

FOREWORD:

THE FOUNDERS PROJECT IS A MULTIMEDIA INSTALLATION PROJECT HEADED BY BOSTON BASED ARTIST AND EDUCATOR STEPHEN HAMILTON. THE PROJECT RE-IMAGINES BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOL HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS AS THE LEGENDARY FOUNDERS OF WEST AND WEST-CENTRAL AFRICAN ETHNIC GROUPS; SPECIFICALLY, THOSE THAT ARE PART OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA'S ANCESTRAL BASE.

THE FOUNDERS PROJECT COMES OUT OF A DESIRE TO ADDRESS THE PERSISTENT LACK OF PRE-COLONIAL AFRICAN NARRATIVES IN MAINSTREAM EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSE AND CREATE EMPOWERING VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF BOSTON'S BLACK YOUTH. THIS PROJECT BOTH EXPLORES AND INTERROGATES POPULAR CONCEPTIONS OF "THE ANCESTORS" WITHIN THE AFRICAN DIASPORIC IMAGINATION. WE EXPLORE THE PROGENITOR OR "FOUNDER" CONCEPT IN WEST AND WESTCENTRAL AFRICAN LORE AS THE PHYSICAL EMBODIMENT OF A PEOPLE AND THEIR HISTORY. THROUGH THEIR NARRATIVES, WE LEARN IMPORTANT LESSONS ABOUT THE CULTURAL IMPERATIVES, WORLDVIEW, AND AESTHETICS OF THE ETHNIC GROUPS WHO VENERATE AND SOMETIMES WORSHIP THEM AS DIVINE ANCESTORS. EACH PIECE DISSECTS IMPORTANT KEY SYMBOLS ABOUT EACH OF THE HIGHLIGHTED INDIVIDUALS' PERSONAL AND BROADER CULTURAL NARRATIVES, GLOSSING THE HISTORICAL FIGURE AND THE CULTURES THAT CLAIM THEM AS ANCESTORS.

DURING THE TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE, MILLIONS OF PEOPLE WERE FORCIBLY TAKEN FROM THEIR HOMELANDS ALL OVER WEST AND WEST-CENTRAL AFRICA. EACH OF THESE PEOPLE BROUGHT WITH THEM THEIR OWN STORIES AS WELL AS CENTURIES OF RICH AND COMPLEX TRADITIONS FROM THEIR ANCESTRAL HOMELANDS. THE FOUNDER'S PROJECT DETAILS THE FOUNDATION MYTHS OF NINE OF THE DOZENS OF ETHNIC GROUPS ANCESTRAL TO MILLIONS OF BLACK PEOPLE ACROSS THE AMERICAS.

MOST OF THESE LEGENDS TOOK PLACE BETWEEN THE 11TH AND 16TH CENTURIES WHEN INCREASES IN TRANS-SAHARAN TRADE ENCOURAGED THE EXPANSION OF STATES THAT HAD EMERGED DURING LATE ANTIQUITY. HOWEVER, IT IS ESSENTIAL FOR US NOT TO RELY ON A LINEAR AND MONOCHRONIC VIEW OF TIME WHEN INTERPRETING THESE STORIES. MANY OF THESE LEGENDS BLEND TOGETHER EVENTS FROM THE SPREAD OF ISLAM IN THE 10TH CENTURY TO THE EMERGENCE OF WEST AFRICA'S EARLIEST IRON AGE CIVILIZATIONS IN THE FIRST MILLENNIUM B.C.E AND EVEN FURTHER TO ANCIENT MIGRATIONS DEEP IN PRE-HISTORY. THEIR DESCENDANTS OFTEN DEIFIED THE FOUNDERS OF THESE ANCIENT DYNASTIES IN BOTH AFRICA AND THE AMERICAS. THE STORIES I SHARE WITH YOU NOW HAVE BEEN PASSED DOWN THROUGH COUNTLESS GENERATIONS.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

