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Chapter 7 Everyone to His Quarter: Ethnic Interaction, Emulation, and Change in Itsekiri Visual Culture

KATHY CURNOW

When interethnic conflicts are rife, as they are in the Niger Delta, two factors that illuminate political and historic relationships are the conscious projection of culture and the denial or acknowledgment of neighboring influences. Both are clearly visible amongst the Itsekiri (Jekri, Iwere) of the Warri Kingdom. A small ethnic group,¹ they once dominated the region. Significantly outnumbered by their immediate neighbors, the Urhobo and Ijo, their former position as overlords has been challenged repeatedly in this century. Today they fight for visibility within Nigeria's Delta State, using art and other forms of cultural expression to affirm their presence and attempt to reestablish paramountcy.

For over four centuries, the Itsekiri were regional masters of commerce, first supplying the Portuguese and other Europeans with slaves, cloths, and other goods, then, in the 1800s, shifting their emphasis to palm oil. Their population was heavily dependent on slaves, who came from a variety of inland ethnic groups. In particular, the Urhobo acted as their cassava and oil palm farmers, as well as their paddlers. The local Ijo, on the other hand, were trade partners, tenants, and, according to the Itsekiri, sometimes pirates. The colonial British government inverted Itsekiri ethnic supremacy in the Warri region. Within the past century, the abolition of slavery robbed them of both population and labor force. Furthermore, the early Western education of former subject peoples aggravated matters, as the Itsekiri began to be outmaneuvered in the newly established colonial civil service. Despite these shifts, old resentments continued. In 1952, the Urhobo rioted during an organized welcome for Itsekiri Chief Arthur Prest, a minister in the federal government, because he was perceived as "the chief organiser of Itsekiri claims to superiority" (Lloyd 1956, 79). After independence, the Nigerian government perpetuated the imported legal system, as well as certain British policies vis-à-vis traditional rulers, further undermining Itsekiri authority. Interethnic relationships shifted drastically. The Itsekiri ruler, the *olu*, can no longer appoint Ijo district titleholders as he once did; the Itsekiri have lost a number of land claims to the Ijo and especially to the Urhobo (Ayomike 1988; Moore 1936 [1970]; Obiomah n.d.); and even expected state entitlements have at times required court battles.

Particularly chafing to the Itsekiri were some perceived and sanctioned abuses of kingship, which occurred in 1991 when Bendel State was split into Edo and Delta States. Each Nigerian state has a council of traditional rulers who remain influential, though they have no active political role. Under the British, these rulers were graded ("First Class," "Second Class," "Third Class") according to their historical importance and spheres of influence. The postindependence Nigerian government continued this practice, also

7.1 Ogiame Aruwaje II, Olu of Warri, on the occasion of his installation as chancellor of the University of Nigeria. Olu Aruwaje II wears an academic gown over his wrapper and sashed chasuble; an academic cap was rejected in favor of one of the formal Portuguese crowns. Photograph by Kathy Curnow, Niukba, 1994

maintaining each monarch's graded government stipend. Under the former Bendel State, the Itsekiri *olu* (a "First Class" traditional ruler) was the permanent vice-chairman of the state's traditional council (the *oba* of Benin being its permanent chairman). The Itsekiri assumed this recognized position would place their *olu* as the head of the traditional council of the new Delta State, just as the *oba* would chair Edo State. To their dismay, Delta decided its own council would have a rotational head, and its first choice of chairman was the Urhobo ruler of Okpe. The Itsekiri viewed this decision as insulting in the extreme. They observed that, under the British, local Urhobo priest-leaders had been "upgraded" into traditional rulers for ease of indirect rule. They also pointed out that the Urhobo had always been decentralized and, as such, were undeserving of the council's initial recognition. In protest, the *olu* refused to attend council meetings.

Rancor has produced more than objections. In the last decade, area violence has grown steadily. The Urhobo have burnt the homes of prominent Itsekiri, tried to destroy an important Itsekiri tree shrine, and attempted to disrupt Itsekiri public festivities. In order to ensure peace and political neutrality, the Itsekiri petitioned the federal government to declare Warri town a "Federal Territory" in the mid-1990s, but without success. By late 1998, the Ogbe Ijo likewise burnt numerous Itsekiri homes and even staged a night marine attack on the island of Ode-Itsekiri, targeting the *olu*'s traditional palace (not his present residence, but an important ceremonial landmark). Retaliations have occurred, with many accompanying deaths and injuries.

Several issues are at stake. Urhobo resentment centers on land ownership, the concept of Itsekiri suzerainty, and perceived Itsekiri insults—the Itsekiri continued to refer to the Urhobo as their slaves well into this century (Lloyd 1956, 82). For decades the Urhobo, who make up the majority of Warri town's inhabitants, have sued unsuccessfully to change the *olu*'s legal title to "*olu* of Itsekiri," rather than "*olu* of Warri." Ijo hostility, on the other hand, was sparked in 1997 by a successful Itsekiri bid to shift a local government headquarters from an Ogbe Ijo to an Itsekiri enclave. By 1999, the Ogbe Ijo were still protesting the loss, petitioning the government to create a new local government for their use, and violence escalated during this year. Since the early 1900s, Itsekiri bitterness has centered on the Urhobo; the Ijo have only recently been viewed as active antagonists. These conflicts have had a significant impact on families. The Itsekiri treat intermarriage as a rule, rather than an exception. By the 1950s, Lloyd estimated 22 percent of the Itsekiri had Urhobo mothers (1956, 83), and the number seems to have increased since then. In the late 1980s, Olu Erejuwa II ruled that very distant relatives could marry, but most Itsekiri still consider any degree of relationship, no matter how remote, as unacceptable incest (*egwere*; Omoneukanrin 1942, 46–48). During crisis periods, Urhobo or Ijo mothers and wives (children are generally considered to have their father's ethnicity) are considered antagonists and told to "go to their own quarter." Currently many interethnic weddings have been canceled or postponed because of the crisis. Although numerous investigatory panels intended to stem ethnic violence and ill will have been formulated, no permanent settlement has yet resulted.

These reversals have threatened the Itsekiri, making them increasingly active and vocal promoters of their kingdom and its culture. Their struggle

for visibility and both local and national recognition have incorporated numerous aspects of visual and performance art, from commercial and fashion statements to regalia and sacred forms. Art has become both territorial marker and border expander, while claims to origination of forms are viewed with legalistic zeal or blasé acceptance (depending on the appropriator). Visual distinction has become a key element in the one-upmanship that is a daily aspect of ethnic rivalry.

The question of identity and its projection is a complex one, for the Itsekiri are themselves an amalgam. As an ethnic entity, they conjoined in the late fifteenth century, uniting peoples of diverse origins. Most appear to have migrated into the Delta from a variety of Yoruba polities, particularly from the Ijebu region. Some linguists go so far as to refer to the Itsekiri language as a Yoruba dialect with numerous loan words. Other immigrants are said to have been Benin Edo, Igala, or Ijo (Moore 1936 [1970], 13; Sagay n.d. [1981], 2; Omoneukanrin 1942, 17). As a group, they coalesced under external leadership in the late fifteenth century when the exiled Benin crown prince Ginuwa canoed south into the Delta, accompanied by the heirs of Benin chiefs. After traveling to the coast and spending some time there among the Ijo, the party voyaged back into the creeks, finally settling on the island of Ode-Itsekiri (also known as Big Warri). Incorporating those people of mixed origins already occupying the area, they expanded, creating additional communities along the mangrove creeks. Their nation has had only one traditional ruler, the *olu*, who administered his state through his chiefs. Rival or breakaway chiefs often fled the capital, setting up communities some distance away; this expanded the kingdom's boundaries.

