Forms of Worship

How Orișa Worship Became Religion in Nigeria and Brazil

AYODEJI OGUNNAIKE

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THE RELIGIOUS CULTURES OF AFRICAN AND AFRICAN DIASPORA PEOPLE

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To our father, Babatunde Ayọdeji Ogunnaike, who taught us to worship in spirit and in truth

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Introduction

No one knows how many people identify with or engage in one of the world's most popular religions. The growing number is likely in the hundreds of millions, and most of them live outside the religion's homeland in countries on practically every continent. In fact, the religion did not exist until about one hundred years ago. What is perhaps *most* remarkable about this highly successful religion is that many involved in it do not consider it to be a religion at all—at least not in the modern sense of the word. Because of its high global profile and privileged place in the African diaspora, traditional Yoruba religion (sometimes called "Orișa," "Ifa-orișa," or simply "Yoruba") is arguably the most prominent, iconic indigenous African religious tradition and makes a convincing claim to the title of "world religion." Despite people from Australia to Atlanta converting to, engaging with, and/or practicing traditional Yoruba religion, in historical perspective it might not be considered traditional, Yoruba, or even a religion (much as Voltaire observed the Holy Roman Empire was not holy, Roman, or a true empire).[1] If the preeminent traditional African religion was not and in some cases still is not a "religion," then what was it, and how did it come to be one of the most popular religions in world? This book traces the evolution of the religious traditions of the contemporary Yoruba people from premodern forms of worship to a successful, modern religion.[2]

Forms of Worship

In tracing the religious evolution of Yoruba society, the book articulates the indigenous Yoruba orientation toward religious traditions and how they operate, identifying how these forms of worship differ greatly from modern assumptions about the nature of religion. The Yoruba word *ẹsin* is usually translated

as "religion," but a literal translation could render it as "form/way of worship." I argue the indigenous category of ẹsin as "form of worship" demonstrates an orientation to religious practice distinct from that of the modern world in that it implies the acceptance of a plurality of valid, complementary traditions with a common purpose; an inclusive and dynamic, rather than exclusive and fixed, cosmology; the possibility of engaging in more than one form of worship; and a greater emphasis on the relational aspect of the tradition over doctrines or beliefs. It also presupposes a cosmically ordained ritual practice for each person independent of private or individual preferences or beliefs. Furthermore, without the modern, Western separation between the sacred/secular, private/public, and individual/collective, forms of worship are integrated into all aspects of life from ancestry to politics to professional activities and the arts. While ẹsin as forms of worship may refer to phenomena that could fall under the modern category of religion (and many that may not), it articulates a fundamentally different understanding of how people interact with these phenomena and offers insight into traditional Yoruba cosmology and society.

Through analyzing the historical and contemporary religious behavior of Yoruba people and their descendants in diaspora; the Yoruba language; and indigenous social, religious, and political structures, I offer a description of what Yoruba ẹsin traditionally has been and how it has structured the lives of Yoruba people. The central feature is the remarkably high level of religious harmony that used to be the hallmark of Yoruba society but is rapidly eroding. Rather than focusing on the emergence of religious movements such as Pentecostalism or Salafism as a cause of increasing conflict (although they may be implicated in this change), my contention is that with the advent of modernity, it is the subtle, silent shift in understandings of what "religion" is and should be that is behind the recent rise in religious tension. Because this shift is still ongoing, its effects are apparent and far-reaching. The main historical and contemporary analysis of the book is of the Yoruba town of Ẹdẹ because of its unique ability to navigate the issues inherent in the modern notion of religion.

As analyzed in chapter 3, the use of the term *Yoruba* to refer to the current ethnic group has its origins in nineteenth-century missionary activity, making its use for people in the area of southwestern Nigeria, Benin, and Togo before that period a bit of an anachronism. While not bearing a unified pan-ethnic name and identity, these people did still share similar linguistic, political, economic, familial, religious, and artistic traditions and practices. As such, most scholars retrospectively treat the people as a loosely unified whole under the term *Yoruba*, particularly with respect to how these common features have influenced contemporary shared dynamics. When necessary, I use terms such as *proto-Yoruba*,

but I will refrain from constantly referring to the ancestors of the contemporary Yoruba as "the people who became Yoruba" for ease of reading but without intending to gloss over their internal diversity.

At the heart of this book is a shared orientation to the religious that I refer to as *traditional*, but only in the sense that it differs from a more recently introduced, oppositional orientation that conceptualizes and polices religion very differently. As Rowland Abiodun has demonstrated, Yoruba artistic traditions and concepts have deep roots and remarkable durability precisely because "tradition" for the Yoruba/proto-Yoruba has never reflected the notion of a rigid, unreflective repetition of some timeless ancestral practice but instead constitutes a continued dynamic enlistment of core values, frameworks, and practices, which are rearticulated in light of contemporary needs and landscapes.[3] Consequently, my use of expressions such as "Yoruba tradition of religious pluralism" does not refer to a monolithic and fixed religious institution but to a shared regional process or system of conceptualizing issues such as religious diversity and its perpetual rearticulation in particular ways unique to each specific setting. The two sites of Ẹdẹ, Nigeria, and Salvador, Brazil, demonstrate how Yoruba religious traditions and dynamics have always possessed fluid, constantly evolving cosmologies, with two different orientations toward understanding "religion" or "forms of worship" offering a useful framework for understanding the choices and practices of practitioners of all religious traditions.

A-Historic Religion

A great deal of scholarship has emerged over the past few decades on the problematic nature of the category of *religion*, particularly with respect to the modern, Western origin of the term. Famously, in tracing the development of the term through unique circumstances in the modern West, Jonathan Z. Smith explained that "'religion' is not a native category. . . . It is a category imposed from the outside on some aspect of native culture."[4] This does not mean that phenomena and institutions that might be categorized as "religion" or "religious" did not exist, but rather that not all people at all times have organized their lives through this specific category with its implied assumptions. Until the category of religion was imposed from outside, people would have thought about and engaged with "religious" aspects of their lives and societies in very different terms. Consequently, religious studies scholars, following Talal Asad, stress that it is necessary to provide the historical and cultural context of the tradition in question so as not to distort it.[5] Wilfred Cantwell Smith actually called for the term *religion* to be dropped altogether because of the specific and unique nature of its modern connotations, and he is not alone in his perspective.[6]

The growing consensus is that scholars should be careful about applying the idea of religion to many traditions and historical contexts, because even the words often translated as "religion" have carried drastically different meanings.[7] Many others have analyzed what societies and traditions around the world were like before the advent of the modern concept of religion.[8] Such work also complicates our understanding of religion itself, and of the nature of traditions such as Hinduism, Shintoism, or Buddhism, by shedding light on how contact with the West initiated a process that reconfigured them into their current forms. Such studies provide a glimpse into historical worlds and orientations that could be described as pre-religious. I engage in a similar process of framing the Yoruba category of ẹsin through ethnography, but I also document and analyze the lived experiences and perspectives of many in Nigeria and Brazil who currently do not operate within the modern framework of religion. Understanding how these contemporary people conceptualize and interact with the institutions and traditions in their lives can help us understand how many others across the globe may also have done so and to make sense of issues that are otherwise difficult to theorize and understand despite being central to Yoruba society.

Some of these issues include the notorious difficulty in acquiring accurate demographics on religious identity; some Africans' ease in crossing religious boundaries in discourse, practice, or affiliation; and the impressive readiness and enthusiasm with which many have embraced Islam and Christianity. Again, one of the most notable—and curious from a Western perspective—features of Yoruba society was its high level of religious harmony, despite boasting approximately equal numbers of Muslims and Christians. This dynamic challenges the common, modern notion that religion is dangerous and potentially violent when combined with politics, resulting in the necessity of a secular/religious divide. This idea, also a product of the Enlightenment and of the modern West, must be understood within the context of nation-states' rise to power and the subjugation of non-Western societies with different configurations of politics and religion. Contrary to popular belief, the advent of secularism largely did *not* coincide with a progression from violence to peace, and nation-states and ideologies such as Marxism or capitalism have engendered as much—if not more—conflict as religious traditions have.[9] Traditional Yoruba society offers a strong challenge to the myth of religious violence, and the events documented in this book similarly link the creation of religion as a separate sphere of life to processes of nationalism and colonization.

David Laitin, perhaps the first theorist to examine how religion did not function as a divisive force in Yoruba politics, argued that it was the notion of communal identity tied to the ancestral city-state (ilu) and its elevated importance under colonialism that could explain the apparent non-politicization

of religious affiliation in Yorubaland.[10] From a more cultural perspective, I. A. Akinjogbin argued for the concept of ẹbi, or primary identification with and responsibility to one's family and lineage, as the root of how Yoruba communities imagined themselves.[11] A related argument commonly repeated by scholars and Yoruba people themselves is that many Yoruba families have both Muslim and Christian members, and so conflict along religious lines risks antagonizing one's relatives. Furthermore, the Yoruba have a tradition of attending each other's festivals regardless of religious identity, and this common spirit in celebration may help to counteract conflict.[12] From an indigenous point of view, Yoruba religious harmony is quite natural rather than a novelty requiring explanation, while it is religious *conflict* that is novel and requires explanation. While what might be called "religion" has always been critically important to the Yoruba, how they understood its nature and practice made conflict along religious lines almost unthinkable and provided the logic for why family members might have differing religious affiliations and still participate in communal rituals from varied religious traditions.

As Olufemi Vaughan argued in the case of the Nigerian state, religion need not always be divisive; instead, it can and often has been employed to form broader but still diverse identities, institutions, and sociopolitical structures.[13] The pluralistic and conciliatory Yoruba approach toward religion has proven essential for the stability of the Nigerian state. In previous religiously charged moments, such as the 1970s debate over the federal Shari'ah Courts or Nigeria's admittance into the Organisation of the Islamic Conference in 1986, Yoruba politicians (both Muslim and Christian) played a key role in bridging the religious divide and fostering political reconciliation, understanding, and compromise that kept the country together.[14] However, while religious harmony and pluralism have traditionally been hallmarks of Yoruba societies, this has begun to change right when economic, political, and social tensions with strong religious overtones have plagued Nigeria, including the conflict between farmers and herdsmen in the Middle Belt and the rise of Boko Haram in the northeast. Pressing questions raised in this book are, What was the traditional Yoruba orientation to the religious that produced this tolerant perspective? What has caused it to change? And what does this change mean for the future of Yorubaland and perhaps Nigeria at large?

At the heart of any response to these questions is the meaning and implications of the term *ẹsin*, and as Abiodun has argued, greater understanding and use of indigenous terms and concepts in African languages is essential to increase the level of cultural respect and quality of work in African studies, just as the use of Italian terms is essential with respect to Western art.[15] I will generally use the Yoruba term *ẹsin* or the translation "form of worship," instead of "religion," when referring to Yoruba or Yoruba-inspired traditions in historical perspective. However, because

the concept of religion *has* gained salience in Yoruba society in the modern era, I will still employ the term *ẹsin* in that context when necessary and will specify the sense in which I use it if left untranslated.[16] The importance of developing and working with indigenous Yoruba terms extends far beyond factual accuracy, however. The choice to work with indigenous African terms, categories, and theories demonstrates that African societies have always interpreted themselves effectively and offers African studies scholars and others the opportunity to avoid becoming "complicit in the elimination of epistemological models" that developed outside of the Western academy, a situation that is sadly all too common.[17] Consequently, I articulate how Yoruba people and their descendants have known, justified, and deployed the Yoruba model of ẹsin as forms of worship at all levels of society.

Following Wilfred Cantwell Smith, this work will not primarily define and explain what Yoruba religion *is* in a universal or transhistorical sense, but rather will describe how people historically have related to a pluralistic set of Yoruba forms of worship and/or traditions of the orișa, Yoruba deities.[18] The fact that Yoruba societies already practiced a diverse array of forms of worship before Islam and Christianity took root offers insight into the creative ways both traditions were integrated into Yoruba religious life and also offers an alternative to Ali Mazrui's famous triple heritage model which postulates that African societies draw from Islamic, Christian/Western, and a more unified, traditional African source in forming their identities.[19]

Ẹdẹ and Salvador as Sites

To understand the nature of Yoruba forms of worship in historical and contemporary perspective, I lived in Ẹdẹ in Osun State, Nigeria, for ten months from June 2016 to April 2017, excepting a five-week period of research in Salvador, Brazil, in January and February 2017, while also drawing on five years of previous regular research trips to both areas. In both locations I divided my time between attending and observing religious festivals ("traditional," Muslim, and Christian), interviewing religious specialists and laypeople, and living among the various religious communities. The cities of Ẹdẹ and Salvador effectively demonstrate the most important dynamics of the changing nature of Yoruba conceptions of religion and the resulting religious tensions. Ẹdẹ specifically is well known for its tradition of religious tolerance and pluralism even within the broader regional trend toward religious exclusivism and tension.[20] This makes it an ideal location for studying how and why the Yoruba have traditionally not interpreted religious difference as reasonable grounds for conflict. Ẹdẹ also beautifully demonstrates several seeming contradictions, managing to hold on to multiple values in a productive tension.

First, Ẹdẹ is well known for many aspects of traditional Yoruba life but has also embraced much of modernity. For example, several lineages in Ẹdẹ are celebrated for their expertise in traditional Yoruba drumming and dancing, and its orișa traditions, such as Șango Timi and its Egungun masquerades, enjoy a strong reputation as well. Second, among Ẹdẹ's large Muslim population, there was an initial hesitance to embrace Western, secular, and Christian education, but many leading Muslim families have sent their children to such educational institutions, and several of them became well-accomplished secular scholars. Third, approximately 80 percent of Ẹdẹ's population is Muslim; it boasts the first Muslim ọba (king) in Yorubaland, Timi Habib Lagunju, and has a privileged place in the history of Islam in Yorubaland, but there is little conflict with the reasonably sized Christian minority. In fact, Ẹdẹ's first and only Christian ọba, Timi John Laoye, was widely respected, loved, and likely chosen because of his ability to straddle the traditional and modern Yoruba worlds. Fourth, Ẹdẹ was founded as a military outpost, and despite its warlike past and proud military tradition, the town is internally peaceful. While some claim Ẹdẹ is so peaceful because it is modestly sized and fairly isolated, it has from its inception played an important role in international trading and religious networks, embracing both the local and the global.[21] Finally, and most centrally, whereas a common Western assumption is that the more attached people are to a religious tradition and worldview, the more likely they are to come into conflict with those of differing backgrounds, the people in Ẹdẹ—based on lived experience—assume the more people understand their own religious traditions, the more perfectly and harmoniously they will relate to others.

Ẹdẹ is also an ideal case study because its history of sacred kingship highlights the complex and changing religious nature of the office perhaps better than any other Yoruba town. The ọba in Ẹdẹ, called the *Timi*, has successfully managed to switch religious affiliations between orișa traditions, then to Islam, to Christianity, and back to Islam with little conflict. Even the limited conflict present in these transitions is quite telling in terms of the nature of and expectations associated with Yoruba sacred kingship. Ẹdẹ's Timi have been particularly inventive and adept at navigating the rapidly shifting religious landscape in Yoruba modernity. The current Timi, His Royal Highness (HRH) Ọba Munirudeen Adeșọla Lawal, the first of the Laminisa royal house, is an excellent embodiment of Ẹdẹ's historical and contemporary values, identities, and tensions, demonstrating the continued if not heightened importance of the tradition of sacred kingship in contemporary Yoruba society.

Across the Atlantic, Salvador, Brazil, is sometimes called the "Black Mecca" because of its central role in Black Atlantic religiosity, but I include it in this work for other reasons. Adopting J. Lorand Matory's methodology of understanding

and analyzing African and Afro-diasporic traditions *together* as mutually influential rather than existing in a purely linear relationship, this book considers the place of Salvador *alongside* Yorubaland in the historical development of a transnational, traditional Yoruba religion.[22] The experience of Yoruba-speaking peoples in Brazil—primarily in Salvador—as a result of the transatlantic slave trade and the subsequent return of many to Lagos around the turn of the twentieth century played a critical role in developing a Yoruba ethnic identity and religion, called ẹsin ibile (traditional religion) or Iṣẹṣe in Yorubaland, and the preeminent ritual "nation" of Candomblé in Brazil. The involvement of ethnically Yoruba Brazilians in the production and dissemination of ideas, practices, and materials related to traditional Yoruba religion and forms of worship put the worship of the orisa (or orixás in Portuguese) on a similar trajectory through a perpetual transatlantic dialogue. There have been other important locations in this broader dialogue—namely, Cuba, Trinidad and Tobago, and other regions in Brazil—but Salvador looms the largest.

Applying the perspective of Yoruba forms of worship rather than religion comparatively to Ẹdẹ and Salvador yields fascinating and productive results. Ẹdẹ and Candomblé communities in Salvador are both currently undergoing a generational shift from elderly people who understand their religious institutions as forms of worship to a younger generation more comfortable with a framework of multiple, exclusive modern religions. These traditions in Nigeria and Brazil share similar internal and external factors and challenges in the modern era, which in conjunction with their mutual dialogue, caused them to respond in remarkably similar ways and to draw on each other in navigating the process. Finally, interpreting Candomblé's history through the lens of forms of worship provides more culturally appropriate and useful tools for analyzing the notoriously thorny and contentious issue of Afro-Catholic syncretism in Brazil and beyond. I chose Ẹdẹ and Salvador not because this is a history of the people of Ẹdẹ and the central role they played in creating a Yoruba religion at home and in diaspora but because these centers best highlight the dynamics and trajectory of shifting perspectives of Yoruba religious traditions in historical and contemporary settings. This work is more about the history of an idea within the settings of Ẹdẹ and Salvador rather than exclusively a history of the people in whose lives these ideas are interwoven.

How Worship Becomes Religion

As Talal Asad argued, any treatment of a religious tradition must be historically and culturally situated, and this is what I set out to do in chapter 1 with regard to the religious history of Ẹdẹ. Rather than simply presenting a brief description of

a timeless, ancestral religious landscape before Islam and Christianity arrived, I document the individual history of each form of worship separately, starting with various individual orișa traditions and subsequently turning to Islam and Christianity. Beginning with archaeological and mythological sources, this chapter follows the establishment and development of Ẹdẹ in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. Ogun, the orișa of war and iron, was the most prominent and the royal orișa of Ẹdẹ until the early nineteenth century, when Șango, royal orișa of thunder and lightning, became the official orișa tradition of the state.

Around the same time, some of Ẹdẹ's citizens embraced Islam as a result of a traveling cleric saving the town from an invading army. Shortly thereafter, Ẹdẹ crowned the first Muslim ọba in Yorubaland—Timi Habib Lagunju—who is primarily responsible for Ẹdẹ's strong Islamic tradition and identity. At the turn of the twentieth century, a returning citizen of Ẹdẹ established the first church, laying the foundation of Ẹdẹ's minority Christian population. Several other orișa traditions, such as the Ogboni society, Ọbatala, and Ọșun, were introduced in Ẹdẹ at some point as well, creating a pluralistic and diverse religious atmosphere. For a period in the 1970s and 1980s, religious tension rose with various groups of orișa worshippers, Muslims, and Christians coming into conflict with one another as the practice of and identification with Ẹdẹ's religious traditions became increasingly separated and religious boundaries became more fixed. Ẹdẹ's Timi managed to restore a strong sense of harmony and maintain it remarkably well to this day. Ẹdẹ's citizens have also developed theologies from their respective traditions to support and explain their conciliatory approach toward other religious groups. Because, from a historical perspective, the category of religion is largely not salient in this case, this brief history deals with Ẹdẹ's past from related perspectives in economics, politics, mythology and literature, and even sociology in addition to religion.

Drawing on the history of Ẹdẹ's multiple religious traditions, chapter 2 explains precisely what the nature of Yoruba ẹsin, or forms of worship, is and how it differs from modern conceptions of religion. This chapter employs Jacob Olupona's theory of indigenous hermeneutics by drawing theory out of indigenous traditions and practices themselves rather than imposing it from without, much as Abiodun has previously done in an interdisciplinary manner with respect to emic analyses of Yoruba art and aesthetics.[23] The chapter enlists Yoruba linguistics, historical accounts of debates and religious encounters, songs and myths, and some rituals to develop and articulate the indigenous theory of forms of worship as a primarily lineage-based cosmic reality one must accept but need not practice or engage in to the exclusion of others. In this way Yoruba forms of worship admit not multiple, competing theologies but rather one broad theological framework that constantly adjusts to account for the emergence and integration

of new traditions. Rather than possessing one unified "traditional religion," Yoruba society has *always* contained a high degree of religious pluralism with many diverse forms of worship that functioned analogously to language in that one always has a mother tongue but may learn to speak many new languages to express the same ideas in different terms.

Chapter 3 is an intellectual history, delving into the modern historical and cultural process by which a diverse plurality of Yoruba ẹsin, as multiple forms of worship, were separated from Islam and Christianity and bound together into what could be identified as a singular ẹsin in the sense of a modern religion. It was in fact this reorientation toward religious traditions rather than the introduction of Islam or Christianity per se that constituted a radical shift in the Yoruba religious sphere, and the Yoruba were simply one group among many who went through such a process after prolonged contact with the modern West.[24] A critical first step in this process was the new conception of a unified Yoruba ethnicity emerging from the experience in diaspora as a result of the Atlantic slave trade and the linked missionary projects of translating the Bible, the creation of a panethnic language, the introduction of Western education, conversion, and the advent of modernity (ọlaju in Yoruba). Responding to the inherent racism of British colonialism, the Western-educated leaders of emergent Yoruba nationalism in turn-of-the-century Lagos began revalorizing their civilization and conducted research and published material on indigenous traditions, adopting not only the modern Western idea of ethnic nationalism but also Protestant Christian universal frameworks such as religion, paganism, or heathenism. Because of the internal diversity and plurality of orișa forms of worship, it was difficult to systematize and categorize them as one religion, not to mention identifying and formulating a universal doctrine, so missionaries and nationalists turned to the tradition of Ifa—the preeminent Yoruba divination system and repository of oral wisdom—to help them articulate a vision of a unified religion. They found Ifa to be the ideal source of information on "Yoruba religion" because not only did it contain an overarching perspective on all traditions with which it had contact, it also had the highest number of features that modern Protestant authors, researchers, and clergymen could recognize. Ifa became the bedrock of subsequent publications on Yoruba religion and has enjoyed this position in the global tradition ever since.

Foreign Roots of an Indigenous Religion

Salvador, Brazil, and its importance in the creation and global development of traditional Yoruba religion constitute the subject of chapter 4, which adopts Matory's view of the relationship between homeland and diaspora as one of

dialogue and mutual exchange. Beginning with the social and intellectual history outlined in chapter 3, this chapter examines how the experiences of Yoruba-speaking people in Brazil unified them in a new ethnic configuration. This new social grouping found interesting parallels in the religious sphere as well, providing a proto-pantheon of orișa/orixá that was then brought back to Lagos by thousands of returnees in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These returnees played an important role in forging the new traditional Yoruba religion in Lagos and brought back ideas, material culture, and literature from Lagos to Salvador, helping to create a class of religious elite and serving as informants for anthropologists conducting research on African/African-derived religion in Brazil. Much as prejudice against Yoruba people in West Africa drove an interest in and articulation of a traditional Yoruba religion *as* religion, religious persecution and discrimination led to a long fight for Afro-Brazilians to have their traditions recognized and protected as religion. As a result of the systematic marginalization of Candomblé and its practitioners by the broader Catholic Brazilian society alongside contact with a new wave of traveling Nigerian Ifa priests, several prominent leading priestesses of Candomblé made a statement supporting the end of Afro-Catholic syncretism and the full separation of the two traditions.

Chapter 5 analyzes the significance of this watershed moment in the Brazilian transition from Yoruba forms of worship to a traditional religion and offers a critique of the common notion of syncretism as a mask, which was primarily conceptualized by Roger Bastide.[25] Employing indigenous Yoruba perspectives of forms of worship and conceptions of masking, and putting perspectives from contemporary orișa specialists in Ẹdẹ in conversation with orixá devotees in Salvador, it offers an alternative to the vibrant discussion on religious authenticity and purity in Candomblé today. The chapter articulates how, because of their unique orientation toward the religious, Africans in Brazil—and many of their descendants today—did not conceptualize the veneration of Catholic saints as *only* a disguise for the true worship of the orixás. Rather, they were not concerned with boundaries between "religions," understanding saints and orixás as a unified spiritual and ontological reality that could be worshipped in multiple forms, often simultaneously.

Current State of Affairs

Jumping back across the Atlantic, chapter 6 connects the modern transitions occurring in Salvador to the contemporary situation in Ẹdẹ. There is a noticeable generational shift in which the oldest generation operates within a framework of forms of worship, the youngest generation operates within a framework of

mutually exclusive and competitive religions, and a middle generation finds itself somewhere in between. This shift across generations and the temporal shift in conceptions of religion in Ẹdẹ and Salvador are direct results of contact with and reaction against forces in the modern world. A common experience of religious boundaries having been drawn *around* orișa/orixá communities, if not *by* them, enhanced the saliency of the concept of religion and consequently generated a rise in conflict along the lines created by this framework. This chapter also delves into the messy business of how people in Ẹdẹ categorize their diverse traditions and practices as culture, work, tradition, or religion; how the same tradition might be understood as religion by one person but as something else by another; and how individuals make different choices about what they can and should do based on their categorizations. The silent, largely implicit transition to understanding ẹsin as religion rather than forms of worship has resulted in several new social tensions tracked in this chapter, including growing religious homogeneity in lineages, increased pressure on women and children regarding their religious affiliation, controversy over burial rites, and a decline in the practice of attending festivals of other religious traditions. The chapter demonstrates how the new understanding of ẹsin in light of ọlaju (modernity) gave rise to the period of religious tension in Ẹdẹ in the 1970s and 1980s.

Ẹdẹ's various religious leaders developed robust, orthodox, and productive theologies of religious pluralism, but the most important figure in restoring the Yoruba tradition of religious harmony in the modern age was the Timi, the subject of chapter 7. Drawing on Ẹdẹ's history, Yoruba ontology, academic theory on Yoruba kingship and identity, and a close analysis of the Timi's role in Ẹdẹ's most prominent festivals, it addresses what a Yoruba ọba is, how Yoruba sacred kingship intersects with forms of worship or religion, and how this intersection dictates the religious culture of Yoruba towns. In addition, developing further the work of scholars such as Karin Barber and Andrew Apter, I argue for an understanding of the ọba as a microcosm or literal embodiment of his entire kingdom, making it incumbent on him to be involved with all major religious traditions within his realm. I argue that the Timi constitutes a form of Peter Berger's "sacred canopy" who can externalize and concretize his own personal cosmology for the community and whose festival forms the basis of a civil religion that allows all citizens to participate fully within the same community and identity, reinforcing their unity without negating religious differences.[26] The current Timi of Ẹdẹ, Timi Lawal, is an excellent exemplar of Yoruba sacred kingship because he embodies many of the apparent tensions in Ẹdẹ's society and has found effective—if not always easy—ways of navigating the transition from forms of worship to religion while preserving Ẹdẹ's remarkable religious

harmony in the process. The chapter analyzes how his deft leadership in articulating Yoruba tradition in new, modern contexts is not without challenges but illustrates an effective method of reconciling commonly held binaries such as modern/traditional or religious/secular.

Central Themes

While the main historical subject of this book is the development of a traditional and international Yoruba religion from a previous system of forms of worship, it is also a historical reflection on religion in Yorubaland in general. It illustrates and explicates a religious orientation that has and still does cut across religious traditions. In this sense it also informs how many Yoruba have—and some still do—interpreted and practiced both Islam and Christianity. The book can be read in a way that complicates the broad teleological narratives commonly employed with respect to the issue of conversion in Yorubaland and West Africa in general. Without necessarily negating the intellectualist approach put forward by Robin Horton and J. D. Y. Peel, which suggests that as West Africans were brought into a global sphere of activity, their cosmos naturally expanded from limited microcosms of local divinities to the "cult of the Supreme Being," the model of forms of worship offers a different perspective.[27] Perhaps Yoruba people embraced both Islam and Christianity in such large numbers not because their previous religious systems were not sufficiently equipped to deal with the new global setting but because adopting new traditions when useful (often alongside preexisting traditions) was in fact already an integral part of the indigenous worldview itself. When viewed from a global perspective, it is suggestive that those forcibly brought to Brazil and enmeshed in complex transatlantic economies and transnational spheres of operation intentionally leveraged orișa/orixá traditions rather than abandoning them in favor of a "cult of the Supreme Being," whom they considered the ultimate recipient of their worship anyway.

Humphrey Fisher also articulated a useful model for the spread of Islam in Africa, which has a similar telos of large-scale conversion from traditional religion to Islam at the end of a three-stage process of quarantine, mixing, and reform.[28] Fisher refers to Islam in this context as a "juggernaut," almost implying that it steamrolls other traditions in its path. The history of Ẹdẹ demonstrates that without the idea of separate, competing religions, rather than Islam steamrolling or even mixing with other worship practices, it was possible to develop fully Islamic and traditional understandings of both religions informed by engagement with each other. Oludamini Ogunnaike has produced an in-depth study of how both Ifa and Tijani Sufism have been engaged in such a process for centuries, and

the phenomenon is certainly not unique to West Africa or a deviation from Islamic orthodoxy.[29] The adoption and orthodox interpretation of a new tradition in light of preexisting institutions and traditions is very similar to what William Chittick described in his impressive study of Confucian values and categories that were translated to and supplemented by an Islamic framework rather than one annihilating the other, and also to Shankar Nair's equally impressive analysis of the translation of sacred Hindu texts into the Persian language and Islamic contexts.[30] The distinction to be made here is that parallel to the story of the formation of a traditional religion in Yoruba society is the emergence of both Islam and Christianity as separate *religions* rather than additional *forms of worship*, as they were initially received. Particularly because the forms of Christianity coming from Iberia and Britain defined themselves in contradistinction to Islam and "paganism," these three categories as separate entities came into being at roughly the same time, even if the adoption of these frameworks has occurred to varying degrees across and within generations.

The historical practice of Ifa and Ifa oral narratives form a critical part of this work because they demonstrate that the central issue is not in fact conversion from one tradition to another, but rather people's understanding of what those traditions are and how they are used. In Ẹdẹ, Ifa has historically mediated changes in primary religious affiliation and involvement with new traditions without conflict, and Ifa narratives absorb content and characters from the Bible and Qur'an as if they were part of the same, shared theological background. However, even this process has begun changing, fascinatingly demonstrating the continuous evolution of Yoruba cosmology and theology, particularly with respect to Ifa divination predicting or announcing the religious identity of the Timi.

Tracking the changes in the religious identity and orientation of the Timi through chapters 1 and 7 is enlightening, as their shifting identities have had very little effect on the nature of religious life in Ẹdẹ. However, the religious *orientation* rather than religious *affiliation* of the Timi does have a strong effect. More so than anyone else, the Timi (and by extension Yoruba ọba at large) are primarily responsible for how religious life in Ẹdẹ has transitioned from forms of worship to religions, particularly as religion has become an increasingly salient factor in people's lives. Invoking Aristide Zolberg's notion of "moments of madness" in which society suspends previously normal routines and draws on utopian projects that put forward new symbols and terms to "create new societal goals, new agendas, and new social networks," David Laitin claimed in the 1980s that there had as of that time been no "moments of madness" in Yorubaland.[31] In his view, Christian and Islamic utopian ideas "remain[ed] backstage, as it were, waiting for their cues," but I argue in this book that these cues were embedded

within Yoruba modernity, and we are in fact reaching the end of a long, but silent, "moment of madness." This moment of madness is characterized by terms and categories wrestled from a utopian Christian enterprise of conversion, education, "enlightenment," and modernity that have formed the contours of contemporary Yoruba society and religion in Nigeria and diaspora whether those affected adhere to that specific utopian vision or not.

Precisely because younger and older people in Yorubaland and Brazil often attribute different meanings and connotations to terms such as *religion*, *Candomblé*, *ẹsin ibile*, or even *ẹsin* itself, this religious upheaval can be difficult to identify. Consequently, one of the purposes of this book is to document and analyze a worldview or orientation to the religious that may well fade away within the next few decades. Rather than view predominantly elderly people whose religious dispositions and practice do not fit neatly into dominant modern religious categories as undereducated, heterodox, or possessing a lack of faith or commitment to their religion, I articulate the alternative ways their cosmologies operate. I attempt to complicate the dominant discourse about Afro-Catholic syncretism in Candomblé before this perspective rooted in the modern concept of religion can fully eclipse another, perhaps more historically consistent perspective rooted in a system of forms of worship.[32] Engaging with such views in Yorubaland before the generation that primarily lives by them is gone is timely and essential for gaining a more complete and robust understanding of orișa traditions and sacred history. This has significance beyond the alternative perspective that it offers on what "religion" actually is or can be. My grandfather—himself a fiercely proud Yoruba man—was fond of saying "a person who does not know where (s)he has been can never know where (s)he is headed," and coming to grips with this indigenous orientation toward religion can shed light on the Yoruba religious past and present situations as well as help us understand and properly prepare for the future.

Hidden in Plain Sight

When I arrived in Murtala Muhammed Airport in Lagos to begin my fieldwork, I was met by a thoroughly puzzled customs agent who suspected I was up to something. When I explained that my purpose for returning to Nigeria was to conduct research for my dissertation, he responded, "You want me to believe that you made it all the way to Harvard in America, but you are coming back *here* to study something about religion?" I even had to show him my student ID before he believed me. I understood his incredulity, however, because many other Yoruba people and Nigerians often have trouble imagining what our country or society has to offer that Harvard and the United States cannot provide more fully or

effectively. It is difficult to deny the many problems currently faced by the Yoruba, Nigeria, or even the African continent at large, but one goal of this book is to demonstrate that many of our greatest treasures often go unrecognized, hidden in plain sight. Much more than oil, diamonds, rubber, or many of the other treasures that have drawn and still draw foreign powers to Africa like magnets but have done little to improve our own societies, many of our indigenous traditions and ways of life have more to offer us and the world now than ever before.

While the United States has recently become deeply divided and conflicted about issues of diversity, pluralism, religion, identity, and politics, the people of Ẹdẹ in Osun State often take the effective resolution of such issues to be a given, if they would perceive them as issues at all. While some religious conflicts in places such as Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka, or Palestine currently seem intractable, the occasional conflicts between Christians, Muslims, and orișa worshippers in Ẹdẹ have been resolved with relative ease and with a marked lack of violence. Furthermore, as countries as different as France, India, Turkey, and China struggle with how their political structures can and should interact with religious institutions, religious pluralism, and articulations of secularism, the Timi of Ẹdẹ demonstrate now and historically how political and religious power can potentially be reconciled and mutually supportive. Similarly, such traditional kingship or chieftaincy structures may have a great deal to offer when many people around the world are losing faith in democratic processes that serve to deepen sectarian divides rather than draw people together. I certainly am not suggesting that all people need to adopt a Yoruba "forms of worship" approach to religion or adopt Yoruba sacred kingship. However, at a critical moment in global affairs and Yoruba society, such indigenous perspectives can offer positive and powerful critiques to our implicit assumptions about the nature of issues such as religion, governance, conflict, or diversity, particularly when the models in use seem inadequate. Like it or not, the concept and institutions of religion as well as religious difference are indeed part and parcel of our world, and the history of how orișa forms of worship became a successful international religion and how one particular community navigated this transition very effectively could help us all come to grips with what religion actually is and what role it can play in our lives and societies.

1

From Myth to Modernity

A RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF ẸDẸ

To trace how forms of worship became religion, it is first necessary to provide an account of the context and religious history of Ẹdẹ. Given that a general history of Ẹdẹ already exists, this chapter focuses on Ẹdẹ's different prominent religious traditions and their development.[1] This account of the changing religious history in Ẹdẹ provides the context and background for the analysis in the subsequent chapters. This chapter tells the religious history of a community in a unique way, by illustrating the nature of forms of worship. It offers an account of how traditional Yoruba society has never been without religious tension and what the tradition of religious harmony generally looked like on the ground, while demonstrating how the situation has begun to change. This background on Ẹdẹ's religious history makes it much easier to understand the nature of forms of worship and to develop a critical analysis of the term and how it differs significantly from modern religion. It also supports the following chapters by offering a narrative that informs their analyses, such as offering background regarding how

enslaved Yoruba people might have responded to a new religious environment in Brazil.

As previously noted, while scholars and laypeople alike often refer to the triple religious heritage of the Yoruba—namely, that of traditional religion, Islam, and Christianity—this work instead treats each form of worship individually to demonstrate how Yoruba society has *always* been inherently pluralistic and multireligious. By adopting a model that treats the traditions of each individual oriṣa (or Yoruba deity) as a form of worship in its own right, this chapter demonstrates several advantages that such a perspective provides for understanding the religious identity, behavior, and dynamics of Ẹdẹ today and in historical perspective. This will also set the stage for revealing the subtle but substantial changes that precipitated the transformation of these fairly disparate traditions into a unified religion, which would be difficult to appreciate if a traditional Yoruba religion were conceptualized as having existed from time immemorial.

This account of Ẹdẹ's religious history will follow the development of its most prominent traditions, laying strong emphasis on two very particular aspects of Yoruba religion and culture: the tradition of Ifa divination and the office of the Timi, Ẹdẹ's ọba. These two traditions play perhaps the most important role in the religious dynamism of the town while also ensuring the religious harmony for which it is well known. While Ifa and sacred kingship are common features of practically all Yoruba societies, the unique history of how these two traditions have operated in Ẹdẹ to incorporate new forms of worship and also to manage the introduction of the concept of religions makes Ẹdẹ an ideal case study. Analyzing Ẹdẹ and its history through the forms of worship model rather than as three discrete religions (Islam, Christianity, and traditional religion) and focusing on the role of Ifa and the Timi will help to address and explain a fascinating and important aspect of Yoruba society and why it is changing so quickly: how a deeply religious and religiously diverse ethnic group has historically existed without much religious conflict. Practically all scholars of Yoruba society and culture draw attention to the fact that Muslims, Christians, and traditionalists coexist peacefully, and Ẹdẹ's reputation for religious tolerance recently inspired an in-depth study by Insa Nolte, Olukoya Ogen, and Rebecca Jones.[2]

Specifically, after Christian and Muslim Yoruba politicians successfully bridged a religious divide that threatened to tear Nigeria apart in the 1970s, David Laitin conducted a study to determine how and why Yoruba society refused to be divided along religious lines. He argued that, in part because of the British colonial employment of preexisting social and political structures, the Yoruba identified primarily with their city of ancestry and did not consider

religious affiliation to be an important criterion for identity construction.[3] I. A. Akinjogbin provided a similar but more emic explanation through his argument that the primacy of family/lineages, or ẹbi, as an identity marker has fostered a conciliatory approach to religious difference, first on the familial and then on societal levels.[4] However, Laitin himself recognized that this unique tradition of religious pluralism and inclusion may not constitute a "permanent condition," and even predicted in the 1980s that many Yoruba would choose to realign themselves according to religious affiliation in the "near future."[5]

By 1996 Stephan Reichmuth had observed that Laitin's findings on the increasing religious homogenization of Yoruba families were evidence of "a more recent development whereby religious differences have gained in communal relevance."[6] Writing about the sacred city of Ile-Ifẹ, where Laitin had also conducted his research thirty-five years prior, Jacob K. Olupona reflected on the tradition of "mutual tolerance and respect" between religious groups, but noted that this had been true in the past, "at least before the recent period."[7] Olupona argued that currently "all available data suggest that these notions . . . that the Yoruba are incredibly tolerant of religious difference, and that religion constitutes no great divide amongst the Yoruba—can no longer be supported."[8] Olupona cited the importance of indigenous traditions, particularly that of sacred kingship, in maintaining religious harmony amid the changing religious climate, and examples abound of religious conflict emerging that would previously have been difficult to imagine, sometimes even involving the ọba themselves.

Recently, the attitude of many ọba with respect to their role in ensuring religious tolerance, and the consequences these attitudes have, has sometimes been quite severe. For example, one ọba who failed to fulfill these duties had his palace burned down in 2007, and an armed insurrection almost stormed the palace of another before dethroning and expelling him.[9] Yet another prayed that "evil should befall" those who took part in a traditional masquerade, attempted to make Christianity the sole state religion, and generated conflict in his town between Christians and orișa worshippers.[10] The previous ọba of Modakẹkẹ, where I studied Ifa divination, turned his back on orișa traditions, causing a number of crises there during the 2010s. Clearly, religious dynamics in Yorubaland have been changing for some time, and while Ẹdẹ has not been immune to this increased strain on the tradition of religious pluralism, its citizens are proud that their city can boast a level of harmony difficult to find anywhere else in the country. This chapter tracks the history of Ẹdẹ's religious pluralism, how it has been tested, and how the community has managed to maintain it against the trend of heightened religious tension in the broader Yoruba region.

Foundation of Ẹdẹ

Recent archaeological evidence suggests that Ẹdẹ-Ile was founded either late in the sixteenth century or early in the seventeenth century, making it an ancient Yoruba city.[11] Fortunately, oral history and archaeology provide an excellent understanding of why the town was founded and how it developed. An important part of the fabled Ọyọ Empire, "Ẹdẹ-Ile was most likely the first successful colony that Oyo-Ile established," and it constituted an ambitious project of the ọba of Ọyọ, the Alaafin.[12] There is some debate about whether Ẹdẹ was founded on the orders of Alaafin Ṣango, who later became the orișa, or of the subsequent ruler, Kọri.[13] Whichever Alaafin it was, he ordered one of his most powerful generals to establish an outpost between the towns of Ara and Awo to protect their traders from raids by the neighboring Ijeṣa people. This was an important decision because, as Akinwumi Ogundiran noted, the Atlantic trade with the Portuguese had made this area connecting the Yoruba hinterlands with the Atlantic coast of great economic importance. The area was previously dominated by the Ifẹ and Ijeṣa kingdoms, but the Alaafin clearly recognized its significance and established a strong colony in the area to control more of the burgeoning market.[14] Oral traditions recount that Alaafin Ṣango felt threatened by the power of one of his generals, so Ṣango sent him on this mission, believing he would either succeed and give the empire control of the important market or die in the process, ridding Ṣango of a potential threat. Although it is commonly believed that this general was named Timi (the origin of the title of the king in Ẹdẹ today), his name was in fact Agbale Ọlọfa Ina, meaning "the one who shoots flaming arrows," because he possessed magical flaming arrows that never missed their mark.[15] Agbale Ọlọfa Ina traveled with his army to an area on the border of the rainforest and savannah, where a great number of trees called "ẹdẹ" were found, and the city derived its name from these trees.[16]

Ẹdẹ-Ile was a powerful and critical military outpost, as documented by an excavation that yielded the highest number of horse remains of any location in Yorubaland, including the capital of Ọyọ itself.[17] This is significant because the Ọyọ Empire's might lay in its powerful and highly mobile cavalry, and the presence of such a high number of horses demonstrated the empire's ability and determination to protect and expand its commercial interests. Ẹdẹ-Ile's importance is further illustrated by its location at the northern edge of the tropical rainforest, where the presence of tsetse flies would have resulted in high mortality rates among the horses. Because the people of Ẹdẹ-Ile would not have been able to breed horses locally, they needed to bring them from the metropole.[18] The Ọyọ

Empire evidently invested heavily in its first colony of Ẹdẹ-Ile, and it did not take long for the colony to prove its worth.

