RIPPLES IN THE ATLANTIC: REVISITING THE ROLE OF WATER IN AFRICANS' VISION OF REALITY AND SURVIVAL

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by
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All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was…

Toni Morrison, Rita Dove's *Grace Notes*

ABSTRACT

This research aims to connect Africans from the continent to Africans dwelling in the diaspora through ripples of retention. This thesis examines the role of water and African water divinities as markers of cultural and spiritual retention in African communities abroad and on the continent of Africa. Drawing mostly from secondary sources for the investigation, this work revisits texts already documented to uncover the role of water in the survival and lived reality of Africans. The investigation starts by the Nile in Kemet (Egypt in antiquity) and travels through time and space. By beginning at the source of African civilization, this study solidifies the role of water in the ontology and cosmology of African people that is found in antiquity, in a number of ethnic groups along the west coast of Africa, and in the diaspora. Analysis of figures like Oshun, Yemaya, and Mami Wata reveals that external factors, one's lived reality, and one's social and physical environment is reflected in the characteristics and attributes of the water divinity abroad. For water spirits must reflect the African people; thus, the tremendous social and geographical changes African people undergo throughout the centuries can be noted as variations in a collective African culture. While this work is conducted in three chapters, future investigation is needed to explore the emancipatory features of water to Africans that are still burdened by the effects of colonialism, assimilation, imperialism, and slavery. Yet, this research in its present state adds to the collection of works in the field of Africana Studies and Africology by reestablishing the strong link among Africans from around the world.

Keywords and Terms: ripple, ripple effect, reality, survival, Africanity, Afrocentric

DEDICATIONS

This thesis is dedicated to the late scholar, artist, and friend, Michael Wickliffe, whose body left this earth too soon.

His spirit resounds in this work and

within the realm of the living dead. May he be proud of this thesis that I've completed in honor of his name.

I would also like to dedicate this thesis

to my ancestors, family, loved ones, and friends

who have supported me from day one

and continue to be my foundation and source of encouragement as I follow my dreams and continue

on this path to enlightenment. May they be proud of the work I have completed thus far.

Lastly, I dedicate this work to the sixty million and counting

who were affected by the involuntary mass exodus,

the MAAFA.

May we inch closer to emancipation by returning to our source

like the Atlantic waves return to the shore of Africa.

A s é

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Lastly I would like to acknowledge every person who checked in on my daily progress and the following who took time out of their busy schedules to read my work and offer suggestions and critique: Asia Hightower, Cokie Nanka, Claudius Purcell, and Verna Pickens.

I appreciate you all!

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Photo Source: *Artstories.md. GitHub, Inc.com, "Mami Wata's Origins"*
This is an image of the German depiction of a Samoan snake charmer who traveled to Germany in the1880s and instantly became a sensation. In due time, this image of *Maladamatjaute* began to circulate as propaganda to entice an audience that was willing to watch exotic entertainers. This image soon finds it way to Africa where *Maladamatjaute* is instantly regarded as Mami Wata. Now closely associated with African water divinities, this image spans generations and locations and plays a part in the survival of African water divinities around the globe.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION
REFLECTIONS ON WATER

The great Atlantic ocean is one-fifth of the Earth's surface and connects Europe, Africa, North America, South America and the oceanic islands resting in the peripheral of the S-shaped abyss. The narrow Atlantic is approximately 41,100,000 square miles and its maximum depth is about 27, 493 feet (Ericson, Flemming et.al, 2017). Its first seafaring explorers ventured out on its surface as early as AD 545 and later Egyptians of Africa set sail in the Atlantic (Ericson, Flemming et.al, 2017). It comes to no surprise that explorers had a magnificent fascination with the sea, as it presents both a reflection of the present and endless possibilities for the future. It connects one land mass to another and allows one's people, culture, and economy to flourish and travel beyond homelands.

Beneath the surface of that reflective entity rests aspects of African culture and life that not only resides in the core of our brown bodies, but also in the mundanity of the African's lived experiences–our realities. The water transcends time, space, and imperialist European notions that subscribe to dichotomies, oppression, and systematic division. The toxicity of such notions have led many to believe in, and sometimes regard as fact, the illogical myth that the brown-skinned peoples of the West are not related to the browned-skinned people of the East and that those living in the West are not a part of Africa and all her glorious facets. This myth allows those who look out at the Atlantic to forget what is on the other side of the horizon or how the brown-skinned person even arrived in the Americas and the Caribbean in the first place. Water, from the perspective of the ignorant and from the toxic mind of the conqueror, is seen as a tool of major division.

But water does not operate that way. Making up ninety percent of the Earth's surface and creating coasts that act as entries into land masses, water does not aim to create vestiges out of ethnic groups and their ontologies. Water is not a site of separation. Instead, the ripples in the Atlantic ocean are a great unifier and preserver of culture for African people residing at the east of its stretch and at the west of its stretch. Each ripple carries along the surface of the water a cultural aspect of Africa that is retained in the diaspora. We are not separate entities but instead one force linked together by what has been retained and practiced in our inhabited spaces. These cultural retentions or ripples of retention are expressed in our language[1], our dance[2], and our spirituality[3].

Ripples in the Atlantic: Revisiting the Role of Water in the Africans' Vision of Reality and Survival, is interested in studying the role of water and its spiritual divinities as ripples of Africanity that links African communities from the West to the East. By investigating the role of water in the Africans' vision of reality abroad and on the continent, one should see that indigenous, brown-skinned Africans share a common culture and worldview despite slight variations due to external forces (Kambon, 1999). Thus, these ripples that bind Africans are really symbols of cultural legacy and survival. As discussed later in this thesis, the role of water

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[1] There are a great number of linguists who have used language and root words as a tool to unify all of Africa. These scholars include, but are not limited to: Dr. Ama Mazama, Dr. Cheikh Anta Diop, Dr. Théophile Obenga.

[2] See the following scholars: Dr. Thomas F. Defrantz (2004) *Black Atlantic Dance;* Dr. Katrina Hazard-Donald (1996) *The Circle and the Line: Speculations of the Development of African American Vernacular Dancing* and (2011) *Hoodoo Religion and American Dance Traditions: Rethinking the Ring Shout;* Vicente Rossi (1958) *Cosas de Negros.*

[3] See the following scholars: Dr. Marta Moreno Vega (2000) *The Altar of My Soul: The Living Traditions of Santería;* Dr. Ama Mazama (2002) *Afrocentricity and African Spirituality;* Dr. Robert Farris Thompson (1983) *Flash of the Spirit;* Nathaniel Murrell (2010) *Afro-Caribbean Religions;* Dr. John S. Mbiti (1975) *Introduction to African Religion.*

is to protect African people and to ensure the culture and people's preservation no matter one's geographical location or bout with systematic oppression[4].

Consequently, the following research questions will be investigated in this assessment. How does water operate in the spirituality of African peoples and are these spiritual systems reflected in one's sense of reality and truth both in the diaspora and on the continent? What role does water play in the survival of African people? And later on in the future, how can African people be liberated from the constraints of oppression by regarding water as a symbol of retention and cultural significance?

METHODOLOGY

As an africologist who is concerned with the afrocentric study of African concepts, issues, and behaviors, I intend to analyze, penetrate, and fully elaborate on the prior queries from an afrocentric lens. This means that I rely heavily on an afrocentric paradigm as a metatheory that guides my understanding of the texts explored for this research and my future investigation on how the *ripple effect* aids in the liberation and emancipation of African peoples transcontinentally and transgenerationally. Expounded on greatly by afrocentric scholars, Dr. Mazama and Dr. Asante, the afrocentric paradigm insists that the afrocentric scholar should place the African subject at the center of any analysis of African phenomena: history, art, spirituality, politics, philosophy, law, etc. (Mazama, 2003; Asante, 2007). This approach allows the scholar and the investigator to seek truth and understanding from a point of view that is not misconstrued, manipulated, or mishandled by those who aim to write and expound on African people and their phenomena, but from their own worldview and understanding. If the African is

[4]Oppression from all forces that continuously attempt to divide and conquer for the sake of expansion and domination.

not the center of their own phenomena then they are objects of one's study and can be susceptible to projection, loss of voice, loss of narrative, falsifications, and misrepresentation.

In an effort to accurately study the African subject and find logic and truth in my study, I will implement the three pyramidal elements of afrocentricity which are grounding, orientation, and perspective. I will ground myself in the history and culture of African people, have a genuine interest in the needs and concerns of people of African descent, and look at the world and my research in a way that seeks the emancipation and empowerment of all Africans. The implementation of the pyramidal elements of afrocentricity will allow me to write, research, and share from a centered perspective that does not silence the voice or the experiences of the African person. With an interest in the realities and survival of African people and how these realities are reflected in the context of African water divinities, this paradigmatic approach makes certain that my work as a scholar gives the truest possible reflection of African peoples in the diaspora and the continent. Furthermore, by proceeding forward with this approach, I subscribe to the following notions as it pertains to my study: African people have unique and distinctive cultural and historical experiences (Kershaw, 1992); a people's worldview determines what constitutes a problem for them and how they approach solving problems (Mazama, 2003); the fundamental substance of all reality is spirit and not everything that is important is measurable (Mazama, 2003; Nobles, 2006); and lastly, African people's experience can be used to help gain a greater understanding of the human experience (Kershaw, 1992).

Afrocentricity and its paradigm influences the approach I am implementing in my three part work. Yet, I find my research draws upon Kambon's African Self-Consciousness theory, which was birthed in its entirety in the 1999 publication of *African/Black Psychology in the*

American Context: An African-Centered Approach. Kambon insists that Western models for assessing personality are not adequate for assessing the personalities of people of African descent because these models are rooted in the history and cultures of people of European descent (Kambon, 1999). To appropriately study the personalities of African people and their descendants, one must draw upon the history and cultures of Africa. Imperatively, Kambon notes that not every black person will exhibit African cultural characteristics to the same degree and in the same way based on his or her unique social environment, experience, and exposure (Kambon, 1999). However, "black personality structure" is African at its core and consequently should be addressed from an afrocentric point of view and apparatus (Kambon, 1999). As this study will demonstrate, the diaspora indicates that there are vast variations among people of African descent living in the West; however, these variations do not make brown-skinned peoples of the West any less African. As noted in the early part of the introduction, there are ripples of water that are symbolic of the cultural extension, legacy, and retention of Africanity. These ripples link all Africans together. Delving into the realm of reality and survival, one will conclude by the end of this assessment that not only are Africans in the West linked to Africans in the East through cultural extension, but that water in all its essence and symbolism ensures the survival and longevity of African people.