Foreign trade further affected Itsekiri culture. By about 1500, the Portuguese had already reached the area (Pereira 1937, 129),² and contact intensified within the next century. The court was Christianized, beginning a tradition of Catholic monarchs that was nearly unbroken until the nineteenth century. This coincided with an economy that was extremely externally oriented; many Itsekiri words for luxury imports (such as *seda* for "silk") come directly from the Portuguese. By the seventeenth century, the Dutch began to make trade inroads, followed by the French and the British. In the nineteenth century, the latter dominated the palm oil trade, which became the area mainstay after British stoppage of the slave trade.

In 1848, civil insurrection and an eighty-eight year interregnum followed the *olu*'s death and that of two of his heirs. Effective control was in the hands of a series of "governors" (*gofines*), who continued to operate even after the 1884 British-Itsekiri "protection" treaties and the 1891 integration of the Warri Kingdom into the Niger Coast Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. It was the British who built up what has become Warri town (once known as New Warri); their initial establishment quickly grew to incorporate Itsekiri, Urhobo, and Ijo lands. In 1936, the royal throne was reestablished, and by mid-century the *olu* had built a new palace in Warri town, an architectural statement that staked a claim on the mainland, leaving the ancient island palace as a ceremonial center for coronations, funerals, and festivals.

Questions of Itsekiri identity revolve around five groups: two parent cultures, the Edo of the Benin Kingdom and the Yoruba; their external allies the Portuguese; and two sources of contention, the Urhobo and Ijo. Ambivalence marks relations with the parent cultures. Benin is valued as the

source of the monarchy, as well as for its undeniable historic presence. It is the origin of royal traditions such as a coral crown, netted coral garments, coral *odigbe* collar, ceremonial swords (*uda* and *eberen*), semicircular royal ancestral altars, many chiefly titles, and numerous elements of regalia. Independence from Benin authority and cultural innovations are, however, even more esteemed. Though the reports of some early travelers suggest that Warri may have been subject to Benin (Ryder 1959, 296, 301),³ no ceremonial or other evidence supports this: the *oba* of Benin did not confirm new *olus* (as he did the rulers of other subject peoples), nor were *olus* buried at Benin (as some of the northern Urhobo leaders were). This type of origin reinforcement was common; even Benin itself continued to send certain remains of deceased *obas* for interment at Ife, their dynastic home, until the late nineteenth century. In contrast, Itsekiri royal burials take place at Ijala, a settlement founded by the first *olu*, Ginuwa, who died and was buried there. His sons went on to found their capital at nearby Ode-Itsekiri.

Many more travelers asserted Warri's autonomy; if tribute was ever paid, it seems to have been sporadic and related to trade privileges, rather than political dominance. Benin and Itsekiri policies toward foreigners and neighbors differed, and numerous conflicts with Benin were noted from the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries (Ryder 1969, 75, 113, 226, 230, 274). The blood ties between Edo and Itsekiri royals, however, have never been disputed. Indeed, in the sixteenth century, two *olus* were named for the recently deceased Oba Ozolua (Ojoluwa) and Oba Esigie; although the meaning of this gesture is unclear, the implications relating to royal reincarnation are intriguing. More often, however, the family relationship has been marked by filial rivalry. Throughout history, numerous Itsekiri chiefs have fled the *olu*'s wrath to take refuge with the *oba* of Benin (Ryder 1969, 112, 230–31; Lloyd 1957, 180). In a 1984 survey of interethnic preferences, Joseph Nevadomsky discovered Itsekiri participants ranked the Edo last in a list of nine groups, suggesting this might have resulted from "Itsekiri attempts to throw off what is left of Bini political hegemony" (Nevadomsky 1989, 639). Distaste for perceived cultural hegemony is also likely, for the Itsekiri are well aware that Benin has overshadowed their own place in world history.

With the exception of language, the Yoruba stamp on Itsekiri culture is minimal. The Itsekiri do practice Ifa divination (called Ife), but without a regularized priesthood, and the Yoruba pantheon is, for the most part, unrepresented. Only the war/iron god Ogun and the sea deity Umalokun (both of whom may have moved indirectly to Warri from Benin, where they are also worshiped as Ogun and Olokun) are found among the Itsekiri. Most styles of dancing and drumming are dissimilar, as are textile traditions, masquerades, architecture, and sculpture; the Itsekiri are instead key participants in general Niger Delta cultural patterns. There have, however, been some Yoruba associations. In 1820, John King described the *olu*'s crown as beaded, "with two birds' heads" (1822, 318), a form that clearly followed a Yoruba prototype for beaded crowns. This was not the official state crown, and may have been worn for fashion's sake; it may also, however, have had political implications, as similar choices did in this century. Olu Erejuwa II (r. 1951–1987) owned a collection of contemporary beaded crowns for less formal wear, modeled on the "everyday" crowns Yoruba rulers began to wear by mid-century. All Itsekiri informal crowns include a short, pierced projection

for the (optional) insertion of a white egret feather, the same feather that appears on Yoruba state crowns; both peoples consider it a sign of authority. Olu Erejuwa II's political alliances may have influenced his choices: in the 1950s and early 1960s, he was aligned with the Yoruba-led Action Group, and his dressing showed an allegiance that disassociated him from Benin's Oba Akenzua II, a supporter of the rival NCNC party. Under Erejuwa II, official Itsekiri identification with the Yoruba was at its height; the Action Group even stated that the Itsekiri were part of the Yoruba (Sagay n.d. [1981], 187). This comment prompted another prominent Itsekiri, Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh, the *olu*'s political enemy, to accuse the monarch of having "sacrificed the greatness and identity of the Itsekiris and soiled our great history by saying Itsekiris are Yorubas" (Sagay n.d. [1981], 189). Under the present *olu*, Atuwatse II, considerable cultural distancing has taken place. Links with the Yoruba are not stressed, and popular exchanges in local magazines and newspapers protest that Itsekiri is not a Yoruba dialect. This is no indicator of conflict, but rather a continuous attempt to stress the differentiation of the Itsekiri as a cultural entity.⁴

Long association with the Portuguese helped make the Itsekiri unique in Southern Nigeria, and their contributions are consciously recalled and celebrated. Although the Ijo, Urhobo, Ijebu-Yoruba, and Edo also encountered the Portuguese long ago, their relationships with the foreigners were less sustained and close. Portuguese impact, though discernible among the Ijebu and Edo, is not immediately evident. Under the surface, the effects of Portuguese contact on the Warri Kingdom can still be felt. They derive from the European studies of an early Itsekiri prince, sustained missionization, repeated exchange of official letters, and favorable trade. The power Portuguese support (and weapons) gave the Itsekiri over their neighbors no longer exists, but its legacy is sustained through pride in the grandiosity and privilege of the past.

Many of the supposed Portuguese influences on the Itsekiri are superficial, but they have the advantage of being highly visible, as they involve dress, accessories and royal regalia. Itsekiri absorption of these kinds of Portuguese elements was a matter of choice. What is immediately apparent in present Itsekiri culture is a mystique of exaltedness, expressed through visual reminders of the glorious, outward-looking past (fig. 7.2 and see interleaf C). These reminders include both objects and attire. In the 1940s, a colonial observer mentioned that in a typical chief's house "Gold garters, swords, armour breast plate, and a melee of articles of the Victorian era greet your eyes, and if the chief was agreeable and took you within the sanctum of his home you would find he probably sleeps on a fifteenth century Portuguese four-poster" (Allen 1949, 757). P. C. Lloyd noted that the Itsekiri happily attribute "many heirlooms" to the Portuguese, even when their origin was elsewhere in Europe (Moore 1936 [1970], viii).