The colony's economic success and importance is demonstrated by its being one of the first Yoruba centers to use cowrie shells as widely accepted and traded currency, likely reflecting its status as the most important outpost of an extensive commercial network that required the rapid and effective transportation of goods and capital.[19] General Agbale Ọlọfa Ina is believed to have attracted many traders and settlers to his town because of Ẹdẹ's high security, and he was authorized to collect a toll of five cowries from all traders who passed through his territory, a portion of which he was to send to the Alaafin as tribute. However, Agbale eventually stopped sending this tribute back to the Alaafin, which unsurprisingly did not please the king. Agbale's defiance could have stemmed from the fact that within less than a generation, his military outpost had achieved complete self-sufficiency and already grown to the size of many other towns in the empire.[20] The loss of an important source of revenue and of direct control of the most important trade routes obliged the Alaafin to send troops to bring Agbale to heel, and it is at this point that Ẹdẹ plays a central role in the mythic history of Ọyọ and Yorubaland.

Those who believe Alaafin Ṣango sent Agbale to Ẹdẹ-Ile recount that he sent two military expeditions to put the latter in his place and return with the tribute owed to the crown. However, being a powerful general and warrior in his own right, Agbale repulsed both forces, and Ṣango was left in a difficult position because he could not allow such open insurrection to go unpunished. In consultation with his advisors, Ṣango devised another plan to kill two birds with one stone, so to speak. Another of his generals, named Gbọnka Ebiri, was good friends with Agbale and had become so powerful that he, too, posed a threat to the Alaafin. Ṣango sent Gbọnka to attack Ẹdẹ-Ile, hoping that one or both of his generals would be killed in the battle. After being repulsed several times, Gbọnka challenged Agbale to single combat, and Agbale accepted. Although Agbale was a mighty archer, Gbọnka possessed numerous powerful magic charms, and when Agbale shot his flaming arrows, they either somehow missed their target or had no effect on Gbọnka. Then Gbọnka uttered an incantation and ordered Agbale to fall asleep and collapse, which he did immediately. Gbọnka brought Agbale back to Ọyọ and presented him to Ṣango.

Ṣango was surprised that Gbọnka had subdued the mighty Agbale Ọlọfa Ina so easily and ordered the two generals to duel again in his presence. Gbọnka released Agbale Ọlọfa Ina and again defeated him, but this time Gbọnka beheaded Agbale. Realizing that Ṣango's intent was to have him killed, Gbọnka declared

no one had the power to kill him and demanded that Ṣango either abdicate the throne for trying to do so or die. Ṣango tried to burn Gbọnka in a large bonfire, but after all the wood had been burned to ashes, Gbọnka was found dancing and singing elsewhere in the street. Embarrassed and ashamed, Ṣango fled his palace and became deified, some say by hanging himself on an ayan tree. He is also said to have struck with lightning those who spread the rumor that he had committed suicide by hanging himself. Subsequently, the Alaafin's close friend Mọgba instructed the people of Ọyọ to stop spreading these rumors and taught them how to placate Ṣango's spirit and bring an end to the lightning strikes, establishing the tradition of Ṣango's worship in Yorubaland.[21]

Ogun as the Primary Form of Worship in Ẹdẹ

Because of Ẹdẹ's important role in the history of the Ọyọ Empire, its connection with the establishment of Ṣango worship, and Ṣango's status as the orișa of the Timi, it is commonly believed that Ṣango has always been the royal orișa in Ẹdẹ, but this is actually not the case. Because Agbale Ọlọfa Ina was a military man and remembered as a hunter (the two occupations were often the same in Yoruba culture), he was almost certainly an Ogun devotee as Ogun is the orișa of war, hunting, and iron.[22] Agbale Ọlọfa Ina also fits into a broader Yoruba trend of "linking Ogun with kingship, and particularly the first king of a dynasty."[23] As Ulli Beier noted, this interpretation is further supported by Ẹdẹ's new yam festival—which is usually dedicated to the patron deity of each Yoruba town—being Ogun's festival, and it opens the series of festivals known as Ipedi, which culminates in the royal festival for the Timi.[24]

In addition to being Agbale's orișa, Ogun was almost certainly the orișa of Agbale's successor, Alapo Tiẹmi Tiẹmi, whose name means "the one with a quiver full of arrows" and from whom the current Timi of Ẹdẹ are descended and draw the name of their title, Timi. Alapo Tiẹmi Tiẹmi was also an important general, and because most of his subjects were undoubtedly soldiers and hunters as well, the worship of Ogun enjoyed broad currency beyond its royal patronage. Furthermore, Ẹdẹ-Ile sat atop rich iron deposits, and iron mining and blacksmithing were important occupations in the town.[25] As with hunting and war, the worship of Ogun was part and parcel of blacksmithing and agriculture because these occupations use and depend on the iron implements that are the domain of and/or constitute the orișa himself.

Ẹdẹ-Ile was a highly successful colony and city in its own right, but a rebellion by the premier Ọyọ general Afọnja against the Alaafin led to the eventual fall of the capital around 1836 to a coalition of Fulani, Hausa, and Yoruba soldiers

Afọnja had gathered at his base in Ilọrin. Thereafter, Timi Kubolaje Agbọnran Gbakonija moved Ẹdẹ-Ile south of the River Ọṣun to protect it from the threat of invasion by Ilọrin forces.[26] Perhaps because of this strategic move, Ẹdẹ's strong identity as a warrior town, or the benevolence of its patron Ogun, Ẹdẹ remained the only major Ọyọ town to have weathered the empire's collapse without submitting to Ilọrin.[27] Ogundiran placed the abandonment of Ẹdẹ-Ile in 1836 or 1837, and Ẹdẹ's citizens resettled in an area inhabited by a local hunter, which is where the city stands today.[28]

Oral histories maintained by the town's babalawo (Ifa priests and diviners) in the Odu (a chapter of the oral Ifa corpus) Ọsa-Rẹtẹ record that the name of this hunter was Laawọn (sometimes called Lagbonnu).[29] When Ọrunmila, the orisa of wisdom and divination, performed Ifa divination for him shortly after the founding of his town, Ifa revealed that war would never enter it. However, because of the miserliness he had shown to Ọrunmila upon his arrival, Laawọn's people would always want for money and resources and would be left unable to improve their lot in the way others would. Timi Kubolaje eventually replaced Laawọn as the ruler of the town, which is now known as Ẹdẹ to differentiate it from the previous site of Ẹdẹ-Ile.[30] Laawọn's descendants still hold an important title called Asunara in Ẹdẹ,[31] but their fortune has never been as great as that of the Timi or the other important chiefly lineages of the town, which the babalawo attribute to the mistake of their ancestor. Despite its participation in practically all the numerous wars during and after the fall of the Ọyọ Empire, its strategic position, and its having been besieged several times, Ẹdẹ's citizens are very proud that their warrior ancestors fulfilled Ọrunmila's prophecy that war would never enter Ẹdẹ's gates. The contemporary hunters are particularly quick to draw attention to this fact. However, shortly after the relocation to the current site of Ẹdẹ, the religious affiliation of the Timi changed.

Egungun and Other Orisa Traditions

Several other orisa traditions were brought to Ẹdẹ from Ọyọ, including those of Ṣango, Ifa, and possibly others such as the Egungun masquerade tradition. While it is practically impossible to date precisely when many of the ancestral Egungun masquerades came to Ẹdẹ, this tradition developed in old Ọyọ in the sixteenth century before Ẹdẹ-Ile was established.[32] As such it is most likely to have been brought to Ẹdẹ-Ile by its founders or to have spread to the imperial outpost shortly thereafter. The Egungun found in Ẹdẹ are linked to the town's history, and the vast majority are war masquerades that were brought back from war, traditionally went out with the warriors to fight, or both. There is still a

large number of active and prominent Egungun in Ẹdẹ today, and the Egungun tradition, doubtless because of its close links to war, has been another critically important orișa tradition in Ẹdẹ. Some lineages that maintain these Egungun (such as Epete and Ikulapo) were originally stationed at strategic points along the edge of the town as a form of spiritual and military defense against potential invaders. Many if not most of Ẹdẹ's Egungun can be traced back to the wars with the Ijeșa and the various warring Yoruba states in the nineteenth century, but others such as Andu and Ariayọ have come into existence more recently.

There are also a few traditions that were almost certainly established in Ẹdẹ after its foundation. One prominent example is Ogboni—a traditional secret society that assists in civil administrative manners and serves to check or aid the ọba. It was almost certainly not brought from Ọyọ, as it was not a native tradition there, but rather was instituted much later as a result of contact with the Ẹgba ethnic subgroup.[33] Beier suggested a strong link with the ancient kingdom of Owu because shortly before Owu fell in 1830, its ọba sent a sacred Ogboni brass figure to Ẹdẹ because his daughter was married to Timi Ajeniju.[34] While the Ogboni tradition is fairly large and still quite active in Ẹdẹ, it is likely not indigenous in the sense that it was introduced later than the Ogun and Ṣango traditions, which were in Ẹdẹ from the beginning. Part of Ogboni's continued success is due in part to its ability to draw in both Christian and Muslim members and to offer them prominent positions, perhaps as a result of its secretive nature and because it is not always considered to fall under the category of religion, as will be addressed in chapter 6.

Another important and high-profile tradition is that of Ọbatala, the white orișa associated with wisdom and creation. The presence and importance of this deity is perhaps a bit curious because it is most closely associated with and centered in Ile-Ifẹ, the primary cultural and political rival of the Ọyọ Empire. In fact, an important mock battle that historically composed one of the most important rituals of the tradition has been interpreted as a mythological reenactment of the power struggle between these two important political centers.[35] Curiously, it is also linked with the Ogboni tradition, and the Ajagẹmọ (chief priest of Ọbatala in Ẹdẹ) informed me that Ogboni must always hold its festival one Yoruba week (four days) before Ọbatala's because Ọbatala is a father/authority figure over Ogboni. Hence, they are celebrated on the same day of the traditional week, but the junior celebration must come before the senior one, in much the same way as the Ogun festival precedes the Timi's Ipedi festival or as the second-born of a set of Yoruba twins is considered the elder.[36]

There are two possible ways Ọbatala worship came to Ẹdẹ. The first is that the original settlers of the present site of Ẹdẹ and their leader Laawọn were of

Ifẹ extraction and may have worshipped Ọbatala before Timi Kubolaje arrived at the current site of Ẹdẹ.[37] G. O. Oyeweso is of the opinion that there was likely some degree of struggle between the people who relocated from Ẹdẹ-Ile and the original settlers of Ẹdẹ, which could provide an alternative interpretation of the mock battle of the Ọbatala festival as a reenactment of the encounter between the Ifẹ indigenes and the Ọyọ settlers.[38] This localized interpretation is strikingly in line with the interpretation Olupona provided for the Ọbatala festival in Ile-Ifẹ with respect to its relationship to the conquest of Oduduwa, who subsequently became Ile-Ifẹ's and the Yoruba's paramount ruler.[39]

The second possible avenue through which Ọbatala worship came to Ẹdẹ is via the many uprooted refugees who fled their homes during the perpetual wars of the nineteenth century. During this time, people from a town called Ajagẹmọ sought refuge in Ẹdẹ, and Ajagẹmọ is still the title of the chief priest of Ọbatala's tradition in Ẹdẹ today.[40] These two vectors need not be mutually exclusive, and two separate Ọbatala traditions could easily have taken root in Ẹdẹ at different times and been merged. With Ẹdẹ's location on the frontier of the Ọyọ Empire close to the centers of the Ọbatala and Ogboni traditions, it is most likely that these traditions were introduced, possibly with some relationship between them, as a result of some type of exchange through migration or trade with those who inhabited the region prior to the arrival of the Ọyọ settlers.

One final orișa who is still prominent in Ẹdẹ but was likely not brought with Agbale and his settlers is Ọșun, the orișa of fertility, wealth, and the Ọșun River. Although she was later mythologized as the wife of Șango, Ọșun was in fact not originally an Ọyọ orișa, but came from the Ekiti/Ijeșa region.[41] Furthermore, Peel documented that Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) reports hardly mention Ọșun in most Ọyọ territories between 1845 and 1912, indicating that she was absent from or at least not prevalent in old Ọyọ territories.[42] While Ọșun devotees believe that her tradition was most likely brought from Ọyọ, her association with the river that bears her name and runs right next to both the old site of Ẹdẹ-Ile and the present Ẹdẹ suggests she was most likely first encountered in the area or introduced to Ẹdẹ by other local groups that moved into the town or simply exchanged goods, ideas, and ritual practices with residents.

There are certainly other orișa traditions present within the history of Ẹdẹ (such as Eșu, Ọya, and Orișa Oko), but the continual presence and introduction of those mentioned so far help to demonstrate the vibrancy of Ẹdẹ's religious culture in historical perspective. The Ọyọ soldiers and settlers clearly brought some traditions with them but were also quite open to developing new ones—such as the various Egungun masquerades—and to adopting foreign orișa traditions as well, such as Ọbatala, Ọșun, and possibly Ogboni. This is an important

point because shortly after Timi Kubolaje Agbonran relocated to Ẹdẹ, another very important shift in the religious landscape occurred.

The Rise of Ṣango Worship

Immediately after Timi Kubolaje Agbonran's reign ended, the royal form of worship changed when he was succeeded by Bamgbaiye Ajeniju, whom Ifa divination prophesied would be a Ṣango worshipper due to the unique circumstances of his birth. According to oral tradition, Ajeniju was born with both fists clenched and refused to open them. This greatly concerned his parents, but fortunately when the babalawo came to perform ẹṣẹntaye—the customary divination session for a newborn to determine its lot in life—they were able to decipher the significance of the fists. Ifa revealed the sign Ọkanran Meji and indicated that the baby would be an ọba and powerful Ṣango worshipper.[43] The babalawo exclaimed, "Kabiyesi o!" the customary greeting for Ṣango, prostrated themselves before him, and informed his parents that for the boy to open his hands, they would have to send for the Mọgba, or chief priests of Ṣango, in Ọyọ to perform a sacrifice on his behalf. The Ṣango priests brought the materials necessary to make a new Ṣango for him, and as soon as the blood from a sacrificial ram touched Ajeniju's hands, he opened them to reveal a thunderstone (ẹdun ara) in his right hand and one or several cowrie shells in his left.[44] These symbols of Ṣango confirmed to all that he had indeed brought the worship of Ṣango with him from heaven.[45]

Hence, when Ajeniju became Timi, his personal deity became known as Ṣango Timi, which has been the official royal orișa of every ọba in Ẹdẹ ever since. While Ajeniju's ascension to the throne marked the recognition of Ṣango Timi as Ẹdẹ's official patron deity, it is worth mentioning again that, as an Ọyọ town, the worship of Ṣango was surely present in Ẹdẹ before Ajeniju's reign, albeit not as prevalent or of as much civic importance as Ogun. Ogun's replacement by Ṣango as Ẹdẹ's patron orișa is demonstrated in Ẹdẹ's ritual calendar today, as in each Yoruba town the festival of the primary royal orișa is usually linked to and celebrated in conjunction with the festival of the ọba and is quite elaborate. Perhaps the best-known examples would be the Ọlọjọ festival for Ogun in Ile-Ifẹ or the Ọṣun festival in Oṣogbo, both of which celebrate and renew the power of the cities' ọba and function as the main ritual of the civil religion of the entire city itself.[46]

In Ẹdẹ, however, this festival, called Ipedi, is linked to the worship of Ogun, while the main and much more elaborate civic festival is that of Ṣango, the royal orișa, which takes place three months after Ipedi.[47] This almost certainly indicates that the Ṣango festival was established in the sacred calendar and liturgy at the foundation of Ẹdẹ but was elevated to the most prominent festival *after*

Ṣango replaced Ogun as the Timi's patron orișa. This fascinating shift in the religious affiliation of Ẹdẹ's royalty is unique in Yoruba history and provides a quite informative model for the subsequent adoption of later traditions. It is also significant because it demonstrates that Yoruba sacred kingship festivals need not be completely fixed to their patron orișa, suggesting that the ọba's festival can be separated from that of the town's predominant orișa tradition. It is interesting that the whole complex of Ipedi festivals was not simply moved to coincide with the Ṣango festival but remained at a different time, creating two prominent festivals associated with Ẹdẹ's civic life and demonstrating the great dynamism inherent in Ẹdẹ's political and religious system.

Much like his patron orișa, or perhaps because he was himself believed to be an incarnation of Ṣango, Ajeniju was quite skillful in both politics and war.[48] Consequently, he was well loved by his people and became a very successful and wealthy ọba, which "confirmed the expectations that the deity he was predestined to worship had brought good fortune to him and, by extension, to his town."[49] One of the ways Timi Ajeniju ensured military victory and the well-being of his town was by introducing the practice of Islam to Ẹdẹ via a Muslim cleric whose religious services were credited with bringing about the defeat of an invading army from the mighty city of Ibadan around 1837.[50]

The Establishment of Islam

Despite Ẹdẹ's great military reputation, the might of the Ibadan army had many of Timi Ajeniju's councilors convinced they would have to fight to the death; surrendering was not an option for a community with such a proud military history. Fortunately, the Timi's younger brother, Ojo Arohanran, had a Muslim friend named Buremọ (one Yoruba spelling of Ibrahīm) Owonlarago from Nupeland, who offered his esoteric services, claiming he could win the war without firing a shot. The Timi quickly agreed, whereupon Owonlarago plowed a special concoction into the soil and quickly planted cotton seeds. The cotton plants grew to maturity within the same day, and their fibers were woven into a large white cloth. Owonlarago then shook the cloth in the air so that all the dirt and dust blew off it in the direction of the Ibadan war camp. Immediately, storm clouds formed over the camp and massive hailstones fell, killing many Ibadan warriors. After three days of inundation, the Ibadan forces hastily withdrew, as Owonlarago had predicted.[51] Timi Ajeniju was so pleased that he gave Owonlarago a parcel of land on which to live, and that area is now known as Imọle Compound, or the Compound of Islam, because of its central role in establishing, preserving, expanding, and educating Ẹdẹ's prominent Muslim community.[52]

This story is noteworthy because it not only mirrors other accounts from West Africa in which Muslim clerics establish Islam by offering their services to local rulers, it also counters the common assumption that Islam was spread by the sword in West Africa in general and Yorubaland in particular.[53] Although war is a central element to this story, instead of waging a holy war against the traditionalist people of Ẹdẹ, Owonlarago employs his religious knowledge and power to put an end to the war and protect their lives from the Ibadan forces, which happened to include many Muslims. Furthermore, Owonlarago attracted followers and converts as a result of Ẹdẹ's great willingness to patronize a spiritual leader powerful enough to defeat a whole army; he is not believed to have forced anyone to convert to Islam. Instead, in a strange twist of fate, when his old friend Ojo Arohanran became Timi after the death of Ajeniju, it was the Muslim converts who were persecuted. They were forced to take refuge in Owonlarago's compound, and he and many others had to flee Ẹdẹ.[54] Although it is not entirely clear why Timi Arohanran turned on the very man he enlisted to save Ẹdẹ, the people clearly did not resent Timi Ajeniju's cooperation with Owonlarago and tolerance of Islam as a whole. His oriki (praise poetry recounting his accomplishments as Timi) affectionately refer to him as the one who "selected a Muslim as [his] friend" and "showed kindness to a Koran pupil."[55]

However, this persecution did not last long. Twelve years later, Ẹdẹ received its first Muslim Timi in Habib Sangolami Lagunju. Timi Lagunju is possibly the most famous Timi in Ẹdẹ's history as well as being unique among all ọba because of his incredible power and historical importance. Much like Timi Ajeniju, his religious affiliation, or rather his change from the family's previous religious affiliation, was predestined and declared through Ifa divination. As with all Yoruba children, the babalawo were called after Lagunju's birth to perform ẹsẹntaye to learn about his future. Ifa revealed the sign Otura Meji, the chapter of the Ifa corpus that governs Islam. The babalawo informed the prince's parents that "he was not a devotee of any of the orișas worshipped by his parents but a strange great orișa of the East," meaning Islam/the Prophet Muhammad.[56] Whether because the parents did not understand what the oracular message meant and how they should respond, or because they did not wish their child to worship something other than the royal lineage orișa, they gave Lagunju the name of a Șango worshipper and brought him up within that tradition.

While Timi Lagunju is one of the earliest recorded instances of such a "predestined Muslim," there is in fact some disagreement about whether Ifa could have ordained that he become a Muslim. The late Araba, the oldest and chief priest of Ifa in Ẹdẹ, asserted that when the sign Otura Meji is cast for a child during Ifa divination, as it was with Timi Lagunju, the parents must create a small

enclosure for the child to go perform prayers, provide him with white clothing, and release him to a Muslim cleric whenever possible so that he can receive an Islamic education.[57] This is in complete accord with T. G. O. Gbadamosi's findings from the 1970s,[58] but one of the Araba's own sons, a very knowledgeable and prominent babalawo in Osun State, did not accept that version of the story because he does not believe that Otura Meji indicates that a child *must* become Muslim. Rather, he suggests this could simply be a story used to justify the current Islamic hegemony in the town.[59] Like any responsible babalawo and Yoruba man, the Araba's son deferred to his father's seniority and knowledge, but his alternative position on this story and interpretation of Otura Meji is one I heard echoed by other younger babalawo.

Regardless of internal debates within the Ifa tradition about whether Timi Lagunju was predestined to become a Muslim, he did travel to Ilọrin, the center of Islamic learning in Yorubaland at the time, converted to Islam, took the Muslim name Habib, and spent several years receiving Islamic education before returning to Ẹdẹ. Consequently, when he ascended to the throne in 1849, he became the first Muslim ọba in Yoruba history and later also the first ọba to institute shari'ah as the official legal system. In keeping with his devotion to Islam, Timi Lagunju oversaw the transition of the Timi's religious affiliation from the worship of Ṣango to Islam and took steps to strengthen Islam in Ẹdẹ and win converts.

His first step was to invite several friends he had made during his Islamic education to relocate to Ẹdẹ. The most prominent and knowledgeable of these scholars was Shaykh Nuhu Adekilekun, who settled in the Owonlarago compound and served as Ẹdẹ's first chief imam.[60] Besides being very close friends with the Timi, Shaykh Nuhu had prophesied that Habib Lagunju would become Timi and greatly supported his bid for the throne through spiritual means. With royal support, Shaykh Nuhu and the other Muslim scholars and clerics won converts, established schools and mosques, and moved the central mosque to its current location directly in front of the palace at the center of town. In a novel but ingenious strategy, Timi Lagunju also identified wealthy and powerful Ẹdẹ citizens and promised to give them either a chieftaincy title or one of his daughters in marriage if they would convert to Islam.[61] He also strengthened Ẹdẹ's ties with other Islamic centers and figures through marrying his other daughters to important clerics from outside Ẹdẹ.[62]

Timi Lagunju proved to be a new and unique ruler when it came to traditional forms of worship in that he "insisted on an end to orișa worship."[63] When citizens converted to Islam, he required that they take their traditional "idols" and either burn them or throw them in the Ọṣun River.[64] Whereas orișa-worshipping

families had previously marginalized and persecuted the Muslim converts, the situation was now reversed, which they resented. Furthermore, Timi Lagunju's harsh retributive justice and his legalistic application of the shari'ah disturbed many Ẹdẹ citizens, Muslim and non-Muslim alike.[65] Some also perceived him to be a despotic and autocratic ruler, and consequently his official oriki is replete with references to his cruel and uncompromising nature. During his tenure the people sang a song with the lyrics, "You, Timi, a despised Moslem, are unwanted in Ẹdẹ; you have to go, beyond Osun River."[66]

Despite being as wealthy as Timi Ajeniju and perhaps even more successful as a warrior, Timi Lagunju was driven from Ẹdẹ on three separate occasions. Because of his strong connections with the most important political, military, and religious figures in the region at the time, he was able to return to the throne twice, but after the third expulsion, he lived the rest of his life in exile in Ibadan. The rejection of Timi Lagunju as ọba did not equal a rejection of Islam, as Timi Lagunju's reign marked the turning point after which Islam remained dominant in Ẹdẹ, establishing Ẹdẹ's position as one of the most prominent Islamic centers in Yorubaland and making Islam one of the central aspects of Ẹdẹ's culture and identity. While not necessarily agreeing with the harsher aspects of his rule, most people in Ẹdẹ are still immensely proud of the fact that Timi Lagunju was the first Muslim ọba in Yorubaland and of the great role he played in establishing Ẹdẹ as one of Yorubaland's prominent Islamic centers.

The Introduction of Christianity

Timi Lagunju is most famous for his elevation of the position of Islam and establishment of Ẹdẹ's strong tradition of Islamic education, but he is also notable for overseeing Ẹdẹ's first encounter with Christianity. This occurred on November 15, 1857, when the Baptist missionary William H. Clarke visited during his travels in Yorubaland. Clarke left an account of his brief visit and reflected on how well he was received and his surprise at the eagerness of Ẹdẹ's Muslims to hear from him and to recognize "the truth of [his] remarks."[67] Furthermore, he was very impressed with Timi Lagunju and the tolerance with which he invited Clarke to stay in Ẹdẹ, the desire of some chiefs for a white minister to reside in the town, and the invitation from the Muslim king to preach to his court. These complimentary reflections are particularly striking given Clarke's explicit prejudice against Islam and Muslims.[68]

This open and accommodating approach to Christianity is in keeping with the general approach of Yoruba ọba to the introduction of religious traditions (recall Timi Ajeniju's approach to Islam), but it is in clear contrast to Timi Lagunju's

approach to the worship of the orișa. Given his strong Islamic education and time spent abroad in Yorubaland, Timi Lagunju's relatively warm reception of Clarke could reflect the ọba's recognition of the political advantage of alliances with missionaries, who were closely associated with Western/British political, military, and spiritual power, and the desire for a resident white missionary may have been more a political move than an embrace of Christianity. Timi Lagunju also could have recognized Clarke as a person of the book (ahl al-kitāb) whose religious practice could be afforded more acceptance than that of the orișa worshippers, whose practice he perceived as polytheism (shirk).

Clarke's visit lasted no longer than a few days, and Christianity did not make an appearance in Ẹdẹ again for almost fifty years. In 1900 a young man named Jacob Akerele returned to Ẹdẹ from the nearby city of Ọgbọmọșọ, where he had been employed for eight years, joined the Baptist Church, and received a fair degree of Western education. Upon returning to his homeland, Akerele quickly befriended and offered his services to the Timi as the first Ẹdẹ citizen trained in Western literacy.[69] Timi Oyelekan, although a Muslim, greatly appreciated Akerele's services, approved of Akerele's religious and educational work, and granted a plot of land for a Baptist church in an area called Oke Babasanya and another at the current site of the First Baptist Church at Oke Apaso after a rift developed within the church. During the rift he even welcomed Akerele and his fellow Christians to hold Sunday services in front of his palace.[70] Despite some internal disagreements, the budding Baptist church grew rather quickly, having thirty-seven official members in 1903 and growing to 115 just ten years later when an overseer from Ọgbọmọșọ came to work with the church.[71]

As the first church in Ẹdẹ, the Baptist Church also served Christians who had previously joined other denominations such as Anglicans or Methodists and helped them establish their own churches in Ẹdẹ. In 1911 St. Peter's Anglican Church was founded.[72] The Roman Catholic Church established a church in 1921, and in 1938 the Christ Apostolic Church was established, which was to be an important event in the history of religion and Christianity in Ẹdẹ.[73] Like other mission churches in Nigeria at the time, these churches grew in large part because of the educational and medical services they operated as part of their evangelical work. Some churches are proud that many of their students converted to Christianity during their education, but not all students did so, and unlike most mission schools at the time, the Baptist schools in Ẹdẹ did not require conversion for admission.[74] Consequently, even some of the leading Muslim families, such as the Imọle compound, were among the first to send their children to the Christian mission schools.[75] A significant facet of Christian education in Ẹdẹ is that the introduction of Western/missionary education had

fewer "destabilizing effects . . . on local traditions" than was true in many other Yoruba areas, perhaps because of either the central place of Islam in society or Ẹdẹ's general approach to reconciling innovation with tradition.[76]

Many congregations grew during the early twentieth century, most notably the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), in part because one of its most prominent and important figures, Prophet Samson Oladeji Akande, was a native of Ẹdẹ. A fascinating person and excellent exemplar of the complex religious pluralism of Yorubaland at the time, Prophet Samson Akande was born around 1896 to an orișa-worshipping family in Ẹdẹ, but along with many others at the time, he became a Muslim during his childhood, taking the name Salami. Just before his marriage, he suddenly went blind and, after seeking help from many traditionalist priests, some relatives took him to a Muslim cleric in Ilọrin. In Ilọrin he memorized the Qur'an but did not regain his sight and was told by the cleric the solution to his plight lay elsewhere. He eventually returned to Ẹdẹ, where the prophecy of a female evangelist drew him to the newly founded CAC, in which he was baptized and adopted the Christian name Samson.[77] This conversion upset many in the community, but although he faced persecution, he rose up the ranks of the church to become one of the most prominent figures in its history.[78]

In 1939 CAC leaders requested a plot of land from Timi Sanusi Akangbe, who granted one in the Talafia Forest, on what had traditionally been the site of a shrine for ancestral and hunter traditions. Its members interpret the great success of the church on the site of a former traditional shrine as a symbol of the triumph of Christianity over indigenous traditions.[79] In 1945 the CAC established its own primary school, and with the support of Timi John Laoye in 1958, the Faith Home was established to train midwives and deliver babies safely.[80] Much like the mission schools, this institution has since served the general public in Ẹdẹ regardless of religious affiliation. Besides the many other CAC churches founded in Ẹdẹ, perhaps its greatest achievement was the founding of Ori Oke Baba Abiye, or Baba Abiye's prayer mountain. In 1944 Prophet Samson Akande was instructed by God that he should establish a prayer mountain, and after some searching and conflict with malevolent spirits, he found the appropriate site on a rocky mountain just outside Ẹdẹ between the towns of Awo and Iwoye.[81] Just as God foreordained, Ori Oke Baba Abiye now draws tens of thousands of pilgrims of various religious backgrounds every year from as far away as Europe and other African countries to seek miracles and have their prayers answered. While the mountain is permanently inhabited by members of the CAC and pilgrims come at all times during the year, the most popular times are the international convention every November (the month when the mountain was established) and during the Lenten period before Easter.

Ori Oke Baba Abiye has also made Ẹdẹ, despite being an overwhelmingly Muslim town, one of the most important Christian pilgrimage sites in Nigeria, and those who make an annual pilgrimage to Ori Oke Baba Abiye say they do so to tap into the powerful spiritual connection between Prophet Samson Akande and God. This mirrors how he was viewed during his lifetime, as many from all religious backgrounds sought his spiritual assistance and guidance, and his funeral services at the first CAC church in the Talafia quarter in 1993 attracted several ọba, prominent chiefs, and religious leaders of all kinds.[82] Despite his conversion to Christianity, Prophet Samson Akande, known as Baba Abiye, managed to attract the respect of Ẹdẹ indigenes through his spiritual gifts and raise the religious profile of the whole town. His image can still be seen on many buildings, cars, and pamphlets in Ẹdẹ, all over Yorubaland, and beyond, making him one of the most famous Christians in the city's history.

Timi John Adetoyese Laoye

The longest serving and perhaps most popular Timi in Ẹdẹ's history is Timi John Adetoyese Laoye, who was born into a Muslim family in 1899 (figure 1.1). As a child, he attended a service held by Christian missionaries in the Timi's palace, and after he followed them outside, the missionaries asked his father if they could educate him at a mission school in Ọṣogbo. His father, a long-distance trader, had already considered taking him to Lomé, in Togo, to receive a Western education, so he gladly accepted. From that point, the young prince excelled academically, mostly at Baptist institutions, and was encouraged to enter the Baptist Theological Seminary in Ogbọmọṣọ but studied chemistry and dispensing at King's College, Lagos, instead. After graduation he held several positions for the colonial administration in many places, including Kano, Maiduguri, Lagos, Benin City, Warri, and Akure.[83] While in Akure, he attended a revival service where a prophet stopped the worship, pointed his staff at the future Timi, and declared, "Behold, in five years' time from now, everybody will be saying KABIYESI before him; write this down for remembrance."[84] As luck or fate would have it, after a drawn-out succession struggle he ascended to the throne on December 13, 1946, just less than five years after the prophecy![85]

Despite being the first Christian ọba of one of the most prominent Yoruba Muslim towns, Timi Laoye enjoyed widespread support and popularity. When he emerged victorious from a legal struggle over the crown, the chief imam and Muslim community held a special thanksgiving service on the 'Eīd prayer ground, and oriṣa devotees held a thanksgiving ceremony on Ọjọ Jakuta, the sacred day dedicated to Ṣango, the Timi's oriṣa.[86] Much of Timi Laoye's popularity can

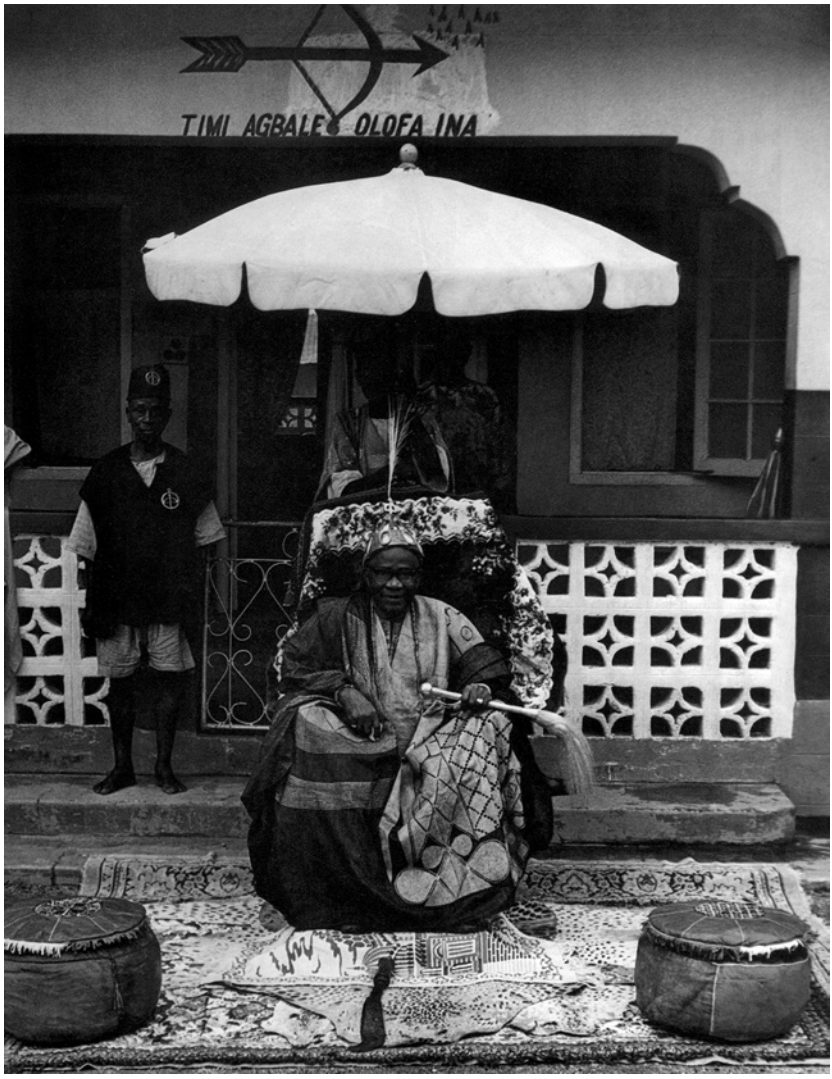

FIGURE 1.1. HRM Timi John Laoye, 1973. From Roy Sieber, "Ede: Crafts and Surveys," *African Arts* 6, no. 4 (1973): 44–49.

be attributed to his role in bringing a greater level of development to the town. During his reign electricity, asphalt roads, waterworks, several medical facilities, and many schools, including the prestigious Queen's School, where my own grandfather and great-aunt worked, were established in Ẹdẹ. A number of these institutions were established through cooperation with and grants of land to religious denominations such as the Seventh Day Adventists, Baptists, and CAC.

Timi Laoye's reign is widely cited as the time when Christianity was most firmly established in Ẹdẹ, and he enjoyed the support and friendship of many important Christian figures, including CAC's Prophet Samson Akande and the Baptist minister D. T. T. Afolayan.

However, some factions were not pleased at the apparent greater level of support granted to Christians in the development of the town. When his allocation of a small plot of land for the expansion of the central mosque was interpreted as reflecting a bias toward Christians, some citizens chanted a protest song, "Ọba ti o jẹ, ti ko fẹ 'mọle, ẹ le l'Ẹdẹ" ("The reigning king who hates Muslims should be banished from Ẹdẹ") to pressure him to respond to their concerns.[87] However, in the spirit of supporting all religions, Timi Laoye did make an effort to provide land and royal support for Muslim groups. He ensured that his drive to improve education in Ẹdẹ did not exclude Muslims, and he supported the establishment of several Muslim schools so that Muslim families would not be forced to send their children to institutions affiliated with Christian missions.[88] He is also fondly remembered by members of the Ahmadiyya movement for granting them a plot of land close to the palace for their central mosque and another for their 'Eīd prayer ground.[89] In fact, when conflict with other Muslim groups threatened the Ahmadiyya movement, it was Timi Laoye who intervened to restore the peace.[90]

As Oyeweso noted, Timi Laoye's popularity is quite interesting given that it was not a function of his reputation as a powerful warrior like Timi Bamgbaiye Ajeniju, or even Agbale Ọlọfa Ina or the first Timi, Alapo Tiẹmi Tiẹmi. However, given the rapidly changing times during the Pax Britannica, perhaps his understanding of modern forces and connections through his affiliation with Christianity and Western education was more important than military might.[91] At the same time, Timi Laoye was also an excellent embodiment of Ẹdẹ's seemingly paradoxical talent for embracing the modern without losing tradition, or rather for demonstrating that the modern and traditional need not be binary, polar opposites. Despite being a devoted Christian, Timi Laoye was also a staunch supporter of Ẹdẹ's traditional customs and forms of worship, and each time his name was mentioned around the Ṣango priests while I was in Ẹdẹ, they would sing his praises for elevating the tradition of the royal oriṣa. Because he also learned traditional drumming as a boy from his uncle, Timi Laoye became a living icon of the Yoruba talking drum, writing an important article on the subject and traveling with his troupe to many festivals and educational institutions in Europe and the United States to demonstrate the beauty of the Yoruba talking drum.[92] His fame as a drummer was so widespread that when Queen Elizabeth visited Nigeria in 1956, she awarded him the Silver Medal for Chiefs

and specifically asked to dine with him and for him to provide a demonstration of Yoruba drumming and dance.[93]

Contemporary Religion in Ẹdẹ

The people of Ẹdẹ are very proud of their tradition of religious harmony, and one of the common refrains I heard was ko si ija laarin awọn ẹlẹsin (there is no conflict among people of different religious identities). Furthermore, the people of Ẹdẹ are fond of saying "ọmọ iya kan naa ni wa" (we are children of the same mother/all one family), emphasizing the unity and close ties among all citizens. However, what makes Ẹdẹ truly exemplary is not that it has had no religious conflict—as is clear from the preceding history—but that when such rare occasions do arise, the people have always managed to resolve matters quickly and efficiently. The Timi plays the central role in restoring harmony to the town and establishing and maintaining a sense of religious pluralism that has been internalized and adopted as normative by both religious leaders and laypeople. This is exemplified in how quick Ẹdẹ's citizens are to draw on aspects of their traditions that encourage them to live in peace with other religious groups, even when those leaders are not natives of Ẹdẹ. Still, it appears that religious groups are not quite as interconnected as they once were but that the contemporary Timi have risen to the challenge and upheld Ẹdẹ's strong commitment to religious learning, identity, and pluralism.

During the reign of the previous Timi, Tijani Ọladokun Oyewusi, a comic musician named Ọlanrewaju Adepọju composed a song critiquing the placement of a prominent Ṣango statue near a mosque. Because the Ṣango statue drew electricity from the mosque to light a bulb representing the fire Ṣango shoots out of his mouth, Adepọju sang:

> Nigba ti eniyan o gọ bi ara Ẹdẹ?
> Wọn kọ mọsalasi, wọn fi Ṣango jẹ lemọmu!
>
> When are people not as daft as those of Ẹdẹ?
> They built a mosque, and they made Ṣango the imam!

Adepọju made fun of the perceived absurdity that an orisa statue drew its electrical power from the sacred building of another religion.[94] This enraged several prominent Muslim leaders, who sought the statue's removal from its location right in the center of town by the imposing central mosque. This, of course, did not sit well with the Ṣango priesthood, protests broke out, and several people were even killed. Eventually, all sides were called to the palace, and an agreement was reached. A wealthy Muslim leader paid to relocate the statue to the palace courtyard (figure 1.2). Order

FIGURE 1.2. The controversial Ṣango statue, now located in the Timi's palace, Ẹdẹ, 2016. Photograph by the author.

was restored, and when I asked about the conflict, members of both religious groups responded that they believed the outcome was favorable for their group.[95]

Several other more minor incidents have also taken place intermittently, but it seems that a general sense of stability reigns today. For example, most of the people I interviewed who are involved in Egungun masquerade traditions, which manifest the spirits of the ancestors through the masks that parade through the streets, mentioned that twenty or thirty years ago they used to experience conflict with Muslims on a regular basis when they went out during their festivals, but this is uncommon now.[96] When I asked one church deacon about Ẹdẹ's high level of religious harmony, he quickly interrupted to inform me that it was not always so, and his congregation used to have stones thrown at them during open-air crusades—a complaint several others echoed as well.[97] Another complaint I

often heard was that orișa devotees would frequently hold their processions in front of mosques and play loud music, disturbing the faithful who were there to pray in peace, but this issue is no longer a problem. Practically all members of different religious groups agreed that the current state of affairs is indeed harmonious, and they are quite proud of that fact.

