A SHANGO RELIGIOUS GROUP AND THE PROBLEM OF

PRESTIGE IN TRINIDADIAN SOCIETY

DISSERTATION

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Frances Osterman Mischel, B. A., M. A.

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Approved by:

Adviser
Department of Sociology and
Anthropology

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Preface

The group with which this thesis will be concerned is called the Shango cult[1], or as the members call themselves, the Orisha workers. It is an Afro-American Negro religious cult in Trinidad, British West Indies, and derives from the complex of religious beliefs found among the Yoruba of Nigeria.[2] Its most striking characteristic is the syncretism between African beliefs and Roman Catholic dogma and ritual so that old African gods have become identified with Catholic saints. Catholic prayers are interspersed with African chants, songs, and other items of African ritual which have been remembered and retained.

We went to Trinidad during the summer of 1956 with the intention of collecting data on its Shango group. We were soon impressed by the vast variety of data that seemed available not only with respect to the group but also on many other aspects of Trinidadian culture. Everywhere we

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1. Although it is popularly known as a "cult", we restricted our study to one group and we shall, therefore, use the word "group" rather than "cult".
2. "The Yoruba tribe includes over 3,000,000 individuals living in the southwestern portion of Nigeria, British West Africa and in the eastern section of Dahomey. Within the tribe there are a number of autonomous but related 'kingdoms' which center about the larger cities ruled by 'kings'. (W. Bascom, "The Sociological Role of the Yoruba Cult Group", American Anthropological Association Memoir no. 63, Jan., 1944, p. 6) Of Yoruba religion, Bascom indicates that the social structure of the Yoruba is intimately connected with the cult groups and secret societies. In describing Yoruba religion, Bascom states: "While the worship of one's immediate ancestors are modest and private, the annual festivals of the Orishas involve elaborate ceremonies extending over seven or eight days, when friends and affinal relatives visit the worshippers and join them in feasting, drinking, and dancing."

were confronted with potentially interesting data on a variety of problems we had not anticipated. Trinidad was obviously an exciting field situation, with tempting problems in the area of acculturation, prejudice, communication, political and economic transitions and the like. We were intent upon Shango as the phenomenon to be studied but found the study of Shango leading us to other aspects of Trinidadian society.

The Shango group itself, as will be seen in Chapter 4 was hardly a tightly organized, well structured group with clear boundaries; on the contrary, it appeared geographically diffuse, scattered throughout various parts of the island and was characterized by much geographical mobility. Ceremonies were held in different parts of the island and group members travelled to the various parts in order to attend ceremonies. Our idea of locating a "Shango village" was thus quickly dispelled. Once our inital contacts were made, our physical route became quickly established for us; we were going to try to see the group activities in some of the major locations within one "circuit" (see chapter 4). To make this possible, we located ourselves in Port of Spain, the capital, and in Lengua, a small southern Trinidad village and the home of the major Shango leader of the island. Our time was approximately equally divided in residence at each of these locations, and we travelled back and forth depending on where ceremonies were being held at a particular time. Rapport with group

leaders and members as well as with necessary government officials was established without much difficulty and the task of getting to know more members of the group, learning where it flourished, and being permitted to observe it was not too formidable. The general aim of this thesis will be to present and interpret selected portions of the data collected within this field study.

CHAPTER I
THE PROBLEM

We went to Trinidad to investigate Shango religion. We
came to the field with minimal knowledge of this group; it
had received very little previous study. Our first task,
thus, was to describe the group ethnographically. That is,
we gathered data on its ritual, cosmology, the deities
worshiped, and the like. In general, our approach was to
observe behavior in a variety of situations, to interview as
many informants as possible, to live in the localities indi-
cated in the Preface and to participate as observers in a
large variety of situations. As we have already indicated,
we found that Shango was diffusely practiced throughout the
Island. In spite of much searching we were unable to find
a "Shango village," i.e., a place in which most of the
inhabitants participated in Shango activities. Our search
for a Shango village took us throughout the island, and
while living in Port-of-Spain to observe the activities of
two major Shango leaders and their followers who lived in
the area, we became acquainted with many non-Shango
Trinidadians from various levels of society. Throughout,
in these contacts, we continued to use the observation and
interview methods indicated above and, essentially, treated
all our acquaintances as informants or at least as potential
informants.

We came without pre-conceived notions or concepts about
how to interpret our data concerning either the Shango group
or Trinidadian society. Rather, from our observations, and
particularly from the detailed data gathered about Shango mem-
bers and their activities, the concepts and problems with
which this thesis deals emerged. From our heterogenous data
one very major theme appeared. This was the intense concern
with in the vernacular "not being a nobody" and "becoming
somebody big"..."being respected"..."able to stand up
proud"..."having people look up when you pass by." This
was generally expressed pessimistically rather than hopefully,
and was frequently talked about by numerous informants. Tales
of insult and injury, particularly of blows to one's "pride"
were most common, and persisted consistently even after it
become clear that we were not in a position to be of direct
personal help to informants and were not, as some tried to
hope, going to "carry me away...give me a chance."

Similar themes were expressed, but to a lesser degree, by
many of the middle and upper class persons whom we met and
observed. Recognition wishes were frequently referred to
and signs of recognition were constantly sought at all levels
of society, e.g., the middle class woman endlessly fussing
with her numerous servants; the clerk loudly abusing his
"helpers" who, in turn, lament their plight or try desperately
to somehow assert their own worth. These kinds of concerns
about being big and important, i.e., being esteemed and gaining

recognition, having power, etc., with which our informants seemed so intensely involved, corresponded, in large part, with our own impressions about aspects of personal inter- actions and group behavior and structure in the Shango group itself. Our data suggested that recognition striving char- acterized large segments of the Shango group. Further, the social structure of the group seemed, to a large degree, to be divided into sub-groups; each sub-group consisting of members who were accorded relatively equal recognition and esteem. There also appeared to be definite and distinct ways available within the total group for furthering the degree to which one is recognized, held in esteem, or positively valued in the group. It will be shown later that certain persons never attain recognition in the eyes of other members of the group, and that some people receive more than others.

Through further observation, we became increasingly con- vinced that our informants' concerns with recognition, esteem and so forth, and our own perceptions that attribution of these structured much of the behavior within the group, reflected one very major aspect of Trinidadian society and of the Shango group. The conceptual problem which emerged from this was what concepts, what labels, might be used to deal with these observations.

One concept which seems appropriate for dealing with aspects of the data is "prestige." The term prestige conveys a variety of meanings, many of which appear to closely fit

our observations of some dominant concerns in the Shango group
and Trinidadian society. Prestige can be used to refer to an
attribute, a state of being, which a person experiences about
himself and possesses in varying degrees, as well as to certain
characteristics, such as differential recognition, honor,
admiration which are accorded or attributed to a particular
person by others.[1]   We shall use prestige primarily in the
latter sense. For example, a person who is esteemed by our
informants and is termed by them a "big man" or "important"
is prestigeful in our usage. We shall also deal with prestige
as a goal for which individuals strive and toward which they
may direct their behavior. An individual's prestige and his
prestige-striving behavior, vary with the particular situation
and context. The ways in which an individual or groups of
individuals strive toward the attainment of this goal of
prestige, and the consequences of the attainment or non-
attainment of this goal, can further be thought of as occurring
on a continuum open to investigation and study. "High" and "low"
are polar ends of this continuum. We assume that every person

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1. This conception of prestige seems somewhat broader in
scope than that of Kahl's which reads: "Prestige is a
sentiment in the minds of men that is expressed in interper-
sonal interaction: deference behavior is demanded by one party
and granted by another." Joseph A. Kahl, The American Class
Structure, New York, 1957, p. 19. In view of the implicit
nature of interpersonal interactions in the Shango group, we
find it difficult to use a formal definition such as this one.
The usage of words such as 'claim' and 'demand' seem inappropriate
in a situation in which interaction takes place on an implicit
covert level.

has some prestige accorded him by other group members. The
person with the least prestige falls closest to the low end
of the prestige continuum and approaches the high as his
prestige is enhanced or increased. A prestige continuum is
our concept for dealing with actually observed variations
in the degree of prestige accorded by informants to other
group members.

In the present investigation we shall make considerable
use of the prestige concept. Prestige will be used in a
variety of the above ways with the attempt to specify the
usage as it varies in differing contexts. Clearly, prestige
is correlated with, and overlaps with, a variety of other
concepts, particularly the concept of status. Different
definitions of this term are in use. By status we can mean,
for example, a position a person has or gets or aspires to
or, as Linton states: "a position in a particular pattern"
or "a collection of rights and duties."[2] However, since
status is generally used to refer to relatively permanent
rankings of definite positions and since, as will be shown
later, such positions are fluid and changing in the Shango
group, we find it more convenient and less confusing to refer
to prestige rather than to status. One of the gaps in our
data and in our major sources is the lack of knowledge regard-
ing statuses (positions) in Trinidadian society. We have only
vague notions about the different evaluations which are

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2. Ralph Linton, <u>The Study of Man</u>, New York, 1936, p. 113.

attached to the different statuses in that society. To cite
just one illustration, very little is known about occupational
status. Does, for example, the position of parole officer
carry more status than the position of an education officer?

It would be quite consistent with our own observation,
if, on further detailed investigation of Trinidadian society,
prestige can be shown to be a gross index of a variety of
other dimensions. That is, in Trinidadian society, prestige
may well be highly correlated with such variables as status
and power. However, since the present work is largely
exploratory, and one of the first socio-anthropological
studies for Trinidad, we shall not be able to specify the
detailed relations between these variables. Therefore,
we have decided to use "prestige" as a rather gross concept
which, nevertheless, appears to be useful in the light of
our observations. We hope that this usefulness will become
increasingly evident throughout the course of the thesis.

In summary, we are suggesting that the concept of
prestige appears to be well suited for dealing with much of
our data. We shall mean by prestige the degree of recognition
and esteem accorded to any one member of a group by other
members of the group. Clearly, respect, honor, admiration,
power, etc., often may be synonymous with, or at least highly
correlated with, prestige. Wherever possible, we shall attempt
to indicate which of these meanings seems to apply best.
However, we shall often be compelled, sometimes for the sake

of parsimony, sometimes because of insufficient data, to refrain from such subtler discriminations and to use prestige as the gross index for these various correlated and sometimes equivalent aspects.

We shall be concerned for the most part with prestige striving in Trinidadian society and in later sections of this thesis with similar strivings in the Shango group itself. It must be made clear that while prestige striving appears to be a dominant concern in Trinidad, it is by no means the only concern. Our data are, at this point, insufficient to isolate other major themes or concerns in Trinidadian society. It would not be at all surprising if, for example, money, education, recreational activities, were also major preoccupations. However, in the present study, we shall deal with these preoccupations, and others, only as they are means for the Trinidadian's attempt to gain prestige. They will not be considered as ends in themselves but rather only as they serve as means toward prestige enhancement.

Having delineated our major concept, we turn now to the problem to be investigated. Thus far, we have indicated that prestige may be a major motive and concern both within the Shango group and within the larger society in which it exists. The recognition of this parallel between the group and the society led us to questions about the relationship between prestige-striving on the part of the lower class

Trinidadian Negro within the larger society and his participation in religious cults such as Shango.

In order to study the concern with prestige in the Shango group in relation to the quest for prestige in the larger society, it will be necessary to investigate and evaluate the possible "paths" or "avenues"[3] toward prestige attainment which are available to the lower class Negro.[4]

In this we shall be guided by our scheme or conception of Trinidadian society. This conception is obviously grossly oversimplified and its refinement will have to await further research in Trinidad. It should be kept in mind that our primary concern is with a particular Shango group, and with the ways in which that group is related to the larger society, rather than with the latter itself. Nevertheless, in view of the paucity of available work on Trinidadian society, it may be of value to make explicit, albeit briefly, this conception. Our view is as follows.

Trinidadian society seems to be quite rigidly stratified. This stratification appears to a large degree to be based on such factors as skin color and ethnic affiliation. These (and a number of other factors which will be discussed in this thesis) appear to be the prerequisites for upward

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3. These terms refer to the means toward goals, values, acts or attributes whose acquisition is considered prestige enhancing.
4. The definitions of "lower class Negro" and of the other classes will be held in abeyance until they can be made within the context of the Trinidadian class system, cf. Chapter II.

mobility in the society. If one does not have a white or
fair skin or European ethnic affiliation, upward mobility
appears to be difficult if not impossible. To the degree
that the Negro, particularly the native Trinidadian Negro,
does not have the necessary attributes (e.g., a light skin)
for bridging the stratification barriers, upward mobility
is denied to him. However, to a considerable degree the
values of the larger society are also shared by the Negro
at the bottom of the social scale; he too wants a lighter
skin and the other attributes for which prestige is gained
in Trinidad. He desires to rise in the social system, to
improve his position, to enhance his prestige. However,
in these attempts he persistently runs into the largely
insurmountable barriers which separate the strata within
the society. The ultimate consequence of this frustrating
situation is a great deal of "lateral drifting" into lateral
activities. That is, he drifts into a variety of alternative
activities or behavior patterns, including various religious
organizations, which are available to him within his own
social strata. Once he becomes involved in these lateral
activities, however, his chances for upward mobility and for
cutting across social strata are even further impeded. His
behavioral alternatives become increasingly limited to such
lateral activities,and the attempt to break through the vertical
stratification barriers of the larger society become increas-
ingly futile.

With this brief and grossly oversimplified conception as a background, we shall now examine some of the specific paths through which the lower class Negro in Trinidad may seek to enhance the prestige which is accorded to him. It is recognized, of course, that the quest for prestige enhancement is only one of the common and dominant motives in that society. However, it will be focused upon in the present investigation.

At the very outset a distinction must be made between those paths or avenues toward prestige attainment which are valued throughout the larger society, including the lower class (e.g., economic and educational advancement), and those which are considered prestige enhancing only by limited portions of the society (e.g., participation in steel bands or in religious groups such as Shango). Recognizing this distinction, two preliminary questions will be raised to serve as guides in the study of the potential paths for prestige attainment available to the lower class Trinidadian Negro.

1. What are the available pathways through which the lower class Trinidadian Negro can have prestige accorded to him by the larger society (i.e., by the other classes as well as his own)?

To investigate this first question, (Chapter II),we shall have to examine in greater detail the social stratification of Trinidadian society and the ways in which the

lower class Negro in that society can gain prestige. We shall attempt to demonstrate that these ways are limited and most difficult and that there are cultural conditions which prevent the lower class Negro who seeks prestige from bridging the rigid stratification lines of the society. We shall further argue that if he desires prestige he has few recourses other than to turn to those activities which are sanctioned in his own class, but which are unacceptable to, or incompatible with, the values of the larger society. These are the lateral activities mentioned above. Adherence to religious groups, such as Shango, is one such activity. This leads us to the second preliminary question.

2. What are the available pathways through which the lower class Trinidadian Negro can have prestige accorded to him by his own class but not by the larger society?

This question will be considered in Chapter III. In the course of answering these two questions we shall attempt to illuminate some of the major characteristics of Trinidadian social stratification. It will be argued that membership in the Shango group can be seen as one of the relatively few pathways available to the lower class Negro for the potential attainment of prestige.

Following the discussion of these two preliminary questions we shall turn to a more specific investigation of the Shango group. First, a detailed description of its organization, rituals, and belief system will be presented

(chapter IV and V). Since Trinidad's Shango religion is one of a series of syncretic cults found throughout the New World, its rituals and beliefs will be compared with those of other cults, especially the Brazilian and Haitian. We shall then turn to the specific ways in which the group functions to give prestige to its members.

It will become clear during the course of this thesis that we shall be discussing prestige accordation from several different reference groups. In Chapter II we shall discuss prestige as accorded in and by the larger Trinidadian society; in Chapter III we shall discuss prestige as accorded in and by the lower class. In subsequent chapters, in which the Shango group will be discussed, we shall consider prestige as accorded within and by that group. The prestige accorded to a person within and by each of these three groups may function in a variety of complex ways, some of which will be considered in detail. For example, the recognition gained by a Shango participant within the context of the Shango group may or may not serve to enhance the prestige accorded to him by other segments of the lower class and may further function to severely limit the prestige accorded to him by the larger society.

Four further questions, major questions in this study, will be raised to clarify the functions of prestige in the Shango group. These are:

3. What are the ways in which prestige can be attained

within the Shango group (Chapter VI)? That is, what are the
conditions under which prestige is accorded to members within
the group?

4. How is the prestige of members related to the structure
and organization of the group (Chapter VII)? That is, how is
prestige related to the formation of, and interactions within,
sub-groups?

5. What are the rewards a member gains once he has
attained prestige within the group (Chapter VIII)?

6. What are the relationships between prestige attain-
ment within the Shango group and prestige attainment outside
the group (Chapter VIII)?

This thesis raises six questions dealing with prestige
in Trinidadian society and, more specifically, in its Shango
group. In the first part of this study, we shall attempt
to show that the lower class Negro has few realistically
available means for having prestige accorded to him by the
larger society. (Chapter II). Next, the avenues available
for prestige attainment within his own class, but not accepted
by the larger society, will be discussed. It will be argued
that participation in certain religions provides the poten-
tiality for attaining prestige within portions of his own
class, but not as accorded by the larger society. (Chapter III).
The Shango group, as one example of such a religion, will then
be investigated in detail. First, its organization, ritual,
and belief system will be described and compared with other

relevant groups (Chapters IV and V). Then, the ways through
which prestige can be attained within it (Chapter VI) and the
relationship between prestige and its structure (Chapter VII)
will be examined. Finally, the individual consequences
(rewards) of prestige attainment within the group, and the
relationship between prestige attainment in the Shango group
and prestige attainment or accordation outside the group,
will be discussed (Chapter VII). The final chapter will
deal with implications for future research and will summarize
the present thesis and its conclusions.

CHAPTER II

PRESTIGE AND MOBILITY IN TRINIDADIAN SOCIETY

In the preceding pages we have outlined the two prelim-
inary questions which will guide the material to be presented
in this chapter. We turn now to our first question. What
are the available pathways through which the lower class
Negro in Trinidad can have prestige accorded to him by the
rest of the society (i.e., the other classes). Evidence will
be drawn from previously published sources, primarily the work
of Braithwaite[1] and from information gathered during the course
of field work.[2] We will concentrate mainly on Trinidad, but
we will have occasion to raise questions and make references
to other areas in the Caribbean.

We shall attempt to show that for the most part, the
attributes for which prestige is accorded in Trinidad are
skin color, ethnicity and economic and educational attainment.
These, in turn seem to be dimensions along which Trinidadian
society is rigidly stratified. We shall consider each of
these dimensions and discuss each in terms of its relevance

1. Lloyd Braithwaite, "Social Stratification in Trinidad,"
Social and Economic Studies, v. 2, Institute of Social and
Economic Research, University College of the West Indies,
Jamaica, BWI, 1953, pp. 6-175.
2. Our aim in this chapter is to present some tentative rather
than definitive conclusions. This is due, in part, to the
relative lack of published material available on the
social structure of Trinidad, and our short stay in Trinidad
which prevented systematic data collection on this topic.
We were primarily concerned with collecting data on the
Shango cult.

for the Trinidadian lower class Negro. "Lower class" will be delineated in terms of the stratification system which will be elaborated.

Ethnicity and Color

First, we shall consider ethnic and color stratification, and ethnicitity and color in relationship to prestige attainment. Since ethnicity and color appear inextricably mixed in Trinidadian society, we shall discuss them together. As Braithwaite points out, the existence of a large variety of ethnic groups in Trinidad has led to a ranking of these groups in terms of their inferiority or superiority as groups, rather than to an "eclectic cosmopolitanism." This condition may be historically related to the fact that numerous ethnic groups entered gradually into a society which was already stratified along racial lines. Braithwaite indicates that in nineteenth century Trinidad, the upper class consisted entirely and exclusively of whites (British administrators and British and French plantation families), the middle class consisted predominantly of light skinned and brown skinned peoples ("coloured people"), and the lower class consisted of black-skinned Negroes. Into this color-oriented and color-ranked society, other peoples began to arrive in significant numbers. In 1834, the British abolition of Negro slavery occurred which resulted in a huge labor shortage on the large French and English plantations. To solve this problem, indentured East

Indian laborers were imported in 1845 with the understanding

that they might return to their native land after their period

of labor or remain in the island and claim free title to a

certain area of public farm land. Enormous numbers of East

Indians came until 1917. At that time importation of inden-

tured labor ceased but many remained and their descendants

compose fully one third of Trinidad's population today.

Throughout this period, Chinese and Syrians, as well

as Portugese, and Spaniards (from Venezuela) came to Trinidad.

These immigrant groups remained outside the color ranked

social system. Braitwaite says:

> They were considered for the most part by the rest
> of the population to be on the lowest social scale.
> The Portugese were identified as dirty shopkeepers
> .... The Indians coming in as identured labourers
> were despised and thought of as 'coolies' . . . .
> The Syrians came in for the most part as peddlers of
> dry goods . . . their exorbitant prices . . . and
> the humble nature of their work caused them, too, to
> be considered as almost outside the system.[3]

Despite their lowly status and

> "Because they did not share the same scale of values,
> they were able to accumulate wealth with greater ease
> than the local population who were committed to the
> 'standards of living' and the symbolism of their
> respective classes. For these and other reasons
> there emerged in time a middle class among these
> ethnic groups which, in terms of the values of the
> society, could not be considered outside the social
> system."[4]

With this rise in economic status, came gradual mobil-

ity into the upper white classes, so that "The Chinese, the

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3. Braithwaite, op.cit., p. 49.
4. Ibid.

Syrian and the Indian groups are, in that order, breaking
into the lower fringes of white society."[5] Braithwaite
seems to feel that while wealth on the part of these groups
influenced their ability to enter into white society, their
racial characteristics ("The Chinese and the Syrians are light-
skinned and have 'good' hair and hence appear to be more
acceptable to the white group.")[6] had a great deal to do
with it.

In a later section on "economic attainment" we shall
discuss possible factors, in addition to color barriers,
which have, on the whole, prevented the Trinidadian Negro
from effectively using economic attainment as a path toward
becoming recognized and esteemed and for infiltration into
the upper classes.

It is difficult to establish the hierarchical arrange-
ment of ethnic and color groups in Trinidad since, as Crowley
points out, ". . . the exact arrangement varies with the class
and origin of the arranger."[7] There is agreement, however,
about which groups constitute the top of the hierarchy and
these groups have remained virtually unchanged from the
nineteenth century. Crowley lists the following:

1. Foreign whites . . .
2. Local whites ('French Creoles'), often but not
   always of French origin . . .

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5. Ibid., p. 52.
6. Ibid.,
7. Danial Crowley, "Plural and Differential Acculturation in
Trinidad," American Anthropologist, v. 59, October 1957,
p. 817.

3. Coloreds . . . of French origin . . .
4. Colored of English origin . . .   8
5. Coloreds from other West Indian Islands.

The area of disagreement is "whether the Blacks, the East Indians, or one or another small 'foreign' group should be placed next.[9] Crowley presents an arrangement slightly at variance with Braithwaite's in that he places the Negro or Blacks next, followed by "Spanishy" peoples and Syrians and Lebanese, with the East Indians at the bottom.[10]

In very broad outlines, we can distinguish a lower class composed primarily of Indians and black-skinned Negroes, a middle class whose boundaries seem relatively flexible in that lower class members other than the "very black" can slowly filter into it as their economic and educational status improves, and which is composed primarily of coloreds, Chinese and people derived from the other ethnic

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8. Ibid., p. 818.
9. Ibid.
10. In our concluding chapter, we shall briefly indicate some recent developments (within the last two years), which suggest increasing chances for mobility out of the lower class. In politics, especially the newly formed Peoples National Movement Party, at least some black-skinned Negroes are being elected to public office. Civil servant positions are also becoming increasingly open to qualified Negroes from the lower class. Some indication of this is given in Crowley's recent paper. He indicates that within each sub group, further hierarchical arrangements are made, so that within the Negro or black group, the range is from "chief minister through civil servants to laborers." And further, "The majority of the dark-skinned group are in the lower class, but by numbers alone, they manage to have considerable representation in every class." (Ibid., p. 818.) Such developments are of recent origin and were seemingly not in evidence at the time of Braithwaite's research in Trinidad, i.e., probably between 1950-52, since his monograph appeared in print in 1953.

groups, and an upper class of foreign and native born whites. [11]

At the present time, then, two major bases of social stratification in Trinidad are ethnic affiliation and color, both of which have become inextricably combined. Ethnically, European origins, especially British origins, are universally seen as by far the most prestigeful and desirable. Correlated with this is the deeply ingrained notion, seemingly accepted by all classes, that the lighter the person's skin color, the more prestigeful or powerful he is. Thus, automatically the most powerful individual is the British white foreigner; the least powerful and most impotent individual is the black Trinidadian (but African derived) Negro. As Braithwaite repeatedly stresses: "Just as whiteness tended to put the individual automatically at the top of the social class scale, so blackness of skin colour automatically put the individual at the bottom end of the social scale."[12] Insofar as "the

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11. While for our purposes, this simple delineation is perhaps sufficient, it must be stressed that the numerous ethnic groups in Trinidadian society complicate its social structure. Thus "The population of Trinidad can only be defined as segmented, for it is not split horizontally in the sense that there are homogeneous upper, middle, and lower stratums which cut through the entire society. Instead, there is a complex pattern of self-contained, parallel, social hierarchies -- each with its own upper, middle, and lower classes. Broadly speaking, these hierarchies are one of two types: the first . . . is based on colour, this is the white-coloured-black structure; the second is of a purely ethnic type and contains such segments as the East Indians, Chinese, Portuguese, and Syrians." (Barbara E. Powrie, "The Changing Attitude of The Colored Middle Class Toward Carnival," Caribbean Quarterly, v. 4, 1956, p. 225.) We will for the most part be concerned with the former structure.
12. Braithwaite, op. cit., p. 46.

main common value shared by the whole society is the ascrip-
tive one of 'ethnicity' and colour,"[13] he sees the lower

class as set apart from the rest of the society by insur-

mountable caste barriers.