Many aspects of everyday dress originated through Portuguese trade: the ubiquitous use of Indian madras cottons and their more elaborate cousins (*george*; fig. 7.3), the women's traditional small knotted headtie made from handkerchiefs, imported silver and gold filigree jewelry (fig. 7.4). Other items, such as English derbies, straw boaters, top hats and fedoras, or shirts with pleated bibs, derive from later trading partners. In this decade, several chiefs and nobles use cowboy hats with their formal wear, an appropriation apparently resulting from contact with the Texans and other denizens of



7.2 European porcelain statue (probably Portuguese) belonging to an Itsekiri family and likely dating from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. This work was one of many antiques exhibited during a coronation anniversary activity. Photograph by Kathy Curnow, Warri, 1994.



7.3 Itsekiri men in traditional orange wrappers and European-derived shirts. Photograph by Kathy Curran, Warri, 1994

the American South who manage some of the Delta's many offshore oil rigs (fig. 7.5).

In most cases, it was aristocratic dress that was adopted and adapted, and a very strong sense of historicity persists. Not only is the average person familiar with which dress items are Portuguese-inspired (and familiar too with which costume names are Portuguese-derived), but there is also an interest in preserving specific dress and display items for reasons of family history and pride (fig. 7.6). Several recent coronation anniversary celebrations under Olu Atuwatse II have included antique contests for both objects and dress as part of the festivities. In 1994, a participant won with a family relic, a gold-braided French bicorne from the Napoleonic period. While this type of preservation might not be surprising in Europe or America, it is a conceptualization of dress that is uncommon in Africa, where newness, vitality, wealth, and power are intertwined clothing messages.

References to dress frequently allow the Itsekiri to articulate their disdain for the Urhobo, as for centuries their control of area trade meant they were the sole possessors of imported cloths, foreign hats, Mediterranean coral, and other jewelry in the Warri area. Elegance, rare textiles, and color coordination became their hallmarks (figs. 7.7, 7.8). That today others can not only afford such materials but also actively reproduce Itsekiri clothing traditions is considered irritating in the extreme. Photographs from the first



7.4 Chief Rita Kon, the igha of Warri, wearing hairpins of imported coral. Olu Ereguwa II was the first to create female chieftaincies. Photograph by Kathy Curran, Warri, 1994

7.5 The late eze of Warri wearing an imported top hat as an occasion celebrating his position as a Christian church elder. He sits beside several other Itsekiri chiefs, one of whom wears a cowboy hat. Photograph by Kathy Curran, Warri, 1994





7.6 Display of imported Indian george cloths from previous decades at a coronation anniversary exhibition. Many Isekiri keep old cloths and value them for their age, even though they are highly critical of those not wearing the latest georges at public occasions. Photograph by Kathy Curnow, Warri, 1994.



7.7 Members of an Isekiri club presenting gifts to the *olu* on his coronation anniversary. Photograph by O. Anthony Mathone, Ode-Isekiri, 1994.



7.8 Fashionable Isekiri woman wearing coordinated *aisiwarin* and an imported george embroidered with the *olu*'s picture for a coronation anniversary event. The Isekiri originated the stiffened *oli* headtie, now worn throughout Southern Nigeria. Photograph by Kathy Curnow, Warri, 1994.

half of this century show Itsekiri chiefs wearing long caped garments derived from the clothing of Catholic priests, a style that more recently surfaced as chiefly dress in Benin. Itsekiri chiefs currently, however, wear long-sleeved white shirts, white wrappers, and scarlet sashes (fig. 7.9), a switch they attribute to Urhobo adaptation of their previous style. Urhobo chiefs are also using the distinctive chokers (*oronwu*) worn by their Itsekiri counterparts: two large round corals flanking a central bead whose core is covered with contrasting geometrically patterned seed beads (fig. 7.10). This necklace is associated with priestly authority; although any Itsekiri can wear it to worship his ancestors, only chiefs were meant to wear it in public (Uwangué of Warri, personal communication, 1994). Known from even the earliest available nineteenth-century photographs, it is worn with dark red stone circlets of Benin origin (*oron okun*) and one large coral suspended on a long, plaited seed-bead strand (fig. 7.11). Urhobo use of such objects is viewed neither as assimilation nor homage, but as a proprietary challenge. The Itsekiri recalled the “good old days” when the Urhobo never ventured into competition through the saying: “The Whiteman is God to the Itsekiri; the Itsekiri is God to the Sobo [an abusive term for the Urhobo]” (Lloyd 1956, 82). A jealous, defensive posture toward heritage has developed. The Itsekiri broadcaster Egert Omoneukanrin caustically described Urhobo habits of appropriation in 1994:

They imitate everything we have. You know, the Urhobos...most of the things they do today are not original to them. If you look at their dance now, you find that they've copied the Itsekiri dance...our type of graceful dance, they now dance it. It has never been part of their dance. It's straightforward imitation. They want to copy all the culture that we have and turn it into their own. And then the outside world will look at it and say it is the Urhobo man's culture. If not that some people already know the history of *george* [Indian madras], people will say that the Urhobos started wearing *george* before us! Do you know that even the waistcoat we wear today, they've started wearing it! Yes! It was never part of their own dressing. I called one of them one day. He was putting on the waistcoat at one of their ceremonies. I called him and said, “Do you people wear this, too?” He said yes. “What is the name?” He said, “It's waistcoat, now.” I said, “Don't you have a name for it in your language?” He said, “No, it's waistcoat.” I said, “You people copied this thing from the Itsekiri. The Itsekiri dress like this.” He said, “No, it's our dressing from time.” I said, “Shut up. It's not your dressing from time. If it's your dressing from time, why is it you don't have a name for it [in Urhobo]?” He said, “Do you people have a name for it?” I said, “Of course.” He asked me to tell him the name. I wouldn't. I said, “If you know it is part of your dressing, go and ask your elders, let them tell you the name.” They have no name for it.

The Itsekiri word for waistcoat, *culete*, is adapted from the Portuguese *colete*.

The *olu*'s formal attire is based on Portuguese church dress. Olu Ginuwa II, installed in 1936, was photographed wearing a caped coronation robe (fig. 7.12). Olu Atuwatse II likewise wore a gold brocade cape with a train for his installation in 1987 and frequently wears sashed chasubles of luxurious fabrics for formal wear (fig. 7.1). It is in the sacred royal regalia, however, that the Portuguese connection is most exploited and given full cultural sanction. On state occasions, the *olu* wears several sets of rosary beads as



7.9 Three Isekiri chiefs in contemporary formal attire, including saris made of ododo, an imported scarlet cloth associated with leadership. They are bareheaded because they will appear in the presence of the *olu*. Photograph by Kathy Curnow, Nsukka, 1994.



7.10 Isekiri chief wearing his chiefdom necklaces. Only the circles derive from Benin. Blue-beaded circles are associated with women and are worn by chiefs who have notable females in their family line. Photograph by Kathy Curnow, Nsukka, 1994.



7.11 Isekiri nobleman and his family. This late nineteenth-century image includes children dressed in European clothing. Reproduced with the permission of Unilever PLC (from an original in the Unilever Archives), box 25, folder 2, no. 2.



7.12 Ogiame Ginuwu II, Olu of Warri, at his installation in 1936. His cape, crown, and rattlers serve as reminders of past Catholic monarchs, while his high coral adigbe mouth cover and circle beards point to the royal family's Benin origin. Photographs unknown.



7.13 Detail of Olu Atuwatse II's royal regalia, which includes several seventeenth-century rosaries, lantana bead circles, various coral necklaces, and the branch coral heads worn only by the monarch. Photographer unknown, Warri, 1992.

necklaces, mixed among heavy strands of hanging coral and stone bead circles (fig. 7.13). They are an indispensable aspect of kingship. A centuries-old emblem, they perform no Catholic function (Olu Atuwatse II is a Pentecostal Christian), although they retain a generally protective aspect. They, like the European crowns worn by the *olu*, are sacred links to an exotic history that gives the Itsekiri primacy in numerous ways.