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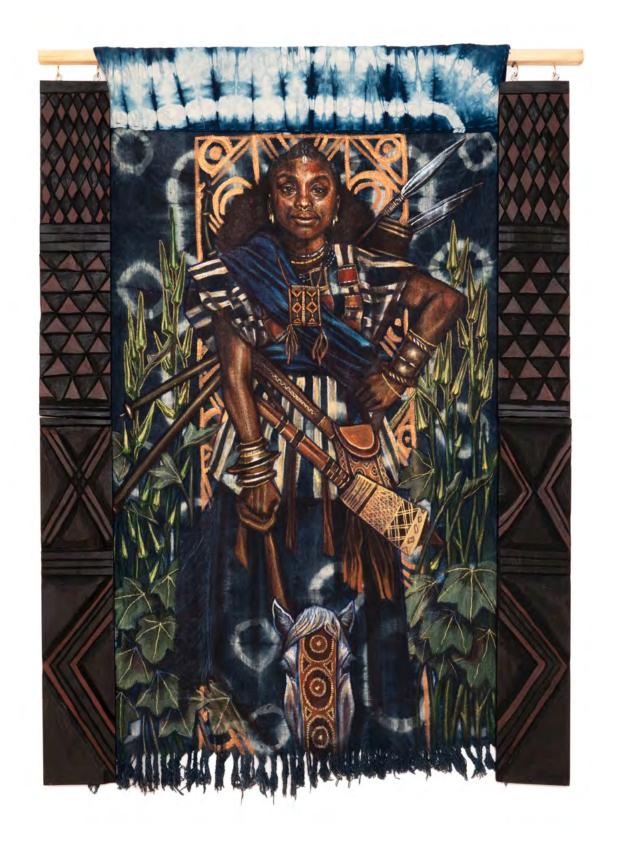
PHOTOTOGRAPHY: STACEY HAMILTON