KEYWORDS AND TERMS

There are various keywords and terms that I will employ in my assessment and may have already referenced in this introductory section. An understanding of these words and how they are used in my written work will hopefully help guide you to my conclusion with ease and

precision. The following words will be referenced: *ripple* or *ripple effect*, *reality*, *survival*, *Africanity*, and *Afrocentric*.

The word, *ripple* and its variant term, the *ripple effect*, is symbolic and literal in its implication. Symbolically, I use the word *ripple* to represent the flow and movement of African cultural aspects across the Atlantic and into African communities in the diaspora. This word holds a significant amount of sensory, such as opthalmoception (sight), audioception (sound), and tactioception (touch), that correlates to this study of retention and understanding how Africans in the West are linked to Africans in the East. The sensory aspect is beneficial in the visualization of how African legacy transcends time and space because it does so in a way that one can see, hear, and touch. Respectively, we can see the legacy in one's phenotype, ways of dress or dance. We can hear one's legacy in their speech, diction, and styles of orature and music. Lastly, we can touch one's legacy, metaphorically speaking, when afrocentric scholarship and narratives are published and distributed to the masses who can read, write, and study from a source that can be passed down from one generation to the next.

On a deeper and more scientific level, ripples illustrate both amplification and frequency. The amplification references the high and low points of the wave, known as the modulation, while the frequency measures the number of waves created in a given time (Siangla, 2017). If we take this scientific definition of a ripple and apply it to the variations of African culture found in the diaspora (Kambon, 1999) then what we reveal is the retention rate in these diasporic communities[5]. People are dynamic, just as dynamic as waves. We undergo changes due to

[5] What is most interesting about the ripple is that its amplification, modulation, and frequency may be regarded as a metaphor for the influx of African communities abroad. With the arrival of Africans in the "New World" comes a rich cultural presence that varies in its amplification. One's bout with life in these new curated spaces have points of extreme highs and lows which is reflected in one's experience.

external forces such as colonialism, imperialism, and globalization etc. Just as the water is the base for the ripple to move, our culture is the base for African people that allows us to move around but still be African at the core. Sure, there are variations in our form due to these external pressures, but we are inevitably still rooted in our cultural heritage though it may look and sound different. Consider these symbols and how they function in the role of water and African cultural retention, I use the world *ripple* to enhance the process of cultural legacy navigating across the surface of the Atlantic and into African communities of the West.

Consequently, the ripple does not end but reverberates and forms multiple waves which represent all aspects of culture like spirituality, music, dance, food, dress, or orature and folklore. Rooted in the center of a ripple is the foundation or the catalyst that allows all the surrounding waves to appear. At the root of African people is an African worldview; the waves or entities that surround and enhance that worldview are aspects of our culture that we retain. Moreover, the center of a ripple represents the continent of Africa where the worldview and the culture does not fizzle out in the center but moves outward to encapsulate or link many individuals and communities of African descent beyond the continent. That notion of forever and the linking of multiple cultural aspects and people of African origin is the *ripple effect*. Whatever cultural markings that began on the continent of Africa–even if they began in antiquity–does not end in that particular time period or physical space, but transcends geography and generations. The employment of these words will be explained in greater detail in the first part of my analysis on Nile Valley civilizations and the role of water to the cultural and spiritual reality of the people of Kemet who inevitably influence, through the *ripple effect*, all the West African ethnic groups that have inherited that cultural and spiritual system and continue to practice both today.

Reality is an important word to grasp in this assessment. Because this work grapples with spirituality a great deal, it is important to discuss the relationship between faith and reality. For example, my use of the word *reality* is closely related to matter and how the African expresses his/her hermeneutics and ontology. Reality is the tangible, lived experiences that can be felt and seen or documented and reproduced as truth because there are practices and laws to every particular group of people that govern what is real in this universe. To the African, the fundamental substance of all reality is spirit because all physical matter is affirmed by the human spirit –"spirit and matter are both aspects, different manifestations, of reality" (Obenga, 2004: 57; Mazama, 2003). Note the inseparability of matter and spirit. Reality is one's understanding of what is real and fact but what is *real* and *actual* depends a great deal on how one understands and makes sense of how the world operates. One's vision of reality is influenced by a group's worldview, cosmology, ritual, law, moral. Once a group understands how the world operates and how they fit into its dimension, then they may see matter and the tangible through their own eyes and interpretation. I will show later on in this thesis how African worldview and European worldview clash with regards to reality and how these differences in perception influence truth and reality.

Survival is synonymous with retention, regeneration, and reconstruction for the sake of preservation. When I reference the role of water in the survival of Africanity in the African diaspora, I am referring to what cultural elements are retained in the diaspora. More specifically, I am interested in what characteristics of African water divinities are retained in the diaspora and how these divinities have helped African people relate to their customs, beliefs, and realities. This means African culture has a foundation even if the infiltration of toxic, western or European

ideas have forced the African to reconstruct and rework that original spiritual system to suite their environment and ensure their survival as African people. What aspects have survived and what does that mean for the regeneration of African people living abroad or under the burden of industrialization, globalization, imperialism, colonialism, etc.? To survive means to thrive, reproduce, and endure but these elements of survival are only successful and beneficial to the African people if our cultural legacy survives as well.

Lastly, the two words *Africanity* and *Afrocentricity* have very different meanings but are often used interchangeably by those who do not take the time to figure out their true definition. *Africanity* is concerned with one's African origin, identity, lifestyle, traditions, customs, traits etc.. *Afrocentricity*, however, is concerned with agency and action. An afrocentric study will propose a liberatory or emancipatory thrust that promotes self-conscious action. While *Africanity* is referenced in great frequency in this assessment, *Afrocentricity* will be discussed in the concluding remarks as we look at where this initial research can go in the future for the liberation and emancipation of African people in the diaspora and on the continent.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This thesis utilizes both primary and secondary sources that are categorized by topic: Kemet, African cultural traditions on the west coast of Africa, and African cultural traditions in the diaspora. Reference guides on historical events and African spiritual systems are also used to guide my understanding of certain terms and events as well as to contextualize the impact of cultural retention.

Beginning with Kemet as the nucleus of the ripple, I turned to several sources that provide data on the history and culture of Kemet (Nehusi, 2016; Obenga, 2004; Asante, 2015a; Asante, 2015b, Asante & Abarry, 1996; Collier, 1998; Wilkinson 2003). Asante's 2015 body of work, coupled with the *African Intellectual Heritage:A Book of Sources,* provided rich background information and significant details about the structure and cosmology of Kemet. The afrocentric publications that place the African in the center of her or his own phenomena and history in Abarry and Asante's text provided a sound foundation of reference in my research. With the history of Africa in its antiquity summed up from an afrocentric lens, I was then able to turn to Egyptologists whose scholarship really delves into the cultural stratosphere of Kemet.

Dr. Kimani Nehusi's 2016 publication, *Libation: An Afrikan Ritual Heritage in the Circle of Life,* offers a thorough and well organized study of the ritual of libation in Kemet and in African communities around the world. In this work, Dr. Nehusi's wealth of knowledge on Africa in antiquity shines exuberantly, as he provides an extensive list of sources, narratives, and discourse on the African ritual of heritage in the circle of life. His afrocentric approach to the knowledge and study of libation coupled with his mastery of Kemet and the African worldview and ontology adds a new layer to the role of water on the continent and in the diaspora. His work is able to unify a number of African communities through ritual, which peaked my interest in the study of water divinities as another ripple worthy of investigation.

While Nehusi's work implicitly underlines the importance of unity and restoration in African communities, Dr. Théophile Obenga's *African Philosophy: The Pharaonic Period: 2780-330 BC* is a work that displays all of Obenga's talents as an Egyptologist, historian, linguist and philosopher. Obenga's all-encompassing work examines African phenomena and philosophy

in a way that maps the influence of Egyptian philosophy in Mali, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and in academic realms such as science, astronomy, geology, zoology, mathematics and the like. His work exposes the connection between Africa in antiquity and modern Africa. He provides the spark needed for my research as I investigate the many waves of cultural retention from the east of the Atlantic to the west.

Obenga, Nehusi, Asante, and Abarry master African culture, history, and linguistics in a way that is afrocentric and refreshing. Their approach to the data is original and they provide access to primary sources such as the *Doctrine of Heliopolis*, the *Pyramid Texts*, and the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*. As a means to interpret the glyphs and ideograms that make up the Kemetic language, I turned to Collier's *How to Read Egyptian Hieroglyphics* and Wilkinson's *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt.* While these reference sources were not drenched in the rich history, cosmology, and ontology of Africa in antiquity, they did provide a basis of understanding the importance of the writing system in Kemet when conducting a study that aims to magnify the cultural retentions of African people from one location and time period to the next. These texts were great linguistic tools that helped ground my understanding of Kemet as the nucleus and blueprint for all African ethnic groups; thus, beginning my research with Africa in antiquity only seemed logical.

Pushing my research further into modern-day Africa, the compilation of publications from historians, spiritualists, and theorists shifted the focus from Kemet to cultural retentions on the continent of Africa (Mazama & Asante, 2009; Diop 1989; Drewel 1987; Farris Thompson, 1983; Hurst et.al, 2017; Jell-Bahlsen, 2008; Law 1973; Mbiti,1975; Monaghan, 2011; Young, 2007).

Discourse on the culture of modern day Africa is drenched in scholarship that is written from a Western and European standpoint or worldview. This thesis was not interested in those forms of retelling and transmitting knowledge. Instead the use of afrocentric works were needed in the overall aim of this thesis, which is to find solidarity between African communities through cultural retentions such as African water divinities and their role in the reality and survival of African people. Thus afrocentric scholars Dr. Ama Mazama and Dr. Molefi Asante dismantle the hegemony in scholarship with their groundbreaking 2009 reference text, the *Encyclopedia of African Religion.* Changing the way discourse on modern day Africa is constructed, this text is an agglomeration of entries from talented scholars who have mastered cultural and spiritual phenomena in Africa and are willing to share their knowledge by placing African people at their center of their own experiences. Relying heavily on this reference text, most of my insight for terms and ideas that seemed abstract to me were explained in this two volume set.

Afrocentric scholarship on the cultural aspects of modern day Africa did not begin and end with Mazama and Asante's encyclopedia. The Senegalese historian, theorist, linguist, and scholar Dr. Cheikh Anta Diop dispels the myth widely circulating about the African origin of civilization in his 1989 publication entitled *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*. Countering claims that ancient Egyptians were not African despite Egypt's geographical location on the continent, Diop does some very important work and leaves a tangible legacy in academia for later scholars. What is most intriguing about his work is the two cradle theory that explains the formation of two worldviews based off of the ecological conditions Aryans and Southerners had to cope with. His work presents a theory that is expounded upon in part two of the thesis. Furthermore, the two cradle theory allows scholars to write about narratives and ontology in a

way that distinguishes the African worldview and indigenous epistemology from a European one. Also, this two cradle theory allows Africans to write, read, and share their own stories and truths without adhering to a worldview that may not understand or care about Africanity. No other source presents scholars with this amount of critique; Diop's work reigns supreme.