The Itsekiri affirm that their original crown was of a coral-beaded Benin type (Iyatsere of Warri, personal communication, 1994; Bowen 1955, 62–63), but this has not been the official crown since the early seventeenth century. Instead, two European metal crowns are used for coronations and formal occasions. The “Diamond Crown,” is made of open-worked gilt silver inset with colored stones and is topped with a curving cross; the other, made of bronze or brass, is also open-worked, and ends in a straight cross. Both were originally open at the top, but they are now inset with *ododo*, an imported scarlet cloth associated with leadership. This adaptation protects the ruler's head from public view, which aligns the pieces with other Southern Nigerian crowns. According to tradition, Dom Domingos, an Itsekiri prince who studied in Portugal for ten years, brought them back for himself and his Portuguese-born wife (Lloyd and Ryder 1957, 27–39). While style and documented knowledge of the prince make his commission of the works likely, neither piece has been worn by a royal wife, at least in recorded memory. Both are used officially, but the heavier “Diamond Crown” is now worn for coronations and some formal photographs, while the other is commonly used at major state occasions.

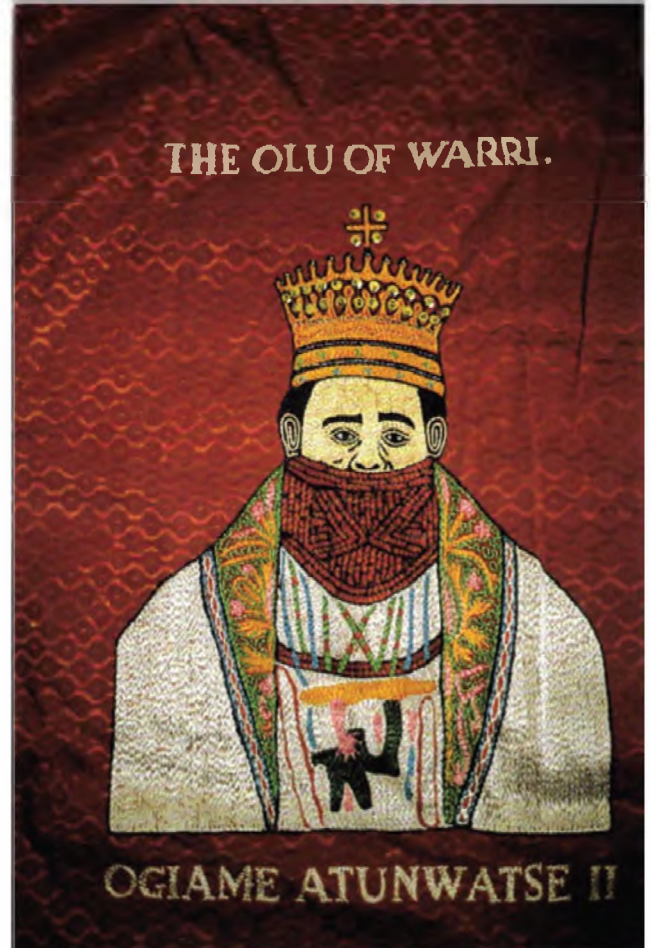
The elevation of this symbol above the Benin-style crown is clearly political, rather than religious, in impulse. In past centuries most Itsekiri adhered to traditional worship practices, not Christianity; many of the twelve baptized *olus* were dual religionists, and at least three others were not Christians at all but continued to wear the state crowns. The crown reminded both *olu* and subjects of certain factors that differentiated them from their neighbors: a foreign deity, trade, education, and alliances—a package that made them unique.

Rosaries and crowns topped with crosses, long intrinsic parts of the regalia, are reminders to all Itsekiri that they can lay claim to the first Christian monarch in all of Nigeria, Olu Sebastião, as well as his son Dom Domingos, the first monarch to receive an overseas education and the first to marry a European. The crown is an instantly recognizable symbol of the *olu*, who makes the Itsekiri unique among Delta peoples. No other Delta ethnic group has a history of union under one ruler; this additional singularity ties the Itsekiri to other prominent centralized states and empires with whom they share a complex court structure and rich cultural heritage. This sense of their own history and position is the major factor in ethnic pride and nostalgia (figs. 7.14, 7.15). As the late Justice R. A. I. Ogbobine, an Itsekiri, put it, “The one strong criticism about them [the Itsekiri] is that they look with disdain and contempt on those whose background and history are not as rich as their own” (1995, 11–12).

The Itsekiri coat-of-arms distills the dual emblematic factors that make the society unique: the crossed *uda* and *eberen* ceremonial swords link the state with its powerful Edo progenitor, as they are a symbol of the Benin Kingdom, while the Portuguese crown surmounting the swords marks the



7.14 Detail of Nigerian commemorative wax print created for the Olu's coronation anniversary. The image shows Olu Atuwatse II in royal accoutrements and stresses love for the monarch through the heart and crown motifs on his gown. Photograph by Kathy Curnow, Warri, 1994.



7.15 Detail of Indian georgette cloth created for the Olu's coronation anniversary. The machine-embroidered motif emphasizes the crown and the Benin-derived Odighe mouth cover, symbols of the unique past of the Isekiri. Photograph by Kathy Curnow, Warri, 1994.

7.16 A motorized float in the form of a "regatta boat" complete with paddlers and prow dancers, sponsored by the United States oil company Texaco and emblazoned with its logos. Photograph by Kathy Curnow, Warri, 1994.



divergent past of the Itsekiri, outward-looking qualities and a sense of apartness. Manipulation of these arms for political effect is frequent. The crest minus the *uda* sword is featured on the Warri town water-rate sticker, which is displayed in public places as proof of payment. Its posting is a constant irritant to the Urhobo inhabitants of Warri, as it figuratively expands the territory of the *olu* to those who are not his subjects.

Similarly, territory and alliances have been visually proclaimed in another venue. Olu Aruwatse II created an innovation in the annual coronation anniversary; while the major festivities take place at the Ode-Itsekiri homeland, some side attractions take place in Warri town itself. One such was his institution of the Coronation Carnival, a Rose Bowl-inspired parade with motorized floats in the form of regatta canoes. The parade is led by the *olu*'s scarlet-draped float, with a large foil-wrapped coat-of-arms at the front. His wife, the *olori*, has her own float, as do numerous chiefs, clubs, and prominent businesses, amongst which are foreign oil companies (fig. 7.16). The parade route leads throughout the town, passing

7.17 Bronze bust of the grandmother of Olu Aruwatse II as a young woman, made before 1992. The *olu* has supported the training of Itsekiri bronze casters and has commissioned numerous busts and figures of royal personages in a realistic style to decorate his palace and to give as royal gifts. Photograph by Kathy Currow.

7.18 The royal boatmen standing before the doors to the royal ancestral shrine. These carved doors include images of past monarchs inspired by photographs. They were hung in the late 1980s. Photograph by D. Anthony Mahone, Ode-Itsekiri, 1994.



the review stand on a major road and finally ending in a field across from the *olu*'s palace. While colorful and festive, the parade has more than a celebratory function. The effect of circling the town with the royal symbol becomes a proprietary claim, a demarcation of royal territory, as even non-Itsekiri lands are enclosed. The participation of oil company floats also proclaims an intimate relationship between the Itsekiri and the major source of wealth in the area. Rival groups do not consider the intent of these gestures a matter of doubt; several carnivals have been interrupted by extremely violent clashes between the Itsekiri and the Urhobo, who interpret the exercise as political aggression. The state government has banned the display for the past several years.