In effect, color may create caste, rather than class,
differentiation.[14] The gross class (or caste) lines of the

society have been determined, at least until very recently,

to the largest degree by these two considerations. By

definition, the only way that the lower class Black can

rise to a more prestigeful position is by somehow having

his skin become lighter. This was reflected by the numerous

informants who repeatedly talked about skin color, who are

very concerned about washing, "keeping clean" and using

deodorants. One stated, "No matter what I do, I'm not able

to wash my color off." Another example of concern about

color occurred when an informant took great pains to hide

from us a flash photo which he had taken of a group of friends

because (due to sharp contrast) "They look so black, so black,

I hate that picture."

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13. Ibid., p. 143.
14. Since Braithwaite himself is confused about the class-
caste distinction and seems to use the terms interchangeably,
we will simply indicate here that he does feel that the term
caste may perhaps be appropriate for this society. We shall
continue to use class, however, since Braithwaite does not
definitively prefer either term and since intermarriage does
occur, even if rarely, between members of the lower and mid-
dle strata.

The effects of this are seen in the striving to marry lighter skinned individuals. "The chances of moving from the lower class into the middle class (the predominantly colored or brown-skinned class) are much greater for the light-skinned man, and even greater for the light-skinned girl than for their dark-skinned counterparts."[15] Of course, it will be readily apparent that color lightening through marriage is not possible for the great majority of lower class members who are black-skinned to begin with and who will not be accepted by lighter skinned persons. Nevertheless, in spite of its unrealism, the extreme concern with color in the lower class is reflected in the fantasy of the black-skinned man who dreams of marrying a brown-skinned girl. (For example, another black-skinned informant, who in talking about his marriage plans says, "I don't know what kind of girl I'd like to marry, but she should be brown-skinned.")

Partially available towards overcoming the automatic ascriptive limitations of skin color and ethnic (African) identity are two other avenues through which mobility, and therefore increased power or prestige, can theoretically be attained. These are economic and educational advancements.

Economic Attainment

We shall first deal with the former and concern ourselves with the economic situation of the black-skinned

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15. Ibid, p. 122.

Trinidadian Negro. We shall begin by briefly describing
that situation

Economically, urban lower class Negroes constitute the work-
ing or laboring group in the capital Port-of-Spain, and in the
island's second largest city, San Fernando. These persons
live in the La Ventille hills, which surround the capital
city, and large parts of which closely resemble in feeling
tone, the slums of any large city. The average male
income is $15 to $20 West Indian dollars a week at such
jobs as masons, carpenters, semi-skilled electricians, shop
and street vendors and the like. (The American dollar is
worth nearly twice the West Indian dollar.) The female
salary is lower, since most of the women are employed as
domestic workers earning $25 a month. Rural Negroes are
mostly engaged in small scale agriculture termed "gardening,"
but many men are employed in semi-skilled jobs such as
carpentry, brick laying or in southern Trinidad, in the oil
fields. Fishing is the major occupation of Northern rural
Negroes. The average salary even in the oil field, where
lower class men are employed in the lowest positions, is
comparable to city wage earners. Rural Negroes are at an
advantage since most families grow vegetables and other food
items for home consumption. Food expenditures are thus
decreased and life in a rural environment does not offer
the buying temptations which face the city dweller. Few
commodities can be bought in the country even in the larger

villages. Women in the country generally tend the "garden"
and very few are formally employed. The rural Negroes
generally rent their small piece of property but occasionally
individuals are found who have bought or inherited a small
piece of land. Housing in the rural villages consists of
thatched coconut palm roofing over a wooden construction,
generally a small two or three rommed house with a separate
kitchen or cook-house. Some poorer families live in wattle
and daub thatched houses while a few richer ones maintain a
wooden house with a galvanized iron roof. The East Indians,
as a rule, live in such houses and maintain some cattle
and shickens. Most Negroes have little in the way of
livestock.

It is extremely difficult to evaluate the economic
condition of the lower class Negroes since statistics on
this are both scarce and rather unreliable. According to
the most recent source, the 1946 Trinidad census, 6.2 per
cent is the unemployment percentage cited.[16]   However,
there are large categories of "unpaid helpers" and "learners"
who are considered "gainfully employed." Consequently, it
seems likely that the cited unemployment percentages are
spuriously low. Further, we cannot really assess the economic
condition of the lower class Negro since none of the economic

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16. In Jamaica, where unemployment is thought to be at its
highest in the West Indies, the unemployment percentage re-
ported is 20 per cent. John Figueroa, "British West Indian
Immigration to Great Britain," Caribbean Quarterly, v. 5,
Feb. 1958, p. 120.

statistics are presented in such a category. Rather, the
figures are presented for the total population in an
undifferentiated way. Although statistical documentation
is lacking, the dominant impression gained in observing the
economic condition of the black lower class in Trinidad
is that it is quite poverty-ridden, in spite of the fact
that Trinidad is popularly considered the most prosperous
of the West Indian islands. However, we do not wish to
create a picture of economic despair. On the contrary,
we observed no cases of severe famine or starvation and
were under the distinct impression that most of the lower
class Negroes are not lacking in the minimal essentials
of food and shelter, the former being reasonably plentiful
throughout the island and the latter generally being quite
simple in this essentially mild climate. "Luxury" items
such as clothes and furnishings are frequently scarce and
occasionally almost lacking.

Although the present economic situation of the lower
class Negro is certainly poor, it can be argued that
economic enhancement is one channel which is theoretically
available to him for the attainment of greater prestige in
the eyes of the larger society. Certainly economic advance
is associated with prestige throughout the larger culture
and is highly valued and desired. Braithwaite argues strongly
that even in this the Negro's color stands as a virtually
insurmountable barrier preventing his economic advancement.

He argues that employment discrimination is rampant and that the Negro is automatically kept out of those positions which can lead, essentially, to greater economic prosperity and enhanced prestige.

It is being suggested then that wheras economic attainment is a means towards prestige which is theoretically available to the Trinidadian Negro it is, in practice, regardless of cause, most rare for the Negro to advance economically in any major way within the current society.

Educational Advancement

Educational advancement is one further means through which the Trinidadian Negro could, theoretically, gain prestige, i.e.,have prestige accorded to him by the larger society. Education is highly valued and commonly sought-after throughout much of Trinidadian society. However, education for the most part tends to be limited to the primary school which is universally attended. Beyond the primary school level there are a number of secondary schools, offering both academic and vocational programs. Most of these require tuition and are thus out of the economic reach of the majority. Some scholarships are available and children of unusual promise frequently seem to be given a good deal of attention and encouragement, primarily by their teachers who are often dark-skinned Negroes. However, even the individual who manages to finance secondary schooling,

or who obtains a scholarship, does not very greatly or
effectively enhance either his prestige or his economic oppor-
tunities. Completion of a secondary school program permits
the individual to become a primary school teacher and offers
some advantage in preparing him for assuming skilled jobs,
both in various trades and in clerical capacities. The
economic recompense for such activities appears to be rather
meager and gains the individual an income which is generally
no more than a few dollars above the figures cited earlier.
The prestige of the individual who obtains a teaching posi-
tion, a skilled job, or a position on the lower rungs of
the civil service (e.g., clerks, policemen) is certainly
somewhat enhanced. However, we received the distinct impres-
sion from interviews with persons in such positions that
"I'm still black . . . and I'm still poor" mixed with the
intense feelings that theirs are dead-end positions with
little chance for further advancement. ("Have you ever seen
a black (police) superintendent?" We had not.)

The advantages of reaching a relatively high educational
level are further obscured by the fact that competition for
skilled and semi-skilled jobs appears to be most keen and
many individuals with completed secondary schooling report
that they are still forced to take jobs for which no real
training is prerequisite.

In order for education to result in major prestige
gains for the person the education must be beyond the

secondary level. It must be more than training for the possibility (by no means for the certainty) of gaining a somewhat better job. Such education is at the university level and there are no universities in Trinidad. The British, and other members of the upper and middle classes, consistently sent their children "abroad" for schooling. "Abroad" traditionally has meant Britain and, in more recent years, is increasingly including Canada and, to a lesser degree, the United States. The opportunity for a university education is, with the rarest exceptions, not available to the Negro and hence prestige enhancement through this source is, in practice, also exceedingly rare.

Several of our informants, desperately eager to "do something . . . get somewhere" attempted to get university "degrees" through the various "correspondence schools," mostly advertising from the U.S., and mostly apparently operating fraudulently. They tell of saving money, taking the "courses," "graduating" and finding, to their dismay, that little improvement resulted in their opportunities for anything. Some, however, seemed to have attained a measure of prestige and satisfaction from showing their certificates to their friends. This was sometimes sufficient for them not to regret their move.

To summarize (and recognizing that we are dealing in generalities to which there will be obvious exceptions), the attributes of particular kinds of ethnicity (European

and preferable British), closely coupled with the attribute
of light skin color, are universally valued and desired.
To have them is to have prestige accorded automatically
within the total society; to be lacking in them is to be
lacking in prestige automatically. (Although our concern
is with prestige, similar relationships are also likely
to hold with feelings of personal adequacy, security, etc.)
Since both ethnicity and skin color are givens, they are
not under direct control of the individual. They can
only be gained ultimately through intermarriage or, indirectly
and symbolically by personal attempts to identify with, or
associate with, others who have those attributes. Class
membership is to the largest degree defined by the degree
to which the individual possesses these attributes. Thus,
when we speak of the black-skinned Trinidadian Negro we are
by definition speaking of members of the lower class. The
blackness of the Trinidadian Negro prevents him from readily
having prestige accorded to him in the total society by
severely limiting his chances for upward mobility and infil-
tration into the upper and middle class of society. From
the viewpoint of the upper and middle class, most aspects
associated with the lower class are associated with the African,
the barbarian, the unenlightened poor and the undesirable.
For example,

> The areas in which the lower class seemed to have the
> most to contribute were areas heavily associated with
> the more despised forms of lower class behavior. The

singing and dancing of the lower class were associated
with relative freedom and lack of inhibition. The
words of the songs were frequently, by upper class
standards, vulgar; and the dancing struck the inhibited
as being exceedingly erotic in nature.[17, 18]

To a large degree, from the perspective of the upper and
middle class, anything associated with the lower class black
Trinidadian is undesirable, yet the ways through which the
latter could leave his class (or caste, in Braithwaite's
terms) are not available to him unless he somehow succeeds
in the quest to lighten his skin. What he is, is not valued;
what is valued, he cannot get or become.

This situation is partially modified if the black-skinned
Negro has managed to attain a measure of education beyond the
secondary level or some degree of economic eminence. Both of
the latter, however, seem to occur only very rarely.

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17. Lloyd Braithwaite, "Cultural Integration in Trinidad,"
Social and Economic Studies, v. 3, Institute of Social and
Economic Research, University College of the West Indies,
Jamaica, BWI, 1954, p. 91.
18. In recent years, a small, self-conscious group of West
Indian intellectuals have attempted to "search for a distinc-
tive and national form of expression which would both symbolize
and give unity to the society . . . . " (Ibid., p. 90.) This
was, however, "not altogether easy." Thus, the "Formation of
a national society" which would incorporate a lower class
"African" sub-culture, an upper and middle class which draws
its inspiration from Britain, and various ethnic groups, who
have, to a great extent retained their own cultural identity,
remains to a large degree an unsolved problem in Trinidad.
In a more general sense, the same problem is prevalent through-
out the Colonial Caribbean. See Andrew Pearse, "Vocational
and Community Education in the Caribbean," in The Caribbean:
Its Culture, (ed. A. C. Wilgus), U. of Florida Press,
1955, p. 126-7.

What is the significance of this for our initial question? It seems apparent that the attainment of two major attributes for which prestige tends to be accorded in the society, namely European ethnicity and white skin color, are obviously unavailable to the lower class Trinidadian Negro. What we have said thus far may appear quite obvious, i.e., the upper class is accorded high prestige, but the lower class is not. However, the important point being stressed here is that upper class values are shared by most members of the lower class,[19] but that the means towards attaining those desired values are denied or are not realistically available to the lower class member. Thus, insofar as these values constitute the bases for social stratification, the lower class members cannot readily move out of their class; they are fixed by virtually insurmountable caste barriers. The unavailability of these desired values is often a source of deep personal pain and frustration, self-rejection and utter dissatisfaction. Two other avenues, educational and economic attainment, are not entirely ascriptive and are theoretically capable of being achieved. However, as we have shown, they tend nevertheless to be out of reach of most of Trinidad's lower class Negroes.

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19. Braithwaite comments: "The lower-class shared with the whole society the negative evaluation of the black skin. 'The only thing that black that's good, is ink'; 'I don't like too many dark people around me'; 'I want somebody to lighten up my complexion' -- these are typical working class remarks." Braithwaite, "Social Stratification . . " op. cit. p. 132.

Our tentative conclusion, recognizing the gross limita-
tions in our data and sources, is that there are few or no
avenues sanctioned by the larger society which are realisti-
cally available to the lower class Trinidadian Negro for
the attainment of prestige. The four major means which are
sanctioned and considered universally valuable by all classes
within Trinidadian society are not readily available to him.
It is quite likely that this condition is not unique in
Trinidad and that it has its parallels in other societies
in which the Negro is at the bottom of the social scale.
Although we do not wish to digress from our focus on Trinida-
dian society and the Shango group within that society, a few
interesting parallels within the social structure of Jamaica,
Brazil and Haiti may be briefly alluded to.

In Jamaica, a very similar situation with respect to
color appears to exist. Horowitz states: "One cannot
stress too often the crucial role played by color in the
organization of Jamaican society . . . in Jamaica color
determines position regardless of wealth, occupation, or
education, to a very great although certainly not absolute
degree."[20] Further, the author of a fairly recent work on
Jamaica suggests that "The black lower class individual is
not only bound by his poverty but is frustrated by the
knowledge that if he does overcome the barriers of poverty,

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20. Michael M. Horowitz, "A Comparative Study of Several
Negro Cults in the New World," unpublished Master's thesis,
Columbia University, 1955, p. 48.

social frustration is inevitable as a result of his color."[21]

Horowitz concludes, as does Braithwaite for Trinidad, that Jamaica is more nearly a caste rather than an open class organized society where especially the lower class is prevented from mobility by the color barriers. In our terms, then, we may speculate that for the Jamaican lower class Negro, just as for the Trinidadian, color seriously impedes his use of possible channels for prestige attainment.

In Brazil, a slightly different situation seems to exist. Class, rather than caste, serves to distinguish the lower class.[22] This has been related to a variety of historical factors. These include early Portuguese colonists were already familiar with the highly prestigeful dark skinned Moors in Portugal and this placed the Negro into a familiar category and easily led to inter-racial marriages; the attitude of the Roman Catholic church which approved of both secular and spiritual instruction for the slave (in contrast to other areas of the West Indies and the U. S. where this did not frequently occur); and the seemingly closer relationship between master and slave on the plantations. All of these factors may be related to early miscegenation which has been continued to the present.[23]

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21. F. Henriques, Family and Color in Jamaica, London, 1953, p. 167.
22. For example, "Where Brazilian society was once formed by castes, it has now become a society of social classes which are themselves undergoing rapid change." Race and Class in Rural Brazil, (ed. Charles Wagley), UNESCO, 1952, p. 144.
23. Horowitz, op. cit., p. 32.

For example, Pierson writes: "The disposition to tolerate intermixture with the African grew up during slavery, and no circumstance has subsequently arisen to change it."[24] In Bahia, an individual, regardless of his color, may compete with other individuals provided that he gives evidence of ability and "definite personal worth."[25] Occupation, education, income and meeting social (e.g., correct manners and dress) requirements as well as "ideas, attitudes and sentiments"[26] serve to distinguish the lower class.[27] The above are, of course, associated with color since most of the lower class is black skinned. However, color cannot be considered to "cause" deficiencies in these other areas. While the lower class members seem to feel frustrated and dissatisfied, these dissatisfactions are "focused on class problems."[28] We may again tentatively speculate that prestige channels, while not directly "closed" to the Brazilian lower class Negro, are not completely open or available either as a function of class barriers.

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24. Donald Pierson, Negroes in Brazil, University of Chicago Press, 1942, p. 119-20.
25. Ibid., p. 186.
26. Ibid., p. 270.
27. "As yet, economic opportunities and educational advantages have not been extended to the rural masses not even to all the urban poor. It is thus still a general rule throughout Brazil that the people of the upper class are almost exclusively Caucasian in appearance, and the majority of the 'people of colour' are found in the middle and lower classes." Race and Class ... op. cit., p. 145.
28. Horowitz, op. cit., p. 39.

In the Negro Republic of Haiti, color does not seem to operate in such striking fashion to stratify the society. According to Simpson, "The present social structure consists of a small powerful elite; a small and rather uninfluential middle class; and a mass of economically poor, inarticulate, politically impotent peasants . . . ."[29] There seems to be very little mobility from the lower class into the middle or upper. While "certain social bonds between the classes"[30] do seem to exist. "To some extent each class has its own sub-culture."[31] Mobility seems to be prevented by cultural differences which "perpetuate the huge social distance between the elite and the masses" and the "two Haitian strata operate as distinct cultures rather than as cultures in contact."[32]

It should be recognized that the above parallels are merely suggestive and cannot be elaborated within the present study. Instead, focusing again on Trinidad, we turn to the second question of this investigation.

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29. George Simpson, "Discussion," Acculturation in the Americas, Selected Papers of the International Congress of Americanists, ed. Sol Tax, 1952, p. 148.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Horowitz, op. cit., p. 40.

CHAPTER III

PRESTIGE ATTAINMENT IN THE NEGRO LOWER CLASS

We turn next to our second question. What are the ways of attaining prestige which are available to the lower class Trinidadian Negro? What are the paths or means through which the lower class member can have prestige accorded to him by his own class, i.e., by his own class peers? We shall attempt to show that there are some ways for this to occur, i.e., for the lower class member to gain prestige within his own class, but these ways are considered undesirable, or at best, only desirable in limited ways, by the larger society. For the most part, the paths which some lower class Negroes take toward having prestige accorded to them by members of their own class only serve to reinforce their class or caste position in the eyes of the larger society.

Using the published sources and our own observations, we can isolate four major channels through which some lower class Negroes appear to gain recognition and esteem within their own class. These are through Carnival activities, by joining steel band associations (and other sport and recreational clubs), by joining small criminal bands, and by becoming actively involved with one or more religious organizations.[1]

Let us briefly consider each of these possible activities.

1. We must again stress that other channels may exist, but we do not have the sources available to go beyond the statements made here. Nor do we have data to explain why these particular channels are resorted to by the lower class Negro. It would be quite illuminating to study historically the role of religion during and after slavery. In this way, some light might be shed upon the crucial role of religion in Trinidad today.

For the most part, Carnival, the two day "fete" just
prior to Ash Wednesday, "belongs to the black, lower class."[2]
While members of the middle (and occasionally upper class)
participate to some extent, the lower class urban Negroes
are its outstanding active participants. Although persons
from rural areas travel into Port-of-Spain for the Carnival,
the most active participants, that is those who are members
of the "masque band," reside in Port-of-Spain or San Fernando,
the second largest urban center. Each masque band consists
of from two to eight hundred masquers, each of whom is
dressed in costumes based on "a theme from history, current
events, films, Carnival tradition, from the imagination, or
from a combination of these."[3] Belonging to a masque band
appears to provide a great deal of prestige to its members.
As Crowley points out: "The kinds of masques played in the
last hundred years of Carnival are extremely varied, suggest-
ing that Carnival is a major focus of culture for the urban
Trinidadian. He spends more time and thought, has a more
extensive vocabulary, and is more praised for innovation in
the creation of Carnival masques than in any other aspect of
his culture."[4] It appears, then, that despite the fact that

2. Powrie, op. cit., p. 226.
3. Danial J. Crowley, "The Traditional Masques of Carnival,"
Caribbean Quarterly, v. 4, March 1956, p. 194.
4. Ibid.

Carnival occurs only once a year, the planning and activities
which surround it occupy the major portion of the year.

In recent years, the tourist trade has increased in
Trinidad and Carnival is one of the island's major attrac-
tions. In the effort to commercialize Carnival, a great
deal of the spontaneity has apparently gone out of it. As
Braithwaite indicates, the upper class is now attempting to
"reform and control" Carnival activities. Attempts are now
being made to curb the complete abandon and carousing which
formerly characterized Carnival. This, coupled with the ever
increasing expense (borne by the participants) of the costumes
may, in the future, serve to decrease the function of Carnival
as a means of prestige attainment for the lower class. One of
our informants, who had in the past belonged to a masque band,
found that he could no longer, even with the greatest frugal-
ity, afford to provide his own costume.

While there generally seems to be acceptance of the lower
class culture of Carnival on the part of the upper class, this
acceptance, Braithwaite indicates "is only of a limited nature."[5]
Carnival activities are thus one of the few ways in which the
lower class person can gain some importance, but even here we
must note that the attempts at regulation of Carnival behavior,
and the only partial acceptance of it by the upper classes,
make it primarily prestigeful within the lower class rather than
the total society.

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5. Braithwaite, "Cultural Integration . . .," op. cit., p. 89.

Steel Bands

Closely associated with Carnival are the steel band organizations. Immediately after the war, steel bands numerically increased in especially the urban areas, although more recently bands are also being formed in rural areas. Being a member of a band not only gains the individual prestige but also a fairly good income, since the bands are hired to play at most social functions and the better ones are regularly employed by night clubs and hotels.

The steel band had its beginnings in the slum areas of Port-of-Spain and has often been coupled with gang warfare. ". . . fights between rival gangs took place on the streets to the risk of life and limb of innocent bystanders; . . . /and/ pedestrians on the street were bounded (given slight cuts with a razor on the arms) just for the fun of it."[6] This led to a suppression of steel band activities by the police and other "officials." Some individuals, however, saw the steel band as an "indigenous expression" and fought for the official legality of the bands. While, in recent years, the bands have greatly increased their skill and "official recognition by the upper classes of the society, of the achievement of the steel band in creating from nothing or rather from empty gasoline drums, something of an orchestra,"[7] has been given to them to some extent, the bands

6. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
7. *Ibid.*

have not yet "become definitely removed from /their/ crim-
inal associations."

Some recognition by the society is given to the bands,
yet many are still feared because of their criminal asso-
ciations, especially in Port-of-Spain. At the same time,
middle class persons have learned to play the steel drum,
but this has not "served to bridge the gap between the lower
class and the middle class because as soon as the middle
class groups learn the technique . . . they move away from
association with the 'real' bandsmen.[8] For the lower class
Negro, belonging to a steel band is positively evaluated by
his own class but, like Carnival activity, is only partially
acceptable to the upper and middle class segments of the
society.

Sports, such as cricket, and to a lesser extent rugby,
tennis and football play an exceedingly important role in
Trinidadian culture. "In one respect sport . . . has served
as a means of breaking down racial separation along caste
lines."[9] The emphasis on skill, rather than other qualities,
has resulted in many members of the colored middle class and
some members of the lower class belonging to a variety of
rather upper class sports clubs. Despite the fact that
lower class members may become team members, the captains
of the leading cricket and football teams are invariably

8. Ibid., pp. 95-96.
9. Ibid., p. 65.

white. Participation in sports and belonging to a sport club
is then quite prestigeful, but this affects only few people
since a great deal of proficiency is required before one can
become a member of an official team. Recreational or social
clubs appear to flourish at all levels of society, but the
lower class Negro can gain admittance to very few. In some
urban neighborhoods, young men spontaneously organize a social
club seemingly for the purpose of "night-clubbing" together.
We cannot at this time indicate how extensive these clubs are
or what other functions, besides "night-clubbing," they fulfill.

Gangs

One seemingly very major way of attaining recognition
within the lower class is to join criminal gangs. These gangs
appear to be plentiful and are located in the slum areas sur-
rounding Port-of-Spain. Many of them are evidently highly
organized. The gangs, composed primarily of young men in
their twenties, frequently wage "war" against each other.
One informant who lived in this area stated that "a man can
no longer live there safely, has to have a cutlass at home
all the time." He gave accounts of street fighting between
rival gang members and told of "people getting hurt there all
the time." We heard from a number of other sources that
these gangs were indeed quite threatening and that the police
are apparently helpless in combatting them. The newspapers,
for example, are constantly concerned with this situation.

According to another informant, the most famous of these gangs, a group known as the "Marabunta," includes some two hundred members, most of whom "are in and out of jail all the time, but it doesn't stop them." These young men probably are accorded enormous prestige within their peer group, and they are greatly feared by non-members. However, this kind of aggressive behavior is not condoned by the larger lower class, but rather only by segments within it, nor, of course, by the total society.

Religion

This leads us to religious participation as a means towards prestige attainment. Does active membership in one or more religious organizations give lower class Negroes prestige within their own class? Various different religious organizations are profuse in Trinidad. While 34.5 per cent of the total population (non-Indian) is Roman Catholic, and 24.2 per cent are Anglican, many other Protestant denominations such as Presbyterian, Wesleyan, Baptist, Moravian and Seventh Day Adventist are found. Affiliation with these denominations is to be found through all the social classes. That is, many religions cut across the stratification lines. Certain religious groups attracting lower class members, such as the Pilgrim Holiness, Seventh Day Adventist, and Jehovah's Witnesses, are seen as less "respectable" than others.