Because religious harmony is clearly the order of the day in Ẹdẹ, I frequently asked how groups resolved conflicts, and the most common response across the board was that God is responsible for restoring order. Deacon Oke from the First Baptist Church said, "If it is peaceful now, it is the work of God!" and the custodians of the Egungun masquerades similarly attribute this more peaceful and tolerant time to the intervention of the Egungun spirits and God. The other main factor that all people of Ẹdẹ recognized regardless of religious affiliation was the role of the Timi, both currently and historically. The Timi has played a crucial role in resolving conflicts such as those over the eventual acceptance of Islam, the Ahmadiyya movement, or the location of the Șango statue, but even more important is how the current Timi always supports all religious groups and is at the very least present at (if not participating in) each of their major holidays.

Because of how this religious tolerance is modeled, and to a certain degree enforced, by the Timi, most religious groups have well-developed theologies of how to live peacefully with religious others. This topic will be addressed more fully in chapter 6, but a few examples are in order. While the alfa (Muslim clerics) frequently cite Qur'anic verses common in interfaith contexts, such as "there is no compulsion in religion," Ẹdẹ's specific history and context inform the parts of Islamic tradition with which the population engages and how they do so.[98] For example, the first alfa brought to Ẹdẹ by Timi Lagunju did not engage in the kind of forceful proselytizing common today. Instead they attended the orișa festivals and offered prayers for the devotees and the community to forge positive relationships. Then they offered to educate children of all backgrounds, and because of their positive relationships and the generally open religious disposition of Yoruba families, large numbers of children received a Qur'anic education and voluntarily adopted Islamic orthodoxy as a way of life.[99] Naturally, this produced a situation experienced by many in Ẹdẹ to this day in which children who practice Islam exclusively have family members who serve only the orișa or mix orișa worship with Islam. Alfa Hassan Alaaye remembers that his grandfather was a Muslim and Ogun devotee, but he learned as a boy that the Prophet once said that people should worship only God, but after God we owe the most respect to our parents and elders. Consequently, despite disagreeing with his grandfather's religious practice, he refused to say a negative word about it, approaches orișa

devotees in the same way he did his grandfather, and insists that offering quality education is both more effective than force and more pleasing to God.[100]

One of the most respected alfa in Ẹdẹ, the late Shaykh Salahuddin, remembered times when open violence became more common, and when asked what the appropriate response to such violence is, he cited prayer and preaching. Specifically, he expressed concerns over violence and mixing Islam with oriṣa worship, but he recited part of Sūrat al-Fātiḥah, the first chapter of the Qur'an—"ihdinā aṣ-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm" (guide us on the right/straight path). In his view, preaching and effective education allow people to see the truth, and being open to being led by God to the "straight path" will cause people to conduct themselves appropriately without any need of outside pressure or coercion.[101] The alfa's insistence on education was not limited to formal Islamic education, as they also stressed the necessity of understanding the religious practices of those around them and entering into dialogue with them to ensure that no group's activities would disrupt another's, a practice that occurred several times during my time in Ẹdẹ. Besides education, preaching, and dialogue, both alfa and laypeople simply leave the rest up to the Timi and God, and they cite the historical record as the evidence that this strategy was appropriate and effective.

Similarly, Christian clergy were quick to draw on aspects of their tradition that guide the way they manage their relations with other religious groups. The pastor of the First Baptist Church, Reverend Nathaniel Oyewole, expressed sadness at the general state of religion in Nigeria but pride in the religious climate of Ẹdẹ and said, "Human relationships should matter. [They] should be ultimate in our heart, rather than this religious . . . affiliation, because some of us, some people are so crazy about religion." His belief is that "Jesus wants people to do everything in their power to find peace with [each other]," and he cited the common verses of "turning the other cheek," "repaying evil with good," and of Christians rejoicing in the face of persecution because "great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets before you."[102]

Pastor Oluṣeyi Alakija, one of the chaplains of Redeemer's University, referenced 1 John 4, which states that "God is love," and "he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"[103] For Pastor Alakija, this should be paired with the second half of Jesus's summation of the law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."[104] Pastor Alakija believes there to be no other choice but love because "there is no condition attached to it, we must love our neighbors no matter who they are or what religion they practice."[105] Although he had only spent seven months in Ẹdẹ when I spoke with him, Pastor Bennett Irogbalam of Winner's Chapel was deeply impressed

by the level of religious harmony in Ẹdẹ. He believed it to be in line with his biblical principles, laid out by Paul in Romans, specifically that "if it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."[106] Much like Pastor Alakija, he also emphasized that there is no qualification attached to "all men," so religious affiliation should not prevent people from living peaceably with each other. These perspectives are fascinating because, unlike most Muslim leaders, the vast majority of Christian clergy are *not* natives of Ẹdẹ but still adhere to the same general religious outlook and affirm its harmonious religious climate. Although this may not come as a surprise given the history of Christianity and Western education, practically all the Christian clergy also underscored their commitment to bringing education and knowledge rather than confrontation to the community.

From the perspective of every orișa devotee, the state of religious affairs in Ẹdẹ required almost no explanation because "[they] are all worshipping the same God."[107] The babalawo, in particular, make reference to oral mythology about how Islam and Christianity are simply more recently arrived traditions of worshipping Olodumare, or the Supreme God, and one babalawo even referred to followers of the Abrahamic traditions as the "sons" of orișa devotees. Although the traditional Yoruba perspective of alternative but perfectly legitimate methods of worshipping God renders conflict or violence based on religious identity unreasonable, their marginalized position further incentivizes harmony. Ifaṣọla Onifade stated that in light of the negative stereotypes surrounding orișa worship, he and many others are particularly careful to promote harmonious interactions because any hint of conflict could be interpreted as them engaging in black magic and could further fuel these misconceptions.[108]

Moments of Tension

While practically all agree that Ẹdẹ's religious pluralism is well ordered and has recently become more so, no system is perfect, and there are still some instances of religiously charged tension. One contentious issue is the construction of Redeemer's University just outside the main part of town. When construction began several years ago, there were protests, and there are legal matters still being settled in court, but for all intents and purposes the Timi restored order in this instance also. (This event is addressed in greater detail in chapter 7.) Despite the university's foundation and the Muslim identity of the protesters certainly adding a religious dimension to the conflict, most who disapproved of the university's construction objected to how the land was acquired and used, rather than wanting to exclude Christians from the town.[109] Perhaps one of the

greatest instances of tension was the Dag Heward-Mills Healing Jesus Crusade in July 2011. The publicity campaign for this large open-air crusade was very aggressive, including posting flyers and painting advertisements on the walls of Muslim-owned houses and buildings, erecting roadside billboards with messages such as "Only Jesus Can Save You," and making frequent announcements via loudspeakers mounted on cars. Such actions caused several reformist Muslim groups, such as the Tablighi Jamaat and Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN), to lead a protest that threatened to become violent. Again, after a successful intervention led by the Timi and the chief imam, the issue was resolved peacefully.[110]

On the last evenings of the Ipedi festival—the great civic festival of the Timi—several Egungun masquerades dance around the city, drawing large crowds of onlookers. During my fieldwork, one group of masquerades almost got into a fight with some students inside the prestigious Islamic Institute as they passed by it. Although accounts of the incident vary, all agree that verbal insults were hurled, and perhaps stones as well, but when one of the teachers in the Islamic Institute heard what was happening, he made the students stop, apologized to the Egungun party, and then called the head Egungun chiefs to discuss the matter. While some members of the Egungun tradition maintain that more contentious confrontations used to be quite common in the past, what is interesting about this case is the degree of respect both sides were able to maintain toward the other. Although some Egungun chiefs were understandably aggrieved, they were all very quick to affirm their respect and admiration for the Islamic Institute and its founder Shaykh Salahuddin, and one Egungun chief even praised the Shaykh for having supported him financially when he needed assistance.[111] Furthermore, they also agreed with some of the Muslim clerics that those who did not want to allow a traditional masquerade to pass in front of the Islamic Institute were likely boarding students and not Ẹdẹ indigenes because children of Ẹdẹ should know better.[112]

Growing Religious Cleavages

Such instances of tension are not common and are ordinarily resolved skillfully through a combination of the authority of the Timi, established religious leaders, and the general culture of pluralism these figures cultivate. However, there is clearly a greater separation between religious groups than existed in the past. As Akinjogbin argued, one of the most important organizing principles of traditional Yoruba society is that of ẹbi, or familial lineage, and this contributes greatly to the lack of religious tension. Membership in and adherence to the

norms of a lineage should not necessarily be considered as superseding adherence to a religious group, as the two often simply did not compete and instead reinforced each other. Members of a lineage would often be devoted to the same orișa or would join together to celebrate the festivals or achievements of lineage members who practiced other traditions.[113] As J. D. Y. Peel noted, scholars of Yoruba society and the Yoruba themselves often claim the religious harmony that used to dominate the region was a result of attending each other's festivals and marrying across religious lines. However, as Peel observed, "there is a certain circularity here, a 'chicken-and-the-egg' problem. Which came first; the egg of the value of tolerance or the chicken of families easily containing both Muslim and Christian members?"[114] While it is difficult to answer Peel's question in the past, it does appear that each of these mutually supporting dynamics is waning in the region, and Ẹdẹ is no exception to this trend.

By most accounts, the number of people attending the festivals of other traditions is decreasing, and interfaith marriage is increasingly frowned upon, which may help to explain why religious dynamics have shifted so much recently. In a survey in Ẹdẹ led by Rebecca Jones and Insa Nolte, about half of the respondents indicated that they would not like to marry someone of a different religion.[115] In another survey conducted in 1973, seven of the ten major town lineages polled were composed of at least 95 percent Muslims.[116] In the mid-1990s Stephan Reichmuth noted "a more recent development whereby religious differences have gained in communal relevance."[117] Jones and Nolte found that only about half of their respondents thought it appropriate for religious outsiders to attend their religious events, and when I asked several Muslim and Christian friends if they would ever attend the festivals of other religions, their responses were overwhelmingly negative, and one person—shocked that I would even suggest that she might attend the annual Ṣango festival—quickly affirmed that she had no business there, "since it has nothing to do with [her] religion."[118] Clearly, families are not as religiously pluralistic as they were in the past, and many people are not comfortable attending the festivals of other religious groups or hosting those of a different religious background.

If these two previously common features were the bedrock of religious harmony in Yorubaland, perhaps it makes sense that religious tension is growing as families become more homogenous and restrict themselves to attending functions of their own religious groups. However, this does not answer Peel's question of *why* the Yoruba may have chosen these patterns of behavior in the past or why they have changed over the past few decades. Perhaps even more curious is that Ẹdẹ—an overwhelmingly Muslim town—has managed to maintain a relatively higher degree of religious harmony in the face of these changes compared

to other cities. The next chapter addresses how the adoption of the category of religion, its nature, how it operates, and how this subtle change in the way people order their religious worship and identity may answer all of these questions.

Conclusion

Whether viewed through a mythological, economic, political, or military lens, Ẹdẹ has played an important role in the history of Yorubaland as a major economic and imperial outpost of the Ọyọ Empire, but its rich and pluralistic religious history is perhaps even more interesting and informative. Because the soldiers who settled in Ẹdẹ-Ile with Agbale Ọlọfa Ina came from Ọyọ, they surely brought many of Ọyọ's religious traditions with them. As soldiers and hunters, their most prominent and royal orișa was Ogun, demonstrated by its prominence in opening the Ipedi group of festivals. Several other orișa traditions were surely brought to Ẹdẹ-Ile as well, including Ṣango, Ifa, and Egungun masquerades. If these traditions are viewed as distinct forms of worship, then Ẹdẹ was a religiously pluralistic society right from its establishment.

In this sense, when Timi Ajeniju was identified as a Ṣango devotee at his birth, it marked a shift in the religious affiliation of the Timi as Ẹdẹ's sacred king. This, however, did not pose a problem because it was divinely ordained and the only way that the young prince could achieve his destiny, and by extension, best serve the community as a whole, which he did successfully. Curiously, mirroring Ṣango's particularly close relationship with Islam, Timi Ajeniju also oversaw the introduction of Islam in Ẹdẹ society.

Timi Ajeniju invited Buremọ Owonlarago to use his esoteric knowledge to defend Ẹdẹ from Ibadan invaders, demonstrating not only the general openness to new religious traditions, but also that Islam was often not spread by force but was employed to protect Muslims and non-Muslims alike and restore peace in an era of widespread warfare and uncertainty. While the Muslim community founded by Owonlarago did not thrive, the determination of Prince Lagunju to practice Islam as a "predestined Muslim" paralleled the experience of Timi Ajeniju and ensured the establishment of Islam as a pillar of Ẹdẹ's culture. Just as Ifa divination prescribed that Timi Ajeniju switch his religious affiliation from Ogun to Ṣango, it similarly revealed that Timi Lagunju would switch his religious affiliation from Ṣango to Islam, despite his parents raising him as a Ṣango devotee.

Although Gbadamosi was astonished by this occurrence and called for scholarly explanations of it, if Islam were viewed as merely another form of worship among the many others already present, it appears quite in keeping with Yoruba customs and cosmology.[119] Because Islam was not considered a "foreign religion"

but a new form of worship founded by "a strange orișa from the East," this message from the Ifa priests was perfectly in line with the message given to Timi Ajeniju and provided a type of divine justification and call for the new form of worship to gain a prominent place in both the town and the palace. However, Timi Lagunju's rejection of the type of religious pluralism that predicted and justified his identity as a Muslim makes him the first of the Yoruba ọba to be faced with the now-common challenge of exclusivist perspectives on religion and the capacious traditional Yoruba cosmology. His rejection of and attempt to eliminate Ẹdẹ's religious plurality contributed to his ultimate exile and shocked those who had assumed the ọba would participate in all forms of worship and provide each of them a space to contribute to the well-being of the town.

On the other hand, Timi Lagunju did receive the missionary William H. Clarke warmly, in stark contrast to how he treated orișa traditions. This is likely because he recognized the Christian missionary as a person of the book, and whether for this reason, hopes for political connections through the white man, the general tradition of religious accommodation among Yoruba ọba, or some combination thereof, the Timi of Ẹdẹ have responded just as positively toward Christianity ever since, regardless of their personal religious affiliation. From the moment Jacob Akerele returned to Ẹdẹ in 1900 following his baptism in the Baptist Church, Christians have enjoyed a close and positive relationship with the Timi through service to the court as scribes and general service to the population through founding medical and educational institutions. The profile of Christianity in Ẹdẹ was raised further through the activity of the prophet Samson Akande, affectionately called Baba Abiye. Through employing his spiritual gifts for the benefit of Ẹdẹ's people of all religious backgrounds and his establishing the prayer mountain Ori Oke Baba Abiye, he turned Ẹdẹ into a major pilgrimage site for Christians in the region and for adherents of other traditions as well.

Timi Laoye also played an important role in Ẹdẹ's history as its first and only Christian ruler, but despite having a different religious identity from most of his citizens, he enjoyed a great deal of popularity. Again, if his conversion to Christianity is viewed not as abandoning either a traditional religion or Islam but simply as practicing a legitimate and most personally appropriate form of worship, his identity as a Christian need not present a substantial obstacle to his ability to occupy the office of Timi. In fact, his continued attachment to and support of indigenous Yoruba traditions, such as drumming and Ṣango as the Timi's orișa, cause him to be fondly remembered by many and certainly did not impede him from introducing a large number of modern improvements to the city, effectively and deftly negotiating the presence of modernity and tradition in Ẹdẹ.

In keeping with—or perhaps as a result of—the relative ease with which the Timi have managed to negotiate their changes in religious affiliation, the town has fostered a culture of religious harmony, which is increasingly uncommon in Yorubaland and Nigeria at large. While Ẹdẹ has also been a part of a general trend of increasing reluctance to marry across religious lines or attend ceremonies of other religious groups, and for a short while even saw a rise in religious conflict, these issues largely appear to have been resolved. Religious leaders and laypeople from all religious backgrounds are able and often eager to identify the aspects of their traditions that support the accommodating and pluralistic nature of Ẹdẹ's society, and the Timi have been equally quick to enforce these norms whenever they have been challenged. The religious opinions, behavior, and dispositions of Yoruba people at large have undergone remarkable change over the past several decades, and Ẹdẹ has been perhaps more successful than almost any other town in navigating these changes without losing the culture of religious harmony of which its citizens are so proud. The next chapter will analyze in greater detail the nature of traditional Yoruba conceptions of forms of worship, how they have contributed to the religious climate of Ẹdẹ, and how they may differ from more modern conceptions of separate "religions," laying the groundwork for understanding precisely how the Timi of Ẹdẹ have rearticulated the tradition of religious pluralism in a modern religious context.

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2

Forms of Worship, Not Religion

No people are without religion. . . . What is found may not be religion but the material out of which religion may be made. —C. SYLVESTER GREEN, *New Nigeria*

The words of Baptist missionary C. Sylvester Green in the epigraph initially appear patronizing and condescending by implying that Nigerians did not possess religion but only the raw material for creating it. However, I would argue that he was partially correct, if not precisely in the way he intended. As Patrick Ryan observed, "the modern . . . understanding of how West Africans have traditionally looked upon the transcendent betrays a tendency to impose upon West African religious experience conceptual categories inherited from the Middle East or from the Greco-Roman world."[1] For Ryan, this implied outsiders' subconscious imposition of alien categories and patterns of thought on indigenous traditions. Green may have been wrong about the impossibility of a people being without

religion (as a particular category drawn from his modern world), but his lens on "religion" nevertheless allowed him and many others to identify material from which religion could be forged. The previous chapter reviewed Ẹdẹ's various traditions from which a "religion" could be produced, but rather than imposing the foreign lens of religion, as Green did, this chapter draws out an alternative configuration of Yoruba ẹsin as "forms of worship" from these traditions themselves. The concept of ẹsin as forms of worship is more enlightening because it emerges from Yoruba traditions and practices and is free of connotations that accompany any foreign framework. It is helpful in identifying how and why several important events at the advent of modernity (ọlaju) in Yorubaland constituted a radical reorganization of religious life but are easily overlooked from the perspective of modern religions. Additionally, it makes the history of Yoruba-inspired religion in Salvador, Brazil, more intelligible and makes sense of the past and present religious dynamics of Ẹdẹ outlined in subsequent chapters.

In addressing the nature of ẹsin in traditional Yoruba life as different from religion, I do not mean to suggest that there was nothing religious about the society. Far from it. Much as Jason Josephson Storm argued with respect to Japanese history, certain phenomena have always existed that could be categorized as religious, but "they did not exist in the same aggregate form that has come to define current uses of the term."[2] Wilfred Cantwell Smith similarly recognized the practically universal quality of personal experiences and dispositions that could be characterized as religious but noted that "when we move . . . to thinking rather of an organized system, the conceptualization that envisages a series of entities in the world each of which is called a religion, this unanimity of mankind vanishes."[3] Smith was further doubtful that a concept similar to religion has ever been developed outside the influence of the modern West.[4] Evidence for his position can be found in the lack of sufficient direct translations for *religion* in the languages of non-Western societies. Japanese has more than ten terms that could be translated as "religion," although none is directly synonymous, and the Yoruba term *ẹsin* is in fact more akin to "form of worship" than modern "religion." The historian Edwin Judge suggested that when translating the term *religion* from ancient languages, one should just cross it out, identify the source word, and substitute practically any other translation for it to arrive at a more accurate understanding.[5]

The specific evolution and development of both the term and concept of religion has been well documented by others and is largely outside the scope of this work.[6] It is significant, however, that much like many contemporary non-Western languages, ancient Greek and Latin had no direct translation for religion, and that "the Greeks thought about the gods, about God; but they did not

think about religion."[7] Hence, religion as a category and reified social construct is not a historical given but has a particular history in Western Christianity and society, and "its nature and definition, its origins or expressions were born in the West."[8] As Daniel Dubuisson noted, this concept of religion has subsequently been exported to the rest of the world—including Yorubaland—but I am primarily concerned here with *Yoruba* traditions and religious orientations that are largely independent of religion and will address the introduction of and interaction with religion in the next chapter.

Although religion may not be an entirely appropriate category in this instance, the question must still be asked, If the Yoruba people did not think and order their lives in terms of religion, how could we better and more appropriately understand this facet of their lives? Wilfred Cantwell Smith asserted that it would require a "powerful act of imagination" to go back in time to understand how other people may have understood traditions that have now become reified as religions, but I argue it does not require a powerful act of imagination or time travel because there are still many people in Ẹdẹ, Yorubaland at large, and Salvador, Brazil, for whom the concept of religion is rather foreign.[9] Consequently, in order to understand religious traditions in any society, one must analyze them within a culturally and historically specific framework.[10] This is precisely the goal of this chapter through a process Olupona calls "indigenous hermeneutics," or drawing theoretical frameworks out of the material itself rather than imposing them on the material from the outside.[11] By drawing on history, rituals and lived experience, linguistic features, social and political structures, and mythology gathered from Ẹdẹ specifically and Yorubaland more generally, I will provide a description of what constitutes a form of worship within the Yoruba context and show how this phrase is more appropriate than the more common conception of religion.

The Not-Traditional "Religion"

Religious traditions such as the worship of Yoruba orișa are often categorized as "indigenous religions" in reference to their rootedness in a particular geographic and cultural location. However, it is ironic that the second half of the term is anything but indigenous and has largely been introduced by the modern West. In the Yoruba language, the word most commonly employed as a translation for the English "religion" is *ẹsin*, which is simply a nominal form of the verb *sin*, meaning "to worship" or "to serve." Consequently, its root meaning is more akin to "form" or "way of worship" than "religion." Similarly, when the prefix *ẹ-* is added to the root verb *kọ* (to study), it becomes the nominal *ẹkọ,* meaning "education" or "lesson" or the structure given to or created to guide the act of

studying, rather than studying itself. Thus, the addition of *ẹ-* before the verb *sin* indicates the process, system, or structures that come about through and guide the enacting of the verb.

Furthermore, the word *isin* can also refer to a gift or service presented to a king/ọba as a sign of devotion and submission, which reveals the linked root meaning of service and the relationship of a subordinate with a superior. While *isin* could refer to "worship," "devotion," or "service" to an ọba, for example, it would be odd to speak of the *ẹsin* of an ọba in terms of royal service, as *ẹsin* would instead mean the form of worship in which the ọba engages. I would like to underscore the relational aspect of the terms *ẹsin* and *sin* as they are rooted not only in action but also in an intimate relationship with a more powerful entity. This could, of course, be the etymology of a word that has now taken on new meaning, and to an extent in contemporary times this is the case. However, the important distinctions in both meaning and usage of the term *ẹsin* as a form or way of worship compared to *religion* contain critical information and importance, which this chapter analyzes.

Previous Religious Models

Because the Yoruba are possibly the most-studied African society, there is no shortage of academic work on their religious life. Hence, before proposing a new model of forms of worship rather than religion, it is worth reviewing how previous prominent scholars have theorized Yoruba religiosity. Two primary models exist, and both assume a framework of religion to a degree. The first and most dominant model is a hierarchical pantheon with the Supreme Being or Deity called Olodumare or Ọlọrun at the top; minor deities—the orișa and perhaps a few other spirits—operating at the next level to rule over certain aspects of the cosmos; and human beings one step below the minor deities. This cosmological ordering of a Yoruba religion was perhaps the first to be articulated, and it is clearly laid out from the earliest works on Yoruba religion and society, such as A. B. Ellis's *The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa*, Reverend Samuel Johnson's foundational work *The History of the Yorubas*, Reverend James Johnson's *Yoruba Heathenism*, and Reverend J. Olumide Lucas's *The Religion of the Yorubas*. Such works always begin with Ọlọrun or Olodumare and then move down to discuss the position and function of the minor divinities, although some acknowledge there is little if any consensus on a potential hierarchy among these divinities or about which are relatively major or minor compared to the others.[12] This framework is still dominant today and is often used to teach students about indigenous African traditions in general.[13]

In large part because of the great deal of diversity and lack of consensus, some scholars, such as Pierre Verger and more recently Karin Barber, suggested a second, more fragmentary, approach. Independently drawing on the oriki, or praise poetry and songs of the individual orișa, they conclude that there is "no harmonious pantheon and organized hierarchy" but rather "multiple juxtaposed monotheisms" to which each individual person is devoted.[14] Barber even suggests that these discrete individual traditions are often in competition with each other for prominence and prestige, emphasizing the dynamic nature of orișa traditions in their tendencies to adopt new features in order to serve all the needs of their devotees.[15]

While the second model adheres more closely to indigenous hermeneutics by drawing from the oriki rather than assuming a certain theology and cosmological form, as the first does, it still relies on a certain conception of monotheism(s) and the idea of religion itself. Other scholars have argued about the implications and complications of using the framework of monotheism, there is an extensive and historic debate about the merits of the category of polytheism versus monotheism, and still others have disputed whether or not a Supreme Deity has always been a part of the Yoruba cosmology.[16] In this chapter, I sidestep these issues entirely by simply examining the most salient features of orișa traditions themselves and the worldview of those who practice them. My analysis shares many similarities with the approach of Verger and Barber simply because the majority of the orișa devotees themselves interact with these traditions as somewhat disparate institutions rather than merely individual aspects of a larger whole.

Lineage Traditions

One of the best-known features of many orișa traditions is their lineage-based structure, demonstrated in the hereditary nature of most important chieftaincy titles. While there are exceptions to practically every trend within orișa traditions, this is generally the case in Ẹdẹ as the Oluọdẹ, or head of the hunters' guild and worship of Ogun; the Alagbaa, or head of the Egungun masquerade tradition; the Alagẹmọ, or head of Ọbatala worship; and the Mọgba, or senior Șango priest, are all titles either held by a particular lineage or rotated among a small number of lineages. Even family names, such as my own—Ogunnaike—often indicate the patron orișa of a particular lineage. In Ẹdẹ the orișa–lineage relationship can almost work in the reverse direction, with orișa themselves taking on the name of a lineage devoted to them, as with Șango Yapọ and Șango Agbajere (or simply the Șango of the Yapọ or Agbajere families). The link between a lineage and its orișa is particularly evident with the Egungun because

they often "claim" a lineage that then must serve it and bring it out for festivals at least once every year. The relationship between an orișa and its devotees is often also described in biological, familial terms with the devotee called ọmọ (child) and the orișa called baba (father) or iya (mother).

This close link between familial identity and the worship of a particular orișa was thrown into sharp relief when many residents in Ẹdẹ began converting to Islam and some wanted to leave orișa forms of worship behind. As Oyeweso noted, the desire to abandon these traditions caused concern for the well-being of the whole family, and potentially the town, because it represented a breakdown in a specific and important cosmological relationship.[17] When I spoke to many older people during my fieldwork in Ẹdẹ—most of whom were Muslims—a common refrain was confusion over why young people thought they had to abandon the traditions of their ancestors in order to bring new traditions into their lives. Even after conversion to Islam, the link between biology or genealogy and form of worship remains salient, as is demonstrated by two of the most famous lineages in Ẹdẹ, Ile Imọle and Ile Talafia Imam. Both lineages and their compounds within Ẹdẹ are specifically known for their high degree of Islamic education and piety, and to be a member of the lineage implies an important relationship with Islam, although it is articulated slightly differently within each lineage.[18]

In fact, just like many of the orișa-related chieftaincy titles, many of the most important titles linked to Islam, including chief imam, are held by a small number of families that have long been established as strong Islamic lineages. However, the emphasis on a person's choice to convert to or practice Islam (and also Christianity) has implied a move away from a previous emphasis on biological descent with respect to religious identity, although this relationship "is negotiated differently in different compounds and exists along a continuum."[19] The traditional importance of biological descent has a clear importance in orișa traditions, but even this was not and is not a hard and fast rule, as we will now see.

Religious Identity as Cosmic Fact

While religious affiliation is largely understood to be a choice or matter of personal belief in the modern world, for those involved with orișa traditions this is a strange notion. Dubuisson argued that in contemporary times religious life has become a "private domain, strictly personal," but that this is not at all how Plato or Cicero would have conceptualized it.[20] He traces the origins of this development from Saint Paul's evangelization of the Gentiles through the influence of the Protestant Reformation to the present state of affairs in which "it is almost

everywhere recognized that religion is a strictly private, interior matter, which exclusively concerns personal conscience."[21] Yoruba rituals, mythology, and conceptualizations of their lived experiences, however, demonstrate that there are many Yoruba today and in the past who do not take this stance.

To begin, the religious affiliation of any newborn child is chosen not by the individual and not necessarily even by the family, but is *revealed* through the process of Ifa divination. Almost all orișa devotees, and even some Muslims and Christians, go through an important ritual called ẹsẹntaye after birth. In this ritual, a babalawo consults Ifa to learn important information about the newborn's life, including taboos, important future events, messages from spirits, and most importantly here, the child's religious identity. Generally, the message transmitted by Ifa is simply that the child is a devotee of the family's patron orișa, which is quite sensible in light of the traditional belief in reincarnation and familial occupations or guilds. However, there are certainly instances in which Ifa divination prescribes a new religious affiliation for a child, and such a declaration is always noteworthy. This is why the story in chapter 1 about Timi Ajeniju becoming a Ṣango devotee when his ancestors were Ogun worshippers is so well known, and likely why the details of the story are so fantastic. When he was born, his fists were clenched, and he would not open them. When the Ifa priests performed divination, they declared him to be a Ṣango devotee, and when Ṣango priests came from Ọyọ and made a sacrifice to Ṣango, the child opened his hands to reveal a cowrie shell and a thunderstone—emblems of Ṣango. Either this revelation that an important child was to worship an orișa other than that of his lineage necessitated an extreme sign such as locked hands and sacred symbols, or the shift in royal religious affiliation was so dramatic that its retelling had to be so as well, or potentially both were true.

To draw again on the history of Ẹdẹ's ọba, ẹsẹntaye was performed for Timi Lagunju also, and he was revealed to be a Muslim even though his lineage had become Ṣango worshippers following Timi Ajeniju.[22] This instance of Ifa divination has attracted even more attention, but it is significant that when his parents were told that their son had a different religious identity, the babalawo said he would serve "a strange orișa from the east," not necessarily that he would practice a different or separate religion. Furthermore, Lagunju's parents brought him up in the worship of Ṣango anyway, but none of the babalawo I interviewed were surprised that Timi Lagunju later converted to Islam and rose to fame and prominence by properly aligning himself with his destiny.

Several other orișa devotees also stressed to me how they interpret their own personal experiences and histories as a struggle to align themselves with their predestined religious practice and identity. For example, Oluwatoyin Salaudeen,

the chief Ọṣun priestess, was raised as a Christian and practiced Islam for a while when she married a Muslim, but nothing in life seemed to work for her no matter how hard she tried in business and personal matters. However, she later realized that Ọṣun, the orisa of fertility and wealth, had been calling her to her service, remembered how her own mother had performed some Ọṣun rituals for her as a young girl, and decided to begin training to become a priestess of Ọṣun. Since that time, she has flourished in life, which she attributes to the benevolence of Ọṣun and to having finally found the form of worship that was appropriate for her. Similarly, the chief possession priest of Ṣango in Ẹdẹ, Ṣangoniyi Ṣangosogo, left the worship of Ṣango for some time to practice Islam, but once when he went to the mosque to perform his prayers, he lost consciousness and started breathing fire. To him, this was a clear message from Ṣango—who is known for breathing fire and has a curiously close connection to Islam—so he left Islam and delved wholeheartedly into the tradition of Ṣango.

In each case—Timi Ajeniju and Lagunju, Oluwatoyin Salaudeen, and Ṣangoniyi Ṣangosogo—their personal preference for religious tradition/form of worship was largely irrelevant. Each had a predestined religious affiliation or identity that various forms of divination (including the ẹṣẹntaye ritual) could reveal. Each had the option of ignoring this destiny, much in the same way one could ignore a biological fact such as skin pigmentation, but the results were almost always negative, much in the way too much sun causes sunburn for the fair-complexioned who might imagine themselves to be dark-skinned. The effects of this cosmic misalignment were rectified as soon as each person adopted the proper form of worship.

Conversion Confusion

From such a perspective, the idea and concept of conversion to a particular religious tradition is actually quite strange, almost incomprehensible, and utterly irrelevant. If one's religious identity is simply a cosmic fact, pressuring someone to leave that form of worship for another is in fact unethical, doing that person a disservice. It is furthermore absurd because a person does not choose which tradition she is meant to follow. For this reason, in traditional Yoruba society "there was no insistence upon adherence to a particular dogma 'to join' a religion; there was no 'conversion' so to speak."[23] As a result, the vigorous efforts of Christian missionaries to convert orisa worshippers in nineteenth-century Yorubaland would have appeared quite strange and inappropriate from a traditional perspective. The sense of bewilderment in the face of pressure to convert is present in an Ifa verse I learned in Ẹdẹ which states:

Atanpako lo fẹ ka yanyan
difa fun iseusi ti n ṣe iyawo onigbagbọ,
ma bọsi tiẹ lọ,
emi o ma bọtun mi lọ,
maa ṣe waasu fun mi lori irọ.[24]

The Thumb Wants Us to Argue
consulted Ifa for Iseusi [Church],
who was the wife of the Christian(s).
You take the way to the left,
I will take the way to the right.
Don't preach to me about something that isn't true.

Several parts of this verse are quite revealing about the traditional Yoruba response to missionary Christian religious perspectives. Ifa verses begin with the name of the babalawo who cast that particular sign in the mythic past, and while the names of these babalawo can often be unusual, entertaining, or cryptic, they frequently contain important keys to the message that follows.[25] In this particular Ifa verse from Odu Ogbe-Alara, the curious name of the priest who performed divination is Thumb Wants Us to Argue, which suggests that someone separated from a group wants to sow discord by getting people to fight unnecessarily and primes the listener for the dynamics of evangelical sermons at the end of the verse. There is a fascinating reference to "Church" as the "wife" of Christians or *the* Christian, which could constitute a deep engagement with the Bible as an allusion to Saint Paul's description of the church as the bride of Christ.[26] While the verse does acknowledge the legitimacy of Christianity by suggesting its followers continue on their way, it does so somewhat disparagingly by suggesting the Christian way is to the left (understood as unlucky, improper, or more aptly gauche in the Yoruba context) while that of Ifa lies to the right (understood as fortuitous, proper, and well ordered). Finally, the end of the verse drives to the heart of the issue by demanding that waasu, or the sermons preached by Christian pastors, be stopped, because something about them is not true.[27]

The statement that the sermon is not based on truth may seem curious given the earlier recognition that Christians can go their own way. The likely implication here is not that any truth of Christianity itself is wrong, but instead that the act and perspective of preaching and attempting to persuade others to abandon their own way is out of line and is the action of a person who wants to cause an argument. There is an old Yoruba song that illustrates the traditional perspective quite well, suggesting the importance of allowing each person to follow her predestined path:

Ẹ jonifa o bọfa
Ẹ jonifa o bọfa
Ẹ jọlọṣun bọṣun
Ẹ jọlọṣun bọṣun
Ẹ jolodu o bodu
Kaye le gun.

Let the Ifa worshippers worship Ifa
Let the Ifa worshippers worship Ifa
Let the Ọṣun worshippers worship their Ọṣun
Let the Ọṣun worshippers worship their Ọṣun.
Let the Odu worshippers worship their Odu
So that there will be peace on earth.[28]

The various orișa traditions are laid out as perfectly legitimate forms of worship, and the end of the song makes it clear that it is precisely by allowing for and respecting this plurality that "there will be peace on earth"—a peace that the evangelistic sermons had disrupted.

This critique is not limited to Christianity, as Olupona noted in the adjacent town of Oṣogbo. He cites two popular songs within Ọṣun's tradition there, which state:

Baba Onirugbọn
Yee gbọ t'ẹbọ wa
Enikan ọ mọ ni o mọ mọ
Kirun lojojumọ.
Nibo lo ni n gbe Yeye mi si o?

You long-bearded Malam
Stop poking your nose into our rituals
No one disturbs you from performing
Your daily prayer (salat).
Where do you want me to cast my Great Mother?

Enilawaani osi
To ni n wa se 'mọle
Nibo lo ni n gbe Yeye mi si?

You with wretched turbans
Who want to convert me to Islam
Where do you want me to cast my Great Mother?[29]

In this song, "the critique of Islamic militancy [against the order of religious pluralism] is *not a rejection of Islam*," but is rather a "strong critique of exclusivist Islamic ideology" and perhaps even of the very idea of conversion.[30] The songs emphasize that there is nothing wrong with Muslims engaging in their own ritual practice, but the idea that one could or should simply cast aside one's cosmic mother is as absurd as denying the reality of one's birth mother. It does not take a "powerful act of imagination" to get a sense of the frustration and bewilderment of someone who understands her own religious identity to be divinely ordained when someone tells her she must leave it. These songs are also informative in understanding Ẹdẹ's history, as Timi Lagunju attempted to do precisely what the songs decry and was ousted because his actions ran so contrary to the nature of the system that undergirds orișa traditions and his own office as an ọba.

At the same time, there is ample evidence of people abandoning a particular orișa under certain circumstances. As Karin Barber brilliantly explicated, the relationship between devotee and orișa is mutually beneficial because the devotee enhances the orișa's power and prestige through ritual propitiation and public praise, and the orișa are expected to reciprocate by ensuring blessings and cosmic order in the lives of their faithful. However, if these divine services are not forthcoming, then it is understood and even sanctioned that the devotee should transfer allegiances to another tradition.[31] Elsewhere, Barber records a Ṣango devotee threatening to become a devotee of Ọṣun or a Christian,[32] and a Yoruba proverb states Orișa ta kẹ kẹ kẹ, ti o gbọ, ta gẹ, gẹ, gẹ, ti o gba, oju popo ni ngbe, which roughly means, "If your orișa doesn't listen when you praise it, or doesn't help you when you worship it, get rid of it!" This, however, is not at odds with an individual's preordained religious identity; instead, it suggests that if a particular orișa is unable to fulfill this role, then the devotee needs to seek out the appropriate orișa who *can* place that person's life back in line with her destiny. Note that in the proverb becoming a Christian is placed as an alternative to becoming a devotee of another orișa (Ọṣun) rather than all orișa collectively constituting one religion that is contrasted with Christianity.

Undergirding the absence of a concept of conversion is another that is often taken for granted with respect to religion in a modern context: the idea of "true" and "false" religions. The concept that only one tradition can have a definitive claim on Truth or salvation while others do not also has its own conceptual and developmental history within the Christian West. It is a unique product of a long series of radical oppositions to a separate other (which could be pagan, profane, atheist, or even a religious person in an atheist worldview).[33] Consequently, this schema is "inherent in the Christian conception alone. Elsewhere, where its

influence was modest or nonexistent . . . 'Our' religion, for example, as the one true religion, is not absolutely opposed to 'other' religions considered 'false.'"[34] As is clear from the evidence cited above, within the traditional Yoruba context, there exists a plurality of forms of worship, each of which is appropriate for certain people precisely *because* each is different in nature. Hence there is no "our true religion" to be contrasted with some "false religion" of others. Furthermore, the proof of one's personally appropriate tradition lies in the divine messages revealed through divinatory rituals or the simple fact that practicing that tradition provides cosmic order in one's life. From such a perspective, it is obvious that multiple traditions are true, at least in a relative sense, and no single tradition can be true in an absolute, universal sense.

This is not to suggest that the idea of one "true" religion opposed to the other "false" religions is and has always been inherent within Christianity. The fabled Christian mystic and theologian Nicholas of Cusa argued in his *De pace fidei* that God "provided them [the people of the world] with various prophets, each of whom had taught the same wisdom, but in different customs and languages," and he actually equated the identification of certain customs or practices as immutable or universal Truth with confusion arising from human weakness.[35] Cusa's understanding of the origin, purpose, and function of religious practice from a medieval Christian perspective is quite similar to traditional Yoruba perspectives on forms of worship, if one were to replace the word *prophet* with *orișa*, and given his cultural/theological background, Cusa might have found Yoruba religious behavior and norms more comprehensible than they were for his modern, Protestant coreligionists.

Regional Distribution

As previously mentioned, rather than functioning with a pan-ethnic pantheon, orișa traditions were often regionally proscribed. In fact, some have suggested that "the sheer extent of regional diversity in Yoruba religious practice calls into question whether we should be speaking of Yoruba religion as a single entity at all."[36] For example, J. D. Y. Peel found great diversity in the number and kinds of orișa present in the nineteenth-century Anglican Church Missionary Society records and in the geographic distribution of the orișa themselves. Some prominent orișa traditions were totally absent or even resisted in certain places but dominant in others.[37] However, some traditions were almost omnipresent, such as Ifa, Eșu, and to a lesser extent Ogun. The regional importance of individual orișa traditions is also demonstrated in the affiliation of the ọba as a representative and embodiment of the whole town. For example, the Alaafin of Ọyọ is

inextricably linked to the tradition of Ṣango as the patron orișa of the former empire, as is the Ataọja of Oṣogbo with the tradition of Ọṣun. While a pantheon of the regionally important orișa must be kept by the ọba in the palace, there is *always* one tradition that enjoys a privileged position in town and an exclusive relationship with the ọba, and hence the citizens, or perhaps vice versa.

What Do Orișa Devotees Call Themselves?

Given the great difficulty inherent in imposing outside categories and conceptual frameworks on orișa traditions, it seems much more appropriate simply to identify how orișa practitioners refer to themselves and what insights those references provide about the devotees' religious orientations and worldview(s). The most common way Yoruba orișa devotees refer to themselves and are referred to by others, both currently and historically, is through reference to the primary orișa they worship. In fact, people who are especially well known for a strong devotion to a particular orișa's tradition may simply be called by that orișa's name. Usually, however, they would be called Onișango if they serve Ṣango, Ọlọṣun, if they serve Ọṣun, or Onifa, if they serve Ifa. These terms literally means that the person "owns" or "has" Ṣango, Ọṣun, or Ifa, respectively, because the orișa is ritually prepared and subsequently "lives" in the devotee's house. Again, this demonstrates the Yoruba tendency to mark an individual's religious identity in relation to the specific orișa that she serves, the particular form of worship in which she is involved, or alternatively, the orișa with whom she shares the most intimate relationship.