Olu Atuwatse II, a London-educated lawyer, has also introduced and encouraged several other new art forms. Sponsorship of academically trained artists has led to the creation of realistic cast-bronze busts and figures representing the *olu*'s grandmother (fig. 7.17) and other royals for use as royal gifts. Figurative wooden doors now decorate various palace structures (fig. 7.18), as do sculpted metal gates (fig. 7.19). Works such as these parallel contemporary Benin gates and doors as well as historical bronze work; their introduction consciously challenges Benin's rich artistic history. Since Itsekiri palace art has no similar history, it concentrates on contemporary object types. Natural proportion and realism (often based on photographs) are favored, object placement is conspicuous, and no references to traditional religion occur.

Despite their strong views on "cultural copyrights," the Itsekiri themselves emulate others, although they do give them credit. Like many other Niger Delta peoples, they perform water spirit masquerades that frequently exhibit Ijo stylistic traits, and many seem to have an Ijo origin as well. The Itsekiri acknowledge this debt freely, while pointing out they also have masquerades that are "pure Itsekiri." When the two groups coexisted peacefully, mask origin was never an issue. As the Itsekiri consolidate themselves, feeling under siege, their changing relationship with the Ijo does affect issues of cultural emulation and sovereignty. The contexts in which credit is given to others and claims of cultural originality are made have shifted.



7.19 The gate to the *olu*'s temporary palace includes references to the monarch, his chiefs, and the royal arms. Photograph by Kathy Curnow, Warri, 1994.

While some Western Ijo live amidst the Itsekiri, most live in areas closer to the coast and along the Forcados River. Itsekiri-Ijo interaction began in the fifteenth century, when the first Itsekiri *olu*, the Benin prince Ginuwa, married Derumo, an Ijo woman (Moore 1936 [1970], 18–19; Omoneukanrin 1942, 15; Ayomike 1988).⁵ Itsekiri still remember subsequent dynastic marriages between royal Itsekiri women and Eastern Ijo rulers at Nembe and Bonny. Relations through the centuries have been, in the main, equitable and cooperative, although occasionally strained by piracy and attempts to limit Western Ijo participation in European trade (Ikime 1969). Exactly when and why the Ijo affected Itsekiri masquerading is unclear, but the connection is visible. Many Itsekiri water spirit masquerades, known as *umale*, strongly resemble their Ijo counterparts. The *umale* represent pre-Itsekiri residents of the area, who are said to have fled into the waters when Ginuwa arrived. There they transformed into spirits who now control the creeks. *Umale* have priests and shrines in creek villages; they are quite localized, and those honored and represented in one community are not usually worshiped in another.

Like Ijo masquerades, the *umale* wear multiple cloths, with either a finlike section (referred to as the tail) projecting from the rear or rounded, padded “buttocks.” Arms and legs are covered. Performers tie locust-bean rattles at their ankles and dust their feet with camwood (fig. 7.20). Their headpieces are often wooden and horizontal with many carved in the hard-edged, geometric Western Ijo style. Many *umale* have Ijo names, are accompanied by Ijo lyrics, and share certain dance steps with Ijo performers. Itsekiri village masquerades, however, are not considered examples of “art for art’s sake,” as Rohin Horton interprets Kalahari Ijo performances (1965a). Furthermore, they do not act out vignettes or plays. *Umale* dancing is more structured than that of the Ijo, and its singing and drumming styles are substantially different.⁶

The age and the circumstances of the introduction of most of these masks are uncertain, although the *umale* of Olugbo town suggests an early and intriguing relationship with the Ijo. This *umale* claims to be the Itsekiri monarch’s equal, because it says it predates the arrival of his ancestors in the area. Only the *olu*’s appearance and personally conducted sacrifice will make it emerge from its grove. Its name, Otuekine, is Ijo; the Eastern Ijo consider Ekine or Ekineba to be the deified woman who introduced masking (Horton 1963, 94), and Ilaje- and Ijebu-Yoruba use the same name for their Ijo-style masking society. Otuekine’s name and its claim to primacy at Olugbo suggest the Itsekiri may have pushed the Ijo out of the Warri area. Although the Itsekiri never actually identify any of the *umale* as Ijo, instead referring to the autochthons as subhuman (Omoneukanrin 1942, 17; Moore 1936 [1970], 14), their adoption of Ijo spirits and masking may have been intended to placate the displaced original creek owners.

Whatever their initial role, today villages use masks to invoke the *umale* for spiritual and material benefits. While these masked performances may reinforce village unity, they have no real impact on most Itsekiri or any non-Itsekiri, for they are unpublicized and perform solely for a small internal audience. The urban areas, on the other hand, provide an opportunity for the Itsekiri to solidify group identification and project aesthetic superiority by presenting masks in a highly visible arena. This new context also allows for a further examination of Itsekiri thoughts about cultural debts and



7.20 Itsekiri *umale* masquerader from the Omo Ologbara Cultural Society. The masquerader represents a hammerhead shark. Photograph by D. Anthony Mahone, Warri, 1994.

cultural originality, for city masks are chosen, rather than inherited as they are in the villages.

Social clubs perform urban masquerades. Their members come from all over the Warri Kingdom, and they feature mask types drawn from the traditions of many different communities, as well as new inventions. The clubs, also known as *umale* societies, operate primarily in the multiethnic cities of Warri and Sapele, as well as Lagos and Benin. Their festivals are widely promoted in advance on television and radio as well as through banners and invitations (fig. 7.21). Performances are held outdoors at highly visible venues, drawing large crowds of both Itsekiri and non-Itsekiri; television broadcasts increase their viewership. Knowing they are on display, nonmasked club dancers dress in expensive *george* wrappers and lace, sometimes changing up to three times daily (fig. 7.22). Because of their very public face, these urban performances allow the projection of a conscious “Itsekiri-ness,” which is both unnecessary and nonexistent in the village masquerade context, but highly appropriate in the arena of urban ethnic rivalry.

Over twenty such clubs or cultural societies exist; many were founded in the 1950s. Membership is based on the ethnic affiliation of either parent and includes both men and women. Festivals are held once annually on Christian holidays—Christmas, New Year’s, or Easter, depending on the club. A three-day spectacle is rigidly and consistently presented: the arena consists of a public square bounded at its far end by the drummers and canopied seating for dignitaries, fencing holds back spectators at each side, and the fourth side



7.21 Club banner proclaiming the annual masquerade display. These performances take place in public arenas abutting main roads in Warri. Photograph by Kathy Curnow, Warri, 1994.



7.22 Dancer with the Omo Ologbara Cultural Society. Both male and female members perform in the intervals between masquerade appearances. Photograph by Kathy Curnow, Warri, 1994.

is open to the street and passing cars. Usually three sets of *umale*, represented by three or four masks each, come out daily with club dancers entertaining during the intervals.

Like their village counterparts, these urban masquerades honor the *umale*. Their masks, costumes, dances, and drumming follow a village-established pattern. Motivation, however, is quite different. Urban visibility, aesthetic recognition, and innovation replace divine intervention as goals. The Itsekiri themselves quickly distinguish village and urban masquerades. Village participants refer to city performances as “elite festivals, what they use for enjoyment.” Club members concede their own masquerades have no shrines or priest and thus no real spiritual power. They conduct no preliminary cleansing rites, nor do they “serve” the masks with sacrifices. *Umale* club members, however, do not actually behave as if their masks are powerless. Permission to use exclusive village mask types is secured from the appropriate *umale* priest, dancers still reinforce themselves with medicine and have to be restrained when overcome by spiritual forces (fig. 7.23). No female members are admitted to discussions of masks, and club women can neither look directly at masqueraders nor approach them in performance. Likewise, very strict Christians avoid membership altogether, despite its social status, and will not attend the societies’ festivals because they do not regard them as purely entertainment in purpose. Still, club *umale*—unlike village masks—can be freely photographed and videotaped (although by men only) and draw substantial audiences.