While critique and approach is the current that runs through Diop's piece, the ethnographic work of Jell-Bahlsen and Patricia Monaghan solidifies the African worldview or calls attention to its legitimacy. Interacting first hand with the Igbo people of Nigeria, their work finely crafts a narrative of an African community that venerates and regards their water divinities without hesitation. Adding texture to the field of anthropology, Jell-Bahlsen is able to record the stories of the Oru-Igbo people without turning to western modes of perceiving. The African worldview is audible in her research (Jell-Bahlsen, 2008).

At last, I turn to Dr. Farris-Thompson who provides a detailed account of the connection between African and Afro-American art and philosophy in his 1983 work, *Flash of the Spirit.* Embracing the African worldview and it's regard for art and philosophy as not just aesthetically pleasing but also functional, Farris Thompson is able to map out the three points of dispersion from the west coast of Africa to African communities in the diaspora. He concludes that Afro-Caribbeans and Afro-Americans stem from three central points in Africa: Nigeria, Kongo/ Angola, and Benin among the Yoruba, Kongo Dahomean, Mande, and Ejagham. Farris Thompson's extensive research goes back into time and leaps forward with retentions that are expressed in the arts and philosophy of all African communities. His work does not stand alone. He is followed by scholars such as Young (Young, 2007).

The last topic of exploration is the African diaspora and the role of water divinities in these communities. The scholarship on divinities like Yemayá and Oshun are plentiful (Connor & Sparks, 2004; Drewal, 2008; Falola & Otero, 2013; Mazama & Asante, 2009; Stipriaan, 2003; Valdés, 2014; Vega, 2000; Farris Thompson, 1983). Yet, most of the scholarship implicitly references the role of water with regards to African cultural retention. The bulk of the work is interested in the liberation of women or the definition of womanhood thru these iconic, spiritual figures (Valdés, 2014; Pérez, 2013; Stokes, 2010). When the liberation or definition of woman is not the core mission of the written work and research, then the exploration of sexuality and gender is explored by way of these divinities (Conner & Sparks, 2004; Valdés, 2014, Falola & Otero, 2013). Sometimes both of these ideas combine in various ways to form new discourse concerning African water divinities and agency, sexual emancipation, or the connection between water divinities and the LGBT community.

In addition to those points of interest, scholars have also explored the creolization of these African divinities in the diaspora, how these divinities are reflections of the lived reality in these foreign spaces, and what this may mean for African women of the diaspora (Stipriaan, 2003; Nwokocha, 2013; Falola & Otero, 2013). Discourse concerning the lived realities of Africans in the diaspora and their link to water divinities are very implicit. Furthermore, few speak explicitly on the survival of African people and the role of water in that survival. Speaking on the fertility and germinative forces of these divinities just scratch the surface. This thesis aims to fill that gap in scholarship by stressing the role of water, in the form of the divine and beyond, to the survival and cultural retention of African people.

ORDER OF ANALYSIS

Ripples in the Atlantic: Revisiting the Role of Water in the African's Vision of Reality and Survival, is composed in three core chapters, excluding the introduction. First, I will conduct a study on the role of water in the reality of Africa in antiquity because Kemet and the civilizations that have come before its erection act as the nucleus in the ripple effect. Second, I will turn to the west coast of Africa as a spiritual hub that gave birth to a plethora of divinities that survived the involuntary mass exodus of African peoples. This aspect of the study will show how these divinities acted as reflections of reality for ethnic groups along the western coast of Africa and how these reflections are symmetrical to those in the diaspora. This section of the investigation will touch on Kambon's theory of inevitable variations but will emphasize the survival aspect that is embedded in the notion of Africanity in both the continent and the diaspora. Third, I will conclude that this Africological study dispels the nonsensical myth that there is disjunction between indigenous brown-skinned people in the West and indigenous brown-skinned people in the East because there are ripples of culture, expressed through the role of water, that has linked all African peoples by way of reality and survival. Thus, African decedents in the West and African people in the East are joined through cultural retentions and the will to survive. I would also like to discuss the future of this research and how it may contribute to the field of Africology by highlighting the liberatory and emancipatory aspects of *Ripples in the Atlantic*.

CHAPTER 2
NAVIGATING THE WATERS OF OUR AFRICA IN ANTIQUITY

"At the origin of the universe then, the ancient Egyptians posited matter in the form of an abyss of water. In time this matter would gain consciousness of itself, then manifest itself as creation, a multiform figure of all that was, is, and will be."

-Théophile Obenga, *African Philosophy Pharaonic Period*

I am sure that the depth of water would be monumental to all Africans had we collectively known from the very beginning that we were a people who built our ancient kingdoms by the Nile[6]. Or if we knew in African cosmology that water was the abyss that held all forms of creation and infinite possibility[7]. Seemingly, the longer we float on the surface of the goddess, away from the mother continent, the farther we are from the subjugated truth[8] of our past. If Africans in the diaspora aim to see a true reflection of themselves when they look into the water and to make sense of their current reality then they must return to the foundation of their culture and how water is reflected within that culture and particular time period. Once we do so,

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[6] The brilliant scientist, linguist, and historian, Cheikh Anta Diop, published a series of works that proposed and proved that the people of ancient Egypt were indeed African. Yet, till this day many do not know that the people of Egypt were African. Furthermore, some blatantly ignore the geographical location of Egypt which is in Africa and not the Middle East.
Diop, C.A. (1989). *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality.* Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press.
Asante, M.K. (2015): *The History of Africa: The Quest for Eternal Harmony* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
Obenga, T. (2004). *African Philosophy, The Pharaonic Period: 2780-330 BC.* Per Ankh.

[7] I am referring to Nwn or Nun as the primordial waters in Kemetic cosmology, as discussed in the following texts:
Nehusi, K. (2016). *Libation: An Afrikan Ritual of Heritage in the Circle of Life*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America. p. 5
Obenga, T. (2004). *African Philosophy, The Pharaonic Period: 2780-330 BC.* Per Ankh. pp. 43-50
Asante, M.K. (2015): *The History of Africa: The Quest for Eternal Harmony* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge. p. 33

[8] Knowledge is subjugated by those whose aim is to remain in power and control. Oppressors and institutions have both the power and the access to knowledge about African culture and all its facets. This access allows those who aim to dominate and control what is publicly known and circulated. Thus, those in power have the ability to distort, erase, and manipulate what is true about African history, culture, philosophy, art, sciences, spirituality etc.

we will see that we are the descendants of our mother country and we are innately African at our core.

In the current wealth of knowledge humans have collected on Africa in antiquity, the most explored civilization is Kemet[9] due to its extensive, writing system that has been preserved and interpreted for a significant amount of time. Yet, there are many civilizations that have sprung from the Nile Valley that predate Kemet such as *Kas*, later known as Kush, and *Ta Seti,* meaning "land of the bow", which is now called Nubia (Nehusi, 2016; Asante, 2015b). Scholars have found relatively very little data about these civilizations when compared to the research conducted on Kemet; yet, researchers have concluded that as Africa's first civilizations, Kushites and Nubians have passed down considerable facets of their reality and ontology to the ancient people of Kemet (Nehusi, 2016; Asante 2015b). Just as the ripple effect demonstrates, Kemetic practices, beliefs, and culture is not isolated but expands and is found in the cosmologies and ontologies of many ethnic groups in Africa. Kemet's greatest contribution to all of Africa is its rich cosmology that acts as a blueprint for other ethnic group's understanding of the universe and its language. Furthermore, the role of water in Kemet is a precursor to how other Nile Valley civilizations and African communities in the diaspora will come to regard water. For the abyss is a part of the reality and survival of the people, even in antiquity.

[9] *Kemet* is the African name for the Greek word "Egypt". *Kemet* means "land of the blacks" or "the black country". Asante, M.K. (2015) *The History of Africa: The Quest of Eternal Harmony* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge. p. 22

COSMOLOGY IN KEMET

One of the most considerable inheritances the people of Kemet embraced is cosmology and the belief of primordial water  : *Nwn*[10] or Nun (Obenga, 2004; Nehusi 2016; Asante 2015b; Asante & Abarry, 1996; Mazama & Asante, 2009; Collier, 1998). Nun is imperative to reference here because it is the first massive body of water Africans conceive as the beginning and is even a belief among the Akan of Ghana (under the title, *Tano),* among the Dogon of Malia (under the title, *Nommo),* and among the Zulu of South Africa who believe the great god, Unkulunkulu rises from a primordorial marshland (Obenga, 2004; Bankole, 2009: 184-186). Nun, the generative force, makes all life and creation possible because all divinities and the supreme deity is conceived in this realm. This watery abyss springs matter[11]. Be that matter god[12], humanity, or nature itself, all matter would gain consciousness of itself in this sphere and then manifest itself into creation and become "a multiform figure of all that was, is, and will be" (Obenga, 2004: 31). Here, water is regarded as a germinating entity where all life and all tangible objects are born such as humans and plant-life.

In the *Doctrine of Heliopolis,* the anthropomorphic qualities of water are bestowed onto gods and goddesses that may be venerated and spoken into the day-to-day reality of Kemetan life

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[10] The following is the glyph for the word Nun or *Nwn.*

[11] Théophile Obenga describes the bond between spirit and matter in African spirituality and philosophy. According to Obenga, there is no opposition in Kemetan philosophy unlike the dichotomies found in Western thought. In African philosophy, water is a germinating force, an energy, and divinity. Likewise, knowledge of *what is,* is affirmed by the human spirit itself; therefore, spirit and matter are both aspects, different manifestations, of reality. Obenga, T. (2004). *African Philosophy, The Pharaonic Period: 2780-330 BC*. Per Ankh. p. 57

[12] Ra- Atum was the supreme god in Kemet.

(Asante, 2015b: 27-28; Asante & Abarry, 1996). For instance, the goddess Tefnut who is paired with the god of air dubbed Shu, is part of the ennead[13] and shares part of the responsibility in the order of the earth and balancing chaos and order appropriately[14].