The close relationship between patron orișa and devotee is among the most central elements of these traditions, although the devotee may have limited involvement in the traditions of other orișa.[38] As Barber argued, "The devotee addresses the orișa as if she had no other object of worship. She will often stress her single-minded devotion to one orișa. She may assert, more competitively, that her own orișa is the only spiritual force she can rely on."[39] This effectively challenges the idea of a unified pantheon, because devotees are centrally focused on only their own tradition, often to the exclusion of others. Although the different orișa do have different characteristics and specializations, each is believed by its devotees to be able to provide blessings in every aspect of life.[40] This underlines the fact that while the Ifa divination tradition tends to systematize the often-bewildering number of Yoruba deities, the devotees of those specific orișa traditions themselves do not always perceive them in this sense and could have significant disagreements with each other on certain issues without these disagreements presenting a serious problem.[41] For example, the Ṣango priests in Ẹdẹ

are very insistent that Ọṣun was Ṣango's wife, but the Ifa priests are equally insistent that she was instead the wife of Ọrunmila.[42] Each tradition also has its own form of oral praise, different musical instruments, and very different rituals, further underscoring the unique and separate nature of each specific form of worship, particularly from the perspective of the individual devotee of a specific orișa.

Devotees are often identified by or with their tutelary orișa precisely because this relationship with and worship of that deity constitutes a process of self-realization or actualization. Evan Zuesse provides an excellent outline of how and why ritual effectively molds the will and articulates definitions of selfhood.[43] Rituals such as vocalizing and valorizing the qualities of an orișa and/or manifesting the orișa through possession, dance, or physical material are good examples of how central the orișa is in determining who a person is and becomes, or always was before entering space and time. The important issue of character development will be addressed shortly, but this process of self-actualization often occurs even physically. Ulli Beier noted that in Ẹdẹ "the most intense personification of Obatala, is undoubtedly the priest, Ajagemo . . . who shows the power 'of the god himself.'"[44] Meeting the current Ajagẹmọ in Ẹdẹ immediately reminded me of that passage, and the Jagun Ṣango's breathing fire similarly demonstrates that orișa worship is an embodied—not merely an intellectual—process.[45] Linking self-realization to a particular orișa implies a plurality of models, with patience and unwavering honesty being more important to devotees of Ọrunmila and Ọbatala, for example, than to Ogun devotees. Worship is naturally the most central aspect of Yoruba forms of worship/ẹsin, in that it is directed toward an object (usually an orișa), and it is the process of worship that allows the devotee to become who she truly is or should be. This is why it is not uncommon to call those who have perfected their form of worship to a high degree simply by the name of their orișa; in a sense, that is in fact who they most truly are, like the Ajagẹmọ. The intimate relationship is mediated through ritual, which is why religious identity is at times also described in terms of what a person *does*.

Traditional Neologisms/What Do You Do?

Despite the clear emphasis on the importance of involvement and affiliation with one particular orișa and its worship, there are more modern terms that are often employed as a Yoruba equivalent to the English phrase "Yoruba traditionalist." The most direct—albeit wordy—Yoruba translation is *Ẹlẹsin Ibile*, which means more or less "the possessor/practitioner of indigenous forms of worship." This translation is accurate to a certain degree but would never have been used before the arrival of Islam and Christianity, which made certain

forms of worship "more traditional" than others. The more common terms are Abọrịṣa and Olorịṣa, which mean "one who sacrifices to the orịṣa" and "possessor of orịṣa," respectively. Again, it would seem unnecessary to describe an Egungun priest as someone who sacrifices to the orịṣa when everyone else around him does so as well. This indicates that the need to specify that a person sacrifices to the orịṣa is more recent and that the term likely emerged from a context in which many other people were *not* involved in such practices. Still, the emphasis on identification through what a person *has* or *does* merits further reflection, particularly in contemporary times when people's religious life and activity seem to defy categorization in modern, Western terms.

If an Abọrịṣa is simply someone who offers sacrifices to the orịṣa, then the term would technically include not only those revealed to be orịṣa devotees at birth, but also the many Muslims and Christians who participate in orịṣa traditions either occasionally or on a regular basis. While working with an Ifa priest for a year, I witnessed firsthand that the majority of those who sacrificed to the orịṣa were practicing Muslims or Christians (although they did so less frequently than "traditionalists"). Linguistically—and I would argue cosmologically from this particular point of view—the act of making a sacrifice to an orịṣa is open to all, regardless of their religious affiliation, and leaves the categories of Abọrịṣa, Christian, and Muslim more fluid and less exclusive. Additionally, if an Onifa is simply someone who has or possesses Ifa, then the term covers many Muslims and Christians in addition to Ọṣun or Ogun devotees. One babalawo with whom I worked in Ẹdẹ said he had initiated at least six Christian pastors and at least as many alfa (Muslim clerics) into Ifa, but that they usually traveled from other towns so nobody would know about it.[46] While it is highly unlikely that all or even most pastors or alfa have also received orịṣa themselves, many of them, and perhaps even more of their followers, could technically be described as Olorịṣa.

If one pays close attention to the way religious identity is described for adherents of the Abrahamic traditions as well, some interesting parallels emerge. When I asked many people in Ẹdẹ what their religious affiliation was, it was not uncommon for them to respond "a n kirun" or even "a lọ si mọsalasi/ṣọọṣi," literally meaning "I/we perform Muslim prayers" or "I/we go to mosque/church." This is, again, a literal interpretation, but it is striking that more emphasis is placed on what people *do* than on affiliation with a particular religion—although what they do is certainly contained within a specific tradition.[47] With respect to Christianity, it is not uncommon for members of a church to refer to themselves as "ọmọ lẹhin Kristi," or "followers of Christ," which seems a rather suitable replacement for, say, Ọlọṣun in that it preserves the important personal relationship between

the central figure of the tradition and the devotee when the act of "possessing" or "receiving" a divinity is no longer an option, at least in the same way.

Is this all merely semantic gymnastics? I think not. I would argue that it effectively serves to clarify religious orientation and behavior. Several older people told me that their children now "go to church/mosque," but I would still see those children return to perform important orișa rituals with the family. The first time I asked these elderly parents whether this might be an issue for the children, my question did not seem to make sense to them, and their response was still that they "go to the mosque." An Egungun devotee informed me that his obligatory involvement with Egungun did not prevent him from practicing Islam, but he asserted that "it doesn't stop me from performing Muslim prayers" (ki n ma kirun). Additionally, a few people in Ẹdẹ described themselves to me in different terms depending on the situation. For example, an elderly man introduced himself to me as Yisa, and I asked if his name indicated that he was Muslim. He responded that his *lineage* performs Muslim prayers (kirun) and then continued to say that there were many Onifa, Onișango, Christians, and even some Ogun worshippers among them. During the interview, it became clear that he was the chief caretaker for a prominent Egungun, and he quickly confirmed that he is certainly an Eleegun (owner of an Egungun, or Egungun devotee). His response also reiterates the important point about identity being defined through the lineage or corporate entity first and the individual second, as his first response described what the family lineage does, with the fact of internal diversity of individual affiliation coming almost as an afterthought. Other Eleegun in Ẹdẹ even told me that they perform the prayers but no longer go to the mosque, complicating matters and terminology further. In essence, what all these different Yoruba phrases and terms indicate is an involvement and affiliation with a particular tradition and/or ritual practice rather than an exclusive or even necessarily a primary *personal* affiliation with any particular tradition or religion. This clearly leaves the door open to a certain type of simultaneous involvement in other traditions, a lived Yoruba reality that we will address now.

Involvement in Multiple Forms of Worship

As is likely clear by this point, one of the major differences between orișa forms of worship and common modern conceptions of religion or religious identity is that involvement in one orișa tradition certainly does not preclude involvement in another. In some instances, such involvement might actually *suggest* multiple religious affiliations. When P. R. McKenzie analyzed the two dominant models of the orișa cosmology, he, like Verger and Barber, came out strongly in favor of a

conception of individual traditions centered around specific orișa but cautioned that this approach could "under-value the inter-relatedness of the cults and the specialization of particular cult-groups, such as Ifa and Eșu."[48] Even Barber, who particularly stressed the importance of the relationship between a devotee and a single patron orișa, commented that these devotees could very well participate in other orișa traditions "with varying degrees of involvement."[49] I would push even further, however, and suggest that plural involvement may have been normal or even expected before the advent of Islam and Christianity. This dynamic of involvement in multiple religious traditions or forms of worship is not unique to the Yoruba and was (and still is in many cases) the case in places such as Japan or China before the introduction of the idea of religion through contact with the West.

When I went to interview a man in Ẹdẹ at the recommendation of an orișa devotee, I had to wait for him to come home because he was at the mosque praying. He took me into his room, and I was astonished to see a large collection of orișa, of which he was very proud. He stressed at different times that he was an Eleegun and a "traditionalist" but that he added Islam to his collection of religious traditions simply because he had so many Muslim friends, they all wanted him to join them, and he found much truth and beauty within it. While most people in Ẹdẹ today certainly do not share this perspective, there are several reasons why many orișa devotees still do and even more did in the past.

From the perspective of various orișa forms of worship, becoming involved in an additional tradition does not constitute crossing any religious boundaries but is often more like seeking "consultant specialists . . . if necessary."[50] This is because, while each orișa is responsible for providing all blessings for their devotees, each one specializes in a particular aspect of life. If a woman or member of her family is afflicted by a disease, she might visit a priest of Ọsanyin—the orișa of herbs, plants, and medicine—or perhaps an Ifa priest to conduct divination to find the source of the problem and provide medicine. In addition, several of the orișa are simply understood to be certain aspects of life. As such, if a house were struck by lightning, the devotees of Ṣango would have to address the issue, whereas if a child were afflicted with smallpox, the parents would turn to the tradition of Ṣọpọnna—the orișa of pestilence and this disease. This involvement with an additional form of worship may be isolated—such as a one-time sacrifice in a time of need—or could be more intensive, such as receiving the new orișa and becoming initiated into that form of worship. With respect to Ifa divination, I have learned many verses in which Ifa prescribes that a person make a sacrifice to Ọșun in order to have healthy children and others in which a person must get initiated into an additional form of worship because that particular orișa has either taken an interest in the person or will be needed in her life.

Hence, from a traditional and orișa-centric perspective, it is much more appropriate and accurate to understand a person's religious identity as constituted by involvement in one specific and dominant tradition alongside a few potential additional traditions. In fact, this is self-evident from the practice of Ifa, as its divinatory messages and texts indicate, but it is perhaps even clearer in the tradition of Ẹdẹ's patron deity, Ṣango. This first occurred to me when I noticed that any time the Ifa priests and devotees would hold an important meeting, have a festival, or perform rituals, the Ṣango priests were *always* present. When I asked the Jagun Ṣango and Mọgba, the two ranking Ṣango priests (the former incorporates Ṣango in ritual contexts and the latter does not), why the traditions of these two orișa seem to be unusually close, they told me that it was because once when Ṣango was deathly ill, Ọrunmila performed divination for him and discovered that he would not recover until he became initiated into Ifa. Ọrunmila quickly paid for and performed all the necessary rituals, and after a period of seclusion, Ṣango returned to society more powerful than ever.[51] Several babalawo (both in Ẹdẹ and outside) confirmed this narrative from Odu Otura-Ariko, which is the source of an important metaphysical agreement and bond between both traditions and is quite revealing in several ways.

First, while Ṣango could have decided to become initiated into Ifa on his own, it was clearly his destiny that he do so, rather than a personal preference or belief. Second, in addition to this multiple religious affiliation being required of him, it was beneficial, rather than a serious breach of orthopraxy. Third, Ọrunmila was perfectly happy to initiate Ṣango, who was clearly primarily devoted to the separate tradition that he himself had founded. Fourth, this sacred history of the founder of their tradition is taken by Ṣango devotees as an indication that they, too, should show a great deal of respect for Ifa devotees and engage in that form of worship, just as Ṣango did.

Moreover, Ifa is not the only other form of worship that is implicated in the tradition of Ṣango. In his analysis of the elaborate Ṣango Timi festival in Ẹdẹ, Ajibade noted that the rituals indicate Ṣango's engagement with the tradition of Ọsanyin as the guardian of a lamp that plays a central role in the festival's early stages, with Ayan Agalu as the orișa of the bata drummers who are always present at important Ṣango rituals and festivals, and of course, with Ọya, his divine consort, whose devotees are even more closely associated with Ṣango's tradition than Ṣango devotees are to Ifa.[52] Ṣango has at times even been identified as a Muslim, and many of his rituals have clear links to some Muslim rituals.[53] The tradition of Ṣango, perhaps more than any other, is emblematic of this multireligious affiliation, as a song from his festival in Ẹdẹ indicates:

Mejeeji la o maa ṣe
Mejeeji la o maa ṣe
Ka ti ṣọọṣi de
Ka tun wado o Ṣango
Mejeeji la o maa ṣe
Mejeeji la o maa ṣe

Mejeeji la o maa ṣe
Mejeeji la o maa ṣe
Ka ti mọsalaṣi de
Ka tun wado o Ṣango
Mejeeji la o maa ṣe
Mejeeji la o maa ṣe.

We shall practice the two
We shall practice the two
When we return from the church
We should also go to Ṣango's brook (shrine)
We shall practice the two
We shall practice the two

We shall practice the two
We shall practice the two
When we return from the mosque
We should also go to Ṣango's brook (shrine)
We shall practice the two
We shall practice the two.[54]

The inherently pluralistic nature of the worship of Ṣango may have a great deal to do with his status as an imperial ọba. This subject will be addressed more fully in chapter 7, but since Yoruba kings are known as ọba onigbogbo ẹsin, they can be understood quite literally to be "owners or participants in all forms of worship." As a Yoruba monarch, Ṣango would not only be open to new traditions but would be actively involved in creating a type of religious pluralism. Once again, it was Timi Ajeniju, the predestined royal devotee of Ṣango, who was the first to welcome Islam into Ẹdẹ, saving the town in the process. Given the unique nature of Ṣango's tradition and its privileged position in Ẹdẹ society, Ajibade has asked, "is it possible that Ede's most important deity contributes to the peaceful relationship between Islam and Christianity?"[55]

Another important difference between a conglomeration of forms of worship over the currently dominant model of three separate religions is that a model of multiple forms of worship reframes Yoruba society as already pluralistic *long before* the introduction of Islam and Christianity. This is significant because it places the largely rapid and peaceful incorporation of Abrahamic traditions into Yoruba society into a broader perspective. Just as Ṣango, Ọṣun, Ọbatala, and perhaps several other traditions were incorporated into Ẹdẹ's religious life, Islam and then Christianity were likely treated the same way the individual new orișa traditions were. This may explain why Ṣango devotees would believe they could maintain their devotion to Ṣango while embracing Islam or Christianity, but it is perhaps even more useful in framing how aspects of Islam and Christianity were interpreted from an indigenous perspective. Ifa oral narratives provide excellent examples, but so do common understandings of aspects of the Qur'an.

Because Islam is so central to Ẹdẹ's civic life, practically all citizens are aware of major Muslim holidays, rituals, and narratives from the Qur'an. Perhaps one of the most important is the story of Ibrahīm and Isma'īl found in Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt, which forms the basis of the 'Eīd al-Kabīr celebration, known as Ileya in Yorubaland. However, I discovered some fascinating understandings of the narrative that place it within an orișa-centric context. While the Qur'an does not state explicitly that it was the angel Jibrīl who provided a ram so that Ibrahīm would not have to sacrifice his son to God, that is a very common belief, and many Ṣango worshippers maintain that Jibrīl is simply their patron orișa under an Arabic name. From their perspective, a divine being coming from the sky, carrying a message from God, and providing a ram must be Ṣango because he resides in the sky as the orișa of thunder and lightning, and the ram is his iconic sacrificial animal. As a result, the 'Eīd rituals, while Islamic, are also performed in honor of this orișa in their opinion. Muslims holding a major festival in honor of Ṣango does not seem odd or strange to his devotees given that Ṣango has a special relationship with their tradition in the same way that Ọrunmila does with Ṣango's, and there is no reason why one form of worship cannot be linked to another. The Ṣango priests also argue that one of Ṣango's sacred thunderstones (ẹdun ara) is placed underneath the mound where the ram is to be slaughtered on 'Eīd so that Ṣango can receive the sacrifice.

The Ṣango priests are acutely aware that the alfa fiercely contest this claim, and I have never seen a thunderstone involved in 'Eīd traditions, but not all Muslims consider this point of contact between Islam and Ṣango to be wild

speculation. I asked an elderly, well-respected Muslim layman about this belief that Ṣango provided the ram to Ibrahīm, and I was a bit surprised when he said it was quite possible. I asked if this type of interaction with oriṣa traditions might constitute shirk or a violation of tawḥīd—the important Islamic principle of the singleness and unity of God—but I was not fully prepared for his answer. He said, "Well, there is only one God, but who created Ṣango and gave him his power?"[56] Because he understood Ṣango to be just another messenger sent by God and whose power is derived only through God, the acknowledgment of this oriṣa did not compromise his commitment to God's unity. Similarly, even some alfa have suggested that the prophet Luqmān and/or Idrīs from the Qur'an was likely Ọrunmila, the oriṣa of wisdom and Ifa divination, and some identify this tradition of divination as an example of revealed knowledge given by God before He sent the Prophet.[57] As a result, Islam and indigenous religious traditions do not constitute two hermetically sealed traditions set up as conflicting claims on Truth, but rather are fully capable of containing—and to a certain degree justifying—one another within a single, comprehensive theology or framework.

To return to Ifa and Ileya, the babalawo in fact have two separate narratives about the origins of the festival from an indigenous Yoruba perspective. In the first narrative from Odu Otura Meji (the Ifa chapter dedicated to Islam) Ọrunmila performed divination for the parents of Buraimọ (a Yoruba pronunciation of Ibrahīm) and warned that he was a headstrong child who would destroy all of his parents' idols/statues if they did not perform a sacrifice. His parents did not think this was possible, so they did not perform the sacrifice, and one day while his father was out working on their farm, Buraimọ collected all their statues and burned them. When his father discovered what he had done, he sent Buraimọ out of the house, cursing him by proclaiming he would never be able to have children as a punishment. Buraimọ eventually got married, but after about sixty years his wife still had not had a child. She complained that they served Olodumare faithfully, but Olodumare had never rewarded them with a child, so she went to Ọrunmila to ask for his assistance. Ọrunmila performed divination, informed her that the curse of Buraimọ's father would have to be lifted, and he slowly worked with her to do so. Eventually, she was able to have a child whom they named Osunmanu ("sleeping together is fruitful" in Yoruba), but the pronunciation later changed to Ismaila. Olodumare told Buraimọ in a dream that he would have to sacrifice his only child, and Buraimọ asked his wife what she thought about this. She consented to whatever he thought would be best. Buraimọ took Ismaila far out into the bush, but just before he was about to perform the sacrifice, Olodumare sent down a thunderstone and a ram to be

used in place of Buraimọ's son. After Buraimọ had performed the sacrifice, Olodumare told him there was no need to sacrifice people anymore and it was time to go home ("ile ti ya" in Yoruba), which is how the festival Ileya got its name.[58]

I heard this narrative for the first time in Ẹdẹ, but the babalawo there were also aware of another verse about Ileya that is more common. In this narrative from Odu Okanran-Tutu, Muslims had to make a sacrifice to Olodumare in heaven every year. However, the journey to heaven was long and arduous and became increasingly dangerous with every passing year. More and more people kept dying, and eventually the leader of the Muslims (believed by some babalawo to be the Prophet Muhammad himself) went to Ọrunmila to ask what they should do about this hardship in meeting their ritual obligation. Ọrunmila consulted Ifa for them and informed them that Olodumare would accept a sacrifice made on earth instead. He said "ile lo ya," meaning "at home is appropriate," and since that time Muslims have called this sacrifice Ileya and perform it here on earth.

While Ṣango is not mentioned by name in the first narrative, the inclusion of a thunderstone with the sacrificial ram is a clear nod to his presence in the ritual. These Ifa stories are significant, however, for a few additional reasons. First, anyone familiar with the relevant passage of the Qur'an will be struck by how closely the first story parallels it. The only significant divergences are the implicit inclusion of Ṣango and, of course, the more explicit inclusion of Ọrunmila, the orisa of those who tell this alternative story. This demonstrates the eagerness with which the babalawo engage with aspects of other forms of worship and are quick to incorporate, reinterpret, and rework them into their own traditions. In this narrative it seems perfectly normal for Buraimọ, as a Muslim prophet, and his wife to have dealings with the orisa and to perform some rituals within their traditions. Similarly, another Muslim leader (the Prophet himself in some versions) also decided to turn to Ọrunmila's tradition to understand the best way to practice *his own* form of worship. This clearly demonstrates not only the lack of an exclusive, contentious, and antagonistic relationship between these traditions but the possibility and appropriateness of their mutually beneficial interaction—at least from the perspective of the orisa devotees. Finally, each narrative, whether told by Ṣango devotees or Ifa devotees, privileges the importance of the founder of their particular tradition in helping Muslims to establish aspects of their own method of worshipping Olodumare, once again stressing the simultaneously independent but interconnected nature of Yoruba religious traditions.

In Ẹdẹ this type of engagement is not limited to the Qur'an and Muslim traditions however, but extends to the Bible and Christianity also.[59] To begin with Ṣango again, after telling me Ṣango could be found in the Qur'an—albeit under a different name—the Jagun Ṣango asserted that Christians venerate him as well.

A bit taken aback, I asked how so, and he explained that they have another flying holy figure who uses a flaming sword to drive out evil. When I asked if he was perhaps referring to the Archangel Michael and showed him a picture, he got excited. He said that was how Christians depict Ṣango because he lives in the sky and uses lightning and fire as his weapons.[60]

The babalawo give their own indigenous interpretations to narratives from the Bible, particularly the nativity and crucifixion, largely in Odu Ogunda-Tẹtuala.[61] In this verse Mary and Jose (Joseph) went to consult Ọrunmila when she was pregnant, and Ọrunmila informed them that they would have a child who should be named Jesu (the Yoruba version of Jesus), and he would have the power to make whatever he said come to pass. However, they must leave town because the king had decided to kill all male babies because of a prophecy that a child born in the region would become greater than he was. Ọrunmila suggested that they have their baby out in the bush among the animals because they could not disobey God, so Jesu would be safe there. Just as in all Ifa solutions, Mary and Jose were required to make a sacrifice to protect their son's life, but Jose was poor and unable to perform it. When Jesu grew up, his power was exactly as Ifa had predicted; he opened the eyes of the blind, healed the sick, and performed all manner of miracles. Jesu's success and popularity created enemies for him, and these enemies plotted with one of his companions to kill him. This companion told Jesu's enemies one night that they should capture whomever he kissed as if he loved him. That was how they captured Jesu and later killed him. Ẹṣu had the power to stop these enemies from killing Jesu, but he had not been given the appropriate sacrifice when Jesu was born and consequently did not intervene. Sadly, this great man was killed before he could have gotten married or had any children himself.[62]

This Ifa verse is, of course, drawn from the account of Jesus's life in the Gospels and includes a surprising number of significant details from the biblical accounts. Just like myth about Buraimọ and Ismaila, this myth demonstrates the great degree of familiarity and engagement with sacred texts from other traditions. However, it is not just a passive reproduction. It domesticates the life of Jesus by reconstituting it in a familiar, traditional Yoruba form. The babalawo naturally incorporated Ọrunmila into the story as the voice of wisdom, effectively playing the role of the Angel Gabriel as well as Joseph's dreams. Also, in a Yoruba cosmology designed to provide humans with the blessings of long life and children, the death of such a holy man without any children requires explanation. Jesu's humble beginnings and Jose's difficulty in performing the needed sacrifice were employed as the cause of Ẹṣu's refusal to protect someone who otherwise should have enjoyed Ẹṣu's benevolence. These small details

indicate a strikingly deep level of engagement with not just the Bible but also Christian tradition, as Joseph's relative poverty is never stated explicitly in the Bible but has often been inferred and highlighted through commentary on the fact that he and Mary only brought two doves to the temple as a sacrifice for her purification—an acceptable substitute for those who could not afford the standard practice of sacrificing a lamb.[63] Clearly, in the minds of the babalawo, the Gospels did not constitute a competing claim on Truth to be combatted or a different sacred history from a rival religion, but rather additional wisdom and information that should be engaged and accepted, albeit somewhat critically. In fact, Jesu could very easily be understood in this context as simply another in the collection of the orișa, and the tradition he founded as one more form of worship in the larger, interconnected, and dynamic cosmology.

Orișa devotees—particularly the babalawo—have been quick and ready to interpret sacred texts from other traditions and read their own orișa into them, but there is also a great tradition of reinterpreting their own traditions in light of the significant influence of Islam and Christianity. For example, Mecca is commonly understood by many orișa devotees in Ẹdẹ and elsewhere to be the mythical city Mẹrẹẹtẹlu mentioned in many Yoruba myths. In some, the Yoruba themselves came from Mecca to their current location.[64] In other narratives, some figures, such as Ọrunmila and Oduduwa (the progenitor and first ọba of the Yoruba), were active in Mecca, and an ancient, mythological ọba from the Ijẹbu part of Yorubaland has even been reinterpreted as Bilqīs from the Qur'an and the Queen of Sheba from the Bible.[65] Clearly, the orișa cosmology constitutes simply one overarching framework that incorporates many additional traditions rather than clashing with them. This perspective is not limited to orișa devotees themselves, as I encountered many Muslims as well who agreed that there were orișa in Saudi Arabia and in the Ka'ba in particular![66]

This phenomenon of reinterpreting foreign traditions from one's own framework of beliefs is not new or unique to the Yoruba. Elsewhere in West Africa, after their extensive engagement with Islam, the royal Keita clan of the ancient Mali Empire traced their lineage back to Bilal, the Black Ethiopian companion of the Prophet and the first muezzin. Although not everyone had embraced Islam at the time, the Keitas' divine right to rule was incorporated into early Islamic narratives, the most prominent black-skinned figure presented the most logical link, and even the ancestor of the Keitas' praise singer was presented as having served the Prophet in Mecca.[67] Similarly, when the Japanese encountered Christianity for the first time, they did not conceptualize it as a new, foreign religion, but rather understood it in terms of the traditions with which they were familiar. For quite some time, they considered it a corrupted form of a Buddhist heresy.[68]

Early Christians also did not initially understand Islam as a separate religion, but for centuries rather considered it a degenerate form of Christianity.[69] Additionally, "the first Christian thinkers . . . annexed Plato and made a proto-Christian of him (one supposed to have been secretly initiated into the teachings of Moses in Egypt), simply because they found motifs in his work . . . that could only have a divine origin."[70] A common feature of societies that have not internalized the concept of religion is to operate within one universal cosmology that can simply be enlarged or altered in order to accommodate and accept important outside traditions rather than conceptualizing them as completely separate and competing frameworks.

Character Is Religion

A common Yoruba phrase, iwa lẹsin, is often translated as "character is religion," and I had always been a bit confused about its meaning. As a result, I was pleased when I asked the Jagun Ṣango for the meaning of the word ẹsin, and he responded by quoting the phrase. He clarified further stating, "I do not go to church, and I don't go to the mosque. I worship [sin] Ṣango. That is my way of worship [ẹsin]. What is important is the character I exhibit and the way I order my life."[71] According to him, a Muslim who faithfully performs all prayers and rituals but does not behave well will not enjoy the favor of the Prophet or of God, because it is good character and lifestyle that ultimately pleases God. A prominent hunter in Ẹdẹ echoed these sentiments and asked me, "If a person is very dedicated to Islam or Christianity but is wicked, and someone else is not like that but lives well, which one will please God?"[72]

Wilfred Cantwell Smith also drew this point out of Saint Augustine's *De vera religione*, arguing that the title's translation as "On the True Religion" might be misleading to modern readers. He argued that the meaning of the title is closer to "On Proper Piety" or "On Genuine Worship" and goes to great length to illuminate how Augustine's idea of true *religio* was closer to proper and pious personal attitudes and dispositions as an act of devotion to and love for God rather than a conception of Christianity as an institution which was more correct and true than any other.[73] Although Smith is unlikely ever to have met the Jagun Ṣango, he concluded that "some have been prompted to hold that nothing ultimately matters to God or to man but character," which is strikingly close to the Ṣango priest's perspective.[74]

Perhaps even closer to the Jagun Ṣango's perspective is the first section of the famous Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali's *On Disciplining the Soul, Refining the Character, and Curing the Sickness of the Heart*, in which he makes character

(khuluq in Arabic) the central focus. Quoting extensively from ḥadīth before analyzing what constitutes good character and how to cultivate it, al-Ghazali states, "He [the Prophet] said (may God bless him and grant him peace), 'I was sent only to perfect the noble qualities of character.'"[75] Later, almost reiterating the Jagun Ṣango's statement, al-Ghazali writes, "al-Fudayl, the Emissary of God (may God bless him and grant him peace) was once told that a certain woman fasted all day and prayed all night, but was possessed of a bad character, so that she injured her neighbours with her words. 'There is no good in her,' he [the Emissary] said, 'she is of Hell's people.'"[76] Islamic precedent for this type of perspective certainly exists, even if a similar perspective may have developed independently in Yorubaland within orișa traditions. However, Smith notes that in contemporary times, a shift has taken place "from personal orientation to an ideal, then to an abstraction, [and] finally to an institution" or individual religions.[77] It appears that despite being separated by a great geographic distance, about 1,700 years in time, and different religious traditions, two of Islam's and Christianity's most celebrated theologians in the form of Saint Augustine and al-Ghazali both agree with Ẹdẹ's preeminent Ṣango priest that individual religious forms, rituals, and institutions are less central to ẹsin than is the character and comportment that they seek to produce and inspire. The two are clearly and closely linked, as the rituals and institutions are essential in cultivating specific types of holy character, but even this function suggests the character—rather than the forms that support it—as the telos. Additionally, al-Ghazali, Saint Augustine, and the Jagun Ṣango each allude to a relationship (in terms of benevolence, pleasure, displeasure, devotion, and so on) between a person and the object(s) of their worship.

This perspective is not limited to orișa devotees in Ẹdẹ, however, since Reverend Oyewole of the First Baptist Church shared similar thoughts. He commented that although everyone likes to say that they are serving God, he is not so easily convinced: "Human relationships should matter. It should be ultimate in our heart, rather than this religious . . . affiliation, because some of us, some people are so crazy about religion. Once it comes to the issue of religion . . . they can do anything; they can do and undo."[78] He lamented the disrespectful way some Muslims and Christians treat each other, and he believes the obsession and conflict that arise from the emphasis on religious affiliation and institutions often run contrary to the nature of these traditions themselves. While the Reverend Oyewole certainly did not go this far, the Iya Ọṣun (chief priestess of Ọṣun), Oluwatoyin Salaudeen, argued that if a person has good character and enters any of God's houses—be it a mosque, a church, or a shrine—and prays sincerely, her prayers would be accepted. However, she insisted that anyone who had poor

character would not be found acceptable and even quoted 2 Corinthians 5:10 from the Bible to emphasize how we are to be judged by what we have done, good or evil.[79]

Hence, much in the way Pierre Hadot argued that ancient Greek philosophy was not mere ideology and disembodied thought but a rigorous process of the cultivation of character, the Yoruba ẹsin as a general category could also be better understood in its relationship to iwa (character/comportment) rather than any particular institution.[80] Poor character would not please the object of one's worship, which consequently renders the specific form of that worship irrelevant and less central than the character of the individual performing it. Listening to the recording of my conversation with Iya Ọṣun reminded me of a common joke that going to church regularly doesn't make you a Christian any more than sitting in a garage makes you a car. It is rather the nature of the person or object, not the structures around them, that truly makes a Christian, or a car.

Ẹsin Is Like Language

After having met many people who were perfectly comfortable with multiple religious affiliations, and hearing about the greater importance of one's character over religious affiliation, I developed a theory that the Yoruba may have traditionally approached forms of worship the way they might approach languages. The previously mentioned guardian of an Egungun masquerade who came from the mosque to meet me was very proud to show me the nine or more orișa he served in his house and demonstrated this approach to forms of worship quite well. When I asked why he got involved in Islam since he was so devoted to the orișa, he said he could take on any religious tradition he liked, and since so many of his friends were Muslim and wanted him to join them, he saw no harm in it.[81] I broached this topic with an elderly woman whom I had come to know quite well, and she told me that if she were to travel to Igboland in the east of Nigeria, she could decide to adopt their language or way of speaking in addition to Yoruba and that "it is the same thing" with ẹsin or ways of worshipping. She also expressed her willingness to participate in additional traditions because "they all worship [sin] the same God; it is only the form of worship [ẹsin] that is different."[82]

I asked one of the leaders of the Ẹgbẹ tradition—another masquerade tradition that specializes in dealing with abiku (children who go through a vicious cycle of birth and subsequent death)—if people could affiliate themselves with religious traditions the same way that Yoruba children might learn Arabic in a Qur'anic school or English in addition to Yoruba. She got very excited, saying, "That's it!" She proceeded to explain that, in addition to holding a prominent

title within the Ẹgbẹ tradition, she is a devoted Muslim, adopted Ṣango because it was important in her father's lineage, and adopted a white orișa related to Ọbatala because it was important in her husband's lineage. She was a bit confused and frustrated that some of her children could not understand this approach to worship.[83]

While she liked the parallel between religion and language, she also added some important clarification. She insisted that one cannot simply *choose* any religion at random, given that the performance of the ẹsẹntaye ritual will determine the form of worship each person brings from heaven. Thus, as an abiku child who had died multiple times, she had to be given an Ẹgbẹ name and become devoted to that tradition before she would be able to stay alive after birth. Consequently, she was free to acquire new traditions, such as Islam and Ṣango worship, but Ẹgbẹ must always come first, in much the same way as it is almost impossible to replace a mother tongue regardless of how many languages one may subsequently learn.[84] Similarly the Ajagẹmọ—chief priest of Ọbatala—agreed that people could take on additional forms of worship to improve their lives in the same way that learning a new language may open certain doors, but one must never leave one's predestined tradition.[85]

Practically everyone I met who agreed that religious affiliation was like language was perhaps in their sixties or older and either deeply involved in orișa traditions or very open to their practice. Muslim and Christian clerics both noted that older and past generations would often be involved in multiple traditions, but that this was beginning to change. Even one young Ṣango devotee told me that he did not agree with the idea in general, but if one were to limit the scope to orișa traditions and exclude Islam and Christianity, he could acquire new traditions just as he could another language.[86] Another middle-aged Muslim woman simply laughed when I presented this perspective to her and stated that, as far as she knew, people should have their particular tradition and stick to only that one, so it was not at all like language. The view of ẹsin as operating like language is clearly not universal, but it does have a great deal of currency within orișa communities in Ẹdẹ, particularly among the elderly.

Hence, to a certain degree, it may be no less surprising that a survey of the religious affiliation of a Yoruba population would add up to well over 100 percent than that a survey of speakers of individual languages would add up to more than 100 percent. Each simply indicates participation in the category rather than an exclusive and fixed location within it. This perspective also helped to clear up some confusions I faced in the interview process, as in certain circumstances some people would introduce themselves to me—or be introduced by others—as a Muslim and then in another situation as a devotee of a particular orișa. Similarly, many of the

members of the hunters' guild, almost all of whom are Muslim, literally wear different hats depending on the occasion, as important Ogun rituals would call for wearing the traditional long hunters' caps and on Muslim holidays, they would wear the knit Hausa caps that are associated with Islam. In certain contexts some Yoruba people I know teasingly call me Awodeji—a name given to someone in a priestly Ifa lineage—instead of my given name Ayọdeji because they know I have spent a great deal of time studying Ifa. Given the great success Islam and Christianity have had in attracting converts, if not always convincing them to abandon their orișa affiliations, and that practically all the older orișa devotees I interviewed are currently or had been involved with at least one of the Abrahamic traditions, it is worth considering what might have happened to the orișa traditions if they were not so open to adopting other forms of worship. Either the orișa traditions might have been swept aside by the propagation of new traditions or they would have been forced to put up fierce resistance to them, both of which clearly did not happen.

Christian Misinterpretation

This worldview of a fluid plurality of forms of worship that is functionally similar to multilingualism is quite distinct from modern, and particularly Protestant, Christian understandings of religion, a fact best demonstrated by Western missionaries in Yorubaland. A Baptist report on its missions in Yorubaland complained that despite "large numerical growth . . . [it] is often no more than nominal church affiliation." It suggested that many sought this nominal affiliation to tap into the advancing "civilization" through the "White Man's Religion."[87] This desire might make a good deal of sense if one believed the white man's form of worship offered the benefits of their modern world in the same way that tapping into the tradition of Ifa offered the benefits of oracular wisdom and traditional medicine, even if one did not become fully initiated. One missionary even expressed his frustration that many "seemingly assent to what we have to say and then go blithely on their way."[88]

Peel has also recorded that many missionaries were dismayed by how some orișa devotees—particularly Ifa priests—would accept their message as true, at times attend services eagerly, but refuse to abandon their orișa. Sometimes they would eventually become Christians, and some even gave up the worship of their orișa, but others simply stated they had "gone too far [in orișa worship]" to abandon their divinities.[89] Another babalawo expressed a common perspective that "it was the unrepenting will of God that he should be a babalawo, whilst his wife and children were destined by the same to be Christians."[90] The father

of Pastor B. P. Michael in Ẹdẹ was such a babalawo who performed ẹsẹntaye at his son's birth and determined that the boy was destined to serve God as a great Christian.[91] Similarly, the Baptist Mission recorded that "to them [the older people, particularly men] Christianity is the 'White Man's Religion.' It will do for the young people, but it is not for them."[92] To these babalawo, accepting the Christian message clearly did not entail the need to reject Ifa and the orisa, and as the white man's world was becoming more a part of theirs, it makes sense that they might see themselves as "too far" into Ifa while their children would be more suited for the white man's way of worship.

Similarly, my great-grandfather (an Ogun devotee) never had to learn English because he had very few dealings with the colonial administration, but learning English was of the utmost importance for my grandfather (a proud Anglican) as he was educated by Anglican missionaries and became a civil servant. My great-grandfather identified struggling to learn the English language as playing no part in his personal destiny but as reasonably being a critical component in that of his son—without, it must be noted, his son abandoning the Ijẹbu and Yoruba that he spoke. Similarly, the babalawo of nineteenth-century Yorubaland could accept the validity and growing relevance of Christianity without feeling any compulsion to embrace it themselves, given their age and way of life. In essence, the tension between many orisa devotees and the clergymen who attempted to convert them, both in historical and contemporary contexts, may well not have been an issue of devotion and sincerity, as missionaries often assumed, but rather a difference in their respective perceptions of forms of worship versus religion.

Religious Conflict

The traditional orientation to religious identity as a cosmic fact and to the centrality of character rather than a contentious dichotomy between true and false religions helps explain the pluralistic and peaceful nature of Yoruba religious life. If a person brings a form of worship from heaven and uses it to cultivate good iwa/character, then conflict and violence over religious difference would make no more sense than fighting over that person's height. This does not mean, however, that Yoruba history is entirely free of religious tension and even violence. Devotees of other orisa in eastern Yorubaland openly resented the incursion of Sango priests from Ọyọ, and Marc Schlitz analyzed similar resistance to Sango's imperial tradition and conflict with the orisa Ara in Itasa.[93] However, these events must be understood within the context of Ọyọ imperial hegemony, the often predatory exercise of political power by Sango priests deployed as regional governors (ajẹlẹ), and the exorbitant fees collected by Sango priests whenever

lightning struck a house. Perhaps the most significant moment of religiously inflected violence in Yoruba history is the Ifọle, the destruction of mission property and forceful expulsion of European missionaries from Ẹgba territory in 1867 carried out by mostly Oloriṣa. The context of this shocking departure from the general trend of valorizing religious diversity was the recent surprise of British annexation of Lagos, growing violations of traditional customs such as burial rituals, and real threats on Ẹgba sovereignty. Consequently, Ajayi noted, "It was not a persecution of Christians, but a persecution of Europeans" because Ẹgba converts—who also grew increasingly wary of British colonial expansion and prejudice—were allowed to stay and continue practicing Christianity.[94]

In all three cases of religious conflict, the central issue was one of sovereignty and disruption of the political/social order rather than a demonization of a foreign religion. Both Europeans and Ṣango priests came to represent antagonistic imperialism, illustrating that without a clear category of religion it is impossible to disentangle religion from politics and social structures. The rampant violence of the nineteenth century demonstrates that the Yoruba are not necessarily more peaceful than any other ethnicity—as the myth and rituals of oriṣa like Ogun or Ṣango make clear—and violence in Yoruba society has indeed taken religious overtones. However, when such conflict has arisen, it is not because a religion itself has been rejected, but because specific practitioners or ways of practicing the tradition in particular circumstances violate common norms and expectations that extend far beyond what could be called "religion" in the modern sense. This is why Islam continued to spread quickly in Ẹdẹ even after Timi Lagunju was deposed, why the Ẹgba fought Europeans rather than Christianity, and why some oriṣa practitioners have resorted to violence when their ọba refuse to fulfill communal ritual obligations, as will be analyzed in chapter 7. I have even witnessed the oriṣa themselves taking action against outsiders *and* insiders who violate or disrespect their norms, but these are responses to disruptive action not to the perpetrator's religious affiliation. Religious identity and practice *on its own* simply does not constitute reasonable grounds for conflict.

Conclusion

If the concept of religion itself is not indigenous and can distort relevant aspects of Yoruba society and history, then a suitable replacement must be found. The most appropriate way of doing so is through Olupona's method of indigenous hermeneutics that allows the material itself to produce and reveal the nature and underlying assumptions associated with the term and category *ẹsin*. The first and most important step is deciding not to translate *ẹsin* as "religion," but as Edwin

Judge suggested, instead to seek a different translation drawn from the Yoruba language. In the Yoruba language, *ẹsin* could be more accurately translated as a "form of worship" or "way of worship," which is clearly related to the concept of religion but is also different in some important respects. As we have seen repeatedly in this chapter, a perspective of different forms of worship rather than different religions suggests that although individual methods of worship, and even objects of that worship, may be different, they are all ultimately engaged in the same endeavor. Still, it is essential to understand what constitutes a form of worship in traditional Yoruba society and how it operates if one cannot rely on religion as an effective framework.

