi Saide	Lukumí	Iyalòrìşà
Jasmine Devereaux	Akan, Vodun, Kemetic	N/A
Natasha Oliver	Lukumí /Vodun/Akan	Aleyo
Donna Aza Weir-Soley	N/A	N/A
Baba Sinque	Lukumí	Oba
Mama Faye	Lukumí/ Palo	Iyalòrìşà, Palera
Baba Funmi	Palo/ Lukumí	Babalòrìşà, Palero

731

732 **Data Collection**

733 This study was designed to address the research questions in four stages. The
734 design also included methods employed to generate a historical context within which the
735 data collected during the four stages were considered. Stage one of the study involved
736 working with the elder council to (a) identify other potential study participants; (b)
737 achieve access to rituals and other gatherings for observations; and (c) to maintain
738 credibility within the òrìşà community. Stage two of the study consisted of ethnographic
739 field observations during which I was able to observe two rituals, one ceremony, one
740 divination session, and one celebration. I also attended one class held by an initiated
741 priest for her godchildren. All events were open to my current initiation level--aborisha.

742 The third stage of the study was performed at the same time as stage two and
743 consisted of two in-depth interviews with eleven members of the study population.
744 During the data collection phase of this study, nine of the participants sat for two 30-
745 minute interviews. One couple was interviewed together and one participant sat for one
746 57-minute interview. I provided each interviewee a transcript of their first round
747 interview before a second, follow-up interview was conducted with the exception of the
748 57-minute interviewee who received her transcript and then answered outstanding
749 questions in a follow-up telephone call. During the second interviews, study participants
750 were given the opportunity to negate, clarify, and/or expand their previous answers. One
751 participant declined to review her transcripts. In her words, "this is what I do and I want
752 my words to be my words. What I said is what I said" (interview, Yaba Blay). For other
753 participants, questions posed during the second round of interviews were generated from
754 ethnographic observations (Street & Heath, 2008) of DAST practice, review of the
755 archival materials, and through dialogue between the participant and myself during the
756 course of the initial interview. The aim of each of these interviews was to identify the
757 ways in which participants described and practiced literacy within the context of their
758 spiritual traditions. In other words, questions were designed to uncover the ways in
759 which literacy is explicitly articulated and implicitly operationalized by these people.
760 ***Instrumentation.*** During each of the preceding stages, I employed an observation
761 checklist to address the third guiding question of this study: In what ways might these
762 practitioners constitute African Diaspora Participatory Learning Communities (ADPLC)
763 (Fisher, 2003)? I created The ADPLC-DAST Observation Form or "AADF" for this
764 purpose (see Appendix B). The checklist, based on Fisher's (2003) definition of

765 ADPLCs, was used to examine all individual interview transcripts, documents, field
766 notes, and archival materials. The instrument was designed to collect evidence of
767 demonstrated literacy practices equivalent to the characteristics of ADPLCs described by
768 Fisher. On each form, I recorded data by checking the yes/comment or the no/comment
769 column. Additional notes were taken to provide thick description (Geertz, 1973) of the
770 event and/or materials reviewed. An analysis of the AADF-generated data enabled me to
771 determine whether the characteristics of DASTs met the requirements to be described as
772 ADPLCs.

773 **Data Analysis**

774 Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed by me. The transcripts were
775 shared with study participants to ensure data quality and to provide an opportunity for
776 participants to negate, expand, or clarify their responses. Notes collected during the
777 participants' review were used to generate research memos that were then attached to the
778 original transcripts. The resulting transcriptions and memos were read first for initial
779 coding during which statements of relevance to the research questions were identified. A
780 second reading of transcripts was used to perform secondary coding to identify any
781 segments of interest. I approached this second level of reading as an opportunity to code
782 "from the ground up." Third level coding was used to identify and note emergent
783 patterns. Finally, a fourth level of coding was used to garner inferential codes from
784 which the findings of this study were generated. MAXQDA software was used to record
785 transcripts and for data coding and analysis.

786

787

Historical Context

In addition to the data collection and analysis procedures described above, I found it necessary to include a historical context through which the data could be better understood. Specifically, I explored the historical DAST practices of individuals in the U.S. (1) to determine the role of literacy in their practices and (2) to identify patterns of practice continuity that exist between these historical populations and their contemporary counterparts. This historical work informed the ways in which I approached the contemporary data and the framework through which it was considered. To do so, I turned to three important historical records: Zora Neale Hurston's work on hoodoo, and the Mamie Wade Avant and Reed Family collections housed at Emory University.

Zora Neale Hurston's "Hoodoo in America" was written and published in a 1931 issue of the *Journal of American Folklore*. Hurston's research of hoodoo led her to interview a number of practitioners in the U.S. South. Covering land between New Orleans, Louisiana, Florida, and Alabama, Hurston describes a number of conjure strategies and associated stories used by hoodoo and root practitioners. I was able to glean data from this important text by exporting the article into MAXQDA software and then coding it in the same manner as the interview transcripts and field notes. This allowed me to identify parallels and divergences between historical literacy practices and those performed by contemporary DAST devotees.

To add an additional layer of historical context, I consulted Emory University's Manuscript and Rare Book Library (MARBL) holdings for Mamie Wade Avant and The Reed family. These two collections contain evidence of non-Christian spiritual work performed by Mamie Wade Avant and John Reed. I photographed, and archived with

811 MAXQDA software, prescriptions written by the individuals for their clients. Archival
812 analysis worksheets were used to generate descriptions of the items in the collection and
813 photographic documentation as collected with archival approval. The data provided by
814 accessing these historical records were used to illuminate the data gathered from
815 contemporary populations and allowed me to identify patterns of practice that evidence
816 continuity in literacy tradition between and across temporal limitations.

817 **Validity and Reliability**

818 Data analysis was undertaken with an effort towards data crystallization. Unlike
819 triangulation (Denzen, 1978; Flick, 1998; Patton, 2002) as means of method combination
820 and cross-data validity check, crystallization was used to test for consistency within the
821 data by employing multiple methods in the study's design. Concisely, crystallization
822 enabled me, as the researcher, to account for the changing nature of my assumptions and
823 the dynamic world in which I performed this study (Richardson, 2000). By applying use
824 of the AADF to interview transcripts, field notes, and the historical record, I was able to
825 identify parallels and divergences within the data. Additionally, the number of sources
826 and methods I used allowed for a greater body of data from which I was able to draw
827 inferences.

828 Generally, reliability is understood to be the extent to which research findings can
829 be replicated. However, eliability for qualitative studies is more concerned with the
830 consistency between the data and the results than with replication of the study.
831 Accordingly, crystallization and peer-checked coding have been utilized in an effort to
832 maintain consistency between the available data and my findings (Merriam, 2009). Also,
833 to further strengthen my reliability, I reviewed the findings with the elder council to

ensure, through our conversations and transcriptions of these conversations, that the findings matched the data from which I had drawn.

Positionality. I consider my personal relationships with several differing kinds of DAST practices to be a particular strength in regards to the proposed study. First, I am the granddaughter of a conjure man. Second, I am also the daughter of a Baptist minister. Finally, I maintain my own introductory initiations[7] within the Lucumí tradition of North America. My intimate relationships with the DASTs examined during the course of the study permitted me some degree of insider access that might not have otherwise been granted to researchers. I also believe that my non-professional relationships with the three key informants helped me maintain a stance of respectability in the communities I studied. Participants seemed to be rather trusting of my role as a researcher that also had a vested commitment to the communities I sought to study and to serve.

As described, the study was designed to address the research questions, provide a historical context for the framing of the answers to the questions, and to allow for participant involvement and feedback of data analysis. It should also be noted that during the process of the study, I regarded the actual drafting of the completed paper as an additional method—one of inquiry. Using the writing process as a method is described by Laurel Richardson (2001) as a grounds upon which one can understand "how a knowledge system disciplines itself and its members, its methods for claiming authority over both the subject matter and its members" (p. 525). It also helped me engage in an ethical ethnography whereby the language used to communicate findings was critically

[7] I am an aborisha. Though not an initiated priest in the Lucumí tradition, an aborisha is one who has received one or more òrìşàs. Additionally, I have received my elekes, a symbol of the protection of the òrìşà over a particular individual. Prior to these initiations, I have studied the faith as an aleyo (an uninitiated outsider) for over twelve years.

855 approached in order to replace the illusion of objectivity with a very real presentation of
856 the Self and its relation to the subject. Figure 1 illustrates, at a glance, the sampling
857 technique used to determine study participants and Table 1 summarizes the basic design
858 of the study including the data sources and the methods used to mine them. Taken
859 together, this varied methodological approach ensured that patterns and information
860 regarding the relationship(s) between literacy and DASTs could more intimately be
861 known.

862 *Table 2.* Data Sources and Methdology

Research Question	Data Source	Methodology
1. In what ways has Literacy been used in the practice of African-Derived Religious Traditions in the United States?	a) Zora Neale Hurston's record of Marie Leveau's prescriptions for her clients b) Mamie Wade Avant Collection c) Ritual Specialists d) Rituals/ Ceremonies/ Events	a) Content analysis; close reading; historical method b) Document Analysis; historical method c) Interviews d) Participant Observation
2. How do practitioners of these traditions define and understand literacy within the context of these traditions?	a) Participants b) Zora Neale Hurston's record of Marie Leveau's prescriptions for her clients c) Mamie Wade Avant Collection d) Rituals/Ceremonies/ Events	a) Semi-structured interviews b) Content analysis; close reading; historical method c) Content analysis; close reading; historical method d) Participant Observation
3. In what ways might these practitioners constitute an African Diaspora Participatory Learning Community (Fisher, 2003)?	a) Interview and Focus group transcripts b) Notes from close readings and document analyses	a & b) Observation checklist developed from Fisher's (2003) notion of African Diaspora Participatory Learning Communities

863

864 **Chapter Four**

865 **Did You Read What She Said? Orality, Literacy, and Embodied Texts**

866

867 Many African cosmologies share the fundamental idea of complementary
868 opposites (Ani, 2004; Jahn, 1988; Mason, 1985; Mbiti, 1969/2008; Smith, 1994). These
869 polarities are binary partnerships that allow each construct to be known more fully. For
870 example, there can be no concept of cold without the complementary concept of hot. The
871 understanding, and interpretation, of each construct is completely and totally necessitated
872 by an understanding of the other. Seemingly contradictory concepts, in fact, are balanced
873 when in their most desirable states. According to Mason (1985), in Yorùbá thought God
874 itself is "a combination of opposites" (p. 5) and the very nature of the spiritual tradition is
875 one based on the idea of complementary polarities. In the West, some people are
876 conditioned to privilege an "either/or" understanding of these pairs even though the
877 ideology of "both/and" still exists in many U.S. African Diasporic communities.
878 Theophus Smith (1994) explains the New World iteration of complementary polarities
879 philosophy thusly:

880 > The wisdom tradition of black North American folk culture dissents from the
881 > predominant Western form of disjunctive thinking—that conventional "either/or"
882 > in which rationalism insists on unambiguous, univocal meanings of things.
883 > Instead this tradition prefers the conjunctive "both/and" of archaic and oral
884 > cultures, in which ambiguity and multivocality are taken for granted (even
885 > promoted). (p. 143)

886 Smith further argues that in Western thinking, a cultural privileging between the two
887 constructs occurs and provides the following examples: “one/many, same/other,
888 truth/error, presence/absence, good/evil, male/female, white/black and so on…”(p.143).
889 Unfortunately and ironically, Smith’s important argument is plagued by his participation
890 in dichotomous thinking. He mentions that the conjunctive tendency is a marker of “oral
891 cultures.” His assumption is that the holistic thinking he describes is indicative of an
892 “archaic” culture that privileges orality. But how is an understanding of complementary
893 polarities reframed if one considers dichotomous relationships such as the oral/literate
894 dynamic in a more conjunctive fashion? In the following chapter, I suggest that in order
895 to fully understand DASTs and their relationship to literacy, one must first move away
896 from disjunctive thinking that isolates orality from literacy
897 In my conversations with DAST devotees, I found that both orality and other
898 forms of literacy were essential to their practice. Whether through the reading of colors,
899 patterns, energy, shells, Odu, or body movements, devotees are able to negotiate both
900 spiritual and physical realms in order to understand and to manipulate their environments.
901 Consider what Dr. Yaba Blay told me about how she recognizes the different kinds of
902 DAST communities in her area:
903 There are people whose ides are yellow and green and you know that means that
904 their babalawo is Cuban or Spanish speaking. In NY, they use the language of
905 Spanish. So he can be Cuban, he can be Puerto Rican, he can be anything, but
906 he's Spanish speaking. Right? And then you have people whose ideas are green
907 and purple or green and brown which means that their babalawo is "African" and

908 I think that means that they were trained in Nigeria. But I could be wrong. So
909 just even knowing that, I see them differently.

910 Dr. Blay's description of this kind of (un)written literacy was echoed throughout the
911 course of the study and may be the kind of literacy one would normally expect to find in
912 these seemingly oral traditions. After all, the reading of text is not centered in the
913 communicative act even if it is indeed an act of deciphering the coded colors. I
914 encountered many other acts of the (un)written during the course of data collection.

915 I observed one Lukumí/Santeria[8] birthday celebration. In both Santeria and
916 Lukumí the anniversary of one's initiation into the priesthood, or making ocha, is
917 ceremoniously celebrated. Members of the community come to pay homage to the òrìşà
918 that was crowned into a devotee. In this case, the celebrant was celebrating twenty-eight
919 years of Yemonja—an òrìşà of motherhood and salt water. As I entered the home, I was
920 welcomed by the smells of Cuban food, the sounds of Spanish and English, and laughter.
921 From a small radio on the kitchen counter music was playing as devotees—mostly
922 dressed in all white—moved from room to room. Whenever someone new would enter
923 the home, the same thing occurred. In ritual settings such as this, devotees are expected
924 to greet one another in order of initiation age. For example, as a young abòrìşà, I was to
925 greet every priest in attendance from the oldest to the youngest beginning first with the
926 òrìşà herself.

927 I approached Yemonja's vessel which had been lavishly decorated for the
928 occasion. Covered in blue, silver, and white fabrics, the ceramic pot looked otherworldly

[8] While I make a distinction between Santeria and Lukumí elsewhere, the circumstances of this particular celebration demonstrate how there is extreme overlap between the two. The person whose òrìşà birthday was being celebrated is a Santera. She uses Catholic prayers and images of Catholic saints in her practice. However, the priest—the celebrant's goddaughter-- with whom I had attended the event, uses no Catholic imagery with her own godchildren. The celebration attracted both devotees of Santeria and Lukumí alike. The structure of the celebration differs little in either tradition.

929 and served as a point through which communication between a devotee and the divine is
930 possible. In front of her and the other decorated òrìşà, I laid down first on my left hip and
931 then on my right while praying to her for the continued protection of her children—
932 particularly my godmother and the celebrant—my "abuela." As was the case with other
933 devotees, the style in which I saluted the òrìşà evidenced to those present that I was a
934 child of a female òrìşà. (Those with male òrìşà salute face down, lying flat on the floor
935 with arms tucked to their sides). This is an example of what I call embodied literacy.
936 The body itself, and its gestures, become part of a symbolic message read by literates in
937 the near vicinity.

938 After my prayer, the celebrant "lifted me." In the Lukumí language[9], she greeted
939 me and blessed my head òrìşà, Ọsùn. After this, I was expected to salute my godparents
940 in the tradition—those most responsible for my spiritual growth and development. I
941 saluted my "madrina" in the same way that I had Yemonja. She lifted me again in
942 Lukumí by blessing Ọsùn—my head òrìşà-- and I answered "Bendicion, Madrina"
943 hugging her left shoulder to left and right shoulder to right before she answered, "Santo,
944 Baby." As I moved towards my godfather, a babalawo, I bent over and touched my right
945 hand to the floor and in Lukumí said: "Aboru, Aboye, Aboshishe." Padrino, my
946 godfather, rose from his chair, touched my shoulders, and hugged me tightly.

947 Having fulfilled my obligations to my direct lineage, it was time to salute the
948 other priests in the house. Because protocol requires that priests are saluted according to
949 their ritual age, it becomes quite a circus as young aleyos, abòrìşà, and unfamiliar priests

[9] Lukumí has become a ritual language among Santeria and Lukumí practitioners. Primarily based on the original Yorùbá tongue, Lukumí is a mixture of Spanish and Yorùbá. Over the hundreds of years of its use, some words have lost their specific meaning and the language itself is rarely spoken outside of spiritual settings.

950 attempt to "figure out" who goes next. If one is lucky, their godparent will steer them
951 around the room. If one is not so lucky, it can become difficult to discreetly read ides,
952 parrot feathers[10], and the dobales of more senior priests to figure out the represented
953 seniority in the room. I asked one participant how she overcame this kind of difficulty:

954 Me: Ok. Dobale. When you enter a ritual space, because this is a dilemma that I
955 often have and I want to know how someone else deals with it, when you're in a
956 space you're usually with someone from your house, usually a godparent, but let's
957 say they leave the room, how do you know who to salute first?