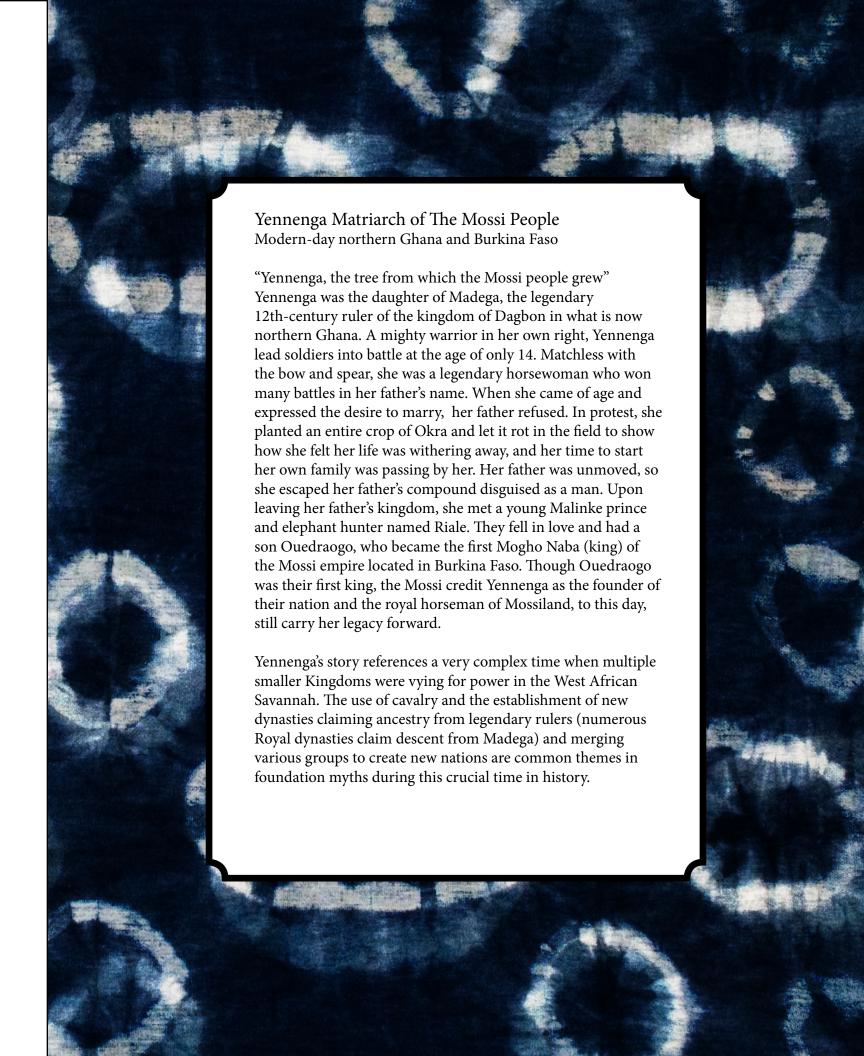
VIDEO: SHEENA QUINTYNE

SOCIAL MEDIA:
LENORA HOUSEWORTH KELLY

SPECIAL THANKS TO NOW+THERE

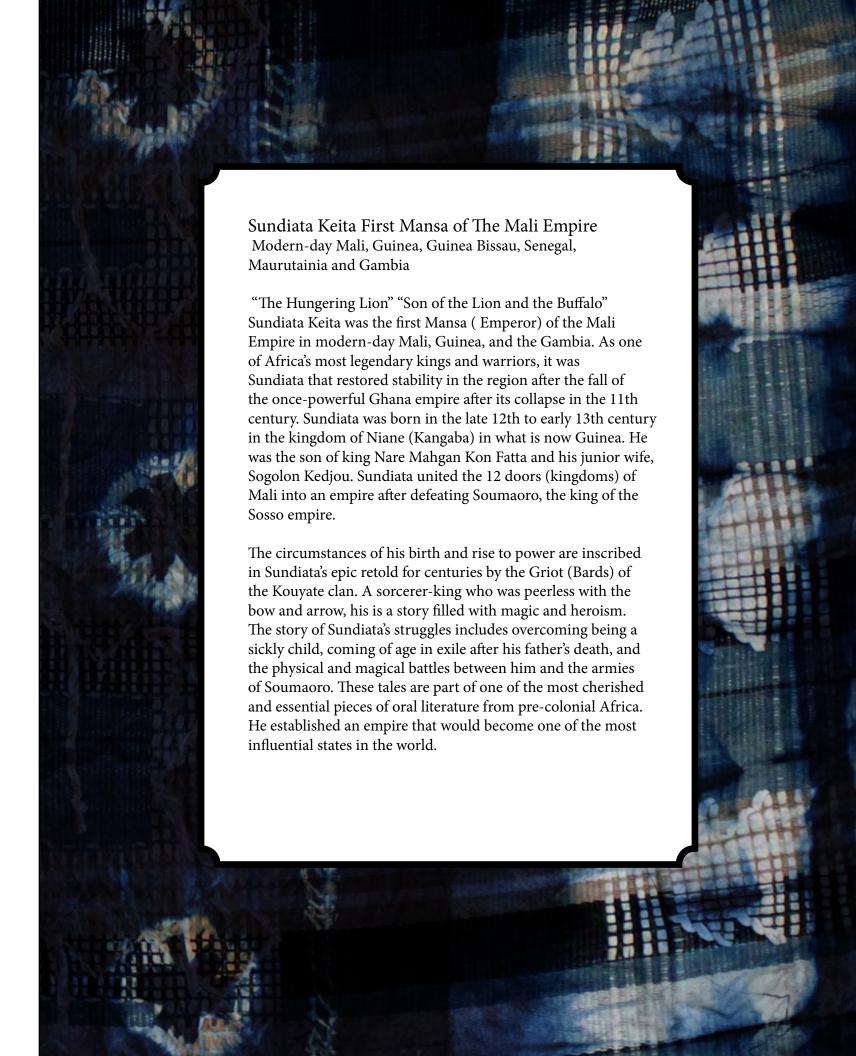
GIANNA WATSON AS YENNENGA





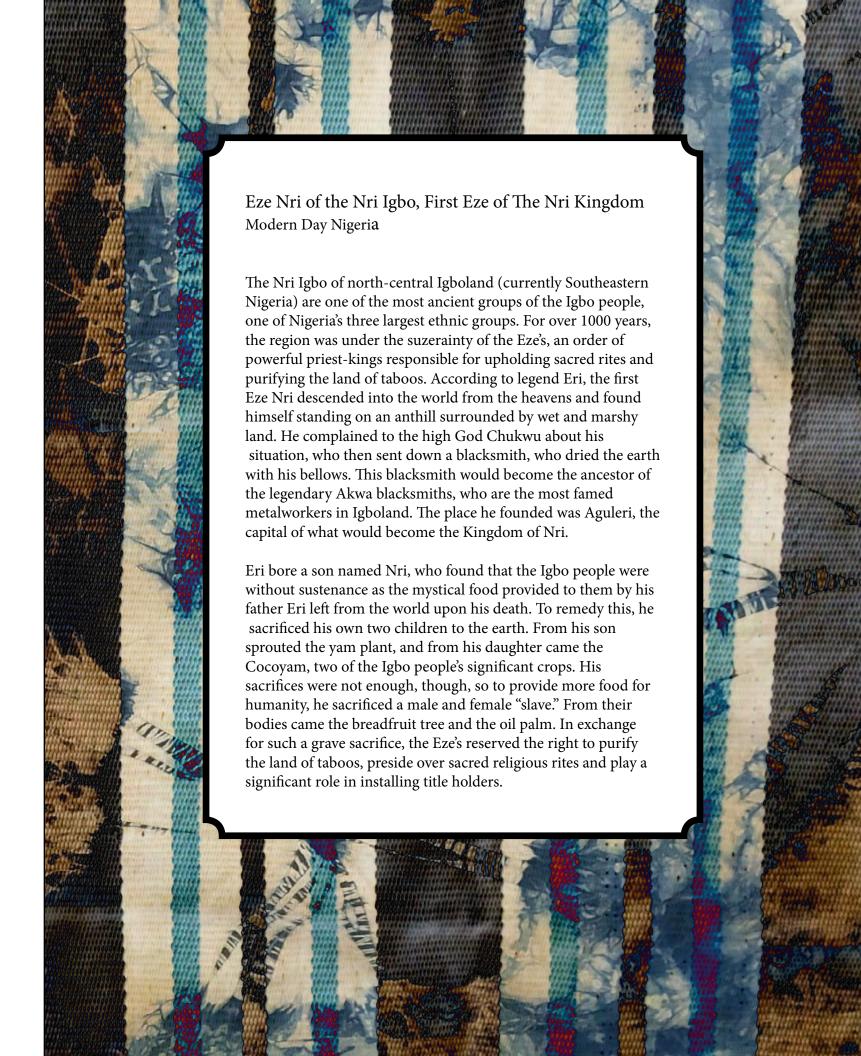
DASHAWN BORDEN AS SUNDIATA KEITA





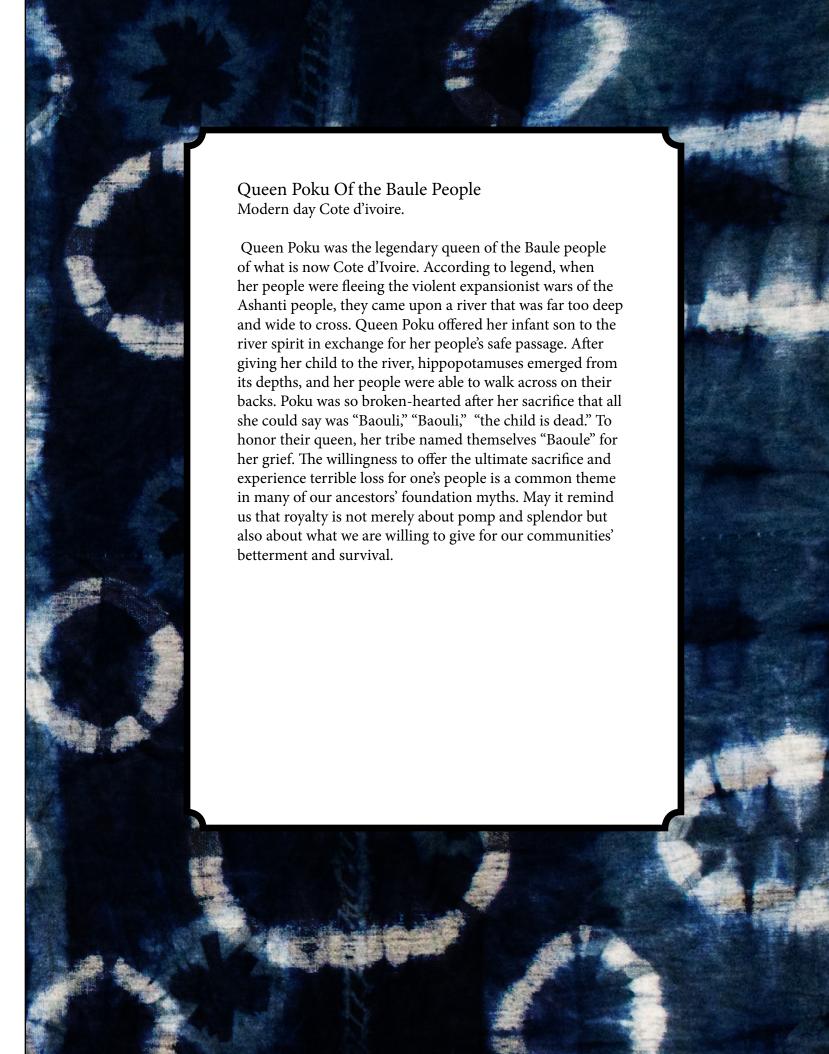
JOSEPH LEWIS AS EZE NRI





JAHNAE WYATT AS QUEEN POKU





RUTH AYUSO AS THE FIRST NNIMM WOMAN



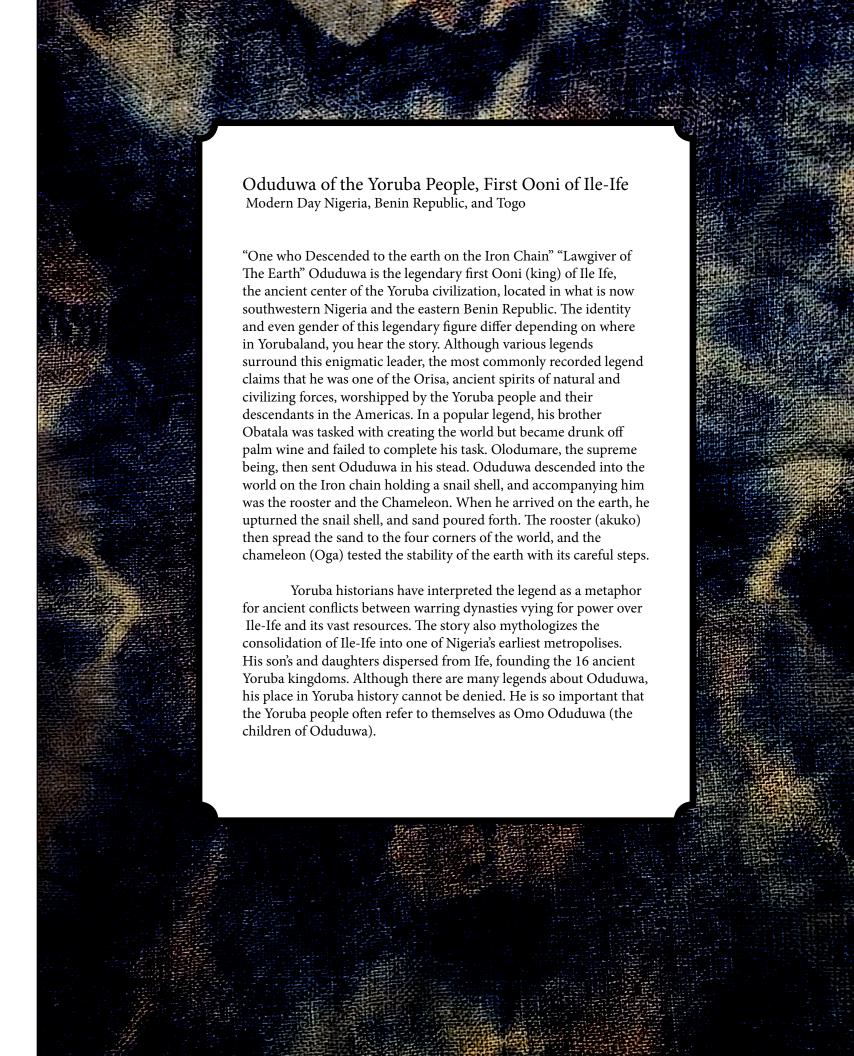
First Nnimm Woman of the Ejagham Modern Day Nigeria and Cameroon

'Among the Ejagham people of southeastern Nigeria and western Cameroon, there existed two powerful ancient magico-religious institutions. These are the ancient orders of Nimm and Ngbe. Divided along the gender lines, Ngbe was and still is a powerful male society representing the leopard's embodied mysteries. Its members held political and spiritual sway over the region. They shared this power with Nnimm's once-powerful Female order represented by water spirits, such as the Crocodile and Snake. Both cults used the ancient Nsibidi script used by the Ejagham, Ibibio, and Igbo peoples in the various Ngbe lodges throughout southeastern Nigeria. The Nnimm goddess represents the feminine powers of the world, such as water, fertility, and the mysteries of life itself. Her knowledge is also tied to important women's initiation ritual spaces, such as the fattening house, where women prepare for marriage and learn of feminine matters.