Familial connections and relations are of paramount importance because most forms of worship are defined by, passed down through, and propagated by specific lineages. To be a member of a lineage or its associated guild or profession would often necessitate engagement with a particular ẹsin to one degree or another. Similarly, the link between an orisa and its devotees is often expressed in biological and familial terms. These devotees are often called the ọmọ, or children, of their patron orisa and refer to the orisa as a mother or father. The important divination ritual of ẹsẹntaye would reveal, among other information, which form of worship a child "brought from heaven" or to which orisa she belongs. Thus, the child's religious affiliation and identity is not a matter of choice, belief, or free will, but rather a cosmic fact in the same way that familial descent is a biological fact. As was demonstrated with Timi Ajeniju and Lagunju, this predestined religious identity could differ from that of the family and could even dictate the child's practice of a new tradition such as Islam. Consequently, the idea of conversion is foreign: Each person simply must practice the tradition appropriate for her, and no one tradition can be universally true or correct while the others are false. This, of course, does not imply that there is no conception of theological Truth, but rather that the worship system was inherently relativistic. Different groups may have competing perspectives on the same issue, or an individual may acknowledge a theological Truth without asserting that it is the exclusive domain of her tradition. The babalawo often took this approach with early missionaries.

While it is common now to speak of a unified "traditional Yoruba religion," most who practice it are specifically devoted to just the one orisa whose tradition they brought from heaven at birth, and when I asked many people in Ẹdẹ what their ẹsin was, the most common response among orisa devotees was simply the name of their patron divinity (Ṣango, Egungun, Ifa, and so on). These devotees are usually referred to as Onisango, Eleegun, or Onifa/babalawo, which in Yoruba indicates that they "possess" that particular orisa. Interestingly, this type

of identification leaves open the possibility of being primarily devoted to one orișa but also possessing many others, and some orișa forms of worship even promote this kind of cross-tradition engagement. Furthermore, the term *Onișango* could also cover some Muslims or Christians who have also received Șango and his tradition. Additionally, each specific orișa tradition has a specific regional distribution and there is no pan-ethnic pantheon. Hence, an orișa such as Șango may be of paramount importance in Ẹdẹ but largely irrelevant in other cities. It has become more common to refer to orișa devotees as Abọrișa or Olorișa, meaning "one who sacrifices to orișa" or "possesses orișa." However, this could cover anyone who has performed or regularly performs such sacrifices or has ever received an orișa, and it is clearly a recent development as there would have been no need to distinguish those who sacrifice to orișa when doing so was part of everyone's religious practice. Not only does practicing a particular orișa tradition allow for the possibility of engaging in additional forms of worship, some of the orișa did so themselves. Ẹdẹ's patron orișa, Șango, was initiated into Ifa, was perhaps Muslim, and has important links to several other orișa traditions besides.

The interwoven nature of these independent forms of worship causes various cosmologies and sacred histories to encounter each other, but rather than clashing, they have formed some fascinating syntheses. The connections drawn between Șango, Ifa, and Islam are deepened by the reinterpretation of Qur'anic narratives and rituals to include these orișa and their perspectives. Even the life of Jesus has been integrated into traditional Yoruba mythology, and the full extent of the engagement of Ifa with Christianity and Islam is truly staggering. These interactions operated in an inverse direction from Yoruba sacred history; for example, the Yoruba origin myth and the myth of a wealthy traditional Yoruba female ruler were reinterpreted in light of exposure to Islam, producing links to Mecca and the Queen of Sheba, respectively. This topic will be addressed further in the next chapter, but in all these processes, Ifa played a prominent and central role, which had important ramifications for how new forms of worship were integrated as well as how the older ones were adjusted.

In discussing the nature of different forms of worship, several prominent orișa practitioners stressed the centrality of iwa, or character, over more concrete forms, structures, or rituals of religious observance, which is demonstrated in the Yoruba proverb iwa lẹsin. It is proper comportment and virtue that makes worship effective and lies at the heart and purpose of each individual form of devotion. The emphasis on what Wilfred Cantwell Smith would call the "meaning and end of religion" can help us understand the perspective shared by many Ẹdẹ residents that forms of worship are analogous to languages. Because they are all used to transmit meaning, albeit in different ways, one can always learn to speak

new languages if the need arises, but one's native tongue still remains the most effective language and the one central to the individual's identity.

In summary, rather than having possessed one traditional religion, Yoruba societies like Ẹdẹ have always had an intricately pluralistic system of forms of worship that allow for new traditions to be incorporated quite readily, as demonstrated in regard to Islam and Christianity but also to some orișa traditions such as Ogboni, Ọbatala, and Ọșun. Biological and cosmological descent and relationships essentially dictate the most prominent and central form of worship for each individual, although the person could become involved in almost any other form of worship to a certain degree, and perhaps their children might even become affiliated with newly introduced traditions. This has led to a fascinating acceptance, adoption, and integration of aspects of new traditions across the board that has had important and observable ramifications in areas such as mythology, ritual practice, and cosmology. This pluralistic orientation toward religious traditions understandably confused and frustrated Christian missionaries as it clearly did not align with their assumptions about religion: namely, that religious affiliation and practice is a deeply personal choice, that each person should practice one and only one religion, that only one such religion could be true and legitimate, and consequently one should fully convert when introduced to it. However, attitudes are changing, and it is clear today that not all people in Ẹdẹ specifically and in Yorubaland generally adhere to the forms of worship model. Instead, a "traditional religion" is very much in existence today, which begs the question addressed by the next chapter, "How was the religion made?" to borrow a phrase from Sylvester Green.

3

How Worship Became Religion

DIASPORA, HOMELAND, AND THE LAGOSIAN RENAISSANCE

No people are without religion. . . . What is found may not be religion but the material out of which religion may be made. —C. SYLVESTER GREEN, *New Nigeria*

Chapter 2 dealt with the first part of this chapter's epigraph and how religious traditions in Yoruba society might be better characterized as forms of worship rather than religion. Now we will address the second part: namely, how the material of Yoruba forms of worship was almost intentionally turned into a religion. This process was not always straightforward and is not fully complete or evenly carried out. This was made clear to me one morning in Ẹdẹ when I met with a group of hunters to discuss whether the tradition of Ogun is in fact a religion.[1] I barely got a word in edgewise as they launched into a friendly but animated debate. One man, who identifies as a Muslim, insisted Ogun's tradition is *not* a religion but merely what one must do in order to hunt, and that there were hunters

during the time of the Prophet, proving its legitimacy for Muslims. Another man said his father raised him both in the Anglican Church and as a hunter in Ogun's tradition, but he has now realized that Ogun's tradition is itself a religion like Christianity. As a result, he stopped going to church and identifies exclusively as an Ogun worshipper. A third man insisted that Ogun's tradition is forbidden to him as an Islamic cleric and scholar because it is itself, or at least it is part of, a different religion. He is still a hunter but refuses to take part in any Ogun rituals or sacrifices. This man agreed that there are some Muslims and Christians who do not believe Ogun's traditions fall under the category of religion, and he even told me of another hunter whom the cleric believed was likely to consider himself an Ogun worshipper who dabbles in Islam; however, when I asked this supposed Ogun worshipper about his religious affiliation, he identified himself to me as exclusively a Muslim.

All three of these men were brought up in hunting lineages closely tied to Ogun and, if they themselves did not follow Ogun's tradition and at least one Abrahamic tradition, they had family members in the previous generation who had done so. Since all these men are very familiar with all of these traditions, how could one decide to practice Ogun's tradition because it is *not* a religion, another decide to practice it because it *is* a religion, and the third decide *not* to practice it because it is a religion?[2] This level of disagreement over categorization and its consequences demonstrates both the previous absence of religion as an indigenous Yoruba category and also the historical process of its introduction and application. As Daniel Dubuisson has pointed out, "It is through [religion's] categories that we conceive of others, and that these others, who are most often subject to our [Western] influence, conceive of themselves."[3] The formulation of these categories, their invocation, and their application was—at least initially—a specifically Western process.[4] At the same time, it appears that the Yoruba "other" has begun a process of conceiving of its own traditions through the lens of religion, as evidenced by how these Yoruba hunters all grappled with how to categorize Ogun's tradition and subsequently how to interact with it. It is further demonstrated by the fact that many Yoruba people and many non-Yoruba people abroad have come to view the worship of Yoruba orișa as having transcended the identity of a traditional religion to become a world religion in its own right.[5]

This chapter traces the historical process by which the previously dominant forms of worship paradigm has largely given way to one based on modern religion. As demonstrated by the hunters' spirited debate, the modern category of religion does not map neatly onto Yoruba traditions and requires creative interpretation and application, hinting at the long and nonlinear process through

which it became domesticated. The coming together of multiple religious traditions, experience with the Atlantic slave trade and diaspora, engagement with Western scholarship, racial prejudice, and the forces of modernity created a dynamic environment in which multiple actors of various religious, racial, and ethnic backgrounds contributed to the emergence of a traditional Yoruba religion that was subsequently exported to the rest of the world.

Ọlaju/Modernity and the Creation of Religious Boundaries

Brian Pennington noted the relationship between the globalization of modernity and rise of "religions" in the nineteenth century, and the introduction of modernity into the newly conceived Yoruba society was similarly central to the establishment of its traditional religion.[6] Some of the most important traditions recognized as prominent religions today, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shintoism, or Zoroastrianism were first named and conceptualized as religions during this period.[7] The worship of Yoruba oriṣa could easily be added to this list as an already prominent and rapidly growing tradition, conceptualized in Lagos at the end of the nineteenth century. The missionary project of ọlaju—meaning "modernity" or literally "enlightenment/the opening of eyes"—was the driving force behind forging the contemporary Yoruba identity, and I would argue it drove the categorization and definition of traditional Yoruba religion.[8] Despite doing so subconsciously and almost indirectly, ọlaju established Christianity as the prototype after which Yoruba traditions were imagined to a degree. As Jason Josephson Storm argued, "For most of its modern history, the category religion has taken its contours and meaning from Christianity, which has served as its prototypical member. Whatever the explicit or stipulated definition given to religion, Christianity has always seemed to be a better fit than any other cultural system. In the era of globalizing modernity, the category has broadened to include other traditions. Nevertheless, the category of religion has retained Christianity as its prototypical member."[9]

The introduction of modernity to Yorubaland brought with it an assumed category of religion, always with reference to Christianity, as seen in the writings of early missionaries such as T. J. Bowen or W. H. Clarke—the latter the first Christian to arrive in Ẹdẹ—who each devotes a specific section to Yoruba "religion," comparing it explicitly to Christianity.[10] Christian converts and missionaries frequently adopted a triumphalist teleology that focused on social and spiritual progress toward a more enlightened future on earth and in heaven compared to the dark existence of pagan Yorubaland. This was contrasted with an orientation toward a cyclical sacred history that was more characteristic of

the orișa-worshipping Yoruba.[11] The idea of backward-facing traditional African societies is clearly an exaggerated stereotype, but the teleological Christian, or at least Western, perspective is still operative today in contexts from common speech to the highly controversial address by French President Nicholas Sarkozy in Dakar in 2007.[12] Just as missionaries imagined and formulated this future in modern, inherently Christian-centric terms, the idea of a Yoruba religion was largely developed through Christian, and specifically Protestant, frameworks.

A close examination of how traditional Yoruba religion was initially articulated reveals strikingly close parallels to the intellectual trends in and experiences of late nineteenth-century Protestant Christianity in England, and in this way it may better reflect dynamics of English Christianity at that moment than indigenous Yoruba traditions.[13] For example, J. Z. Smith observed that the trend in late nineteenth-century scholarship was to classify religions through binaries such as "true religion/false religion," "monotheism/polytheism," "religion/superstition," and Abrahamic traditions "set over and against an undifferentiated other" usually classified as "heathenism," "paganism," or "idolatry."[14] Naturally, this is how Western missionaries and travelers (such as Bowen or Clarke) conceptualized and wrote about Yoruba traditions. However, even a cursory glance at the earliest prominent works on Yoruba religion by the Yoruba themselves reveals that they used precisely the same frameworks and language and actively participated in the intellectual trends of the period. Unsurprisingly, this process of enlightenment and its fascination with identifying and categorizing religion was introduced primarily by Protestant missionaries but was largely driven by Yoruba Christian converts and returnees who had been exposed to the Western world, education system, and modern ideas.

Much scholarship exists on how the mission enterprise was instrumental in forging a Yoruba ethnicity and how the diasporic experiences resulting from the transatlantic slave trade helped to give rise to a pan-Yoruba identity that was fed back to the homeland.[15] It was against this backdrop of contemporary Western scholarship cataloging, categorizing, and naming modern religions that an educated class in Yoruba society drew on their own traditions to launch the process of transforming a set of different forms of worship into a unified, traditional religion. Although drawn directly from actual traditions (most notably Ifa), the contours and borders of this new traditional religion were drawn from the outside, largely by nonpractitioners. However, the results of this process have had an immense impact on orișa devotees, have in some ways been internalized, and in other ways are still being accepted, contested, and negotiated.

Although it may seem natural to assume the existence of a traditional Yoruba religion today given the high profile of orișa devotion across the world, the

incredible internal diversity of orișa traditions makes this reality seem curious. One of the clearest reasons for considering traditional Yoruba religion to be a world religion is that it is practiced not only in Africa, but globally from Japan to Argentina. On the other hand, the worship of the orișa takes a different name in practically all locations, such as Santería/Regla de Ocha in Cuba; Candomblé, Umbanda, Xangô, and Batuque (among other names) in Brazil; and Orisha (previously Shango) in Trinidad and Tobago, and it has influenced countless other traditions all over the Americas, including Haitian Vodou. The practitioners of individual orișa traditions do not always agree with each other on various issues, and J. D. Y. Peel remarked on how the bewildering diversity within Yoruba religious belief and thought almost defies systematic categorization.[16] Given the significant disparity and complex diversity within and between orișa traditions in and across geographic locations, something must have served as a galvanizing force to transform this constellation of forms of worship into a contender for the title of world religion. Clearly, the Yoruba participated in a process Wilfred Cantwell Smith described as follows: "In modern times, amongst most peoples of the earth the spread of Western ideas and attitudes and social patterns and the response to these seem to have led . . . to a development . . . of a counterpart term and concept for 'religion.'"[17] Before a Yoruba religion could be created, however, the Yoruba had to exist as an ethnic group.

Forging the Yoruba Ethnicity

The use of the term *Yoruba* to refer to the ethnic group currently located in southwestern Nigeria, Benin, and Togo began in the nineteenth century. Before that time, there was no single name outsiders used to refer to all these people, nor one the people themselves used self-referentially.[18] Records left during the era of the Atlantic slave trade document some related terms, such as *Lukumí* and *Nagô*, that were used at various times, in various places, and by different linguistic groups.[19] However, these names did not cover the entire group; at times included other non-Yoruba peoples; and most importantly, were not used by people living in what is now Yorubaland. The modern Yoruba people previously identified with several smaller subgroups, such as the Ijẹbu, Ifẹ, Ọyọ, or Ondo, but experiences of dislocation and contact with foreign groups in the nineteenth century created a greater sense of communal identity. Most scholarly work has focused on the role of the British and the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) in creating a strong, broad sense of ethnic identity in the people originally called "Aku" in Sierra Leone—where the British "repatriated" Africans captured aboard European slave ships in the Atlantic Ocean. Because of linguistic,

cultural, and even religious similarities, the Aku were differentiated from other Africans in the colony, and the perspective of the CMS missionaries was central in the formation of this identity.[20]

Because these Western missionaries assumed the primacy of a specific ethnos and were eager to translate the Gospel into indigenous languages for the purpose of proselytization, they used the term *Yoruba* to refer to the whole group and the language they spoke.[21] In this sense, the missionaries' action was quite similar to the formation of imagined communities with the advent of print technology as outlined by Benedict Anderson.[22] However, there was a particular element to this imagined community as it existed in the minds of Western missionary outsiders and in the social structures they created and assumed to exist. Ultimately, the conception of this language and ethnicity was solidified through the publication of *Vocabulary of the Yoruba Language* (1843) by the well-known Yoruba clergyman Reverend Samuel Ajayi Crowther.[23] At the same time, it is not the case that the people who came to be known as Yoruba had no prior sense of interconnectedness. In addition to their clear similarities in social, religious, and political structures and in language, they mostly adhered to a notion of common descent from Oduduwa (the mythical Ifẹ deity and progenitor of the various Yoruba peoples) and recognition of Ile-Ifẹ as the center of the ritual and physical world. What was new was the way the subethnic identities were reconfigured and subsumed in a broader, combined identity as "Aku." Proto-Yoruba people migrating from Sierra Leone back to their homelands brought this new collective ethnic identity with them, and the process of evangelization and Western mission education helped to establish firmly the contemporary Yoruba identity.[24] Even the common Yoruba language widely spoken today is a direct result of this history.[25]

However, Sierra Leone was not the only location where Yoruba identity was formed through a process of displacement and greater contact with other cultural groups. Proto-Yoruba people in Brazil and Cuba had similar experiences. Generally referred to as Nagô or Lukumí in these respective societies, they often banded together as a result of cultural similarity. In fact, in some instances, such as under the administration of Bahian Governor D. Marcos de Noronha e Brito, the Count of Arcos in the early nineteenth century, ethnic association was actively encouraged as a way to maintain intergroup prejudice and prevent unification and uprisings among the enslaved.[26] These experiences prompted members of various Yoruba subgroups to identify with each other to a greater extent and to construct pan-ethnic traditions of dance, language, and collective action. Many formerly enslaved West Africans subsequently migrated back to Yorubaland, bringing their new Nagô or Lukumí identity with them, which correlated quite well with the Sierra Leonean Yoruba/Aku identity. Although this dimen-

sion has received less scholarly attention, Olatunji Ojo has emphasized how the internal wars within Yorubaland at the time fed the Atlantic slave trade and created a great internal environment of displacement, conflict, and resettlement. This, in turn, caused people from different subgroups to live together, intermarry, combine certain practices, and unify their identity.[27] In this sense, while proto-nationalism was brewing in the diaspora, important and similar changes were taking place within the Yoruba homeland which moved that society in a similar direction. Hence, the components for a Yoruba ethnic identity had always existed but had to be reworked and reimagined, specifically against the backdrop of social upheaval and a perceived other.[28]

Missionaries and Nationalists

Two groups led the development and definition of a Yoruba religion and identity: missionaries and nationalists. These two groups overlapped considerably, as most indigenous Yoruba missionaries also became nationalists, and the nationalist movement itself was a product of mission education, policies, and activity. One of the most significant effects of the mission project in nineteenth-century Nigeria was the creation of a Western-educated middle class, particularly in the areas that now compose Yorubaland.[29] By the 1880s, the introduction of print technology in Lagos facilitated the publication and distribution of a wealth of material with a cultural nationalist flair, specifically debating and invoking the name and concept of a Yoruba people.[30] J. Lorand Matory provided perhaps the best summary of this powerful cultural movement:

> What came to be classified as "Yoruba" tradition fed on cultural precedents in the hinterland of Lagos, but its overall name, shape, contents, standards of membership, meaning, means of transmission, and degree of prestige would have been radically different—if they had come into existence at all—were it not for the intervention of a set of transnational financial, professional, and ideological interests that converged on Lagos during the 19th century and not only composed a novel African ethnic identity but, through a literate and politicized struggle, guaranteed that it would be respected in a unique way by generations of students of Africa and its diaspora.[31]

This cultural nationalist movement fought against racist discrimination and exclusion from important positions within the mission churches and British colonial administration. Although this reaction largely took the form of a rejection of British influence and a revalorization of indigenous traditions, it did so largely

through conceptual frameworks borrowed from the West, including race and nationalism.[32] Centered in Lagos where many Western-educated people from all different subethnicities lived, this movement produced groups such as the Native Research Society, which gathered information about specific aspects of Yoruba society—most notably, religion—and by 1940 local authors had published more than twenty books and pamphlets about the Yoruba.[33] Through this process, Yoruba cultural nationalists created a "new category, which did not correspond precisely to anything recognized in indigenous pre-colonial society," although the component parts of this identity and category certainly did exist previously.[34] After having developed and envisioned these ideas themselves, the nationalists went to work filling them in with material drawn from indigenous traditions.

Importance of Returnees

In his critique of previous models of cultural and religious "retentions" in Afro-Atlantic traditions such as the worship of the oriṣa, Matory has argued "surprisingly, the African diaspora has at times played a critical role in the making of its own alleged African 'base line' as well."[35] During the Atlantic slave trade, many proto-Yoruba people were forcibly taken to several places in the Americas, most notably Cuba and Brazil. Following the Slave Trade Act, passed in Britain in 1807 to outlaw the slave trade, the Royal Navy began searching ships off the western coast of Africa, and later when they found enslaved Africans, those Africans were "repatriated" to the colony of Sierra Leone. After gaining freedom, education, and/or enough money, many proto-Yoruba people taken to Cuba, Brazil, and Sierra Leone traveled back to what is now Yorubaland. Matory argued that West Africans' exposure to Western ideas and society in Brazil, Cuba, and Sierra Leone, and their subsequent repatriation, was one of the most unifying forces in creating and imagining large ethnic communities such as the modern Yoruba.[36] J. F. Ade Ajayi agreed that the return of these Yoruba-speaking people from diaspora beginning in the 1850s "had an importance in Nigerian History out of all proportion to their numbers."[37] Indeed, it was the Saros—Sierra Leonean returnees—who pioneered the idea of Christianity as a unique religion defined in contradistinction to Muslim and "pagan" or "heathen" others.[38] Although most scholarship focuses on the importance of returnees from Sierra Leone, such as Bishops Samuel Ajayi Crowther or James Johnson, the diaspora experience in Brazil predated that of Sierra Leone, and "[a] sense of pan-ethnic identity had emerged even earlier among Yoruba-speaking slaves in the Americas, where they first began to employ a common collective name for themselves."[39]

The Saros did enjoy a great deal of prominence due to their training in some of the same Anglophone institutions that operated in Lagos, but in 1872 the 1,533 Saros could quite reasonably be compared to the 1,237 Brazilian and Cuban repatriates, at least numerically speaking.[40] By 1881 the number of Brazilian and Cuban repatriates had grown to 2,732, and by 1889 an estimated one in seven residents of Lagos (or about five thousand people) had come from Cuba or Brazil.[41] Although Brazilian and Cuban repatriates returned from different places, the large numbers of Brazilian repatriates and their shared experience with Roman Catholicism and Iberian culture led most Cuban returnees to associate and identify more with the Brazilian community than the Sierra Leoneans or indigenous Lagosians.[42] During the rise of cultural nationalism in Lagos at the end of the nineteenth century, the British colonial administration also supported a steamship line between the colony and prominent Brazilian cities because of the high volume of voluntary traffic in people, goods, and ideas between the two areas.[43]

This large influx of people at a transformational cultural moment was of critical importance in the creation of a Yoruba religion and ethnic identity precisely because of returnees' religious experience in diaspora. In Brazil, the coalescence and reinforcement of Nagô or Yoruba identity was also reflected religiously, as the worship of individual orișa (orixá in Portuguese orthography) was reconfigured into one whole in which multiple orișa were served and celebrated in the same rituals and housed in the same temples.[44] In what became known as Yorubaland, these orișa traditions were generally kept separate, or at most a palace or lineage might engage only in the orișa traditions present in their own area. In diaspora, however, traditions from every region of an emergent Yorubaland were both represented and actively combined and systematized. As a result, the large number of Nagô/Yoruba returnees already had an experience of orișa worship within the framework of a unified pantheon, closely linked to and paralleling the fusion of the various subethnicities that constituted the raw material for the later imagination of a pan-Yoruba identity. This process also found parallels in the experience of upheaval in Yorubaland, where displaced people joined new lineages and compounds, bringing their orișa with them and creating "micro-pantheons."[45]

Hence, Lagos served as the focal point in collecting people from across the Atlantic and the hinterland who began to see themselves as part of a larger, unified ethnic group with a cultural-historical attachment to—if not active worship of—a unified orișa pantheon. Just as the raw material for a Yoruba identity was marshaled in the experience and minds of Saros in Sierra Leone, Lukumís in Cuba, Nagôs in Brazil, and many displaced people within Yorubaland itself, the raw material of individual orișa traditions was also beginning to be combined

and reconfigured in novel ways into a nineteenth-century traditional Yoruba religion. This occurred in Lagos specifically, where the educated elites were interested in researching and finding identity markers to combat those of their European oppressors. In this way, the creation of a Yoruba identity and perhaps even religion in Lagos and the homeland was actually more recent than it was in diasporic centers such as Brazil.[46]

Mission-Educated Scholarship

The products of the Lagosian Cultural Renaissance focused on indigenous Yoruba culture and traditions, but an implicit and integral aspect of this work was the forms and categories it assumed. The vast majority of the Yoruba authors had become Christians and wrote mostly in English. The result, as Patrick Ryan observed, was that "African Christian insiders have perpetuated a tendency, perhaps unconscious, to describe African conceptions of the transcendent in Semitic or Indo-European theological categories that are still basically foreign."[47] Ryan specifically addresses the definition and categorizations of gods in some West African societies, but his observations apply to the broader conception of religion itself. It was precisely by internalizing Western and Christian lenses, and then reimagining Yoruba society through those lenses, that these authors began to present the contours of a newly formed traditional religion, much as Dubuisson argued occurred across the colonized world.[48]

The earliest Yoruba scholars of traditional religion adopted the form, categories, and assumptions characteristic of nineteenth-century Western, Protestant writing on religion. These include beginning with the position of God, classifying non-Abrahamic traditions as "heathenism" or "idolatry," placing them within the binaries of true/false religion or monotheism/polytheism, and subsequently cataloging the various gods contained within the polytheistic pantheon. Of all these works, James Johnson's seminal *Yoruba Heathenism* (1899) provides perhaps the prime example. *Yoruba Heathenism* is a relatively short work, taking the question-and-answer form of the Church of England catechism with which Reverend Johnson was intimately familiar. It formulates simple queries that draw out the main facets of the tradition so that those who wish to learn about it can understand the broad strokes. Johnson begins with the question, "What is religion," and launches his discussion of Yoruba traditions with the Yoruba conception of Ọlọrun, the Yoruba Supreme Deity.[49] Throughout the book he applies the lens of paganism, a framework to which he devotes an entire chapter in which he defines and lays out a pantheon of Yoruba gods.[50] He also devotes the final chapter to a discussion of the afterlife, a concept of little if any importance in the traditional

Yoruba cosmology.[51] I do not mean to discredit any of Johnson's information, as much of it is remarkably insightful and accurate. It is his perspective on this material, how he conceptualized it, and the framework of assumed categories that is more revealing. Rather than focusing on indigenous features of worship such as the intense personal relationship between a devotee, lineage, or town and a tutelary orișa; praise poetry; or perhaps festivals, he employs almost from start to finish a categorical and literary framework that would be immediately familiar to most Christians and Westerners, undoubtedly because as a Western-educated Christian who passed through nineteenth-century Anglican catechesis, he understood these perspectives to be both true and universal. Apart from his personal Christian identity, this perspective on truth and universalism would come naturally to him, as the style and form of academic writing on religion of the period was inherently based on a Christian, and largely Protestant, model.

Johnson was not alone in this regard, given that all "African Christian communities engage in a process of intercultural translation, moving back and forth between indigenous religious knowledge and the terms of Christian doctrine, practice, and authority."[52] Perhaps the first book written on Yoruba "religion" in English was Colonel A. B. Ellis's *The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa* (1894), in which he likewise followed the dominant academic model by beginning with Ọlọrun (Almighty God) and the pantheon of orișa, or gods, adopting the developmental/social evolutionary perspective in vogue at the time.[53] The Yoruba Reverends Samuel Johnson and Olumide Lucas adopted this common method in describing Yoruba religious traditions as "heathenism," "paganism," "idolatry," or "primitive religion." Lucas's first chapter addressing religion specifically begins, "Like all primitive religions, the religion of the Yoruba people . . . ,"[54] and Samuel Johnson begins his chapter on religion thus: "The Yorubas originally were entirely pagans."[55] Both authors also started from the place of Ọlọrun and summarily sought to flesh out the pantheon of deities, although Lucas interestingly observed that it was impossible to classify them accurately and systematically.[56] Such works recast the tradition of Oduduwa (which is still active in Ile-Ifẹ today) as that of an ancestral progenitor and firmly established a clear—if also imprecise—pantheon of common Yoruba gods.[57]

It is precisely such corollaries between indigenous African writers and Western thought that caused Matory to note the parallels in conceptions and representations of nation, race, language, and religion.[58] In fact, the Yoruba mission project closely follows the theories of Max Muller—a leading intellectual in the eighteenth-century Anglophone world and a founding figure in the Western study of religion—who wrote that "there exists the most intimate relationship between language, religion, and nationality."[59] With the mission project already

providing the contours of both a national identity and a unified language, it is perhaps unsurprising that Yoruba intellectuals simply assumed that there must be a "religion" to accompany them. At the same time, early modern Yoruba intellectual thought was not characterized merely by the passive acceptance of European ideas and values. It was born out of the resistance to European discrimination and a diasporic experience of "passing through slavery into freedom" that made them "acutely conscious of the gaps that separated them as a people from the Europeans."[60] With respect to religion, this resulted in one particular articulation of the broad tradition of Christianity—specifically Protestantism—being held up as the ideal reference point or prototype.[61] Given the contemporary hegemonic and binary perspective of primitive versus advanced peoples, societies, and even religions, it is little surprise that early Yoruba writing on religion assumed the paradigm of "other religions [being] henceforth viewed as rough drafts, archaic or primitive forms of [Western] religion. The universal undeniably exists, but at different stages of development."[62]

James Johnson adopted this universalizing teleological perspective, describing Yoruba "heathens" as "groping their way in the dark to find their Lord and their God," and even describing Ẹ̀la/Ọ̀runmila in deliberately salvific and comparative terms to Christ, albeit as incomplete inferior corollaries.[63] The Reverend E. Moses Lijadu similarly suggested that Ọ̀runmila was an imperfect Yoruba precursor of or attempt to understand Christ, demonstrating the Yoruba trajectory toward a Christian telos.[64] Even the Reverends Samuel Johnson and J. Olumide Lucas, in their attempts to reassert a sense of cultural pride, value, and enlightenment to their Yoruba traditions, did so by conceptualizing the Yoruba as having a Semitic origin and simply practicing a lapsed form of religion needing to be reelevated by Protestant Christianity.[65] Once again, this idea was likely influenced—consciously or unconsciously—by trends in the contemporary study of religion, as European scholars and theologians were making similar arguments about forms of Buddhism being "corrupted" and "superstitious" descendants of a higher, purer religion of antiquity and were categorizing the "racial" origins of religions using labels such as "Semitic" and "Aryan."[66]

Protestant-centric frameworks and explicitly Protestant traditions seemed like a natural if not universal starting point to native missionaries and intellectuals, and so "by making what seemed to them to be descriptive comparisons between the religions, these Christian Yoruba theologians (for such they were), were actually delimiting the boundaries of Yoruba 'religion' in a new way."[67] Again, they drew on actual cultural and religious traditions, but their own experiences and background led them to reconfigure that material "in a new way," as Peel put it. Writing in "English and Yoruba, turn-of-the-century Yoruba intel-

lectuals constructed, codified, and valorized an ancestral religious legacy" that indeed already existed, just not in the form of "religion," and they did so to assert the dignity of their national identity in the face of British discrimination and prejudice.[68] This project was so enthusiastic and successful that by 1910 a group of mostly Christian dignitaries produced a report for the Lagos colonial administration that proclaimed, "The different [Yoruba] tribal states are one people and homogenous, speaking the same language [Yoruba], observing the same laws and customs, professing the same *religion*, and claiming descent from a common ancestor [Oduduwa]."[69] Such a statement would not have been possible or even imaginable just a few decades earlier, and its constituent parts and implicit categories are clearly reliant on the Yoruba history of internal displacement, the Atlantic slave trade, the experience of diaspora, Western/Christian education, and the need for a response to a colonial policy of white supremacy.

The conception of a "Yoruba religion" was significant because it began to exist in the minds of some Yoruba people themselves, and as Matory noted, the writings and perspectives of the educated early twentieth-century Yoruba elite had a great deal of influence on Western missionaries and administrators.[70] Although written by a British military officer, Ellis's *The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa* circulated widely, even far beyond Lagos and Africa, and was subsequently read by Yoruba, British, and many other readers.[71] Hence, this new conception of a Yoruba nation with its own religion is how leading Yoruba figures came to view their own society and also how they projected it to the ruling administration. It was perhaps precisely *because* of the need to project a specific vision of themselves to a distinct other that this vision was developed and its contours defined. The Yoruba are not unique in this regard; the Japanese went through a similar process of Western-educated scholars rearticulating their traditions in Western terms and according to Western norms, at times even asserting the nobility of non-Western traditions by explaining perceived deviations from these norms as a form of degradation à la Johnson or Lucas.[72] It was precisely at this moment, at the turn of the twentieth century, that a conception of Yoruba religion first began to exist.

Drawing and Deviating from Ifa

The raw material for this new religion was indeed drawn from actual, existing traditions, but none played nearly as important a role as Ifa, a fact that highlights several ways this new religion differed from more traditional perspectives on oriṣa traditions. Ifa provided a wellspring of traditional mythology and consequently came to constitute one of the most central aspects of the intellectual

endeavor of articulating the Yoruba religion. As Karin Barber astutely observed, the itan (stories, histories, or myths) about the orișa "lend themselves to the classificatory cosmology-building project" by depicting the orișa in relation to each other and as representations of static aspects of life, making "it possible to envision a pantheon in which . . . every character can be assigned its own distinctive role, however multiplex and difficult to unravel its relationships may be."[73] Hence, mythology became central to the nascent traditional Yoruba religion more because it suited the particular needs of the conceptual project at hand than because of its centrality to orișa traditions themselves. Other features, specifically oriki (praise poetry), were more ubiquitous and essential in practical, daily worship. Oriki were deployed to worship individual orișa and in immediate and personal expressions of the relationship between orișa and devotee, articulating the devotee's understanding and conception of the orișa's position in the cosmos.[74] Although itan were privileged over oriki—likely because itan are closer to the familiar category of impersonal sacred text—even the way Yoruba myths were presented and interpreted differed from the way practitioners understood them. The most significant such difference is how Ifa was simultaneously elevated to the preeminent position within the orișa traditions but also confined to operate within the new configuration of Yoruba "heathenism" or "paganism." This is largely contrary to the conception of Ifa held by its practitioners or how it operated—and still operates—within its own narratives. We have already seen how Ifa frequently served to direct devotees and discrete instances of worship toward each individual orișa tradition, as well as toward Islam and Christianity, without prejudice, and many Ifa narratives also depict Muslims and Christians employing the services of Ọrunmila or his priests.[75]

To return to Ẹdẹ's history, many understand Ifa to have declared Timi Lagunju's identity as a Muslim. Sacred histories from both Islam and Christianity were incorporated into the Ifa corpus in Ẹdẹ, demonstrating how boundaries proclaimed within/between these two Abrahamic traditions were either not recognized or of no concern to Ifa practitioners. To be sure, many Yoruba even today consider Ifa "as a source of esoteric traditional wisdom which they are quite justified in consulting," and Ifa priests often say that Ifa is for all people regardless of their background or religious identity.[76] This lack of any "special commitment to the traditional religion against Islam and Christianity" has seemed curious to many,[77] but could easily be explained from an emic perspective in which there is no traditional religion defined in contradistinction to Islam and Christianity, making Ifa a transcendent repository of all sacred knowledge and wisdom.

Furthermore, David Laitin observed that a type of "commonsense" hegemony has taken root in Yoruba society in which religious identity constitutes a *choice*, which has clear antecedents in Western thought and the turn-of-the-twentieth-century Protestant authors who believed in the centrality and importance of the personal decision to accept Jesus and Christianity.[78] Laitin contrasts this Protestant perspective with the more emic belief that ancestry and ancestral ties to a city are "blood" ties or biological facts that have nothing to do with personal opinion or belief, as demonstrated in certain rituals such as ẹṣẹntaye described in the last chapter and the "pre-religious" perspective that would not have separated involvement in certain religious traditions from ancestral occupation, lineage, or citizenship. This can still be observed in Ẹdẹ today, as almost all Ẹdẹ citizens identify with Ṣango Timi to some degree. This may be in only a civic, patriotic, and ancestral sense as an emblem of their shared historical identity, as demonstrated by turning out for, or even returning from abroad for, the annual Ṣango festival, or by how many Ẹdẹ citizens regardless of religious identity call on Ṣango when they need justice.[79] Of course, while an element of choice beyond a primary religious affiliation was always available—such as choosing to receive another orișa or perform additional rituals—the idea of practicing a religion as a personal choice was quite novel, was at variance with the ritual practice of Ifa and other orișa traditions, and can trace its origins back to this particular point in Yoruba history.

Another important, related issue was implicit in the Christian perspective on "heathens" or "pagans": their erroneous beliefs. During the evolution of the conception and meaning of religion in the Christian West, a framework of correct or true religion as opposed to false religion emerged. As Wilfred Cantwell Smith put it, "In numerous instances, a meaning can be discerned that reflects the clash of religious systems and the new exclusivist situation—in which for the first time in this area the immensely significant notion was set forth that if it is right to worship God in one way then it is wrong to do so according to the alternative pattern of one's neighbors. This [was a] clear-cut choice superseding the previous unselfconscious coexistence of numerous patterns of worship and numerous objects of worship."[80] Smith could easily have been describing the shifting assumptions of the Yoruba Lagosian elite. Perhaps the greatest native Yoruba missionary, Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther, was surprised when he returned to Sierra Leone after being ordained in England, and despite praising Christianity and the Bible, "he received a royal welcome by people 'from all quarters, both Christians, Mahommedans as well as heathens'" rather than being met with polemics, resistance, and debate.[81] The leading Muslims even "'gloried in having their

countrymen [*sic*] to be the first clergyman of the Church of England among the liberated Africans.'"[82] The orișa worshippers and Muslims viewed Crowther's ordination not as the strengthening of a competing rival religion, but rather as a cause for celebration that one of their own community had gained knowledge and standing in a useful tradition, the same way professors from different disciplines might celebrate the arrival of a new distinguished colleague at a modern university.

Interestingly, Muslims did not entirely share the strongly exclusivist understanding of religion that the Christian missionaries took for granted. For example, Peel recorded how one missionary in the mid-nineteenth century was opposed by both a Muslim and an Ọbatala worshipper for his unaccommodating insistence that Jesus was the *only* mediator between God and humankind. His message was apparently not well received by the audience, which was likely to have been of mixed religious backgrounds.[83] It is common to hear scholars and Yoruba people alike quote the Ifa saying "Aye la ba'fa, aye la ba'male. Ọsan gangan nigbagbọ wọle de" (We met Ifa in the world, we met Islam in the world. Christianity only arrived in the afternoon), indicating a greater proximity and sense of integration between Ifa and Islam compared to the Christian tradition, which was actively and deliberately distanced from the other two. It is also common knowledge that Islam was more easily integrated into traditional Yoruba life than Christianity, with many offering explanations linked to the colonial experience, a talismanic tradition, and other sociological factors such as similarities in dress, the acceptance of polygamy, or closer perspectives on slavery.[84] These points are indeed significant and insightful. Given that the idea of Islam as a modern religion has a significantly different history and was not adopted in the same way as was Western Christianity, perhaps the different reactions to Islam and Christianity had as much to do with the difference in perspective toward and assumptions about religious traditions as a whole, at least among the propagators of the monotheistic traditions.[85] This could also explain why European missionaries and even some scholars tended to consider the practice of Islam among the Yoruba and in West Africa in general as more "syncretic." The missionaries' and scholars' own framework assumed that the continuity of some traditional features was incompatible with religion as they understood it, but traditional features may not have been understood as syncretic at all by well-educated, orthodox, and devout Muslims themselves.

The very fact that the Yoruba nationalists at the turn of the twentieth century had to revalorize many traditions they thought were compatible with Christianity suggests that the introduction of Christianity, "enlightenment," and religion constituted a fraught and complicated process that tended to exclude much that

had previously been important to Yoruba life. Surely this is why older generations tended to prefer the way involvement in Islam did not necessitate abandoning important ancestral traditions (as far fewer of them were understood as off-limits to a devout Muslim) over the involvement in mission Christianity, which often demanded a sharper break with tradition.[86] On the other hand, Christian missionaries' great efforts to inculcate a specific understanding of what was expected and appropriate within the boundaries of "religion" could also help to explain how dominant Christianity became after younger people converted. This, of course, is not to suggest that religious exclusivism or conflict is the sole domain of Protestants or Christians. Rather, the specific forms of religious exclusivism present in contemporary Yoruba society—which can now be identified to varying degrees across all religious groups—have their primary conceptual origins in the particular history W. C. Smith documents in the Western Protestant Church.[87]

If in the past, involvement in a religious tradition or form of worship did not necessitate abandoning all others, there appears to be little barrier to experimenting with a new tradition, as it would be like learning a new language. Just as it is practically impossible to replace a mother tongue, it is impossible to change the form of worship a person brings from heaven, but all people are able to gain whatever level of proficiency in another language or form of worship they may require for a specific purpose. In the same way, a Ṣango devotee might choose to become involved in the tradition of Ọṣun to a limited degree to address an isolated issue with infertility and might also become deeply involved in the Egungun masquerade tradition if a sustained need were to arise—which has indeed happened in Ẹdẹ, as will be discussed later in this chapter.[88] However, if after having become involved in a new form of worship, one were required to abandon all others, this process would slowly increase the number of adherents of the new tradition while diminishing adherents of the others. By presenting Christianity as an exclusivist religion, missionaries did not simply increase the number of practicing Christians but also actively decreased the number of people involved in oriṣa traditions, perhaps as much by their teachings about the *nature* of religion as by their teachings about Christianity itself. This may have been quite novel and unheard of at the time. Again employing the metaphor of language, scholars such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and John Mugane have demonstrated this exclusivist dynamic to be how European/colonial languages have functioned to replace indigenous languages in Africa. Other languages, Swahili in particular, have managed to gain speakers without fully supplanting or repressing the mother tongues of its new speakers.[89]

Understanding mission Christianity's orientation toward indigenous traditions and religion as a category can add another perspective to Robin Horton's

intellectualist theory. Horton suggested that the rapid rise of Christianity and Islam was due primarily to the natural widening of the traditional cosmos from a restricted microcosm to a broader macrocosm that included the worship of a Supreme Being through expanding political and economic spheres of activity.[90] Conversion to, or at least involvement in, a new tradition may well have been prompted by the internal metaphysical and ritual dynamics of orișa traditions such as a widening cosmos or Ifa divination rather than only imposed from the outside by foreign political and economic forces. An additional reason why Islam and particularly Christianity gained such wide membership instead of becoming just another important form of worship alongside other traditions, such as Ifa or Ṣango, was how they actively siphoned adherents away from other forms of worship, drawing religious boundaries where there previously had been none.