The religious groups whose membership is solely derived from the black lower class[10] are the Spiritual Baptists, popularly called Shouters, and other off-shoot Baptist groups and the African-derived Shango and Rada cults. These organizations are strongly frowned upon by the middle and upper classes who see in them a retention of Africanisms and who find their strong emotional flavor quite distasteful. Braithwaite states: "The essentials of their religious behavior violate the code of the more highly placed classes so completely, however, that it would have to reform itself out of existence in order to find recognition."[11] In studying the Shango group, we found that virtually all its members belong, not only to the cult, but also affiliate with the Catholic and Anglican churches, as well as some variety of the Baptist faith. Thus we found persons who, for example, stated their religion as Catholic, who were active Shango members, and who regularly attended the Spiritual Baptist church as well as one or more of the off-shoot Baptist branches. We can state with a good deal of confidence that, not only do most lower class members affiliate themselves quite strongly with a religious group, but that many of them belong to several religious groups. Many of our informants stated that the more religions one belongs to, the greater the chances for salvation and the better off one is. The

10. In recent years a few East Indians seem to be joining some of these.
11. Braithwaite, "Social Stratification . . ." op. cit., p.131.

positive worth of religion was constantly stressed, e.g.,
"the only thing that good is to worship god," or "you feel
powerful in church, a lot of people goes to church but they
don't feel it (apparently, they don't feel the power of
religion)." One prominent Shango leader, in response to the
Incomplete Sentence Stem "the happiest time" says, "is when
the powers /i.e., Shango gods/ is around" and to the stem
"I feel" says: "most joyous when having my spiritual work
to do." Religion is then very positively evaluated and does
seem to play an important and major role in the lives of the
lower class Negroes.[12]

A great deal of prestige seems to be derived from
religious participation and, in this connection, Braithwaite
states:

> In terms of Trinidad society there were few com-
> pensations available to those condemned to inferior
> status in the stratification system . . . . the
> religious world outlook of the society acted as a

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12. This, of course, is not unique to Trinidad but is found
in most areas of the New World. Religion seems to play a
dominant role especially within the lower class. As one of
many possible examples, Henriques suggests that perhaps
religion serves as an outlet for the frustrations of the
lower class person in Jamaica. In Jamaica we do not find
organized syncretistic cults of the type we are concerned
with in this thesis. This seems due, in part, to the predom-
inance of Protestantism in Jamaica rather than Roman
Catholicism. A possible substitute for the African derived
cult appears to be the enormous numbers of revivalistic, es-
sentially Protestant-based cults found especially in urban
areas. (These cults include some African rituals but they
are not of the African-Catholic mixture.)
See George Simpson, "Jamaican Revivalist Cults," Social
and Economic Studies, v. 5, Institute of Social and Economic
Research, University College of the West Indies, Jamaica,
BWI, 1956.

compensatory force. In the world to come there
would be salvation; at least there was an order
superior in justice to the present social system.
Psychologically this acted as a powerful factor
among the lower class. The revivalist hymn-singing
and religious groups were only in part a means of
releasing emotional tension; to a certain extent
they also served to give some ideological expres-
sion to the resentments of the lower class. The
religious belief system of Christianity contains a
great deal which holds an especial appeal for
groups of lowly social status. The rejected stone
that is to become the corner stone, the righteous
who are none the less made to suffer--all found an
echo in the minds of the lower class Trinidadian.[13]

It seems, in view of the importance of religion in the
lower class as witnessed by the number of lower class reli-
gious organizations found in Trinidad and the multiple
religious participation of many of its members, that reli-
gion serves a crucial function in the lives of the lower
class. We are suggesting that at least one of its most
important functions is to give its members prestige. People
who are known to be active participants in one or more
religious groups are accorded a great deal of prestige and
tend to be judged as worthy and "holy" people.

We must again stress that participation in those
religious groups considered "African," e.g., the Spiritual
and off-shoot Baptist churches and the African derived cults
tends to result in increased prestige, but only within the
context of the lower class. Such religious organizations
serve as distinct and unpleasant reminders to the majority
of the middle and upper classes that much of Trinidad's

13. Braithwaite, op. cit., pp. 137-38.

population (to a large degree including themselves) is African in origin. As has been suggested earlier, whatever is seen as "African" tends to be considered "uncouth" and primitive by the middle and upper class and to some extent this feeling is shared by those lower class Trinidadian Negroes who are aspiring to bridge the stratification lines through means acceptable to the larger society. Thus, participation in these "African" religious groups also serves to further decrease the chances for upward mobility in Trinidadian society, even if prestige-enhancing within portions of the lower class.

The relationship between participation in lower class Negro religious organizations (i.e., those organizations considered "African") and the attainment of prestige is most complex. As has been indicated, participation in such organizations is extremely detrimental to prestige attainment as accorded by the middle and upper classes of the society. Within the black lower class it is positively evaluated only by some lower class members. The minority of lower class blacks who are actively struggling to disaffiliate themselves with everything associated with the lower class, and who are tenaciously, even if often unsuccessfully, pursuing these paths approved by the larger society (discussed in the first section of this chapter), look upon such participation with disdain.

Others, and many were observed, seem caught in conflict between the two kinds of paths (those discussed in the first section versus those discussed in the second section of this chapter). Such conflict was observed particularly in the urban areas. For example, several persons who were employed in clerical or sales capacities in British firms and struggled by day to "act white," spoke sometimes with derision and sometimes with respect about the "African" religions, and came at night to the local Shango "palais." There they often hovered at the brink of active participation, frequently seemingly fighting with themselves to avoid this.

On the other hand, perhaps the largest number of lower class Trinidadian Negroes look favorably upon participation in "African" religions. (This will be further discussed in Chapter VIII.)

We have thus far stressed that the lower class Negro tends to share the values of particular color and ethnic preference, and of economic and educational attainment, espoused by the larger society. There is one major area, however, in which the values of many lower class Negroes are utterly at variance with those of the broader society. This is "African religion." We were repeatedly impressed by the fact that Catholic informants, who deeply respect their church and priest, nevertheless actively participated in Shango and Shouter activities which were explicitly condemned and prohibited by their priests. Characteristically they seemed to show little concern or anxiety about this

violation. As one informant put it "my priest (a white man) is a good man and he knows a lot. There is just one thing he does not understand . . . the African way. He is confused about it and no one who was not born to it can understand it." Similarly, in one London Baptist church, headed by a white British minister, the congregation comes dressed in suits, quietly and sedately, emulating the upper class manners urged by the minister, to conventional Western Sunday morning services.[14] The same group is frequently in the same church the same evening, without the priest ("I'm afraid to pass by my own church at night") actively involved in Shouter services, speaking in tongues, or in the neighboring "palais" in the midst of a Shango ceremony. Although they tend to accept many of the middle and upper class goals and values, e.g., think it is better to be white than black, British than Trinidadian, they recognize, implicitly and sometimes explicitly, that they will never be white, non-Trinidadian, rich, or highly educated, and consider those paths entirely out of the range of possibility, even if they are often included within the realm of fantasy. They participate, with varying degrees of frustration, in those paths (e.g., "African religions") towards recognition which are accepted by many of their peers, but which are rather unanimously condemned by the bulk of the larger society.

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14. We unfortunately do not have any detailed information on perhaps one of the most intriguing features of lower class religious participation. This is religious participation in several different organizations. The relationship between the Shouters and Shango is particularly worthy of further study.

In summary, the activities which the lower class Negro has realistically available to him and tends to take for the attainment of prestige are all only at best partially accepted by the larger society whose central values he shares. Carnival and steel band activities are only partially and occasionally accepted by the larger society; criminal activity is condemned by the majority of the lower class as well as by the other classes. There is broad participation in religious organizations throughout the society and, indeed, most lower class Negroes are involved in numerous religions. Many are particularly attracted to African-derived cults. Participation in religious organizations associated with the "African," while potentially enhancing the prestige accorded to the person by large sections of the lower class, tends to be severely condemned by the middle and upper classes which associate these cults with the primitive, the uncouth, and the undesirable.

In the remaining portions of this thesis we shall focus on one such lower class religious organization, very strongly associated with the "African," the Shango cult. In the next two chapters its organization, ceremonies, cosmology, etc. will be described in detail and compared where possible with similar Afro-American cults found in other areas of the New World. We shall then in subsequent chapters attempt to show specifically the ways in which prestige, i.e., recognition and esteem can be attained within the cult, the relationship

between the prestige of members and group organization and behavior, and the individual effects of prestige attainment within the cult.

CHAPTER IV

THE SHANGO GROUP: ORGANIZATION AND CEREMONIES

The Shango cult, as an Afro-American cult, is far from
unique in the New World. Afro-American cults flourish in
areas in which the official European religion easily lends
itself to the syncretism of African deities with the saints
of the Church. This is particularly possible with
Catholicism and one finds these cults in predominantly
Catholic areas such as Cuba, Haiti, St. Vincent, Grenada,
Trinidad and Brazil. The Cuban "Santeria," the Haitian
"Vodun," the Trinidadian "Shango" and "Rada," the "Macumba"
of Rio de Janeiro, the "Candomblé" of Bahia, and "Xango" in
Recife and Porto Alegre have thus far, in various degrees of
intensity, been studied by investigators. (No published
studies of Grenada and St. Vincent have been found.) All
of these cults display, in varying degrees, the following
characteristics: syncretisms of African (predominantly
Yoruba or Dahomey) deities with Catholic saints, the essen-
tially West African pattern of spirit possession, the reten-
tion of animal sacrifices and patterns of African drumming,
singing and dancing. Most seem to also include some form
of divination.

In this chapter, a description of the organization,
ritual, and belief system of the Trinidadian Shango group
will be presented. Wherever possible, relevant material
from Haiti and Brazil will be presented for comparison

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purposes. In order to clearly delineate these comparisons from our own material on Trinidad, they will always be presented in sub-sections labelled "comparisons." Haiti and Brazil have been chosen as the locations for comparison since they seem to serve most effectively for placing our original data in greater perspective and since they are the two locations on which relatively detailed literature is most available. Grenada and St. Vincent have thus far received little systematic study on relevant problems and most of the relevant literature on Cuba has unfortunately not been translated into English.

Organization

The Shango cult flourishes in both rural and urban areas; in both, membership is exclusively composed of lower class, black-skinned Negroes. Its total membership can only be approximated; rough guesses indicate that there are perhaps 100 "palais" or Shango establishments in the island. Each establishment has one major leader who gives a feast for the explicit purpose of summoning the gods, once a year. This large feast lasts four consecutive days and nights, always beginning on a Tuesday. After an interval of one week, another feast, lasting three consecutive days and nights, occurs. Occasionally some leader gives one-or two-day feasts to commemorate special events at odd times during the year. Of the perhaps 100 separate Shango establishments,

we selected six. These six were seemingly related to each
other in that they rather consistently followed a type of
geographical circuit similar to a troup of travelling play-
ers. No real headquarters in the sense, for example, of a
permanent church is maintained. Rather, each leader schedules
his (or her) feast so that no two overlap in time. The entire
membership moves from feast to feast. We have then, with some
specific exceptions, one membership group of about 70 persons
led by six leaders. This group attends all the feasts given
by the six leaders so that the same persons attend a feast in
Port-of-Spain one week and the following week visit a feast
in a small village in Southern Trinidad. At each feast,
visitors from the immediate neighborhood attend but these
people do not travel the circuit.

The Shango cult in Trinidad, then, consists of separate
groups whose members divide their time between attendance at
the feasts of about three to eight leaders, but who generally
do not attend the feasts given by leaders not within their
immediate group. Some degree of communication between all these
groups is maintained throughout the island. All, or at least
most of the groups, for example, seem implicitly to recognize
Mr. E. as an unofficial leader despite the fact that he
attends only those feasts in his immediate group. In inter-
viewing a few leaders outside this group of immediate concern
to us, we discovered that they all knew, or had heard of, other
leaders and knew the location of many Shango establishments

throughout the island. Similarly, Mr. E. knew of at least 50 different establishments, some of which he had visited or had had some contact with in previous years.

The present study is based upon the investigation of one group whose members move between two feasts in Port-of-Spain. These feasts are followed by four feasts in various villages and towns in central and southern Trinidad. Of the six leaders, two are men and four are women. Thus, this Shango group appears loosely organized and does not have the fairly rigid social organization found in similar cults in Haiti and Brazil.[1]

In the Trinidadian Shango group of concern we can delineate four major sub-groupings of persons within the

1. This travelling pattern is seemingly not found to any great extent in Brazil nor Haiti. The "seitas" (Candomblé establishments) are located almost exclusively in the city "where residents are almost exclusively blacks and dark mulattoes" (Pierson, op. cit., p. 278). There are perhaps one hundred to one hundred and fifty seitas, each with its own distinct membership. While some communication between various seita leaders seems to be maintained, members appear to attend the ceremonies of only one seita. In Haiti, according to Herskovits, Vodun consists of two phases. First, a ceremony given by a particular family for the purpose of propiating the gods and attendance is limited to members of that family and specifically invited guests. After this ceremony, the Vodun dance, which "serves to express joy at the dangers averted and gratitude for the good that the friendly loa /Vodun gods/ are to bring." (M. J. Herskovits, Life in a Haition Valley, N. Y., 1937, p. 156) To the latter, the entire countryside is invited. Thus, while anyone apparently can attend the Vodun dance, the actual familial ceremony is restricted. This is not found in Trinidad, where only one major ceremony is offered and apparently anyone can attend it.

larger group. (Our delineations of sub-groupings are based
on the dimension of the degree of prestige accorded the person
by others in the group, (Chapter I) as judged by observation,
and is discussed more specifically in Chapter VII.)

The first sub-grouping consists of those who hold
leadership positions. The leaders, for the most part, are
people who have been raised in Shango families and who have
learned cult lore and belief from earliest childhood. These
persons become possessed frequently and intensively at feasts
and some of them may undergo possession without the immediate
stimulus of the feast. Most of them engage in "bush-
doctoring," rendering such services as giving advice and
cures to the people who come to them for aid. Leaders are
not paid for giving feasts and pay their own expenses when
giving feasts. These expenses involve purchasing sacrifical
animals, buying olive oil, rum, candles and other ritual
accoutrements. Female leaders are, for the most part,
supported by their husbands, or, more commonly by "keepers."
In exchange for their bush-doctoring services, leaders are
paid very small sums which are used to maintain their establish-
ments, especially the "chapelle" for which, for example, a
daily supply of candles is required. One male leader works
at a job to maintain his establishment and his wife takes in
laundry. Mr. E., on the other hand, is relatively wealthy since
he owns some 50 acres of productive land.

At a feast, the leader's main function is to inaugurate
the activities, that is, to lead the various songs, to lead
the initial period of prayer and generally to watch the
proceedings to see that everything goes "all right." Often,
Mr. E., due in part to his superior knowledge of cult prac-
tices, leads the ceremony even if it is held at another
leader's establishment. Most leaders often become possessed
during the initial hours of a feast. When this occurs, the
drummers frequently take on the responsibility of watching
the proceedings and initiating songs to the various powers as
they appear.

Comparisons

In the Bahian Candomblé, the priest called the "pae de
santo" "retains his original prestige as the depository of
the secrets of worship, the interpreter of tradition and
the witch doctor of the African tribe."[2] In general, he
(or she) supervises the ceremonial proceedings and an espe-
cially important task seems to be the supervision of the
initiation rites (discussed below). The priest also engages
in what the Trinidadians call bush-doctoring, namely, the
diagnosis of ailments, giving cures, advice and "he may
minister to a clientele even outside the members of the
seita, giving advice, and counsel on matters of business,
politics, love, etc."[3] In the Rio de Janeiro Macumba, however,

2. Arthur Ramos, The Negro in Brazil, Washington, 1939, p.85.
3. Pierson, op. cit., p. 284.

the priest appears to have a different function. In the
Macumba, the chief emphasis appears to be "not the patron
deity or saint but a family spirit who from time immemorial
is believed to become incarnate in the Umbanda priest . It
if fundamentally the same thing as the worship of ancestors
and family gods among the Bantu people."[4] The priest's role,
then, seems to be that of the chief medium or "horse" who
becomes possessed by the family spirit.

In Haitian Vodun, the priest (Houngan--male, mambu--
female) appears to supervise the ceremonial proceedings and
at the family ceremony, he induces possession by invocations
and by twirling individual members of the family. Another
important function of the houngan or mambu "is to foretell
the future, and it is a diviner that the Vodun priest or
priestess is most often employed.[5] Thus, bush-doctoring
again in the form of divination, advice, counsel and the like
plays an important role in Vodun.[6]

Slightly below the leaders in the degree of prestige
accorded to them in the Shango group is a sub-group of very

4. Ramos, op. cit., p. 85.
5. Herskovits, op. cit., p. 152.
6. In Cuban santeria the ceremony is found to be almost
secondary to the practice of divination and the symbolic
significance of ritual paraphenalia. As Bascom states:
"but in the mind of the cult members in Jovellanos, those
which are the foundation of their form of worship are the
stones, the blood and the herbs." (W. Bascom, "The Focus of
Cuban Santeria," Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, v. 6,
1950, pp. 64-68) Bascom has also done an exhaustive study
of two forms of Cuban divination which are strongly modeled
after the original Yoruban patterns. (Two forms of Afro-
Cuban Divination in Acculturation in the Americas, (ed. Sol
Tax), U. of Chicago Press, 1952, pp. 169-80.

active participants. These are people who become possessed
frequently and whose behavior in the normal state and in
possession is quite similar to that of the leaders. There
are in this group perhaps 15 such people, who, together with
the six actual leaders, constitute the nucleus, or what we may
designate as the first sub-group of important persons. Some
of these people also engage in bush-doctoring. However, they
are not as much sought after for advice and cures as are the
actual leaders. Many are also drawn from Shango families,
while others merely visited Shango feasts in the past and
gradually became important in the group by virtue primarily
of possession experiences. (Some of the ways of increasing
one's importance or prestige in the group will be discussed
in Chapter VI.)

A few more persons, the drummers, are, by virtue of
their skill, frequently mentioned by the Shango members
themselves as crucial to the ceremony. Our observations
indicate that these drummers tend to associate almost exclu-
sively with the leaders--active participants sub-group and
they may be thought of as a part of the major nucleus group.
Drummers begin learning their "occupation" at any early age.
Most have been brought into contact with Shango establish-
ments in childhood. Frequently, children and occasionally
women, are seen at feasts watching the older drummers and
sometimes they may play during the afternoons when nothing
of importance is happening. Only skilled, mature, male
drummers, however, are allowed to play at the actual ceremony.

The second major sub-group consists of a rather large number of people, perhaps about 40, who may be placed into an intermediate classification with respect to their prestige. These persons become possessed regularly, more than frequently, by one, or sometimes two gods. Their behavior under possession is somewhat circumscribed and they are not permitted the greater freedom of expression which the first group enjoys. Again, most have had prior early contact with the cult, but a few have become involved with Shango activities only recently. One very small segment of this group consists of people who are termed "servants of the powers," that is, they minister to the needs and wishes of people in possession at a feast. The few persons (we encountered only four) never became possessed themselves but functioned in the group in the capacity of "servants." This intermediate group (with the exception of the "servants") corresponds perhaps most closely to the Bahian "filhas de santos," who, in the Candomblé serve as the principal mediums or horses for the gods.

We may isolate a third grouping of people who only rarely become possessed and who seem to have the least prestige in the total group. For the most part, these are people who have had little, if any, prior contact with Shango activities and who are relatively unknown in the group. This sub-group tends to be small, shifting, and transitory. Finally, at most feasts, one finds a group of visitors who

come merely to watch and who do not take an active part in the ceremonial activities. (We will not, in this thesis be concerned with this latter group since these persons seemingly make no major attempt to become part of the group. They simply attend as spectators.) The members of the third sub-group have little direct interaction either at feasts or outside cult activities with other group members. The leaders and the active participants form a rather tightly knit in-group whose major interaction with members of the intermediate group is in terms of the spiritual family. (See Chapter VII.) Most members of the intermediate group recognize one of the leaders as a spiritual parent who serves as his mentor, transmitting the various beliefs of the Shango cult. This parent-child relationship, in a sense, cuts across the boundary lines which ordinarily exist between the leader group and the intermediate group.

In Chapter VII, we hope to show that these three major sub-groupings within the total group form the basis of a prestige hierarchy or continuum. This hierarchy, for the most part, has been isolated by the observer, although some members themselves recognize the existence of these internal or implicit social groupings. The only explicit or formally recognized structure which exists in this group (and it is here that the Shango Cult differs most markedly from cults in Haiti and Brazil) consists of three positions or roles which must be filled for the group to exist. These positions

have already been mentioned and are the leadership positions, and the "occupational" roles of drummers and servants. The leaders, active participants and drummers, as has been indicated, appear to have the highest prestige, whereas the servants have less, but still considerable prestige within the intermediate sub-group. There are no clear cut mobility channels or "levels of hierarchy" such that a person can move from a novice position to become eventually a leader or a leader's assistant. We have, in this group, an implicit social structure. This structure is recognized by a few individuals, but is not recognized by the majority of participating group members. How does this structure compare to that of the Haitian and Brazilian cults? We will briefly present some material on these groups which seem to illustrate that a recognized formal hierarchy appears to exist in the Haitian and Brazilian groups.

Comparisons

In Vodun, the individual often inherits his special gods or "loas" from his parents. He may or may not become an actual participating member of a cult group and whether or not he does seems to depend upon the will of his loa. Once having decided to become a member, or having this decision forced upon him by the loa, he joins the cult group called "la societe" in the menial position of a "bossale." This term refers to a person who is "wild or untaught . . . .

one who has minimal control over his loa."[7]   While in this
initial state, the novice is under the spiritual guidance
and direction of a spiritual parent who is generally a
"houngan" (Vodun priest) of known repute. The novice may
undergo various ceremonies such as, for example, the "laver
tete," a ritual head washing designed to "baptize a loa in
the head of a person, or to strengthen his control /over the
loa/."[8]   By gradually absorbing knowledge from his houngan
mentor and by undergoing further rituals, such as the "canzo"
or trial by fire, to further increase his mastery or control
over the gods, the person may elevate himself to a higher
position within the cult group. After the "canzo" ritual
he may become a "houngenikon" or "la place," these being
immediate assistants to the priest. Finally, they may
undertake the last ceremony, "take the asson," which elevates
him to the priesthood. This hierarchy of positions in the
cult is based upon increasing knowledge of cult activities
and lore. Deren states that: "The entire hierarchy, in
fact, is no more than a statement of the gradations of that
knowledge. The ceremonies of elevation are like the final
tests and recognition of a graduation from level to level
of connaissance."[9]   Further, she says:

> In sum, then, the hierarchy is a recognition of the
> degrees of understanding achieved with spiritual

7.   Maya Deren, The Divine Horsemen, 1953, p. 154.
8.   Ibid., p. 331.
9.   Ibid., p. 158.

maturity, and an individual who has passed through all the ordeals and stages of elevation and has become houngan has undergone a personal characterological development of considerable scope; he is consequently a distinguished figure in the community.[10]

Thus, the levels of hierarchy in Haitian Vodun consist of clearly graded explicit positions. Each position is accompanied by privileges and duties. Any person, providing certain other conditions are met, can theoretically aspire to reach the top of this hierarchy.

Both Dahomean and Yoruban derived cults in Brazil (although many regional differences exist in Brazil), follow essentially similar patterns. In northern Brazil, for example, "the cult head and the dancers are designated respectively by the terms hunbono and vodunsi . . . . The vodunsi . . . are further qualified as vodunsi-hunjai, who are those who have been through a special initiation ceremony, and vodunsi-ahe, that is, those who have not."[11] Seniority and cult knowledge again seem to play a role in determining one's cult position. "In addition to seniority a grasp of cult theology and a knowledge of cult ritual counts very high in determining the position of a cult initiate. . . .[12] Initiation into the cult in this area involves rituals and periods of seclusion. The novice is further distinguished by special clothing and costuming symbolizing her novitiate status.

10. Ibid., p. 158.
11. Octavio da Costa Eduardo, The Negro in Northern Brazil, New York, 1948, p. 69.
12. Ibid.

In the Bahian Condomblé, several positions are also clearly distinguished. Besides the leaders (the "pae or mae de santo"), "other sacred functionaries include the ogans, or male members of the seita /cult centers7 who assist the pae or mae de santo with the ritual . . . the achogan, . . . who performs the sacrifices; the jibonam or pequena mae (little mother), next in authority to the mae de santo . . . the musicians . . . and the very important filhas de santo (literally 'daughters of the orixas') or ceremonial dancers, who serve as the so-called cavolos ('horses') for the deities who 'manifest themselves' in their bodies and speak through them their will."[13] Drummers and other musicians also play a role.

It will be seen in later chapters that these fixed positions are not found to any great extent in Trinidadian Shango. Rather, one finds an implicit hierarchy; the means or avenues for enhancing one's position in the group are equally implicit. Thus, the avenues of mobility are not institutionalized as they seemingly are in Haiti and Brazil, but are implicit in the social structure of this group.

Ceremonies

Most feasts are held in the summer months and each feast is attended by most of the members of the three sub-groups, with the exception of some members of the lowest group whose

13. Pierson, op. cit., pp. 285-86.

attendance seems quite sporadic. This means that anywhere
from 50-75 people constantly go from feast to feast during the
summer months within the circuit studied. The island is small
enough to accomplish this. For example, men who hold regular
jobs often leave in the early morning and are able to return
by night-time. Most of the women stay at the leader's estab-
lishment for the duration of the feast.

We do not have any data to explain why the summer months
are the height of the Shango ceremonial season. The Bahian
Cambomblé also appears to be seasonal but here the season
begins in the second week of September and ends in the first
week of December. In addition, special ceremonies are held
throughout the year. In Haitian Vodun however, the time of
the ceremony appears completely dependent upon the gods.
Herskovits states in this connection: "Fortunately, the
wants of many of the gods are modest, and they are satisfied
if a candle is occasionally lighted, some water 'thrown away'
in the place of worship, and they are kept informed of family
happenings."[14] However, if "the loa finally clamor for a
sacrifice . . . the ceremony must be held or the loa will
cause their worshipers much trouble."[15] Small annual rites
are held in January "each family giving small offerings in
its house of worship to its own deities." A major rite may
be held only once in a decade or generation, but when serious

14. Herskovits, op. cit. p. 154.
15. Ibid.

troubles plague the family, and it is believed that "the gods have reached the end of their patience," the major ceremony takes place.