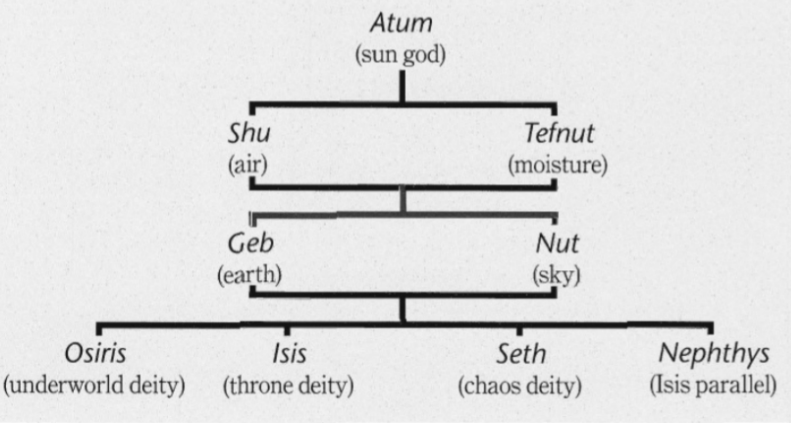

Illustration 1.1: The Ennead according to the *Doctrine of Heliopolis.*

In Wilkinson's 2003 text, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt,* the ennead who are responsible for the makeup of the earth and cosmos, spring from the primordial waters. Just as Nun is a source of creation and chaos, the supreme deity known as Ra, and the following divinities act as creators of order and all of life. This gives a slight overview of how people of Kemet saw the world and its operations.

[13] See Illustration 1.1.

[14] This order or balance is known as *maat. Maat* is the governing principle of Kemetan society and plays a vital role in the living and the living dead.
For more information on maat, please see Karenga, M. (2004). *MAAT: The Moral Ideal In Ancient Egypt: A Study In Classical African Ethics* (M. K. Asante, Ed.). New York: Routledge.

Tefnut, the goddess of moisture, water, and rain embodies the same germinative forces that  inhabits. Often depicted with the ankh in her presence, she is one of the many spirits that gives eternal life, protects, heals, and guides one spirit through the aquatic underworld into the realm of eternal living[15].

In summation, primordial water, which operates as a universe that existed before the universe, plays a crucial role in the creation of spirit and matter. Hence, the first marriage between matter and spirit is developed in Africa in its antiquity but this marriage is not a far-fetched notion for the river dwellers of Kemet. It is easy to conceive that the only way to make sense of reality and the creation of all life is to imagine Nun and its divinities as the powerful, dynamic, creative, innovative, and generative source of all humanity (Obenga, 2004: 33). Elements of day-to-day life of Kemetans validate this idea of water as generative and creative. If we look closely at Kemetic society along the Nile river, one can see that the reality of Kemetans are linked to the massive body of water closest to them, the Nile[16].

WATER, REALITY AND SURVIVAL IN KEMET

The role of the Nile is two-fold: 1) it is a great unifying force that aids in the creation of infrastructure, knowledge, and language in Kemet and 2) because of its ability to bring forth so much matter from the spirit of the people in Kemet, it is the foundation of the ripple effect that expands this notion of Africanity to other African communities through legacy.

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[15] Variations of her character arise in chapter two of this thesis, as she manifests herself in the character of water divinities in continental and diasporic African communities.

[16] The Nile was named *Hapy* by the people of Kemet to signify how divine the river was to its people and to life. Asante, M.K. (2015) *The History of Africa: The Quest of Eternal Harmony* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.p. 25

From a historical perspective, the great Narmer (Menes) unified Kemet from South to North in approximately 3,000 BC (Obenga, 2004; Asante, 2015b). Narmer's merger along the Nile created a sense of community where the members, collectively, understood the spiritual and physical importance of the river. As a result of this unification there was great organization for channeling and utilizing the Nile (Obenga, 2004; Asante, 2015b). Understood as a realm of chaos capable of creating order, water became a symbol of progress and creation for Kemet. Water is reflective of  and the divinities that bring order to the universe and all matter. Yet, the act of balancing chaos and order is not easy by any means and requires a tug and pull of both chaos and balance. Hence, the aquatic entity is unpredictable. The people of Kemet, looked at water as a life-giving force that provides Kemetans with sustenance, as a powerful force that has the authority to destroy during a deluge or inundation period, or as a devastating force that can take life away if water ceases to exist or becomes massive in quantity. Because water can be so unpredictable and can vary in it's magnitude and exertion[17], it makes sense that the agrarian people of Kemet attempted to channel its energy and construct long lasting systems that brought as much order to the society as possible.

For instance, along the Nile, irrigation systems and aqueducts were installed; communication and traveling across great distances ensued; and infrastructure thrived. Kemetans were able to engage in the construction of edifices, the development of a writing system that was useful for regulating ceremonies, rituals, the creation of calendars, and the tracking of time due to inundation periods (Obenga, 2004; Asante, 2015b). This suggests that the role of water as an entity that African people may situate their lives around is palpable even in antiquity. Kemetan

[17] These characteristics of water is not foreign to the African, as water divinities on the continent and in the diaspora inhabit the same features. They may bring peace or chaos depending on if and how people venerate them.

people managed their day, understood the world, and literally survived off of the flow of the Nile.

From a linguistic perspective, the role of water is literally transcribed in the foundation of the city of Kemet. Etched into the walls and tombs of the dead, symbols were erected to illustrate what is happening in society. Water is embedded in the culture and literally written into the reflective narrative and history of African people in antiquity, which allows them to be subjects of any study that wants to discover what life was like for Africans. The following symbols of water–which is just a small piece of the larger palette of symbols mixed and matched to create new meaning within a text– can be found in primary texts such as the *Pyramid Texts*[18]*, Book of Vindication/Coffin Texts,* and the *Book of Going into Enlightenment/ The Egyptian Book of the Dead*[19] (Nehusi, 2016; Obenga, 2004).

[18] See Illustration 1.3 on the next page

[19] See Illustration 1.2 on the next page

Illustration 1.2: NWN, The Primal Waters

In *African Philosophy, The Pharaonic Period: 2780-330 BC,* Théophile Obenga offers his readers excerpts from sacred Kemetic writings. This excerpt on NWN, the primordial waters comes from chapter 17 in *The Book of the Dead*. In its inscription you can spot the ideogram for ripple and water suggesting that the importance of the entity was profound for the creation of life and balance in Kemet.

Source: Obenga, T. (2004). *African Philosophy the Pharaonic Period: 2780-330 BC*. Per Ankh. (Original work published 1990)

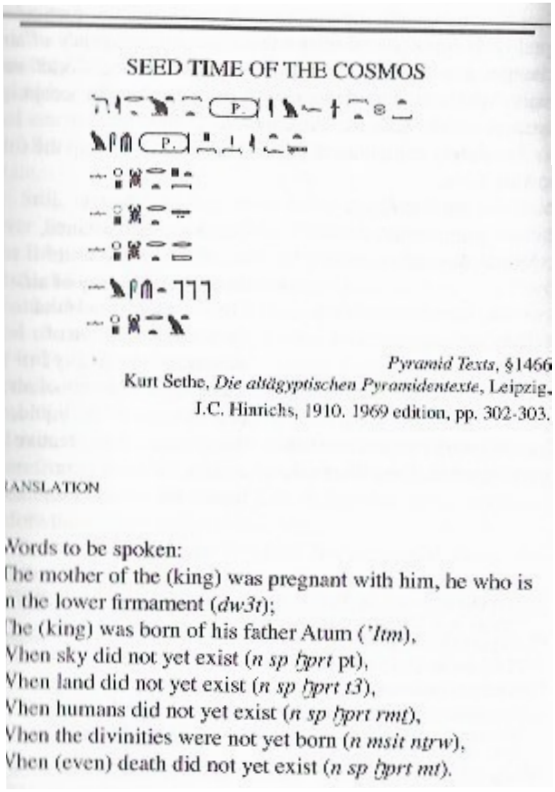


Illustration 1.3: Seed Time of the Cosmos

In this excerpt of the pyramid texts, one can note the ideogram for ripple. Here it is used in the context of fertility, birth, and regermination. This shows the symbolic meaning behind water to the people of Kemet and connects these ideas to ethnic groups all over Africa at a later date. Variations do occur and is inevitable, but these variations do not make the ideas any less African.

Source: Obenga, T. (2004). *African Philosophy the Pharaonic Period: 2780-330 BC*. Per Ankh. (Original work published 1990)

The following table suggests that large bodies of water were spoken of in a way that normalized its significance and power. For example, to speak of libations, irrigation, communication, or travel meant to reflect on the importance of water without hesitation. Within the language and script of Kemet lies the fundamental element of water as a reflective device that made sense of what the people of Kemet valued or saw important in their society. Naming this element, creating ideograms and glyphs for the element, and referencing water in their spiritual and philosophical disciplines showcase for later generations[20] that water has always been a part of the African's life.

Symbol/ Ideogram	Transliteration, Sound, *Meaning*	Source
	mw…*group of ripples, water, cleanse, rejuvenating water, cool water*	Mark Collier, 1998: p.137 Kimani Nehusi, 2016: p.48
	n…*ripple of water*	Théophile Obenga, 2004: p.25 Mark Collier, 1998: p.137
	khhw: *libation water, water pot, water jar*	Kimani Nehusi, 2016: p.49 Mark Collier, 1998: p.140
	nnw (three pots) *in the name* mw *group of ripples….* *In the name of Nwm or Nun, primordial water*	Kimani Nehusi, 2016: p.5 Théophile Obenga, 2004 Mark Collier, 1998:pp.139, 137
	‘nh…ankh… *life, living*	Mark Collier, 1998: p.23

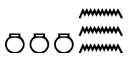
Table 1.1 Kemetic Symbols, Transliteration, Sources

A closer look at these glyphs reveal details that are vital to understand the Kemetic relationship with water as a precursor to the spiritual systems found in West Africa. While there is still plenty of research that needs to be executed on when these ideograms came into

[20] Especially those who chose to study their ancestors in antiquity

formation, their connotative meanings are vast and dense. For instance,  : ankh, is polysemantic. Interpretations range from the joining of male and female genitalia through the meeting of the oval and the line (which makes sense because *ankh* signifies life and both male and female merge to create new forms of human life), to the notion of regeneration and protection in eternal life. The second interpretation is explored further when one studies libation in African communities (Nehusi, 2016). Libations are often poured in ceremonies when one is transitioning within the "Afrikan circle of life" (Nehusi, 2016: 1). Whether the significance of  encompasses a totality of all these interpretations or not, one thing is very clear–Kemet's fascination with water surpasses what is seen from the naked eye or felt with the hand. Water is the source of all creation, understanding, and survival in the realm of the living and the living dead. It is a tool that is used to encapsulate African ontology in its totality.