7.23 An attendant restrains an *umale* masquerader from the Omo Ologbura Cultural Society at an annual social performance. Photograph by D. Anthony Mahone, Warri, 1994.



7.24 Oki masqueraders of the Omo Ologbura Cultural Society, cutting through fresh raffia fences, just as they do in traditional village performances. Photograph by D. Anthony Mahone, Warri, 1994.

Since club members select the masks they feature, they could certainly exclude Ijo-like examples but do not choose to do so. Their adoption, after all, occurred at a community level some time ago, and the popularity of these masks begs for their inclusion. The foreign origin of such *umale* is freely acknowledged—club members and spectators do not hesitate to say, “We borrowed this mask from the Ijo.” Sometimes club members with Ijo fathers act as agents of introduction. The prototype often changes in appearance or performance details, however. The headpiece of the Ijo swordfish masquerade, Oki, is magnified by the Itsekiri (fig. 7.24) and shifts its behavior to an emphasis on capers: pivoting on its snout, inverting its headpiece to touch the earth, and climbing any available trees or poles.⁷ Osibiri and Eyerobu, also attributed to the Ijo, are fierce dramatic masks (fig. 7.25). They have to be fenced in by plantain fronds, herded by attendants, and cooled by libations. Their violence has special crowd appeal.

Some club masks have an Ijo appearance but are described as “pure Itsekiri.” Their names, rather than the headpiece and costume style, are considered the vital indicators of “Ijo-ness.” Oki, for instance, is recognized as Ijo because of its name; the Itsekiri word for swordfish is *ejolude*. Oligbolara, in contrast, bears an Itsekiri name—“the proud one”—and is considered solely Itsekiri despite the very Ijo-like style of its geometric, horizontal headpiece. Sometimes the verses accompanying a mask are considered evidence of its creators but not always. As an *umale* society member noted:

7.25 Eyerobu masquerade of the Omatiton Cultural Society. Although a social performance, this Ijo-style headpiece is “served” by libations and attended by a youth dressed like a traditional priest. Photograph by D. Anthony Mahone. Ode-Itsekiri, 1994.



Even those masks that we did not borrow from Ijo, some of their songs will still have some relation to Ijo songs. Our people...maybe because of their interaction with the Ijos, they tend to compose more in the other language. In most cases, [the composers] do that for those people who are not initiates, to look at it as something strange...[the] Ijo language [gets] those who are not initiates confused about the whole thing.

Although Ijo influence on club masks is apparent, recognized, and cited, *umale* societies are increasingly valuing innovation, giving greatest prominence to masks perceived as quintessentially Itsekiri.

Societies introduce new *umale* or variations on old ones. One popular masquerade, the antelope-headed Igodo, traditionally included a dance passage where performers briefly reclined on the earth. One club altered the sequence so that an attendant rapidly inserted a pillow under the performers' heads, just before they hit the ground. This deviation has since spread to all the societies. One observer stated, "The pillow aspect is just to beautify the thing. As the club members themselves don't sleep on ordinary ground, the masquerade doesn't have to sleep on ordinary ground either." Some masks reflect everyday sights. Plane, for example, represents the helicopters and airplanes of the oil fields. Olitijuro, despite its orange color and lobsterlike extensions, represents household scissors. Others fuel speculation. Jaba-Jaba, a mask that combines human heads with fish bodies, does not represent Mami Wata or other merfolk, despite its appearance. Instead, it represents imported stockfish (dried cod). Since the fish is always sold headless in the market, people suspect there is something odd about its head—that, in fact, the head is humanlike. Other masks are abstract in concept, or just meant to be dazzling. Ebobo (which means "wonderful") spotlights two or three performers who support one mask together while dancing and turning independently (see fig. 14 in the introduction to this volume). Such innovations can make a club's name. A member of one's society commented on originality and its role in mystifying observers:

Maybe a club patron has a certain carving in his house; maybe he brought it from somewhere, it may not even be connected with our own culture.... To honor this our patron [we decide to] carve this thing. [We tell him], "We know you love it, that's why you kept it in your house." When outsiders see it, they may not know what is happening. What does this mean? What type of structure is this? People will be thinking. Fine! Continue to think!

An abstract mask, Ogienuranran, combines invention and non-Ijo stylistic traits while emphasizing Itsekiri pride (fig. 7.26). This popular club-invented *umale* behaves violently, repeatedly hurling sticks at spectators. Ogienuranran may be translated as "The king has prominence"—a reference to the monarchy, the Itsekiri rallying point. A club initiate describes Ogienuranran:

It's an honor to the throne; usually they perform it last on any given day. Normally, all *olus* are supposed to be feared by their subjects. All *olus*—when they get annoyed, they're always very explosive, they can do anything at any time. Even though you find the mask becoming very aggressive, people will still troop to it. The royalty of the kingdom is not what anybody can toy with. It has its own pride, dignity, and prestige.

Prestige and aesthetic value contribute to a mask's position within a club's program. Those masks considered most spectacular end the day's performance; Ijo-like masks are played down, and, in contrast, are usually "openers."

Urban performance includes a strong sense of competition, both with other Itsekiri clubs and, especially, with rival ethnic groups. The Itsekiri affirm their own reputation for taste, elegance, even dandyism. All club masquerade cloths are chosen with an eye to color coordination and are often expensive textiles. Those masquerades considered most characteristically Itsekiri stress aesthetic beauty, in contrast to the Kalabari Ijo whose masks, according to Horton, are not "intended to convey beauty" (1965a, 14). Asamarigho, for instance, is the fashionable *umale*, described as "gorgeously-dressed with walking stick in hand," while Olesughu represents the attractiveness of coral beads.

Highly valued masks, such as Ogienuranran, wear distinctive scarlet *ododo*, the expensive cloth associated with the *olu* and his chiefs. Such performers often hold tusks, flywhisks, or ceremonial *eberen* swords, rather than the more customary paddles or cutlasses. As very distinguished *umale*, their stately, swaying dance is often performed seated, a position that befits their high status. The most magnificent of these *umale* is Olekun (fig. 7.27), considered the "mother of the masquerades," "the chief mermaid."⁸ Usually a Janus mask, its two faces refer to its ability to see in all directions. The name Olekun means "door owner," for it stands at the entrance between the spirit and human worlds. Club members say Olekun "supports looks

7.26 The Ogienuranran masquerade represents certain monarchical qualities, and wears regal *ododo* cloth. One of its royal traits is a hot temper, and it is shown here chasing around the arena throwing sticks at spectators who run for cover. Photograph by D. Anthony Mahone. Warri, 1994.



and wealth”; it is the only masquerade all societies include and it is always their finale piece, their paean to wealth, beauty and originality (fig. 7.28).

Superstructures of plumes, paper flowers, mirrors, and yarn—sometimes even attached parasols or twinkling battery-operated Christmas lights—enhance Olekun’s light-skinned features. The most consequential Olekun have exquisitely dressed female visitor masks called Ejoji to add to their impressive impact. Olekun and other “pure Itsekiri” masks are certainly the most enthusiastically received *umale*. Although their interest in distancing themselves from their neighbors has not led them to abandon their long-standing, Ijo-influenced masquerades completely, urban club performance has promoted a sort of masquerade revisionism that argues the superiority of Itsekiri taste.