The Shango feasts take place in the courtyard of the leader's home. The courtyard is composed of the leader's house, a separate kitchen or cook house, the "palais," "chapelle" and the "tombs." The "palais" is the rectangular wall-less thatched house supported by wooden beams, in which the bulk of the ceremony takes place. The "chapelle" is a small one-or two-room church which contains the sacred relics and implements of the saints; chromolithographs adorn the walls, statues and other paraphernalia litter the numerous altars. Near the gate or entrance to the courtyard is an area dedicated to the gods which consists of raised cement or earthen slabs which are memorial stones dedicated to the gods. (They are not considered to be actual tombs, but simply consecrated areas which are sacred to the gods.) Flags and charred implements of the gods adorn the area. The leader's courtyard is generally located in the outlying districts of the city or village; this dates from the time when, until quite recently, drumming after ten p.m. was prohibited by law.[16]

16. Again we may note the similarity with the Candomblé where the _terreiro_ or temple grounds approximates the Trinidadian courtyard, the _barracao_ is the sacred dance pavilion or palais, the _pegi_ or "fetish sanctuary" seems to serve the same function as the chapelle. "Special huts for those orixas . . . who 'prefer to dwell outside the _pegi_'" (Pierson, _op. cit._, p. 279) seem to resemble the tomb area in Trinidadian Shango. In Vodun, a distinction is made between the "_maison de servitude_," which is the "family house of service for the gods" (Herskovits, _op. cit._, p. 155) and the "humfort, or 'temple' of the Vodun priest . . . ." (_Ibid._).

A typical Trinidadian Shango feast begins at about 8 p.m. Approximately 25-50 people are seated in the palais on rough wooden benches and a comparable number circulate about the courtyard. At this time the atmosphere in the courtyard is rather casual; e.g., people are joking with each other, renewing friendships, eating dinner, playing with children and the like. Despite the seeming mood of jocularity, there is an air of tenseness and waiting. Occasionally, a few people in the palais begin singing with or without the accompaniment of drums. At about 10 o'clock the leader enters frequently holding a rosary and a candle in his hand, and kneels in the center of the palais. He begins chanting the Lord's Prayer, Hail Marys', sometimes the Catholic Litany of the Saints and other Catholic prayers. He recites line by line as the audience chants antiphonally after him. At times, he interrupts the prayers to sprinkle water from a pottery jug into the four corners of the palais. The same prayers are constantly repeated and the entire prayer period may last as long as two hours. During this time more and more people stream into the courtyard. As the prayer period comes to an end a hymn may or may not be sung, depending in large part upon the whim of the leader. After this, one man, whose role is that of a "servant to the powers," places a candle flanked by two calabashes containing water and ashes respectively, into the center of the palais. A line of olive oil is drawn about it by slowly pouring the oil from a bottle.

The drummers, three in number, and the chac-chac (a type of maracas) players enter and seat themselves at one end of the palais; the leader is in front of them resting on a chair. He begins the first song to Eschu,[17] the devil. The drums pick up the beat and the audience begins singing. At the same time, a circle of roughly 20 people, mostly women, forms. The women begin to dance in a slow shuffle around the candle and calabash.

Seven songs are sung to Eschu and each new song is marked by a reversal of the dancing circle. At the conclusion of the sixth song the candle and calabashes are thrown out by the same "servant of the powers." This circle procedure is known as "getting rid of the devil" or "giving him his due." This form of propitiation is immediately followed by songs dedicated to Ogun-St. Michael,[18] who is the leading deity in the Shango pantheon. At least seven songs must be sung to Ogun to equal the number sung to the devil, because "the saints are higher than the devil." Usually, after three or four songs to Ogun-St. Michael, the first possession manifesting the characteristics ascribed to Ogun begins. Generally, a woman dancing in the circle begins violently swaying back and forth. Her eyes become glazed and dilated, her face undergoes a radical transformation, becoming quite masculine, with

17. We will use the local spelling, Eschu, although the spelling Eshu is used in the published literature.
18. While most members generally refer to the Christian rather than to the African name of the gods, we will, for greater clarity, hyphenate the names.

lips and chin protruding. She falls back and is supported by
several bystanders, thereby breaking the circle of dancers.
Singing and drumming stop for the moment. One bystander ties
a red (Ogun's color) headband about the possessed woman's
head, another ties a sash underneath her stomach, and her
jewelry and shoes are removed. During this dressing period,
the possessed woman is held by others so that the god or
"power" (both the saints and possessed individuals are called
"powers") may be dressed properly and given a chance to "settle."
The power then breaks away and begins dancing in the palais.
Meanwhile the drum and singing has been continuing. At times,
the power may run into the chapelle and kneel on the floor,
or run into the tomb area or anywhere about the courtyard.
The power calls for his implements, a sword or cutlass in
Ogun's case, and dances with them. Ogun, especially, greets
the audience, generally in a mixture of English and Patois,
e.g., "Bon Soir, tout monde, good-night all." (Very little
Patois is spoken in everyday life. In fact only one person
was found who had even rudimentary knowledge of Patois.) He
may bless all present by distributing olive oil either to drink
or to be rubbed onto the head and face. The singing to Ogun
continues until either Ogun decided that he has had enough
songs or until the leader sings to another power. After the
arrival of Ogun-St. Michael different powers "manifest" upon
other persons.

(Most active Shango participants have one or more special
patrons who "manifest" upon them regularly. Such persons are
termed "horses": or "saint horses" and identified as "She
take Michael," or "Michael manifest on her," or "she St.
Michael horse.")

Singing, drumming, and spirit possessions continue until
three to five o'clock in the morning. The duration depends
to some degree upon the fatigue of the members. People then
go to sleep for a few hours, finding themselves berths any-
where in the courtyard. When dawn comes, activities begin
again as selected animals are washed and sacrificed to the
powers, to the accompaniment of drums at sunrise. The killing,
preceded by the leaders casting obi seeds to determine if the
powers will accept the sacrifice, takes place in the chapelle
and the blood of the animals is splashed over the tombs. More
drum beating and possession may take place following the sac-
rifice until about 10 o'clock in the morning. People who have
regular jobs leave sometime in the morning and return again
the following evening. Most of the women remain and spend
the day cooking the sacrificed animals. Some food is cooked
without salt and this is offered to the powers on large leaves
in front of their particular tombs. The rest, cooked with salt,
is eaten by the participants. People in possession do not eat
any food.

Occasionally, during the late afternoon, one of the
water powers may, without specifically being called, manifest

upon his or her horse and call for a special river ceremony.

Then a procession, sometimes dressed in white, marches to

the river. Food is placed on the banks of the river and sing-

ing and drumming to that particular water power takes place.

(Note: This only occurs when the leader's courtyard is

situated near a river.)

This, in rough outline, constitutes a major feast and

this same pattern is repeated at every feast. It will be

observed that singing and drumming (the means by which the

central aim of the feast--the arrival of the gods--is accom-

plished), and the possession experience itself are the most

important activities at a ceremony. On another level, the

interpersonal relationships between the members are simi-

larly significant, but these will be considered in a later

chapter. Most persons who attend a feast, even as mere

spectators, learn the words and melodies of the various songs.

The words, as far as can be gathered, are a mixture of native

Yoruba, Patois and nonsense syllables. The most "genuine"

sounding words were sung by a few of the leaders, especially

Mr. E. The latter is also familiar with many more songs

than are the other members. Drumming is learned by very few

people so that the same drummers are to be seen at every feast.

The drum rhythms appear to be quite genuinely African although

some European traces can be detected.[19]

19. Both European and local influences have built upon the
African base in Trinidadian music. See R. Waterman, "African
Patterns in Trinidad Negro Music," unpublished Ph.D. Disserta-
tion, Northwestern University, 1943.

Comparisons

In comparing the Shango ceremony with that of the
Candomblé, we again find specific differences as well as some
general similarities. For example, the latter ceremony does
not begin with Catholic prayers, but rather with the propia-
tion and banishment of Eschu. Ramos, in describing the cere-
mony states:

> The preparations for the service occur in the prin-
> cipal hall of the temple, the filhas de santo
> arranged in a circle, the pae de santo and the mae
> de santo in the center, the drum beaters on the
> sides and the public grouped in the rear. The pae
> de santo begins the despacho, or banishment of Eshu,
> to the accompaniment of the drums, giving the signal
> for the chants by the filhos de santo. Eshu is
> beseeched to abstain from disturbing the ceremony.
> After security from any interruption by Eshu is
> guaranteed dances and chants to the various orishas
> follow. These go on far into the night, the rhythm
> maintained by the ceaseless pounding of the drums.[20]

The filhas are dressed in a variety of costumes; jewelry
and face and body paint are also in evidence. This is not
found in Trinidadian Shango, where colored head and waist
bands are the only items of costume assumed by the horses
after possession has taken place. We may add, at this point,
that the rather complex and varied initiation rites, and the
special dietary prescriptions which every filha must undergo
and maintain are not found in Trinidadian Shango.

In the Macumba of Rio de Janeiro, the focus of the
ceremony appears to be the possession of the priest by the

20. Ramos, op. cit., p. 86.

particular ancestral spirit who is most honored in the estab-
lishment. (Apparently, the chief ancestral spirit varies from
group to group.) After the spirit has possessed the priest,
he retires to a special room where he receives the visitors
who have come for consultations with him. "As the night wears
on, the consultations continue, while the <u>Cambonde</u> /assistant
to the prie<u>st</u>/ carries on the formal worship."[21]

In the Haitian Vodun ceremonies, we must distinguish the
sacred family rite from the rather public, social Vodun dance.
While the complete family rite as described by Herskovits is
far too lengthy to quote here, we may indicate some of the more
obvious differences and similarities. In both Vodun and Shango,
the ceremony begins with the period of Catholic prayer which in
the former is called the "action de grace." This is followed
in Northern Haiti by the calls to the twins (marassa) and Legba
who must be the first god to be propitiated. The Houngan then,
through songs, a bell,and a whistle,calls upon the gods to
appear. After their arrival they are fed (food and offerings
having been prepared before the ceremony) and they then make
their specific complaints and grievances against the family
known. During the ceremony, sacrifical animals are killed
and cooked. The Vodun dance, on the other hand, appears to
be a sociable affair to which the gods come merely to dance.
It does not appear to have the specific function of propiat-
ing or placating them. The dance generally begins after

21. <u>Ibid</u>., p. 92.

sundown and ends at daybreak, whereas the family ceremony lasts for two days and nights, often followed by the more public dance. In Trinidadian Shango and the Brazilian ceremonies, this division into sacred family rites and public dances is not found. The Shango feast as described above is the only ceremony which takes place and the same pattern of events is repeated at every feast.

Since the culminating act of the Shango feast--the possession by the gods--is of such major importance, not only to the ceremony, but also as a major determinant of the degree of prestige accorded to the horse, a somewhat detailed description of it will follow in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

THE SHANGO GROUP: POSSESSION, COSMOLOGY, AND DEITIES

Despite the many published reports on various aspects of
the Afro-American cult ritual and belief, detailed accounts of
the possession experience are notably lacking. Herskovits in
his studies of Brazil,[1] Haiti[2] and the Shouter ritual in
Trinidad,[3] as well as in his book, The Myth of the Negro
Past[4] repeatedly emphasizes the importance of possession.
Pierson,[5] Ramos,[6] Simpson[7] and others all make mention of
possession, but not in any great detail.

In view of the dearth of material which exists on
possession and also because, as we will show in later chap-
ters, possession plays a crucial role in determining the
degree to which prestige is accorded to a person within the
group, we will present a concrete illustration of one example
of spirit possession. Then we shall describe some of the
specific behaviors which are typically found during possession.
Next, Shango cosmology will be discussed and some comparisons
with Haiti and Brazil will be made. Finally, we shall de-
scribe the deities of the Shango group.

1. M. J. Herskovits, "The Southernmost Outposts of New World
Africanisms," American Anthropologist, v. 45, 1943.
2. Herskovits, op. cit.
3. Trinidad Village, N. Y. 1947
4. New York, 1941
5. Pierson, op. cit.
6. Ramos, op. cit.
7. Simpson, op. cit.

Possession

A concrete description of one example of spirit pos-
session is offered to illustrate some of the physical mani-
festations of this kind of behavior. A fairly typical case
in Trinidad's Shango Cult is "Tanti" under possession by
Ogun-St. Michael.[8]

Illustration

Tanti, when not in possession, is a powerfully built,
yet fairly short, heavy-set woman in her middle forties.
Her skin color is medium brown, her hair is short and kinky
and generally covered by a head tie. Nothing in her behav-
ior when in the nonpossessed state, particularly distinguishes
her from other Trinidadian women of her age and class. She
appears to be a pleasant-mannered, verbal, intelligent, and
highly active person.

When the "spirit begins to manifest on" or "catch"
Tanti, a dramatic physical transformation takes place. If
in a standing position, she staggers, appears to lose her
balance, begins to sway, bending her body forward and back-
ward rhythmically, she may fall either to the ground or into
the arms of bystanders. Her entire body begins to vibrate
while her arms are either rigidly at her sides or out-
stretched above her. Her legs are planted widely apart and
she may lurch back and forth from toe to heel. The

8. Compare with A. Carr, "A Rada Possession," _Caribbean
Quarterly_, in press.

vibrations increase in intensity and somewhat resemble the convulsions of a seizure state. At the same time, she emits deep grunts and groans. Her jaw begins to protrude, her lips pout and turn down sharply at the corners, her eyes dilate and stare ahead fixedly. An expression of masculinity and fierceness envelops her face. She rises from the ground, or breaks away from her supporters. She dresses herself, or is dressed by others, into the costume and implements appropriate to the power possessing her. (In this case, as Ogun-St. Michael, she dons a red head tie and waistband and selects a cutlass or sword and bottles of olive oil as her implements.) In the standing position her stomach and pelvis are thrust forward, her head and shoulders are thrown back, legs planted firmly and wide apart in front of her, hands on hips. The entire posture is quite rigid. (At this point the spectators recognize that full possession by the particular power has occurred. From then on the person is possessed, the "horse," becomes identified with the power and is referred to, and behaved towards as such.)

The particular gait and/or dance as well as other behaviors which follow are to some degree prescribed for the particular power who is manifesting and varies considerably both for the different powers and within the varying interpretations given by different persons to the same powers. In Tanti's behavior as Ogun, the gait is slow; as each leg is extended there is a momentary rest on the toes

or ball of the foot, a swaying of the leg, and finally a
heavy step as the weight is placed on the heel of the foot.
Throughout, the fixed stare is retained in the eyes.

Range of Behavior under Possession: The "Work" of the Powers

The specific behaviors which a particular power may
engage in cover an extremely wide range.   The power may talk
in a mixture of Patois, English and nonsense syllables.   For
example: "bon soir tout monde . . . good, good, people me
say Hildy big Shango woman . . . ooh . . . ooh . . . must
live clean . . . bon, bon."   The power may stalk about,
interspersed with dancing to the drums when they are present
as at a feast, "work" with implements, e.g., brandishing a
sword or pouring oil, do divining, deliver messages, give
advice and prescribe medicines.   The particular activities
vary with the power, the individual under possession, and
the circumstances during which possession occurs (e.g., a
formal ceremony, a private meeting in the chapelle or church,
within one's home, etc.).   At a formal feast some powers may
manifest very violently, hurling their "horses" to the ground
and "making them" roll or writhe in the dust or dance with
great agitation and force.   Others may manifest very gently
and behave benignly, greeting individuals in a friendly way
by name, extending suggestions, questioning about health.
Some require the undivided attention of the entire audience
and engage in activities requiring the participation of
everyone.   Others do their "work" unobtrusively and

inconspicuously in some corner simultaneously with the more
dominant activities of other powers. Although each power
is characterized by a more or less unique pattern of behav-
iors, these are sufficiently broad in range to permit
virtually any interpretation or enactment by a specific
"horse" within a particular manifestation. Thus, although
there is a good deal of similarity in the behavior of the
same "power" when manifested by different individuals,
there is also a good deal of variety in such interpretations
and in the various interpretations of the same power by the
horse at different times.

Range of Occurrence

Within one Shango ceremony in Trinidad any number of
possessions from none to twenty and more may occur within
the same night. For a person who regularly attends cere-
monies, possession may never occur within his lifetime or
it may occur as often as five or more times within the same
night. The same person may be possessed repeatedly by the
same power or by different powers at different times or by
different manifestations of the same power. The age of
those experiencing possession ranges from 16-65. (Although
stories were told of little children in possession no exam-
ples of this were seen.) The vast majority of active
participants in possession are between 25-45 years of age.
The majority of persons who experience possession are women;

the male-female ratio is approximately one to three. A comparable sex ratio holds for those attending ceremonies without undergoing possession. The temporal duration of possession may be as brief as a few moments. It is then referred to as "overshadowing" and shows only some of the characteristics described earlier. If such "overshadowing" is excluded the approximate range of duration becomes ten minutes to five or more hours, with an average of somewhat less than one hour. Some of the more active participants may go from possession to possession, with variability in the particular power who is "manifesting," interspersed only by brief respites, for the entire duration of a four-day ceremony.

Induction of Possession. Immediate Factors

Of the numerous factors most immediately and directly involved in the induction of possession the categorization into "falling with or without the drums" is most commonly made by the participants. "Falling with (or to) the drums" refers to possession in response to, or in the presence of, drumming. The latter is an integral part of formal cere-monies. The drumming, in combination with the crowd excite-ment, singing, darkness, candles, circular rhythmic dancing, and other ceremonial aspects, engenders a situational atmos-phere in which possession has become the expected, desired, and usual behavior. This is by far the most common immediate

stimulus setting for possession. "Falling to the drums"
occurs at the regularly scheduled "feasts" or "sacrifices"
and it is here that the less active followers as well as
the more dominant leaders have the opportunity to "manifest
the powers."

In addition to individual responses in the form of
possession behavior to the drumming at ceremonies, the
power may be "passed on" from person to person at the feast.
Thus, those already in possession may approach bystanders
and rub their heads, faces, chests, and arms, pour oil on
them, pick them up and hurl them in the air. Or, the pos-
sessee may spin onlookers by the waist, starting them in a
whirling circular motion. Behaviors of this kind serve as
the final inducement to possession.

Possession without the stimulation of drumming and
formal ceremony is much more rare and almost completely
restricted to the leaders and dominant followers. Within
this prestigeful group possession may take place at any
time and in almost any setting. The following situations
are some examples of the more usual settings within which
this occurs.

Dreams and visions may serve as the immediate stimulus.
The person may report these, or the interpretation of these
through the power possessing him at a time period rapidly
following his dream or vision experience. Often the transi-
tion between a dream or vision and possession is extremely

short and one follows quickly from the other, the latter
serving apparently as an extension and expansion of the
former.

Possession is occasionally undergone by the leaders for
purposes of giving medication, advice, aid in recovering
lost objects and other such functions outside the context of
formal ceremonies. Virtually all of the leaders have regu-
larly scheduled days and times during which these functions
are performed for the multitudes who seek out their help
and services. On such occasions the leaders are sometimes,
at least for brief periods, said to be in "power." The
behaviors involved in this manifestation of power are,
however, quite different from those observed in connection
with possession in response to drumming. Here, on the
whole, there is much less motor activity and frequently a
less dramatic facial and behavioral change. Usually there
is some dilation of the eyes and changes in speech are less
marked and the utterances are mostly in English and primarily
coherent. Persons who are recognized as being in "power"
under this condition are said to have a "special gift." In
practice, all of the "old heads" and leaders are credited
with this gift. Indeed, the value attributed to this kind
of possession is much higher than that of the more active
possession at ceremonials. Leaders who have the gift are
said to be able to "get power" at any time in view of their
constant close association and communication with the powers.

They "just concentrate" or "look for a time at the (statue of the) saint." There is some question in the minds of the cult followers regarding the nature of this kind of power. Some appear to interpret the leader as actually being in power or possessed at such times. Others seem to feel that the leader is "still himself" but by virtue of his "gift" is "always close to the powers," and thus able to be in touch with them, to communicate with them and to interpret their wishes by means of readings of the obi seeds without under- going possession.

Another important stimulus situation for the induction of possession is a crisis in the life of the "horse." Thus, when confronted by serious problems in the marital situation, other interpersonal situations, difficult decisions, in- volvement in court cases or other severely frustrating or conflict-producing events, the person is apt to experience possession. At such times particular emphasis is placed on the messages and advice delivered by the power through the "horse" as reported and reconstructed by whatever audience is present at the time of the manifestation.

Finally, a form of possession which occurs with some frequency is known as were.[9] Persons in this state are

[9] This occurs also in Brazil. "As has been indicated else- where, some of the most revealing findings of this period of field work . . . include details of the way in which a pos- sessed person returns to his normal state. He does this by passing through a condition called ére, a type of semi- possession described as 'the childishness that goes with every god.'" M. J. Herskovits, Ibid., p. 505. In Trinidad this same phenomenon is called were and does not necessarily have to follow a possession.

considered to be "messengers of the powers." This behavior involves a half-way state between full possession and normal behavior and a high degree of consciousness is retained. It is marked by disobeying ceremonial regulations, e.g., smoking, swearing, mocking sacred places by spitting on the tombs of the powers and the like. The individual's behavior becomes extremely childish. He may speak with a marked lisp, wet or soil himself, and use extremely vulgar language and gestures. He is treated tolerantly by onlookers, as one treats a naughty and prankish, but loved, child. One person, for example, in this state maintained that he had just landed from "New York Thity" and his plane was parked outside the gate. All available females were cordially invited to examine the inside of the plane with him. (This invitation invoked gales of hysterical laughter from all present.) Were' possession may or may not follow actual possession. Most often, a person who has just been strongly possessed will manifest a were', but many cases were also observed where the were' persons had not undergone a previous possession.

Although were' is termed a messenger, he delivers no actual messages. The term indicates that a power sent the were' in his place since the former was too "busy to stay." Most were' possessions occur at the end of a feast after the drumming and dancing has ceased and promote a gay and light-hearted atmosphere.

Levels of Possession

The level of possession, or the depth, degree or involvement, amount of loss of control and consciousness, intensity of the behaviors, etc., is by no means constant, both among different persons and within the same person. At times the experience appears to consist of merely a brief "overshadowing" or momentary loss of control. On other occasions, the involvement is much more intense and includes an almost total and prolonged loss of consciousness and of many controls over motor behavior. However, even in the most extreme examples observed, sufficient consciousness and control seemed to be retained to permit the individual to behave without injury to self and others, e.g., without stumbling over interfering objects, or mishandling the implements in use such as the cutlass or sword. Further the possessed person appears to recognize those about him and may refer to them by name and make references to known past experiences. He may also refer to himself by his secular name and allude to aspects of his daily life. Sometimes content previously privately expressed in the normal state is publicly reiterated or rephrased under possession. It should be emphasized, thus, that possession does not appear to be an all-or-none process, utterly separated from the person's usual state. Rather, an extension and distortion of everyday behaviors seems to be involved and possession behavior cannot be rigidly dichotomized from

the person's secular roles. It would appear more useful to deal with the different levels of involvement in possession rather than possession versus normality.

Recovery from Possession

There is some degree of variability in the manner of ending possession. Most frequently a possessed person spins rapidly while standing in one place and suddently falls to the ground. Onlookers immediately rush to his assistance and he is aided to a seat and water is placed to his lips. In a very few moments he regains command of himself and possession is over. At times, a very gradual ceasing of activity, accompanied by shaking of the head from side to side, or holding the head in the hands, indicates the end of possession. Although recovery from possession occurs most often in the palais, some persons, either alone or aided by others run to the chapelle where they lie down on the floor and await the "power's going back." Occasionally, a person leaves the palais in order not to hear the drums, or he may signal the drums to stop so that the power will leave. In such instances, this is interpreted as the power's refusal to stay at the feast because of activities which disturb him, or he is said to be "too busy" to remain. After possession, the person has seemingly no conscious memory of the experience.

Shango Cosmology

The above pictures the gods as they are in possession
of their horse, but how do Shango members visualize the
powers when not on earth possessing their bodies?

The gods or powers with whom the Shango cult or "orisha
workers," as they prefer to be called, deal inhabit the
heavens and are accordingly called "heavenly powers."
Other powers exist, but these are the powers of darkness
and evil and inhabit the "nether" regions. These powers
are called by various names, Prince of Darkness, Skull and
Crossbones, being a few. Occasionally during a feast such
an evil spirit may appear despite the fact that he has not
been summoned. These evil spirits are then exorcised by
the major heavenly powers, usually Ogun-St. Michael. Groups
working with these supposed evil powers exist in Port-of-
Spain and are greatly feared.

The powers are conceived as leading ordinary lives in
heaven. Indeed, it seemed that the powers are looked upon
as if they lived on earth, "always around working." While
theoretically, they live in heaven, the concept of heaven
as a home for the powers is vague and nebulous. The powers
may arrive with or without being summoned, especially in
the latter case, when they have "work to do." The nature
of this work, aside from dancing at feasts, appears to be
diagnosing and suggesting cures for ills and delivering
messages to "warn of something going to happen." The spe-
cific behavior of a power is said to be a function of what

activity he or she was engaged in at the time of being summoned. For example, if Ebejee-St. Peter calls for a dagger when he arrives this means that he has just been fishing or cleaning fish. If, however, he calls for a key, he has just been opening or closing the heavenly gates. Similarly, Ogun-St. Michael will call for a cutlass if he has merely been protecting heaven and his dancing and activity will be relatively subdued. If he has been fighting he will call for a sword and dance violently and behave aggressively.