958 Her: (Laughs) I just don't salute. I know who I know and I make sure to salute
959 them. And then often times, what's interesting, is that it depends on the
960 relationship. Our house is… there are so many points of connection… so they
961 know Mommy [redacted] is my godmother we'll all know Mama [redacted], I
962 play it safe and make sure I salute Mama [redacted]--I call her our god-
963 grandmother--I salute her mother, I salute my godmother, and people that I'm
964 familiar with. Other than that, I don't break my neck to salute unless somebody
965 says "that's mama so and so" or "that's baba so and so; make sure you salute." But
966 if somebody doesn't let me know the significance of a person, I don't. I just keep
967 it simple.

968 Her answer demonstrates the importance of saluting in reinforcing existing social
969 relationships. How one chooses to respect their lineage and the order and seniority
970 within that lineage is extremely important. While some priests that may be new to the
971 community or otherwise unfamiliar to devotees might not be saluted, those with

[10] Only priests wear a red parrot feather in these settings. Because not all priests may choose to wear them, one must also look for other unwritten texts to determine if one is an initiate.

972 respected standing will. And all of this can be noted by an observer familiar with this
973 type of embodied literacy. The text of saluting one's elders reads as a lesson in age
974 hierarchy and in community closeness.

975 Abuela's ocha birthday celebration also included a drumming for Yemonja.
976 Before singing, devotees watched as the drummers played directly to the òrìşà. Ani
977 (2004) says that the role of the drummer is to communicate the universal life force to
978 those around him. Even though Yemonja was the òrìşà being celebrated, all drummings
979 begin with the òrìşà that is responsible for opening paths—Èşù. John Mason (1992) has
980 described the liturgical structure of drummed rituals as laying out a narrative—usually
981 historical—in a specific sequence and serving as a mnemonic device to aid practitioners
982 in the remembrance of important historical events. In all cases, Èşù must first grant entry
983 to other spiritual entities. If he is not properly venerated, the bembe, or drumming, will
984 likely be ignored by other divinities. For this purpose the drummers' rhythm started with
985 a song to Èşù.

986 In 2011, I attended a drumming where the ritual order of òrìşà rhythms was
987 ignored. Some of the drummers were not directly involved in DASTs and simply saw
988 themselves as musicians, not devotees responsible for abiding by ritual order. In
989 response to their failure to follow spiritual protocol, an attending devotee became
990 possessed by the òrìşà Yemonja. She first greeted the person financially (and spiritually)
991 responsible for the occasion before turning her motherly, but stern, attention to the
992 drummers. She told them that there was an order to things and that man could not exist
993 without order. She explained that she was not (yet) angry, but that protocol had to be
994 followed. From this, and other experiences in the tradition, I have learned that everything

995 is done according to a ritual purpose. What can be observed can be understood as a text,
996 recording and communicating the same things that have been done for hundreds of
997 years—and in the same order.

998 How things are worn, how people and divinities are greeted, and in which order
999 they appear, communicate specific ideas to the literate audience. In the case of
1000 drumming, Èṣù has to open the portal for other divinities who then come in order of
1001 seniority. To violate this order is to disrespect the divinities and the African concept of
1002 age protocol. In fact, among Yorùbá—for example—the young are responsible for
1003 respecting those that are older than them. In the Odu Oyekun Meji, it is said "A child is
1004 not tall enough to stretch his hand and reach the high shelf. An adult's hands cannot
1005 enter the mouth of a gourd. The work an adult asks a child to do, do not let him refuse to
1006 do." Here, the sacred text of the Yorùbá explains that while the younger person is
1007 responsible for deferring to elders, elders are responsible for working with young people.
1008 Individually, neither is able to access the contents of the gourd. The child is too short to
1009 reach the shelf and the elder's hand is too large to enter the gourd to remove the contents.
1010 However, together the two are able to accomplish that which they could not do alone.

1011 What I observed during the ocha birthday was evidence of spiritual hegemony
1012 that supports the Yorùbá cultural understandings of how age is venerated. Younger
1013 devotees are expected to defer—marked by their ritual dobales—to their elders. The
1014 elders, in turn, are expected to "lift" the younger devotees as marked by their ritual
1015 blessings. By maintaining spiritual protocols related to saluting and drumming, DAST
1016 devotees are in fact maintaining Yorùbá cultural understandings. Practitioners learning
1017 the proper spiritual protocols for ceremonious events such as those described, are

1018 learning African, in this case Yorùbá, cultural traditions--all without the need for written
1019 text, or so it might seem.

1020 DASTs are oral traditions; but to understand them as only that is to ignore the
1021 complex relationship that exists between the oral and the written. Again, if one considers
1022 literacy and orality as complementary polarities, one can note just how strong the
1023 relationship between them truly is. My findings support this relationship as I encountered
1024 evidence of textual literacies as critical components of DAST practice. The written
1025 literacies I uncovered can be best understood as speakerly texts (Gates, 1988). According
1026 to Gates, speakerly texts are those that are designed to mediate between the oral and the
1027 written. They represent the lyrical construction of Black speech but also apply some
1028 principles of written "standard" English. In the case of the DASTs I explored, speakerly
1029 texts are those texts that record segments of information that might otherwise be spoken.
1030 In many cases, they document actual conversations. Consider what Dr. Bess
1031 Montgomery told me when I asked her if she took notes during divination sessions:

1032 Oh yea! Absolutely. I take notes, yes. If somebody is giving me a reading? Oh
1033 yea, I want to write it down because what they say don't always manifest right
1034 then and there. Like what I said, I had my reading from Oshunkunle--like in
1035 1992, and I still remember. It still resonates with me and this has been 20 years
1036 ago, so they become richer. It's like reading a novel. You go back through it two
1037 or three times...you go back 10 years later and you've got a whole 'nother reading
1038 of that text. And that's the same thing that happens. That's another way that
1039 literacy is used. They do tell you to write those down. And I know that Baba
1040 Tosu when he gives readings, he's constantly flipping through a book that has his

1041 writing in it--stuff that he's written--I don't know what they are. I've never looked
1042 at them. When Houngan Paline does his reading he uses playing cards and
1043 however it is that he is reading them is an act of literacy. And he encourages you
1044 to also then write down--because not only are you being told what's going on,
1045 you're also being told what it is you need to do...how it is that you need to do
1046 it....you need to write those things down so that you can do it correctly and you
1047 can do it right. But also there are things that you don't know what it means that's
1048 made manifest, made clear, to you later when you go back to read it. So
1049 constantly you'll want to go back to read those. So yes, yes, yes.

1050 In her response, Dr. Bess Montgomery has explained how the notes from the divination
1051 sessions are recordings of that which has been spoken so that she can refer to the
1052 conversation years later. Oshunfunmi also indicated that she had notes that were
1053 approximately forty years old that she referred to. The written, in the case of these notes,
1054 does not stand apart from the oral. The written simply complements the oral. Neither is
1055 privileged as both are essential to the devotee's ability to continually return to the
1056 information uncovered during the session.

1057 As elder ritual specialists teach novices about their traditions, they also tend to
1058 combine written and oral strategies to do so. One participant described her own learning
1059 experiences thusly: "You learn and you teach as you go and a lot of that is through
1060 observation. And a lot of it is from instruction. Because there is no manual. There is
1061 more written stuff on the tradition now than there has ever been but at that time there was
1062 almost nothing and whatever it was it was written in Spanish. And most of us are not

1063 fluent in Spanish" (personal interview). However, she uses the relatively new written
1064 materials when teaching her own godchildren:

1065 …it's that one-on-one [instruction]-- not referring you to a book and read this
1066 verse necessarily. Don't go reading this verse in the Bible and just pray but I'm
1067 going to tell you to pray and to put yourself in it but again it comes with a lot of
1068 one-on-one understanding what it is that is being said to you and being able to
1069 utilize that information but the other side of the one-on-one is that I gave her
1070 some written stuff as well that I said 'I need you to do. I need you to look at this.
1071 Some of this I need you to read until you almost have it memorized. If you're not
1072 going to memorize it, it's okay but you have to read it and keep reading it so you
1073 can feed your psyche or your subconscious mind.' And with that, she had great
1074 success. ... So, like I said before it was a combination. One would have not been
1075 sufficient. The one-on-one wouldn't have been sufficient. The written instruction
1076 would not have been sufficient by itself. (personal interview)

1077 In other words, when working with godchildren, this ritual specialist has found that it is
1078 through a deliberate strategy that includes balancing one-on-one instruction, including
1079 oral teachings and modeled behavior, combined with written materials that ensures the
1080 successful transmission of cultural values, ideas, and practices to younger devotees.

1081 Another way these instructions and values are transmitted, in the case of the
1082 Lukumí tradition is through the use of the *Ita*. Considered one of the most important
1083 divination readings of a devotee's life, the *Ita* is performed during a priest's initiation
1084 ritual. During the divination, the orisa come to "speak" and offer prescriptions for the
1085 life of the newly initiated. As the divination is performed, some trusted member of the

1086 community writes the instructions in a composition book.[11] It is customary in some
1087 houses for the original *Ita* to remain in the godparent's home until the time of his/her
1088 death before being transferred to the godchild. A copy of the book is given to the initiate
1089 after a year and seven days and they are encouraged to learn as much about the text as
1090 possible. Several priests indicated to me, that the *Itas* they had been given continue to
1091 reveal new and relevant information with each read. The oral reading, done during
1092 initiation then, continues to live as a recorded document (field notes, personal
1093 interviews). Because these *Itas* contain detailed information about various *Odu*, or sacred
1094 scriptures, they are highly valued by members of the community. According to Omi
1095 Saide, in some cases these *Itas* have become the foundation of other written texts about
1096 DASTs (personal interview).

1097 The historical record also indicates the codependency that exists between the
1098 written and the oral in DAST work. I found in both the Avant archives and the Reed
1099 Family collection evidence of written scripts that most probably resulted from divination
1100 or other sessions with ritual specialists. Take for example the following prescription
1101 found handwritten on a small piece of lineless paper in Mamie Wade Avant's
1102 possessions:

1103 Burn these words on parchment. Until it be come ashes and put in [word erased
1104 but seems to say "beer"] or anything [illegible] Drink the words has waters. ____
1105 wash under wear PP [illegible] and as you are washing it say in the name of God

[11] I was told that the use of the composition book was so that the individual would be able to detect if pages had been removed or added to the original text.

1106 the father God the son and the holy ghost. Then put in a Dark Bottle and Burry to

1107 Eve of house put a penny in [rest is missing].[12]

1108 As one can note, the text, although partial, appears to be a notation of what advice was

1109 probably first offered orally. In this way, as Dr. Bess Montgomery's response indicates,

1110 the devotee would have been able to ensure that directions were followed properly. As

1111 such, the script evidences the importance of the written to ensuring rituals were followed

1112 as prescribed. The script also demonstrates that the oral was essential to the proper

1113 execution of the ritual. In this case, a vocal invocation of God is necessary in order for

1114 the prescription to be viable. In other cases, the names of other spirits and of people were

1115 equally as important.

1116 Zora Neale Hurston's work with hoodoo doctors in the early twentieth century

1117 likewise reveals the importance of names. One of her informants offered the following as

1118 the method of dressing candles for a death ceremony:

1119 Dobinus, Bobinus, Spiritus! Kind

1120 spirit,

1121 I want you

1122 to

1123 dress this candle. I call on the king of the

1124 spirits, which is Moccasin."

1125 One does not have to necessarily recognize the owners of these names to understand how

1126 important the explicit invocation is to the task at hand. The candles will not perform their

1127 desired function unless given power by the invoked spirit. Another prescription found in

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[12] [Handwritten note, Mamie Wade Avant Collection,] Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

1128 the Avant collection also demonstrates the importance of names. On a quarter sheet of
1129 lineless paper is written:

1130 i (name) James Mac the son of Rebecca Mac Breathe upon thee three Drops of
1131 Blood i take From thee the First out of my heart the other out thy Liver and in this
1132 i Deprive thee out they strength and manliness that you will come under my
1133 control and stay at home in the name of god the father god the son and the holy
1134 ghost. Amen.

1135 In this passage, one will note that names are used to clarify who is making the request.
1136 Further, this passage demonstrates the importance of family to DAST work. The
1137 supplicant, James Mac, is sure to invoke his lineage. This is similar to the importance of
1138 lineage observed during the ocha celebration over fifty years later.

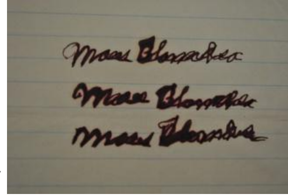
1139 One study participant explained to me the importance of names in traditional
1140 Yorùbá practice:

1141 Um, being able to write someone's name is about the same as being able to
1142 remember and call someone's name. Because when you do that, you are keeping
1143 that person alive. And you're keeping them among the rest of us.

1144 This response deepened my understanding of how the complementary relationship
1145 between reading and writing a name works in DAST devotion. The recitation of a
1146 name—either written or oral—indicates that the person's energy is being called forth.
1147 Another participant's response to a question about naming in DAST rituals supports my
1148 conclusion:

1149 You can always work on somebody's name! I think it's something that becomes
1150 important; we understand the concept of nommo and the power of naming. When

1151 we talk about the significance of even having a naming ceremony when we're
1152 giving names and given multiple names over the course of our life, we exist
1153 connected to our names. And once you're able to speak the name...say the
1154 name...that's why we have egun. Egun exist because we are able to speak their
1155 names into infinity. Saying someone's name working on names is vibrational
1156 energy that is absolutely connected to that person. So whether its negative or
1157 positive, like the way to attach...straight up connect yourself to a space where
1158 something exists-- is to say its name. Writing the name becomes important and
1159 equally as powerful. So yea, we definitely use names. Even to the extent where
1160 you have different names...you may be Tiffany when we talk on the phone but
1161 when you approach òrìşà on the mat in the ritual space you'll use another name.
1162 She was correct; I have been given a ritual name that speaks directly to the energy of the
1163 òrìşà that has claimed me. This ritual name serves as a kind of protection against those
1164 that would use my “real” name against me. One iyalòrìşà explained to me, “don’t ever
1165 give your name to anyone else; they can use it against you. Use your ocha name”
1166 (personal communication). One way a person’s name could be used against them was
1167 described to me by a Yorùbá priest: “You write...you want a person out of your life, you
1168 can write their name down on a sheet of paper and freeze it in the freezer.”
1169 Taken together, these responses helped me understand what I was seeing when I
1170 saw a name written several times on a small sheet of lineless paper in the Avant
1171 collection (see photo 1).



1172 *Image 1*

1173 At first glance, one might assume that a signature is being copied to be duplicated later.
1174 However, considering the entire Avant collection as functional set leads me to conclude
1175 that we are seeing the energy of a person, in this case someone named Moses, invoked for
1176 ritual purposes. The alignment of this historical finding with contemporary responses
1177 demonstrates the continued importance of names in DAST work. In the case of
1178 Hurston's candle dressing ritual, an otherworldly entity is being called to support the
1179 metaphysical transformation necessary for the candles to be used in the ritual. The Avant
1180 prescription calls forth the energy of the supplicant and his lineage to strengthen the
1181 power of his request. Names carry the energy necessary for the work to work.

1182 There are other instances that demonstrate the importance of text to DAST rituals
1183 as well. Hurston (1931) describes a prescription given to her by one of her participants
1184 regarding how to help a client win a court case:

1185 And if the sheriffs have already
1186 taken you before the
1187 learned
1188 judge you will take of the pure white dove's blood and write
1189 with it: "Oh, pure blood without sin, like the pure white dove that you
1190 come from and represent,
1191 so make me pure
1192 in the eyes of men and make

1193 it so that the

1194 judges

1195 shall see only purity and no sin, and that I shall

1196 be made whole again."

1197 This must be written on pure parchment paper and after

1198 reading

1199 it

1200 over to yourself on your knees,

1201 it is to be burned and the ashes scattered.

1202 This you will do every

1203 time you get a paper

1204 from the low sheriff com-

1205 manding you to appear before the

1206 judges. Fail not in carrying out this

1207 covenant if you value your

1208 life and

1209 liberty.

1210 So Be It. (p. 348)

1211 The supplicant is responsible for destroying the energy that would convict him. And in

1212 this case must write about how he desires to be viewed in the eyes of the law. However,

1213 in another participant response, Hurston (1931) was given a presecription that directly

1214 invoked the name and energy of officials involved in the case:

1215 My poor daughter,

1216 I hear your prayer and will hasten to

1217 your help with heartfelt

1218 sympathy and tell you the secrets of the learned

1219 judges and the high priests

1220 so that you can conquer your enemies and

1221 once more breathe the air of freedom; so that the sun shall shine on your

1222 head and bring you comfort; so that the good moon shall bring you peace

1223 and smiles on your

1224 face. ...

1225 in your house shall burn nine candles of pure wax, brown in color.