If Africans did not truly understand the significance of water and its ability to preserve cultural elements, then the people of Kemet would not have not been able to effectively pass down these important facets of life and reality to other African civilizations. No other medium has been more effective in the inheritance than language.

In summation, without the symbolic understanding of water which then manifests into action–as civilizations in antiquity created societies that function from their understanding of  as a tool in balancing chaos and order–people of Kemet would not have used its essence to create the sound infrastructures humans still visit today in present day Egypt. The people of Kemet would not have been able to grow abundant crops for consumption and inevitably survival or life. The people of Kemet would not have conducted rituals and ceremonies such as libation and circumcision that still occur in Africa

and the diaspora. And most importantly, without the stability of the Nile, the people of Kemet would not have been able to create the complex language system that linguists still study till this day. The Nile insured the legacy and survival of the people in Kemet by giving them life to create and withhold some of the greatest aspects of society we still regard as phenomenal today. Undoubtably, Kemet is the nucleus of the ripple of cultural retention and ontological unity (Nehusi, 2016; Mazama, 2002).

CHAPTER 2
EXPANDING THE WAVE: HOW THE RIPPLE EFFECT UNITES AFRICANS AT THE EAST AND WEST OF THE ATLANTIC

"*It's so magic folks feel their own ancestors coming up out of the earth to be in the realms of their descendants; they feel the blood of their mothers still flowing in them survivors of the diaspora."*

-Ntozake Shange, *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo*

With Kemet acting as the nucleus of all African culture and understanding, we will examine some of the secondary waves that form from the core of African cultural retention. Explored thoroughly in his 1983 masterpiece, *Flash of the Spirit,* Robert Farris Thompson maps out three main locations in West Africa that have strong connections to the African people in the diaspora: Nigeria among the Yoruba and Ibo; Benin and Togo among the Dahomey, Fon, and Ewe; and Kongo/Angola among the Bakongo (Farris-Thompson, 1983). These three regions on the continent of Africa provide a rich source of reference for cultural retentions that stem from Africa in antiquity and extends to the diaspora. Vast remnants of culture persist. Yet, one remnant that I am interested in is water and its role in shaping one's reality and ensuring a group's survival. Water divinities are ripples worth investigating and our analysis will visit Nigeria and Benin/Togo.

WATER IS STILL DIVINE: WATER DIVINITIES OF THE WEST

Let us begin with water goddesses. These divine spirits that dwell in the depths of all aquatic phenomena–river, lake, ocean, waterfall, rain, dew–are manifestations of the marriage between spirituality and matter. As unpredictable forces that are capable of healing and bringing devastation, these mystic divinities are reflections of human

temperament and nature's disposition which suggests that the two are not mutually exclusive in the African worldview. Accordingly, it makes sense that Africans regard water divinities as expressions of both reality and spirituality.

NIGERIA

Our first point of analysis begins in the Oguta lake, located in Southeastern Nigeria, where the local divinity, Ogbuide[21] resides. Functioning as one aspect of the generic mother water called Nne Mmiri,[22] the ephemeral force, Ogbuide is known locally for fertility, wealth, fluidity, transition, and decision making–especially when it comes to the eternal transition between life and death along the aquatic crossroads (Monaghan, 2011). To understand Ogbuide's function in the lives of the Igbo people who make up 18% of Nigeria's population, we must first turn to the original water goddess of the Igbo people, Nne Mmiri.

Nne Mmiri is considered the original prototype for all water goddesses in Igbo cosmology. Similar to the creation of divinities like Tefnut[23] in Kemetic cosmology, Nne Mmiri

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[21] Ogbuide is known by many names like *Eze Mmiri di Egwu*, *Eze Nwanyi*, and *Uhammiri* and her foreign name, *Mammy Water* or *Mami Wota*. She is a local divinity thus she is a tertiary diety, which includes the divinities found in clan spirits and personal gods.
For further information of the structure and organization of deities, see Houessou-Adin, 2009. Mawu-Lisa. In A. Mazama & M. K. Asante (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of African religion* (Vol. 1, pp. 411-413). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
For further information on Ogbuide see Jell-Bahlsen, S. (2008). *The Water Goddess in Igbo Cosmology: Ogbuide of Oguta Lake.* Trenton, NJ: African World Press. p. 35

[22] The internationally acclaimed African writer, Chinwe Achebe describes Nne Mmiri as the generic, mother-like water goddess because she encompasses all related water divinities of the Igbo.
Jell-Bahlsen, S. (2008). *The Water Goddess in Igbo Cosmology: Ogbuide of Oguta Lake.* Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
Monaghan P. (2011) *Goddesses in World Culture: Asia and Africa.* Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.

[23] Tefnut is the goddess of moisture in the *Doctrine of Heliopolis.*

comes from a pantheon of deities that stems from the supreme god of the Igbo, Chi-Ukwu[24]. Nne Mmiri challenges, renews, and modifies customs, as she can change the course of one's destiny when they are trying to cross the watery abyss into eternal life. It is widely believed among the Igbo that when an individual is crossing the river to enter life on earth she/he is challenged by Nne Mmiri and is welcome to either form a pact with the water goddess or not. Either decision may alter one's destiny. Refusing to fulfill her requirements once the pact is established results in illness, mental derangement, loss of children, loss of husbands, and eventual premature death (Jell-Bahlsen, 2008). These notions are found in her local form, Ogbuide.

The water goddess of Oguta, Ogbuide prefers white animals like white chicken and rams for sacrifice. She loves plantains tended by women. And she loves a particular palm wine known as "up-wine" (Jell-Bahlsen, 2008: 38). One must honor her by wearing white clothes and tying white cloths to her offering sites (Jell-Bahslen, 2008: 38). As a celebrated and respected divinity, her followers seek her when they want children or have a fertility issue. They also ask for peace and protection whenever they turn to the goddess (Jell-Bahslen, 2008). As a force of great fluidity, the majority of her followers are women. Hence, the belief in Ogbuide celebrates womanhood, female power, beauty, and fecundity.

Ogbuide, like Nne Mmiri, is multidimensional and she demands respect and obedience. If you respect her then she will be gracious, giving, loving, kind, and a source of protection and wealth. However, if you disrespect her, she will grow impatient, furious, and cruel. Her ability to be dynamic and fluid is not unlike the unpredictability of large bodies of water nor the

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[24] *Chi* meaning "spirit" or "soul". In the spiritual beliefs of the Igbo, each person has a c*hi.* This *chi* can be a force of unification, solidarity, and the proclamation that all humans of the Igbo have a piece of god within them making them part of the divine and so forth.
Jell-Bahlsen, S. (2008). *The Water Goddess in Igbo Cosmology: Ogbuide of Oguta Lake*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

temperament of human beings, which allow her to exist in both entities without question. Because she is anthropomorphic and very much a real part of the everyday life in Oguta, she is unmistakingly a part of the Oru-Igbo African worldview and reflective of her followers and physical space. Thus she presents the scholar with an immense amount of historical and cultural knowledge and acts in the restoration and preservation of memory in this region of Nigeria, especially among the Oru-Igbo (Jell-Bahlsen, 2008).

Yet, the Igbo are not the only ethnic group in Nigeria that venerates a water goddess. Dwelling in the sacred city of Ile Ife rests Yemoja, goddess of ocean water and Oshun, goddess of fresh water or sweet water (Vega, 2000). Equipped with the power of *áshe/asé*[25]*,* these orishas[26] are venerated heavily in Nigeria and beyond among the Yoruba who make up roughly 21% of the Nigerian population and a significant number of Africans in the diaspora.

Fond of jewelry and brass objects, Oshun owns a plethora of bracelets, staffs, needles, and earrings that she took with her to the bottom of the river upon her death (Farris Thompson, 1983: 79). She is loving but swift and merciless when it comes to war; she is capable of healing the sick and making deadly potions. Her counterpart, Yemoja is closely associated with beaded crowns adorned with fringes, earthenware vessels filled with river or sea water[27], and rounded

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[25]*Áshe* or *asé* means "so be it," "make it happen." According to Yoruba cosmology, the supreme deity, Olorun harnesses this 'will to make things happen' and passes it on to all forms of life including divinities and the Yoruba people. Asé is a morally neutral power, as it gives and takes away, kills and gives life. The messengers of asé reflect this complex of power.
Farris-Thompson, R. (1983). *Flash of the Spirit.* New York, NY: Vintage Books. p. 6

[26] An o*risha* is similar to a divinity–a divine being, a god or goddess. The term *orisha* is rooted in the Yoruba faith and is used to reference their spiritual figures of significance such as Yemoja or Oshun.

[27] Note these are similar to libation vessels that were documented in Kemet.

stone and sand. Both goddesses behold the rounded fan known as *adebe* as their legacy (Farris Thompson, 1983: 78).

The rounded fan represent coolness, a characteristic that is valued among the Yoruba. As a way to balance the extreme forces that are sometimes at play, coolness is the preferred disposition of this ethnic group (Farris Thompson, 1983). This means that one is serious, gentle, conscious of one's presentation, and composed. Note the meaning of the fan and its connection to coolness. Yemoja and Oshun are able to sway one to return to a state of tranquility and gentleness when the opposite assumes[28]. The lure of the rounded fan and its properties as it pertains to riverain goddesses are still under investigation. As the roundedness or the concentric circles that dominate Yoruba text and aesthetics may symbolize the foundation and profundity of the earth and its cyclical properties with regards to life. If this is the case, the water goddesses of the Yoruba represent the African cycle of life[29] in the rounded structures of their fans, stones, and droplets of water that are dense and cool. The cycle of life then becomes the system of reference when one determines how the world operates and the human's role in it. Therefore, it is

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[28] Farris Thompson explains the myth behind the riverain goddesses and Ifá, the god of divination, who left the holy city after getting into a quarrel with the river goddesses. When he leaves a famine occurs causing the world to perish slowly. In an effort to *cool* him down, the river goddesses went to the forest where Ifá was hiding out and threw stones at anything solid they saw. When they came across the rounded abode of Ifá, the goddesses fanned him with their rounded fans and fed him so that he would return to the holy city and end the famine.
Farris-Thompson, R. (1983). *Flash of the Spirit.* New York, NY: Vintage Books. p. 73

[29] This african cycle of life is reflected in the Kemet and also in the Bakongo cosmogram.
Nehusi, K.. (2016). Libation: An Afrikan Ritual of Heritage in the Circle of L*ife*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
Farris Thompson, R. (1983). *Flash of the Spirit*. New York, NY: Vintage books.
Peoples, G. (2008). *A Circular Lineage: The Bakongo Cosmogram and the Ring Shout of the Enslaved Africans and Their Descendants on the Georgian and South Carolinian Sea Islands* (Doctoral thesis, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY).

imperative to note that the rounded fans Yemoja and Oshun possess are found in African communities abroad[30].