In this sense, it was not merely the introduction of Christianity as another tradition that caused a reshuffling and recategorization of Yoruba society, but rather the introduction of a new way of seeing and understanding the world (and Christianity's place within it) through the larger process of ọlaju, which means simultaneously "enlightenment" and "modernity." Christian missionaries led the effort to bring the Yoruba into the modern world, which clearly served their ideological purposes as the unification and pacification of the region, and the establishment of a standardized language, print technology, and modern educational institutions, among other developments, all served the evangelical purpose of spreading the Gospel more efficiently.[91] Peel argued that the introduction of ọlaju and its critical position in Yoruba identity make it impossible to discuss Yoruba nationhood and religion in any way except "in relation to the Christian missions and the religious encounter of the nineteenth century."[92] He also argues that the modernizing project implied opening up Yoruba society to the wider world, and the efforts of the cultural nationalists in this endeavor naturally took on the forms, categories, and norms consistent with the new, modern order.[93] Hence, "because the missionary project to convert 'the Yoruba nation' presumed that the nation, as distinguished by its culture (including a pre-Christian 'paganism'), already existed, there was a de facto cooperation between missionary Christianity and Orisa religion . . . they each needed the other's contribution to make the Yoruba nation," and by extension the Yoruba religion.[94] Consequently the understanding of different, mutually exclusive religions, rather than perhaps an expanding number of forms of worship, is inherently linked to this idea and process of modernity (ọlaju).

While Insa Nolte and Olukoya Ogen found ọlaju to be a major source of the appreciation of diversity (and particularly religious diversity) in Ẹdẹ, I found it to provide the first opportunity and model for perceiving an oppositional

religious "other," since great diversity in identity existed before the introduction of this idea.[95] This diversity was understood primarily as complementary rather than competitive as in the mutually exclusive dichotomies of dark/light, enlightened/backward, true/false, and pagan/Christian introduced through ọlaju. Binaries such as left/right or positive/negative certainly carried great weight in traditional Yoruba society, but again they were largely complementary, each possessing its own definitive and positive place in the cosmology even if one might be appropriate in some contexts and inappropriate in others. Consequently, the new binaries of Yoruba modernity were novel both in form—in that the categories were not indigenous—and nature—in that one side of a Yoruba binary was hardly if ever universally superior to the other. The boundaries were drawn around various traditions in a new configuration that allowed for competition and conflict because it was assumed that a person could and *must* make a definitive choice to practice a single religion rather than simply coming into the world with set forms of worship and being able to add others as needed. Furthermore, rather than certain forms of worship being appropriate for certain people at certain times, the newly conceptualized "religions" were presented as universally true or false with only one correct answer for all people at all times, making the new phenomenon of religious choice incredibly weighty and potentially fraught with consequences. As is likely clear and will be addressed in chapter 6, neither I nor many Yoruba view ọlaju as an inevitable and inherently positive development (as the missionaries did) nor do I intend to set it up in an exclusivist binary opposed to some timeless, pure Yoruba tradition. On the contrary, the system of forms of worship has always contested and been actively engaged with the articulation of Yoruba tradition in the era of ọlaju. As a critical step in this process and to persuade Yoruba people to choose a religious affiliation—let alone impressing upon them the gravity of that choice—the missionaries and nationalists still had to go through the process of formulating a Yoruba religion as a viable option, if only to reject it.

Ifa, First Among the Modern Oriṣa

I already hinted that Ifa played a central role in articulating a traditional Yoruba religion, but the great degree to which Yoruba nationalists relied on it is both noteworthy and quite surprising. Given that the traditions of Ogun and Ṣango were also widespread and closely linked to important aspects of Yoruba history at the time, such as the rampant warfare or the power and reach of the Ọyọ Empire, or that the general worship of Yoruba oriṣa in some places in Brazil and Trinidad simply adopted the name of Ṣango for the entire tradition, it is rather

surprising that these traditions were not mined to the same extent by the cultural nationalists. In fact, in the late nineteenth century Ellis even wrote that Ifa was "after Ṣango in order of eminence."[96] Matory similarly identified the preceding two periods in Yoruba history—namely, the height of Ọyọ power and imperialism and the subsequent internecine wars—as the ages of Ṣango and Ogun, respectively.[97] Following Matory's lead, one could easily identify the modern period in orisa history as the "Age of Ifa" because of the central role it played in formulating a traditional Yoruba religion and the preeminent position it enjoys today, particularly in the broader tradition sometimes called "Ifa-Orisa."[98] All of this begs the question, Why and how did Ifa come to occupy such a privileged and prominent position?

Brent Nongbri argued that, given the particular origins of the modern concept of religion in the West and Protestant Christianity, attempts to classify most traditions often "boil down to the question of whether or not they are sufficiently similar to modern Protestant Christianity," as the category of religion is commonly imagined in those terms.[99] As Dubuisson observed regarding traditions of non-Western societies, most ethnographers and historians "can discern religious phenomena only where they perceive facts that recall or evoke, from whatever distance and in however approximate a form" what was already familiar to them.[100] This is, of course, quite natural; for the Yoruba missionaries and intellectual elite in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Lagos, the understanding of religion was heavily inflected by modernity and Christian and Protestant categories and assumptions. Such assumptions included the centrality of sacred texts and their deployment to determine doctrine; the existence of a priestly class; an emphasis on reason over "superstition"; and in the case of paganism or polytheism, a unified pantheon of multiple gods or deities. Those familiar with Ifa will immediately recognize these elements as central to its very nature, indicating how European and native missionaries could more easily recognize it as "religion." Both Western and indigenous missionaries were quick to criticize and mock other orisa priests but reserved a degree of respect for the babalawo, often engaging in mutually beneficial discussions with them.[101] Peel notes, "It is hardly surprising that it should have been the *babalawo* who emerged on the Yoruba side as the missionary's chief interlocutor and antagonist, with the consequence that in the latter's construction of 'Yoruba religion' it was the *babalawo* rather than the *aworo* [other orisa priests/priestesses] who came to be central. He was, as it were, pre-adapted to the encounter."[102] By "pre-adapted," Peel was likely implying the many qualities of Ifa that Christian missionaries would have recognized as constitutive of religion. One could also argue that the babalawo were pre-adapted because they, more than the priests/priestesses of any other

orișa, had deep engagement with other religious traditions which had been integrated into their own. Again, Ifa divination and oral literature connect Ifa with the traditions of practically every other orișa, and the babalawo similarly already had a deep level of engagement with Islam when they began their exchanges with Christians in the nineteenth century. Still, there are more concrete aspects of the tradition that greatly facilitated this engagement.

Perhaps the most prominent aspect of Ifa that sets it apart from other orișa traditions is the vast oral corpus memorized by the babalawo and used in the divination process. This oral corpus is neatly organized into 256 chapters called Odu, each containing an almost endless number of verses (ẹsẹ). These verses usually take the form of sacred history or mythology (itan), poetry, proverbs, and/or songs and are employed during divination to determine the proper course of action for each client. Although there is great variation within the Ifa corpus memorized in each area, it always contains myths depicting the various orișa prominent in that area—often interacting with each other—as the people living there would need to perform rituals with and for those orișa or were dedicated to those traditions from birth. The babalawo memorize as many of these verses as possible, and traditionally they would be required to memorize sixteen or more in each chapter before they could practice Ifa independently. Furthermore, while spirit possession is a central aspect of most orișa traditions, Ifa priests can *never* become possessed. Their process of divination involves the rational interpretation of divining instruments and the oral texts associated with them. Finally, each divinatory sign and its corresponding chapter has a symbolic or physical form that the babalawo both use in ritual and can interpret.

Given these features of Ifa, it is unsurprising that Protestant missionaries might look at it and see resemblances to what they knew as "religion," if only in its "pagan" form. While the orișa devotees lacked a written holy book—assumed to be a central part of the most venerated, if not all, religions—they did have the oral Ifa texts, organized into chapter and verse, with a form of visual representation even if not in the form of a phonetic alphabet.[103] In addition, while Barber rightly observed that the oriki is central to all orișa traditions and for all devotees, it is difficult to extract entirely from its ritual context and is highly variable and situational. The itan, or mythology of Ifa, on the other hand, is memorized and applied repeatedly, and the babalawo draw upon it authoritatively in their daily life and conversations in much the same way as Christian clergy cite the Bible. Additionally, oriki and most other orișa rituals each generally invoke and refer to just one orișa, whereas Ifa narratives contain many orișa and depict their nature and relationships with each other. I have been taught ẹsẹ Ifa that include at least seven orișa in addition to Olodumare, which also demonstrates the position

of orișa with respect to the Supreme God. While other forms of orișa worship certainly produced oral texts such as oriki, they were much more personal and variable in nature, prompting Barber to agree with Peel that "it is not surprising that nationalistically-minded clergymen felt that the Ifa corpus alone among the Yoruba religious oral texts, was capable of standing in for the Scriptures."[104] Hence, the Ifa corpus presented a viable alternative to more singularly focused traditions and offered the potential to analyze scripture over ritual, which was likely quite attractive to Protestant missionaries.

From the perspective of missionaries seeking to publish material on an imagined Yoruba religion, Ifa provided an ideal source for material and research, and these clergymen enthusiastically engaged in this endeavor. Yoruba Anglican clergy were consequently the first to begin collecting Ifa verses, reducing them to writing, and publishing them, and they demonstrated a keen interest in the indigenous medicine that is also part of the tradition.[105] They also conducted research on the "liturgy" of traditional religion, and drawing primarily on their study of Ifa texts, they argued that traditional Yoruba religion contained three principles "on which the teachings of Christianity could be based: the existence of a spirit-God, the belief in sacrifice, and the belief in life after death."[106] This implicit evangelical and triumphalist lens that viewed Christianity as the fulfillment of traditional Yoruba religion is evident in James Johnson's work, and even contemporary Anglican clergy in Ẹdẹ conveyed the similarity of many aspects of Ifa to Christianity. Archdeacon Julius Ọjọmọ believes Yoruba religious thought was progressing toward a full conception of Jesus Christ on its own, and through the figure of Ọrunmila, the Yoruba already had a preconception of Christ and the salvation he offers.[107] This also perfectly demonstrates the Christian teleological metanarrative of ọlaju and Christianity as the next step in the Yoruba historical development from darkness and confusion to light, order, and peace.[108]

In James Johnson's case, Ifa most readily lending itself to the development of a traditional religion and having many similarities with his own professed religion led him to rely heavily on it in his *Yoruba Heathenism*. He explicitly refers to Ọrunmila as "the Son of God," and three of the work's seven chapters deal specifically with Ifa.[109] One chapter presents the babalawo as the preeminent high priests of Yoruba heathenism, describing various facets of the tradition but neglecting to mention priests/priestesses of any other orișa at all. This is because Johnson's chief informant was Philip (Filipe) José Meffre, a returnee from Brazil who was initially a babalawo but converted to Christianity after returning to Lagos, being instructed by Ifa to "read the white man's books," and spending time with prominent clergymen.[110] Meffre is the only person Johnson thanks explicitly in his preface, drawing attention to Meffre's former identity as a "Heathen

Priest."[111] The fruitful interaction between Meffre and Johnson extended beyond this book and is in line with the cultural context of the time. Anglican clergymen came to view the babalawo as their equivalents in traditional Yoruba religion, both Johnson and Meffre had spent significant time in Eurocentric settings in diaspora, and Meffre as a babalawo possessed exactly the pan-orișa perspective Johnson sought to acquire.

Johnson was not the only Anglican clergyman to rely heavily on Ifa in his writing, and the Reverend E. Moses Lijadu focused practically exclusively on Ifa in his *Ifa* (1898) and *Ọrûnmila!* (1908). *Ifa* is primarily concerned with asserting the superiority of Christianity, but in preparation for writing *Ọrûnmila!* Lijadu learned "native theology" from a babalawo and argued in the book that Ọrunmila anticipated Jesus Christ.[112]

The book even opens with a picture of Lijadu dressed in his clerical collar seated with a pen and notebook in hand next to an aged babalawo with his divining board and chain (figure 3.1). Johnson's and Lijadu's works clearly confer a sense of dignity on the tradition of Ifa in particular and Yoruba traditions generally, a feature that must be understood against the backdrop of British racial discrimination. However, as missionaries, they were primarily concerned with converting orișa devotees, which implied being able to understand and conceptualize orișa religion to critique it as effectively as possible.[113] Because Ifa most clearly resembled what missionaries already understood as "religion," it was perfectly positioned to provide them with the material they required to demonstrate a highly developed Yoruba theology and pantheon of which they could be proud, present a precursor to Christianity and Jesus Christ in Ọrunmila, and offer important strategies for evangelism.[114] This experience was not unique to the Yoruba either, as the Brahmins and the Vedic texts became the norm by which Hinduism was interpreted and employed in the nationalist response to British colonialism, and "Buddhism was born as a textual religion, on the model of Protestantism" around the same time.[115]

The preeminent place of Ifa within the complex of orișa traditions is not limited to the writings of Anglican missionaries but is increasingly present within orișa traditions today. Whenever Nollywood films depict the worship of the orișa or artists offer representations of traditional Yoruba religion alongside Islam and Christianity, they invariably turn to Ifa and babalawo. The most prominent spokespeople for Yoruba orișa traditions, such as Professor Wande Abimbola or Araba Ifayẹmi Ẹlẹbuibọn, are babalawo, and the babalawo even have their own postsecondary educational institution, the Ifa Heritage Institute, just as Muslims and Christians in Nigeria do. The Ifa Heritage Institute, located in Ọyọ and led by Professor Wande Abimbola, is recognized and supported by

FIGURE 3.1. Reverend E. Moses Lijadu with his babalawo instructor. From E. M. Lijadu, *Ọrûnmila!* (Ado-Ekiti: Omolayo Standard Press of Nigeria, 1908).

the Nigerian federal government and UNESCO, and its curriculum includes topics such as computer and technology education alongside Ifa studies and traditional medicine.[116] The endeavor to combine important traditional and religious education with modern science and the public education system is not new in West Africa or Nigeria, and Muslims have a long history of creating a number of such schools—in Nigeria often called Islamiyya schools—in Yorubaland and other areas of the country as a response to the close ties between Christianity and the official, secular school system.[117] In this sense, the babalawo have effectively taken a lead from their Muslim compatriots in responding to the privileged access to education that Christianity has historically afforded its adherents.

The babalawo are also generally more visible and numerous than the devotees of other orișa. Although there are many Egungun masquerades in Ẹdẹ and Ṣango is its patron orișa, the babalawo are the most numerous, with an estimated membership of two hundred. Ifa also plays the most central role in the continued system of traditional Yoruba religion, demonstrated by Ifa devotees holding at least eight of thirteen positions on the executive council of TRWASO (Traditional Religion Worshippers Association State of Osun) in 2016 and constituting the vast majority of attendees at the annual Iṣẹṣe festival in August. At one point, the Jagun Ṣango in Ẹdẹ referred to me as an authority on a certain point despite my being a Christian, because he knew that I had studied Ifa and was familiar with some verses addressing the issue in question! This clearly demonstrated that

while individual orișa traditions previously "did not see Ifa, despite its mediating and linking role, as the custodian of a collective, shared cosmology," many orișa devotees are increasingly inclined to accept the authority of Ifa in articulating that shared cosmology and to recognize it as the glue that holds them together.[118]

The continuous interaction with Christian clergymen who recognize Ifa as the closest equivalent to their own understanding of religion and the growing prevalence of Protestant assumptions about what religion is and how it should work have also influenced Ifa, drawing it the closest to Protestant religious models of any orișa tradition. While the engagement of babalawo with Islam is well studied and represented in Ifa verses, it appears that the babalawo also actively engaged with Christianity, not as much to incorporate the content of the tradition itself but to engage with its forms and the implicit assumptions carried by its practitioners. The most prominent examples include notably recent features such as very strict and exclusive identity formation within orișa traditions against Islam and Christianity, or the creation of a type of indigenous church that recognizes Ọrunmila as its prophet. Babalawo even borrowed features such as building architecture, liturgical order, and services held in the Semitic seven-day week cycle rather than the traditional Yoruba four-day week used by orișa traditions.[119]

While most other orișa devotees in Ẹdẹ also had participated or still do participate in Islam and/or Christianity, the babalawo are almost uniform in their insistence that they never have done so, never will do so, and will not tolerate their children doing so. When I asked one young and very knowledgeable babalawo if his children could ever practice Islam, he said it would not be possible and quickly prayed "ọmọ temi ba bi, mo n bẹ Ọlọrun, loju aye mi lati igba ti mo ba tun lọ tan o, ko si nkankan to le kirun" (As for any of my own children, I beg God that from the time I am alive until I pass on, none of them will practice Islam).[120] At the annual Ifa festival, one of the Ifa chiefs turned to the children and passionately instructed them that they had no business going to the mosque on Friday or to the church on Sunday. This does not mean the babalawo are opposed to others practicing Islam or Christianity or believe that these are false religions. They simply recognize important religious boundaries between the traditions and do not want their own people to cross them. This is a relatively recent development, as many babalawo used to be involved in the practice of Islam in the past but have almost completely ceased to do so over the past generation.

The babalawo are also the only group of orișa worshippers in Ẹdẹ who have collectively bought a large plot of land for their own use and have their own building for communal worship.[121] Although not completely finished at the time of my visit, it is built in the style of most Nigerian Anglican churches. Just like

most churches, there is a sign in front with information and times of worship, an elevated area in a sanctuary where the altar is usually located in churches, a section for musicians on one side near the front, and neat rows of seats for the congregation before the altar. The communal services are held on Saturday, and I attended several while in Ẹdẹ. During the first service, I even recognized the order of service as eerily similar to that of the Anglican Communion, as will be analyzed below. Because the babalawo in Ẹdẹ know many Ifa verses about Muslims, have a long history of interaction with Muslims, and are intimately familiar with Muslim traditions, the clear parallels with Christian features and patterns of worship seemed peculiar. When I asked some senior babalawo about how this came about, they revealed that it had to do with Ẹdẹ's links to the larger Yoruba movement of the indigenous church of Ọrunmila known as Ijọ Ọrunmila.

Ijọ Ọrunmila

The Ijọ Ọrunmila (literally Church of Ọrunmila) movement founded in the 1930s constitutes the clearest imposition of Christian—particularly Anglican—structures on Ifa. Surprisingly little has been written about this fascinating movement, but its creation perfectly demonstrates the direct and eager participation of Ifa practitioners in the nationalists' project and an assertion that it was "capable of development along the lines parallel and equal to the world religions [Islam and Christianity]."[122] Emerging directly from the movement of predominantly Yoruba Anglicans, it sought to create a modern Yoruba religion drawn entirely from indigenous material, and the founders naturally turned to Ifa for content and Anglican Christianity for structure. Although this movement is partially separate from the general practice of Ifa by contemporary babalawo, it has had an effect on the tradition in general, including in Ẹdẹ.

The consensus is that the Ijọ Ọrunmila movement was founded in the early 1930s by one Ọlọrunfunmi Ọṣiga who was previously an Anglican, joined a separatist and nationalist movement that sought to revalorize Yoruba identity and customs, but was eventually frustrated by how it fused African traditions with Christianity. Ọrunmila appeared to him in a vision and instructed him to establish a new community based solely on the sacred word of Ifa. This is precisely what he did in Lagos, and the new movement drew members from both Christian and Ifa backgrounds.[123] This new movement was not simply a return to Ifa and indigenous traditions but was very modern in purpose and form. Many prominent members were practicing or former Christians, and some defined it as Ọrunmilaism, or the belief that Ọrunmila is the prophet sent by God to the Yoruba specifically, but who could be accepted by any and all people of the world

in the same way Jesus was sent to the Jews and the Prophet Muhammad to Arabs. However, Ọrunmila is superior to them all in this particular system because he predates them and in fact helped to instruct all other prophets. One prominent member and Saro descendant named A. Fagbenro-Beyioku broke with Christianity when he realized how many Christians rejected traditional Yoruba medicine and religion, and he articulated the neotraditional position of Orunmilaism in a public lecture in 1943.[124] The group even initially attempted to register itself as the "First Church" (Ijọ Akoda) in reference to its spiritual seniority, but when colonial officials rejected the name, they opted for the name Indigenous Faith of Africa (IFA), demonstrating its pan-African not just pan-Yoruba perspective and intentions.[125]

Although the content of this new church was drawn from Ifa, its forms are unmistakably Christian. First, it holds its service on Saturdays, not on Ifa's day in the traditional four-day Yoruba week, and does so because many early members also went to church on Sunday, and Friday had already been claimed as the holy day for Muslims.[126] Additionally, although belief—particularly a set of unified, universal beliefs—never played a major role in Ifa, the Ijọ Ọrunmila developed its own creed to be recited at every service, which is in itself an innovation. The creed begins, "Mo gba Ọlọrun, Eledumare gbọ, Ẹni ti O da ọrun ati aye. Mo gba Ọrunmila gbọ, ẹni ti n ṣe wọli Olodumare akoko" (I believe in God, the Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. I believe in Ọrunmila, the first prophet of God). It is unmistakably modeled after the Nicene Creed, which Ọṣiga must have recited countless times.[127] Additionally, the church developed a detailed liturgical order, complete with opening prayers, processional hymns (and a choir to sing them), the reading of lessons, the collection of an offering, a sermon, the presentation of Ifa, and recessional hymns in practically an identical order and format as the Anglican liturgy.[128] The form of this neotraditional group is unmistakably Christian and Anglican, but the material used for each element of the liturgy is drawn from Ifa.

However, to sing from a hymnal and to read a scripture lesson, it is necessary to have a hymnal from which to sing and a holy scripture from which to read. This is precisely what the Ijọ Ọrunmila sought to create under Ọṣiga. The *Iwe Odu Imọ* (Book of Holy Odu) was produced after the central Lagos branch called for babalawo from all over Yorubaland each to bring a certain number of verses to be compiled and published in a printed volume.[129] The leaders of Ijọ Ọrunmila were perfectly positioned to carry out this task as they were mostly mission educated, grew up with a pan-Yoruba perspective and identity, were intimately familiar with prominent Christian clergymen and their work on Ifa and Yoruba traditions, and most found even the nationalist movement within

mission Christianity to be too European and Western for their liking. This new book was described as one that "could replace the Bible and the Qur'an," and Barber observed "the intense need they [members of Ijọ Ọrunmila] felt for a written scripture."[130] One babalawo and leader within the church remarked that "when the Christians or the Muslims come to our services and say this and that, quoting the Bible and Qur'an, [now] we too can point to things and say, in such and such a book, in such and such a verse, Ifa said this. It's all there."[131] The babalawo internalized the hegemonic importance and centrality of not only a sacred text but a *written* sacred text as a result of their interactions with Muslims and Christians and the leaders of Ijọ Ọrunmila took quick and impressive action to produce an indigenous scripture for themselves.

The content of the *Iwe Odu Mimọ* was indeed oral Ifa verses, but they were not simply transcribed and compiled ad hoc. The *Iwe Odu Mimọ* is organized into books and verses (more reminiscent of the Qur'an than the Bible), because the traditional structure of the odu and individual ẹsẹ within them naturally lend themselves to such easy categorization. However, the ẹsẹ Ifa were not incorporated in their entirety and were slightly modified in cases. Each ẹsẹ Ifa almost stands alone in the oral Ifa corpus, which has no unified, linear structure. When reduced to writing and employed to provide instruction on the importance and actions of Ọrunmila, however, the *Iwe Odu Mimọ* adopted a clearly linear configuration. It even adopted syntax and lexicon from the Yoruba Bible written by Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther, to the extent that some articulations "would not be found in any Yoruba text that had not been influenced by the Yoruba translation of the Bible," let alone found in an oral recitation of Ifa verses.[132] The *Iwe Odu Mimọ* also introduces new theological ideas and terms such as conversion, true faith, a long series of prophets, repentance, sin, becoming a believer (onigbagbọ, a term previously used almost exclusively and self-referentially by Christians), and even a day of judgment, all of which were quite foreign to Ifa.[133] Muslim groups such as the prominent Ansar Ud-Deen also borrowed practices, forms, and organizational structures from Anglican Christianity around this period because it was the most hegemonic and representative of a successful, modern Yoruba identity.[134] In short, the perceived need of Ijọ Ọrunmila to respond to Islam and especially Christianity on these two traditions' terms led to the creation of a new written text that could be used in a liturgy that was modern and Christian in form but largely traditional and Ifa/Ọrunmila-centric in nature.

The engagement with Yoruba modernity in response to Islam and Christianity was further demonstrated by Ijọ Ọrunmila's efforts to spread their message on the radio just as Muslim and Christian organizations do. In 1957 members of Ijọ Ọrunmila petitioned the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) to

afford them as much coverage as Muslim and Christian groups received, and the NBC convened a meeting to determine whether "*Ọrunmilaism* was the 'religion' of the Yoruba (or, in fact, of the Africans) or not."[135] The committee—which included the famous scholar the Reverend Bọlaji Idowu and officials from the popular Ijọ Ọrunmila movement—concluded that Ọrunmilaism could *not* be the religion of the Yoruba because Ọrunmila was just one of many deities in the Yoruba pantheon.[136] Although Ijọ Ọrunmila was unsuccessful, this effort is quite significant in constituting one of the first instances in which indigenous religious traditions took a lead from Muslim and Christian practices, adopted their liturgical and credal forms and structures, and then vied for equal recognition as a religion. In addition, the modern neotraditional Ijọ Ọrunmila movement is centered around the Ifa tradition, and—in a nationalist spirit—it presented Ifa as the overarching religion of the Yoruba, if not all of Africa. It was in fact because this assertion did not fit the dominant paradigm of the times—that of African societies being polytheistic—that their petition was rejected: Since there were other orișa in addition to Ọrunmila, this disqualified the tradition from the benefits afforded to a legitimate religion.

Ifa's proclivity for integrating and absorbing aspects of other traditions was not limited to Anglicanism. The Anglican Church happened to be the most popular and prominent new religious movement in Nigeria at the time of the founding of Ijọ Ọrunmila, but as times have changed, so has this indigenous church. Oye-Laguda noted that recently the church also engages in "crusades and itinerant evangelism," seeking to convert people back to Ọrunmila and Olodumare, and holds long prayer sessions and night vigils.[137] While there are hints of such activities in the Ifa tradition—such as aisun, the recitation of Ifa verses and rituals all night before important festivals—these new traditions are drawn directly from Pentecostal Christianity, the dominant new religious force in Yorubaland. One member of the Ijọ Ọrunmila movement likens their initiation to being "born again," and yet another categorizes their church as "evangelical" in nature.[138] Oye-Laguda attributed these new developments to the Ijọ Ọrunmila "striving to make African traditional religion relevant to the twenty-first century spirituality in Lagos, which is attuned to Pentecostalism" and to engage with modernity as an attempt to keep the tradition relevant "in the religious 'market place.'"[139]

Although Ijọ Ọrunmila is partially separate from the general practice of Ifa across Yorubaland, and its popularity has waned significantly since its heyday in the 1950s, it is very much enmeshed in the history of Ẹdẹ. The Akọda (second most senior Ifa priest) of Ẹdẹ at the time of my research took part in the large effort to collect ẹsẹ Ifa for the publication of the *Iwe Odu Mimọ*, and he remem-

bered the period and progression of the movement well. He was a young boy then, and when a call went out over the radio for babalawo to collect verses and bring them to Oketaṣẹ, the home of Ọrunmila in Ile-Ifẹ, he went with his father to that large gathering. At the time (the 1940s–50s), not many babalawo were fully literate in English, so they chose a mission-trained man from Ijẹbu-Ode—most likely Oṣiga—as their secretary. After he collected the money, compiled the Ifa verses, and produced several books, including the *Iwe Odu Mimọ* and a small children's prayer book, he absconded with the rest of the funds to establish his own organization. The Akọda was shocked that some of the organization's members were or had been Christians, and he firmly asserted that all the new traditions that came out of those meetings—such as the liturgical order, the creed, and the layout of the building—were copied from Ifa by the Anglicans, not the other way around.[140] The babalawo in Ẹdẹ do not consider themselves a part of the Ijọ Ọrunmila movement, but their participation in the movement's modernizing efforts within Ifa more broadly led them to adopt many of its Anglican-derived features. The modern configuration of the tradition of Ifa with a written scripture, a creed, an order of collective worship, recognizable structures in buildings, signs with the schedule of worship, exclusive membership, and competition with other religions is a fascinating combination of the inherent nature of Ifa and its engagement with Christianity and mission evangelization (see figure 3.2).

Results of New Religious Boundaries

The new religious environment of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries created novel interreligious dynamics on all sides and has had a lasting effect on the contours of religious life in Yorubaland to the present day. Chapter 6 will address the contemporary dynamics of the shift from forms of worship to modern religions more comprehensively, but a historical perspective on a few developments is relevant here. The introduction of the concepts of religious practice as a choice, conversion, and the existence of one universal and true religion, with subsequent lines being drawn around all other false religions, were both novel and confusing to oriṣa worshippers. This religious encounter deviated radically from the way the various oriṣa traditions had interacted with each other and heavily influenced the newly created traditional Yoruba religion, reinforcing the boundaries between oriṣa devotees, Muslims, and Christians.

It is fitting that Ifa provides the clearest evidence of such a reimagination of the religious landscape. Much has been written about Ifa verses that present the practice of Islam in a critical light.[141] Yet there are others that seem to represent

FIGURE 3.2. Sign for Ile Ijuba, Ifa house of worship, Ẹdẹ, 2017. Photograph by the author.

Muslims and the Prophet much like any other religious group in the Yoruba cosmology.[142] However, there are several interesting myths that describe a split between Ifa as the primordial tradition and Islam. Several Ifa verses describe Aafa/Agba Mọle (the Prophet Muhammad) being embarrassed by Ọrunmila's superior skills in divination and distancing himself from Ifa, running away from Ọrunmila to establish his mosque outside the town,[143] or seeking revenge on Ọrunmila for revealing the hiding place of the Prophet when his enemies in Mecca were pursuing him.[144]

In addition to mythological precedent, in common practice many babalawo now consider their tradition fully exclusive of Islam, despite their understanding that Islam emerged from Ifa. Several younger babalawo in Ẹdẹ are quite insistent that there is no way Ifa could have declared Timi Lagunju to be a Muslim because Ifa would not tell orisa worshippers to abandon their ancestral traditions. They contend that this story was simply created by Muslims to justify their present hegemony in Ẹdẹ's society and to legitimate the Timi's conversion.[145] This is apparently a recent occurrence because the most senior priest of Ifa (the Araba) in Ẹdẹ accepted without hesitation that Ifa declared Timi Lagunju's Muslim identity and interpreted that particular verse precisely as it had been interpreted for the Timi. Furthermore, in the 1970s T. G. O. Gbadamosi cited babalawo interpret-

ing the verse as an indication that the child "brought Islam into the world."[146] In addition, in the past it was quite common for Christian pastors and Muslim alfa to be good friends and professional colleagues.[147] Today, while this type of interreligious work and friendship still occurs, it is far from the norm, and the babalawo I know are purposefully closer to other babalawo and orișa worshippers because interactions with Muslims and Christians are often so fraught with tension. This indicates a retraction of the previously universal perspective on Ifa rituals as an umbrella system that gathered all traditions underneath it, as depicted in Ifa narratives. The babalawo still offer their advice and services to all, but it is clear that they are much more closely affiliated with the orișa than the Abrahamic traditions.

Scholars often refer to indigenous African traditions as "lived religions," following Robert Orsi and David Hall, because of their emphasis on rituals and ceremonies rather than abstracted theologies, dogma, and written scripture.[148] But one interaction with an Egungun chief prompted me to take this a step further and understand them as *living traditions*. After this chief expressed his frustration at some Muslims calling the Egungun tradition shirk (polytheism), he said many of them still come to him later to ask for ritually charged cloth from his masquerade. When I asked if he still provides it, he responded that he simply has to do whatever the masquerade instructs him to do, but he has noticed that it is aware of how people malign the tradition in public and it only agrees to give out the cloth about half as often as it used to.[149] This statement was eye-opening because within the indigenous epistemology, the chief is merely a willing instrument of the masquerade. Not only does *it* tell *him* when and to whom to extend its blessings, more importantly it is paying close attention to the religious dynamics around it, actively responding by adjusting its own behavior. For the chief this was not an exercise in theology, and although it is rooted in his ritual practice, it is primarily the *living* Egungun spirit that observes the religious landscape around it, assesses the situation, and modifies the ritual playing field accordingly. Hence, it is the agency of the tradition itself, not any doctrine or even set of rituals or experiences of the devotee, that dictates the religious experiences.

Another telling example of redrawn religious boundaries in Ẹdẹ was the successful celebration of a Șango festival in 1974. The then Timi, Ọba John Adetoyese Laoye, was a staunch supporter of Șango traditions as well as a Christian, and he invited the entire community to a Christian thanksgiving service at the First Baptist Church. Șango and Ọya devotees entered the church along with the Timi and several Muslims, but the onibata (those who play Șango's sacred bata drums) were forced to stay outside because the bata drums "were still imbued with spiritual power from the festival, [and] challenged the boundaries

between Ṣango and Christianity."[150] Even so, the Baptist Convention and some Christians were not pleased with the decision to admit people who were actively marked as Ṣango devotees. Interestingly, the subsequent ceremony that took place in the mosque raised no such issues, perhaps because many of those affiliated with Ṣango were Muslim themselves and did not bring anything related to the orișa to the mosque with them.[151] Much like with Ifa and Egungun, some associated with Ṣango (despite his identity as an orișa who defies religious boundaries) had boundaries drawn around their religious operations. In addition, there was a significant and charged disagreement about where the boundaries should be drawn, as some thought only the onibata should not enter the church while others were upset that the Ṣango and Ọya devotees had entered it.

It is not uncommon for those who perform orișa rituals—whether they identify as orișa devotees, Muslims, or Christians—to be denied certain religious services within Christianity or Islam. An important ritual performed every so often among Muslims in Ẹdẹ is atunwẹ, or a "rewashing" of the influence of orișa traditions, so that "backsliding" Muslims can be welcomed back into the fold of Islam. Most of the alfa agree that the vast majority of Muslims do not engage in orișa rituals and Islam at the same time, but they are very familiar with this process because it is essential before the individual can receive any other religious rites. This is a matter of utmost importance as final burial rites, marriage rituals, and other ceremonies otherwise become inaccessible, creating serious consequences for the afterlife and family. I heard from a few individuals who identify as Muslim that they no longer go to the mosque for this reason, instead performing the five daily prayers at home, because they are acutely aware that a religious boundary has been drawn around them, whether or not *they* imagine the borders in this way, if at all. A ritual such as atunwẹ would be unthinkable in a purely orișa setting, because devotees are generally free to participate in rituals of other traditions (within certain limits), and no purifying rituals would be needed to continue worshipping one's primary orișa.

The process of mutual identification by exclusion is quite similar to the Yoruba/Aku/Lukumí/Nagô experience of ethnic mutual identification in diaspora and has only served to strengthen the bonds between different orișa traditions. Still, it has not been enough to forge a fully unified traditional religion, as demonstrated by the creation of TRWASO in Osun State. Because Muslims and Christians already had their own umbrella organizations at the national and state levels, they had a distinct advantage over orișa traditions in terms of collective organization, action, and interaction with various levels of the government. In 2013, Governor Ọgbẹni Rauf Aregbesọla called for one unified organization of orișa worshippers with whom he could interact as he did with

Muslims and Christians. Consequently, Osun became the first state to recognize officially traditional religion alongside Islam and Christianity, to declare that August 20 would be observed as a public holiday just like 'Eīd or Christmas, and to ensure that the religious needs and concerns of orișa worshippers would be heard.[152] Many (particularly among the babalawo) bought into the idea of a central organization, but even so, members in Ẹdẹ noted that it can be very difficult to get leaders of the different orișa traditions to cooperate and move in the same direction.[153] Apart from not being totally unified, TRWASO has also drawn religious boundaries around orișa traditions by calling out members seen in a church or mosque and threatening to expel them if they continued attending those services.[154] TRWASO was created to ensure the religious rights of orișa devotees in response to the organizational forms of Christianity and Islam and has actively begun to assert itself as an equal religion by reinforcing religious boundaries accordingly.

Within most literature on religion in Africa, particularly work relating to the issue of conversion, there is a general teleological narrative in which Africans have rapidly adopted Islam and/or Christianity, leaving the ranks of their ancestral traditions progressively thinner.[155] However, the experience of many in Ẹdẹ and elsewhere does not follow this neat paradigm, as the leaders of the Ijọ Ọrunmila movement were initially Christian (if not always exclusively) before embracing Ifa. Within Ẹdẹ, one of the most famous Egungun masquerades is Tẹẹrẹ, a terrifyingly powerful masquerade who chose a Muslim lineage as its caretakers. While farming, that family found snails, pigeons, and cowrie shells inside a termite mound and turned to leave because this abnormal discovery frightened them. When they did so, they could no longer see and had to return to the mound to continue digging. There they found the wooden sculpture of Tẹẹrẹ, which they tried unsuccessfully to burn. They threw it into the Ọșun River but found it waiting for them when they returned home. Then Tẹẹrẹ began afflicting the family with infertility until Ifa revealed that they would have to turn it into a masquerade and bring it out twice a year.

One of the chief caretakers of Tẹẹrẹ insisted that, being Muslim, the family had not chosen to adopt the Egungun but the other way around, and they had no alternative since it was the destiny that God gave them.[156] The readiness with which he offered this history suggested that I was not the first to wonder how a devoted Muslim could also keep such a powerful masquerade in his compound. He was keenly aware of this tension, as many Muslims did not approve of his multifaceted religious identity, and said that even babalawo would sometimes tell him to leave Islam to focus on Egungun. In this family's case, their practice of Islam *predated* orișa traditions—Tẹẹrẹ brought several others with it—and rather

than leaving the orișa for Islam, Tẹẹrẹ added *itself* to their religious practice, making it not a matter of choice but the will of living divine forces. The experience of this lineage excellently demonstrates the tension between the traditional system of forms of worship, in which several traditions have their own agency and may be ancestral and/or preordained, and the newer system of "religion," in which one tradition must be *chosen* and practiced to the exclusion of others.

Another Muslim lineage in Ẹdẹ also has a long history with Islam but added Ogun to its traditions a few generations afterward and has also had to negotiate the same tensions Tẹẹrẹ's caretakers have.[157] Still others, however, have moved from Islam or Christianity to practicing orișa traditions exclusively. This was the case for one of the hunters mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, who left Christianity when he realized Ogun's tradition was in fact a religion and must not be practiced alongside others. Both the Jagun Ṣango and Mọgba (the two most senior Ṣango priests) were practicing Muslims at one point but are no longer involved with Islam. In a locally famous event, the Jagun Ṣango was possessed by Ṣango in the mosque during prayers one day and began breathing fire, which prompted him to devote himself entirely to Ṣango. The chief priestess of Ọṣun was raised a Christian, practiced Islam for a time when she married a Muslim, but found no success in life until she became a priestess of the orișa of fertility and wealth. The babalawo seem to be the only priestly class not to have been actively involved in the practice of Islam or Christianity, and in Ẹdẹ it appeared to be very common for people to have left an Abrahamic tradition to serve one of the orișa, complicating the perceived teleological path from orișa worship to Islam or Christianity. While movement between religious traditions has been more complicated and anything but linear or clearly delineated, the pattern that has proven to be fairly consistent is a changing orientation from involvement in a collection of forms of worship to membership in a unified religion.

Conclusion

The transition from forms of worship to different religions is a process initiated primarily as a result of missionary and diasporic experiences. It has not unfolded evenly or always as expected, as demonstrated by the three hunters who could not agree on whether Ogun's tradition was a religion and, if so, how that status would change how they relate to it. Before a traditional Yoruba religion could exist, the Yoruba had to be imagined as a unified ethnicity, and this new identity was produced largely through the experience of diaspora as a result of the transatlantic slave trade and to a lesser extent through internal displacement within what became known as Yorubaland. Major factors that drove the development

of the Yoruba identity included people of different subethnic groups being drawn together by cultural similarities in the face of difference from ethnic and racial others as well as colonial policies that reinforced ethnic boundaries and particularly the creation of a pan-ethnic language that could be used to translate the Bible and carry out evangelism. When returnees arrived in Lagos from Sierra Leone, Brazil, and Cuba in the late nineteenth century, they shared similar experiences with Western Christianity, society, and modernity, and naturally joined forces to promote their vision of a united ethnic group.

The engagement of these returnees with the modern West was a major factor in forging the Yoruba nation, and they also participated in other trends of the modern era, particularly with respect to religion. Many Western scholars began codifying and naming "religions" they encountered elsewhere in the world at the time, and the missionaries and nationalists of the new Yoruba elite sought to present the religion of their new nation in similar ways. This process, however, was no mindless repetition of the European gaze on an African other; it was an instrumental part of the nationalists' desire to assert their own sense of pride and cultural achievement in the face of British racial discrimination and of their own efforts to convert their compatriots to their perceived true faith. Print technology had also been recently introduced, enabling Yoruba nationalists to publish many pamphlets and books, and they conducted extensive research on indigenous traditions. This historical process is similar to that many South Asians followed in the nineteenth century in creating and fostering a strong sense of nationalism and attachment to a venerable ancient religion in Hinduism. And as Brian Pennington argued, while the process brought a new religion into being, it was *not* simply imposed from without by colonial structures, but rather indigenous nationalists and scholars played a central role in this project.[158] Still, the experience of colonialism was a major force in motivating this process and providing the frameworks and categories through which it could be executed.

While the forms of worship that provided the material for the new traditional Yoruba religion were undoubtedly ancestral traditions that had existed for some time, they were reimagined and interpreted in a different light. Although orișa traditions were a natural unifying cultural, religious, and historical force, they were quite diverse and disparate individual forms of worship, very few of which had more than subregional relevance. In the diaspora, however, these traditions began to be practiced together in a unified framework, and the internal displacement of many people in the homeland as a result of the perpetual wars of the nineteenth century created complexes and mini-pantheons of orișa from diverse areas. Just as the pan-Yoruba ethnicity and language was a new innovation emerging from the reinterpretation of preexisting materials, the beginnings of a

Yoruba religion were drawn from orișa traditions and rearticulated in creative new ways.