1226 One of these candles you will burn every day

1227 for nine days after the

1228 sun has gone down and under each of these candles as you burn them

1229 you will put of pure parchment paper with the name of your enemy on

1230 it. Do this so that his

1231 testimony will not be believed by

1232 the learned

1233 judges and the high sheriff, and so that he will become confused when he

1234 speaks

1235 to the

1236 judge.

1237 ... .(p. 343-344)

1238 There is historical alignment between the use of written texts in this way to more
1239 contemporary uses of the written. On the back of a school worksheet in the Avant
1240 collection, I found the following list of names and occupations:
1241 Kenneth Griffin-Judge
1242 Joseph Dozier- DA
1243 Geraldine Colson Patterson- my wife
1244 Julius Chamber- Bast Family lawyer
1245 Eleanor Bast-the dead man's wife
1246 John Plumide + Bart Shuster- my lawyer
1247 Investigator Horne – Investigating office
1248 Doctor woods- Corner [sic]
1249 One could conclude that the DAST ritual could not be performed without the writing of
1250 these names in much the same way as was indicated in the description of how to get
1251 someone to leave your life. According to Oshunfunmi, "if you are trying to get a
1252 response from someone or to gain favorability with somebody, knowing who that person
1253 is is to your advantage and to whatever it is that you are doing." Speaking the name
1254 brings forth energy, but writing the names keeps the energy where the ritual specialist
1255 wants it to be—frozen, sweetened, tied up, and/or destroyed.
1256 Names themselves are also important in preserving the history of DASTs. One
1257 way this is done is in the "mojuba." A prayer used to open all Lukumi/Santeria rituals
1258 and ceremonies, the *mojuba* varies from house to house but remains fundamentally the
1259 same. First, the supplicant will offer cool water (and energy) to the road, the house, and
1260 Esu. Next, Oludumare (or God) is praised. While the specific order of these invocations

1261 may vary, I did not observe a single mojuba that did not have these elements. After
1262 invoking and praising God, the supplicant offers *Ibaye* to their ancestors. I was told that
1263 this helps elevate the ancestors as their names are called one by one in the prayer
1264 (personal communication). After ancestors are invoked, the supplicant will wish that no
1265 harm comes to the priests within their lineage. This, along with the invocation of
1266 ancestors, is how historical memory is embedded within the *mojuba.* After the living
1267 priests are listed, those that are deceased are also offered *Ibaye*. What comes next varies
1268 according to houses I observed. Whatever the order, the supplicant will invoke specific
1269 orisa—usually in a prescribed ritual order, state the specific intention for their prayer, and
1270 close asking that death, sickness, and other issues be kept from them. In a completely
1271 oral way, the *mojuba* becomes a way that devotees both acknowledge and preserve their
1272 personal and spiritual lineages. If one wants to know who serves as the supplicants'
1273 immediate godparents or other house member, all one must do is listen to their prayer.
1274 Moreover, because deceased priests are also named, the history of the lineage is
1275 communicated to both Spirit and to mankind whenever the *mojuba* is offered.

1276 One cannot argue against the oral nature of DASTs. But one cannot ignore the
1277 fundamental necessity of the written. Even those very oral constructs, like the *mojuba*,
1278 are sometimes written by new novices that must learn to recall the lengthy prayer through
1279 memorization. As such, ritual specialists, and their clients, must have some basic
1280 literacy skills that enable them to invoke specific energies to ensure the viability of their
1281 rituals as these examples indicate. Prayer books, divination notes, and texts participants
1282 referred to in an effort to inform their practices are all literacy artifacts that I was able to

1283 identify during the course of this study. The artifacts, however, were at most viewed as
1284 complementary to the oral and never privileged above it. According to one participant,

1285 We can read about Sango all day in the various books but still you've got to know
1286 who Sango is for yourself. And so that comes from having a relationship with,
1287 and interacting with Sango. And we all have very different experiences with
1288 Sango. (personal interview)

1289 None of the devotees that I interviewed or observed during the course of this study
1290 disparaged those that chose to read about DASTs. However, as the above quote
1291 demonstrates, they believed that the written should at best, support the transmission of
1292 practice and not be the sole medium for it. Another participant stated it in another way:
1293 "you can't get asé from a book;" in other words, the energy of the instruction cannot be
1294 transmitted except through human interaction.

1295 Interestingly, when explicitly asked about "literacy" and DAST practices,
1296 contemporary study participants hesitated to say that they relied upon the written word.
1297 However, when pushed to think about the use of names, and the reading of the unwritten,
1298 they responded enthusiastically. When encouraged to think about what is "read" during
1299 rituals and ceremonies, and the impact of colors, body gestures, and other markers as
1300 coded information, participants acknowledged the importance of literacy in their work.
1301 For example, Dr. Bess Montgomery answered:

1302 If you're talking about literacy as something written down, there aren't many
1303 because most rituals are not written. Many of them are not written. Many of the
1304 songs are not written. They are literally passed down orally. They are taught
1305 orally. They are passed on orally. In fact, one of the things I was just trying to

1306 study the Odu part of it was you just got to learn this. You've got to learn the
1307 libations, you're going to learn these things you're not writing them down per se.
1308 So, literacy is often in that sense isn't used as much.
1309 Me: Now I want to tie that to the historical record. What I'm finding in the
1310 historical record a lot is that a lot of these conjure men and women were doing
1311 prescriptions that required writing a certain Psalm a number of times or writing
1312 someone's name in a certain color and burning it....
1313 Dr. Bess Montgomery: Awww, yea I hadn't thought about that. Yes! Because
1314 like when I go to Paulin to get a reading, oftentimes he will have us write stuff
1315 down and to leave on the shrine. We may write down what it is that we want. I
1316 have to say I had forgotten about that. You write down what you want on a piece
1317 of paper and you leave it at the shrine. Or like when I learned my first chant,
1318 Baba Medahochi had me write it down so that I could learn it but the point was
1319 that I was to learn it. I was not to keep it, not forever read it. So there are those
1320 times that you are writing things down. There are rituals that you perform if you
1321 want to rid yourself or if you want to cleanse yourself of an issue you can write it
1322 and tear it up, flush it down the toilet, burn it....whatever it is....and send it out into
1323 the Universe. Literacy is used that way as well. I'm so glad you said that.
1324 Dr. Bess Montgomery's responses demonstrate the way in which literacy has come to be
1325 defined within DAST communities as well as how the performance of literacy has come
1326 to be understood as distinct from the definition.
1327 In other words, when asked explicitly about the role of literacy in DAST work,
1328 many DAST devotees viewed it as unessential. However, their own performances of

various literacies contradicted what they defined as legitimate literacy. As Hymes (1964) and others (Heath, 1983; Jacobs & Jordan, 1993; Skilton-Sylvestor, 2002) have noted, non-verbal acts indicate and reveal various social and cultural codes that, within the context of this study, are evidenced by DAST unwritten and written literacy performances. Devotees may have bought into the prevailing mainstream notion that their traditions are solely oral. However, their actions, and the traditions themselves suggest otherwise. Indeed, both the written and the unwritten must—just as literacy and orality must—work together to support the overall desired purpose of devotees. It is the complementarity of orality and literacy that shapes the form of literacy in relationship to DAST communities and to *all* members of these communities.

1347 # Chapter Five

1348 ## Reading, 'Riting, & Ritual: Literacy in Spiritual Contexts

1349

1350 According to the anthropologist Victor Turner (1973), the smallest unit of any
1351 ritual is the ritual symbol. These symbols are characterized by their (1) multiple
1352 meanings, (2) seemingly different and distinct significata connected in fact and thought,
1353 (3) ideas, relationships, interactions, and transactions represented concurrently by a
1354 ritually employed medium in an act of condensation, and (4) significata organized around
1355 polarities—at one end those referring to cultural norms and at the other those expected to
1356 stimulate devotees. Turner provides the following example among the Ndembu people of
1357 Zambia whose female puberty rites center around the ritual symbol of the milk-tree or
1358 *mudyi*:

1359 …at its normative pole [the tree] represents womanhood, motherhood, the
1360 mother-child bond, a novice undergoing initiation into mature womanhood, a
1361 specific matrilineage, the principle of matrilinity, the process of learning
1362 'women's wisdom,' and the unity and perdurance of Ndembu society, and all of
1363 the values and virtues inherent in the various relationships—domestic, legal, and
1364 political—controlled by matrilineal descent. Each of these aspects of its
1365 normative meaning becomes paramount in a specific episode of the puberty ritual;
1366 together, they form a condensed statement of the structural and communal
1367 importance of femaleness in Ndembu culture. At its sensory pole, the same
1368 symbol stands for breast milk (the tree exudes milky latex—indeed, the significata
1369 associated with the sensory pole often have a more or less direct connection with

1370 some sensorily perceptible attribute of the symbol), mother's breasts, and the
1371 bodily slenderness and mental pliancy of the novice (a young slender sapling of
1372 the mudyi is used). The tree, situated a short distance from the novice's village,
1373 becomes the center of a sequence of ritual episodes rich in symbols (words,
1374 objects, and actions) that express important cultural themes. (p. 1100)

1375 As evidenced by this example, rituals are important focal points for the reading, writing,
1376 and interpretation of critical cultural themes. In the case of the *mudyi*, the cultural
1377 importance of women and fertility is celebrated and the initiation of young girls into
1378 womanhood transmits this value to them ritually.

1379 For those unfamiliar with cultural themes, ritual allows those in attendance an
1380 opportunity to be exposed to them. Ani (1997/2003) describes ritual spaces as settings
1381 where "values and beliefs are redefined, reaffirmed, and reinterpreted" (p. 9). In fact,
1382 rituals are educative settings, and educative texts, where the transmission of cultural
1383 values to others is performed through ritual symbols that include, but are not limited to,
1384 colors, shapes and symbols, fabrics, songs, rhythms, prayers, and specific language
1385 choices.

1386 In this chapter, I will explore Turner's notion of the ritual symbol and use it to
1387 discuss how literacy is performed in ritual settings within the DAST communities I
1388 studied. I specifically attend to the educative processes within DAST settings and trace
1389 pedagogical practice to philosophical and spiritual sources. I conclude by offering
1390 description of these pedagogical strategies and the reasons for them.

1391

1392

1393 **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in Spiritual Spaces**

1394 Turner cautions that within rituals a wide range of themes could lead to unclear,
1395 inefficient communication because the ritual symbols can represent “disparate, even
1396 contradictory themes.” I assert that this is overcome, however, by the cultural and
1397 operational contexts that frame the ritual itself. Recall that complementary polarities are
1398 themselves seemingly disparate and contradictory in some cultural settings. However, in
1399 other cultures, these same polarities exist as binary partners that operate in tandem. In
1400 these cases, the kinds of themes and ideas expressed during rituals are necessarily bound
1401 by the culture shared by devotees. In other words, the ritual must be culturally, and
1402 contextually, relevant in order for the ritual symbols to perform their desired task(s).
1403 According to Wirtz (2007), how some of these ritual symbols, in her case the language of
1404 Lukumí, is treated results in devotees’ “situated interpretation practices” that function
1405 through mechanisms of cultural replication in which different knowledge—based on the
1406 situated meanings—is permeated by historical significance that ensures further cultural
1407 transmission and replication.

1408 Ritual symbols contain a wide array of possible meanings. They epitomize the
1409 concept of multivocality and may only carry certain meanings in certain settings. Thus,
1410 only a small portion of a symbol’s substance is employed at any given time. The context
1411 for the ritual, according to Turner, becomes that which drives a particular meaning during
1412 a given episode. Ritual symbols bounded by a specific context constitute a functional set
1413 that enables devotees to decipher the particular theme being applied. Taken together the
1414 ritual symbols form a ritual that, as Ani (2004) notes, “get at the essence of things” (p.
1415 11). Abiodun (1994) explains that the choice and arrangement of the symbols are critical

1416 in the interpretation of the ritual. Spiritual communities then, attached to these rituals,
1417 must become conversant in as many meanings as possible; this is knowledge amassed by
1418 observing an entire ritual cycle—parts of which are only available when a devotee is
1419 deemed as ready. But again, the context is what makes the message decipherable as
1420 encoded. An exploration of a DAST deity can be explanatory here.

1421 **The Crossroads as Context: Èşù as explanation for Literacy Ambiguity in DASTs**

1422 Èşù is an especially important deity in the Yorùbá pantheon. As guardian of the
1423 crossroads, he resides between worlds and mediates all that happens in intersections
1424 (Brandon 1997; Stewart, 2005). Making linguistic translation possible, Èşù must be
1425 invoked so that communication between the òrìşà and mankind is possible.
1426 As described in Chapter Four, it is Èşù that must first be invoked before any other deity
1427 can be invoked by mankind. Further, because he speaks all languages, Èşù facilitates
1428 communication in general. In Fon cosmology, Èşù (there known as Legba) is considered
1429 a divine linguist who reports to the Supreme Deity on affairs of both mortals and
1430 immortals alike (Cosentino, 1987). Èşù is responsible for interpreting the will of
1431 Oludumare (the Supreme Deity of the Yorùbá) and the other òrìşà as well as transmitting
1432 messages among them all. He is the one who translates the oral verses of the sacred
1433 word—*Odu Ifa*—into messages of text read by diviners known as babalawos. In fact
1434 Èşù is represented in Gates' seminal text *The Signifying Monkey* as a metaphor for the
1435 ambiguity of every written text. Èşù is an embodiment of multiplicity and therefore an
1436 appropriate figure through which the consequences of context can be more deeply
1437 understood. He also represents through his multiplicity and mutlivocality, diversity. At

1438 the crossroads, Èṣù stands in a position where the "penetration of thresholds" serves as a
1439 space for exchange between "discursive universes" (Gates, 1988, p. 27).

1440 Èṣù complicates individuals' understandings of reality. As the trickster who
1441 resides between worlds, Èṣù is an essential model for understanding the complicated
1442 notion of multivocality and double-voicedness inherent in ritual symbol communication.
1443 Èṣù's own from Yorùbáland in West Africa to other places of the African Diaspora
1444 serves to illuminate the importance of a broad consideration of context and perspective to
1445 understanding DAST literacy possibilities and practices.

1446 Cosentino's (1987) study of Èṣù's movement from West Africa suggests that the
1447 original trickster of Nigeria, Èṣù, migrated to Dahomey and to Haiti. Through a
1448 comparative study of the resulting deities—Papa Legba, Carrefour, and Ghede—he
1449 provides not only new perspectives of imagination in Haitian Vodun, but also illuminates
1450 the kind of perspectives and positions that Èṣù embodies both as god of transformation
1451 but also as a product of it himself. Cosentino contends that Èṣù migrated through both
1452 Yorùbá and Fon oral traditions during the 17th and 18th centuries to the New World. He
1453 offers evidence of this movement by noting that in both places (the New and the Old
1454 Worlds) Èṣù/Papa Legba fulfills the same purpose of presiding over crossroads
1455 "regulating traffic between the visible and invisible worlds" (p. 262). Cosentino posits
1456 the narrative of Èṣù to be the result of "ceaseless rearrangements" that help us envision
1457 the transformative power of the crossroads. Cosentino considers Èṣù's own
1458 transformation to Papa Legba in Haiti to be evidence of recombination and re-presents
1459 the trickster without much authority except as the quintessential gatekeeper. However,

1460 because Èṣù is the consummate trickster, he continues to move between categories
1461 continually mediating through his clever tricks.

1462 Consentino also suggests that Èṣù has recombined into not just Papa Legba but
1463 also has contributed to the appearance of Mait Carrefour (the guardian of the crossroads)
1464 in Haitian Vodun. While Papa Legba embodies many of Èṣù's more positive attributes
1465 (clever, linguist, etc.), Carrefour is more associated with negativity including bad luck
1466 and misfortune. Still strongly associated with crossroads, Carrefour exaggerates Yorùbá
1467 Èṣù's original strengths.

1468 Despite linking Carrefour to Èṣù, Consentino argues that the latter is a distinct
1469 deity without African antecedents because it would seem that Carrefour is more nefarious
1470 than his Yorùbáland counterpart. In fact, Carrefour is not without antecedent but is
1471 instead a Diasporic form of Èṣù transformed—via the crossroads—into a new type that
1472 bears strong resemblance to its original African form. In Yorùbá, some praise names for
1473 Èṣù speak of the same attributes that Carrefour possesses: *Èṣù Maako* or Èṣù that
1474 entangles, *Èṣù Awonilele* or Èṣù, the quarrel in the house, and *Èṣù Alusi* or Èṣù who is
1475 untrustworthy (Mason, 2003). How Èṣù is viewed is what changes; not the deity itself.
1476 The story of Èṣù's red and black cap is useful in illustrating this point.

1477 Two farmers, who were the best of friends, were tending to their fields one day.
1478 The first friend looked up and noticed a man walking down a path between his and his
1479 friend's farm. The friend also noticed the fellow and remarked about the man wearing
1480 the red cap walking between the two. "No," his friend replied, "that fellow was wearing
1481 a black cap." Soon, the two men were arguing assuming that the other was being

1482 untruthful. As the argument escalated, Èṣù—the curious fellow on the path—chuckled to
1483 himself giving his black and red cap a playful tap.