The powers can manifest on any person. Generally a "horse" will have one or two special patrons who <u>regularly</u> manifest upon him. (Indeed, a power is recognized after his arrival not so much by his behavior, but by the regularity of the manifestation upon the same horse.) The powers are free to choose their horses and very frequently individuals become "overshadowed" with powers. They do not fall into the deep trancelike state of active possession but may become dizzy, fall down, or shake violently for a few moments and then return to normal. When this occurs it is said to be a power trying to find a horse to settle upon. This may happen, for example, to two or three persons at the same time and then a fourth suddenly becomes completely possessed. In order to receive a power the horse must be "living clean." By this is meant sexual abstention and no drinking two to three days prior to and during the feast and a generally religious and nonevil outlook. Rejected

individuals, i.e., those who do not "catch power" are assumed to have lived "unclean" and are considered "not proper horses."

At the time of first possession, or when a person first "falls under a power," the leader of the palais in which this event takes place interprets to the new horse the name of the god who possesses him. The behavior of a newly possessed person is erratic. For example, he may call for several conflicting implements or use different dance steps. When this occurs, it is said that several powers are competing for the new horse. A newly possessed person, not having learned to control his body adequately, is apt to hurt himself while under possession. There appear to be no special initiation rites as found in Brazil and Haiti.

The powers are said to come in three's. Thus, for example, three individuals may simultaneously be possessed by Shango-St. John. However, each is possessed by a different form of St. John, e.g., the Baptist, the Evangelist, and the Cross. While, theoretically, this is supposed to occur with all powers, it was noted that only John and Francis have multiple manifestations, as might be expected in view of the fact that several saints bearing these names are particularly well known. The dead are not worshipped by this group. Ancestor spirits and special family duties found in Haiti and Brazil play no role in this group.

The majority of Orisha workers have little knowledge concerning the African origins of the powers. The major

leaders and a handful of active participants are able to cite
African names; the rest seem more comfortable referring to and
following the Catholic saints. Informants spontaneously talk
about the saints rather than the African gods.

On the whole, the gods are considered to be friendly
beings (with the exception of the Devil, whose presence is
never summoned and who never, supposedly, makes a voluntary
appearance), whose sole function is to aid man. They do not
especially require attention other than the annual feasts
given by each leader. Similarly, there is no feeling on the
part of Shango members that the gods will become malicious
if neglected. Man has no responsibilities or obligations
towards the gods other than the annual feast which leaders
claim they "must give or the powers don't help you no more."
This, as will be seen below, seems similar to the Brazilian
cults but is in striking contrast to Haitian Vodun.

Haiti and Brazil: Comparison

A striking difference between Vodun and Trinidadian
Shango regards the conceptions of the gods as held by cult
members. In Haiti, according to Simpson:

> Most of the loas (Vodun gods) are believed to be
> capable of both friendly and hostile actions towards
> men, but a few gods are thought to be wholly mali-
> cious. The dead, as well as the loas, punish men
> for violating the mores and for failing to live up
> to their ceremonial obligations, but one can pardon
> and secure the aid of the dead and the loas through
> the prescribed offerings and rites.[10]

10. Simpson, op. cit. "Discussion," p. 150.

The individual has strong obligations to his loa which eventually must be fulfilled. Similarly, an individual through a series of specific rituals learns to control his god so that "the gods, if properly under control, are permitted to come only to members of the family giving the rite."[11] This element of control is lacking in Trinidad and any god, theoretically, is allowed to come at any feast. (Whether or not he will be recognized depends to a large extent upon the position of the horse rather than the actual god possessing the horse.) Some of these specific differences may be related to the different purposes of the ceremonies, e.g., in Vodun, the division between family rites and the public dances each having specific purpose, whereas in Trinidad only one kind of ceremony takes place and its function seems primarily to summon the gods to "dance and work."

In Vodun, the gods seem to be conceptualized much more concretely. Each god seems to have a specific identity. In Trinidad, the gods and their horses are closely related and much of the identity of an individual god is dependent upon the interpretations given by his chief horses. Despite the fact that there are certain ritualized behaviors appropriate to each god (see below), the behavior of two people possessed by the same god often shows as much variation as does behavior under possession by two different gods.

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11. Herskovits, Life in a Haitian Valley, p. 148.

In the case study quoted by Pierson,[12] it appears as if the Candomble members also have specific obligations towards the gods. A young woman, describing aspects of Candomble worship, says "My sister she died, burned up . . . . He who killed her is Oxossi . . . . She burned to death because she disobeyed him. He sent a message and she paid no attention to it . . . . But before she died, he 'arrived' and said it was he who had set fire to the _saveiro_ /sailboat/. When one doesn't carry out his obligations, the _orixa_ takes his life."[13] Similarly, the _filhas de santo_ must perform certain ritualistic acts, "rigorously observe certain food, drink, and sex taboos, and wear a special costume on ceremonial occasions."[14]

Shango Deities

We will end our description of the Shango group by presenting a list of the major deities worshipped, their characteristics, sacred foods, days, implements and colors.

Ogun

Christian Counterpart: St. Michael.
Characteristics: god of war and iron; highest deity in the Shango pantheon since he is the "chief angel." He is so powerful that "he can move mountains." Ogun is generally the first power to arrive and it is said that no power can arrive before him at a feast. In practice, however, another power can arrive first but the reason is then given that Michael used this other power as a messenger, being too busy to come himself. His behavior is generally aggressive; he does a good deal of violent dancing, using large steps, with his hands on his hips. Much of his time is spent in

13. _Ibid._, pp. 266-67.
14. _Ibid._, p. 287.

diagnosing ailments and solving problems.
He uses great quantities of olive oil which
he distributes as blessings or scatters
about the "palais." He most frequently
"manifests" on large, stout women.
Implement: cutlass; sword when angry.
Color: red, white. Day: Wednesday.
Food: goat, black eyed peas, rice, corn,
rum.

Osain

Christian Counterpart: St. Francis.
Characteristics: god of the jungle and
bush, an herbalist or "bush doctor." He
has three manifestations: Osain Kiribejii,
identified as St. Francis of Assissi; Osain
Demolay, identified as St. Francis Xavier;
and Osain Metaphy who is known simply as
St. Francis. He is a quiet power. One
form of Francis dances bent at the waist,
using a slow shuffle step. Another walks
on his toes, sometimes with a candle lit at
both ends clamped between his teeth. Occa-
sionally, he throws himself to the ground
and rolls on the earth. He "manifests" on
both men and slim, young women.
Implement: pessie (thick vine); "checheray
broom"; lance; turtle carapace. For Osain
Kiribejii; "checkeray broom"; Osain Demolay;
cross; Osain Metaphi: candle lit at both
ends in mouth.
Color: yellow. Day: Thursday. Food:
Muracoy (land turtle), black eyed peas,
rice, corn.

Aireelay
(Ajaja)

Christian Counterpart: "St." Jonah.
Characteristics: "master of the sea." He
has two names because Jonah "died twice."
He is revered as a "grim, serious man, no
time for play." He paces back and forth
with his hands on his hips or behind his
back. When he dances, he throws his feet
forward and spins on one heel. He is very
authoritative and generally delivers a
sermon or gives various orders, e.g., to
clean the "palais." He is called by many
"the crab." Only three Aireelay "horses"
were observed, two men and one woman.
(Part of the reverence and fear which this
power inspires is due to the fact that the
chief Shango leader throughout Trinidad is
an "Aireelay horse.")

Implement: bamboo rod called "roseau"; dagger; great deal of olive oil.
Color: blue, mauve belt. Day: Thursday.
Food: guinea bird, black eyed peas, rice, corn.

Shakpana
(Zewo, although the latter is sometimes considered to be the son of Shakpana and identified with St. Vincent de Paul)

Christian Counterpart: St. Jerome.
Characteristics: This power "gets rid of evil and disease." He does little dancing, his activity is confined to pacing about swishing his broom. When he "manifests" upon a woman, a red dress is worn. This is tied between the legs to form trousers. He is feared by some people because of his connection with disease, evil and prophecy. Implement: "checheray broom"
Color: red. Day: none. Food: cock, pidgeon, black eyed peas, rice, corn.

Shango

Christian Counterpart: St. John the Baptist.
Characteristics: He is the god of lightening and thunder. He does little in the ritual other than dancing actively. He uses large steps and waves his arms, swinging his axe above his head. He is the only power who is "fed." At odd intervals, Friday night, 24 small bits of cotton are rolled to form small balls, put on a plate, drenched with olive oil and lighted. The power then swallows this mixture. Only one specific Shango "horse" performs this feat currently.
Implement: axe, pessie, cross. For Shango (John the Baptist) axe; Allado (John the Evangelist) pessie; Amado Shango (John of the Cross) cross.
Color: white, red, Day: Friday. Food: Sheep, black eyed peas, rice, corn.

Aba Koso

Christian Counterpart: St. John the Baptist after beheading. Characteristics: The activity of this power is limited to pacing and stamping about with hands on hips. He grunts and groans continually, all the while shaking his head which is thrown back. The grunting indicates that he has no head and is thus unable to talk. This makes him seem angry and "vexed" and he is often not taken seriously by other people. Only two people, both young men, were observed to be Aba Koso "horses."
Implement: usually none, sometimes the axe. Color: red. Day: Friday. Food: usually no sacrifice.

Aba Lofa or Elofa Christian Counterpart: Eternal Father or
"God himself." Characteristics: This
power is another patron of the chief Shango
leader and is much revered. He comes only
at this leaders' own feast since the latter
is the only known Aba Lofa Horse in Trinidad.
Occasionally, if at another feast, a cattle
has been sacrificed and if the big leader
is present, Aba Lofa may "manifest" upon
him. This power does not "manifest"
suddenly but comes with a slow gradual
shaking of the head. This becomes faster
and faster, the hands are clasped and eyes
closed. As the power comes the "horse"
rises but keeps the hands clasped and the
eyes closed. The power is an old man and
must walk slowly and haltingly, sometimes
with a cane. He dresses in white trousers,
white shirt, white headband and a white bed
sheet which is draped over the shoulders
to form a cloak. He dances slowly, manip-
ulating the cloak about him and holds a
freshly killed cattle head on his own head.
After a while, he holds the cattle head in
the crook of his arm and dabs blood on the
heads of all people present as a blessing.
He also holds a ritual for children, which
generally takes place on the third evening,
Huge loaves of specially baked bread are
brought out of the Chapelle and are distrib-
uted in small pieces by Aba Lofa to all
children present.
Implement: stick or cane, cattle head, 3
candles, bottle of oil. Color: white.
Day: Monday or Tuesday. Food; beef or
sometimes a whole cattle, black eyed peas,
rice, corn.

Omira Christian Counterpart: St. Raphael.
Characteristics: This power is sacred to
hunters and is more important as a chief
archangel than as a hunter. He does little
dancing, but generally walks about carrying
a wooden gun. He dresses in a pink and
lilac colored dress, carrying a hamsack
"for his lunch," over his shoulder and
sometimes a "flambeau," a candle in his
hand, since "hunters need a light."
Implement: gun, candle, hamsack. Color:
pink and lilac. Day: Wednesday. Food:
fowl, black eyed peas, rice, corn.

Ebejee

Christian Counterpart: St. Peter.
Characteristics: He is a fisherman. As is
the case with Raphael, he is more important
in Christian terms than as an African deity.
He is especially revered by one of the
leaders who calls Peter her chief patron.
She is the only individual who manifested
this power.
Implement: keys, dagger, may wear a crown
of leaves on head. Color: red, yellow,
mauve. Day: none. Food: drake, black
eyed peas, rice, corn.

Yemanja
(Amanja, Manja)

Christian Counterpart: St. Anne.
Characteristics: Is a water power and lives
in the sea. This power is either "saintly,"
e.g., simply walks about praying and bless-
ing people or quite actively going through
the maneuvers of rowing a boat. This is
done by sitting on the ground and sliding
across it while at the same time, she
carries a calabash of water in one hand and
a "pa-gye" or oar with which she imitates
the motion of rowing in the other. Yemanja
is considered to be one of the most power-
ful of the female deities.
Implements: oar, calabash of water.
Color: blue and white. Day: Thursday.
Food: duck, pullet, peas, rice.

Oya

Christian Counterpart: St. Catherine.
Characteristics: She "lives in the air and
comes with the breeze." Oya is closely
identified with Shango and some individuals
speak of them as married. She does a good
deal of vigorous dancing, which looks very
similar to the dancing of Shango and occa-
sionally holds her left ear when dancing.
This is interpreted as "listening to the
breeze."
Implement: hatchet. Color: green, red.
Day; Friday. Food: fowl, pidgeon, peas,
rice and corn. (the only female power who
is offered corn, but her active vigorous
behavior resembles that of the masculine
powers more so than that of the females).

Oshun

Christian Counterpart: St. Philomen.
Characteristics: This deity is a river
goddess and "lives in the river." Her
dancing is very delicate and often she

balances a filled goblet (pottery jug) of water on her head without a head pad and dances with it for as long as 30 minutes without spilling its contents. At special river ceremonies, Oshun wades into the water and offers food to the river. She is considered by some to be the female counterpart of Aireelay.
Implement: anchor, goblet. Color: blue and white. Day: Thursday. Food: fowl, pidgeon, black eyed peas, rice.

Omela
(Mama Latay)

Christian Counterpart: Mother of the Earth. This deity is supposed to accompany Ogun-St. Michael, and is generally sung to after Ogun. She does not dance but sits on her knees and slides across the floor distributing water in a calabash to the people present and to the four corners of the "palais." She is supposedly an old, stooped woman.
Implement: calabash of water. Color: brown. Day: Wednesday. Food: ground provisions (potatoes, etc.).

Lesser known powers or those who "manifest" rarely are

listed below:

Bayanni (St. Anthony) Implement: three candles, bottle of oil.

Oromeelay (St. Joseph) Implement: carpenter square.

Mayadu (St. Theresa) Implement: crucifix, flowers. Color: brown, blue.

Da Lua (St. Jude).

Da Logee (St. Simon). These two (Da Lua and Da Logee) are "twins."

Obatala (Mary).

Abatala (Jesus).

Zooah (St. Benedict).

Ojah (St. Mark).

Ajakba (Mother of all Nations).

Mahabil (St. Michael). This power is recognized by only one Shango leader who calls him the "Indian King." He was an Indian god who was met by Christ in India and baptized as St. Michael. In behavior he is similar to Ogun, uses the sword or cutlass and dresses similarly. He has an altar and a "tomb" in the establishment of this one leader, but is not recognized outside of her immediate circle.

CHAPTER VI

PRESTIGE ATTAINMENT IN THE SHANGO GROUP

Thus far, we have suggested that there are few or no avenues sanctioned by the larger society which are available to the lower class Negro for the attainment of prestige in the larger society. In examining potential avenues for enhancing the prestige accorded to one by and within the lower class, we have indicated that, of the four potential pathways, religion appears to be the most crucial. Within the larger area of religious organizations, we have focused our attention on the Shango group as an example of one such potential channel for the attainment of prestige within the lower class. The Shango group has been described in detail and compared with other related groups. We have also indicated in Chapter IV that a prestige hierarchy seems to exist within the group itself. Thus, prestige attainment within the group is not uniform, i.e., some individuals are considered to be very important (those in the first subgroup), while others appear to receive very little recognition (those in the third or low prestige group). That is, the potential for prestige attainment within the group seems to be realized by some, but not by others. We may demonstrate the fact that prestige attainment is not uniform, but rather, that it is dramatically uneven in the group, by presenting two illustrations. These clearly seem to show two different patterns of behavior. The first, "Hildy," is an example of the behavior of a person

accorded high prestige. The second, "Anna," is an example of
the behavior of a person accorded little prestige. Since
prestige disparities are most obvious when the person is
possessed, both examples show behavior under possession.
Discussion will be deferred until both illustrations have
been presented. After showing that not all members of this
group attain high prestige, we will then consider the condi-
tions and limiting factors which seem to account for this.
A discussion of these relevant conditions will be the major
aim of this chapter. First, however, we will present the
illustrations.

A. Hildy: High Prestige

At about 1:30 p.m., Hildy became possessed by Ogun-St.
Michael. (Up to the time of her possession, she had been
exceedingly quiet, spending most of her time sitting in the
palais.) Possession took place very rapidly and quite
suddenly Hildy fell to the ground, arms and legs thrashing
wildly. She quickly rose and one of the onlooking women
tied the red scarf of Ogun about her head. Hildy glared at
the woman for several seconds and ripped the scarf from her
head, threw it to the ground and stamped on it. She made the
motion for the cutlass and immediately one was brought and
presented to her. She began a violent and active dance in
the palais, swinging the cutlass, which she had doused in
olive oil, rapidly about her head. After this she rushed

into the chapelle, knelt, and seemed to pray silently in front of the Altar of Ogun. She rushed back into the palais, where people had stopped all activity, waiting for her. The drums continued, and singing to Ogun took place. Hildy then fell to her knees in front of Mr. E., who was standing, and rubbed her head and cheek against his thighs, stomach and groin. She then took the cutlass and thrashed it (rather menacingly) in front of him, all the while mumbling and seemingly giving orders to a group of servants who constantly hovered close to her. She then lined up Tanti, Mr. E., and Mother B. (a huge, stout woman) so that one stood next to the other. Following a signal with her hand, the three spread their legs, while she crawled through them. This feat resulted in some suppressed laughter from the onlookers which Hildy angrily silenced. For the next half hour or so Hildy continued to give orders at an astoundingly rapid rate. She moved people from their seats (including the observer) and made them sit elsewhere. She ordered at least six different calabashes containing water, flour, and other ingredients and threw them to the floor. She ordered different cutlasses to be brought to her and a variety of other implements, normally associated with different gods. Her possession was so active that it virtually stopped the possession activity of others. She had complete control of the situation, keeping several persons constantly busy, fulfilling her orders. Her possession dominated the entire scene, despite the fact that two possessions

were also taking place. After some more dancing and running
about, Hildy verbally ordered Mr. E., Tanti (in possession by
Shakpana-St. Jerome), Mother B., and two servants of the
powers to line up single file. The group slowly moved out of
the palais, with Hildy at the head of the procession, past
the house and up to the small enclosure in which the tombs
of the saints are located. She carried candles and calabashes
and Tanti swished a "che'che'ray" broom (made from coconut
fibers) in front of her, and to clear the way for her. When
they reached the tombs they proceeded to go through a variety
of rituals which were difficult to observe. The members of
the little group seemed to be pouring water from bottles into
calabashes onto each others hands, foreheads, and heads in
what appeared to be blessings, washing the cutlass in the
fluid from one of the calabashes, joining hands, bowing in
front of the tomb of Ogun-St. Michael, and waving the candles
up and down. All this seemed to be done at the express wishes
of Hildy. These proceedings at the tombs continued for about
twenty minutes. Then Hildy came running out, motioning to
the others to follow her, and they did so. When they reached
the gate, she ordered one of the servants to place a candle
in the ground. As the ground was hard, he had difficulty in
doing so and Hildy, impatient and scowling, hurriedly dug a
hole with her cutlass and placed the candle into it. Next
she ordered Mr. E. to pour oil around it making such comments
as "quick, quick, good, candle, light." Then apparently

satisfied, she began to leave the entrance of the compound, returning to the tomb still followed by Mr. E. and the rest. From the tomb she went back into the palais, with the procession still following behind her doing her bidding. The The procession then returned into the palais within which the bulk of the audience had remained, the drummers beating the drums, and apparently awaiting the return of the leaders. As they returned a very rapid transition began to take place in the palais. The activities reached a very high pitch, in which Hildy, dancing still as Ogun, began to wave red scarfs about her head. She summoned for more scarfs and began to distribute them. As she did so, she put her hands around the waist of various people, and whirled them rapidly around in something that looked (and was later confirmed) as though she were trying to impart the power to them. Many people began to whirl, dance, fall, waving red scarfs over their heads, with Hildy urging them on. At this point, approximately 25 to 30 people were dancing, whirling, and rolling on the floor, waving red scarfs with the drums at an extremely rapid tempo and an atmosphere of fervent excitement and abandon characterizing the activities.

At points throughout her possession, Hildy appeared to act quite normally. Her posture was normal and she did not, except occasionally, go through the radical physical transformation which generally characterizes possession. She also came out of possession rather differently, simply stopping in

the middle of a dance, shaking her head several times and returning completely to normal within seconds. Her possession lasted a little more than two hours.

B. Anna: Low Prestige

At an early point in the same evening a woman known as Anna suddenly jumped from her seat and began dancing slowly. Tanti, observing this, ran over to the woman and slashed her several times with her broom and forcefully pushed her back onto the bench. The woman's activity subsided and she sat quietly and unobtrusively. One half hour later, Anna again jumped up and began some typical possession behaviors. This time she was able to continue. Her behavior was erratic and seemingly out of control. She showed the signs of several different gods in rapid succession, but the gods did not stay with her for any length of time. She rapidly switched from one god's pattern to another, but she did not call for the various implements associated with these different powers. She was possessed for a total period of one and a half hours. During this time she remained in the palais, constantly walked about, and occasionally broke into spurts of dancing. She often held her head in her hands, as if it were terribly heavy, and once in a great while, she stamped her feet. She ordered no one about and no servant of the powers waited upon her. She called for no implements or colored head scarfs. In short, she was quite inactive and remained passively in one corner

of the palais for the most part. For a while we doubted the genuineness of her possession, but we were assured by others that she was considered possessed, although not by any one god for any length of time. Perhaps more striking than her behavior (or lack of it) was the fact that no one in the audience, not the other possessed powers, paid the slightest bit of attention to her. She was totally ignored despite her seemingly genuine possession. These two very different behavior patterns lead to the central question of this chapter. What are the conditions which seem to relate to attaining versus not attaining prestige within this group?[1,2]

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1. The absence of formal initiation rites in this group makes this question particularly important. We have already indicated that in both Vodun and the Candomble, the new member must go through a series of rigidly prescribed rituals before he can become a full-fledged member. In both, his position as a novice is clearly indicated; he has a name which indicates his status and in the latter, he wears a particular costume which further marks him as a novitiate. Since formally prescribed initiation activities do not characterize Trinidadian Shango, the position of a new member or of a nonimportant member is ambiguous. His lowly position is not clearly marked nor does he have any particular obligations. Thus, establishing himself as a full and actively participating member becomes exceedingly difficult and hinges upon his success in attracting attention to himself, or in other words, utilizing the means available within the group to increase his prestige. This holds for the person who already enters with some degree of importance. For the person who enters the group as an unknown the situation is even more difficult as we shall show below.
2. At this point we may raise the question of whether all Shango members strive for high prestige in the group. It will be shown in a later section that prestige striving seems to characterize the high and intermediate

It should be noted that there seems to be a parallel in this respect between the Shango group and the larger Trinidadian society. Just as color and ethnicity serve at least in part to automatically distinguish between the upper and lower strata of the society, there seem to be definite prerequisites here which the person must have before entering the group in order to gain even the realistic potential for attaining prestige within it.

We must distinguish between these prerequisites and the ways of attaining prestige for activities within the group itself. We shall first be concerned with the prerequisites for prestige attainment. Before doing so, however, we must further qualify our usage of prestige.

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prestige sub-groups (as delineated in Chapter IV), but does not appear to motivate most low prestige members, that is, the group of persons who merely attend as spectators. This raises the further question of whether Shango members join the group primarily in order to gain prestige. Do they expect and hope that they will be accorded high prestige in the group? We have indicated in Chapter I that prestige striving does appear to motivate at least some Shango members, but it is doubtful if they enter the group with this as a conscious and dominant aim. Shango people when explicitly asked will talk rather about the religious or spiritual value of Shango. While becoming a "big man" certainly appears to be of concern, this concern becomes crystallized after one has already actively participated in the group over a period of time. While the observer may make several interpretations here, it seems safest to speculate that the readily verbalized initial aim of joining Shango, is to participate in a spiritual group, one that is in close and constant communication with the powers.

The term prestige, as we have been using it thus far, refers to recognition accorded an individual within and by the society as a whole. In Chapter II we have further refined the term to distinguish the recognition accorded to an individual within and by his own class but not necessarily within and by the larger society. Such recognition can be gained, potentially, through participation in "lateral" activities (see Chapter I) such as religious groups, steel bands and the like. In the present chapter we shall consider ways through which recognition can be obtained within the Shango group itself.

Sometimes the attributes or activities for which prestige is accorded within the Shango group are equivalent with, or at least compatible with, those for which prestige is accorded in the rest of the lower class. That is, to some degree there is overlap in the attributes or activities for which prestige tends to be accorded within the Shango group and within the lower class. However, sometimes, at least as evaluated by some lower class non-Shango members, the attributes or activities for which prestige tends to be accorded in the group, including Shango membership itself, are not recognized and esteemed. This problem will be discussed in some detail in Chapter VIII. At this point we are only stressing the necessity for making a conceptual distinction between prestige as accorded within

the context of Shango and prestige as accorded by and within the larger lower class. (If one were to investigate other, non-Negro, segments of the lower class, further distinctions would obviously be necessary also.)

It should be clear that our reference group when referring to prestige accordation is now shifted to the Shango group and its members. The prerequisites refer to those attributes or activities which a person has outside the group and which are recognized and positively evaluated by Shango group members. This is similar to the amount of "social credit", or the marks in his favor which the person gains within the context of Shango as a function, for example, of being relatively wealthy. Similarly, if he comes from a Shango family, this is to his credit or in his favor in the eyes of the other group members and will permit him a variety of behaviors not permitted to members who lack this credit.