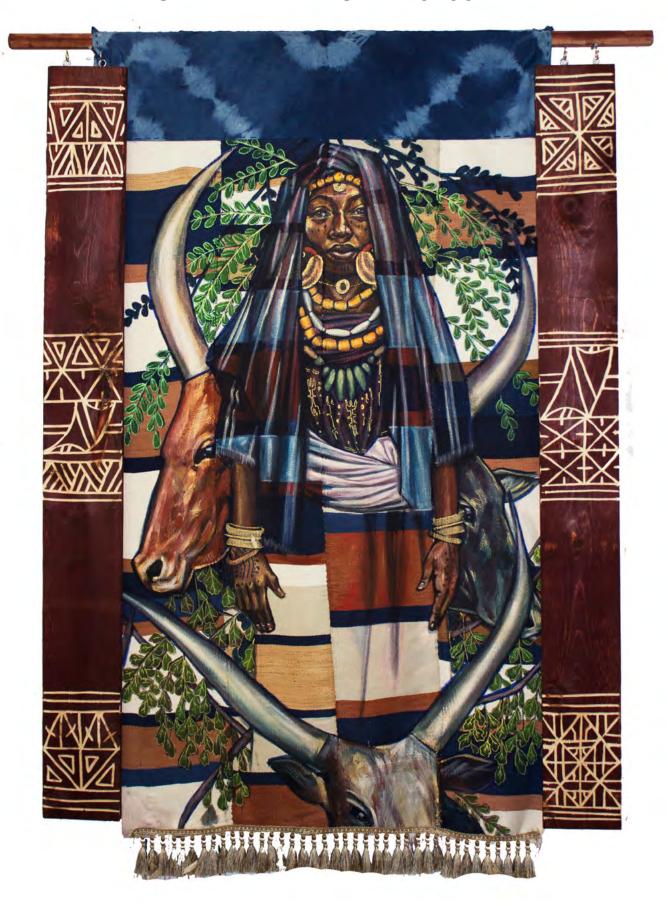
It is through the priestesses of Nnimm that women exerted spiritual and political influence in the cross-river region. The Nnimm priestess and initiates' splendid regalia are abundant with feathers, shells, bones, beads, and abundant cloth. They are also painted with sacred symbols and patterns using sacred white chalk. This regalia was believed to have been brought down from the heavens by the first Nnimm initiate, who revealed the water and forest spirits' secret to humanity centuries ago. These women were as feared and respected as the Ngbe (leopard/panther) society ruled by their male counterparts and represented the balance between male and female powers necessary in preserving order. Although the ancient Nnimm society no longer exists, many of their ancient practices survive in the traditional dress and regalia of the modern Ejagham, Ibibio, and Aro Igbo peoples. During the Transatlantic slave trade, the mythology and regalia of Nnimm absorbed into the Ngbe leopard society in Cuba to create the Abakua society, which still preserves the ceremony, sacred writing, and mysteries of the ancient orders in their contemporary traditions.