1484 From Èṣù's tale, one can note that it is the context from which the curious traveler
1485 was viewed that determined what the farmers were seeing. The results of this study
1486 reveal that context is what shapes how readers view DAST texts. As such, a discussion
1487 of how the texts are able to be fluid and ambiguous but bound by context is fitting.

1488 According to the Ethnography of Communication approach, the socially situated
1489 meanings of words and other devices is important to interpretation (Hymes, 1964; Heath,
1490 1983; Skilton-Sylvestor, 2002) and the data for this study support that assertion. Take for
1491 example the ceramic soperas or pots that house the essence of devotees' òrìṣà. Normally,
1492 these pots are not placed on the floor. There are two exceptions to this rule I observed
1493 during the course of this study: when an òrìṣà is offered the blood of animals as part of
1494 ritual or ceremonial requirements and when the devotee to whom a pot belongs dies. In a
1495 conversation with a Lukumí priest, I also discovered that the only other time an òrìṣà pot
1496 is placed on the floor is when that particular òrìṣà is "born" during a devotee's initiation
1497 (personal interview). In each of these scenarios, the pot itself serves as a ritual symbol
1498 but the context of the entire ritual helps devotees decode the meaning of the òrìṣà's
1499 placement.

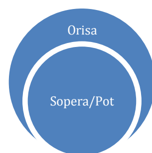
1500 Applying Turner's (1973) notion of referents, it becomes possible to see how the
1501 context of the pot takes on different meanings at the normative and sensory poles.
1502 In all three cases—feeding, death, and birth—the normative pole represents the
1503 òrìṣà itself which has been shaped by the community's cultural norms. And
1504 because òrìṣà represent particular nature forces and cosmological ideas, the

1505 normative pole is contextualized by the òrìşà as a broader ritual symbol based on

1506 cultural context. In other words, the ritual symbol of the pot and its placement is

1507 nested within the larger ritual symbol of the òrìşà.

1508 *Image 2*



1509

1510 Exploring the feeding of an Òsun vessel can be explanatory here. In the case of

1511 feeding an Òsun pot, the entire ritual act of feeding the òrìşà communicates important

1512 ideas about Yorùbá cultural thought and practice to those familiar with the bodies of

1513 knowledge necessary for decoding the entextualized information. The domain of Òsun,

1514 the placement of the ceramic vessel holding the òrìşà's implements, and the exchange of

1515 energy that occurs during the feeding are each important ritual symbols that carry the

1516 kinds of contextualizing information necessary to decode the entire ritual.

1517 Òsun is is a Yorùbá deity perceived to be richer, powerful, and beautiful.

1518 Frequently consulted by women having difficulty becoming pregnant, the òrìşà is the

1519 giver of children who loves fine things and possesses the epitome of femininity. Òsun is

1520 linked to the number five, colors of gold and brass, and most importantly her natural

1521 domain—cool, fresh water. She reminds humans to be reflective and is consulted by

1522 market women to ensure their success (Badejo, 1996).

1523 By honoring Òsun as part of the sacred pantheon, the Yorùbá celebrate the power

1524 of the feminine and through their religious hegemony, as described, are acknowledging

1525 the essentiality of female power to true balance; recall that the complementary polarities

1526 concept requires balance and not hierarchy. When she is ritually fed, the normative pole

1527 of the symbolic act of feeding transmits the Yorùbá cultural idea that the sacred feminine
1528 is powerful and deserves to be honored. For devotees, feeding Òsun is an opportunity to
1529 both invoke the sacred power of the feminine to obtain those good, refined things so
1530 valued by the òrìşà and to ensure their continued protection by this great warrior that is
1531 female. A gendered ideology is transmitted in the ritual symbol and communicates to
1532 devotees how women must be present for true cultural and community wellness to occur.
1533 At the sensory pole, Ọsùn's governance of rivers is encoded. In Nigeria, the òrìşà
1534 is linked to the Ọsùn River that flows through Yorubaland. Water is essential to human
1535 life. Normally, rivers provide richness to surrounding areas by creating fertile soil,
1536 providing a habitat for living creatures that can be hunted, and by providing water. Òsun,
1537 as ritual symbol at the sensory pole, also is essential to human life. She too, can be
1538 invoked to encourage fertility, not only in nature, but in women, and is often linked to
1539 other kinds of richness as well. Just as flooding rivers can be destructive, Òsun is
1540 respected as a severe warrior who protects her children fiercely. Thus, when she is fed,
1541 the sensory pole creates an entextualized message that celebrates fertility and the richness
1542 of life as well as a respect for the warrior aspect of the òrìşà.
1543 To those literate in the rendering of blood sacrifice to òrìşà, the placement of the
1544 pot on the ground signifies the devotee's desire to ground the vast energy of Òsun so that
1545 the energy can exchanged appropriately. According to study participants, the earth itself
1546 is seen as a divine entity and is sacred (personal interviews). By placing Òsun's vessel
1547 on the ground, her energy is focused in an area where communication and exchange can
1548 occur between devotees and divinity. It is also an opportunity for the devotee to alert
1549 Òsun to the seriousness of the ritual. She is being offered the energy of the sacrifice so

1550 that her mercies might be invoked by devotees. Turner (1973) asserts that "the manner in
1551 which [an] object or activity assigned symbolic value is placed or arranged vis-à-vis
1552 similar objects or activities" is useful in identifying the cultural theme being employed.
1553 By placing Òsun's pot on the ground, devotees are in fact ritually entexutalizing their
1554 recognition of the power of the òrìşà to aid humankind.

1555 Other elements of ritually feeding òrìşà also serve as both context and ritual
1556 symbols for the literate devotee community. Through the ritual context, that includes
1557 particular songs and other ritual symbols like knives, honey, liquor, palm oil, and *esteras*
1558 or straw mats, the ritual transmits cultural themes based on Yorùbá worldview. Consider
1559 the honey that is normally present when devotees feed òrìşà. It is offered to the òrìşà so
1560 that the òrìşà can make the life of the devotee sweet and is also representative of the
1561 devotee's effort to sweeten the will of the òrìşà. The honey becomes a symbol that
1562 encodes evidence of Yorùbá thought related to the reciprocal relationship between the
1563 divine and the mortal. As Abimbola (2003) opines, sacrifice is a means by which
1564 humans can "reorganize the universe" for their own best interests. The ritual act of
1565 feeding an òrìşà can be viewed as a critical literacy act in that it literally helps to rewrite
1566 reality.

1567 None of the information linked to the normative and sensory poles, nor to the
1568 critical act of rewriting reality, however, is decipherable if one is not familiar with Òsun
1569 and/or her domain. For example, if a layperson witnesses the feeding of a pot that is
1570 linked to Òsun, but has not been introduced to the concept of òrìşà in general nor of Òsun
1571 in particular, they would be unable to link fertility, power, and femininity to the ritual
1572 they witness. The context necessary for deciphering the ritual is held within the religious

1573 hegemony that laypersons may not be exposed to. The communication event is just as
1574 important as the speech community and the communication situation in the entire ritual
1575 context. The ritual then, becomes something to witness and not to read if one fails to
1576 consider the vast knowledge that surrounds and informs the practice that is inherently
1577 multi-layered.

1578 Importantly, it must be considered that the deities venerated in DAST practices
1579 are understood by humans whose own perceptions shape the characteristics they align
1580 with the deities. Recall Esu's red and black cap. The context that is used to understand a
1581 phenomenon, such as the color of his cap, depends heavily on the perspective one
1582 employs to understand that phenomenon. Accordingly, the contemporary realities that
1583 shape our understandings of DAST rituals and contexts have necessarily shifted as a
1584 result of new experiences. In this case, it should be noted that while the energy of Òsun,
1585 for example, does not change, how humans understand her may. Because the religious
1586 hegemony linked to her *represents* her in reality but can never wholly encompass all of
1587 that reality, she is indeed both referent and sign in DAST rituals. She, as
1588 anthropomorphized in religious hegemony, represents (or better said, refers) to a
1589 particular kind of energy. As such, that energy—that we call Òsun —is the signified.
1590 The deity, and the entextualized rituals associated with her, demonstrate how she refers
1591 to, and is signified by, her Self.

1592 **Reading Multi-Layered Signs**

1593 At the deepest level, the elemental energy itself becomes the referent for the sign
1594 of the river (in the case of Òsun). This level is developed as mankind contemplates the
1595 specific manifestations of divine energy and make sense of it. Another level is added as

1596 comparisons are drawn, by humankind, between the forces of this elemental energy and
1597 the characteristics of rivers as sources of sustenance and potential bringers of devastation.
1598 At the next level, humankind's cultural understandings of feminine energy, again
1599 based on the normative sensory pole, is combined with the other referents to signify the
1600 deity Òsun as she becomes more anthropomorphized in accordance with cultural gender
1601 hegemony. Interestingly, this gender hegemony—or those cultural norms that make a
1602 woman the epitome of woman—varies in different African world contexts. For example,
1603 in Nigeria, Òsun's birthplace, she is commonly seen as a dark woman with braided, kinky
1604 hair. She is the one who helps the king rule in Osogbo, where her sacred grove is
1605 located. In the European New World, she has lost some of her color, frequently
1606 appearing as a mulatta with long, flowing hair seemingly matching the Western standards
1607 of beauty that shape her new religious, gendered context. In addition to this
1608 Westernization, Òsun's power is frequently reduced—by those who do not understand all
1609 that she is—to a coquette overly concerned with material goods (Badejo, 1996; Murphy
1610 & Sanford, 2001).
1611 While there are some political and social implications for Òsun's new appearance
1612 that represent an entirely different kind of study, it should be noted that the fluidity of
1613 context allows her elemental energy to be understood based on devotee's own lived
1614 realities. In this way, how the deity is represented becomes part of a historical recording,
1615 or rather a snapshot in time, of how—in Òsun's case—woman-ness and fertility are
1616 considered. Without the need for written text, Òsun literally writes a social history of the
1617 people because "she" is but a symbol for the energy that humankind has considered.
1618

Only When You're Ready

Turner asserts that ritual symbols represent a "mobilization of energies as well as messages" (p. 1102). The symbols are only abstract representations of the energy that ritual specialists and other devotees seek to employ. In a discussion of Lukumí ritual tongue, Wirtz (2007) explains that the power of ritual language itself lies not only in its power to evoke but also in its ability to represent esoteric secrets. Evidence of deep cultural continuities is embedded within rituals that surface exploration cannot uncover. The situations in which the language and other communicative devices are employed transmit specific messages but only to those for whom the information is deemed appropriate. For example, in a discussion of the explanation for a particular ritual requirement that one participant and I were not privy to, she said, "right now, we're on one side of the sheet, if you will … when you initiate it'll make a difference" (personal interview). In other words, even though we held some information of the ritual and what we were witnessing when we participated in it, there was some information embedded within the ritual symbols that neither of us had been able to decode. The literal sheet that often separated us from the parts of ritual we were not able to observe represented the veil between the worlds of the aleyo and abòrìşà and the world of the ritual specialist. The sheet entextualizes the cultural idea that knowledge should only be shared with those deemed ready to receive it. As relative novices, we were privy to some of the necessary context clues, but not all of them.

Again, such secrecy is made possible because the surface reading of some ritual symbols only provides a small portion of the entire cultural theme. Knowledge of the context provides additional information. For this reason, only those whose

1642 initiation/exposure level is deemed appropriate by elders, are given additional
1643 information, through training, needed to more deeply decode messages. One Iyanifa
1644 responded, "no you don't teach everything you know and you don't feed a baby steak if
1645 all it can eat is Pablum[13]" (personal interview). In other words, elders will withhold
1646 information if individuals are not granted access to the entire body of cultural
1647 communication.

1648 The same kind of deliberate withholding of information is evident in Hurston's
1649 historical record as well. She writes, "By nine-thirty the next morning the other five
1650 participants were there and had dressed for the dance. A dispute arose about me. Some
1651 felt I had not gone far enough to dance" (Hurston, 1931, p. 369). In this case, Hurston
1652 was privy to a dangerous ceremony in which Death itself was to be invoked by the ritual
1653 specialists in attendance. While she had undergone some training, as her quote indicates,
1654 the level of information to which she could appropriately be exposed, was of concern.

1655 The job of the elder, then, is to evaluate the readiness of devotees to move
1656 forward in their learning. Chief Tifase said of an Akan man she learned about plants
1657 from:

> 1658 He suggested, after a certain point in our studies, that I move a little bit further
> 1659 and get the spiritual part of [herb training] because he noticed that I had an
> 1660 affinity for working in the dirt and working with the herbs. And he said it's time
> 1661 to move on and get the spiritual piece. (personal interview)

1662 In Tifase's case, the elder's observation was based on what might be understood as
1663 Tifase's zone of proximal development. However, some elders make their decisions
1664 based on divination.

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[13] Pablum was a brand name for baby cereal sold by the Mead Johnson company.

1665 Once these decisions are made, the strategies used by elders to transmit DAST
1666 occult information to novice devotees include modeling and slow absorption. In many
1667 cases, elders apply a combination of these and other strategies. Consider the following
1668 description offered by a participant about how she learned not to use lighters and other
1669 things in DAST practice.

1670 I think a lot of it has been modeled. And some has come in conversation.
1671 I think I think with me the whole idea of how did I come to know that we
1672 don't use lighters? I think maybe I tried to use a lighter and my godmother
1673 at the time was like, "Did your grandmother have a lighter? Nope?
1674 Alright, then you can use matches." So I think it was that kind of thing. I
1675 think with other things it's just what I noticed. For me, sometimes, I try
1676 not to--and it might just be my personality--I try not to bog people down
1677 with the most --or what feels like---the most mundane of questions.
1678 Something in makes me think that I'm supposed to know certain things so
1679 I don't ask questions. And sometimes not asking questions means do it
1680 how you saw it done. And other times its like what does it feel like? And
1681 that's me trying to tap into myself in terms of what feels like what I should
1682 be doing and so I think it comes from a variety of places. Because I think
1683 there's also some level of tapping into the extent that you connect. So that
1684 if you know something about the landscape and the space, then you
1685 understand ...and when I say landscape and space...if I know enough about
1686 the tradition, the history, and the culture, then certain things are going to
1687 make a little more sense.

1688 And from the historical record, Hurston (1931) reports:

1689 I asked Samuel the words, but he

1690 replied

1691 that in good

1692 time I would know what to say. It was not to be

1693 taught.

1694 If nothing came, to be silent.

1695 As these responses indicate, physical elders are able to employ a number of strategies to

1696 transmit information. It also indicates that some information comes from the learner

1697 him/herself.

1698 Despite the occasional focus on allowing students to amass the tradition from

1699 spiritual sources, apprenticeship is the strategy I found to be privileged in both my

1700 contemporary and historical data sources. Hurston (1931) described her relationship with

1701 one of her hoodoo teachers thusly:

1702 This is how the dance came to be held. I sat with my

1703 teacher in her

1704 front room as the various cases were disposed of. It was my business to

1705 assist wherever possible,

1706 such as

1707 running errands for materials or to

1708 verify addresses; locating materials in the various drawers and cabinets,

1709 undressing and handling patients, writing out formulas as

1710 they were

1711 dictated, and finally making "hands". At

1712 last, of course, I could do all

1713 of the work while she looked on and made corrections where necessary.

1714 And in the contemporary record, one participant explained that she learned a great deal

1715 about the Ifa tradition by “going to ceremonies with [redacted] and his teaching us how to

1716 do things” (personal interview). In a conversation with an iyalòrìşà, I was told, “the best

1717 way to learn is to keep your mouth closed and your eyes and ears opened. Pay attention

1718 and do what you’re told” (personal interview). The data suggest that the instruction

1719 devotees received was not always explicit but was left up to them to interpret based upon

1720 what they observe of their elders.

1721 According to Gundaker (1998), selective cuing is one way Diasporic groups have

1722 encoded information through rituals, symbols, and elements of material culture. While

1723 Turner understands the use of ritual symbols as encompassing the normative and sensory

1724 poles, Gundaker characterizes ritual symbol use as employing “insider” and “outsider”

1725 orientations. She provides the following example: the placement of a flowerpot with

1726 four holes in the bottom in an individual’s yard can be viewed from both orientations.

1727 From the outsider orientation, the holes are simply functionary and provide drainage for

1728 the plant. From the insider perspective, the four holes can be seen as eyes with the

1729 individual asserting, through the encoded message, information about double sight. I

1730 would add, that the four holes could also represent four points as often seen in

1731 Kongolese-influenced cosmograms[14]. To read the message of the flowerpot

1732 appropriately, one would have to consider the context within which the flowerpot is

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[14] Cosmograms are ritual symbols in Kongo-based spiritual traditions used as points of invocation and prayer.

1733 found as well as the author of the message that chose to place the flowerpot in their yard
1734 in the first place. Again, the contextual information is what clarifies the message.
1735 However, the clarity is only offered to those to whom the message is intended.