"Achieved prestige," in contrast, refers to the recognition a person is accorded through his own efforts within the group itself, independent of his money, family or the like outside the group. Relevant activities in this category are primarily possession experiences and, secondarily, drumming or other ways of "serving the gods." (The latter are secondary insofar as only a few persons fulfill these positions.) We must make clear that there is no qualitative difference between these prerequisites and

achieved prestige. These terms refer to two different
(but quite dependent) ways or means of securing recogni-
tion. In both cases, the recognition "value" is the same,
but the reasons for which this recognition is given are
different. In the first case, recognition is given as a
function of how group members perceive a person's position
or activities outside the group. On the other hand,
achieved prestige refers to the recognition an individual
gains for his own efforts within the group. Both are
accorded by the same reference group, the Shango members.

Before examining in some detail the specific ways in
which prestige can be attained, we must first discuss the
integral and dependent relationship between the prerequisites
for having prestige outside the group and achieved prestige
in the Shango group.

It is relatively impossible (or, at best, seemingly
very rare) for an individual to achieve recognition in
this group without entering it with some of the prerequisites
mentioned above. Here we may refer to the case of Anna
presented above. Anna is a fairly typical member of the
lowest prestige sub-group. She is virtually unknown in the
Shango group as a whole. She is neither wealthy nor does
she belong to any of the religious organizations with which
other members are familiar. Of more significance, however,
is the fact that she does not come from a known Shango family.

At several feasts she became intensely possessed by several different gods, yet her possessions passed almost unnoticed by other group members. Hildy, on the other hand, comes from a highly respected family and begins already as a prestigeful figure in the group. Achieving prestige is dependent upon having some ascribed prestige of social credit to begin with. This requires some further qualification.

In order to become a member of the prestigeful in-group, and this appears to be a motive for many members, a person must, through his own efforts, become a horse for one, or preferably more, gods. In other words, he must have intense and frequent possessions. Possession experiences then become the major means by which a person can maintain and preferably enhance his original position. Thus, a person who enters the group, coming from an important family, for example, and who does not undergo possession for some reason will not become a member of the highly influential in-group.

Both the person who already has ascriptive prestige (e.g., Hildy) and the person who has not (e.g., Anna) appear to be striving towards the same goal in the group. The former strives to enhance or increase the recognition accorded him and possibly to enter the highest prestige sub-group as well as to validate the credits which he already has. The latter strives to simply gain some

initial recognition. Both use the same mechanism, that of possession. Here, however, the similarity ends. The person who enters the group with some ascriptive prestige is ahead, so to speak, of the individual who enters as a relative unknown and must proceed on his own. The former's possessions are recognized and noticed; the latter's generally are not. The former person tends to be more spontaneous in his possession (and normal) behavior, whereas, in the latter case, behavioral inhibition tends to be more common. Anna, in her first possession attempt, was stopped physically by a leader. Low prestige persons tend to become possessed at a time when many leaders and other high prestige persons are also possessed and often become lost in the crowd. Some, like Anna, never leave the palais during possession. In contrast, the possessed person with some ascribed prestige or social credit has far greater freedom and often behaves in a manner similar to that of the leaders. Similarly, a person who already has considerable prestige accorded to him can be seen conversing readily with a possessed individual, whereas the person with less importance is quite hesitant to take such a major step and must be content to wait until the possessed addresses him. Further specific reference will be made to our illustrative cases of high and low prestige when the individual effects of having high prestige are discussed in the next chapter.

The prerequisites for entering the group and achieved prestige within the group appear to be necessary in order

for an individual to achieve a major power position within
the group. The person who lacks prestige by ascription,
may, in the long run, gain some recognition in the group and
become, at best, a member of the intermediate sub-group, but
it is most unlikely that he will become a member of the
highest prestige group. Achieving high prestige, then, seems
quite dependent upon initially meeting the ascriptive pre-
requisites or having the initial social credits. This
condition is reminiscent of the lighter-skinned lower class
person who, by virtue of his lighter skin color may manage
to achieve membership in the colored middle class by marriage,
may gain greater educational opportunity and the like.

We are not suggesting that group members have directly
or consciously incorporated the structure of their society.
Rather, we may tentatively speculate that the group mirrors
or reflects some of the important concerns and characteristics
of the society. Although there are definite ascriptive pre-
requisites for prestige attainment within this group, just
as there are within the larger society within which it is
found, there are some interesting and important differences.
In Chapter II it was suggested that the major prerequisites
for prestige attainment in the larger society are color and
ethnicity. In the Shango group, in contrast, color and
ethnicity are virtually uniform for all; blackness and
Trinidadian birth are universal. Thus, the two prerequisites
which are the major barriers to prestige attainment for the

Trinidadian Blacks in socially acceptable ways within the
larger society do not operate here. The question of whether
similar prestige concerns are found in Haitian and/or
Brazilian society and whether these concerns are also in
turn reflected within Vodun and the Candomble may be raised.
It appears, for example, that prestige does not seem to be
so important for Vodun members.[2] This issue will be further
discussed in a later section.

Let us now consider in greater detail the necessary
prerequisites for gaining initial recognition in the group
and the ways in which prestige can be achieved within the
group.

The Prerequisites for Initial Prestige

Many Shango members are related to each other. For
example, three or more members of a given family are often
Shango participants. In such instances, the family acquires
a reputation and prestige in the group. This is especially
so since one or more members of such a family is usually a

2. Simpson points out some of the advantages of Vodun in
terms of the condition of the Haitian peasantry. "The
untutored peasants of rural Haiti, living on a bare subsist-
ence level and constantly facing misfortune, feel that they
need all the help they can obtain to supplement their own
techniques and labors. But in addition to the utilitarianism
of Vodun, it has certain artistic and recreative aspects which
the peasants enjoy . . . . The magico-religious complex of
Vodun has been so elaborately developed, and has become so
closely related to everything in country life, that it cannot
be stamped out by decree or denunciation. Unless and until
there are changes in their economic, educational, and medical
situations, Vodun will continue to play an important role in
the lives of the Haitian peasantry." (op. cit., "Discussion,
p. 150-51)

leader of known repute. In view of this circumstance, a new member of such a well known family who enters the Shango ceremony does so with a certain amount of prestige already obtained through his or her family connections. In one such case, where a grandmother and her two daughters are active members, her young grandson entered as a drummer and, although inexperienced, he was allowed to play at a major ceremony. Similarly, his new wife was also rapidly accorded prestige and was one of the rare individuals to whom a great deal of attention was paid at the time of her first possession. These instances are examples of ascribed prestige.

Money is often another prerequisite. One person was fairly well respected in the group despite his infrequent possession. He was known to be a relatively prosperous small shopkeeper in the village. In general, any person with some importance outside the group (and this may be based upon kinship connections, the ownership of land or a tiny shop, etc.) is accorded a high position in the group if there is common knowledge of this.

Finally, prestige can be also enhanced by attending or belonging to different religious organizations. Although this multiple religious participation takes place outside the immediate group environs, it has a major effect within the group. It was noticed fairly early that many individuals, although they attend Shango feasts, also call themselves, when asked, Roman Catholics and regularly attend the Catholic

church. Similarly, these same individuals may attend one or more of the Baptist churches, such as the Spiritual Baptists or Shouters, the Orthodox, London controlled, London Baptist church, and perhaps the African Baptists, the Independent Baptists and several other offshoots of the Baptist Church. Persons with as many as four different church affiliations were frequently encountered.

This multiple religiousness seemingly engendered very little conflict for the members. The feeling seems to be that the more religious affiliations one has, the easier and the better are one's chances for going to heaven and being saved. These various churches are seen as leading to the same goal. The Shango members see no conflict between their African religious form, which is seen simply as a carry-over of their African heritage, and the organized Catholic church, which is more directly identified by them as their religion. Shango is thus seen as their social heritage which must be maintained. This feeling is, of course, not shared by the Catholic priesthood which is adamantly against Shango. While the priests evidently attempt to sway the Shango members towards this position, they do not seem to have much success. The Shango members feel, as has been suggested earlier, that the priest is indeed a "holy man" and one who is to be unquestionably obeyed in all things except his ideas on the cult. Since he is not of African origin, he does not understand the role of

Shango. There is a feeling among the group members that if one does belong to several different religions, one must be a very spiritual or holy person (a highly prized value within the group) and prestige accrues to such an individual. This applies particularly if one happens also to hold office in several different churches. Such people are, it is felt, intensively carrying on "the Lord's work," and the more ways the better.

Thus far we have dealt with the prerequisites for attaining prestige outside the group. We turn now to avenues for prestige achievement within the group itself.

Achieved Prestige

Perhaps the most prestige or recognition producing activity is "catching the power" or becoming possessed. Three-quarters of the members present at any one ceremony do not become possessed; the remaining individuals are the ones occupying the high prestige positions. This is in large part achieved by their frequent and powerful possession experiences. Possession behavior may lead to, and enhance prestige in several different ways. The aspects of possession behavior which serve this function may be summarized as follows: the number of possessions per evening; the number of gods that one is possessed by; the intensity of the possession; the amount of "good works" accomplished under possession; the duration of the possession; the ease and

speed with which possession is accomplished; and the status
of one's gods in the hierarchy of the gods.

The highest number of possessions by all people in one
evening was 24. One leader was possessed by five different
powers in succession. Most leaders and other influential
members are possessed by more than one power per evening.
Frequent possession, according to the cult members,
indicates that an individual is worthy, "clean" and is a
"good horse." Such an individual is a favorite of the gods
and is said to be much sought after by them. In the group
an individual who is possessed by many different powers
tends to be listened to readily and is given a good deal
of respect. The advice of such an individual "in power,"
i.e., possessed, is rarely ignored. In an interview with
one of the prominent leaders, the first statement she
proudly made to us was that every god "manifests" on her
with only one exception. The more powers that arrive in
one evening, and, in general, the more patrons one has,
the better it is in terms of prestige for the individual
and attention paid to him by the rest of the group. There
is one exception to this. The highest leader, the undisputed
"Shango King" of Trinidad, Mr. E., is an individual of such
high prestige that he is beyond the influence of these
factors. He becomes possessed generally only twice per
feast and he has only three patrons who "manifest" upon
him.

The "intensity" of the possession refers to the amount and quality of the activity in which the power engages when he arrives. Frenzied dancing, much running back and forth, much ordering about and calling for different implements, etc., indicates an active, intense power, one who has a great deal of "work" to do. A relatively quiet power is often ignored, although, again, this depends upon the position of the possessed individual. A highly important person need not be exceedingly active to attract attention; a relatively lowly person, seeking to improve his condition, will try to be as "noisy" as possible so that all eyes will be upon him and so that the audience must assume that the power has something important to say or do. As indicated earlier, there are a set of prescribed activities which are unique for each power. All people possessed by Ogun-St. Michael, for example, will call for a cutlass or a sword and wear red. However, there is also a great deal of flexibility in interpreting the behavior of the same power by different people. Except for the basic rules, so to speak, the same power might not even be clearly recognizable when he manifests upon another individual. Aside from the few basic walking or dancing steps, applicable to all, the interpretation of a power is in the hands of the "horse" he possesses, and the horse's imagination, as well as his position in the group hierarchy, enter into the interpretation. This point is relevant here with respect to the activity level of particular powers. Ogun-St. Michael

is known, for example, to be a very active power. Yemanja-
St. Anne, in contrast, is known to be quiet and subdued.
It follows that Ogun has more status and is higher in the
prestige hierarchy than Yemanja and that an individual
possessed by Ogun is thought to be more important than one
possessed by Yemanja. However, when one compares two
individuals, both possessed by Yemanja, one notes that one
presents a fairly active Yemanja whereas the other is so
quiet while possessed that it is difficult to tell whether
or not possession is occurring. This usually indicates that
the more active individual is attempting to call attention to
himself while the quiet individual is either an important
individual already or, for one reason or another, is not
interested or cannot strive for further success. Often,
then, the activity level must be judged in terms of intra-
power comparison rather than interpower comparison. Activity
is closely correlated with the amount of "work" accomplished
under possession. "Work" is defined by the members in terms
of the kinds of activity mentioned above. Running around in
a seemingly pointless fashion is considered to be the "work"
of the powers. Similarly, giving advice and medication for
illness is part of the "work" of the powers. In this
instance an individual gains prestige by administering a
cure which works, especially when the news of the cure is
quickly spread about. If the god does not consider the
"horse" to be particularly worthy despite the fact that the

god deigns to use the individual's body, the advice or
medication given by such an individual is often not to be
trusted or, when used, does not appear to be effective. When
a cure is effective it is an obvious sign of the "horse's"
worth and cleanliness and this increases his position in the
cult. Occasionally a power dispenses "faulty" advice (as
interpreted by the leaders) or medication and this is taken
as an indication of the nonworthiness of the horse. Only
negative attention (e.g., rebuke and criticism) is paid to
such an individual. (In a similar fashion, when a power
hurls his horse to the ground and makes him roll on the earth,
this is an indication of the horse's uncleanliness.) In
general then, authoritativeness and agressiveness characterizes
the "work" of the powers. The more authority the power
displays, the more he is listened to, the more prestige accrues
to the individual horse. Occasionally this may backfire as
when an individual oversteps his bounds and is brought back
sharply by a leader or another important person. One such
instance was noted when a possessed "horse" of nonexceptional
power demanded an unusually large number of songs sung to
himself, that is, sung in honor of his power. The leader at
this establishment refused to allow the drummers to continue
leading these songs and began another song honoring a different
power. This is an illustration of an act which is not sup-
ported by enough prestige on the part of the "horse." If a
leader indulges in similar behavior, such songs honoring the

leader's power would be continued, without question, almost
indefinitely. Another equally effective method through which
a possessed person's behavior may be stopped or interfered with
is total neglect of the person. Many instances were noted in
which "powers" made certain demands and issued orders which
were totally ignored by the other members present. Again
these were individuals who lacked the personal position
needed to carry out their demands.

The duration of the possession experience is another
index of power or importance. The range observed was from
five minutes to four hours with the average anywhere from
one to one and one half hours. Again it is the leaders,
the persons with high prestige, who remain possessed the
longest amount of time, and they, of course, pride them-
selves upon their endurance. Shortness of possession is
interpreted by group members as another indication that the
power is somehow displeased with his horse, else he would
"stay more." This is thought by them to be especially
apparent when one power leaves a particular horse quickly
and "manifests" upon another horse in the course of the
same evening. One woman who did enjoy a rather high
position in the group, by virtue primarily of her close
friendship with the big leader, found duration to be her
most difficult problem. She would actually lament the fact
that she could not remain possessed for more than five
minutes at a time. While a person who can remain possessed

by one god for a long time receives approval for this, the
individual who is possessed by a number of powers in rapid
succession is accorded even more honor and respect.

A relatively minor means of attaining prestige through
possession is the ease and speed with which the god arrives
in the "horse's head." The horse who has no particular
trouble becoming possessed is favored. When individuals
seem to have actual trouble in becoming possessed (i.e.,
when it takes an hour or more for the god to arrive) some
suspicion is provoked by the audience which begins to doubt
if the god wants to come to this particular horse. This is
again taken as an indication of unworthiness on the part of
the horse. On the other hand, if a god is invited to attend
through singing and drumming, and if he does not make an
appearance during the course of the evening, the usual
interpretation is that the entire group has displeased him
and his means of showing displeasure is avoidance of the
feast. A god may also avoid a feast if his favorite "horse"
i.e., the horse who always "gets" a particular power, is
absent.

Finally, a major means by which prestige is enhanced
through spirit possession deals with the ranking of the
gods themselves on a prestige hierarchy. An indication of
this hierarchy was given earlier (Chapter IV), but the
problem may be profitably reviewed here so that the intimate
connection between the gods or powers and the horses is

clearly indicated. In general, female gods are accorded less importance than male gods. (It is of interest that there are far more women Shango members than men members and the women especially appear to desire possession by male gods.) The three powers who rank highest in the hierarchy are Ogun-St. Michael, the undisputed chief, Shango-St. John and Osain-St. Francis. Powers of slightly less importance are Aireelay Ajaja-Jonah, Shakpana-St. Jerome, Yemanja-St. Anne and Oya-St. Catherine. Most individuals desire to become possessed by one of the three gods who grant the most power to the horse. On questioning informants about which power they would most like to be possessed with, if they had a choice, most immediately selected Ogun-St. Michael because "he is so powerful, he can move mountains." All the leaders, and those closest to the leaders, become possessed by one or more of the three most powerful gods. Many individuals who begin by becoming possessed with a power who is relatively low in the hierarchy but ultimately almost always add one or more higher ranking powers. One woman, for example, a relative newcomer to the group, became possessed with Omira-Raphael. After attending several feasts with this particular group and always "manifesting" Omira, she gradually became well known as the favorite horse of this power. Then many songs previously forgotten were revived in honor of this god. As soon as her position was relatively fixed, she began manifesting Osain-St. Francis as well,

thereby considerably enhancing her position in the group,
"because St. Francis had noticed her and was using her as a
"horse." It may be speculated that had she begun with Osain-
St. Francis immediately, as a woman with no importance in the
group, she would have been ignored despite the importance of
the god possessing her. Beginning, rather, with a power
whose prestige position more closely approximated her own
bridged this gap quite successfully.

At this point, it may be noted that some of the above
statements require qualification. While successful possession
produces greater recognition in the group, occasionally the
process can be considered as operating in reverse, as when
an important horse gives greater importance to a god who is
relatively low in the hierarchy. This happens when leaders
"choose" to vary their repertoire by becoming possessed with
relatively low gods. Several years ago, before Mr. E., the
Shango leader became possessed with Aireelay Ajaja-Jonah,
this power was unknown. Since this possession, the god has
become exceedingly powerful. A similar situation occurred
when another leader became possessed with Ebejee-St. Peter.
She is currently the only Peter horse in the cult. Because
of her high position, Peter is mentioned frequently as a
powerful figure. This same leader also manifested a new form
of St. Michael, an Indian form, known as Mahabil. Thus, it
becomes clear that the individuals who are on top of the
group prestige hierarchy have virtually no restrictions
upon their behavior and may even, in a sense, "tamper"

with the powers themselves. The total neglect of lowly
people even while possessed may be contrasted to this. On
the one hand, respect and veneration of the gods are taught
in the group; the feeling that the powers can do no wrong.
On the other hand, high prestige figures may manipulate the
powers according to their will and, perhaps more significantly,
low prestige individuals in possession by one of the gods sup-
posedly venerated in the group are ignored instead of worshipped.
Thus, it appears as if it is the prestige of the individual, the
horse, which is the paramount factor in the recognition or non-
recognition of the importance of the power and of the possession
experience itself.

Thus far we have been emphasizing the way in which pos-
session can enhance the prestige accorded to the horse. We
move on to a slightly different, although integrally related
manner of enhancing one's prestige. This is through fulfilling
the requirements of particular social roles. Despite the fact
that this organization is loosely structured, there are a few
roles which do exist and which must be filled. Of these the
most important is, of course, the leadership role, since
every group or every establishment has a leader around which
the activity of the cult is organized. It is quite clear from
the above that the leaders are the individuals who receive
prestige by virtue of the possession experience, yet not all
individuals who meet the above high requirements with respect
to possession behavior are leaders. To fill the leader role

an individual must already have high prestige and concurrently must have the financial means to support a Shango establish-ment.[3] (Most leaders, especially females, derive their income from husbands or keepers. They are not supported by the group.) Since this cost is not inconsiderable, very few people, despite their importance, are "palais" leaders. Once a powerful person becomes a leader and opens up his own "palais" his power becomes further increased. Thus, being a leader is not peripherally a determinant of prestige; a great amount of recognition is needed before one can become a leader. Slightly below the leaders is a rather large group of people. These are the active Shango participants. These are individuals who have prestige accorded to them in the group by frequent and active possession but who are also in a close, occasionally intimate, relationship with one or more leaders. These persons also are accorded prestige by association. Again this operates in a circular fashion in the sense that one must already possess some degree of importance in order to be received in the higher circles of the leaders either as friends or relatives, but at the same time, by virtue of this association, more prestige accrues to the individual thus favored.

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3. Most prestigeful people who want to and who sometimes receive specific visions or dreams telling them to become leaders and who have the necessary money do so. In Haiti, according to Deren, at least one houngan whom she knew resist-ed the specific call, which he received through a dream, to become a leader. In Shango there are no specific rituals which an aspiring leader must go through as in Vodun, and seemingly also in the Candomble. Becoming a "mae or pae de santo" in Candomble seems a function of various determinants. "Age, number of years a member of the cult, intimate knowledge of the ritual, and, particularly, a purity of African descent" seem to be important considerations. (Pierson, op. cit., p. 284)

Another slightly smaller group of persons achieve recognition by fulfilling certain "occupational" roles. These individuals are the drummers and the "servants of the powers." An eminently successful and skillful drummer may rival a "big" leader in importance and prestige. Drummers, as a group, gain power in the group by virtue of their skill and abilities; two drummers are considered so far above the others in stature that they are known throughout the island. Since the drummers are also indispensible for any feast, they are accorded special privileges and treated exceptionally well by the leaders. Drummers may walk in and out of the palais at will; they may smoke (although not in the palais area itself), and they may drink during the ceremony in order to, as it is said, maintain their energy. The "servants of the powers" are drawn from ordinary members or spectators who are unable to become possessed despite repeated attempts. A few of these unsuccessful people then become servants, that is, individuals whose job it is to "fetch and carry" for the powers, to bring the implements and articles of adornment called for by the powers, and to perform the initial rite of placing two calabashes of water and ashes unto the center of the palais ground to propitiate the devil. These menial jobs do tend to enhance the prestige of the servant. Certain powers are habitually served by the same servants so that a particular servant becomes seen by others in the group as almost indispensible to a particular power and is associated, to

some degree with him. Certain moments of extreme excitement were observed one evening when a power became angry and resentful due to the absence of his favorite servant. More importantly, however, the servant always remains near the powers to, as it were, anticipate their wishes. In the course of this nearness, they are told messages by the powers and other secrets which the powers rarely disclose. The servant can thus become a sought-after person who receives a good deal of attention as others inquire from him if the power left any message for them and so forth. Also as a result of the physical nearness the servant receives many added blessings from the powers which also serves to enhance the recognition which he gets from the audience.

In this chapter we have been concerned with the specific ways in which members can enhance the prestige accorded to them within this group. The prerequisites for gaining initial recognition and achieved prestige within the group were distinguished and two illustrations of high and low prestige behavior, in the context of spirit possession, were presented.

CHAPTER VII

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PRESTIGE AND

SHANGO GROUP STRUCTURE

In the last chapter, we were concerned with ways in which
prestige can be attained and enhanced in the Shango group. We
noted that one can have high prestige accorded in the group
primarily through possession experiences, but that a necessary
prerequisite to this is some ascribed prestige or social credit
upon entering the group. In this chapter we shall examine the
relationship between prestige and group structure. We have
already indicated in Chapter IV that a hierarchy of subgroups,
varying in degrees of prestige, exists within this group. We
shall delineate these subgroups on the prestige dimension[1] in

1. In selecting prestige as the dimension to characterize sub-
group formations and the interrelations of group members, we
are dealing with what we may call the implicit social structure
of the group. That is, we are not concerned with explicit
social structure in the sense of, for example, kinship patterns,
but rather with divisions which are implicit or covert. There
is no explicit hierarchy in this group as for example in Haiti
where people are explicitly or clearly differentiated from each
other. The only formal roles which exist in this group are
leaders, drummers and the few servants. The rest of the members
are not clearly differentiated, except as we shall argue, im-
plicitly in terms of similar degrees of prestige. We are per-
haps dealing with what Redfield indicates as "the latent aspect
of social structure as contrasted with the constant or patent
aspect." The Little Community.,U. of Chicago Press, 1955.
    Whyte's classic Street Corner Society has some parallels
to this. Implicit in Whyte's data and explicit in Homan's
analysis of it is the social structure which has developed
within the gang. The leader is quite clearly differentiated
from the followers, but the latter are themselves ranked in an
implicit social hierarchy. See W.F. Whyte, Street Corner
Society and George Homan's The Human Group, N.Y. 1950.

greater detail, and attempt to show some of the major kinds of
personal interactions, which occur within each of these sub-
groups.

Our first observations of the interactions of members
within the total group at feasts, gave us the impression of
a good deal of solidarity and cohesiveness. Many people seem
to know each other at least slightly. There is much friendly
"chit-chat," and people seem to wander around the ceremonial
areas with a great degree of freedom and overt friendliness.
Hostility and jealousy do not seem to be present; all inter-
actions seem to be harmonious. Factions and cliques do not
appear to exist. One is strongly tempted to believe the
informant who states that "everybody happer here, like one
big family--all together serving God." This initial impres-
sion soon disappears as signs of tension, stress, and what,
as we have already indicated elsewhere, appear to be fairly
rigid stratification lines become apparent.

Recognition strivings and the prestige of members are
important in the interpersonal network within the total group.
Interpersonal relations are ordered, to a great extent, on
the dimensions of prestige, in the sense that most inter-
action takes place between people who are relatively equiva-
lent in prestige or who have similar degrees of prestige
accorded to them in the group.[2] We can further state that

2. This, in effect, is in accord with Homan's hypothesis:
"the more nearly equal in social rank a number of men are
the more frequently they will interact with one another",
Ibid., p. 184.

people are divided in their interactions into subgroups based upon similar degrees of prestige. Let us now examine the specific nature of the three subgroups which seemingly exist within the total group.