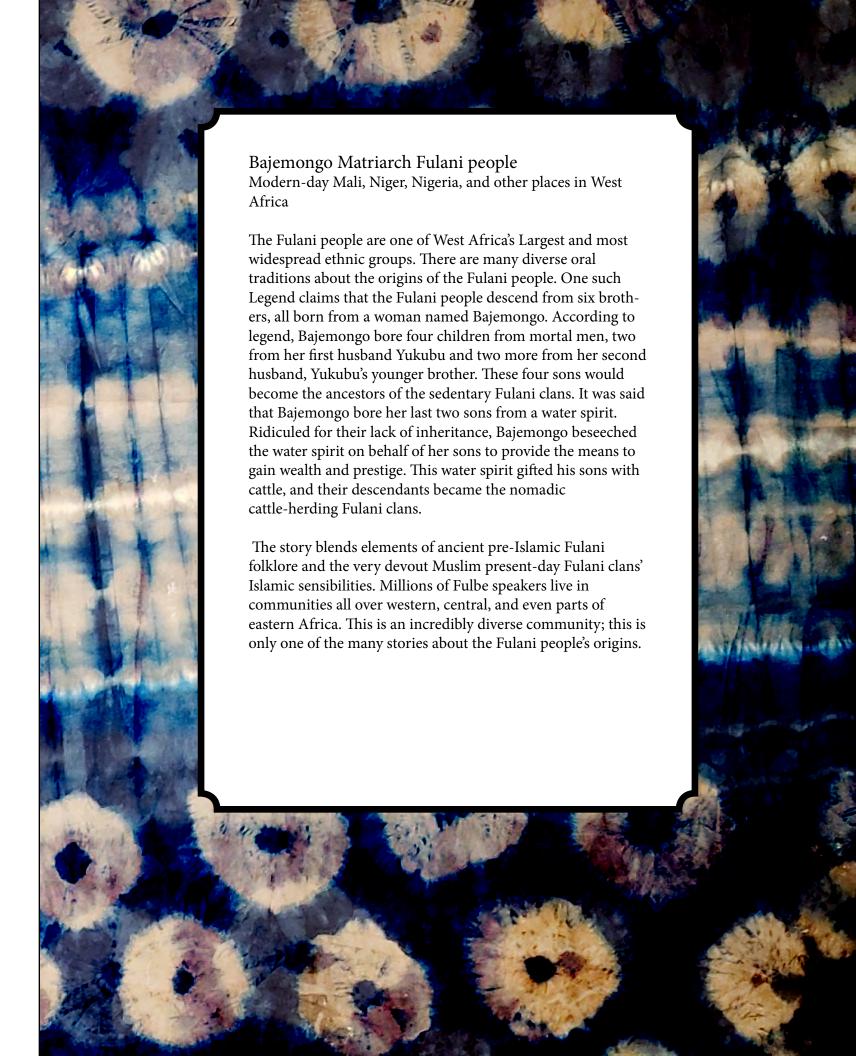
RASHAD CLARKE AS ODUDUWA





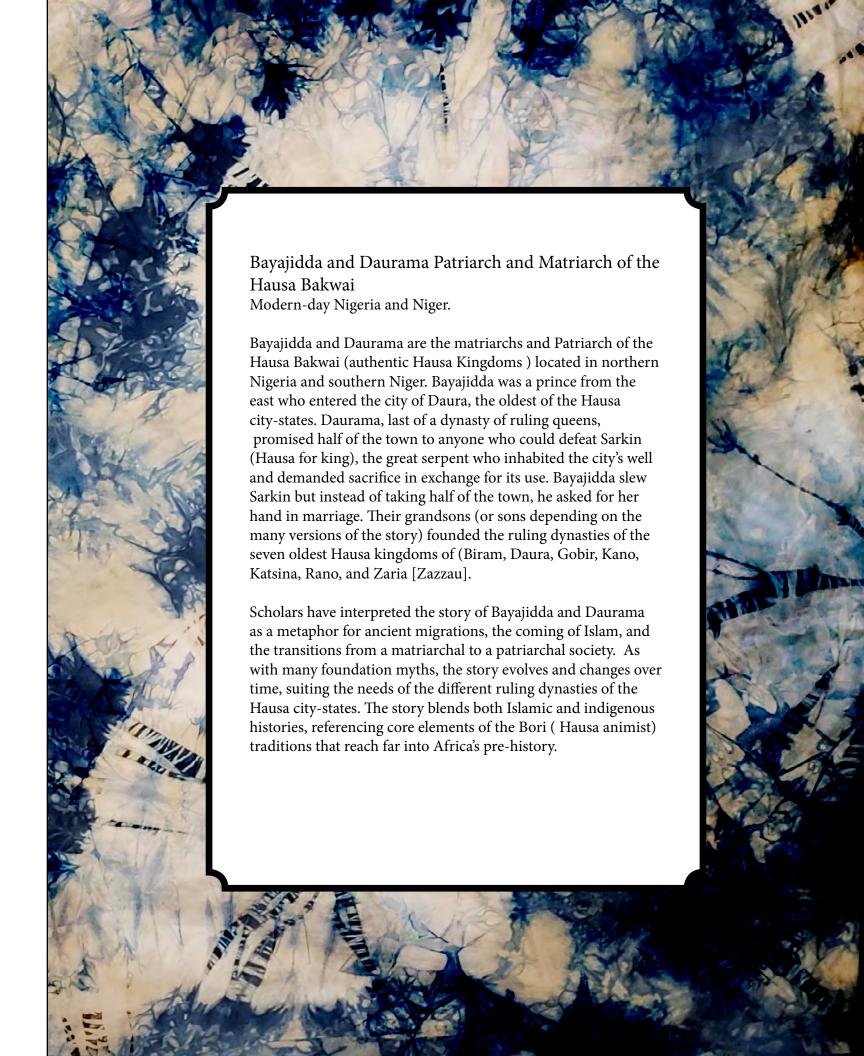
SALAMATA BARRY AS BAJEMONGO





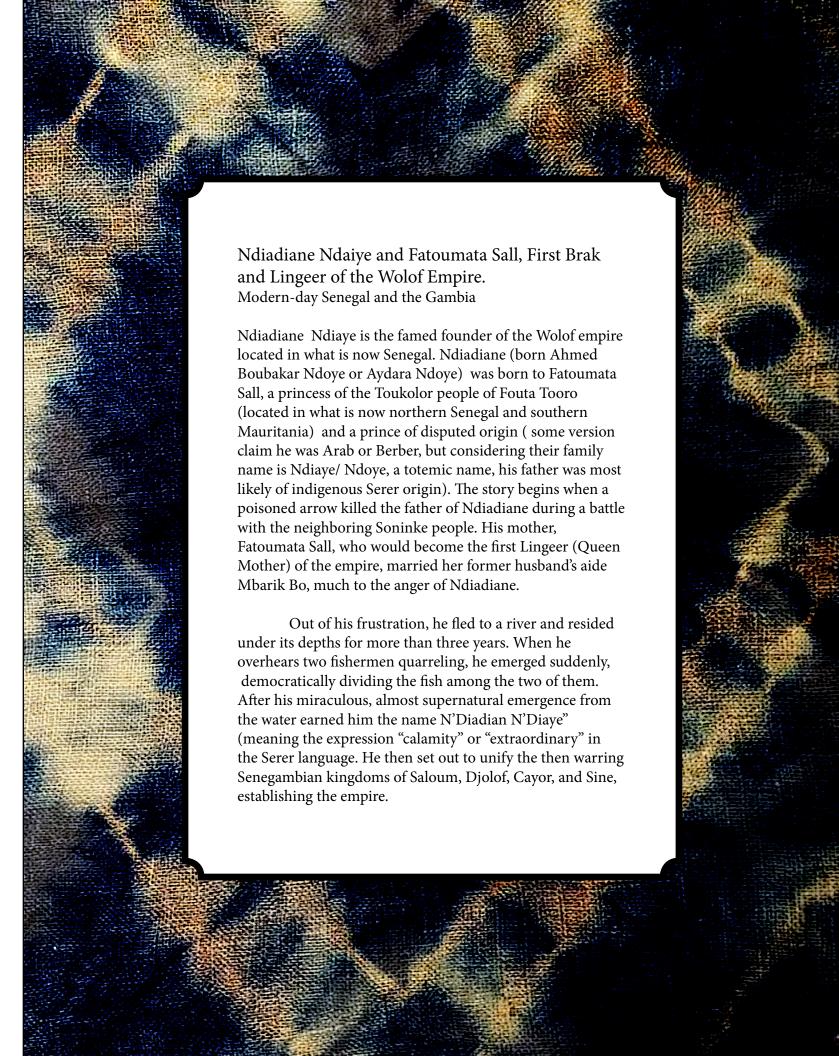
DEMAUNI SANKEY AND DEMARRIA LENDER AS BAYAJIDDA AND DAURAMA





DARRIUS ALLEN AND JASERY DOUMBOUYA AS NDIADIANE N'DIAYE AND FATOUMATA SALL





SOURCES AND SUGGESTED READING:

THE FOLLOWING SOURCES WERE USED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FOUNDER'S PROJECT. THEY ALSO FORM THE BASIS OF THE SUGGESTED READING. AS WITH ANY INFORMATION, WE MUST INTERROGATE AND ASK ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS ABOUT OUR SOURCES.

- ***WHO IS THE AUTHOR?**
- ***WHEN AND WHERE WAS IT WRITTEN?**
- ***WHAT ARE THEIR SOURCES?**
- ***HOW DO THE ABOVE FACTORS IMPACT THEIR BIASES AND POINT OF VIEW?**

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