1736 What Gundaker is explaining, is that "insiders" may choose to encode cultural
1737 themes and other ideas so that only those with access to specific contextual knowledge
1738 will be able to interpret them. The hidden-ness without hiding, then, characterizes both
1739 the ways in which rituals entextualize information and the ways in which devotees
1740 choose to inform others of the information necessary to gain access to "insider"
1741 understandings.

1742 The ritual symbols used to encode cultural themes are indeed related to how
1743 devotees read and write themselves into a historical and cultural continuum. However,
1744 how the ritual symbols work together to communicate such information is also related to
1745 philosophical ideas about how humans should function and be educated to do so. The
1746 importance of preparedness to receive certain information is apparent as described above,
1747 but also is the relationship of the message, or communication act, to the community, or
1748 the speech community.

1749 Again, let us recall the importance of positionality in the placement of ritual
1750 symbols. Indeed, the data show that ritual symbols communicate given messages that are
1751 interpreted based, at least on part, on their relationship to other symbols and messages in
1752 a given setting. In other words, the relationship is essential context for the conveyance of
1753 the message. We might choose to understand the entire body of ritual symbols employed
1754 in a given ritual as a functional set. The idea of the functional set, suggests a particular
1755 philosophical stance taken in DAST communities. The symbol cannot be isolated. To do

1756 so is to remove the context that shapes what the symbol is. The literacy strategy of
1757 context in turn entextualizes the DAST philosophy of the importance of community and
1758 the importance of inclusivity to the proper functioning of community.

1759 No person can function alone. They must be part of a functional set that includes
1760 other members of society that are responsible for one another. Such a stance is indicative
1761 of the ways in which DAST communities view and value diversity. “The determining
1762 mode of African world-view is harmony” (Ani, 2004, p. 6). And, that harmony includes
1763 not only a privileging of community but a respect for the individual. The data evidence
1764 that such a stance is both in devotee rhetoric and cultural hegemony linked to DAST
1765 practice. Take for example, one participant’s appreciation for such a stance:

1766 …at the end of the day, one of the things that I really love about this
1767 spirituality is that it’s so intensely personal. We all have our perceptions
1768 of who Sango is…who Ọsùn is, what he is and what she is, is very
1769 different with each of us. Our relationship with that Spirit is very
1770 different. (personal interview)

1771 Although there is religious hegemony that provides information about the characteristics
1772 and natural domains of deities, the relationship devotees have with their spirits is
1773 intensely personal. However, there is no perceived problem with individual ownership of
1774 personal relationships with spirit as long as the community is still privileged over all.

1775 Perhaps it is this point that allows for diversity and inclusivity to be embraced
1776 within DAST communities. Recall from Chapter Four, that the identities of devotees
1777 does not exclude them from community practice or acceptance. In reality, though the
1778 DAST communities and devotees I observed for this study self-identified as members of

1779 the African Diaspora, they acknowledged the diversity within their practices and
1780 communities. Even ides, described in greater detail in Chapter Four, evidence this
1781 diversity with the green and yellow ones more closely aligned with Cuban houses and the
1782 brown and green ones with Nigerian-diasporic houses (personal interviews; field notes).
1783 In fact, it is not unusual to be in a setting where devotees of both factions are represented
1784 openly.
1785

1786 **Chapter Six**

1787 **Is There Room for Spirit in African Diaspora Participatory Literacy Communities?**

1788

1789 As elucidated in Chapter Five, community is important to the acts of literacy
1790 embedded within DAST ritual work. In this chapter, I will compare the role of
1791 community among DAST devotees to African Diaspora Participatory Literacy
1792 Communities (ADPLCs) described by Fisher (2003; 2007). According to Fisher,
1793 ADPLCs are comprised of African descendants involved in literacy-events outside of
1794 traditional school and work settings. According to the scholar's work, these communities
1795 "combine the oral, aural, and written traditions of people of African descent…" (p. 363).
1796 Herein, I will suggest that the DAST communities I encountered can be defined as
1797 ADPLCs according to Fisher's notions. In so doing, I will complicate the idea of
1798 "community" and work to extend Fisher's important construct to include a discussion of
1799 what happens when an ADPLC may not see itself as involved in literacy. I do not seek to
1800 refute Fisher's important definition of ADPLCs. Instead, I will offer nuanced critiques
1801 that may help deepen understandings of them.

1802 **Orality, Flexibility, and Intergenerational Emphasis**

1803 Similar to other communities of practice (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002),
1804 ADPLCs are collaborative learning relationships. Within them, individuals share a
1805 particular passion and interact regularly. According to Tu (2004), there are four
1806 important characteristics of learning communities: learner empowerment, community
1807 building, member support, and patience. These four characteristics are typical of the
1808 ADPLC construct described by Fisher. My findings suggest that they are also typical of

1809 DAST communities. Additionally, ADPLCs are characterized by the importance of
1810 orality in expressing the written, flexibility, and the sharing of works (Fisher, 2003;
1811 2007)--other characteristics also evidenced by my findings.

1812 In a study of open mics as ADPLCs, Fisher (2003) noted that members of these
1813 communities tended to blur boundaries between the oral and the written. As I
1814 demonstrated in Chapter Four, DAST communities transcend the boundaries between
1815 orality and the written in ways that suggest that the two constructs are better understood
1816 as complementary polarities. The oral, in the case of Fisher's study, is a performance of
1817 pieces that had been written earlier by coffee shop and open mic performers. In DASTs,
1818 the written is often what was originally oral. Information in the previous chapter explains
1819 how in these traditions literacy is characterized by a nuanced, necessary symbiosis
1820 between the oral and the written.

1821 The flexibility required of such symbiotic work is typical within ADPLCs and
1822 DAST communities. The very nature of the spoken word poetry events described in
1823 Fisher's (2003) "Open Mics and Open Minds" can be described as flexible. They are,
1824 says Fisher, "the ultimate example of multiple literacies, where people share their poetry
1825 and prose" (p. 365). In her study of these settings, Fisher observed performers that read
1826 from journals, shared memorized work, and freestyled--all very different, but accepted
1827 ways, of presenting material. The emphasis on the mode of delivery was not bound by a
1828 prescribed manner but was open to the desires and needs of the performer and his/her
1829 audience. Likewise, DAST rituals are not bound by a particular dogma. Just as spoken
1830 word performers are able to tailor their means of delivery to the specific context in

1831 question, I found that DAST devotees are able to pull from different cosmologies in a

1832 way that mirrors the same kind of flexibility.

1833 **Flexibility and Overlap in ADPLCs and DASTs**

1834 In fact, there is much overlap in cosmologies for many DAST devotees allowing

1835 for a kind of flexibility in practice. Distinct cosmologies (and the epistemologies that

1836 inform them) such as Christianity and hoodoo may be employed by the same person,

1837 simultaneously or separately, depending on the needs of the individual and/or his or her

1838 client. Zora Neale Hurston (1931) writes about Ruth Mason as a "well-known hoodoo

1839 doctor" in New Orleans, whom she also describes as a Catholic. There are no hard and

1840 true distinctions between Mason's identities in Hurston's text. Hurston also encountered

1841 William Jones of Mobile, Alabama whom she describes as belonging to the local

1842 Protestant community and a hoodoo doctor. The flexibility afforded these ritual

1843 specialists enabled them to walk between differing cosmologies in the same way the

1844 flexibility of the spoken word events enabled performers to walk between varying modes

1845 of delivery. The structure of both the spoken word event and the DAST ritual is not

1846 bound but is informed by the cosmologies and appropriate-ness of a given construct to a

1847 specific need.

1848 Similar flexibility is noted in the following prescription found in the Mamie Wade

1849 Avant collection on a small sheet of white, lineless paper, where it is handwritten:

1850 Legs of master

1851

1852 nig__hand

1853 Sence {scratches after} briar to gether sprinkle Gr---_____ dirt over it Deslove

1854 [sic] a chew of tobacco in whiskey and pour over it and say what you ---- <u>in the 3</u>

1855 holy names. Repeat 35th pslams [sic] over salt and red pepper and throw behind
1856 the L. and curse them and say don't come here any more."
1857 Here, a seemingly non-Christian ritual that contains biblical text is described. Since both
1858 Christian scripture and conjure ritual are needed to elicit the desired response within a
1859 specific context, both are employed to achieved the desired goal. This confirms the
1860 flexibility historic DAST populations used in their ritual work. Although we are not
1861 privy to the specific problem that this ritual addresses, comparing it to a more
1862 contemporary DAST ritual can demonstrate the ways in which this same kind of
1863 flexibility in cosmology is repeated contemporarily.
1864 Performers in Fisher's (2003) study who held other identities beyond the open
1865 mic space were linked to the ADPLC based on their relationship to their performances to
1866 the ADPLCs. Their other identities did not prohibit their involvement. For example, in
1867 Fisher's (2007) description of open mic spaces, she describes one of her participants,
1868 Sister A, as a teacher. Her vocation did not preclude her ADPLC involvement. Instead,
1869 her teaching identity became a source used to inform her role within ADPLCs. Similarly,
1870 overlap of traditions and of identity are accepted and desired within the DAST
1871 community settings I visited.
1872 In 2011, I attended two spiritual misas. Misas are ritual gatherings where
1873 members of a community come together to commune with spirit to receive messages and
1874 instruction (and sometimes healings) from the other side. Influenced heavily by Allen
1875 Kardac and his French séances, misas in the United States are typically associated with
1876 other kinds of DAST work. In my experiences during the course of this study, I have
1877 found misas to be informed by the community in attendance. For example, during a misa

1878 given especially for me—within my Spanish-speaking ile—Catholicism was a heavy
1879 component of the ritual itself. Catholic prayers and imagery were used to invoke
1880 protection for those present.

1881 After each member of the group attending the misa approached the sacred portal,
1882 represented by a table covered in white cloth and containing vessels of water, white
1883 flowers, a Christian cross, and candles, "Hail Mary," a Catholic prayer, was recited. The
1884 òrìṣà priest in attendance, who also served as a medium for the misa, used a small golden
1885 book with a picture of a white man wearing a crown of thorns to establish ritual protocol
1886 and to read the prayers to mark the space as sacred. The small book, *Collection of*
1887 *Selected Prayers* by Allen Kardac, is a mainstay of misa work that I have encountered in
1888 every misa I have ever attended including those not observed for this study. Biblical
1889 characters and scriptural references are made throughout text that is meant to inform
1890 Spirit of the goodness intended from the gathering.

1891 In the non-Spanish-speaking misa I attended, Christianity still played a major role
1892 in the misa. While the Spanish misa was attended by Santeros and Paleros, the English-
1893 speaking misa was attended by Lukumí devotees who chose not to invoke Catholic
1894 imagery specifically but still made use of Christian prayers and a cross to mark the space
1895 as sacred. Again, as attendees approached the white covered table to open the portal, a
1896 prayer was recited. This time, it was not the "Hail Mary" but the "Lord's Prayer."
1897 Interestingly, there was some overlap between the devotees who attended the Spanish-
1898 speaking misa and the English-speaking misa but no one seemed disturbed by the
1899 difference in Christian invocation. Those who readily recited the "Hail Mary" as
1900 required in the first misa recited the "Lord's Prayer" in the second. Devotees were

1901 flexible in how they chose to invoke God because the fundamental requirement was not
1902 the mode of invocation but simply that invocation was made.

1903 In both cases, oral and written prayers were used to create an appropriate ritual
1904 space for the spiritual work to occur. These prayers may be the kind of literacy practice
1905 one might expect in DAST settings. However, memorized scriptures, recitations of
1906 sacred requests, and the Kardec text were all other examples of literacy artifacts observed
1907 during both misas. Additionally, in both misas, there was always a person appointed to
1908 take notes. These notes were eventually distributed to devotees to whom Spirit had
1909 spoken. Just as Dr. Bess Montgomery details about divination notes evidenced in
1910 Chapter Four, these misa notes enable devotees to access the information uncovered for
1911 years to come.

1912 Another interesting literacy artifact observed during the second misa was author
1913 Iyanla Vanzant's *Acts of Faith: Meditations for People of Color*. This small book,
1914 purple in color, was used to "break bread." One by one, each devotee took the book and
1915 meditated with it as the remainder of the group prayed for them. Opening the book at a
1916 random page gave the devotee the message s/he was to receive from spirit. Once the
1917 page was determined, the devotee read aloud to the rest of the group while another
1918 devotee took notes. This act of "breaking bread" demonstrated how speakerly texts were
1919 employed in the use of DAST work. The text itself, while perhaps not originally created
1920 for this use, operated primarily as an oral-type message from spirit.

1921 Like Fisher's open mic performers, devotees attending misas transcended
1922 boundaries between written and oral text as they saw fit. Fluidity in modes of delivery
1923 and identity are not new inventions in DAST communities. The identity of devotees

1924 attending both misas exhibit the same kind of flexibility in identity as in the historical
1925 record evidenced in Hurston's text and the anthropologist's description of Ruth Mason
1926 and William Jones cited earlier. For example, the medium/priest that moderated the first
1927 misa is a Santera iyalòrìşà, a Palera, and a Catholic. There is no contradiction between
1928 these Selves as she moves seamlessly between them based on the needs of the context. In
1929 the misa, she is primarily a medium with the ability to see and hear spirits. She is also
1930 able to pull from her Catholic upbringing to recall the appropriate prayers and litanies
1931 used to maintain a space where only good spirits are allowed. The distinctions between
1932 her identities are secondary to her ability to pull on a number of traditions as required by
1933 the particular ritual context. Her ability to transcend boundaries between the oral and the
1934 written afford her the opportunity to move beyond Kardec's prescriptive text to offer
1935 other prayers and/or litanies as required by a specific context. In this case, her dual-ed
1936 identity is a strength to be celebrated for the resource that it is for the those in attendance.

1937 One participant discussed the overlap I encountered between Christianity and the
1938 DASTs I explored thusly, "We can be connected to a Christian spirituality even though it
1939 has its own symbolisms" (Yaba Blay, personal interview). Dr. Yaba Blay expressed her
1940 appreciation for this kind of inclusivity in DASTs:

1941 The thing that I appreciate for the most part in my experiences--I haven't had any
1942 experiences with Vodun--but with the Akan, with the Yorùbá /Lukumí/Santería,
1943 there's a space and a place for Christianity. There's a space and a place for Jesus
1944 Christ. There's a space and a place for the Saints. I think we understand that
1945 there's not any separation; ultimately this is energy and we can name that energy a

1946 variety of names but the idea is to understand the energy. (Yaba Blay, personal
1947 interview)

1948 The flexibility in the DAST work comes from its inclusiveness that is found not just in its
1949 individual devotees, but within the structure of ritual itself.

1950 The flexibility of literacy practice in ADPLCs is inclusive. No one in the
1951 communities Fisher explored was denied involvement in the spoken word events based
1952 upon who they were (i.e. artists, deejays, restaurateurs) just as no one in the misas was
1953 denied involvement on the basis of their primary identification. In fact, one participant
1954 told me that while some rituals are closed to outsiders, Lukumi/Santeria drummings, also
1955 called bembes, are open to anyone and entry cannot be denied less the deities themselves
1956 be turned away. In both ADPLCs and DAST communities, relationships are critical and
1957 energy is to be shared.

1958 DAST communities meet the qualification of ADPLCs as defined by Fisher; but
1959 they also offer the opportunity to deepen understandings of the nature of community
1960 within ADPLCs. Specifically, DASTs can be used to elucidate the composition of
1961 community and the importance of community standing in African Diasporic settings.
1962 DASTs, therefore, can extend how we think about ADPLCs and their memberships.

1963 **Not Just Flesh: Spirit as Community Member**

1964 Marta Moreno Vega (1999) articulates, “the underlying belief that for traditional
1965 Africans all things are based in spirit and in divine energy was carried to the Americas
1966 and continued in the children of Africa in the Americas” (p. 48). Throughout the African
1967 World, spiritual realities are free from temporal limitations. The categories of past,

present, and future are so far overlapped that they need not be considered. "Spirit does not die" and through ritual, the living are capable of keeping the dead alive (Ani, 2004).

Vega and Ani's positions suggest that ADPLCs contain a segment of the African Diasporic community not yet explored by Fisher—spirits. In fact, her study mentions an invocation of Spirit without unpacking the episode. In this particular event, Fisher witnesses a performer, Malik, beginning a performance by asking for permission to speak and then:

> This was followed by a libation ceremony, an ancestral tradition of calling out names of deceased persons who were relatives, friends, or famous people. As each name was called, Malik would repeat the name as an affirmation and everyone was expected to say "*Ashe*" in unison defined as "so be it" or "let it be said." The libation ceremony was an opportunity to create a shared creative space between audience, artists, and emcees of the events. (p. 369-370)

Fisher correctly notes that the libation is about creating a sacred space in which creativity, among other things, can be shared. However, she misses the critical necessity of spirit in creating such a space. Libation is meant to not only give affirmation to those who have transcended living-ness, it is also an active invocation of spirit to join those present in whatever task is at hand. No DAST ritual is complete without first invoking the ancestors through libation. Because libation, in Fisher's case, is given secondary treatment as the living attendees are privileged in her study, one might miss an opportunity to observe the essential role of spiritual energy in ADPLC work.