The most active participants in the nationalist project of presenting the Yoruba as a proud nation with its own traditional religion were mission-educated native clergymen who internalized Western, and specifically Protestant, assumptions about religion and the relevant categories for its analysis. Beyond assuming that there must have been a Yoruba nation and thus a national religion before the arrival of Christianity, early writing on traditional Yoruba religion employed the contemporary paradigms of heathenism, paganism, idolatry, and polytheism, which necessitated finding and articulating a unified pantheon of deities within orișa traditions. As a natural way of valorizing Yoruba culture and traditions, nationalists also stressed the importance of the Supreme Deity as an entirely indigenous understanding of God independent of the British missionaries. For the same reasons, they also suggested possible Semitic origins, and other issues such as the afterlife or sets of doctrines that were previously not well defined or understood as important were given a prime place in the new literature. The research behind this literature was influential in how it caused prominent figures to imagine traditional Yoruba religion against the backdrop of Protestant Christianity. The literature circulated widely as a result of mission education and print technology and was read by European colonial officials and even others outside of Yorubaland. After the Bible was translated into the new Yoruba language, the Reverend James Johnson stated that it "must influence the religion, the coming literature, the thought, the language, the phraseology, and the life of the country."[159] The entire national and mission project went beyond simply influencing the traditional religion but rather in a certain sense *created* the religion and subsequently influenced its contours, as seen through the shared experiences of orișa devotees, the elevated status of Ifa, and most evidently and literally, Ijọ Ọrunmila.

The clergymen who were primarily responsible for this new literature on and articulation of traditional Yoruba religion drew most heavily from Ifa, but their work clearly deviated from the ways Ifa presents itself and other orișa traditions. The first and most significant difference from Ifa is that Ifa was presented as a system of divination for and within the new religion, whereas Ifa narratives depict Ọrunmila and Ifa as being the source of *all* knowledge and wisdom, which members of all traditions in sacred history patronized and which they should continue to consult without any regard for perceived religious boundaries. In addition, practicing traditional Yoruba religion, exemplified by Ifa, was articulated as a choice that the Yoruba could be taught to reject, rather than one among the numerous divinely ordained ancestral traditions and religious

identities that were cosmic facts within the system of multiple forms of worship. Implicit in this emphasis on personal choice was an "us versus them" paradigm of true religion against false, bad—or at least only partially true—religion, a binary that differed from the traditional Yoruba perspective of multiple valid forms of worship. New religious boundaries were drawn around orișa traditions largely because Christian missionaries needed a religion to present *for* their nation and also *from* which they could win converts. They accomplished this by establishing a narrative of enlightenment, or ọlaju, that inherently linked the teleological progress of the Yoruba to modern, Christian ideas and values.

Although Ifa has always played an important role in Yoruba traditions, the period of cultural nationalism and the introduction of modernity/ọlaju elevated it further. I argue that the modern era could consequently be characterized as "the age of Ifa" because many of Ifa's inherent characteristics lent themselves more naturally to recognition as legitimate features of religion and modernity than the other orișa traditions did. The vast, well-organized oral corpus of Ifa verses were the closest Yoruba tradition to a written holy scripture, and the importance of the rational interpretation of these texts in both divination and lived experience and discussion further heightened the respect that nationalists had for Ifa and its priests. The loosely unified set of myths within the oral corpus depicted a loose pantheon of orișa, could offer a perspective on practices that cut across all orișa traditions, and made Ifa one of the only traditions that could represent the new unified religion in a comprehensive manner. This led the most prominent authors on Yoruba religion, such as the Reverends James Johnson and E. Moses Lijadu, to focus on Ifa almost to the exclusion of other orișa traditions, and to study the tradition in depth with babalawo or Christian converts who used to practice Ifa.

Those who ushered in Yoruba modernity recognized Ifa as possessing great potential for the advancement of the mission and nationalist projects, but the interaction worked in both directions. The babalawo have themselves gained a preeminent position within the orișa traditions and are now generally accepted as the most central and iconic members of traditional Yoruba religion. Even members of other orișa traditions often defer to the authority of Ifa texts and the priests who memorize them, and the babalawo, more than any other orișa specialists, are insistent on their children remaining devoted to Ifa and not converting to another religion. The custodians of Ifa have fully embraced their elevated position within the new configuration of traditional Yoruba religion, and the establishment of the indigenous church Ijọ Ọrunmila is perhaps the most creative response to the modern religious landscape. Emerging from the Yoruba nationalist movement, Ijọ Ọrunmila borrowed the structures of Anglican Christianity and

filled them with material drawn from Ifa, producing the *Iwe Odu Mimọ* as the written Ifa holy scriptures, a hymnal book, weekly worship schedules, and a set liturgy based on the Anglican model. The babalawo have been the most successful of orișa devotees to have engaged these modern features of religion in Yorubaland, and they have even managed to establish their own institution of higher learning recognized and supported by the federal government, analogous to Muslim and Christian institutions.

The imagination of traditional Yoruba religion has had an important impact on all orișa traditions, particularly by placing them in a new religious context that has actively drawn boundaries around them. Those who worship the orișa have been made more aware of their similarities much as the proto-Yoruba discovered a sense of unity in diaspora. The creation of TRWASO was an indication of the need to unify orișa traditions in the face of competition from Christians and Muslims and to ensure the rights of orișa worshippers as members of a religion that merited official recognition. Even if orișa devotees did not draw the boundaries of the new religious landscape, they have felt their effects, which has necessitated responses that engage the terms and categories established by Yoruba modernity.

In addition to practitioners realizing that they are at times actively excluded from aspects of Islam and Christianity, the living traditions of the orișa themselves have responded to this changing religious landscape; the Egungun refusing to offer its powerful cloth to certain Muslims presents a prime example. The active, living nature of orișa traditions also complicates the commonly assumed narrative of a progression from orișa worship to Islam or Christianity in that orișa often claim individuals or whole lineages that had previously adopted the practice of Abrahamic traditions. In addition, they also pose an interesting challenge to the humanistic and sociological approaches dominant in religious studies that analyze religion as a primarily *human* institution lacking a life of its own. However, as will be examined in chapter 6, the transition from forms of worship to individual religions seems to be much more uniform—if also complicated—than the movement from one tradition to another.

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4

How Religion Becomes International

Se o Catolicismo foi útil aos escravos, hoje, os praticantes da religião dos Orixás, que tem liturgia e doutrina próprias, não necessitam mais desse disfarce.

If Catholicism was useful for slaves, today, practitioners of Orixá religion, who have their own liturgy and doctrine, no longer need this disguise. —SÉRGIO FERRETTI, *Sincretismo e religião*

Não podemos pensar nem deixar que nos pensem como folclore, seita, animismo, religião primitiva.

We cannot think or let them think of us as folklore, sect, animism, or primitive religion. —"AO PÚBLICO E AO POVO DO CANDOMBLÉ," *Jornal da Bahia*, June 29, 1983

Chapter 3 traced the development of a traditional Yoruba religion in nineteenth-century Lagos and the important role proto-Yoruba returnees from Brazil played in this process. This chapter builds on the experience of these returnees and focuses on how it subsequently shaped the development of Yoruba religious

traditions in Brazil and helped to give Bahian Candomblé its current form. The influence of the Yoruba nationalistic literature of Lagos provided a model for a Nagô/Yoruba traditional religion in Salvador and also helped to promote it to preeminent standing among the African religious traditions in Brazil. Subsequently, devotees of the Yoruba orixá (Portuguese spelling of orișa), influenced by Ifa priests and practitioners from Nigeria, insisted upon the status of their traditions as a religion as a way of fighting governmental prejudice and discrimination. Understanding the creation of a traditional Yoruba religion and the adoption of the category of religion from a historical perspective is also helpful in understanding and clarifying one of the most controversial and thorny issues in Afro-Atlantic religions: syncretism. Approaching the concept from the indigenous Yoruba perspective of ẹsin as "forms of worship" rather than the more recent perspective of separate "religions" allows for a richer interpretation of the phenomenon.

The practice of Yoruba religious traditions in Brazil is central to the issue of syncretism in Afro-diasporic religions because it was primarily through the work of scholars such as Raimundo Nina Rodrigues and Roger Bastide that the current dominant paradigm for understanding the phenomenon was developed. The concept of Catholic saints serving as "masks" for enslaved Africans' worship of their own deities is primarily the legacy of Roger Bastide, a French sociologist who taught and conducted research for many years in Brazil. It is invoked by many scholars and practitioners alike both in Brazil and beyond. Many practitioners still do not entirely share this perspective, however, and those who do not tend to approach their religious practice from a perspective of multiple compatible forms of worship rather than separate religions. In addition to engaging in a critical analysis of Yoruba-Catholic syncretism in Brazil, this chapter presents the thoughts of contemporary orișa specialists in Ẹdẹ on the issue of syncretism and why they believe it has occurred, taking a comparative approach that has curiously not yet been adopted in scholarly literature.

This specific experience of interaction between orișa/orixá traditions and Christianity is quite informative because in Ẹdẹ there is a great deal of evidence of the interaction between the Muslim and traditional Yoruba cosmologies, and the history of syncretism in Salvador provides a useful point of comparison with respect to a Christian cosmology, in a way that is not fully possible in Ẹdẹ. Additionally, a central aspect of the theory of the mask is how first-generation Africans would have interpreted devotion to Catholic saints, and the contemporary orișa experts in Ẹdẹ can provide just such a perspective, albeit much later in time. Additionally, it was precisely at the moment when some orixá devotees in Salvador were insisting that their traditions were in fact a religion that the issue of syncretism and defining religious boundaries came to the fore.

Background

The Yoruba influence on the culture—particularly religious culture—of Salvador and northeastern Brazil was and still is immense; however, this was not always the case. Particularly with respect to religious traditions, it was the people known in Salvador as Jeje (or the Fon, Ewe, and Aja peoples in present-day Togo, Benin, and Ghana) who were the dominant and most influential force in the area until at least the 1870s.[1] This time is just before the Lagosian Renaissance, and as Parés noted, the general organization of Candomblé rituals and houses in different ethnicities such as Jeje, Bantu/Angola, or Nagô made it "fertile ground for 'nationalist' revivalisms" such as that of nineteenth-century Lagos.[2] Large numbers of Africans from the same general area and cultural backgrounds were brought to this part of Brazil at the same time, and there were many structural features that promoted identification through ethnicity. Ethnic division among enslaved Africans was at times officially encouraged as a way to prevent them from unifying against the greatly outnumbered white Brazilians, and even the cantos (work crews composed of African laborers) and their gathering places were organized along ethnic lines.[3] Beyond African traditions, many aspects of life in Salvador including the very popular irmandades (Catholic lay fraternities) were organized around the Africans' various ethnic groups as well.[4]

Consequently, ethnic identity held immense importance in nineteenth-century Salvador, and during the latter half of that period, the Nagô/Yoruba grew rapidly in numbers and prominence. In the 1820s about 16 percent of the African-born enslaved population were Yoruba speakers, but by the 1830s that proportion had grown to 31 percent, and by 1850 it grew to 76 percent and 86 percent of all West Africans in Salvador. In the larger area of Bahia, the Nagô accounted for 79 percent of the African-born enslaved population and 54 percent of freed people in the latter half of the nineteenth century.[5] The interstate wars that followed the collapse of the Ọyọ Empire led directly to the steady growth of this population, as evidenced by the fact that the majority of enslaved Nagô/Yoruba brought to Salvador were of Ọyọ origin, although some came from practically every kingdom and region of Yorubaland.[6] Consequently, the Nagô "came to represent the vast majority of slaves in Bahia," and at the end of the nineteenth century, Rodrigues identified a form of the Yoruba language as the African lingua franca because practically all his informants were able to speak it.[7] Up until the early twentieth century Yoruba was spoken almost as much as Portuguese in Salvador and several other cities in Bahia, and Afro-Brazilian children's bedtime stories were recounted with almost the same frequency in each language.[8] The importance of Yoruba language and culture for Salvador's

African population was so extensive that in 1899 the Catholic catechism was recommended to be administered in the "Nagô" language to maximize its efficacy.[9] The influence of Yoruba culture extended to other areas, including food, social/economic organization, clothes, and of course religious items, but most importantly, several scholars have noted that ethnicity always seemed to take precedence over religious affiliation in terms of self-identification and collective organization, just as David Laitin observed in Yorubaland in the 1980s.[10] Yoruba traditions and ways of life were not only alive in Salvador, they closely mirrored those of the homeland, making Salvador another Yoruba melting pot much like contemporary Lagos.

Siamese Twins

As J. Lorand Matory argued, in the development of Yoruba religious traditions, the Yoruba homeland and the diaspora in Brazil have been much more akin to Siamese twins than a tree and its roots, as people, ideas, and goods have been exchanged since the nineteenth century.[11] In Brazil and particularly in Salvador, many who were brought from West Africa were important players in different Yoruba political, economic, and religious traditions.[12] Hence, they were deeply familiar with and invested in their indigenous traditions, and in ensuring their re-creation and survival in the new society. Also, many who ultimately returned to West Africa—Lagos specifically—were already members of a Yoruba elite who were primed to participate in its burgeoning renaissance. This great mixture of people from different parts of Yorubaland and the practice of worshipping a large pantheon of deities in the same temple helped to forge a pan-Yoruba/Nagô pantheon of orixás: a religious perspective which returnees carried back across the Atlantic from Brazil.[13]

Traveling back to West Africa became relatively frequent for some Afro-Brazilians, was central to the foundational narratives of the prominent terreiros (Candomblé temples) in Bahia, and was viewed almost as a rite of passage for the elite of Salvador's Nagô/Yoruba religious community.[14] Consequently, not only were some Brazilians involved in the Lagosian Renaissance, many others were actively involved in consuming its products and bringing them back across the Atlantic. Thus, these "black pilgrims, businesspeople, and writers" played "a critical role" in creating their own traditional Yoruba religion in Salvador.[15] Lagos naturally emerged as the primary center for this lively cultural, religious, and economic exchange, and the literacy and education many travelers and repatriates gained allowed them to publish their perspectives and ideas on a scale afforded to few if any other African populations up to that point.[16] The previous

chapter addressed the significant population of Brazilian returnees in Lagos both in number and percentage of the overall population.[17] Many more however had a desire to return, circumstances and economics permitting, and a sizable portion of those who settled in Lagos and their children frequently traveled back and forth to Bahia and had houses in both places.[18] Of these many transatlantic Yoruba travelers and residents, perhaps none was as prominent and important as Martiniano do Bonfim

Martiniano do Bonfim

A simply fascinating and truly compelling individual, Martiniano do Bonfim was born the son of freed Ẹgba (a Yoruba subethnic group) parents in Salvador in 1859. When he was six years old, his father took him to Lagos to study at the Anglican Faji School with other prominent Lagosian children. Bonfim remained in Lagos for eleven years, during which time his father came to visit him once, and he traveled once to Bahia. While studying in Lagos, Bonfim also underwent training as a babalawo and was initiated into Ifa. Interestingly, he never traveled inland, but he eagerly soaked up the new literature and discussions on Yoruba culture and religion produced around him during the Lagosian Renaissance. In 1886 he returned to Salvador and then traveled back to Yorubaland twice afterward. Upon his return to Salvador, he leveraged to great effect his knowledge of Yoruba traditions and language, English (thanks to his missionary education), and the recent flurry of literature published in both languages, becoming a language instructor and revered expert in all things Yoruba.[19] He brought the new configuration of orișa traditions into a unified traditional Yoruba religion with him, backed by his reputation as a highly qualified expert on the topic with personal experience and cutting-edge research gained in Lagos. Ifa may have appealed to Bonfim precisely because of his pan-ethnic perspective on Yoruba traditions, acquired either as a child in Brazil, later in Lagos, or both. Either way, his identity as a babalawo, well-versed in its oral corpus, ensured that, like the very sources of the material he was reading, he understood orișa traditions within this larger complex.

In Salvador, Bonfim became an important source of authenticity and, in particular, helped the famous Mãe Aninha, founder and leader of the terreiro Opô Afonjá, to transform her temple into the preeminent Yoruba religious community by helping to institute changes to "Africanize" their practice. However, Bonfim's impact was just as great, if not greater, among scholars studying African culture and religion in Salvador. Without a sacred written scripture to which Brazilian orixá devotees could refer, and perhaps because Ifa was not

as widespread in Bahia as in Yorubaland, "the published work of anthropologists was the textual base on which" proper orthodoxy and information could be determined.[20] Experienced travelers like Bonfim—particularly those fluent in English whom Matory calls the "English professors"—had privileged access to the Yoruba religious literature emerging from the Lagosian Renaissance, and they shared it widely with interested scholars and practitioners alike.

Just as James Johnson relied primarily on the Brazilian returnee to Lagos and babalawo Philip (Filipe) José Meffre for his foundational book on traditional Yoruba religion, so did Rodrigues depend on Bonfim—as a babalawo returned from Lagos—for his information in *O animismo fetichista dos negros bahianos* and *Os africanos no Brasil*.[21] One important example of this exchange was how Bonfim translated A. B. Ellis's influential *The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples* for Rodrigues, who subsequently cited it extensively in his work and—no doubt because of Bonfim—eagerly adopted Ellis's perspective of the Nagô/Yoruba being more highly evolved than their African neighbors.[22] Bonfim also collaborated with practically every major scholarly or artistic figure in the field of Afro-Brazilian studies after the founder Rodrigues, including Edison Carneiro, Ruth Landes, Jorge Amado, Lorenzo Turner, and Donald Pierson, particularly because his fluency in English made him a perfect interlocutor for Anglophone anthropologists.[23] Although Bonfim was the preeminent example of a Yoruba transatlantic traveler and "English professor," he was certainly not the only one. This important class of ritual specialists, traders, and intellectuals did much to shape "the discourses, values, ideas, and collective identities" present in Afro-Brazilian society through their work with both scholars and practitioners on both sides of the Atlantic, and they influenced the orixá devotees who read their work with great enthusiasm and devotion.[24] Furthermore, this Yoruba/Nagô-centric religious and intellectual activity was also a source and strategy of Black empowerment in an otherwise oppressive and racist society, and the practitioners, scholars, artists, and activists who learned from them were at the forefront of the fight for Afro-Brazilians' right to the freedom of religion.[25]

Development and Denial of a Religion

The central theme of this book has been identifying precisely what constitutes traditional Yoruba religion, such as Nagô Candomblé, how it can and should be understood in historical context, and how it developed. It is worth asking at this point, For what, precisely, were these practitioners, scholars, artists, and activists fighting when they sought religious freedom? Given the great influence of Yoruba people, culture, and ideas outlined above, it is no surprise that

religious traditions in Salvador were remarkably similar to those in Yorubaland, and indeed they went through many developments at roughly the same time, due largely to how the two communities were linked together and affected each other. However, there were also some important differences. Although mentioned before, one of the most important characteristics of orixá forms of worship in Salvador was that they were not the sole domains of various lineages but instead were joined together in a broader pantheon being worshipped in the same place and time. What is most interesting about this dynamic is that while Ifa seems to have served the role of the great unifier and forge of a traditional Yoruba religion in Yorubaland, it was not nearly as prevalent or influential in contemporary Salvador.

That role was rather assumed by Xangô (Portuguese spelling of Ṣango), who, as Rodrigues noted around the turn of the twentieth century, was the most popular orixá in Salvador.[26] This may seem surprising given the generally assumed centrality of Ifa in the global orișa community today, but it is likely due in large part to the fact that the Africans brought to Salvador were overwhelmingly ethnically Ọyọ and from Xangô's homeland. Additionally, it may suggest that Ifa's position was greatly enhanced with the advent of modernity in Yorubaland, as there were certainly babalawo in Ọyọ in the 1800s, and again Ellis observed Ifa to be less prevalent than Ṣango in much of Yorubaland at roughly that time.[27] Luis Nicolau Parés argued that "the royal aristocratic expression of the *òrìshà* [Xangô] might have engendered the imagination of a royal 'court' that helped galvanize Candomblé's liturgical structure as a multi-divinity cult, while at the same time favoring on the social level the formation of a local Nagô religious elite."[28]

This is a fascinating and insightful theory because Xangô was, of course, the Alaafin of Ọyọ, and as an ọba, he would have assumed the role of onigbogbo ẹsin (patron/owner of all forms of worship) and would indeed have been involved in the worship of all orișa within his domain. Chapter 3 outlined how Ṣango has a fascinating relationship with foreign religious traditions such as Islam and Christianity, and George Ajibade suggested the tendency of Ṣango to establish links with other traditions (albeit in a different way from Ifa's) may play a large role in the religious tolerance in Ẹdẹ.[29] In this sense, the prominence of Xangô as an orixá connected to numerous other orixá forms of worship may also have provided an avenue for the Nagô in Bahia to develop their own unified pantheon as well. Reis and Mamigonian have offered another possible influence on orixá traditions in Bahia by referencing how the Nagô quickly gained experience in "Catholic churches [that] venerated several saints under the same roof," which could have provided yet another model and possible influence on their religious imagination and practice.[30] By the late nineteenth century, Nagô communities in Bahia developed an organized liturgy around the worship of multiple orixás

within the same temple in a way that had not yet—and to a great extent still has not—developed in Yorubaland.

One of the motivations for the interest in indigenous Yoruba traditions during the Lagosian Renaissance was to establish a sense of racial and ethnic pride in the face of British discrimination, and while the same was true in the oppressive context of colonial Brazil, this had another effect in Bahia specifically. Because the Nagô were not the only ethnic group present in the city, Atlantic travelers and scholars greatly enhanced the position of the already numerically prominent Nagô as the "purest," most advanced, or most "African" of all the African ethnicities present.[31] Rodrigues and his reliance on Ellis did much to promote this idea, but the Nagô-centricity of the Brazilian understanding of African religious traditions was already in existence before his publications and was simply enhanced by them.[32] This is a bit of a chicken-or-the-egg situation in which scholars and artists came to rely heavily on prominent orixá priestesses for information and perspectives, which they then projected in their work, and this in turn enhanced the prestige and position of those priestesses who provided the information in the first place.[33] Hence, the worship of the orixá in Brazil was simply one complex of many African forms of worship, but as a result of a confluence of artistic, scholarly, and ritual processes, it became the unquestionably preeminent tradition against which all others were measured.

Still, a central question left unanswered is what all these traditions are and were called. The general term used today is, of course, Candomblé, under which there are various ritual nations including Nagô, Jeje, and Angola, but this term has not always been used. Just as there is no good translation for the word *religion* in Yoruba, let alone a traditional Yoruba religion, there was no clear way to refer to African forms of worship in Brazil either. First and foremost, there are indeed numerous forms of African or African-influenced religious traditions in Brazil, and Roger Bastide provided an extensive list and investigation of many, including Pagelança, Catimbó, Tambor de Mina, Xangô, Macumba, Batuque, and of course, Candomblé.[34] The common term *Candomblé* was first documented in 1807 and seems to have taken the place of a common catch-all term *calundú* used to describe African ritual practice, suggesting that the practice of African religious traditions became more organized and complex around the same period.[35] *Candomblé* is usually used to refer to the various African religious traditions in Bahia, while those in other areas have different names and practices, such as Xangô in Recife, but even within Candomblé there are some divisions that one would not find in traditional Yoruba religion in Yorubaland today. Obviously, there are a variety of nations that have been influenced by different ethnic models and worship different spirits (for example, voduns for the Jeje or inquices for

the Angola), but the tradition of the eguns (ancestral masquerades) is often separated from the worship of the orixás in scholarship, practice, and location.[36] In short, historically speaking, it has been difficult to identify exactly one African religion, or even various distinct African religions, and as Bastide observed, even the names given to them "are not the names the Negroes gave to their cult but are white men's terminology."[37]

Despite the practice of African religious traditions being permitted in Bahia at times, it was always viewed with suspicion by the slave-owning class and was generally severely suppressed even after the end of slavery. As a result, in 1937 a group of practitioners appealed to the state governor for Candomblé to be recognized officially as a religion so that they could be guaranteed the religious rights and privileges outlined in the Brazilian constitution and extended to different denominations of Christianity and other religions.[38] The petition was unsuccessful, and police raids, discriminatory public signs, and very prejudiced publications in newspapers and periodicals proliferated in keeping with the official perspective of the state that African traditions such as Candomblé would prevent Brazil from taking its rightful place as a modern country.[39] The association of African ways of living and even skin color with backwardness and simplicity motivated an official program of branqueamento (whitening) in which the immigration of white Europeans was encouraged, and "backward" African traditions and superstitions were discouraged, even by some "enlightened" Black Brazilians. The current location of many of Salvador's prominent terreiros is a legacy of this state-sanctioned repression because they moved away from the center of the city for greater security.[40] One pai-de-santo recalled the days before Candomblé was recognized and protected (in theory) as a legitimate religion, and how brave one had to be even to admit to practicing Candomblé, not to mention the horrors of police raids.[41]

In 1967 the state of Bahia recognized Candomblé as folklore, which still did not afford it constitutional protection and ensured continued police supervision.[42] In 1976, however, Candomblé was finally recognized by then-governor Roberto Santos as a religion following a long campaign that demonstrated the cultural and artistic value of this heritage, and, significantly, its value for Bahian tourism.[43] Still, while official recognition was a step in the right direction, the fact that the primary association of orixá devotees' tradition and religious practice was with historical nostalgia, folklore, and tourism revenue did not sit well with prominent leaders and naturally had an effect on the tradition itself. This, of course, did not mean the end of Eurocentric discrimination against Candomblé, and indeed, the sensationalization of the tradition has its roots firmly within a Eurocentric framework.

While state-sponsored police raids ended with Candomblé's recognition as a religion, violence against Candomblé practitioners and temples certainly did not, and Brazilian society has even experienced a drastic uptick in violent attacks on Afro-Brazilian religious practitioners in the past twenty years, especially at the hands of Pentecostal-Evangelical Christians.[44] Categorization as a religion, with the legal protections that should accompany that category, was—and increasingly is again—a literal matter of life and death in extreme instances. This makes the decision to present Candomblé as a reputable religion a matter of far more than rhetorical or ideological importance. The practically inevitable reaction against this religious repression led to one of the most significant moments in the history of Candomblé just a few years later.

Insistence on Candomblé as an Independent Religion

In Salvador in 1983, at the International Congress of Orisa Tradition and Culture—the global organization of orișa devotees created and led by the prominent babalawo Wande Abimbola, mentioned in chapter 3—several of the most important figures in Brazilian Candomblé led by Mãe Stella of Opô Afonjá made a statement denouncing syncretism within their religious practice and the importance of returning to a purer African ritual practice. Just days after this massively important statement, several of the most prominent iyalorixás (priestesses) published a joint statement in the form of an open letter that read:

> Ao público e ao povo do Candomblé
>
> As iás e babalorixás da Bahia, coerentes com as posições assumidas na II Conferência Mundial da Tradição dos Orixá e Cultura, realizada durante o período de 17 a 23 Julho de 1983, nesta cidade, tornam público que depois disso ficou claro ser nossa crença uma religião, e não uma seita sincretizada.
>
> Não podemos pensar nem deixar que nos pensem como folclore, seita, animismo, religião primitiva, como sempre vem ocorrendo neste país, nesta cidade, seja por parte de opositores, detratores: muros pichados, artigos escritos—"Candomblé é coisa do Diablo," "Práticas africanas primitivas ou sincréticas"—seja pelos trajes rituais utilizados em concursos oficias e símbolos litúrgicos consumidos na confecção de propaganda turística e ainda nossas casas de culto, nossas templos incluídos, indicados na coluna de folclore dos jornais baianos.
>
> Ma bèru, Olorum wa pelu awon omorisa.

To the public and Candomblé practitioners,

The ia and babalorixás of Bahia, consistent with the positions taken during the Second International Congress of Orisa Tradition and Culture, held between July 13 and 27, 1983, in this city, state publicly that after this it became clear that our belief is a religion, and not a syncretic sect.

We cannot think nor let them think of us as folklore, sect, animism, or primitive religion, as has always happened in this country, this city, be it by opponents, detractors: graffitied walls, written articles—"Candomblé is of the Devil," "Primitive or syncretic African practices"—or by the ritual clothes used in official events and liturgical symbols consumed to make tourist propaganda and still our houses of worship, our temples included, are located in the folklore column of Bahian newspapers.

Do not fear, God is with the children (devotees) of the oriṣa.[45]

This statement understandably sent shock waves through all religious quarters of the city and sparked a remarkably lively debate among orixá devotees, Christians, and the general population. Alonso placed this important development within the context of the major terreiros losing some of their elevated status once all Candomblé houses became recognized and freed of governmental oversight: Until then, the major houses had largely been able to ignore government efforts at control because of the power, connections, and prestige they had acquired. He suggested they "had to once again find a way to reestablish their claims of status over the general Candomblé community and assert a new style of leadership," which they accomplished by placing themselves above ostensibly less pure houses still involved in syncretism.[46] However, I believe several additional factors are important to consider, particularly if the situation is analyzed from the perspective of religion as a category alongside the alternative framework of forms of worship.

First and foremost, the statement was explicitly a response to a prevalent and pervasive discourse that denigrated Afro-Brazilian religious practices. At the turn of the twentieth century, Salvador's elite had supported an extensive and aggressive campaign of imprisonment of Candomblé practitioners, desecration of holy sites, repressive legislation, harassment, and extensive prejudicial media coverage of African traditions they found contrary to their campaign of progress and modernization.[47] This perspective persisted until the 1980s, particularly in a religious context. Almost exactly a year before the iyalorixás' statement, Dom Boaventura Kloppenburg was installed as the auxiliary bishop of the Diocese

of Salvador and promptly issued a statement that the "evangelization of black people in the city had been inadequate and insufficient" because "Jesus Christ was not the *only* Way, Truth, and Light for people of African descent."[48] From the perspective of many, but certainly not all, Catholic authorities, the problem was that many Afro-descendants did not fully fit into the Christian identity, or at least did not do so properly, which is why their evangelization was "inadequate" or "insufficient." This teleological and triumphalist perspective can easily be compared to that of European and American missionaries in Yorubaland who similarly sought to bring orișa devotees out of their ignorance and into the light of Christianity.

The current rector of the Basilica of Nosso Senhor do Bomfim—perhaps the most significant icon and site of Afro-Catholic syncretism in Salvador—remembers orixá devotees being turned away from the church because they had not fully or exclusively embraced Catholicism as their religion and how painful this was for many people.[49] As recently as 2014, a federal judge ruled that "Afro-Brazilian religious ceremonies do not constitute a religion . . . [due to an absence of] hierarchical structure and a venerated God."[50] There is, of course, a sophisticated hierarchical structure to such ceremonies in addition to a venerated God, but what is significant is the invocation of very specific criteria to qualify traditions as a proper religion. In response to some of the statements made by Bishop Kloppenburg and other Catholics, a Candomblé practitioner responded, "What the iyalorixás argued was not to put an end to the religious practice of Catholics. What they did not want is for the practice of Christianity to denigrate African religion."[51]

Furthermore, the coauthors of the initial statement issued another clarifying letter which specifically addressed what their stance resisted: "All our efforts here are to return to the worship of the orixás, to African religion, the dignity lost during slavery and its subsequent consequences: cultural, social, and economic alienation that relegated it to folklore, consumerism, and the profanation of our religion."[52] Clearly the iyalorixás were aware that the experience of slavery and white oppression had resulted in a massive loss of dignity for their traditions, and following the prejudicial perspectives rooted in this history, the government refused to recognize their traditions as "religion." Instead, it chose to marginalize them as folklore or primitive cultural heritage to be exploited for capital gain. Indeed, the authors, "identify syncretic practices as major culprits in the de-legitimization of Candomblé. In response [they] denounce syncretism and relegate it to a thing of the past. To be a legitimate religion, they argue, Candomblé must be independent and autonomous, not a derivative of or dependent on Catholicism." Over time, "researchers, journalists, and practitioners themselves . . .

have increasingly portrayed Candomblé as a unified system of belief analogous to Christianity . . . reflecting the underlying assumption that Candomblé must be able to explain itself systematically in order to be a true religion."[53] They recognized that as long as they and their religious practice did not fit into the category of Christianity or African religion, it would continue to be viewed simply as bad, poorly evolved Catholicism or "inadequate" catechesis. Despite the great efforts of figures such as Martiniano do Bonfim, the interpretation of Candomblé as an evolutionarily inferior religion or degenerate form of Catholicism is ubiquitous in the earliest academic work on the tradition, which surely was influenced by and reinforced public perception.[54]

During the summer of 1983 Bahian newspapers were abuzz with discussions about syncretism and interactions between the Catholic Church and Candomblé. Many argued that Candomblé was "a religion and not a folkloric attraction," and headlines such as "The End of Syncretism," "Ialorixás Say That Candomblé Is a Religion," "Olorum Is Not God, Bonfim Is Oxalá," "Desyncretism," "Terreiros Deny Fighting with the Church," and "Debate: Candomblé or Catholicism?" very much demonstrate the efforts of some to elevate Candomblé to the status of religion on equal footing with Catholicism.[55] They did so by comparing but not conflating one with the other. Insisting that Candomblé be recognized as a religion in its own right rather than as simply superstitious Catholicism was important for these iyalorixás so that "[their] grandchildren can be proud to belong to the religion of their ancestors, to be black brings them back to Africa, and not to slavery."[56] Hence, the stance against syncretism may have been a move to ensure the prestige of prominent Candomblé communities that could boast of their African purity. It must also be understood as a reaction to oppression and exclusion from the broader Brazilian and Bahian society, just as the Lagosian Renaissance and its efforts to produce and valorize a traditional Yoruba religion were sparked by the racial prejudice and exclusionism of colonial British society almost a century earlier.[57] In addition, just as Ifa played an important role in Lagos at the turn of the twentieth century, it featured prominently in this movement in Salvador as well.

Although babalaô were much less common in Nagô religious communities in Salvador than babalawo were in Yorubaland, they were perhaps most closely linked to the Lagosian Renaissance and its projection of traditional Yoruba religion through traveling scholars and practitioners. Donald Pierson recorded one babalaô born in "Africa" to repatriates complaining as early as the 1930s or 1940s that "Bahian *candomblés* aren't African any more. Why, they all go to Mass, pray the rosary, and burn candles to the saints! It's all mixed up now."[58] Given Ifa's involvement in producing the traditional Yoruba religion recorded in Lagosian

literature and its subsequent appeal to Brazilian returnees and travelers, it should be little surprise that some of the earliest efforts to draw boundaries around what a traditional Yoruba religion or Candomblé should be came from Ifa priests. In the late 1970s and early 1980s several Yoruba students and scholars came to Brazil, and much like Matory's "English professors," they leveraged their knowledge of Yoruba and English to teach courses on Yoruba language and also orixá/orișa traditions, relying heavily on anthropological literature in English to give Candomblé practitioners instruction on rituals and traditions from Yorubaland.[59]

Some of these Nigerians presented themselves as Ifa priests. William Bascom's famous book *Ifa Divination* was a central text used in their classes, and training and initiation into Ifa for those interested soon followed. This emphasis on studies of traditions as practiced in Yorubaland, particularly as presented from the perspective of Ifa, caused a degree of friction with practitioners attached to the way orixá traditions had developed in Salvador—specifically syncretism—as opposed to the model presented by these latter-day "English professors" and the literature they brought with them.[60] Later on, other students also consulted the work of Professor Wande Abimbola and sought further instruction in Nigerian models of religious practice. The introduction of an Ifa-centric model of orixá devotion to a certain number of Candomblé practitioners created a new and competing model of authority. The new model challenged the previously established hierarchy, particularly regarding practices that had no identifiable corollary within Ifa literature and/or ethnographic writing on Yorubaland.[61]

Stefania Capone suggested that "the campaign against Afro-Catholic syncretism could therefore be seen as an answer to the on-going influence of Yoruba *babalawo*s among some groups of Brazilian initiates," and leaders of many temples in southeastern Brazil sought to travel to Nigeria and form links with Yoruba babalawo as ways to bring more authority to their communities, given that the main temples in Salvador are still perceived as the most traditional and "African."[62] When Mãe Stella spearheaded the new movement against syncretism in Candomblé, she did so with support and influence from various sources (financial and religious) in Brazil and Nigeria, and perhaps the most important figure in prompting the iyalorixás' joint statement was the babalawo Professor Wande Abimbola.[63] Matory identified Abimbola as the "new Martiniano [do Bomfim]," and his organization, the International Congress of Orisa Tradition and Culture, is where Mãe Stella made her famous statement.[64] Just as babalawo such as Filipe José Meffre helped to create a shape for and understanding of Yoruba religion in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Lagos, subsequently perpetuated by others such as Bonfim in Salvador, the involvement of Wande Abimbola and other babalawo greatly influenced the decision to redefine the worship of the

orixás in Salvador in a way that would ensure its identity and position as a religion in its own right.[65]

This push for recognition as a religion was not limited to comparison with Catholicism in Brazil but is part of a wider international movement carried out by communities in Africa, the Americas, and even Europe to elevate the status of oriṣa worship to that of a world religion.[66] Particularly with the efforts of the International Congress of Orisa Tradition and Culture and in the absence of a fixed credo or set of written scriptures, "Ifa is providing . . . a new structure for, and public articulation of, ethics in Afro-Brazilian religions, and in that sense a stepping-stone towards achieving the status of 'World Religion.'"[67] This time it has sought to do so not simply by providing an overarching framework for the traditions of the various oriṣa/orixá, but by providing one for the multiple oriṣa traditions that have developed all around the Black Atlantic.[68] In order to accomplish these goals, it seems most expedient to standardize ritual practice to at least a certain degree and it is difficult to see the role Afro-Catholic syncretism would play in a move toward status as a world religion.[69]

Conclusion

Over the course of the nineteenth century, Nagô/Yoruba people and traditions became increasingly prevalent and hegemonic in Bahia, and members of the various subethnic groups came to identify more strongly with each other and a shared Nagô identity. This was a result of their mutually intelligible language and culture, combined with the many ethnically defined aspects of life in Salvador that gave it increased salience. In this context, the various forms of orixá worship were reconfigured into a larger pan-ethnic pantheon housed in individual temples. When many formerly enslaved Nagô people returned to West Africa—Lagos in particular—they brought this configuration and conception of an oriṣa/orixá religion with them and took an active part in the Lagosian Renaissance. Many of these returnees traveled back and forth between Lagos and Salvador, bringing the perspectives and information produced in Lagos back with them.

Martiniano do Bonfim is perhaps the best example of such a traveler, and his literacy in English and training as a babalawo conferred on him the authority to project norms of traditional Yoruba religion with great success to both practitioners and scholars. Just as occurred in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Lagos, his knowledge of Yoruba traditions and Ifa made him invaluable to the scholars who founded the field of Afro-Brazilian religions and one of the most prominent and "authentic" ritual authorities of his time. As a result of the great influence of Lagosian literature and the travelers who read and shared it, the Nagô became the

hegemonic model of African traditions and religion in Brazil. Still, just as there was no easy way to define and label a traditional religion in Yorubaland, Afro-Brazilian traditions went by many names in different times and places; however, Bahian Candomblé became most closely associated with the worship of the orixás.

While orixá traditions gained prestige among Afro-Brazilians, the Brazilian government and Catholic Church did not look favorably on them. Police raids, prejudicial media coverage, and denial of the status of a true religion were the order of the day for the first half of the twentieth century, and it was only after a prolonged campaign led by scholars, artists, and practitioners that the state government of Bahia began to see value in Candomblé. However, it was still only considered to be folklore and supported for the purpose of tourism, which did little if anything to change public perception of the traditions as backward and primitive and certainly did not extend to them the same type of constitutional protection enjoyed by Christianity. In 1976, Candomblé was officially recognized as a religion, but a prominent group of priestesses were not content with a position as second-class religious citizens.

During a meeting of the International Congress of Orisa Tradition and Culture in Salvador in 1983, and in several subsequent newspaper articles, Mãe Stella of Opô Afonjá led this group of priestesses in protesting the denigration of their traditions and asserting that they constituted not a syncretic sect but a complete religion. They advocated for the removal of Catholic elements from their ritual practice and terreiros without speaking out against the independent practice of Catholicism. In their official position, they stated that the practice of syncretism had developed as a strategy to disguise the true religious practice of the first generation of Afro-Brazilians from their oppressive masters, but as orixá devotees were now free to practice their religion, syncretism only misrepresented these traditions to insiders and outsiders. This announcement followed a period of increased contact and dialogue with Nigerians and Ifa practitioners, who sought to bring Brazilian Candomblé into greater conformity with practices in Yorubaland as presented in anthropological literature and the tradition of Ifa. This effort was reminiscent of the Lagosian Renaissance, only it was led by practitioners themselves, and Mãe Stella's public statement should be understood within the context of an international movement to elevate the worship of the oriṣa/orixá to the status of world religion. The youngest generation of Candomblé practitioners have grown up in an environment in which this discourse is very prominent and many have struggled to articulate the worship of African deities as a religion to ensure their constitutional rights. Consequently, the framework of Candomblé as a religion separate from, and on par with, Catholicism has become more ingrained in their lives.

5

Masking Tradition(s)

INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES ON SYNCRETISM

Durante a escravidão o sincretismo foi necessário para a nossa sobrevivência; agora, em suas decorrências e manifestações públicas, gente de santo, ialorixás realizando lavagem nas igrejas, saindo das camarinhas para as missas etc, nos descaraterizam como religião, dando margem ao uso da mesma como coisa exótica, folclore, turismo.

During slavery, syncretism was necessary for our survival; now, in its occurrence and public manifestation, devotees, ialorixás participating in washing churches, leaving camarinhas [ritual initiation associated with Umbanda] for mass, etc., undermines our status as a religion, allowing it to be used and relegated to the role of something exotic, folklore, and tourism. —STATEMENT OF SALVADOR'S LEADING IYALORIXÁS ON SYNCRETISM, *Jornal da Bahia*, August 12, 1983.

Anti-Syncretism

The most prominent figures in Candomblé, led by Mãe Stella, took a public stance against syncretism to combat public and state discrimination, but the grounds on which they opposed it and the long history of the anti-syncretic discourse they invoked are also of critical importance. While the word *syncretism* is a loaded and controversial term, it is not always understood in an exclusively negative light. Figures such as Plutarch or Erasmus, who admired how Cretans were able to come together in the face of common enemies despite internal differences, understood syncretism as a positive process of influence by and integration of foreign elements into a system or society, and Christian theology's absorption of classical influences and philosophy enriched the tradition, rather than leaving it less robust.[1] It was not until the Enlightenment that syncretism acquired negative connotations, but more recently it has at times been invoked in a positive sense.[2]

Similarly, while the discourse on syncretism in Candomblé usually refers to Afro-Catholic syncretism, another important type of syncretism has taken—and still is taking—place: Afro-African syncretism, the sharing of practices, ideas, and material between the different Afro-Brazilian traditions. This type of syncretism is generally not considered to be problematic because it occurs between "sister traditions."[3] This was the very process that forged Nagô Candomblé out of many different but related proto-Yoruba traditions in the first place. This chapter does not address whether the term *syncretism* should even be used, nor does it address Afro-African syncretism. It instead focuses on the existing discourse on Afro-Catholic syncretism in Brazil, particularly its central role in the scholarly and practical understanding of Afro-Catholic syncretism more universally.