Recognition and promotion of elegance, wealth, prestige, and aristocratic authority are vital aspects of club masquerades and speak directly to group self-image. Precolonial and colonial foreign observers often remarked on Itsekiri sophistication: “One is immediately impressed by their fine breeding and bearing” (Allen 1949, 757; see also de Negri 1968; Ekwensi 1964, 164–72). The Itsekiri themselves wax philosophical about it, “A really good life needs, besides...things of the flesh, things of beauty, nobility and great-mindedness. It is these things that are the stuff of which the Itsekiri are made”(Ogbobine 1995,10).

Contemporary political tensions have caused the Itsekiri to become increasingly anxious boosters of cultural distinction, stressing those manifestations that emphasize refinement, invention, and aristocratic heritage. As the Itsekiri “go to their own quarter” to build a sense of nationalism, their ambivalent changing views concerning cultural emulation and identity can be tracked clearly through numerous visual weapons. Though they maintain a protective cultural posture in respect to lost dominance and glory, the challenge of defending their identity (conceptually intertwined with status) is pushing the Itsekiri to increased creativity and resourcefulness. If the battle for political dominance is lost, as their small voting numbers would suggest, symbolic manipulation, public emphasis on “cultural property,” and new developments and directions may yet lead to a cultural rout.

7.27 An Olekun masquerader, representing the “mother of the masquerades” who closes all club performances on the final day. Photograph by D. Anthony Mahone, Ode-Itsekiri, 1994.

7.28 Olekun masquerades from the Omo Ologbara club carrying eberen swords and wearing scarlet ododo costume elements—features that emphasize their stateliness and status. Photograph by D. Anthony Mahone, Warri, 1994.



to the Update on Human Rights Violations in the Niger (Human Rights Watch Backgrounder, New York, December 14, 2000): <http://www.hrw.org/backgrounder/africa/nigeriabkg1214.htm>; and finally to "Military Must Account for Abuses: Washington Should Press President Obasanjo (Human Rights Watch, Washington, May 11, 2001): <http://www.hrw.org/press/2001/05/bush0511.htm>Nigeria.

Chapter 4 (Anderson)

Field and archival research for this paper was conducted with the support of a Kress Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship for fourteen months in England and Nigeria in 1978–1979; an Alfred University summer grant for a month in England in 1986; and a Council for International Education Faculty Research Grant for twelve months in Nigeria in 1991–1992. I would like to thank Philip Peek and Philip Leis for commenting on earlier drafts of this chapter and Richard Freeman for providing the proper spelling and orthography of Ijo words.

1. Most carvers report that they carved about one canoe a month and a dozen canoes per year while in their prime. The work also carries spiritual risks, although the carvers I interviewed in 1991 did not emphasize this aspect of the profession. Spirits sometimes live in trees, so anyone who cuts one down has to take precautions or risk their wrath. In 1979, rumors blamed one man's death and another's loss of eyesight on cutting down trees to carve canoes.
2. One diviner clarified this by saying that these objects are merely the emblems spirits have chosen as physical manifestations and that the spirits they represent, who reside in the rivers, are really very beautiful.
3. My first research assistant, Israel Kigibie, offered this explanation, but according to my second research assistant, Richard Freeman, the Ijo consider all whitish or purplish fish to be kings and queens within their categories and do not eat them.
4. The term *foinyou* can refer to either vampires, who fly about at night and suck blood from their victims, or witches, who kill family members to be shared at feasts with their friends. People blame the initial influx of *foinyou* on wives imported from the Isoko area.
5. People consider some of the fish living in the forest to be bush spirits but say water spirits can travel up creeks, settle there, and intermarry with bush spirits.
6. Most lakes call for bush spirit songs, but those sung for Dabiyeyinghi are funeral songs. As of 1979, the Dabiyeyinghi festival had not been held for many years due to a boundary dispute with a neighboring town. The festival for "Tall palms" was to be held in 1979 but was canceled due to a funeral. The figures had deteriorated, and the shrine was in the process of being rebuilt; but a party engaged in a bush spirit ritual paused to libate where they once stood. (See chapter 3 of this volume.)
7. Townspeople explain the substitution by saying they could not find an artist who knew how to carve the headpiece of the original fish.
8. Their word for play, *zoi*, has roughly the same range of connotations as its English counterpart (Horton 1960, 69; Kay Williamson, personal communication, 1978).
9. Most Central Ijo headpieces measure less than three feet in length. The players used the money earned from this performance to commission a new set of smaller, wooden headpieces. Father and son wear similar headpieces; that of the wife takes the form of a female figure.
10. My informant, Richard Freeman, later explained that the sawfish is one of the hostile, gigantic fish that sometimes becomes a water spirit.
11. See Alagoa and Tamuno 1989, 143–52, where Ben Naanen and A. I. Pepple identify the foremost factor as minority opposition to majority domination in the Eastern region but also note cultural and historical differences with peoples on the mainland and "the peculiar development needs" of the region. They refer as well to a "mainland/riverine dichotomy" within Rivers State that fueled demands for the creation of a Port Harcourt State, comprising Ahoada, Ogoni, and Port Harcourt Divisions. This resulted in forming Bavela State from the western part of Rivers State in 1997.

Chapter 5 (Peek)

My deepest appreciation to Edward "Ctoor" Ughoma—a true "man of words"—without whom my research on Isoko history and

culture would never have occurred. I also thank Dr. Adeline Apena (and her whole family!) for many years of support and aid.

1. Technically, "clan" is not appropriate for the Isoko political units because none are composed exclusively of related peoples. Nevertheless, this is the term the Isoko use. The Isoko clan units do represent people who have chosen to live together and to be identified with each other as if they all shared a common ancestor.
2. Kathy Curnow reports that her Edo family was very concerned about her trips into the Delta and were especially distressed when she waded into the ocean at Bar Beach in Lagos!
3. Another form of communication comes to mind with this reference to the ubiquitous multilingualism of the Delta. Despite assurances of the uniqueness of the single forehead to nose-tip scar by Isoko elders, one can find this mark throughout the Delta on older men and women as well as carvings.

Chapter 6 (Drewal)

An earlier condensed version of this essay was presented at the Seventh Triennial Symposium on African Art at UCLA, April 5, 1986. I gratefully acknowledge the support of grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities awarded in 1981 (RO-20072-81-2184) and 1985 (RO-21030-85) for the fieldwork in Ijebu-land, Nigeria, and two Andrew W. Mellon Senior Fellowships at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1985 and 1986 for archival research and writing. I am also pleased to acknowledge the assistance of the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), Nigeria, for research affiliations and the Nigerian Museum for permission to use its archives and collections. Thanks are especially due all my Yoruba and American friends, colleagues, and teachers who gave freely of their time and wisdom to provide information and insights for this work. They include: Oyin Ogundha; Rowland Abiodun; Bóláji and Loládé Campbell; Adísí Awókòyà; Jimoh Bákàrè, Gabriel Omísanmi; Abíódún Kásáí; Adéperé Ogúnánmí; Adéníyí, the Àlùkè of Òmú; Salú Jókotádé, artist, Ijebu-Musin; Chief Ayòdèjì Báláí, the Olówá of Ijebu-Òde; Oba Adéoyè, the Olókò of Ijebu-Musin; Sállyú Ráíí, the Ajíròba of Òmú; Oba Fésogbade II, the Olója of Èpè; Chief Olúfowóbí, Èpè; Oba S. A. Sólé and his son Sunday, Òmú; Oládélé Sánlòlá; Margaret Thompson Drewal; John Mason; Perkins Foss; Martha Anderson; and Philip Peek. Finally I pay my respects to those denizens of the deep—the water people, Òsun, Yemoja, Qbà, Qya, Olókun, Qlòsà, Mami Wata, et al.—as artists and the devour have done for centuries. This essay is dedicated to the memory of Ana Araiz, daughter of Òsun.