1991 The act of libation in Fisher's text can introduce readers to the essential role, and
1992 presence, of Spirit in ADPLC communities. According to Ani (2004), when libation is
1993 given, devotees are "making a statement about the necessity and value of [the ancestors']
1994 spiritual presence…" (p. 10). Again, recall Dr. Blay's description of the importance of
1995 names:

1996 Egun exist because we are able to speak their names into infinity. Saying
1997 someone's name working on names is vibrational energy that is absolutely
1998 connected to that person. So whether it's negative or positive, like the way to
1999 attach--straight up connect yourself to a space where something exists-- is to say
2000 its name. (personal interview)

2001 Blay's response clarifies the scene described by Fisher. The names the audience called
2002 forth, were meant (1) to perpetuate the existence of these people and most importantly (2)
2003 to conjure their energy to be used in that space. In Malik's libation, one notes that the
2004 presence of spirit is considered, at least by the performer and his audience, to be an
2005 essential component of a successful evening. For DAST work, spirit is equally important
2006 to the viability of ritual work. Community in ADPLCs and in DAST settings is
2007 paramount but is not complete without the existence of those who may not be seen with
2008 the physical eye.

2009 Vega (1999) describes a discussion with anthropologist-choreographer Pearl
2010 Primus. Primus revealed that the spirit of her dead grandfather encouraged her to dance
2011 as a young girl and that he had become her guardian spirit and dance coach after his
2012 death. She felt unable to describe their relationship early in her career because she felt
2013 that her visitations with her father would be viewed as unlikely and potentially damaging

2014 to her budding career. Like Primus, the famous poet Lucille Clifton also received
2015 parental support but from her deceased mother.

2016 Clifton's communication with her mother's spirit began in 1975 when she was
2017 playing with a Ouija board with two of her daughters. She reported that the board spelled
2018 out her mother's name, Thelma, before telling her to get some rest. Clifton tried to deny
2019 the realness of what she experienced until her mother began to make more explicit
2020 visitations. At one point, all six of her children saw Thelma and were able to make
2021 contact with the matriarch. According to Hull (2001), Clifton's poetry began to be
2022 influenced by the information she received from her mother. In Clifton's (1980) *two-*
2023 *headed women*[15] she writes:

2024 friends
2025 the ones who talk to me
2026 their words thin as wire
2027 their chorus fine as crystal
2028 their truth direct as stone,
2029 they are present as air.
2030 they are there.

2031 In this passage, Clifton acknowledges the presence of those who may not be seen
2032 physically but whose information and words communicate ideas to her.

2033 During my own misa, held in 2011, I received messages from not just recently
2034 deceased ancestors like those Primus and Clifton encountered, but from those whose own

[15] A two-headed doctor is another name for a conjure worker. It demonstrates the ability of these ritual specialists to receive information from both the physical and spiritual realms.

2035 lives were so far in the past no sense could be made of their familial relationships with
2036 me presently. However, one medium described,

2037 A tall, muscular dark man… he's so dark he's blue black. He's fine too
2038 [laughs]! He's dressed in a red loin cloth and is wearing beads around his neck,
2039 wrists, and waist. He also has some tools hanging from his waist. He's standing
2040 right behind you. He's not saying much. He's your protector. He doesn't
2041 understand all that's happening here [most of the misa was conducted in a
2042 combination of Spanish and English] but he says that if this is what you want, you
2043 can have it. (field notes)

2044 I am not able to identify this man as an immediate blood relative. However, my
2045 connection to him and him to me has been repeated in other settings by priests unfamiliar
2046 with those attending the misa. In fact, in Miami in 2009, a medium informed me that this
2047 spirit, or egun, had saved my life at least two times and that he was a valuable asset. Her
2048 description of him matches almost verbatim the description I was given in Atlanta. In
2049 Miami, I was told that he was from the Kongo, the only information not added at the misa
2050 in Atlanta.

2051 The role of these ancestors, as evidenced by the above anecdotes, is to provide the
2052 living with insights and information from another plane of existence. They are viable
2053 members of the community whose communications help the living with the energy and
2054 information required to maintain a successful existence. Ancestors can be invoked for
2055 protection, for healing, for clarity, and to mark a particular space as sacred. And as I
2056 discussed in Chapter Five, the role of Spirit does shape how literacy is performed in

2057 DAST settings. Hurston's (1931) notes include a description of how the recently
2058 deceased can be implored to maintain secrecy that demonstrate this point:

2059 If you want a secret kept, put
2060 it in the care of the dead by writing
2061 it
2062 on a piece of paper and
2063 folding
2064 it small and
2065 slipping
2066 it into the hand
2067 of the
2068 corpse, of whispering
2069 it in the ear.

2070 Ancestors, then, are capable of observing the lives of the living and interacting with
2071 them when called to do so, both orally and in writing. Even in DAST work that is non-
2072 ancestral in orientation, the ancestors must first be appeased before the work can begin.
2073 As I was told by one babalawo, "Without your ancestors' permission, nothing can be
2074 done. Nothing" (personal communication).

2075 Understanding the nature of the community—including its many members—is
2076 essential to understanding how literacy is performed within a given speech community.
2077 The shared cultural clues and knowledge form the basis for viable communicative and
2078 educative strategies. It is through a deeper understanding of these strategies that one can
2079 note how DAST devotees have, over time, been able to sustain cultural mores and norms

2080 without formal, explicit instruction. For example, the process of ritual dobale is a way of
2081 ensuring Yorùbá age protocols are maintained intergenerationally. But without
2082 community to interpret the clues, none of this is possible.

2083 **Reciprocity in Community**

2084 No member of the community, including the ancestors, is taken for granted
2085 among DAST devotees. The deads' abilities, and will, to help the living depends in part
2086 on the recognition they receive from the living. Marimba Ani (1997/2003) describes the
2087 relationship between the ancestors and the living thusly, "When we perform rituals as
2088 our ancestors did, we become our ancestors, and so transcend the boundaries of ordinary
2089 space and time, and the limitations of separation that they impose" (pp. 8-9). The
2090 boundaries are crossed so that the energy can be shared by community members on both
2091 sides. As Blay stated, the living must invoke the names of the deceased in an effort to
2092 ensure that the deceased are able to facilitate energy and knowledge transfer on both sides
2093 of the temporal bounds. In return, the living are expected, through rituals and offerings,
2094 to venerate the ancestors to ensure they maintain the energy necessary for the facilitation
2095 to occur. How the offerings are given evidence the worldview that supports such a
2096 cyclical relationship. Blay described it to me during an interview. We were discussing
2097 the kinds of sacrifices required of DAST devotees when she began to talk about her
2098 relationship with egun and the sacrifices she makes for them:

> 2099 So even sometimes when it comes to cooking for Egun, it's like did my Egun eat
> 2100 that? Again, there are a lot of people who do different things. Like, they don't
> 2101 care if it's a piece of toast, give it to them. But in my mind, my grandmother is
> 2102 somewhere cursing me out; she would not eat that. And so again, that's about

2103 the sacrifice for me. Because alright, I don't have no food in my house what
2104 could I get for my grandmother? My people didn't eat this kind of meat. I'm not
2105 going to serve it for them. But the other side of it is maybe I don't eat pork but
2106 they might have. So then you cook it. You know what I mean? I think it's the
2107 idea of tapping into tradition. It's about that notion of humility and sacrifice
2108 where it's not about you. And it's not about making your life more convenient
2109 necessarily. It's about honoring tradition. Because that's the only way that they'll
2110 come to understand that you are committed to them. And when they understand
2111 that you're committed to them, they'll continue to bless you with favor.

2112 Blay's sentiment was reflected in the field notes I gathered during the two misas. One
2113 devotee was asked to play Puerto Rican music near her boveda[16] for her Caribbean
2114 ancestors to enjoy. Another was asked to buy a Catholic charm to keep on her boveda for
2115 one of her male egun. These small sacrifices exist as communication acts and events that
2116 mark how devotees demonstrate their respect to their egun and is how they entextualize,
2117 frequently through material culture, a reciprocal relationship with spirit. DAST
2118 community members may also offer small bits of food, coffee, liquor and tobacco to do
2119 the same. But the exchange also reveals something about the kind of intergenerational
2120 transmission of knowledge that is valued in African spaces. The relationships between
2121 the living and those who have already lived must be maintained to ensure the viability of
2122 the entire community—and its culture.

2123 The cycle of energy between the physical and spiritual members of the
2124 community is an expression of the African worldview at work. Through the veneration
2125 of the ancestors and of other spirits, devotees are performing the culture and through that

[16] A boveda is a small white covered table where devotees commune with their ancestors regularly.

2126 performance transmitting the culture to younger generations. The traditional African
2127 ethos is informed by a privileging of the collective in such a way that the community is
2128 viewed as essential to human life (Ani, 2004; Mbiti, 1969/2008). The DAST community
2129 maintains this cultural stance to date.

2130 **No Ile is an Island**

2131 In Fisher's (2003) article on open mics, she found that the information generated
2132 by individuals was designed to be shared with the broader community during their
2133 performances. In some cases, the song/poem/recitation was incomplete without some
2134 degree of audience interaction. Similarly, my conversations with DAST devotees
2135 indicated that no ritual could be complete without the involvement of other ritual
2136 specialists.

2137 In fact, within the Akan, palo, conjure, and Yorùbá /Santeria/Lukumí
2138 communities I explored, no devotee felt that s/he could operate outside of the community.
2139 One participant proclaimed, "Without community, there is no Lukumí!" Although there
2140 were those who preferred to "do their own thing" intermittently, they all felt it necessary
2141 to reconnect with community regularly to maintain themselves spiritually. If individuals
2142 fail to partake in community activities they (1) deny themselves the ability to commune
2143 more closely with Spirit; (2) fail to receive the support of the community in cases where
2144 collective energy is required during rituals and ceremonies; and (3) function in a manner
2145 inconsistent with the cultural philosophies undergirding their own practices.

2146 DAST devotees are able to communicate their intents to Spirit both orally and in
2147 writing as discussed in Chapter Four based on a relationship to community. Dr. Bess
2148 Montgomery explains:

2149 Oh community is important. And community is good too because you have these
2150 ceremonies that are important. Oh, God, you have the chance to worship
2151 Spirit...to sing...it's one thing to sing. It's kinda like going to church. You can
2152 sing church songs all day long but there's something about going to church and
2153 being in that community and having someone feed you and hearing the songs and
2154 all of those things. And as Baba Tosu told me, I remember I was at a wedding
2155 ceremony once and Ọsùn came. I was so embarrassed because after she came I
2156 was on the floor and everyone was looking at me). But it's important to have
2157 ceremonies so Spirit can come. Because if you don't create a space, sometimes
2158 Spirit will just come. So community, community gatherings, ceremonies, are all
2159 so very important. And it's also my chance to connect with Spirit and for me to
2160 have conversations with deity.

2161 What Montgomery's explanation evidences is the role of community in facilitating
2162 communication with Spirit. Without gatherings, like ceremonies and rituals, devotees are
2163 unable to create the space necessary for direct interaction between humans and divinities.

2164 The importance of community in DAST settings requires that the Ethnography of
2165 Communication approach be viewed in a nuanced manner that blurs the distinctions
2166 between the normal areas of interest-- the communication act, the communication event,
2167 the speech community, and the communication situation. In fact, in DAST settings, the
2168 communication event and act are merged with the speech community. The act nor the
2169 event can be viewed as distinct from the speech community which in turn becomes the
2170 communication situation. All are necessary for the transmittal of entextualized

2171 information and boundaries between the areas are so far blurred that they are scarcely
2172 identifiable because community is so critically necessary for the other areas to exist.

2173 The presence of community provides a single devotee with exponential degrees of
2174 energy required of some ritual work. When Hurston (1931) began her introduction to
2175 Southern hoodoo, she found most of the rituals to be conducted with just one or two ritual
2176 specialists present with the client. The second usually being a student—in her case,
2177 herself. However, for more powerful rituals, particularly those working with initiations
2178 and death, other ritual specialists had to be involved. She described the morning of her
2179 own initiation with Father Simms: "When I arrived at the house the next morning a little
2180 before nine, as per instructions, six other persons were there, so that there were nine of
2181 us—all of us in white except Father Simms who was in his purple robe" (p. 381).
2182 Although Father Simms was indeed a ritual specialist, in order to properly conduct a
2183 ritual as powerful as initiation required the presence of other specialists all of whom
2184 participated in Hurston's initiation. Their presence not only provided witnesses to testify
2185 of her legitimacy as a two-headed initiate, but as sources of assistance and energy during
2186 her transformation process—from outsider to accepted learner. As Oshunfunmi reported,

> 2187 … energy is generated from us working with each other so we utilize the energy
> 2188 of each other to move forward to accomplish the things that we are doing and to
> 2189 be successful at it and to be happy with the results of it. So, the community is
> 2190 absolutely essential in this religious tradition as with most. (personal interview)

2191 And this is why, as she explained, although there are now more books available to U.S.
2192 devotees about DASTs and their rituals and practices, the traditions cannot endure
2193 without oral and human instruction:

2194 You can sit down and there are books that will tell you from beginning to end
2195 what the ceremony is but you wouldn't be able to do it because (1) you need a
2196 community of people who can do it and (2) it's just not possible to understand
2197 what you're doing without the force of the energy and you need that community
2198 for that. (personal interview)

2199 But beyond the contribution of spiritual energy, the community likewise serves as
2200 a bank from which individual devotees may draw additional contextual knowledge to
2201 support their own work. Chief Tifase explained it thusly,

2202 Community is about having access to other people because we don't all know
2203 everything nor the same thing at the same time. I may be studying something and
2204 you may be studying something and at some point what I'm doing may help you
2205 with what you're doing and vice versa. (interview transcript)

2206 And a quote from Dr. Bess Montgomery supports her sentiment:

2207 I don't have any issue with calling somebody if I don't know. If I'm asking Spirit
2208 for something and they keep wanting something and I can't come up with the right
2209 answer, I'll call up somebody and say, "Ọsùn is wanting something but I don't
2210 know what. Any suggestions?" That's also part of it because I'm not claiming to
2211 know all of this stuff. There are people who know a whole lot more and people
2212 who may even be younger in it than me who may know more but whose path has
2213 led them to do that. (personal interview)

2214 Additional information provided by Chief Tifase also supports the idea:

2215 You may have a prayer that's two pages long and a child will learn it quicker than
2216 you will and perhaps be able to help you to learn it. So yes, having access to

2217 other people because we don't all know everything nor the same thing at the same
2218 time. I may be studying something and you may be studying something and at
2219 some point what I'm doing may help you with what you're doing and vice versa.
2220 (personal interview)

2221 No devotee is expected to retain all of the information and occult knowledge related to
2222 his/her traditions. However, various individuals may begin to specialize in particular
2223 aspects that allow him/her to be a vital resource for the community. In this way,
2224 individuality is tempered in relation to the ways in which the individual is able to relate to
2225 the community. Moreover, the community provides the context through which the
2226 communication situation envelops and shapes the communication act and event.

2227 When the individual DAST devotee without community support is encountered,
2228 their viability is automatically questioned. Dr. Blay confirms this point when she
2229 describes an Akan priest that she had encountered, “she was an akomfo but she was
2230 basically ostracized from the community so that the thing that I've learned...you know the
2231 thing about being in an ile is that you can't be in an ile that's an island” (interview
2232 transcript). No DAST devotee is truly capable of performing successful DAST work
2233 without some assistance from community because without community the ritual symbols
2234 employed to communicate cultural themes and specific requests to spirit and to others is
2235 impossible.

2236 Recalling the role of community in writing and correctly reading ritual described
2237 in Chapter Five frames the responses from these devotees in an important way for this
2238 study. The literacy performed within DAST settings is dependent upon the community

2239 for context and in turn the literacies of DASTs support and reinforce the cultural
2240 foundations that undergird the essentialness of community itself.

2241 **Community Reputation and Acceptance**

2242 For this reason, and others, how a DAST devotee is regarded within the
2243 community can directly affect their ability to perform rituals and to assert their ideas into
2244 the community discourse. An examination of historical records can be used to
2245 demonstrate this point.

2246 Common requests of hoodoo workers in the early twentieth century included
2247 gaining the love of a certain individual, ensuring marital stability, protection against
2248 slander and libel, and innocence in court cases. If one uses the nature of the requests as
2249 indication, it can be concluded that how one was viewed by the broader community was
2250 an important facet of devotee life.

2251 In Hurston's (1931) treatise on hoodoo, the number of requests to improve one's
2252 social standing is vast. Some prescriptions Hurston describes are for issues such as: "To
2253 bind a lover in place," "To the Man Whose Lodge Brothers Gainsay Him," "The Court
2254 Scrape," "The Lady Who Lost Her Lover," "The Lady Whose Husband Left Home,"
2255 "The Lady Who Cannot Get Lady Friends," "To the Man Whose Lady Friends Speak
2256 Bad of Him," and "The Man Who Has Been Slandered" among others. The remedies for
2257 these issues, as described by ritual specialists to Hurston, were aimed towards the client
2258 maintaining some degree of social respectability either though a good relationship with
2259 his/her mate or through a good reputation. In cases where the ritual specialist reported
2260 that the person's fall from social respectability was the fault of some conjure work—or
2261 crossing spell—a counterspell was offered in turn.