Nne Mmiri/Oguibe, Yemoja and Oshun are the water divinities of Nigeria among the Igbo and Yoruba respectively. Because of Nigeria's location on the western coast of Africa, the beliefs of each group has traveled West with enslaved Africans who had to reside in the Americas and Caribbean. As the fusion commences among these ethnic groups along the long voyage West and into these new seemingly autonomous African communities, the distinct regional and overall African characteristics of these goddesses overlap. Thus new depictions of their prowess ensue. In African communities in the West such as Brazil, Cuba, and the Americas, these divinities are known as Yemayá, Ochun/ Oxim, and Mami Wata.

BENIN & TOGO

Benin and Togo are known for their rich Vodou belief system. Blossoming from Fon cosmology, the benevolent water goddess, Mami Wata awaits in the depths of their potent waters. Mama Wata is unique in many ways. First, her name emphasizes the tenacity of the ripple effect in African culture. According to Dr. Denise Martin, the moniker, *Mami Wata* has roots in Kemet (Martin, 2009: 404). *Ma* or *mama* means truth and wisdom in Kemet, while *wata* stems from the ancient word *uati,* which means water (Martin, 2009: 404). Sudanic languages also suggests that *wat* or *waat* means woman (Martin, 2009: 404). The origins of Mami Wata's name are profound because it embodies time (Africa in antiquity) and space (from Sudan to Benin); but, the history behind her title in a number of countries is credited by the Kru of Liberia (Martin, 2009). At the

[30]Discourse on the rounded fan resumes in the section titled, *Survival in the West.* Further illustrations of these fans and their aesthetics and functions are shown in *Survival in the West.*

end of the eighteenth century the Kru traveled extensively along the west coast of Africa dropping seeds about a divinity dubbed Mami Wata (Martin, 2009). It was on this eighteenth century voyage that the name became prominent on the west coast of Africa. Alone, just by the utter of her name, Mami Wata of Benin and Togo encapsulates generations and crosses several ethnic borders in Africa.

Due to her popularity in a number of ethnic groups in Africa, Mami Wata is a part of a pantheon where each Wata divinity has a specific ceremony, food, drink, taboo, color, and sacred day and she is usually affronted with beads called *danmi* or serpents similar to the serpents found in Kemetic ideograms and to Ogbuide/Nne Mmiri's totem, the python (Martin, 2009). Benin and Togo's, Mami Wata is closely associated with earthly wisdom, creativity, genius, divine inspiration, and sacred paths to enlightenment (Martin, 2009). She usually beholds a comb and mirror which she uses to lure men and women to her underwater cave and encourage them to be loyal to her (Martin, 2009). The comb and mirror may denote her vanity or beauty, or they could denote reflection and the importance of self-representation. Interpretations are encouraged, for she is truly a spirit worth meditation. Her colors are red and white which signify her full nature as aggressive yet healing and nurturing. Her reign does not end and begin in Benin and Togo but extends into all spaces where Vodou is practiced and discussed with veracity. This spirit is regarded in Guyana and Suriname, Haiti, North America and anywhere Vodou is present. She may be called Ezili Freda, Watramama, or Le Siréne among other names.

Name of divinity	Ethnic Group	Country	Characteristics
Nne Mmiri/ Ogbuide	Igbo	Nigeria	tied to lakes and various other forms of water; known for fertility and transition to eternal life; preferred color is white, white chicken, and rams,white limestone found underwater; prefers palm wine; gives wealth; gives protection; gives peace; destiny changing; has long, loc'd hair; totem animal is the python which represents man and woman, life and death
Yemoja/ Oshun	Yoruba	Nigeria	fond of jewelery, the rounded fan, coolness, beaded crowns with fringes, earthenware vessels, related to fresh water and salt water, heals and causes illness, swift and merciless when it comes to war, protective, "love goddess"
Mami Wata	Fon/Ewe/Dahomey	Benin/Togo	Her colors are red and white to represent her dual nature; she is usually adorned with beads; she carries a mirror and comb; she is known for her creativity, genius and paths to enlightenment; she is often depicted with snakes and has long hair that ranges from kinky to straight; she has the power to heal and bring destruction.

Table 2.1 A Survey of Water Divinities Explored in the East.

This illustration is intended for a quick review of characteristics explored in chapter two. Readers are encouraged to make connections among these water divinities and their predecessors in the West. Furthermore, one is encouraged to add their own wealth of knowledge to the survey in an effort to make sense of the ripple effect and African cultural retention.
Source: Angira Pickens

MOTHER, TEACH US WHAT IS REAL AND TRUE

The academic revolutionary, Cheikh Anta Diop proposes a monumental distinction between Aryans and Southerners. The latter includes "Negro-Africans" while the former includes all Caucasians including Semites, Mongoloids, and American Indians (Diop, 1989). Later incorporated into Africana studies, the two cradle theory stems from Diop's hypothesis and conclusion (McDougal, 2014: 51). Diop argues that Aryans developed patriarchal systems "characterized by the suppression of women and a propensity for war", a materialist religion, pessimism, xenophobia, individualism, the city-state, and other oppositional sectors during civilization building in antiquity (Diop, 1989: x).

Southerners in antiquity developed matriarchal systems, a Dionysian[31] approach to life, religious idealism, xenophilia, no concept of sin, social collectivism, and optimism (Diop, 1989: x). The result of this hypothesis depended on ecology, as Aryans were forced to make sense of life in a colder, frigid climate which aids in their formation as such, while Southerners had to makes sense of life in a warmer, humid climate. These ecological differences provide a glimpse of insight into how worldviews are often manufactured. As separate entities, Southerners and Aryans's interpretation of reality is rooted in their ecological habitat, core value structures, and social attitudes. Thus, it makes sense that what Africans consider real or fact may be nonsensical

[31] "Dionysian" stems from Dionysis, the Greco-Roman God. While it is unclear why this word is utilized to explain the nature of Southerners, as it is linked to European concepts, it suggests that Southerners were free in their temperament. This allowed them to be dynamic and aided in an overall optimistic view of the world. Note that this review of the two cradle theory was written by Mercer Cook, who was responsible for translating Diop's text. It could be that Cook's interpretation and translation of Southerns who behold a "Dionysian approach" is really a mistranslation of Diop's original hypothesis. Further investigation into this term is needed because to attribute Southerners with Western ideas or terminology seems to complicate the binary between Aryans and Southerners. Diop, C. A. (1989). *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press.

to the European and vice versa. This section of part two looks at the role of water in shaping what is true in African communities to the west of the Atlantic. By looking at two examples of how water operates in the lived realities of African people living on the continent, one may be encouraged by this investigation to explore how Africans abroad make sense of their lived realities in new social situations and climates. While variations do occur, as supported by Kambon, this study will reveal how the core of each African abroad is rooted in the traditional worldview of African peoples[32]. The ripple effect is at its strongest when linking cultural retention from East to West.

We begin in Nigeria among the Oru-Igbo. In her 2008 work on Ogbuide, writer Sabine Jell- Bahlsen interviews various residents of Oguta about their local water divinity. Madame Onyemuru Uzonwanne, a ferryman of Oguta, states the following about the divine:

> All you need to do is to get the necessary items of offerings and sacrifice to her and unexpectedly, you will be wealthy. That's what she does, and because of that she is called "*Okpara Unu Mgbeji,"* caretaker or refuge of the poor. *Omepuni onye ona aturu. Eze mmiri ogeri isi onah, ogeri isi okpoko:* A redeemer, a woman with long, golden hair…*Uhammiri* helps people. Those who don't know should better take example from the Nigerian civil war…[emphasis by Jell-Bahslen]. (Jell-Bahlsen, 2008: 36-37)

In Uzonwanne's statement, she referenced the Nigerian civil war that spanned three years from 1967-1970. Also known as the Nigerian-Biafra War, this civil disunion occurred seven years after Nigeria gained independence from Britain. Home to three ethnic groups: the Hausa and Fulani in the north, Yoruba in the south-west, and Igbo in the south-east; Nigeria became a place of tension when the southeastern region of the nation succeeded and declared itself the Republic of Biafra. Already trying to stand on its own two feet after the exit of the all-dominating and toxic Great

[32] This concept will be thoroughly explored in the section titled, *Survival in the West*.

Britain, Nigeria's political and economic status had some cracks in the foundation. Whatever the real root and cause for the turmoil that ensued on this nation's rich soil, the Igbo turned to their mother, Nne Mmiri and her local titles for protection when the slaughter rate was steadily increasing.

> During the [civil] war *Uhammiri*[33] stopped them [the attackers] from moving. They could neither go back, nor advance. *Uhammiri* came out in the form of an animal and drowned their [gun] boat. So many people died, and some ran away. When a bad thing comes to Oguta, she will stop it from entering town. (Jell-Bahslen, 2008:38)

In the commentary above, an inhabitant recounts a series of events that transpired during the civil war. In their recollection of this particular incident, the water goddess of lake Oguta protects her people by drowning the gun boat of the opposer. In the lived reality of the people, Ogbuide is a force that protects, threatens, gives, and loves. Her ability to drown a gun boat and to act as a heroine for the Oru-Igbo is not mystics or a grand myth and fable. Her actions are true and tangible in the eyes of her followers. The recollection of events is considered a fact to the Oru-Igbo. She is not just matter but also spirit that can only be a part of an afrocentric recollection of memory because only Africans truly understand her essence.

For instance, when the first Europeans visited this area in the 1920s they came into contact with the loyal followers of Ogbuide and listened as the inhabitants of Oguta explained her significance and role in the lives of the Oru-Igbo people. However, outside perceptions of this African goddess were "diametrically opposed to the views of the locals" (Jell-Bahslen, 2008: 36). While the Oru-Igbo see the their lake as a goddess who gives, colonial explorers saw the goddess as a spirit that takes excessively; she is considered greedy to the alien (Jell-Bahlsen,

[33] This is another name for Nne Mmiri, just as Ogbuide is another name for the generic water goddess.

2008: 36). These two dueling conceptions suggest that distortion of events, memory, and history are very much possible when the reiteration comes from a perspective and worldview that is not African. Thus, the concept of memory, history, and expressing the narratives of the African people and their spiritual system cannot be considered true when it comes from people of a different worldview and perception. The African water goddess cannot tell the lived reality of European people, but it can tell the lived reality of the African who venerates the divine.