The first subgroup is relatively small. This group or, more accurately, clique is composed of the various cult leaders and of a smattering of important followers who, for a variety of reasons, usually financial, cannot become leaders. The structure of this group is relatively nonpermeable and tightly knit; the clique is virtually cut off from other members. The prestige of these individuals is very high and they tend to be adored and revered by the other cult group members. Their every word of order is law to the rest of the group. These are the persons who become possessed frequently and intensively and who perform many varied activities under possession. The prestige accorded to them is enhanced not only through the major vehicle of possession, but also through their services to the community in terms of "bush-doctoring." People from all groups in the population (including, at rare times, some whites) go to these individuals in their homes for medication and advice, the latter usually being rendered through divining techniques. Most of the people in this subgroup know each other intimately and have had many years of contact with each other both within and without the Shango group circle. Often, their names are known throughout the island even by other cult groups who only rarely come into contact

with them. The reactions of other Shango members to this sub-
group leaves little doubt about their prestige in the larger
group. They tend to be rather authoritarian and "bossy" to
other members and many of them seem to relish the humility
with which they are approached by other people. It is not
infrequent for a leader to leave a large group of people who
have come to his or her home for bush doctoring waiting for
hours while the leader engages in other activities or takes
a nap. Similarly, at feasts conducted by them, they may
delay the proceedings, or, occasionally, change parts of the
ritual. Their words or commands are almost never challenged
or doubted. As we have already noted in previous sections,
their behavior under possession is equally authoritative and
the situation is usually completely controlled by them. It
is indeed difficult to overemphasize the power and control
which this small clique of high prestige individuals exercises
over the entire cult membership.

At the same time that this subgroup holds the reigns of
power over the larger cult group, some interesting inter-
personal forces are at work within the high prestige group
itself. Before discussing some of these, we shall present
another example which, in dramatic form, highlights some of
the tensions within this subgroup. This illustration calls
more attention to the situational and group atmosphere than
to individual behaviors. It points to not only the inter-
actions of high and low prestige people, but also to the

competition between high prestige members themselves.

The event took place at 6:00 in the morning and involved the loss of a rather large amount of money by one of the Shango members. What transpired on the previous evening, however, seems relevant here and must be mentioned first.

The evening ceremony had been very active and many possessions had occurred. Mr. E., the undisputed leader of the group, had been wandering about all evening, looking as though he were trying to become possessed. At about 1:00 o'clock, he sat on a stool in the palais and began shaking his head back and forth, simultaneously swaying his body. He rose slowly and the unmistakable mannerisms of Ajaja-Jonah emerged. Throughout his possession he was grim, serious and austere. The entire group in the palais was quite obviously terrified by him. He stalked about issuing orders, and striking the wooden supports of the palais with Ajaja's implement, a long wooden stick. He threw people's possessions (e.g., hats and jackets) out of the palais and into the mud surrounding it. He then delivered a long admonishing speech, the contents of which indicated his anger at not having been sung to. That is, no one had done any singing or drumming to Ajaja and Mr. E., in possession, proclaimed that "when you come to a man's house, not right, must invite him." (The feast was given by him at his own establishment.) This criticism is the more significant when one realizes that Mr. E. himself, as the leader, generally

begins all songs at his own discretion. That is, he gener-
ally begins the songs to whatever power he fancies at any given
moment. Due to Mr. E's violent possession and his stern warn-
ings to the group, a definite atmosphere of fright and threat
was created. Certain people, especially the leaders and
others closest to Mr. E., were apparently so frightened by
this display of power that their own possessions stopped.

Several hours later, at dawn, a woman who is little
known to the group began shrieking that she had lost some
money. Almost immediately, a crowd formed about her, while
she, crying and quite hysterical, simply moaned over and over
again "my money's gone." Tanti, a very active leader, Hildy
(mentioned above), and three other active participants began
to take an alert interest in the situation and rapidly
questioned the woman. They inquired into when she had last
had the money, how much money she had actually lost, whom she
had spoken to during the morning and the like. During this
period Mr. E. sat quietly on the porch of his house, which
overlooks the palais, and smoked his pipe. His only comment
was an occasional "what she screaming about?" Within a few
minutes, the drummers were summoned and Tanti indicated that
the powers were to be called and their help enlisted in the
recovery of the lost money. Within not more than five minutes,
Hildy manifested Ogun, another relatively little known woman
manifested Yemanja-St. Anne (the patron of the woman whose

money had been lost). Tanti, who had meanwhile inaugurated the call to the gods, seemed unable to become possessed by one of her usual Shango gods. She then approached Mr. E. (with whom she had been feuding over her intention to marry a man many years her junior and also about her Spiritual Baptist connections) and asked for his aid. In a curt, offhand reply, he suggested that since "she so big around here" that she and the others attempt the recovery of the money and "leave me be." Almost immediately, Tanti became possessed and showed the unmistakable mannerisms of, not a Shango god, but the power that comes to the Spiritual or Shouting Baptists.[3] (Mr. E. is particularly adamant in his beliefs against the Spiritual Baptists whom he evidently despises. On many occasions he told us that mixing Orisha and "this Baptist nonsense" will harm the Orisha worshippers. Under possession, he frequently makes comments to the audience about this very point.) After Tanti manifested the Baptist power, several other individuals did likewise. By this time, then, there were two Shango possessions; one was Hildy and the other a relatively unknown woman who had just recently attended feasts held by Mr. E. and his circle, and three Baptist possessions. Two of the Baptist possessions were manifested by the relative unknowns in the group and the third by Tanti, who is a well-established leader in the

3. Well described in Herskovits, M.J. and F.S., _Trinidad Village_, N.Y., 1941.

group. The three Baptists attempted entry into the palais,
led by Tanti, and were ordered out by Hildy as Ogun. Hildy
again attempted control of the situation despite the fact
that the other Shango possessee was Yemanja, the special
patron of the woman whose money had been lost. It was
almost immediately evident that the central issue became
not the recovery of the money, but rather, the display of
power by various people and the competition between them.
This competition centered mainly between Hildy and Tanti,
on an individual level and also, in a larger sense,
between the Orisha and Baptist forces. The three other
possessed persons, all of whom were unknown, were largely
lost in the shuffle, and relatively ignored.

After about one hour of this varied activity, Mr. E.
rose from his seat on the porch and casually sauntered over
to the woman possessed by Yemanja-St. Anne. Unfortunately,
we were unable to "overhear" this conversation, but it was
immediately followed by Yemanja's taking a Bible in one hand,
and the incense burner in the other. She began walking
about the courtyard slowly, waving the incense burner. Mr.
E. fell into step behind her. Gradually more and more
people joined the procession which wound itself into every
area of the courtyard. After about 20 people had joined
the procession, still led by the woman in possession by
Yemanja, followed by Mr. E., Tanti, and Hildy, still in
their respective possessions, also joined as did the other

two persons in possession by the Baptist power. (One of the latter began wailing and screaming over and over again, "Jesus, Jeee sus.") At the end of the procession was the woman whose money had been lost. This activity lasted for about 45 minutes and was stopped by Yemanja's suddenly coming out of possession. Within a half hour most other people were out of possession and the normal activity for that period in the day, namely, the sacrificing of selected animals to the powers, was begun.

It was not until much later in the same day, when we were finally able to talk to Mr. E., that we heard his views on this situation. In the first place, he maintained, that he, himself, could have located the money very easily had he been "of a mind to." (The money seems not to have been found and the question was soon raised whether it had ever been lost at all.) But, he maintained, he was sick of doing "everything around here" and that others who were getting so "big" should be put to an actual test to see whether their powers were as great as they thought them to be. This evidently referred to Tanti, with whom he was at odds, and somewhat to Hildy, who had been extremely domineering in earlier possessions. At the same time, he claimed, the only "real power" (recognized by him as genuine) present that morning was on Yemanja-St. Anne and she, through prayer, could have found the money if the others had not interfered. He decided to help Yemanja because on the one hand, he knows

that that particular woman is "good and holy" and, on the
other, "they wouldn't care bother (interfere) with me."
(Mr. E. is the only person in this group who occasionally
thinks that some possessions are faked. He is apt to distrust
persons who have Spiritual Baptist affiliations since he
claims that they do not manifest a "real" power. Whenever
a Baptist power arrives at a Shango feast, and this happens
quite rarely, he immediately brands such powers as faked.)

It was quite evident that the central focus of this
issue was not the recovery of the lost money, but the display
of power put on by the several leaders and their competition
with each other. The woman known as Hildy called upon her
most powerful patron, Ogun-St. Michael, to recover the lost
money. Tanti, another leader of high repute, called upon
another major source of importance for her, namely, her
Spiritual Baptist powers. (Despite the fact that Mr. E.
himself disapproves of these forces, they carry much weight
within the group.) The two women here were clearly in
competition with each other and seemingly seized upon this
opportunity to display their own individual powers. We may
note that Mr. E. joined forces with a little-known woman who
was possessed by a power accorded intermediate recognition
by group members. It seemed fairly clear that he deliberately
sided with the little-known individual so as to offset the
power of the other two women, Hildy and Tanti. At the same
time, he again reinforced or enhanced his own position in

the group and his own prestige; it was he who, again, implicitly
played the dominant role. In a later conversation with him,
he stressed his dismay at how people are trying to become "too
important around here."

This particular situation served to bring to a focus,
in highly dramatic form, the various stresses and strains
within the high prestige clique. We can see that each indiv-
idual plays a particular role, that role, being limited and
circumscribed, in the long run, by Mr. E. Mr. E., on occasion,
asserts his own authority to curb the activities of those
other leaders who, in his terms, try to "get so big around
here." Within this group, each individual, despite his power
in the larger group, is fairly rigidly kept "in his place"
and attempts to challenge the authority of Mr. E. are severely
curtailed. Despite the fact that, in the eyes of other cult
members, "the big ones can do anything," in the final anal-
ysis attempts to "do anything" are frustrated by Mr. E.

The high prestige leaders not only compete with each
other in terms of power displays and the like, but also
compete for the affection of Mr. E. The general feeling seems
to be that the closer one is to Mr. E., that is, the higher
he holds a given individual in his esteem, the more advantages
accrue to the individual. These advantages are seen, pri-
marily, in spiritual terms. That is, by association with
this "holy man," the individual himself will become more
spiritual. In our terms, such an individual is accorded

prestige by association with this greatly respected individual. Very often conversation between leaders will begin with such statements as "Pa (the name by which he is known in the high prestige group) told me such and so" or "Pa asked me to do . . ." etc. In discussing this point with one of the leaders she herself mentioned that "Tanti used to be Pa's favorite spiritual child, nowadays he likes Ada more." She also implied that Tanti "wormed her way to Pa" but "now he see through her." Here we see what might be called envy working against those who are currently enjoying Mr. E.'s favor. Another leader pointed to the fact that those leaders with more money to spend at feasts or more sumptuous ceremonial establishments are the "lucky ones, the powers like them more." Thus, competition within the in-group, so to speak, centers about three different points: power displays, Mr. E.'s favor, and wealth used for ceremonies. This competition sets up various strains within the subgroup of high prestige individuals such that the first impression of a harmonious group is certainly open to serious question.

We see that even within one subgroup, the subgroup of leaders accorded highest prestige, a prestige hierarchy exists based upon the three points mentioned above. Those leaders with a greater amount of power, who are in closer association with Mr. E., and who are fortunate enough to have more of the financial means necessary to make a large feast, are highest on this hierarchy. It appears as if this

particular hierarchy is not generally known among the rest of the Shango group who only distinguish between Mr. E. and all the rest of the other leaders, the latter being all lumped together. It is only within the relatively closed subgroup (that is, closed to outsiders) of leaders that these prestige discrepancies are known and acted upon. It is almost as if the leaders want to present to the rest of the group a picture of people who are very spiritual, who are the favorite horses for many important gods, and who are thus closer to the all important powers; a group spiritually united, working together to serve the powers.

A second major grouping of members includes people who have an intermediate degree of prestige accorded to them. These tend to become possessed regularly, rather than frequently, by perhaps one or, at most, two gods. These people are also generally drawn from rather distinguished families and thus come into the group with a measure of ascribed prestige. This subgroup appears to be characterized by the most extreme striving for prestige enhancement. This striving can be seen in such behaviors as counting the number of gods or patrons another member may have, the number of times per feast that others have become possessed and the like. In the attempt to increase their prestige they often imitate the behavior of the higher group both in the possessed and non-possessed states. This occurred dramatically one evening when several onlookers, watching a man possessed by one of

Mr. E.'s favorite patrons, made such comments as "look, he acting like Pa." This individual also affected the same type of clothing habitually worn by Mr. E., especially a brown slouch hat. Frequently, during possession, members of this group will seemingly deliberately attempt close interactions with a high prestige person when the latter is either possessed or nonpossessed.

Other more direct statements made by some of these individuals which seem to clearly indicate striving are, for example, "I wish St. Michael would come on me, he very powerful," or, while talking about a group of little known gods, "nobody bothers with them." The desire here seems to be to become possessed with important gods in the hierarchy, thereby impressing the other Shango members with one's worth. In the nonpossessed state these individuals do not appear to form a tightly knit group as do the high prestige persons. The boundaries of this group are often difficult to determine, especially since this group seems much larger numerically. (While further distinctions within this subgroup undoubtedly can be made, our data unfortunately are not sufficiently detailed for this purpose.) In gross terms, within this group there seemed to be some smaller cliques made up of friends or people who worked together outside Shango. There was, for example, one group of women who regularly helped in the kitchen during feasts and who seemed somewhat more in interaction with each other than with others. People drawn from this group also made excellent informants since they

knew, in great detail, exactly who becomes possessed by what gods, how often and the like. They evidently followed these events closely. At the same time they would also bemoan the fact that they "manifest" only one god and they hoped for the others to "come quickly." They would occasionally attempt to rationalize their lower position by saying "St. Michael too busy riding the others, maybe soon he ride new ones."

Throughout, their behaviors both during possession and nonpossession seemed to indicate an extreme form of striving towards the enhancement of their own positions within the Shango group. Towards this aim they attempted to interact with people who are above them on the hierarchy and almost never with those below them. While maintaining at least surface friendliness with almost everybody, in order to make themselves well known in the group, it seemed clear that their behavior was directed, insofar as they were free to direct it, toward the attainment of higher prestige in the group.

Finally, the third subgroup in the cult consists of those people who very rarely become possessed and who seem to have the least recognition in the group. As already indicated in Chapter VI, the major difference, perhaps accounting in part for their low prestige, between this group and the others, is that they enter or visit the Shango group without any prior ascribed prestige or social credit.

That is, they may come from villages quite distant or from other cities or their familial background (which often helps to give some measure of ascribed prestige to a newcomer) may be unknown. Thus there is a somewhat vicious circle in which it seems necessary to have some recognition before being able to make one's mark in the group. Such individuals have no foundation upon which to build. These people have minimal communication with other members and their often somewhat pathetic efforts at possession are generally ignored and sometimes ridiculed, as in the case of Anna illustrated earlier. This subgroup tends to be small, shifting, and transitory. Finding few rewards or little need-satisfaction they either leave or attend feasts sporadically. Since they do not, for the most part, have prestige by ascription and are unable to achieve it by other means, they can, at best, attend feasts without actually participating. Occasionally, such an individual receives a "lucky break" in some way thereby giving him the opportunity for enhancing his prestige in the group. However, this seems to be a rare occurrence and was only witnessed by us once.

The above division of members into several different groups seems related to some other important patterns which have significant influences upon the way in which inter-personal relations are structured. One such pattern is a type of ritual kinship whereby a spiritual family is formed among the prestigeful leaders and their followers. One of

the functions of the leader is to interpret to a newly possessed person, or to an established follower who manifests a new god, while in the leader's palais, the name of the god who is possessing him and also some of the behaviors which are appropriate to that god.[4] The new person then considers the leader to be his spiritual mother or father and the two often call each other by the appropriate kin terms. "Children" of the same leader consider themselves to be spiritual siblings and the spiritual family may take on major numerical proportions. Often this family is socially and psychologically more significant to the individual than his actual biological family. It frequently happens that a new person may take up residence for a period of time in the home of his spiritual parent. If this does not occur, much visiting goes on so that the person can benefit from direct talk with his parent. There is often a close interaction between spiritual siblings who are drawn together by having a mutual parent. This pattern makes for almost the only

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4. This pattern whereby the new members are given instruction about ritual and beliefs from the leaders is also found in the other Afro-American cults.

In Haiti, for example, "During the period of training which is part of the initiation, the neophytes are given very detailed instruction. . . . When the members of an oufo society identify themselves outside the society, they call themselves pitit kai So-and-So, that is, child of the house of So-and-So (referring to the ouga or mambo) . . . When their training is complete, they will, as a rule, set themselves up independently in the same manner as their teachers . . ." Rhoda Metreaux, "Some Aspects of Hierarchial Structure in Haiti," Acculturation in the Americas (ed. Sol Tax), U. of Chicago Press, 1952, pp. 191-2.

opportunity for individuals to come into contact with prestigeful people, and, in a sense cuts across the boundary lines existing between the high and intermediate prestige groups. (The spiritual children until they themselves, in turn, become spiritual patents invariably fall into the intermediate group.) While the relationship between the children and the parent remains a rather close one, it is, nevertheless, a subordinate-superordinate relationship with the leader playing the role of the superior (chiefly because of their great knowledge of the gods) and the follower assuming a rather humble student-type role.

Again, prestige plays a role in partially determining this relationship. Leaders compete with each other for new followers since this too enhances their own prestige. While this is a rather difficult maneuver since, supposedly, the owner of the palais in which a new person first "falls" (becomes possessed) automatically becomes the spiritual parent. Occasionally, however, the following situation seems to occur. After the person has fallen another leader who may be present informs the individual that it appears as if St. Peter manifested upon the individual, but, that in actuality, the leader had a dream or vision which said that St. John is really trying to manifest upon this person and that he may have arrived in the guise of Peter. Such statements, when made by a high prestige leader, go unchallenged even by the palais leader and thus the former makes

a new convert. This situation does not seem to occur too often, since only the most prestigeful leaders seem to be able to "get away with it." Similarly, this process can become reversed. The newly possessed person may exercise some choice as to his spiritual parent. The desire on the part of the individual seems to be to come into the fold of a well known and very permanent leader, thereby attaining membership in a more important spiritual family.

To our knowledge this has occurred twice during recent years and in each case it was accomplished somewhat differently. In the first instance, an individual deliberately, when feeling the first signs of possession coming on, left the ceremonial area in order to avoid the possession. The reason given was that he "didn't get along with X" and wanted to fall under another leader. In the second instance, an individual at first accepted the leader in whose palais she fell, and then changed allegiance to another leader, claiming that she had a dream telling her to make the change. In both cases, as far as we were able to determine, the switch was made to a very important figure in cult circles, who ranks perhaps second only to Mr. E. within the cult.

Lastly the vast group of well wishers or spectators may be mentioned--those who come merely to "pleasure their eyes." These people probably do not actively aspire to become recognized as group members. Occasionally, new recruits into the group emerge from these spectators.

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However, this is a rare event unless they have had prior experience with Shango religion. Having a good time, watching an exciting event, gaining vicarious pleasures by watching the activity of others appear to be this group's major motivations for attending feasts. This is in extreme contrast with the other groups discussed for whom prestige striving and prestige enhancement appear to be the major concerns.

We have discussed the structure of the Shango group in terms of the three major subgroups which can be isolated on the dimension of the degree of prestige of the members. Again there are interesting, albeit highly speculative, parallels with the structure of the larger society discussed in Chapter II. It has been suggested earlier that concern with prestige is extremely dominant in Trinidadian society. This same concern is found within its Shango group and is reflected in the implicit social structure of that group. However, a major difference seems apparent. The concern with prestige in the larger society appears to be quite overt and on the surface. Judgments about others, and self-judgments, subgroupings and restrictions about who may or may not enter into such subgroupings, seem to be made rather overtly in terms of the prestige of the persons involved. In contrast, within the Shango group the first impression gained is that prestige is not a major concern, that harmony, unity, equality, all in the service of the "powers,"

characterizes the group. Humility is commonly expressed and the individual who is frequently possessed by important powers may tend to overtly dismiss this ("I am only his horse") in spite of the obvious prestige which is accorded to him directly. It is being speculated that in spite of the probable lack of awareness on the part of most members about the role of prestige within the group's structure, the implicit social structure of the group reflects the deep concern with prestige which, as has been suggested earlier, is a self-conscious characteristic of the larger society. Another striking difference is in the explicitness of the social stratification system, in contrast to the implicit stratification within this group. This will be further discussed in the final chapter.

In the following chapter we shall examine, on an inferential and somewhat speculative level, some of the major personal rewards that are available within the larger group to those members who have relatively high prestige accorded to them.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CONSEQUENCES OF SHANGO-DERIVED PRESTIGE

We turn now to our next question. We have thus far been
describing some of the internal interactions within each sub-
group, paying particular attention to those persons who al-
ready are highly prestigeful. We shift attention to the
individual and consider what happens next, i.e., once having,
through ascription and achievement, attained a high position,
what is the individual then free to do? What rewards or grat-
ifications accrue to him as a function of his high postion?
We shall concentrate upon the possession experience, since the
major individual effect of holding a high prestige position
seems to be that it permits the person increasing freedom dur-
ing possession. That is, this is the person whose possessions
are recognized and who, through the reaction and encouragement
of the audience, is given broad reign in the frequency and
scope of his possession. Following this, our final question,
concerning the ways in which Shango-derived prestige general-
izes to the participant's prestige outside the Shango group,
will be discussed.

Rewards of the High Prestige Group

The high prestige person increasingly gains the "right"
to express a broad variety of behavior during possession.
The major gratifications that accrue to this person are thus
the gratifications obtained from virtually uninhibited

possession behavior. To be more specific, we must turn to an analysis of some of the potential rewards available through unconstricted behavior during possession. We shall describe some of the major behavior patterns which characterize the possessions of relatively prestigeful individuals, i.e., individuals who are in the highest prestige group and whose possessions are recognized as genuine and who are allowed relatively free enactment. Some reference will also be made to the possession of low prestige individuals. We shall infer, for each of these possession behavior patterns, what some of the major personal rewards attained by the individual seem to be.

Perhaps the most striking pattern of behavior available to high prestige individuals during possession is that in which the possessed controls the activities of those around him. Both the degree and temporal duration of this control varies even between individuals in the high prestige group. In the not atypical illustration of Hildy's possession behavior it was seen that the possessed was virtually in absolute control of those around her. In such cases, the slightest wish and order is immediately carried out; the onlookers are utterly at the possessee's disposal and ready to advance, retreat, sing, keep silent, etc., at command. Oil, rum, implements such as axes and swords, food, candles, are quickly brought in response to the power's signals. The attitude of the Shango followers when the power, through the

possessed, is exerting his control over them tends to be one of awe and respect, frequently mingled with fear. The Shango followers flock close to the power, attentive to every word, alert to any advice, warnings, or recommendations that may issue. The rewards derived from this by the possessed appear to be further proofs of, and enhancement of, his prestige as evaluated by those around him and under his control.

This factor of control and domination was clearly seen in the possession behavior of Hildy, which was illustrated earlier. As has been shown, in Hildy's possession we see complete control and manipulation of other individuals as well as complete mastery over the entire situation, for a period of over three hours. This factor of control is made more significant when one examines the kinds of people whom she dominated for this long period of time. All the members of the procession which she ordered were leaders or other people of high position. Among these, it is to be noted, was Mr. E. himself, most respected person in the entire group, and Tanti, a leader of great importance. This seems even more significant when one considers that Tanti was also in possession. Thus, Hildy's position in the group is such that she not only controls people of high prestige, but also people of high prestige under possession (as well as, of course, all the other people of lesser importance present). What has been said of Hildy tends to apply to others in the high prestige group.

Close physical interactions between the possessed and
others distinguishes another pattern. The possessed may
crawl through the spread legs of others (either of the
opposite or the same sex), squat on the prostrated form of
another, massaging his chest, breasts, thighs, shoulders,
etc., and rhythmically bouncing up and down on the body.
Particularly when female horses manifest male powers, the
implement used (primarily axe, cutlass, or sword) is fre-
quently flourished in front of the genitals of other par-
ticipants, with both a menacing and sexual effect. The
possessed may life persons and let them ride, legs astrad-
dle, on his back or shoulders, bouncing the rider. Or the
possessed may kneel in front of a standing figure (most
often the male leader) and rub his face on or around the
groin. The variations in this pattern are numerous. Close-
ly intermingled with this appear to be seemingly hostile and
aggressive activities, as where extremely rough or threaten-
ing behavior is directed at the same person whom the possess-
ed is straddling and rubbing. For example, the possessed
may push, crush, lash, etc., persons with whom in the "normal"
state he has a much more restricted relationship.

It is inferred that the rewards derived from these be-
haviors which are available to high prestige persons under
possession are primarily the attainment of intimate, although
often fleeting, interpersonal relationships which are desired
but are socially too prohibited to be permitted gratification

in the nonpossessed state. The content (e.g., sexual, hostile) and the objects (e.g., same or opposite sex individuals, relatives) vary considerably but share the characteristics of being desired by the horse but unattainable in the "normal" state.

Another striking pattern of behavior during possession, which in the nonpossessed state is prohibited, involves the reversal of sex roles. Many females manifest male powers and, to a lesser degree, males manifest female powers.[1] In such cases the female, under possession by a male power, is free to enact typically "masculine" behaviors.[2] For individuals who have not learned clear sex roles, or who do not accept their roles, and whose own goals partially involve those traditionally prescribed for members of the opposite sex, the opportunity to temporarily assume behaviors usually considered appropriate only for the opposite sex is particularly appealing. For example, the woman who resents a passive role can behave in a dominating, aggressive, belligerent manner; the man who finds the aggressive role difficult can behave in a passive, submissive manner. Hildy appears to be an example of this point. In her normal state, she seems to be a quiet, passive woman who seems completely dependent upon

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1. A striking instance of sex role reversal is to be found in the Naven ceremonies of the Iatmul people. See Bateson, <u>Naven</u>, Cambridge, 1936.
2. We encountered no cases of overt homosexuality among the cult members investigated.

her mother. She is rather shy and withdrawn rarely engaging
in any but the most fleeting interactions with other people
present.