2262 In the Reed Family collection I found a small lined journal in which someone had
2263 recorded various scriptures from the book of Psalms and the situations for which each
2264 Psalm was to be appropriate. In this journal I found that one's community standing was
2265 particularly important to spiritual clients. For example, the Reed journal held the
2266 following entry: "36 p. against all evil and slander libels pray this p. and they will cause
2267 you no injury." In fact, Psalms 36 is concerned with the righteous being slandered by the
2268 wicked. The King James Version of the Bible begins the passage with the author
2269 lamenting how the "the transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no
2270 fear of God before his eyes" and concludes the chapter with the following request: "Let
2271 not the foot of pride come before against me, and let not the hand of the wicked remove
2272 me. There are workers of iniquity fallen: they are cast down, and shall not be able to
2273 rise." Here, like the author, the client's request in this literacy artifact is that any person
2274 seeking to vilify their reputations be halted by the work of God.

2275 In summary, just as in Fisher's (2007) study, elders in and around spoken word
2276 events helped situate the context of their performances and behaviors within a larger
2277 historical and cultural narrative. DASTs similarly use age veneration to preserve the
2278 history of the traditions and of their own particular lineages as described in Chapter Four.
2279 The importance of orality in expressing the written, flexibility, the sharing of works, and
2280 intergenerational transmission of knowledge and history all characterize ADPLCs and are
2281 all exhibited within the DAST communities I encountered. Indeed, DASTs are ADPLCs.
2282 They meet Fisher's criteria to be classified as such. But unlike participants within
2283 Fisher's study, many DAST members seldom consider themselves as being involved in
2284 literacy performance and/or tradition unless pushed to do so. I believe that their tendency

2285 to perceive of themselves as members of communities that are predominately oral has, in
2286 part, determined the ways in which researchers have (failed to) consider their practices as
2287 relevant to literacy research. However, as the data show, DASTs are replete with
2288 evidence of written and oral literacies that have served to not only transmit messages
2289 about valued cultural themes and ideas, but also reveal deep philosophical contemplations
2290 about education and how it is best conducted.

2291 I assert that by learning more about DASTs, scholars and educators are given the
2292 opportunity to examine the role of spirit as it may manifest in other ADPLCs. Moreover,
2293 because DASTs are also sites where multiple literacies are employed in inclusive
2294 settings, they offer the chance to examine the particular literacy strategies engaged by
2295 devotees in their inclusive, multi-ethnic community-building work. But how are
2296 literacies employed within DASTs viewed in the context of a community that may not
2297 see itself as engaging in literacy? And where do educational scholars begin to look for
2298 the educative practices used to sustain some marginalized populations over time? In the
2299 following chapter, I address these questions and suggest that how individuals perceive
2300 their own traditions may affect the ways that scholars approach such traditions.
2301
2302
2303
2304

2305 # Chapter Seven

2306 ## Reading at the Crossroads: Literacy Research in Spiritual Contexts

2307 *"There is no way that a pluralistic society can survive if there is no doctrine of tolerance*
2308 *as far as belief is concerned" (Abimbola, 1997/2003), p. 7).*
2309
2310 Shauib Meacham (2000) has suggested that those with political authority have
2311 defined literacy in such narrow ways that cultural diversity is frequently under-
2312 considered in literacy research. Emphasizing "strong text", narrowly conceived literacy
2313 (and its instruction) has had considerable influence on the ways in which research
2314 surrounding literacy has been conducted. Despite the fact that there is growing diversity
2315 in American public schools, the odd myopic view of literacy continues, in Meacham's
2316 opinion. He posits that although new scholarship emphasizes the need for, and
2317 importance of, the inclusion of cultural diversity in literacy studies they have not
2318 "documented multiply constitute and culturally inclusive literacy alternatives"
2319 (Meacham, 2000, p. 183). In response, I use the current chapter to summarize my
2320 findings and to situate them within a broader discussion of where literacy scholarship
2321 currently stands. I offer a grounded theoretical definition of literacy based on this study
2322 and contend that the pedagogical practices discovered during data collection can provide
2323 a useful tool kit for educators working in diverse settings and with diverse populations. I
2324 conclude with my ideas about the next steps needed to further the research trajectory
2325 extending from the particular research questions that have driven the dissertation work.

2326 ### Findings at a Glance

2327 I began this study seeking to respond to the following research questions:
2328 1) In what ways has literacy been used in the practice of DASTs in the United
2329 States?

2330 2) How do practitioners of DASTs in the US define and understand literacy
2331 within the context of these traditions?
2332 3) In what ways might DAST communities constitute African Diaspora
2333 Participatory Literacy Communities (Fisher, 2003)?
2334 within this section, I will provide a summary of my findings.
2335 First, the data indicate that orality and written text must be understood as
2336 complementary polarities in the DAST context. Even though DAST devotees I worked
2337 with during the course of this study explicitly described their traditions as oral, my
2338 observations and conversations indicated that there was a critical balance between the
2339 oral and written that formed the foundation for viable DAST ritual work. Further, the
2340 written was shaped by how oral communication occurred. Many literacy artifacts linked
2341 to DAST devotion like the Kardec book of prayers used for misas and the notes devotees
2342 kept of their divination sessions were essentially recordings of what otherwise would be
2343 spoken. They were speakerly texts valued by communities for their abilities to recall that
2344 which might otherwise be lost.
2345 Second, elements of material culture, drumming sequences, liturgical structures,
2346 and colors, for example, are all ways in which DAST devotees choose to encode specific
2347 information for literate audiences. In the case of DAST literacies, no text is limited by
2348 form. In fact, the order of songs, the liturgical structure of prayers, the colors of
2349 devotees' candles and beads, and other elements of material culture can all be employed
2350 to communicate entextualized information to a literate population. For example in both
2351 the Akan traditional context and the Hurston historical record on hoodoo, the color black
2352 is linked to death. When employed through clothing or in the color of candles, other

2353 devotees are able to recognize the kind ritual of and/or energy being employed in a given
2354 speech situation. Indeed, great amounts of information, in DAST literacies, are
2355 communicated efficiently with single items such as color.

2356 Third, and in relation, DAST texts are by nature fluid because of such efficiency.
2357 By design, the messages encoded in many DAST settings, including those linked to ritual
2358 performance and to specific messages, are ambiguous and reveal a strategy of double-
2359 voicedness. Such flexibility allows for messages to be hidden in plain sight and
2360 interpreted only by those whose knowledge base allows for correct interpretation of the
2361 communication through a consideration of context. Devotees often withhold information
2362 necessary for deciphering such texts and reveal it only to those who are deemed ready,
2363 and appropriate, to receive it.

2364 Fourth, context is essential for understanding DAST entextualized information.
2365 Entire bodies of religious hegemony form the fundamental basis through which the both
2366 the normative and sensory poles of ritual symbols must be understood. Not only that, the
2367 ritual specialists responsible for encoding information must also be considered as part of
2368 the ritual context that shapes the particular cultural theme being transmitted. Ideas
2369 surrounding ritual symbol placement and the community context both inform how the
2370 ritual is performed and how the ritual must be decoded.

2371 Fifth, the people themselves become the most critical context of all. In other
2372 words, the community is an essential part of the context necessary for message
2373 interpretation. The ritual symbols employed within DAST devotion communicate culture
2374 as devotees experience it. As such, a community of devotees functions as a speech
2375 community whose cultural norms, values, and beliefs not only shape communication acts,

2376 events, and situations, but also transmits ideas about the norms, values, and beliefs
2377 themselves through such acts, events, and situations.

2378 Sixth, DAST communities are ADPLCs. They meet every criteria outlined by
2379 Fisher (2003) to be defined as such. However, as discussed in Chapter Six, they also
2380 provide information that can help us reconsider how community is organized within
2381 ADPLCs and who is allowed to become members of these communities.

2382 A not-so-anticipated finding of this study is that where and how DASTs transmit
2383 their religious hegemonies to novice devotees is a site in which existing Western
2384 educational theories can be juxtaposed in order to understand how common folk have
2385 operationalize the theory without a need to name them. I will explicate this idea below,
2386 after discussing the main reason for this study: to describe the relationship between
2387 DASTs and literacy.

2388 **Defining Literacy From the Ground Up**

2389 I began this study seeking to establish a definition of literacy based on my work
2390 within DAST communities. I applied grounded theory in an effort to not only describe
2391 how DAST devotees explicitly defined literacy but also how they performed it. What I
2392 found was that despite the text privileging definitions given by participants, in actuality
2393 what they performed was far more dynamic. For example, Dr. Bess Montgomery
2394 described literacy thusly,

2395 Well, of course as a literature person, the first thing that comes to my mind is the
2396 ability to read and write. But when I think about African spirituality, no when I
2397 think about African culture, African Diasporic culture, literacy is never separate
2398 from orality. I think that literacy simply became the cook pot for our orality.

2399 What some scholars have called orature. And that's because when literacy came,
2400 it did...in many cultures...negate orality. But in African cultures it did not.
2401 (interview)

2402 Here, one can see that Dr. Bess Montgomery's initial response to the literacy construct is
2403 text-driven. However, when she moved to a more holistic treatment of the construct it
2404 expanded. In fact, within the DAST communities the fine line between the written and
2405 the unwritten must be understood as the boundary between binary partners or as no line at
2406 all! In his description of religion, Wande Abimbola, a renowned scholar and babalawo
2407 says, "There is no religion that does not have a book, whether this book is written or
2408 unwritten" (p. 6). The act of textual encoding, in Abimbola's notion, is not what makes a
2409 thing readable. This is binary partnership at work and it characterizes how literacy works
2410 in DAST communities.

2411 I have determined, based upon the data, that literacy in the DAST context can be
2412 defined as the practices by which a literate community both records and decodes
2413 information through a variety of forms including color, rhythm, liturgical structure,
2414 syllabic text, and other items including material culture, in order to transmit ideas about
2415 cultural themes and ontology. The strategies for such literacy are by design ambiguous in
2416 nature and interpreted only through an informed consideration of context. In addition to
2417 this nuanced definition of literacy linked to DASTs, importantly and significantly, an
2418 exploration of the data related to this study reveal a number of pedagogical strategies and
2419 educational philosophies that can be useful in a contemporary school setting.

2420 **Applying What Was Found in a Contemporary Classroom Setting**

2421 Barbara Christian, noted literary critic, espoused the race for theory that I believe
2422 important to the discussion of this study. Christian (1987) lamented that Westerners,

2423 seeking to understand a world "fast escaping their political control" were beginning to
2424 redefine literature in ways that suited their own purposes and agendas. Because such
2425 redefinition, in fact, came in the form of naming and expounding "theory" and was
2426 commodified in ways linked to academic employment and tenure, how people themselves
2427 operated and named their own traditions were frequently overlooked and marginalized.
2428 While I choose to invoke Christian's critique on such a race for theory, I acknowledge
2429 that within educational research in general and literacy research particularly, the race for
2430 theory may not be quite as nefarious. Instead, I believe the race, in most cases, to be
2431 characterized not by a deliberate marginalization of existing folk theories about education
2432 and pedagogy but by an unknowingness of the need to explore those traditions not readily
2433 linked to existing, Western educational theory. As such, though I believe that DAST
2434 pedagogy and educational philosophy should, and necessarily stand on its own without a
2435 need to validate it through any other cultural lens, I do believe that it is educative to
2436 explore the ways in which DAST philosophy can be used to extend, negate, or inform
2437 existing Western educational theory. For the purposes of this study I will compare the
2438 ways in which elders in DAST communities determine the readiness of other devotees to
2439 receive additional training and/or information necessary to decipher and encode
2440 information in ritual settings to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky,
2441 1978, 1987).

2442 As described by Vygotsky (1978; 1987) and others (Chaiklin; 2003; Daniels,
2443 2001; Tappan, 1998), the zone of proximal development is understood to be the "distance
2444 between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving
2445 and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under

2446 adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).
2447 The ZPD was originally introduced in a Vygotskian discussion of child development.
2448 Vygotsky suggested that each stage of childhood was characterized by a given
2449 psychological structure and a set of integral relations of psychological functioning like
2450 perception, thinking, and speech. His emphasis on the whole child reflects a belief
2451 characterized by a recognition that an individual's mental and personal selves are
2452 different ways of expressing the same self. In other words, an individual's psychological
2453 structure is reflective of both their social and material aspects. Each stage of childhood is
2454 entered only when the child is engaged by a contradiction between the child's current
2455 capabilities, their needs and desires, and the demands and possibilities within the social
2456 situation of development. According to Chaiklin (2003) "it is important to remember that
2457 these age periods are understood as historically and materially constructed—historically
2458 because the functions are constructed through the history of human practices; materially
2459 because the functions are developed as a consequence of tasks and interactions between
2460 historically-constructed forms of practice with the child's own interests and actions
2461 enabled by the current age period of the child." (p. 6). Importantly, the ZPD suggests that
2462 these functions are not based upon a biological necessity. Age is viewed, then, as a
2463 psychological construct and not a temporal designation. The ZPD is used, by those who
2464 agree with its premise, to determine the activities needed to move a child from one age
2465 period to another and to identify where a child is in relation to the functioning required of
2466 the next transition. In other words, the ZPD is used to evaluate where a given learner is
2467 and what is needed to move to them to the next stage.

2468 As discussed in Chapter Four, elders in DASTs evaluate other devotees for when
2469 and how they should be exposed to more complicated knowledge bases through which
2470 rituals can be read and/or deciphered. They determine the ability through which devotees
2471 under their careful guidance might be instructed in occult knowledge. Upon first glance,
2472 their evaluations can be seen as demonstrative of Vygotsky's zone of proximal
2473 development. However, a closer analysis reveals that their evaluation practices differ in
2474 nuanced ways from the ZPD.

2475 From the onset is important to note that Chaiklin (2003) links the ZPD to
2476 historical and material constructions. DAST is also fundamentally informed by these
2477 constructions but also includes a focused attention to culture. Whereas the ZPD suggests
2478 that an individual exhibits the psychological characteristics linked to a given age period,
2479 DAST evaluations are based not only on individual functioning but also to the purpose
2480 and destiny to which an individual has been born. In other words, there may be cases, in
2481 the DAST context, where an individual whose psychological structures do not indicate a
2482 readiness to move to the next period, might still be evaluated as needing to move based
2483 on spiritual requirements. For example, it might be that an individual receiving their first
2484 divination might be told that they need to initiate into the secrets of a given deity not
2485 based on their own individual psychological structures but based upon the religious
2486 hegemony to which they are exposed that has been transmitted historically, materially,
2487 and culturally. That is not to say that for many DAST evaluation does not in some ways
2488 mirror the ZPD, but that it does not necessarily always do so.

2489 Another difference between the ZPD and DAST evaluation is that the ZPD is
2490 used to identify appropriate instruction for a group of children and to identify the specific

2491 needs of individual children (Vygotsky, 1978; Chaiklin, 2003). However, DAST
2492 evaluation is consistently individualized. There are no cohorts for instruction. Each
2493 individual is evaluated based upon their psychological structures, as is the case in the
2494 ZPD, and upon their particular spiritual gifts that are identified by ritual specialists in
2495 ways that are fundamentally beyond the consideration of the ZPD. Further, the
2496 implementation of the ZPD depends, in part, on a child's ability to imitate, either an adult
2497 or another learning peer, what lies in the zone of their intellectual potential. But
2498 imitation, in the case of DASTs may be considered dangerous. For example, an elder
2499 priest in the Lukumí tradition informed me of a way of determining which tree in a forest
2500 belongs to The Mothers-- a group of deities so powerful that it can be dangerous to even
2501 mention their names. At the prodding of another senior devotee, she reminded me not to
2502 go look for the tree because she did not want me to "blow myself up, " she laughed (field
2503 notes). Indeed, my conversations with, and observations of, various DAST communities
2504 reveal that some practices should never been imitated unless under the guidance of an
2505 elder and never solely with the assistance of another learning peer.

2506 This comparison of a popular Western education theory to the practiced
2507 theoretical stance of DAST communities demonstrates how further comparisons can be
2508 used to inform how we understand, and approach, the use of Western educational theory.
2509 For example, an educator who finds Vygotsky's ZPD problematic and/or insufficient,
2510 may find within a description of DAST evaluation, subtle changes that can be
2511 implemented that preserve the integrity of the Western model while simultaneously
2512 providing room for teacher adaptation based on their own students' historical, material,
2513 and cultural needs.