As a force in cosmology, in the mundane, in times of war, in times of travel, in times of conception, and in times of despair, the water goddess of the Igbo is a divinity of great prestige. She is cool and turbulent, giving and unforgiving, creator and death. With these great, seemingly oppositional forces at play, she is quickly prejudged as two-dimensional. The Igbo water goddess is anything but– she is a multifaceted, multidimensional, multimodal goddess who not only embodies the history, reality, and spirituality of her people, but also of Africa. Her dynamism does not begin and end among the Igbo and will inevitably find its way into African communities across the diaspora.

For instance, let us review the role of Yemoja and Oshun in the nineteenth-century Yoruba civil wars. A victim of an intra-ethnic turmoil in multiple regions of Yorubaland[34], most notably in the Oyo kingdom, King Owu was killed by warriors from Ibadan and Ijaiye over the new economic market that thrived on enslavement. Owu tried to suppress local slave-raiding (Farris Thompson, 1983: 73; Law 1973: 141). After the slaying of King Owu, the warriors grew terrified of what his spirit might do. Attempting to evade the wrath and vengeance of Owu, the warriors damned the river Oshun and buried the king's body in the river basin so that they could

[34] Yorubaland is a cultural region that spans three nations but not in it's entirety: Benin, Togo, and Nigeria.

release the waters and submerge him. The purpose of this was to "muffle the roar of [King Owu's] spirit and neutralize and appease his awesome powers of áshe" (Farris Thompson, 1983). Again, Yemoja and Oshun have the power to cool the spirit of all matter and to protect people from vengeance of all forms.

Despite the interjection of Europeans and the role they play in these devastating civil wars, a closer look at the actions of the warriors from Ibadan and Ijaiye suggests that African spiritual systems thrive even when foreign forces infiltrate. Moreover, a Eurocentric retelling of the civil war and the death of King Owu would miss pivotal points that only those of Yorubaland could iterate for generations to come. Those points include why King Owu's body was buried in the depths of Oshun's river and what that means to the spiritual aspect of the Yoruba people. Furthermore, as life is often governed around orishas and the Yoruba spiritual system, the actions of a few–if not all– are highly intertwined with the forces of orishas. In the next section of this assessment, we will investigate how Yemoja and Oshun swim across the Atlantic to inspire and anchor African communities in the diaspora as they make sense of their surroundings and remember what is means to be African.

SURVIVAL IN THE WEST

In turbulent times–warfare, poverty, infertility etc.– the water goddess of Africa emerge from her aquatic domain for several reasons. She emerges to bring order, to help us make sense of the events that took place, to give life, to protect, to change our course of destiny, and to help us recall and remember past events and current beliefs with an afrocentric lens. Since she is dynamic and multidimensional, she travels the current with her followers and lures them back to

the water whenever they find themselves lost or in despair. She is ninety percent[35] of the earth, which makes her nearly omnipresent. Thus, she is the ultimate divinity for Africans washed up ashore in the diaspora.

What aspects of these African water goddesses survived in the West and what does that mean about the role of water and the survival of African people? The following analysis will discuss the remnants of these divinities in the diaspora and why any variations of these goddesses happen when the African is forced to travel West.

Let us begin in the Caribbean where the people are drenched in the ripples of African cultural tradition. The sights and sounds of the Afro-Caribbean are echoes from the East; yet, the loudest resonance comes from the ocean. Traveling alongside the Igbo, Yoruba, Fon, Ewe, and Dahomey are Mami Wata, Yemaja, Oshun, and Nne Mmiri. These divinities from Africa show up in contemporary forms of water spirits like Yemayá etc. There is a fusion happening where the multidimensional components of these orishas, lwas[36], and goddesses form a bricolage of intense divinities that act as protectors of the African culture and people. The contemporary water goddess of the West is a symbol of survival, protection, transformation, and reflection.

In Yoruba based Afro-Atlantic spirituality, Yemayá [37] and Oshun[38] embodies the same protective, loving, and dualistic nature she beheld in the West but undergoes slight changes due to the prevalence of poverty, prostitution, sexism, racism, and climate changes in the Caribbean (Falola, 2013; Farris-Thompson, 1983; Valdés, 2014; Vega 2000; Conner & Sparks, 2004). For

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[35] all bodies of water, not just the Atlantic

[36] Lwas or loas are divinities rooted in Vodou faith.

[37] also known as *Yemoja*

[38] known as *Ochun* in Cuba and *Oxim* in Brazil

instance, worshippers of Yemayá in the Caribbean use cowrie shells, beads, and bells to construct the rounded fans mentioned in the early West African stories of Yemayá and Oshun. Using the accessible materials, Yemayá and Oshun are worshipped continuously despite change in location and limited access to some of the usual elements used to create these highly symbolic, functional, and beautiful pieces of religious art[39].

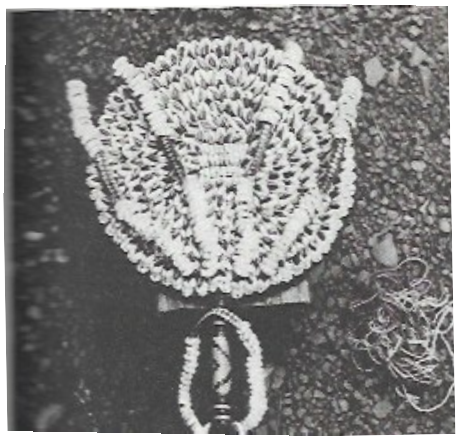

Illustration 2.2: Plate 47

Plate 47 depicts the Afro-Cuban ritual fan. As noted by Farris Thompson, "they are decorated with a richness of material–beads, cowrie shells, jingle bells, even peacock feathers–surpassing those of the originals." The cowrie shell in the Afro-Caribbean becomes a spiritually symbolic earthly element used in rituals.

Source; Farris Thompson, R. (1983). *Flash of the Spirit*. New York, NY: Vintage books. p. 75

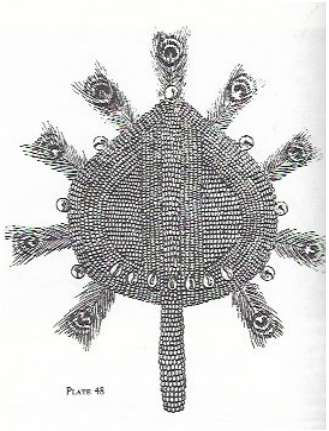

Illustration 2.3: Plate 48
This round shelled fan is complex in its design and material. Made in Cuba for the goddess Yemayá sometime before 1952, Farris Thompson notes the nine peacock feathers and seven jingle bells, which add pleasing sound and motion to the fan. Nine is one of the numbers of Yemayá in Africa, the cowrie shells represent the goddesses wealth in currency, and the feathers represent sacrifice. In its unique form, this fan shows a blending of Afro-Cuban and African ideas about the importance of Yemayá and how she should be adorned and venerated.

Source: Farris Thompson, R. (1983). *Flash of the Spirit*. New York, NY: Vintage books. p. 76

[39] In illustration 2.2 and 2.3 you can note the aesthetic qualities of these fans.

However, the role of white and the significance of the color to the Yoruba water goddess stays in tact, as practitioners and believers often adorn their fans with white cowrie shells or don white clothing when it is time to venerate their goddess (Farris-Thompson, 1983). Tools for veneration and their outward appearance are not the only examples of the slight variation in these water divinities that still function as they did in the East.

In eighteenth century Cuba, African women and men were undergoing a lot of transition as Spaniards marked their territory on the small Caribbean island. From the language to the variations of Afro-Cuban's complexion due to the sexual audacity of the Spanish, colonists made every effort possible to stamp out any trace of Africa and to preserve what they considered a superior way of living. Ideas of what is considered beautiful are formed and often in favor of fair-skin and long straight hair, mimicking the appearance of the oppressor. Hence, motherhood and all its remnants (even in the appearance of African water goddesses who represent womanhood and fecundity) was shaped by local racial discourses, the practice of concubinage, and slavery as an economic, social and political institution (Pérez, ed. Falola & Otero, 2013: 9). The attempted division of African people ensued as colorism came into play in African-Atlantic communities in Cuba and beyond. The pressures from external factors shaped the everyday life of Afro-Cubans and the strain of systematic oppression forced African people living in Cuba to reimagine their reality in a way that made sense to them.

For example, it is no secret that Africans, especially African women who were a part of the involuntary exodus to the West, were often subjected to sexual abuse and rape. Forced sexual intercourse with beings of fairer skin or different ethnic backgrounds may produce African people of various shades if reproduction were to happen. Moreover, an exchange of cultural

ideas as it pertains to religion, worldview, and language, and an urgent need to remember one's core is usually a result of sexual encounter. This shift in ideas are expressed in the appearance of Yoruba water goddesses.

Ochun, the Cuban version of Oshun, has been portrayed as the "refined, high yellow" woman who is able to pass as white and penetrate forbidden territories that darker-skinned African people would not have the privilege to penetrate (Pérez, 2013: 13). Still associated with sweet water, Ochun craves caramel, syrup, honey, and a life of leisure. She is the manifestation of that forced intercourse between Aryans and Southerners. She represents the lived reality of colorism and racism in African communities of the West. Despite her new appearance, she is still a cursor of African agency because African communities are in control of her narrative and understand her roots and willingness to survive despite the mass exodus and abuse of African bodies. Her lighter skin is not a badge of shame nor is it a badge of honor. She is simply who she is and that is an African divinity and mother of water.

Yemayá, unlike her counterpart Ochun, represents those who had to work diligently on the plantations in Cuba. She receives food offerings reminiscent of plantain rations and the diet of enslaved Africans like unfiltered cane syrup and molasses (Pérez, 2013: 14). She personifies the African that has not been subjected to the mulatta stereotype but has had to deal with, like Ochun, the external pressures of a people who operate from a different core and worldview. Though placed in a subordinate position to those whose roots come from Spain, she is still considered a leading orisha in the eyes of Afro-Cubans. Afro-Cubans claim her and see the liberatory potential in her appearance and within her ashé; however, her link to Roman

Catholicism and the Virgin of Regla is what complicates and texturizes her ability to cross the Atlantic and to cross religions in Cuba.

Not willing to forego their beliefs, Afro-Cubans' depictions of the divine begins to inhabit a fusion of ideas reminiscent of the Catholic faith and the notion of creolization that tends to strip African people of their roots. But that assumption is based off of interpretation. Roman Catholicism is a prominent religion among the Spanish. Just as the Yoruba faith travels with Africans who move West, Catholicism travels with Spaniards who cross the seas with hopes of conquest. Yet, what is most intriguing about this mix of two faiths is that the Virgin of Regla has dark skin, thick hair, and carries a white baby in her arms.