1. This summary is based on Horton (1960, 1963) for the Eastern Ijo, specifically Kalabari, and Anderson (1997b) for the Central and Western Ijo. Among the Kalabari, membership in the Ekine/Sekiapu Society is regarded as one of a man's most important accomplishments in life and as such, is celebrated after his death. Ekine headdresses are represented in the memorial screens of the Kalabari Ijo where "a man's prowess with a particular *owu* is one of his most important attributes" (Horton 1960, 32). And one of the most important and deeply felt parts of a man's funeral commemoration is the performance of the mask that was so much a part of his identity during his life (Horton 1963, 108). Martha Anderson (1997b) notes that Western and Central Delta Ijo do not have an Ekine/Sekiapu Society, although they do masquerade for the *owu* (water people).
2. For a fascinating history of the probable re-creation of Òkòdrò masking in association with Gèlédè and Olókun celebrations among the Bini and Yoruba/Lucumi (Ijebu, Awóhí, and Ègbádó) in Cuba, see Mason (1996, 19–21).
3. From my own research in Ijebu, Idàkò was an ancient kingdom according to Oba Adéoyè, the Olókò of Ijebu-Musin (personal communication, 1982).

Chapter 7 (Curnow)

This chapter is based on field research conducted in the Warri Kingdom, Nigeria, in 1992, 1993, and 1994, which was partially funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the State of Ohio, and Cleveland State University.

I am very grateful to Ogiame Atuwatse II, the Olu of Warri, for granting me research permission and for his kind assistance and encouragement, and to his chiefs, especially the Uwangué, Eson, Iyatsere, and Iye of Warri and the Olaraja of Okere. Many thanks also to my research assistant, Mr. Egert Omonekanrin; my able photographer, Mr. D. Anthony Mahone; Dr. Mark Ogharaerumi; Mr. J. O. E. Ayomike, Mr. Thomson Kayoh; Mr. Happy Gaja; the entire membership of the Omo Ologbara Cultural Society; and all the *umale* clubs of Warri, Ode-Itsekiri, and Sapele. Special appreciation is also extended to my American colleagues Drs. Martha Anderson, Barbara Blackmun, Joe Nevadomsky, and Philip Peek.

1. There is disagreement over the exact size of the Itsekiri population, although sources agree they are much smaller in number than either the Urhobo or Ijo. P. C. Lloyd estimated there were only about 30,000 in the early 1960s (1963, 209), but the current *Ethnologue* estimate is 510,000 (Grimes 1996), which seems high. Nigerians have repeatedly rejected official censuses, since most citizens feel the numbers have been manipulated for political purposes.
2. As A. F. C. Ryder points out (1969, 28), the word *Huela*, used by Pacheco Pereira, was probably an attempt to spell *Iwere*, the name Itsekiri use for themselves.
3. Itsekiri tradition states that, some time after Ginuwa's journey in the late fifteenth century, a Benin war party came to the Warri region to recover the chiefs' sons who had accompanied him. They were unsuccessful and, fearing their reception in Benin, founded the mainland settlement of Okere.
4. The Itsekiri are actually now on better terms with their parent cultures than they have been for some time. Recent Delta violence in late 1998 and early 1999 led to a formal alliance among the Benin, Edo, the Itsekiri, and the Ijale-Yoruba of Ondo State. This alignment was created in opposition to manifestos (and statements of support) from the Ijo, Urhobo, and Isoko.
5. Derumo, is one of the few pre-nineteenth-century women to be remembered by name in Itsekiri history. Ginuwa's association with her took place at the coast in Ijo territory; he later withdrew with his followers to an inland position at Ijala, not far from Warri and Ode-Itsekiri.
6. For Ijo performance style, I am dependent on Frank Speed's film *Duminea* (Kalabari Ijo), Martha Anderson's Central Ijo footage, Sokari Douglas Camp's Kalabari *Chief/Chief* and *Alagba* videos, and numerous videos of West and Central Ijo performances broadcast on Delta State's television stations.
7. I base comparisons of size and performance on both published and videotaped versions of Ijo Oki but would be happy to know if other versions and performance styles exist, particularly among the Western Ijo.
8. Olekun should not be confused with Umalokun, the deity who is considered the overall ruler of the sea. Umalokun is analogous (and related to) the Benin and Yoruba deity Olokun, and the Itsekiri consider all water spirits to be mere aspects of Umalokun.

Chapter 8 (Aronson)

This study would not have been possible without the generosity and sensitive insight of Nimi Wariboko, an Abonnema based in the United States. Passionately interested in exploring the many facets of his own culture, he sought answers to my long list of questions about the tortoise while visiting his village in the fall of 1997. I am also indebted to his mother, Grace Wariboko Jack, from Jack's compound, Abonnema, for her generous responses to his many questions. It is to Wariboko and his family that I dedicate this essay.

1. There are three species of the hinge-back in West Africa, the *Kinixys homeana*, *Kinixys eroia*, and *Kinixys belliana*. In turn, the latter is divided into two subspecies, the *Kinixys belliana belliana* and the *Kinixys belliana nogueyi*. It is on a visual basis and on the advice of Dr. Michael Klemens, a leading expert on hinge-backs, that I have singled out the *Kinixys belliana* species.
2. Tortoises are generally quiet creatures. Only when they are in the act of mating do they tend to vocalize, and some even argue that those sounds may be the grinding of shells or the clowing of jaws rather than vocalization itself (Alderton 1988, 57-58). The

"sound" of the hinge-back can be heard on the Web site <http://www.tortoise.org>.

3. The Ijo are not entirely clear on this distinction. While they identify Ikaki as an *oru* spirit, they are also inclined to characterize him as an *owu* because of his appearance in an *owu*-type masquerade (see below). His marginal affiliation with water may also account for his *owu*-like nature.
4. The text for that song goes as follows:
In the forest where I live, in the swamp where I love,
I don't call any child of Kula,
Kwe kwe kwe, etc.
Human meat, yum, yum.
Human bones, yum, yum. (Horton 1967, 226)
5. The name *Kalagidi* is not easily translated. The prefix *kala* suggests "small," and the suffix *agidi* may be a reference to a type of knife (Nimi Wariboko, personal communication, 1998).
6. Not all West African cultures regard the tortoise's shell in so negative a way. For example, the Igbiira conceptualize it as a house and home in the most positive, nurturing sense (John Picton, personal communication, 1998).
7. E. J. Alagoa is cautious to point out that Eastern Ijo trading states are not entirely rooted in the transatlantic trade. Rather, it was a multitude of stimuli that shaped these ruling states (Alagoa 1972, 123). At best, one can say that the Eastern Ijo fine-tuned their trading states to meet the demands of the transatlantic trade.
8. While not discussed in this paper, *ikakibiie* is also worn by members of the Sekiapu (Ekine) Society at important masquerade performances. *Ikakibiie* with a fishing eagle's feathers (*igo piko*) is the popular and preferred handwear of unmasked Ekine members during masquerade displays (Nimi Wariboko, personal communication, 1987).
9. In Benin, the image of a hand holding a mudfish, itself a symbol of the *oba's* relationship to the sea god Olokun, evokes the proverb "the one who holds the fish can also let it loose." The egg-in-hand image in Asante culture similarly implies delicacy with which power must be exercised. Loosely translated, the proverb sends the message that should the egg, a symbol of power, be clutched too tightly, it will be crushed. If it is held too loosely, it will slip from the leader's grasp.
10. In addition, an Abonnema family, the Kaladokubo house of the Jack group of houses, is permitted to use the cloth to play Egbelegbe. In 1882, Chief Kaladokubo, who led the Jack group of houses from Elem Kalabari to Abonnema, was granted the right to play the Egbelegbe and use the cloth associated with it (Nimi Wariboko, personal communication, 1997).

Chapter 9 (Kpone-Tonwe and Salmons)

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