2514 As this example indicates, DAST practices and traditions can be aligned to
2515 contemporary Western classroom theory and practice in ways that can challenge and
2516 inform current approaches to educative strategies and practices. If only we take the time
2517 to explore the pedagogical practices heretofore marginalized communities and practices
2518 we are certain to find more examples that can help us deepen and expand our educational
2519 practices. But first, we must agree to disagree with the ideas that have marginalized these
2520 communities within academic educational discourse in the first place.

2521 **Where From Here?**

2522 Szwed (1981) has argued that scholars have yet to establish consensus on what
2523 literacy is. Despite a lack of an explicit definition upon which all would agree, many
2524 existing studies of literacy traditions have been shaped by an accepted rhetoric of
2525 preliteracy that limits our current interrogations of literacy, including the history of
2526 populations long associated with the lack of "literacy" (Duffy, 2000). Duffy argues that
2527 the way scholars have tended to approach the study of literacy has been in a manner
2528 aligned with the "Great Divide"[17] theories of the past. As Duffy elucidates, although
2529 these theories have long been disputed and largely discredited by newer literacy
2530 scholarship, their ideological basis continues to direct research on the literacies of
2531 marginalized groups including Blacks.

2532 This does not mean that the rhetoric surrounding literacy has not addressed the
2533 problems associated with privileging text in a discussion of literacy. Although "Great
2534 Divide" theories of literacy are inclined to view literacy as way of transforming cognition

[17] "Great Divide" theories of scholarship presented in the works of scholars such as Goody (1968, 1986,) Havelock (1982, 1988) and Ong (1982) have been criticized for their acceptance of the idea that cognitive abilities, and therefore advanced civilization, is made possible through a society's literacy. In the 1980s, the New Literacy Studies scholars like Street (1984, 1993) and Gee (2001) critiqued these theories and presented more sociocultural ideas of literacy. More on these distinctions will be addressed in the literature review of this essay.

2535 and representations of knowledge, other scholars, especially those associated with New
2536 Literacy Studies, have moved towards more fluid understandings of the literacy construct
2537 that considers such things as body art, web-surfing, graffiti, and orality as elements of
2538 literacy (Fisher, 2009; Kolko et al., 2000; Kirkland, 2009; Lankshear, 1997).
2539 Additionally, there is work being done that critiques the well-established literacy myth
2540 and includes a conscious awareness of the affects of race, gender, and class on how
2541 xliteracy is practiced and understood by particular populations (Bartlett, 2007; Fisher,
2542 2004, 2009; Kirkland, 2009; McCarty, 2005; McHenry & Heath, 2004; Street, 1993). In
2543 so doing, these scholars fully engage the hegemonic implications of how literacy is
2544 defined and, perhaps just as importantly, how researchers choose to engage literacy.
2545 However, as demonstrated in Chapter One, how literacy has been defined in the context
2546 of DASTs remains outside the normal purview of even the most contemporary,
2547 culturally-aware scholars. Many scholars remained resigned in privileging syllabic text
2548 in their work.

2549 Nonetheless, the condition of schooling in this country necessitates a
2550 paradigmatic shift from resignation to the courage to explore the margins for all that will
2551 be necessary to save our children. Normally, one would expect to read a list of bleak
2552 statistics facing American public school students, especially those belonging to Black
2553 and/or Brown populations. Or, one might expect to find a critique of the weak
2554 educational policies put in place to respond to what has been described by some as an
2555 "educational crisis" among students of color (College Board, 2010). Here, I refuse to do
2556 so; there are a plethora of studies that can be consulted for such information. Instead, I
2557 suggest that while the situation is indeed critical and deserving of focused attention, our

2558 emphasis should not only be on the problem, but on an understanding that the
2559 environment of public education is no more harsh nor oppressive than has been faced by
2560 communities before—especially communities of color.

2561 Black children are part of a historical metanarrative in which their people have
2562 always found the need, and the strength, to respond to hostile environments while
2563 protecting their own cultural ideas, norms, and communities. I am convinced that by
2564 engaging in a research trajectory that explores the strategies and philosophies employed
2565 by them to do so, we can gain understandings that will allow us to confront whatever
2566 failures our public school system has produced. Specifically, I believe that we must
2567 continue to expand our notions of literacy to align with the social and cultural practices of
2568 marginalized groups so that the fullness of their traditions can be explored. If indeed the
2569 educational crisis is as bleak as it has been painted, we must be willing to look in all
2570 places for answers to address it.
2571

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APPENDIX B
2905
Glossary
2906

2907 Abòrìşà: one who has received one or more òrìşà and has been introduced to the general
2908 mysteries associated with that (or those) òrìşà

2909 Abosom: a diety in Akan-based spiritual traditions

2910 Akomfo: an initiated priest in Akan-based spiritual traditions

2911 Aleyo: a Yorùbá -based spiritual devotee who has not been initiated into any mysteries
2912 associated with the tradition; literally translated as an outsider

2913 Babalawo: literally, father of mysteries; an initiated priest of Ifa—the deity of divination in
2914 Yoruba-based spiritual traditions

2915 Babalòrìşà: A male devotee initiated into the secrets of a guiding òrìşà; a priest

2916 Boveda: a table decorated to venerate a person’s ancestors and/or spirit guides; a
2917 portal through which communication with spirits is possible

2918 Conjure: spiritual tradition that is nature based and depends on manipulation of substances
2919 and energies for a desired effect

2920 Cosmogram: Kongo-based ritual symbols used during rituals as invocation and prayer points

2921 Elekes: Beaded necklaces worn by DAST devotees

2922 Èşù: Yorùbá -based deity associated with the crossroads and with choice

2923 Hoodoo: DAST practiced predominately in the US South closely related to conjure and
2924 Palo

2925 Ide: Beaded bracelet worn by DAST devotees for spiritual purposes

2926 Iyalòrìşà: Female devotee initiated into the secrets of a guiding òrìşà; a priest

2927 Iyanifa: considered by some to be the female equivalent to the babalawo, in most Cuban
2928 lineages this position is not recognized.

2929 Libreta: literally notebook; a book containing notes taken and collected by DAST
2930 devotees

2931 Lukumí Yorùbá -based spiritual tradition primarily identified with Spanish-
2932 speaking lineages and very similar to Santería.
2933 Lwa deity in Vodun traditions
2934 Misa also called a mass; a ritual during which devotees commune with the non-living
2935 through specific prayers and deliberate invocation
2936 Nommo the energy (and power) of the spoken word
2937 Oba literally king; an initiated priest in Yorùbá -based spiritual traditions who is
2938 considered an expert in ritual protocols
2939 Ocha Spanishized word referring to all things òrìşà
2940 Odu more accurately Odu Ifá; the sacred spiritual text of Yorùbá -based spiritual
2941 traditions
2942 Òrìşà: intercessory spirits in Yorùbá -based traditions; each spirit is linked to constructs
2943 in the natural world including, but not limited to, fresh water, salt water, thunder
2944 and lightning, lava, and mountains as well as elements of human life such as
2945 motherhood, fertility, masculinity, and intelligence among others.
2946 Ọsùn: Yoruba deity associated with femininity, beauty, wealth, and fresh water
2947 Palero(a) devotee of a nature-based DAST heavily influenced by Kongolese
2948 spiritual traditions
2949 Sango Yorùbá deity associated with thunder and lightning and masculinity
2950 Santería Yorùbá -based spiritual tradition that utilizes Catholic prayers and imagery to
2951 represent the various òrìşà.
2952 Umbanda Brazilian Diasporic African Spiritual Tradition that includes veneration of the
2953 ancestors and òrìşàs.
2954 Vodun (Voodoo): Diasporic African Spiritual Tradition that includes the veneration of ancestors
2955 and other deities known as lwa.
2956 Yemonja: Yorùbá deity associated with salt water and motherhood

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APPENDIX B

2958 ADPLC – DAST Observation Form (ADOF)

Characteristic	Yes/Comment	No/Comment
1. Is the setting observed and/or described made up predominately of people of African descent?	 Visually?	
2. Is Africa represented in the space in other ways?	 How?	
3. Is the setting observed and/or described outside of traditional school and work settings?		
4. Does everyone in the setting and/or described in the document possess equally important roles?		
5. Does the setting and/or document demonstrate that community members draw from a varied body of expression to communicate?		

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2964 *Adapted from Fisher, M. T. (2003). Open mics and open minds: Spoken word poetry in African*
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APPENDIX C

Notes on Methodology

Dancing Between Circles and Lines: Academic Responsibility and Spiritual Commitment

We all possess the cultural capacity to see, explain, and interpret from the vantage point of our existential location.

~Molefi Kete Asante

In the fall of 2009, I approached the mat of a well-respected babalawo in Atlanta, Georgia. After invoking the necessary spirits, the priest began throwing his opele to determine the signs that were messages from the òrìşà and my ancestors. After discussing a number of rather personal issues with me, his face grew more serious than it had been as he leaned toward me and looked at me glaringly for several seconds before speaking. "You know, Sango says that your spiritual work and your academic work are the same."

The babalawo's pronouncement was not a surprise to me. During my graduate studies, I have consistently found that it is through spiritual means that most of my ideas for research come to me. The present study has been no different. At each stage of the project: generating research questions, reviewing the literature, collecting data, analysis of the data, and writing the study itself, I have found myself led by my ancestors, other egun, and several òrìşà--not the least of which is Sango. At times, it was difficult to separate who I am spiritually from the work I was conducting for this study. I struggled to figure out my "proper" position and from which stance I should approach the data. After all, education research is supposed to be objective. Right?

2992 **Deconstructing the "Objective" Stance**

2993 According to LeCompte and colleagues (1999), for quite some time the prevailing
2994 stereotype of the researcher has been of a white male, working alone who does not get
2995 involved with his research subjects. He is able to control most, if not all, of his biases
2996 about his research. The stereotype results largely from the rise of logical positivistic
2997 perspective for human sciences in the 18th and 19th centuries. This perspective was used
2998 to validate Western hegemony by men and women who were able to empirically
2999 demonstrate what they desired as long as the instruments they employed to do so were
3000 determined to be reliable and valid within their community's norms (Stanfield, 1994;
3001 1995). Under rhetoric that presented positivism and its associated studies as rigorous,
3002 knowledge that came from intangible, immeasurable places, like intuition and/or spiritual
3003 sources, was rejected. Comte, a leading scholar in the positivism movement, understood
3004 humans' interaction with knowledge as evolving from the theological to the positive
3005 (Mill, 2007). For him, and others who were informed by his arguments, only that which
3006 could be empirically measured was authentic, valuable knowledge. All else was less. By
3007 the twentieth century, however, Comte's view was widely contradicted (Giedymin,
3008 1975).

3009 Increasingly, especially among researchers concerned with race and culture, the
3010 belief that all knowledge was marked by its origins was privileged (see for example
3011 Haraway, 1991; Harding 1991). As such, researchers have increasingly been viewed as
3012 integral parts of the research process and deemed to be involved in the production along
3013 with their participants (Geertz, 1993) in non-positivist research methodology.
3014 Researchers place values on the data they collect and the knowledge they generated from

3015 it in ways that many believe must be made transparent. For scholars studying
3016 marginalized cultures and people, this is even more important.
3017 Historically, people of color have been marginalized, ignored, and misrepresented
3018 in educational research (Dillard, 2000; Milner, 2007; Stanfield, 1995). In holding the
3019 illusion of an objective stance, researchers fail to confront the hegemony that plagues
3020 positivist research. Conversely, Asante (1998) argues that objectivity does not exist.
3021 Instead, he asserts, objectivity is really a "kind of collective subjectivity of European
3022 culture" (p. 1). It is characterized by a tendency to consider constructs from only one
3023 angle and it holds the European cultural worldview as the frame through which all things
3024 are come to be understood. European culture, then, become the norm against which all
3025 other cultures' norms, beliefs, and experiences are evaluated (Foster, 1999; Scheurich &
3026 Young, 1997). As a result, the traditions and experiences of people of color that differ
3027 from that which is considered "normal" in European/Western culture cannot be known in
3028 its full richness.
3029 **Green's Double Dutch Methodology**
3030 Aligning my personal ideologies and feelings about research with those of Asante
3031 and others, I attempted to identify a methodological framework that could more
3032 appropriately be used for my study that was characterized by a consideration of the
3033 communities I set out to observe as well as my relationship to them. After some
3034 reflection, my initial approach to my researcher position was framed by a dear
3035 colleague's notion of Double-Dutch Methodology (DDM). In it, Green (2012) describes
3036 the ways in which she has employed different researcher identities based on the needs of
3037 her study as informed by her childhood experiences playing double-dutch with her family

3038 and friends. In an effort to overcome the "reductive constraints" she identified as
3039 characterizing her early interpretations of a positivist, neutral researcher stance, Green
3040 pulled on her personal ideological relationships to critical social movements and activism
3041 as well as her commitments to urban youth to revise her research perspective in order to
3042 inform how she has begun to shift her orientations based on the specific needs of given
3043 situations during her study of a youth radio collective.

3044 According to Green, DDM as a conceptual orientation reflects the researcher
3045 moving rhythmically, and deliberately across lines of participant observation in ways that
3046 are "contextually styled and improvisational" (p. 149). The DDM approach requires that
3047 that myth of the neutral researcher be replaced by an understanding that the researcher
3048 conducting ethnographic work must be reflexive, relevant, and reciprocal. All of
3049 Green's observations and shifts made incredible sense to me and I enthusiastically set out
3050 to maintain a DDM researcher positionality during the course of this study. However, I
3051 quickly found that while Green's approach made sense for her study's context, and in
3052 other contexts that I might find myself in, it was nearly impossible for me to maintain in
3053 relation to this study.

3054 Spirituality is the foundation of my personal identity. My respect of the
3055 permeation of spirituality in my life is represented by a visual proverb found in the Akan
3056 symbols system known as Adinkra—*Nsoromma.* In short, Nsoromma marks an
3057 individual as child of the heavens. Those, like myself, who invoke the proverb do so to
3058 acknowledge the consistent presence of Spirit in any and all situations, including those
3059 related to research. So while DDM allows for the researcher to blur lines between
3060 participant observation roles, it does suggest that a researcher enters and exists their

3061 research setting. In the case of this study, because it was concerned with DAST
3062 communities and practices, I could not withhold my understandings of them from the
3063 ways in which I approached the data. So while Green's study allowed her to "land within
3064 a 'game' already in play," I was already a player in a 'game' that I chose to study. As a
3065 result, though I believe DDM to be an incredibly insightful and valuable way to approach
3066 humanizing research, it was inappropriate this particular study.

3067 As I continued struggling with how I should approach my study and understand
3068 my responsibility to its reliability and validity, a professor at a conference where I
3069 presented suggested that I read M. Jacqui Alexander's *Crossing Pedagogies*. In Chapter
3070 Seven of Alexander's text, she explains how she came to come to her unique
3071 methodological approach to her work. Working in 1989 to understand how African
3072 cosmogonies had been employed in nineteenth-century Trinidad, Alexander, much as I
3073 did in an earlier empirical study (Pogue, 2012) sought to discover how Bantu-Kongo
3074 signs and systems had been employed in the New World. Despite her rigorous initial
3075 approach, Alexander found herself unable to comprehend one historical figure in
3076 particular—Thisbe. She consulted traditional historical sources including legal and
3077 missionary documents in an effort to understand Thisbe who remained troublingly
3078 elusive. Thisbe allowed public parts of her life to be observed but hid all else from
3079 Alexander.

3080 When traditional sources failed Alexander, she chose to turn to her spirituality. A
3081 devotee of Lukumí and of Vodun, the scholar was able to know Kitsimba—Thisbe's real
3082 name—only when Alexander dealt with the "texture" of Kitsimba's living. Alexander
3083 explains it:

3084 …all seeming secular categories in which subjectivity is housed had to be
3085 understood as moored to the Sacred since they anchored a conciousness
3086 that drew its sustenance from elsewhere: a set of codes derived from the
3087 disembodied consciousness of the Divine … In shifting the ground of
3088 experience from the secular to the Sacred, we [gain] better position. (p.
3089 295)

3090 The remainder of the chapter details Alexander's coupling of Vodun and Santeria in an
3091 effort to uncover "their pedagogic content to see how they might instruct us in the
3092 complicated undertaking of Divine self-invention" (pp. 299-300) and pushed me into a
3093 more conscious exploration of how the "Sacred" moored my own subjectivities.

3094 I am not certain that it was I that made the decision about how I would approach
3095 my work so much as it was the decision of forces like Sango, Ọsùn, and my ancestors.
3096 When I attempted to marginalize them in the design of the study and the collection of the
3097 data, they purposely and purposefully reminded me of their presence. When speaking to
3098 an elder priest on my initial ideas about the study, she suggested that I go to Èşù and ask
3099 him to open doors. I had approached her thinking I could maintain a non-spiritual stance
3100 in relationship to my study, but her advice called attention to that which I could not
3101 ignore. I did approach Èşù requesting that he manifest his ability to open doors that stood
3102 between me, potential participants, and the study. I believe that he did and I also believe
3103 that anyone seeking to replicate this study, would find it difficult without obtaining such
3104 a blessing from he that opens and closes all doors and others like him.