Illustration 2.4: The Shrine of Our Lady of Regla in Miami, Florida
This depiction of the Lady Regla and her tight ties to Yemayá are found in Afro-Cuban and Afro-American communities of the diaspora that understand and take part in the Catholic faith. She is reminiscent of the Madonna as she holds onto the child; yet, this is also a marker of the fecundity of orishas like Ochun and Yemayá that come from Nigeria and travel abroad with Africans. This also indicates a merging of cultures and spiritual beliefs but the true query worth investigating is wether or not these catholic figures are veneers for traditional African spiritual systems or if the impact, influence, and mystique of these orishas are so strong that even the oppressor cannot turn away from their asé.

Source of photograph: ivarfjeld.com/2012/03/24/cuba-pope-blesses-virgin-yemaya-and-witchcraft

Illustration 2.5: The Lady of Regla in a monastery on the Paseo de Costa de la Luz in region Cádiz, Andalucía, Spain
In this image, Lady Regla is celebrated in Andalucía, Spain. This photograph demonstrates the longevity of African cultural remnants and its span of influence around the globe. From the continent to Europe, Yemayá takes shape in communities that may not even understand her origin or why she appears the way she does. However, her image is synonymous with the image found in Miami, Florida and in Cuba.

Source of photograph: ivarfjeld.com/2012/03/24/cuba-pope-blesses-virgin-yemaya-and-witchcraft

Yet, Europeans who subscribe to the Catholic faith praise this dark-skinned icon and call her the Madonna[40]. This suggests that the oppressor whose historical role has been to fundamentally break down the glue that bonds African people together in an effort to control them, began to subscribe to the same system they aim to eradicate. Yemayá, in the form of the Virgin Regla, assures the survival and protection of her people by delving into the foreign waters of Catholicism and the chosen waters of her people. Consequently, "the multiplicity and slipperiness of 'black' can be said to mirror that of Yemayá herself" (Pérez, 2013:9). When race, sex, religion, and economic and social despair come into play in Caribbean and African communities who are attempting to cling onto their African cores, the divinities they praise are

[40] It is known that Catholicism and a lot of Western religions are actually African at their core; thus it is not far-fetched to believe that Catholics understood that the true Madonna is black just as most of their figures are closely associated with the pantheon of gods and goddesses in traditional African religions.
For more information on the African origins of Wester religions refer to ben-Jochannan, Y. A.A. (1991). *African Origins of the Major Western Religions*. Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press.

inevitably reflections of that irritating and persistent shift. However, in the end, this false notion of creolization and extractability of African beliefs in these Western communities are really avenues that help maintain opposition to the hegemonic master narrative, preserve counter memories of the African past, and dispel the stereotypes placed upon these African communities (Pérez, 2013).

No other place embodies opposition and perseverance more than Haiti. Succulently dense with Vodou, Haiti acts as a monument of Africanity for all African communities of the West that practice this sacred religion. Coping under the treacherous reign of the French in the 1700s, Haitians decided to revolt against the French regime on August 14, 1971 (Shen, 2015). Attempting to rule with complete domination over all cultural idiosyncrasies of African people, the French pressed Catholicism as the leading religion on the francophone island and banned all practices of Vodou. Adjusting to the new religious demand, and attempting to survive while simultaneously staying close and true to their African roots, Vodou believers that were enslaved on the colony often used these pale-skinned, Catholic idols as veneers for their own African gods. Never letting go of their cultural centers, the enslaved African population in Haiti turned to these figures when it was time to overthrow hegemonic systems. Until this day, the power of the African loa or lwa resides with the African people and is expressed in their lived reality. A Haitian woman declares, “the loa love us, protect us, and watch over us. They show us what is happening to our relatives living far away, and they tell us what medicines will do us good when we are sick,” (Shen, 2015).

No other group of loas/ lwas express the lived realities of the Haitian people more than Ezili or Erzulie. Comprised of multiple female divinities that represent love– *Ezili Danto*, *Ezili*

Zye-Wouj, Grann Ezili, Ezili Mapyan, *Ezili Lemba*, and *Ezili Freda*– these dynamic group of women expose a truth and reality wrapped up in the survival of African people in Haiti (Mazama, 2009a). Hailing from the family of sea spirits, these women embody the transition and realities of African peoples attempting to survive in colonial and post-colonial Haiti (Chatland, 1990). Ezili Danto is referred to as "mother" and is adorned with scars on her cheek and wounds she received while leading the Haitian revolution (Mazama, 2009a; Quadrini, 2014). Fighting alongside her practitioners and believers, Ezili Danto is a representative of the revolutionary African (Quadrini, 2014). She is fierce, angry, heroic, and ready to protect her people without hesitation.

Ezili Lasyrenn or Le Siréne calls from the water and encourages the African to return symbolically and perhaps literally to Africa (Quadrini, 2014; Pauline 2011). And Ezili Freda is the light-skinned lwa that is adorned with jewels and yearns for the attention and loyalty of men. The latter beauty is related to the snake god of sweet waters, Damballah, who shares some commonalities with the sweet watered goddess Oshun and keeps in tact the significance of the serpent found in Kemet and among the Igbo, Yoruba, and Vodou faiths. Ezili Freda is consumed by possessions and represents the lighter-skinned Africans of Haiti who have acquired wealth, mastered the french language, and lives in the upper class realms of society (Chatland 1990; Murray, 2009).

As Haiti underwent great cultural and social changes post colonialism, these figures linked Afro-Haitians to their African core by way of Vodou and gave women a voice when male dominance began to take shape on the island. Filling in gaps along the wide spectrum of history in Haiti–from enslavement to the Haitian Revolution–these Ezilis became recognizable images

across the diaspora among African derived religions. The reflections of these lwas kept the African origins of Afro-Hatians in tact while allowing Africans to straddle two worlds– France and Africa. These divinities aid in the survival and tenacity of African culture in Haiti.

In summation the following section explored some regions of the diaspora and mapped the Africans' vision of reality through their spiritual systems. Orishas and lwas played a vital role in the survival of African people, the creation of an African narrative, and the Africans' vision of what is true and real. Of course, as reassured by Kambon in his African self-consciousness theory, figures such as Yemoja, Oshun, and Mami Wata do undergo changes as Africans learn to survive in these frigid and treacherous territories under foreign rule. However, the changes that these divinities undergo continue to aid in the survival and retention of African culture; therefore, even the pale-skinned lwa and orisha is a strong symbol of Africanity because she allows the African to reconnect with their core through spirituality. The ripples of cultural retention have already been formed and once they are formed they never cease to exist. Instead they move endlessly and wash up ashore anywhere the African decides to reside.

CHAPTER 3
CONCLUSION: RIPPLES NEVER CEASE TO EXIST, THEY MOVE ENDLESSLY

What a vision the Atlantic must have been for all those who sailed on its surface or lived along its shore. The ocean must have acted as a precipice for one's investigation–forever trying to figure out the properties of the entity. The life created along that watery abyss must of been full of mystique and amazement. What is held at the core of each ripple in the ocean? How do these ripples form and reverberate? More importantly, what did African people think about as they gazed out into the seemingly endless ocean in their involuntary exodus from East to West? That beautiful entity is not just a body of wet glory and bewilderment. She is the earthly manifestations of my African culture. She is a reflection of my people and our journey across time and space. But most importantly, she is the reflective device that led me to study every ripple and wave of Africanity that has been retained and spread among her fluid surface. She knows more than we will ever imagine.

Ripples in the Atlantic: Revisiting the Role of Water in the Africans' Vision of Reality and Survival is a multiplex work that aimed to demonstrate that Africans living in the diaspora are not separate from Africans living on the continent. The water is not a symbol of division but instead a capsule that contains cultural retentions in each ripple and wave. Through the ripple effect, Africa in antiquity is tied to the many ethnic groups along the western coast of Africa. And these ethnic groups along the west coast is then tied to the African communities in the diaspora. One ripple worthy of investigation was the role of the water divinity. We mapped out her characteristics and how she operates within an African worldview and spiritual system on the

continent. Then we further linked her to Africa by providing examples of how the water divinity reflected the lived realities of the Igbo and Yoruba of Nigeria and the Fon, Ewe, and Dahomey of Benin/Togo. We then traveled West and identified the water divinities in the diaspora. Two locations acted as coordinates in our study: Cuba and Haiti. In these two countries we looked at Yemaya, Ochun, and Ezili as figures that have undergone variations due to external factors. Though these variations occur, one thing is certain–these divinities continue to reflect the lived realities of African people and ensure their survival despite systematic oppression and the attempted eradication of Africanity by dominating and controlling forces. Just as these water divinities protected and guided their devotees on the continent, they continue to do so in the diaspora. As referenced in Nwokocha's article, *An Equilibrist Vodou Goddess,* writer Karen Brown of *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* states, "These female spirits are both mirrors and maps, making the present comprehensible and offering direction for the future" (Nwokocha, 2013: 6). This examination helped us connect African communities of the diaspora to African communities on the continent, solidifying a core African cultural center that transcends time and space.

Despite our probing there is still so much work to be done especially in the field of Africology. This study only scratches the surface. Dr. Ama Mazama stresses the the power of Afrocentricity as an emancipatory movement that can operate alongside African spirituality in resisting European imposition (Mazama. 2002: 219). Reclamation leads to emancipation and this allows Africans to become agents. This is the aim of Africology.

Once we acknowledge the emancipation and liberation of African people through the veneration of these water divinities, we will be able to truly dive into the water's depths and

come back to the surface with notions of agency redefined and reexamined. Variations in these water divinities not only reflect the new spaces Africans are inhabiting, but they also allow the African to project their voice in public spheres that are foreign and attempt to mask and marginalize the voice of "other". This means that our orishas, lwas, and figures are not the blackened version of white idols. That is ludicrous. Our African divinities are the exemplars of our narrative and give us the ability to act as agents in dismantling hegemonic systems. They equip us with spiritual guidance and allow us to not only survive but populate spaces that need subjects and agents capable and ready to overturn systems that are outdated, unjust, and universal. Furthermore, our collections of history and time are no longer subjugated when we use our divinities as capsules who can pass the rich history of African people onto those who have yet been born through a sound and unwavering spiritual system. In all, the emancipatory factors of African divinities should be explored further to enhance the field of Africology and to begin to eradicate one way of telling, understanding, and broadcasting history.

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Illustration 3: Artist's Depiction of Yemoja
Source: www.vegunleryurumeyebasladi.tumblr.com/post/42090584682/subat-2