Thus far we have been discussing the potentially re-
warding consequences of specific behavior patterns available
to high prestige individuals. Apart from these specific be-
havioral enactments the practice of spirit possession in the
Shango group appears to have two other major rewards. First,
it supplies an available, socially sanctioned (at least within
the practicing group) framework for the interpretation and
acceptance of otherwise threatening and distrubing phenomena,
such as unusual ("Abnormal") psychological or physical symp-
toms. For example, where hysterical (i.e., apparently non-
organic) symptoms develop, the afflicted person himself, or
those around him, while under possession, interpret these as
the first "signs" of the special "gift."[3] This not only pre-
vents the deviation from becoming a source of social stigma
but, on the contrary, makes it a valued behavior, regardless
of the ultimate personal consequences. The belief system
which can render behavior which would otherwise be considered
a malignant symptom into one that is prized is itself strength-
ened by the process.

Second, the relatively unrestricted practice of spirit
possession in the group is also rewarding since it permits

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3. An example of this is given by Pierson who quotes a case
history in which apparently hysterical symptoms led to entry
into the Candomble. op. cit., p. 264-5.

the reference of virtually all serious life problems to the "powers" for solution. The person is thereby to some degree freed of responsibility for controlling and directing his own life. This not only gives aid in difficult decisions but also alleviates anxiety about such choices. The horse assumes a relatively passive role. It is the powers who handle the problems confronting him. Except for a rather flexible adherence to a few vaguely interpreted general rules for "clean living" the participant surrenders control for ordering his life and bearing the consequences. This passivity is implied in the very word "horse" to describe the possessed, who is said to be "ridden" by the power, utterly directed by the power, and is, indeed, a tool or plastic medium controlled by forces from which he disassociates himself. The individual is thought of and considers himself a "horse," not only prior to or during possession, but at other times as well. His identity, his self-concept, and his social roles are influenced to a considerable degree by the kind of horse he is, by the powers who most habitually possess him, and by his behavior at such times,[4] and the distinction between horse and god is often tenuous.

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4. The personal passivity must not be overemphasized. Although the individual does remove most major decisions from his own conscious and immediate jurisdiction, they are not surrendered to an abstract or remote power. The power to which they are transferred is directly and personally experienced within the participant's own body and, although not credited as such by the possessed, is an extension as it were, of the individual's conscious behavior. That is, the "power" is an aspect of the individual himself, presumably

The rewards which have been discussed as becoming potentially available to the Shango member who has gained prestige within the group must be considered within the broader context of that person's life. That is, the gratifications accruing to the person from being able to command others, being the center of attention, being, in essence, a god or, at least a god's messenger or vehicle become particularly striking if the secular role of the possessee in the larger society is recalled. It has been argued in this thesis that prestige is a major concern within the larger society, including the lower class whose members are drawn into this group. It has further been argued that the means towards the attainment of prestige are quite limited for the lower class Negro. Here, at least within the context of the group (the degree to which this generalizes outside the group, remains the issue of our final question), he attains a degree of prestige which is in marked contrast to his secular role. He is no longer a laborer, a servant, an "unpaid helper," at the bottom of the societal social scale. Instead, within the group and during his possession the domestic who thirty

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mostly without his awareness, which emerges during possession. The "solutions" which are reached by the power are thus not actually foreign or external to the individual but rather reflections of his own personality, under disguise. Within this condition the kinds of behaviors which have been indicated above can be enacted, both in symbolic and overt form, during possession, supplying the individual with gratifications and yet freeing him from personal responsibility for any negative consequences.

minutes earlier was submitted to the whims of her British
mistress is transformed into a god; the unemployed laborer
is, under possession, the master of an audience of several
hundred people. The transition is often an almost direct
role reversal, from unimportant passive impotence to central
attention importance, dominance, power, and recognition which
appear to be the major rewards obtained.

We have tried to show here that the major consequence of
high prestige for the individual is that it affords him almost
unlimited freedom during possession. This in turn, makes
available to him the rewards or gratifications of full, re-
latively uninhibited possession experiences and further in-
creases and enhances his prestige within the group.

Similarly, the prestigeful person benefits from his high
position during the normal state by again controlling the
ceremonial situation. Such decisions as where and when to
hold feasts, at what exact time a ceremony is to be inau-
gurated, are dependent upon the desires of the leaders and
other important members. For example, important ceremonies
were delayed often, and everybody was kept waiting, if a
leader happened to be sleeping or was otherwise occupied.
Occasionally leaders seemed to deliberately hold up activi-
ties while they indulged in seemingly trivial personal
affairs. Indeed, much of the activity of this group, which
seemed at first characterized by an utter lack of structure,
seems to be directed by, and dependent upon the wishes and
whims of the high prestige group.

Rewards of the Lower Prestige Groups

We have been considering the individual rewards accruing only to high prestige members. Among individuals of low or intermediate prestige the behaviors which we have seen as characteristic of powerful people are completely absent. The illustration of Anna's behavior will be recalled. The possession of a relatively low prestige individual is completely circumscribed and sometimes the genuineness of the possession itself is doubted, as in the case of Anna. Not only are the behaviors of these individuals circumscribed, but their very physical movements seem to be effected as well. It will be noted that in the case of Anna, she did not leave her one corner of the palais throughout her possession. The high activity level and controlling of others characteristic of high prestige people is in severe contrast to the relative dearth of activity characteristic of the low prestige individuals. When such people occasionally attempt to give warnings and advice to others they are commonly ingored. In one such case, a woman gave a "message" from the powers to one of the drummers, requesting that he perform some particular activity. He immediately ignored her, saying to us, "I don't pay no mind (attention) to her." Very often these individuals are little known to the group since they are not drawn from influential families or do not come from the immediate neighborhood and thus do not meet the prerequisites for entry into the group.

In spite of the striking differences in the prestige
of members which have been demonstrated, and the differences
consequently which are available in terms of the kinds of
behaviors which the individual is free to participate in
fully, particularly in the context of possession, it should
be clear that the "prestige dimension" represents a continuum.
Similarly, the rewards available to members may be seen on a
continuum, with the greatest rewards available to those who
are highest in prestige. Although members with little
prestige in the group are unable to make effective use of
spirit possession for the attainment of the kinds of grati-
fications which have been discussed, there are other, albeit
much more limited, satisfactions which may accrue to them as
a function of their participation, even if that participation
is limited.

For example, it has been indicated already that a large
number of people come essentially to visit, to look, and to
"pleasure their eyes." These are persons whom we have classi-
fied into the low prestige sub-group. (While, for the most
part, this sub-group consists of spectators, a few persons
in it also seemingly make the attempt to gain prestige in the
group. Because there seem to be very few such people, we
have arbitrarily included them in the low prestige sub-group.)
Even if they are not directly involved, even if they are
largely unknown, and their attempts to participate gain them
little recognition or attention, they may still derive consid-

erable satisfactions, both directly and vicariously. For
many, Shango is a "fete," with all the pleasures associated
with this, including food and drink, company, excitement,
singing, dancing, entertainment, curiosity arousal and the
like.[5] There seemed to be many who came for such reasons,
who were very much on the fringe of the group, leaning against
the edges of the palais, alleviating boredom or whatever,
and gaining a good deal of pleasure simply as an audience.

Many seem to find in Shango a haven in which they can
always come to find comfort, rest, pleasure, advice, med-
ication and a variety of other services. The motivations
of individuals who seek these services are obviously varied
and so are the satisfactions which they attain through their
contacts with the Shango group. For example, one young
informant, who was struggling rather desperately and
unsuccessfully to maintain a job and family in Port of Spain,
and who was trying hard to compete successfully in the
larger society, e.g., in terms of gaining some vocational,
economic, and educational advancement, found in the Shango
group "a place to go and think things out . . . to cool off..
. to avoid a fight when I feel I'm ready to boil."

It should be clear from the above that, at the lower
prestige levels, the group's boundaries are extremely per-
meable. Many people come and go, some maintaining a
"visiting" pattern for years or a lifetime, without ever

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5. See footnote, p. 113, in which Simpson points to a
    similar interpretation of the function of Vodun.

becoming fully involved or rising to prestigeful membership [6]
and direct participation in ceremonies and spirit possession.
For those who do not have such full participation as a major
goal this need not be problematic: for those who are seeking,
often quite unsuccessfully, to become importantly involved
and integrated into the upper levels of the group, this is
often frustrating and painful.

In contrast to this limited participation and
marginal membership which characterizes the low prestige
group, those with high prestige are deeply and fully involved
on a full time basis. This seems to apply even for those
who hold other jobs and who are not formal leaders with their
own establishments. Their involvement and commitment is
pervasive and profound and the rewards gained from Shango
membership are probably the most basic which they experience.
As one Shango woman put it: "Shango is my life."

The Generalization of Shango-derived Prestige

It has been argued that prestige is a major concern
within the group and that the implicit structure of the group

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6. We have relatively little information about these persons.
In part, this is due to the fact that it is a shifting and
transitory group. In Port-of-Spain, for example, the low
prestige spectators or visitors are relatively few in
number and frequently people who attend a ceremony one
night are not in attendance the next night. When feasts
are held in rural areas, this group tends to be numerically
larger and many persons are perhaps attracted by the "fete"
atmosphere. It is doubtful that the majority of such
persons actively aspire to attain high prestige in the group.

is to a considerable degree related to subformations on a
prestige heirarchy. Some of the individual rewards accruing
to the Shango participant, once he has become a prestigeful
member of the group, have been discussed.

We shall next discuss the final question raised in
Chapter I. How does the prestige which the individual gains
through Shango participation generalize to his position
outside the cult? In Chapter II it has already been
indicated that participation in "African" religious movements,
of which Shango is an example, is negatively evaluated by
members of the middle and upper class in Trinidad. That is,
participation in such movements is detrimental to the parti-
cipant's prestige as evaluated by the larger society. The
generalization of the prestige gained with the cult is
restricted to the lower class and we shall now attempt to
deal with some of the factors influencing the degree to which
this generalization does indeed occur.

Whether or not the Shango member is evaluated as an
important person, as a function of his Shango membership,
by other lower class Trinidadian Negroes outside the group,
is, of course, dependent upon who is doing the evaluating.
Those lower class Negroes who are still striving for
prestige enhancement through the channels favored by the
larger society (as discussed in Chapter II) tend to be
contemptuous of Shango members. In their attempts to "advance"
in "white ways" they tend to incorporate the middle and upper

class beliefs that Shango (and other movements of this kind)
is African, barbaric, and to be despised and forgotten.
Reference has been made to this in Chapter III. These are
the persons who attempt to break through the stratification
lines of the larger society and in this attempt they frequently
are eager to disassociate themselves from all aspects of
lower class life, and Shango is identified as very much a
part of that lower class life.

Thus, at least a small portion of lower class members
do not see the Shango member as an important or significant
person. We knew one taxi driver who was desperately trying
to save money so that he could buy a home in Port-of-Spain
He talked about "those crazy people" and claimed not to
believe in "That African jumbee (spirits)." However, he
admitted that he occasionally attended feasts and had even
consulted a bush-doctor when his daughter was ill. While
it is, of course, difficult to generalize, we may tentatively
speculate that even those lower class people who seemingly
disapprove of Shango activities, are, nevertheless, at least
slightly attracted to it. The important role of supernatural
beliefs in the lower class, e.g., the belief in witches,
spirits of the night, and other spiritual beings may be
significant here. Even if Shango is disapproved of, it is
also held in awe. That is, the feeling may well be that
these individuals, despite their "craziness" are working
with some kind of spirit and spirits are not to be rejected.

Others in the lower class population seem to be negative

in, or conflicted about, their evaluation of Shango members

for somewhat different reasons. This holds particularly for

those who have affiliated themselves with other religious

movements but who, for a variety of reasons, have not become

involved with Shango. The dominant reason for this, as stated

by these persons, is "because they (Shango members) indulge

in blood sacrifice." This feeling is frequently expressed

by members of the widespread Shouter Baptist group. There

seems to be considerable rivalry between Shouter and Shango

followers, with some members participating in the activities

of both. One possible speculation about why so many Shouters

disapprove of Shango may be that the former is currently

striving to become an increasingly "respectable Church."

Traditionally, many upper and middle class persons have

tended to make little discrimination between the Shouter

and Shango groups, lumping both of them together as "African"

and undesirable. Recently, however, some Shouter leaders

appear to be struggling to make the Shouters respectable

in the eyes of the larger society. In view of the very

large Shouter membership, and their consequent power as a

potential political voting block, some Trinidadian politicians

seem to be recognizing the group more and more. They are

publicly associating with the leaders, lending their official

presence to some functions and, thus, actualizing some of

the leaders' ambitions about becoming more respectable and

recognized. Although many Shouters try to explicitly differ-
entiate themselves from Shango, and deplore its "pagan"
practices, others, consider "all the roads to Heaven" valuable
even if they object to some of the specifics of Shango ritual.

One of the major ways in which the prestigeful Shango
member also gains recognition outside the group is through
his services as a bush-doctor. Many are quite renowned
for the advice and medicine which they give and a very
large proportion of those who seek their help are non-Shango
members from the lower class. For example, more than half
the people who consult Mr. E. are neither Shango followers
nor do they come from his neighborhood. The services of the
more renowned bush doctors are widely sought and people come
to them from all parts of the island to seek their aid.
Similar observations were made with respect to other Shango
bush doctors. Their knowledge and power is thought to come
through the ability to communicate directly with the gods
and this is deeply respected and widely recognized as
possible.

Shango participants whom we have termed members of the
"intermediate" prestige subgroup are, to a lesser degree,
also thought to have this ability and tend, to that degree,
to be respected for it. The bush doctors tend to be
unquestionably obeyed by those who come for their services.
These services tend to be extremely popular and we observed
steady processions of visitors waiting for hours in line for

their turn to speak with the "big man."

Others who do not seek the bush-doctor services still visit Shango feasts for the variety of reasons which have been suggested earlier. Many of those who use Shango primarily as a "fete" which is to be watched, admired and enjoyed seem to closely associate the more active Shango members with this and accord them considerable recognition for their affiliation with the Shango fete even outside the direct context of the cult.

For the most part, in spite of the qualifications which have been mentioned above, it is our strong impression that Shango members tend to be recognized as fairly important people by the majority of the lower class non-Shango participants whom they encounter. Above all, Shango is considered "spiritual" and its members tend to be seen as, and associated with, the spiritual. Some are afraid of Shango members, others are in conflict about them, but most respect them. The virtue of being "spiritual" in the lower class cannot be overemphasized and Shango is often seen as the personification of the spiritual work.

In the following chapter the present thesis will be summarized and the emerging conclusions and implications for further research will be examined. Finally, some very recent events, which may already be influencing some of the conditions which have been discussed, will be mentioned.

CHAPTER IX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this final chapter is to summarize the present thesis, to explore some of the further questions which arise from it in terms of their potential research implications, and to indicate some recent changes in Trinidadian society which may effect the present observations.

Six central questions have been discussed, all dealing with the problem of acquiring prestige in Trinidadian society and in the Shango group. We have attempted to show that the lower class Trinidadian Negro has few realistically available means for the attainment of prestige in the larger society. Color, ethnicity, economics, and education were discussed with respect to this. In the course of this discussion, aspects of Trinidadian social stratification were examined although much of the data was unfortunately fragmentary. It was argued that if the lower class Trinidadian desires prestige (as he indeed seems to) he has little recourse other than to turn to those activities which are sanctioned by major portions of his own class but which are unacceptable to, or incompatible with, the values of the larger society. Certain religious movements, of which Shango is an important example, appear to be crucial among these alternative activities. The Shango group was focused upon and since such Afro-American

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cults are little known to American social scientists, it was
compared with similar groups wherever possible. The organi-
zation, ceremonies, cosmology and deities of the group were
described in detail. Since the practice of spirit possession
is a dominant characteristic of this group, and since it thus
far has received relatively little systematic study, behavior
during spirit possession was elaborated upon in particular
detail. The specific ways through which prestige can be
attained within the Shango group were discussed and the
relationships between prestige and group structure were
examined. Finally, the individual rewards of high prestige
members, both within the cult and outside the cult, were
discussed.

To elaborate, we have discussed prestige striving in the
context of the larger Trinidadian society as well as within
the Shango group itself: in both, concern with prestige ap-
pears to be dominant. It was noted that in both the society
and the group there are prerequisites which must be possessed
before even the potential for prestige attainment within the
group can be realized. It was seen, however, that in the
larger society the two major prerequisites which automat-
ically effect the potential for prestige attainment seem to
be the ascriptive ones of color and ethnicity. These have
tended to automatically place the Black Trinidadian into the
lowest strata of the social scale and to rather rigidly keep
him there until these prerequisites are obtained (e.g.,

through gradual intermarriages for skin-lightening) or are
partially overcome by economic and educational attainments.
However, as was shown, the latter tend to occur only very
rarely. In contrast to this, lightness of skin and European
ethnic origins are not prerequisites for prestige attainment
within the Shango group. On the contrary, such characteristics
might serve to bar the individual from membership. In this
sense, the basic Shango prerequisites are blackness and Trin-
idadian origins: all the members share these attributes. It
is of note that the two major prerequisites for prestige in
the total society, and which are probably the major sources
of personal frustration and pain for the lower class Negro,
are entirely absent in Shango. It seems safe to suggest that
for those who find the color and ethnic barriers of the larger
society particularly disturbing (probably the bulk of the
lower class population), this group, and participation within
the Shango group, is apt to be especially important. It is
tempting to speculate that in a society in which the vast
majority of the population continues to be forced into an in-
ferior role on the basis of ascriptive characteristics such
as color and ethnicity, there is a "need" for a group, such
as Shango, in which prestige can be gained by those who
cannot gain it in other ways within the larger society. This
"need" may be successfully met only for those who can gain
recognition within the group itself. On the other hand,
even those in low prestige positions and those who are merely

spectators probably find some degree of satisfaction, if only of a recreational character, within or through the group.

The broader problem of interest which emerges from this, and which is beyond the scope of the present work, involves the detailed relationship between an organization of this nature and the larger society within which it exists.

R. Metraux, in a somewhat confusing paper, attempts to deal with this kind of problem. She describes a situation in which the concern with power and authority in Haitian political life seems related to aspects of family life. She indicates that this is reflected in the situation which occurs when a vodun priest or priestess dies without having made clear the succession. Metraux argues that the manner in which a new successor is appointed seems similar to the way in which problems involving political leadership are handled in the larger Haitian society.[1]

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1. "There are no other acknowledged steps through which one can rise to authority, and there are no openly competitive or cooperative techniques for working out a decision. Thus, where a single designated position of authority is at stake and no outside assistance is given, the more usual way out of a potentially rivalrous situation, i.e., by the formation of a new, independent hierarchy, is excluded. Instead, covertly rivalrous groups form, and solution is reached by a tipping of the scales in one direction or another by outside forces through which one rival conclusively proves his strength and elegibility . . ." (Metraux, op.cit., p. 192)

A more concrete illustration of the way in which a group
of the kind which concerns us may reflect societal structure
is given by Bourguignon. She was told by a Haitian informant
that "Maurice (a man who had been seen in a dream) is a dark
Negro, a big fellow, so you know it is Papa Gede. That is
the system of the gods. If you dream of a beautiful reddish
woman, with beautiful hair, you know it is Erzili. Any good
looking man, with beautiful hair, any mulatto, that is
Damballa."[2] She further states that ". . . such systems of
identification very interestingly reflect Haitian race
classification, and incidentally, Haitian class structure as
well. The gods, like people, fall into race and class group-
ings—e.g., Gede, particularly representing the lower-class
groups in his skin color, his manners, and in a variety of
other characteristics attributed to him."[3]

As has been pointed out repeatedly in this thesis, color
and ethnicity, the two major ascriptive attributes used by
the larger society including, in part at least, the lower
class, are not prerequisites for Shango membership. However,
it was also shown that there are definite ascriptive pre-
requisites (e.g., a Shango background, some degree of money,
association with Shango leaders) which must be met in order

2. Erika Bourguignon, "Dreams and Dream Interpretation in
Haiti," American Anthropologist, v. 56, April 1954, p. 267.
3. Ibid.

to realize the potential for the achievement of recognition
in the group. It was further shown that the implicit social
structure of the group can be seen as organized on a prestige
dimension or hierarchy. There is of course a major difference
between the functions of prestige in the group and in Trin-
idadian society at large. The prestige barriers and dimen-
sions of judgment or ranking within the larger society are
overt and perhaps even brutally obvious. In contrast, with-
in the Shango group the prestige rankings and the organi-
zation of subgroups on the basis of the degree of prestige
of the members are much more covert and implicit. They are
couched in the language of the cult: in the language of the
"powers" and the service of the powers. But they seem,
nevertheless, to be very real considerations, and some of the
members seem to be quite aware of this, in spite of the out-
ward harmony and cohesiveness of the group. It certainly
appears that the group incorporates some salient features of
the larger society and that just as there are some parallels
between the members' life roles (e.g., domestics) and of their
group functions (e.g., "servants" of the powers), so there
are parallels between their desires for prestige and mobility
in the larger society and their participation in the group.
The further study of the detailed ways in which this group,
and groups like it, parallel or reflect important aspects of
the larger society of which they are a part appears to be an
extremely interesting area for further research. This leads

us to a consideration of other research implications which
may be drawn from this thesis.

First, it seems apparent that a systematic investigation
of Trinidadian society, including not only the relations be-
tween the various Negro groups in the island, but also taking
into account the structure of the numerous other ethnic
groups and their functioning within Trinidadian society, is
needed. Braithwaite's study, which has heavily influenced
the earlier chapters of this thesis and which may perhaps be
thought of as a pioneer work is primarily concerned with the
Negro and handles the problems presented by other groups only
superficially.[4] This is especially needed since the East
Indian population is not only increasing but in addition is
acquiring influence in economic and political affairs.

Further study into the culture of the lower class Negro
in Trinidad is also called for. One study, which deals with
family structure, is quite comprehensive, yet heavily biased
in that it represents the viewpoints of the Catholic Church.[5]
While we have presented material pertaining to religious
organizations, more work is needed to clarify the seemingly
complex relationship between, for example, the Shango cult
and the Spiritual Baptist church. Of the many points of

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4. Braithwaite, op. cit.
5. Dom Basil Mathews, op. cit.

interest which could be raised here, perhaps, one of the most intriguing is the small, but increasing, entry of the lower class, predominantly Moslem, East Indians into the various Baptist churches. Similarly, the participation of some members of the Spiritual Baptists in the orthodox white-controlled London Baptist church raises some interesting questions.

Other aspects of Trinidadian lower class life have been barely tapped. For example, little is known about recreational and leisure time activities. It may well be that future research will isolate other means through which the Negro can attain prestige, within his class and outside the class. Exploration of the particular conditions influencing which of the various alternative pathways for prestige enhancement are chosen (e.g., if the individual participates in lower class religions, which religion(s) does he choose from the variety available to him) remains open. Similarly, the further investigation of the "immediate reward" characteristics and conditions of Negro culture, and of the etiology and consequences of the Negro's immediate reward orientation (as discussed in Chapter II) awaits further study.

The Shango group itself requires further investigation, particularly with respect to the meaning and functions of spirit possession. A variety of tentative hypotheses can now be more fully explored. The relationships between personality variables and particular behaviors during possession seems an especially fertile area. For example, our observations are suggestive of direct relationships between the

content and occurrence of frustrations in daily behavior and the content and occurrence of possession during ceremonies. Relations between such variables as guilt, anxiety, sex role confusion, rigidity, etc., and particular behaviors under possession might fruitfully be explored to further clarify the personal functions of spirit possession.

A more systematic examination of the similarities and differences between Shango and other similar New World syncretic groups might illuminate other important aspects of the functions and rituals of such groups. Studying such groups from a group dynamics viewpoint[6] and exploring them in terms of variables such as group interactions, group cohesiveness, group pressures, etc. might prove quite valuable particularly since such studies have thus far been largely confined to the laboratory setting and have relatively rarely been used either in naturalistic settings or for cross-cultural comparisons.

Finally, we must consider one further area. We have already alluded to the changes which seem to be taking place in Trinidad within the last two years. Similarly, much of what has been presented throughout this thesis may be changing rapidly as major changes occur with the society. Perhaps the most noteworthy change is the increased interest in politics. The formation of the largely Negro nationalistic People's National Movement Party and the subsequent British West Indian Federation are probably exerting major influences

6. Cartwright, D., and Zander, A., *Group Dynamics*. Evanston, Ill., 1953.

on what we have termed the "paths" or "channels" for prestige attainment in Trinidadian society. Recent newspaper reports indicate that British power in the island appears to be waning and this may well relate to a future decreased emphasis upon ethnicity as a major concern within the society. Similarly, the economic picture appears to be rapidly changing. The tourist trade is increasing and the American control of Trinidadian oil also appears to have had a major effect in terms of increased trade relations between the United States and Trinidad. Changes of this magnitude may well be exerting major effects on many aspects of the culture and must have bearing on some of the points made in this thesis. To what extent these effects are felt in the lower class, and within the Shango group, of course, remains an open question. We might anticipate, for example, that if the lower class Trinidadian Negro finds himself able to move upwards and to gain prestige within his society, rather than only within his class, such manifestations as the Shango group and other similar lower class religious organizations may decrease in membership and importance.

The present investigation may be seen as largely exploratory. A variety of problems, some of which have been sketched above, obviously require detailed further research in this complex and still largely unexplored field situation which is itself rapidly changing.

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AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I, Frances Osterman Mischel, was born in Kassel,
Germany, December 24, 1931. I received my secondary school
education in the public schools of Brooklyn, New York, and
my undergraduate training at Brooklyn College, which granted
me the Bachelor of Arts degree in 1953. I received the
Master of Arts degree from Ohio State University in 1955.
In 1956, I received a pre-doctoral fellowship from the
Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research to
undertake field work in Trinidad, B.W.I. From 1956 to
1958 I taught at the Extension Division of the University
of Colorado while completing the requirements for the
degree Doctor of Philosophy.