Much as with the term *religion* or even the names of the specific Afro-Brazilian religions themselves, the first individuals to invoke the idea of syncretism to analyze the worship of African divinities in Brazil were not Afro-Brazilians or devotees themselves. Although he did not specifically invoke the term *syncretism* or *sincretismo*, Raimundo Nina Rodrigues—the founding figure of Afro-Brazilian studies—did express displeasure at the way pure African traditions were becoming increasingly combined with Catholicism in his seminal work *O animismo fetichista*, and he understood such practice as indicating that Black Baianos could not be true Catholics.[4] While Rodrigues did interestingly identify a complex of Jeje-Nagô traditions as indeed constituting their own religion and objected to their identification as fetishism as a ploy to prevent the guarantee of constitutional protection, he still subscribed to a social Darwinian model in which even

the more "advanced" Nagô/Yoruba were not capable of fully integrating into the Western world.[5]

In the 1940s, a scholarly movement sought to assert and valorize Afro-American history and cultures by identifying features that could be traced back to Africa, disproving notions that these populations had no significant past or culture of their own. The pioneering figure of this movement was Melville Herskovits, and in his seminal work *The Myth of the Negro Past*, which emphasized the cultural "survivals" of African descendants, he makes note of forms of religious syncretism.[6] Over time, Herskovits's ideas were refined and developed. With respect to Afro-Catholic syncretism within the Afro-Brazilian tradition of Candomblé, Rodrigues's student Arthur Ramos combined the former's work with Herskovits's framework, articulating a schema of less evolved traditions/populations assimilating to those of their superiors to whatever degree they were able in a mixture of African survivals and Christianity.[7] However, the most influential figure was the French sociologist Roger Bastide. A true expert on the subject as a result of decades studying and teaching African traditions in Brazil and at Brazilian universities, Bastide produced groundbreaking work. He did so at a critical moment in the mid-twentieth century, when the place of Afro-Brazilians and their culture carried great political weight with respect to their claims on Brazilian citizenship.

Bastide's theories evolved considerably, but perhaps his first major contribution was the idea of "compartmentalization," which referred to Africans and their descendants maintaining two distinct modes of being and thought: one African, the other Western. This approach provided Afro-Brazilians with a legitimate claim to membership in modern Brazilian society while also allowing them to "live simultaneously in two distinct and contradictory worlds: one can thus be a good Catholic while being at the same time a Candomblé adept. The western world and the African world can thereby coexist without mixing."[8] As such, African religious practices and Catholic practices formed a "mosaic": They could co-occur spatially and conceptually but always remained conceptually separate. Bastide placed higher value on this "mosaic" syncretism than "fusional" syncretism because it allowed for greater African cultural and religious survivals (à la Herskovits) and did not encourage mixing and diluting traditions.[9] He also inverted the prejudicial framework of Ramos by valorizing a "pure" Nagô tradition that over time became corrupted by syncretism, rather than Catholicism being degraded by contact with African traditions.[10]

For Bastide, this mosaic syncretism was characteristic of those who maintained ethnically Nagô orixá traditions, while others, particularly Afro-Brazilians of Central African heritage, he considered more of a religious hybrid because

of their less-desirable fusional syncretism.[11] Consequently, Nagô-Catholic syncretism was in fact "fake," or rather a "counter-acculturative" resistance strategy, that served to preserve African traditions by allowing those who carried them to survive in a hostile culture.[12] The metaphor of the mask follows quite naturally from this point, and Bastide asserted that expert practitioners of the tradition recognized that the saints and their associated Catholic rituals were "no more than white masks covering the faces of" Black deities.[13] This, of course, was "a means of distracting the white man's attention and evading his watchful eye, [but was] transformed into the system of . . . correspondences between saints and *orixás*" although they were no more the same than "the blacks are linked with the whites without completely merging with them."[14] This theory certainly fits well with his ideas of compartmentalization and mosaic/false syncretism and provides a generous narrative of African agency, ingenuity, and resistance to an oppressive and racist society. However, it stands curiously at odds with his observations just decades before—and those of Rodrigues and Ramos before that—about the simultaneous and absolute devotion of Afro-Brazilians to both Candomblé and Catholicism.[15]

Nevertheless, Bastide's work has had an immense influence on the understanding *and* practice of syncretism in Afro-diasporic religions. Following Herskovits, the study of syncretism has often been paired with the study of sacred art to demonstrate how the similarities between depictions of Catholic saints and the qualities of African deities guided enslaved Africans toward the idea of religious masks and helped them choose the appropriate mask for each deity.[16] For example, in his excellent study of Haitian Vodou, Leslie Desmangles writes that the lithographs employed by Catholic missionaries likely caused enslaved Haitians to link images of Saint Patrick driving the snakes out of Ireland to the West African snake deity Damballah.[17] Similarly, Saint Lazarus is often associated with the ancient West African deity of smallpox and pestilence Omolu/Obaluaye because of Saint Lazarus's depiction as an old man with open sores.

Consequently, many practitioners of Afro-diasporic traditions have sought to "re-Africanize" their traditions by removing the white masks from their Black gods.[18] Over the past several decades, the process of re-Africanization has become an incredibly important feature of many practitioners' "religious careers," as Alejandro Frigerio puts it, and of the political power struggles between different regions in Brazil and individual temples.[19] Mãe Stella and the iyalorixás' statement in 1983 constituted the most significant moment in the movement to remove the mask, as they called for the complete separation of Catholicism and Candomblé as independent religions on the grounds that the conditions necessitating a syncretic survival strategy were long gone.[20] As Stefania Capone put it,

Bastide's central work presents "a rare case where, well after his death, a scholar's theories continue to live in the practices of those he studied."[21]

Bastide's mask has lived on in academic discourse until the present day, with most scholars who engage with syncretism doing so through his model, even as they might add nuance to it. For example, in *Sincretismo religioso afro-brasileiro* (1977), Waldemar Valente described mosaic syncretism as "only apparent" and as *um disfarce* (a disguise) adopted to deceive Catholic priests and masters.[22] Pierre Verger reiterated this perspective, arguing that only a juxtaposition between saints and orixás existed among the most knowledgeable devotees and that any true mixing was the result of their descendants forgetting or misunderstanding the tradition.[23] Volney Berkenbrock reproduced Bastide's arguments almost verbatim, stating, "These saints were initially just like a mask that was worn on the faces of black Orixás."[24] Stephan Palmié cited African American orisha devotees who argue, like many others, that these masks should now be removed, and although he provides a useful critique of the academic, historical, and social circumstances that influenced this discourse, he invokes the same narrative and model of a mask or "disguise."[25]

Palmié, seeking to nuance the concept of syncretism, stressed that all discourse—and particularly the negative reactions to Afro-Catholic syncretism—is the distinct product of historical, political, and cultural processes. He noted that anthropologists and their writings are particularly complicit in both the scholarly and practical sides of the issue. Consequently, he suggested that the emphasis placed on an unrealistic "purity" is "deeply rooted in modernistic 'projects of purification'" rather than inherent to African and diasporic traditions themselves.[26] The mutual influence of different traditions is simply part and parcel of all religions and has traditionally been accepted in the dominant Afro-Brazilian tradition in Pernambuco (Casa das Minas), but certain leaders and scholars of other traditions (most notably Candomblé) have become concerned with removing Catholic elements to purify or re-Africanize them.[27] In contrast, others have demonstrated that efforts at reforming or reinstating tradition have not done so at the expense of Afro-Catholic syncretism.[28] As Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw demonstrated, the syncretic blending of foreign elements in the classical era was understood in a positive light, as is often the case today with respect to cultural and national identity.[29]

Andrew Apter provided a rejoinder to Herskovits's general and broad schema in two important ways. First, he debunked the idea of an "aboriginal unity," such as Fon or Yoruba ethnic religions, that could be used as a baseline, by demonstrating how they were not unified traditions or ethnicities and were internally highly heterogeneous.[30] Second, and most centrally, Apter agued that rather than

simple resistance, enslaved Africans' participation in Catholicism was a genuine but subversive engagement with colonial hegemony to "harness its power within their universes of discourse."[31] In analyzing the struggle over religious symbols in the Lavagem and Irmandade da Boa Morte, Roger Sansi Roca came closest to challenging the mask model when he questioned if it was necessary to reject outright—as Bastide did—the possibility of a person being sincerely devoted to both Catholicism and Candomblé at the same time.[32]

Through his examination of the complex history of syncretism in Haitian politics, Apter demonstrated that the invocation of syncretism has not always mapped neatly onto the tidy racial and cultural borders often associated with discourse centered around resistance (oppressed/oppressor, elite/popular, Black/white).[33] Furthermore, he rightly drew attention to the fact that "West Africa's contribution to the African diaspora lies not merely in specific ritual symbols and forms, but also in the *interpretive practices* that generate their meanings."[34] My intention is similar to Apter's in that I enlist West African interpretive practices to revise a prominent theory of syncretism, although I focus on Bastide's theory of the mask and apply a Yoruba theological and ontological approach rather than the sociological approach used by most other scholars.

The theory of the mask has become the dominant paradigm for understanding Afro-Catholic syncretism and has given rise to a historical perspective still taught to undergraduates at colleges and to practitioners alike. Pierre Verger, perhaps the most prolific and influential scholar on Brazilian Candomblé and Black Atlantic religious traditions and a practitioner-traveler-scholar himself, described this process in the following manner:

> Le synchrétisme afro-catholique, qui à l'origine n'était qu'un masque, est devenue plus sincère. Les nouvelles générations "créoles" considèrent déjà que le "Saint" et le "Orișa" ne sont qu'un, que le nom seul change, mais que suivant le lieu ou le moment il est bon de s'adresser à lui en latin ou dans une langue d'Afrique.
>
> Afro-Catholic syncretism, which initially was only a mask, has become more sincere. The younger "creole" generations already consider the "saint" and the "orișa" to be one, only the name changes, but depending on the place or the time it is useful to address the spirit in Latin or in an African language.[35]

Hence, the first generation of Africans in Brazil developed an ingenious strategy of resisting conversion and fooling white authorities while preserving their ancestral traditions. However, later generations were not so diligent in maintaining the compartmentalization of the very distinct categories of orixá and saint. This

is why some erroneously believed that they were, in fact, one and the same—an error their African forebears would never have made, at least not according to this theory.[36]

Because elite Candomblé practitioners are well-versed in the literature produced on their traditions and are often the very source of the information and perspectives in that literature, it is unsurprising that the iyalorixás' statement in 1983 drew directly from Bastide's theory of compartmentalization and the mask and that they invoked this historical narrative. Part of their follow-up letter read:

> Durante a escravidão o sincretismo foi necessário para a nossa sobrevivência; agora, em suas decorrências e manifestações públicas, gente de santo, ialorixás realizando lavagem nas igrejas, saindo das camarinhas para as missas etc, nos descaracterizam como religião, dando margem ao uso da mesma como coisa exótica, folclore, turismo.
>
> During slavery, syncretism was necessary for our survival; now, in its occurrence and public manifestation, devotees, ialorixás participating in washing churches, leaving camarinhas [ritual initiation associated with Umbanda] for mass, etc., undermines our status as a religion, allowing it to be used and relegated to the role of something exotic, folklore, and tourism.[37]

From this perspective, syncretism between orixás and Catholic saints was a necessary self-preservation strategy that had outlived its purpose and now actively held the religion back from taking its rightful place in Brazilian society and the wider world. Mãe Stella herself said she believed the number of people mixing Catholicism and Candomblé has "already decreased greatly" since her statement because people understand that it was no longer necessary.[38] Another prominent leader in Candomblé and my primary informant, Doté Amilton Costa, shares Mãe Stella's perspective and asserted, "We used them [saints] to preserve our deities. There is no way I can say that Santa Bárbara is Iansã. Iansã already existed when Santa Bárbara was alive. The people of Candomblé . . . realized the similarities between them and would use Santa Bárbara to praise Iansã in order to fool the white people. . . . If we have our traditions today, it is thanks to them [the saints]."[39]

Two younger practitioners, both good friends of mine, explained that they thought the first generation of Africans clearly knew the saints and African deities were different, but people lost direct knowledge of how the religion functioned in Africa, creating the attachment to syncretism. However, one cited an existential reason why he personally was not in favor of syncretism: "If it continues, after a while people will forget who Iansã is and Santa Bárbara will take

over because of the general Catholic hegemony in society, which could very well mean that Iansã could be forgotten." For him, this would make it "appear that Candomblé is not a religion, but a variation of the other [Catholicism]."[40] Another young babalorixá and son of Exu expressed his support for moving beyond syncretism despite his grandmother rejecting the separation of the saints from orixá. He adopted this stance because his orixá, Exu, is syncretized with the devil, an association that has greatly contributed to prejudice against his orixá and Candomblé.[41] Many younger Candomblé practitioners, such as this son of Exu, are likely to distance Candomblé from Catholicism, but the older generation, such as his grandmother, strongly resists the idea.

Still, all the abovementioned interviewees were quite clear about not viewing Catholicism in a negative light. On the contrary, Doté Amilton is quite proud that Brazil, and Salvador in particular, have some of the most beautiful churches in the world, and he still keeps many Catholic ritual objects in his terreiro—but not in the main ritual areas—because they are part of his sacred history and were of central ritual importance to his ancestors. Similarly, after announcing her position on syncretism, Mãe Stella removed all Catholic images from the ritual areas of Opô Afonjá and placed them in a museum with a copy of the statement made by her and the other iyalorixás. This was an ingenious way to acknowledge Catholicism as an important part of their past and history, while removing it from their present sacred ritual sphere and literally and symbolically placing it in a cultural and historical setting. Again, Doté Amilton stressed that he believes those who know Candomblé's past and care about its present and future should have great respect and appreciation for Catholic saints because "it was through them that our religion was saved and transmitted to us today."[42]

Although this position of progression beyond syncretism is remarkably deliberate and clear about serving tangible goals in the interest of their entire religious community, not all practitioners agreed with it in the 1980s, and not all agree today. It is primarily the elite who adopt this perspective, and many initiates with whom I spoke seemed confused at the suggestion that Santa Bárbara might not be the same person as Iansã. On August 5, 1983, the president of FEBCAB (Bahian Federation of the Afro-Brazilian Cult/Worship) issued a statement that they were *not* against syncretism, and several other statements in favor of the practice were issued around the same time.[43] There is a strong generational component to perspectives on syncretism, with younger practitioners being much more likely to identify it as a problem and older practitioners more likely to understand it as perfectly natural. Particularly because the anti-syncretic position and perspective have been so well studied while the voice of those in favor of syncretism has received little if any scholarly attention, the potential complications

with the Bastidian mask and the subsequent historical narrative that relies so heavily on it deserve more attention and analysis.

Pro-Syncretism

I should begin by stating that I have no intention to support any particular stance as more "correct," "orthodox," or "African" than another. I hope to balance the conversation around syncretism by offering a serious analysis of well-defined positions and by illuminating how the issue of syncretism has affected and is affected by a subtle shift from orixá devotion in Candomblé as a complex of forms of worship to a unified religion. Particularly because the true intentions and perspectives of the first generation of Africans to arrive in Salvador are so central to the narrative of the mask, I will also bring contemporary orișa specialists from Ẹdẹ into the conversation, as they have never left Yorubaland, are ethnically Ọyọ (like many of the first Nagô to arrive in Salvador), and can provide valuable insight and comparative perspective.

The thorny but productive issue that deeply troubled Bastide and caused him to develop and constantly refine his models of compartmentalization and the mask was simply, Can Afro-Brazilians truly be Catholic while worshipping African deities? In an uncommonly generous article on the issue of syncretism in the history and practice of the Lavagem do Bonfim (one of the most iconic Afro-Brazilian festivals in Salvador and examples of Afro-Catholic syncretism), Roger Sansi Roca asks, "Could we consider the possibility that the devotees were Catholic and Candomblé practitioners at one and the same time? Perhaps Bastide, thinking it impossible to be one thing and another all at once, was following the discourse of the Church, when it suspected that popular Catholicism was 'in fact' a mask for fetishism and paganism."[44] Bastide himself acknowledged this difficulty when he noted that orixá devotees still voluntarily identified themselves as Christians.[45] He admitted he "devoted almost the whole of one of [his] stays in Bahia and Recife [likely in the 1950s] to this problem, yet, as [his] studies progressed, [he] found that so far as the Negro was concerned it was nonexistent; it was a pseudoproblem."[46] The potential conflict between worshipping the orixás alongside the saints or sincerely performing rituals in a terreiro and a church did not concern or occur to many of his informants. Bastide realized this was because he "had been reasoning according to the logic of Western thought," and "he had forced [his] black friends to step outside their own mentality for a moment and assume [his]."[47]

His is a strikingly honest and self-reflective observation, which led him to look to psychology for a better framework, and ultimately develop the theory

of compartmentalized syncretism. However, I would argue that the aspect of Western thought which turned a "pseudoproblem" into a complex issue that he could not fully explain was his assumption that the category of "religion" had salience in the lives of his interlocutors. If his Afro-Brazilian informants operated within a system of forms of worship rather than mutually exclusive religions, they would certainly have had to step outside their own cultural and religious framework even to be able to answer his questions to his satisfaction. The theory of the mask is built firmly on the structure of syncretism, but if one no longer views Catholicism and the worship of the orixás as two separate religions, or one even abandons the notion of religion altogether, the fundamental framework of syncretism itself begins to fall away. Consequently, without a conception of discrete religions that must be "compartmentalized" or used to mask one another, it becomes easier to understand the fluid way many people in Brazil (and Yorubaland) operate with great conviction in multiple religious traditions, much to the bewilderment of both religious leaders and insightful scholars such as Bastide.

Some of Bastide's observations directly complicated or contradicted his own theories and thus generated telling efforts at explanation. He documented how the enslaved workers in rural farms would "rush to catch as much [holy water] as possible" when priests came to bless mills in April, "for they believed that this water had magical protective powers."[48] Moreover, even the quilombos (maroon societies that functioned autonomously in the bush) maintained at least a certain type of Catholicism despite being freed from Portuguese authority; many Africans voluntarily shared aspects of Catholicism with indigenous Brazilians; and in defending the virginity of Iemanjá, one devotee insisted that despite her virginity, she could still be the mother of all of the orixás by identifying her with Mary, the Virgin Mother.[49] Iyalorixás and babalorixás were fond of telling Bastide that "as Brazilians we are obliged to worship the saints of the church too—especially as they are the same spirits under different names."[50] He likened this kind of tautology to a child stating that the wind is the wind, which needs no further explanation, and the Afro-Brazilian failure to see any problem with responding to the question, "Why is Iansã Santa Bárbara?" with "Because she's the same" caused him to seek complex theories for a phenomenon that seemed self-explanatory and fundamental to practitioners. Again, Bastide was fascinatingly aware of the vast differences in perspective between him as a Westerner and his Afro-Brazilian informants. In another place he remarked that "the blacks inevitably conceived of Christianity in terms of their own conceptions of the sacred, just as their masters conceived of the African religions in terms of the Manichean dualism between God and the Devil."[51]

Particularly given the many similarities between Roman Catholicism and the worship of the orișa in Yorubaland that others observed, it seems natural that recently arrived Nagô would understand Catholicism within the frameworks they brought with them, just as Bastide worked with the tools of "religion" and "syncretism" that he inherited.[52] Rodrigues—whose work was so influential on Bastide's and focused on those who had come directly from Africa—was quick to note that whether Black Baianos had embraced Christianity or Islam, the new faith simply took on the influence of their previous practices.[53] This mere "illusion" of conversion did not negate their "profound devotion to the level of sacrifice and fanaticism."[54] While this could perhaps have been simply a ruse, the above examples suggest that even recently arrived Africans may not have been able to or interested in peeling away their practice of Catholicism like a mask. One elderly woman who sells ritual objects outside the Basilica of Nosso Senhor do Bonfim informed me that her grandmother, who taught her all about the worship of the orixás, came from Africa, was quite devout in her practice of Catholicism, and certainly did not consider it to be a mere mask that concealed her true religiosity.[55]

Catholic Forms of Worship

Evidently, there is more than one way to interpret how and why the first generation of Afro-Brazilians chose to engage with Catholicism and the veneration of Catholic saints. If they had no concept of separate religions that should not be combined but were instead familiar with multiple different forms of worship that could be modified to fit their specific needs, it seems sensible that they might identify devotion to a particular saint as simply the new society's way of worshipping a force they knew as an African deity. After all, it was not uncommon for this exact process to take place in Yorubaland during that time.

Evidence from precolonial Yorubaland demonstrates that the worship of each individual orișa often interacted with that of others in fascinating ways. Peel has demonstrated how the tradition of Ogun (the orișa of iron, war, the hunt, and agriculture) has gone through a bewildering array of changes across time and space. First, there is significant evidence that snakes used to be a prominent symbol of the orișa and prominent in the lives and rituals of his devotees, but this association has now all but disappeared.[56] Furthermore, when Orișa Oko, an orișa of agriculture like Ogun, arrived in some areas where Ogun was already present, this new orișa had to cede the realm of agriculture to him and take over the realm of healing and protection instead.[57] In other cases where

deities overlapped sufficiently, they were interchanged or merged. For example, Erinlẹ, another orisa of the hunt, has sometimes been interchanged with Ogun in both ritual and mythology, and the elephant symbolism in Ogun's tradition may have been adopted from that of Erinlẹ.[58] The two were so close in nature that Abiọdun, the celebrated ruler of the Ọyọ Empire, merged the tradition of Erinlẹ with his mother's tradition of Ogun.[59] The justification for such a synthesis of forms of worship is that "the attributes of the two figures are interchangeable in several dimensions . . . [and] in significant respects [they] occupy a large overlapping segment of the same cosmological domain."[60]

Ogun is not the only deity to have absorbed the tradition of a strikingly similar orisa. One of the most famous orisa today is Ṣango, the royal deity of lightning and patron of the Ọyọ Empire, and he has made a habit of incorporating other similar forms of worship into his own. The sacred day on which he receives sacrifices and praise is called Jakuta's day, alluding to the fact that the day was initially dedicated to the ancient orisa Jakuta, also associated with thunder and fighting with thunderstones.[61] The worship of Ṣango has also become fused with the traditions of another ancient deity of lightning and fire named Ọramfẹ, and this amalgamation of several different traditions into Ṣango's is also present in the Cuban orisa tradition called Santería, or Regla de Ocha.[62] Similarly, while the orisa Yẹmọja is and lives in the River Ogun in Yorubaland, when her tradition was brought to the Americas, she commonly adopted the domains and traditions of Olokun, the orisa of the ocean, in the absence of her anchoring natural feature.

When two orisa who share the same or very similar cosmological domains encountered each other, their particular forms of worship were commonly combined. If the new orisa had additional qualities or domains, as in the case of Orisa Oko, these would become its new central or defining characteristics, while everything else would be absorbed by the more prominent orisa. This occurs because the respective traditions constitute alternative ways of performing the same type of worship, not as categorically different religions. As similar forms of worship to potentially interchangeable deities, it made sense to merge them, particularly when both were understood to be ritually effective. What mattered was the part of life and the cosmos they addressed rather than their origins, names, or even their particular beliefs or rituals.

This common practice of fusing forms of worship can also be explained by the perception of the orisa as not simply ruling over specific domains, such as iron, hunting, and justice in the case of Ogun. They simply *are* those natural phenomena, aspects of life, or activities themselves. Hence, a sacrifice made on iron is made to Ogun because within the traditional Yoruba ontological system

Ogun himself *is* iron. Consequently, when Alaafin Abiọdun received one tradition of interacting with the hunt and iron from his mother (Ogun) and another from his father (Erinlẹ), he understood them as compatible ways of interacting with the same aspects of life that had previously been developed in different contexts, so he joined them together. Furthermore, from a functional standpoint, the Yoruba engaged in a similar process when reciting or composing the oriki (praise poetry) of the orișa. When elements of another orișa's oriki also articulate the nature of a devotee's specific orișa, the devotee will simply borrow and repurpose them. As Barber put it, "This results in a kind of floating and overlapping of identities. The result is paradoxical. The unique individual evoked by the intensely personal and intimate oriki is actually a composite, who participates in others' identities, subsuming them into his own."[63] Similarly, because devotees often turn to their patron orișa for all their needs, they at times appropriate aspects of other orișa traditions in these specific areas.[64]

If Nagô in Brazil identified and understood the traditions of Catholic saints in the same way that Abiọdun and others understood the traditions of Ogun and Erinlẹ as ritually analogous, they likely perceived similar forms of worship developed in different geographical and cultural contexts. Without addressing indigenous Yoruba ontology, Berkenbrock perceived that for many Afro-Brazilians, the relevant question about the nature of saints and orixás was not their historical, geographic, or cultural origins (how they are generally theorized and their differences reinforced in academic literature), but rather the functional and cosmological question of what they "do."[65] The former auxiliary bishop of the Diocese of Salvador, Dom Boaventura Kloppenburg, observed that the orixás were indeed similar to the saints "in the principle of mediation" between humans and God.[66] Berkenbrock went a step further to say Catholic elements and Afro-Brazilian traditions were "from the functionalist point of view . . . integrated."[67] This could also explain why some orixás were associated with saints whose iconography has little in common with their respective African traditions.

For example, the curious pairing in Salvador of Ogum (Portuguese for Ogun) as the orixá of war with Santo Antônio makes little sense given that Santo Antônio was a peaceful monk and is traditionally depicted gently cradling the infant Jesus. However, if one considers the historical context of Santo Antônio's official status as an officer in the Brazilian colonial army and his function as the patron saint of soldiers in the region, his traditions could be understood not as part of an alien religion but as the local form of worship in the domain of war. From this perspective, it seems natural that Santo Antônio's traditions would be combined with those of Ogum, just as Abiọdun combined Ogun's traditions with those of Erinlẹ. Similarly, although the orixá Omolu is usually syncretized

with Saint Lazarus or Saint Rocco, likely because of the presence of disease and plague in their iconography, in Pernambuco he was linked with the warrior Saint Sebastian. This is because Saint Sebastian is invoked there against the spread of contagious disease, the cosmological domain of Omolu.[68]

Surprisingly few scholars have compared the perspectives of orișa/orixá devotees on both sides of the Atlantic on this issue, and their words and insights support the understanding of mutually intelligible, correlative forms of worship rather than compartmentalization and masks. Such a comparative approach is particularly helpful because orișa devotees in Nigeria without much exposure to Catholicism might react very similarly to how the Nagô may have reacted to the traditions of saints when they first arrived in Brazil. Although contemporary orișa devotees have indeed been exposed to Islam and Christianity, the vast majority of nineteenth-century Nagô would have been exposed to Islam by the time they had arrived in Brazil. Subsequent exposure to Christianity as a separate religion would likely only make contemporary devotees more likely to understand their traditions and Christianity as distinct. Furthermore, similarities between contemporary orișa/orixá devotees in both places would strongly indicate a similar religious disposition, particularly if it mirrors the preceding historical information.

In Their Own Words

I showed some images of the festival of Santa Bárbara in Salvador to the knowledgeable chief priest of Șango in Ẹdẹ, Șangoniyi Șangosogo (see figure 5.1). Specifically, I was interested in his interpretations because Santa Bárbara is associated with the Yoruba orixá Iansã—primarily called Ọya in Nigeria—whose tradition is inextricably linked to that of her husband, Șango/Xangô. I simply asked him what he thought the people in the photographs were doing and provided no additional framing apart from explaining that it was a holiday in Brazil. His response was remarkably insightful.

Upon seeing the procession, the statues of Santa Bárbara, all the people dressed in red, and some of the ceremonial offerings of food, he said, "This must be a festival of either Șango, Ọya, Șoponna, or Ogun." Then I showed him a lithograph of Santa Bárbara (see figure 5.2, right), and he said, "Ah! Ọya ni!" (This is Ọya!) Surprised by how quickly he identified Santa Bárbara *as* Ọya, I asked him if it was not a problem that Santa Bárbara was a white woman, to which he replied, "Lots of white people come here to get initiated into her worship. It is very much possible!" He became even more certain in his identification after hearing how Santa Bárbara's oppressors were struck down by lightning, so I

FIGURE 5.1. Santa Bárbara procession in Salvador, 2014. Photograph by the author.

FIGURE 5.2. Iansã and Santa Bárbara. From Twitter post by FINCØ, December 4, 2022, https://x.com/finco/status/1599405058495434752.

finally told him many Yoruba people traveled to the country in the photographs long ago and asked if he would have thought the woman in the lithograph were Ọya if he had encountered the worship of her with them. He said, "Ha, emi ni igbagbọ pe Ọya ni" (Ha, I believe it/she is Ọya), and then he surprised me by citing an additional reason for believing this was the case: her smooth, radiant face, which is also a quintessential characteristic of Ọya.

Chief Ṣangosogo was fascinated by the images and immediately identified Santa Bárbara *as* Ọya, not merely as similar to her. At one point he insisted Ọya is in fact storm winds, so if storm winds brought lightning to kill her enemies, that must be Ọya. For him, the shared physical and cosmological qualities between Ọya and Santa Bárbara make them one and the same because Ọya does not simply possess these qualities, she *is* these qualities in every form they manifest themselves.[69] His comments and the close parallels to the responses recorded by Bastide made me reflect on the alternative ontology at work here. Any historical, cultural, geographic, or religious differences between Santa Bárbara and Ọya were unimportant for Chief Ṣangosogo, because the two are of the same substance, which makes them one and the same.[70] Invoking a similar logic, Chief Ṣangosogo also informed me—as related in chapter 2—on another occasion that Christians worship Ṣango as well, but they depict Ṣango with wings. I was confused at first, but I eventually realized that he might have been referring to an angel, and he confirmed that Christians call him Michael. He recognized Saint Michael the archangel as the Christian form of Ṣango because he flies in the air and carries a flaming sword to strike down evil, uniting both figures in cosmic position and function. The division between traditional Yoruba religion and Christianity seemed utterly irrelevant to him when it came to determining the nature of the phenomenon or person.

Upon returning to Ẹdẹ from the Lavagem, I had the opportunity to learn from the Ajagẹmọ, or chief priest of the orisa Orisanla, called Oxalá in Brazil. Because many Candomblé practitioners identify Nosso Senhor do Bonfim as Oxalá and understand the Lavagem as a festival in his honor, I thought I would ask his opinion on this perspective, paying particular attention to the fact that it was originally a Christian ritual. After I provided a brief description of the Lavagem, he stated that of course it was a ceremony for Orisanla. It is because they are venerating him that they can fill up the church and attract so many people. I told him about an old woman there who told me Jesus and Orisanla were the same, and I asked him if an orisa could possibly be the founder of Christianity. He was, perhaps unsurprisingly, unfazed by her statement, and then sang a song about how Orisanla climbed up a tree called Ọgẹgẹ and gathered all people and religious traditions/ẹsin (including Islam and Christianity) underneath it. He

even suggested that if one is attentive to the similarities between Orișanla's tradition and Islam, one might realize that they are the same.

The Ajagẹmọ is named Tijani Adeleke, and, as his name indicates, he is also a Muslim.[71] In addition, he informed me that based on what we know about Islam, the Prophet, and the ideal characteristics of Muslims, Orișanla was also an alfa! For the Ajagẹmọ, the fact that a ritual is explicitly Christian, or that certain features or characteristics are identified as Muslim, does not preclude the ritual from simultaneously being part of Orișanla's tradition. While I am unsure if he meant to allude to Jesus hanging from a tree/cross, he understands Orișanla's tradition to be like a tree that is expansive enough to embrace both Islam and Christianity underneath its branches. As a peace-loving possessor and dispenser of wisdom clad in long white robes, Orișanla is all of those things wherever and however they may appear.[72]

I also discussed this issue with the Araba of Modakẹkẹ, or chief priest of Ifa, the orișa of wisdom and divination. I once described the Greek god Zeus to him—his fiery temper, his powerful lightning bolts, his position as king of the gods, and so on—and the Araba immediately stated that it was Ṣango. I pushed back by emphasizing that Zeus lived in Greece, has a different name, is white, and has different traditions associated with him, but this argument did not impress the Araba at all. First, he responded, "Do you think people in that land would give their orișa a Yoruba name? They do not speak Yoruba, and everyone in that land is white, so he has to be white, and they will have to give him one of their own names." Second, he pointed out that everyone eats different foods depending on where they are in the world, and orișa are the same with their offerings, music, and other traditions. Third, because he had taught me a great deal about the mythology associated with the tradition of Ifa, he asked, "Don't you remember that Ọrunmila was reincarnated in several places at different times? Didn't he live in Mecca? Doesn't he have many names?" suggesting that Ṣango could also be (re)incarnated in Greece, could take a Greek name, and could adopt a somewhat different appearance without changing his nature.[73]

For these orișa priests, religious distinctions such as Christian or Muslim did not constitute salient categories for conceptualizing or organizing religious action or affiliation. The attributes and cosmological position and function of a particular tradition were much more important. Regardless of the historical, cultural, or even "religious" origins of the tradition, if they overlapped sufficiently, the priests recognized them as the same type or form of worship, which could thus be integrated just as forms of worship venerating the divine hunter (be he Ogun or Erinlẹ) can easily be merged. This does not negate the observation many have made, following Herskovits, that physical resemblances between

representations of the saints and African deities were critical in the process of syncretism; in fact, physical features are precisely what Chief Ṣangosogo, and to a lesser extent the Ajagẹmọ, cited as proof of the shared identity of saints and orişa/orixá. These similarities were the most readily apparent and immediate means to ascertain the more decisive cosmological and ontological congruity between the two. They were not, however, the only means, as physically incongruent figures such as Ogum and Santo Antônio demonstrate. This type of thinking about forms of worship and cosmological domains rather than "religions" was mirrored quite closely by orixá devotees in Brazil.

At the beginning of the procession of the Lavagem, which takes place in a Catholic church, I met a wonderful Baiana whose identity as an orixá devotee was immediately apparent from her beads and dress. Her name is Dona Iraci, and she has overseen several terreiros (Candomblé temples) for more than forty years. On the front steps of the church, she began explaining to me that Jesus and Oxalá were the same and kindly agreed to speak more about the matter in an interview. When I asked how she knew Jesus and Oxalá were one and the same, I was surprised her answer had nothing to do with the appearance or material culture of either figure, but rather with their theology—with which she had a deep familiarity. Her initial response to the question was almost an offhand statement: "It is the mythology of the orixás."[74] When I asked for an example, she stated that Oxalá is the "father of all of the orixás and all of humanity." Then, she alluded to the Gospel of John, in which the whole world was created through Jesus, and to a Yoruba myth in which the whole world was created through Oxalá; in both theological systems, Jesus and Oxalá were, she explained, the first person "in the beginning." Although the thought had never occurred to me, it is true that Oxalá is the orixá of creation and, in addition to having been tasked with the creation of the world in Yoruba mythology, he forms each human being.

When I asked whether it concerned her that Nosso Senhor do Bonfim (crucified Jesus) was white and did not come from Africa like Oxalá, she looked confused at first and then shook her head saying, "Não, não, não." I asked for clarification, and she said that what *is* important is the type of faith cultivated within the tradition and that prayer to either is heard by the same spirit. She further clarified that Nosso Senhor do Bonfim is only a name ("só o nome"), but Jesus and Oxalá are the same person ("a mesma pessoa"). For Mãe Iraci, the connection between Jesus and Oxalá is based on a deep familiarity with the nature and theology of each figure, which led her to understand them as one and the same regardless of their worldly origins. In her mind, Jesus could not serve simply as a mask to cover Oxalá because they are one cosmologically.[75]

Maria da Conceição Carvalho works outside the Basilica of Nosso Senhor do Bonfim in Salvador, and while she is no longer heavily involved in Candomblé, she possesses a wealth of knowledge about it and Catholicism because she grew up surrounded by both traditions. She immediately affirmed that Jesus and Oxalá were the same person and argued that they have different names because people acquire different names in different contexts as a result of their actions and abilities. She offered the example of Santo Antônio, whose original name was Fernando: Antônio and Fernando are still the same person much like Santo Antônio and Ogum are. I asked if she thought the first Africans brought to Brazil really believed that the saints and orixás were the same, or if they simply used the saints as a mask to allow them to continue their traditions. Before I could finish, she interjected that they absolutely believed the two were the same and that it was not merely a survival strategy. Then she provided a rather astonishing explanation. Her grandmother taught her "the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is the same God. . . . The Three are the same Person," and the saints and orixás operate in a similar way. Senhora Conceição has no doubt in her mind about the unity of saints and orixás despite any apparent differences, and in a fascinating manner she employed Nicene Trinitarian theology learned from her grandmother (herself a powerful orixá devotee and Catholic) to explain the validity of Catholic-Candomblé syncretism![76]

While many prominent figures in Candomblé strongly denounce this blending of Candomblé and Catholicism, clearly a considerable number of knowledgeable practitioners and priestesses remain unconcerned with the boundaries of different "religions," and are far more concerned about the nature and domain of particular forms of worship. On the other hand, it seems not only prominent figures but also the younger generation of orixá devotees object to this perspective. Mãe Iraci became visibly upset when I asked her why this was the case, and Ekedi Ernice—another Baiana who takes part in the official procession of the Lavagem every year—agreed that fewer and fewer people practice Catholicism and Candomblé together. According to her, "some now believe only in Candomblé and others now only believe in Catholicism, but this is not the way it should be."[77] Their attitude is likely because the younger generation has only ever lived in a context where the most prominent members of their religious traditions vocally insist on Candomblé's status as a religion as a reaction to discrimination from the church and secular government. Like Mãe Iraci, her fellow orișa specialists in Nigeria were quick to identify saints either as (or as another form of) specific African deities. This shared perspective and lack of concern for divisions between Christianity and the worship of Yoruba orixás/orișa demonstrates a

shared religious orientation that is reminiscent of the Yoruba history of combining similar traditions without cause for concern. With this perspective in mind, several aspects of Candomblé and its history that do not perfectly fit Bastide's dominant theory of syncretism become more intelligible.

Joint Worship and Rituals

From the perspective of parallel forms of worship that may be integrated rather than of separate religions, several rituals linked to or interwoven with Catholicism become much easier to understand than they are under the mask model. For example, the integration of the Virgin Mary in prayers that also include the orixás, and particularly the interchangeable use of names of saints and their corresponding African deities in ritual songs, are like adding material to the orișa's oriki.[78] Another ritual that historically formed an important part of even revered "traditional" Candomblé houses is the dia da romaria in which recent initiates were taken to a Catholic church to celebrate mass, after which there was a public party for friends and family, and then a conclusion of the initiation at the terreiro.[79] The most common location for this pilgrimage was the Basilica of Nosso Senhor do Bonfim.[80] It seems odd that devotees of African deities would voluntarily undergo a pilgrimage to a prominent Catholic church as part of secret initiation rituals if they could easily complete them behind closed doors without having to add this extra step. If, however, this basilica was perceived as a powerful ritual site that could help in important ways with the formation of a devotee and offer an opportunity to worship the orixás, this practice seems quite natural. This could also help to explain the great popularity and centrality of the Lavagem of Nosso Senhor do Bonfim: He is the patron saint of the city (much like Ṣango in Ẹdẹ), the basilica is his most important ritual site, and the Lavagem has become one of the greatest public celebrations in Salvador (perhaps exceeded only by Carnaval).[81] On a related note, even today, in the ritual calendars of Candomblé houses, there is a suspension of festivals during the Lenten period, which we will see closely parallels the suspension of orișa festivals during Ramadan in Ẹdẹ.[82]

The Catholic brotherhoods (irmandades) enjoyed a great deal of popularity from the moment of their inception in the mid to late eighteenth century, and scholars are practically unanimous about the sincerity of Africans' and Afro-Brazilians' involvement in them. Because slaveholders took little interest in the Catholic religious training of their enslaved laborers, the church encouraged participation in the brotherhoods and the tradition of the saints affiliated with them. Over time, as Afro-Brazilians had more agency in the operations of these brotherhoods, they were more able to make what they wanted out of Catholicism

in these contexts.[83] Experience in the irmandades was one of the most important sources of Afro-Catholic syncretism in Brazil, and Parés documented how the belief members had in their efficacy demonstrates that "participation in the brotherhoods was not merely a façade or a means of hiding their 'true' beliefs, for devotion to the saints was also an integral part of their religiosity."[84]

Roca also observed that the sisters of the immensely popular and famous Irmandade da Boa Morte in Cachoeira, Bahia, are all deeply immersed in Candomblé but have never claimed that Catholicism serves as a mask for them. The particular type of religiosity expressed by the sisters (particularly the older members) and the popularity and tourist attention that they gained troubled Catholic authorities, who tried to bring them more closely in line with official Catholic orthodoxy. This resulted in a serious conflict with several legal implications and the intervention of international players. While the church and sisterhood have made amends, during the whole incident, the sisters simply found a different priest who would administer the sacraments to them, rather than break with the church entirely.[85]

Mythology

Just as the Ifa corpus in Ẹdẹ absorbed and indigenized certain aspects and narratives from Islam, Christian narratives have also been reinterpreted from a traditional Yoruba perspective in Candomblé. In much the same way as some who embrace syncretism describe the orixás as having taken on new cultural forms in the contexts of saints, Bastide describes Yoruba myths and stories as having taken on the trappings of Brazilian society through features such as mermaids, knights in shining armor, and women locked in towers. Additionally, he cites a merged myth about a specific manifestation of Xangô not descending because he is Saint John the Baptist who sleeps on his feast day.[86] Pierson also recorded a story in which Xapanã, the orixá of smallpox and pestilence, lived in Venice and returned to his father's house covered in sores only to be turned away because he identified himself as Lazarus. Eventually he identified himself as Xapanã, said God had given him the name Lazarus, and confirmed his identity by singing in his native Nagô/Yoruba.[87] This story is fascinating because it not only demonstrates the clear identification of Xapanã *as* Lazarus and of the new name being given to him by God Himself but also demonstrates the perfect acceptability of an ostensibly white man in Venice being an orixá who speaks Yoruba in addition to Italian.[88]

Pierre Verger published a collection of myths taken from the corpus of Dilogum (as the Yoruba Ẹẹrindinlogun, or cowrie-shell divination, is called in Brazil) and written down by a Yoruba woman, Agripina Souza, in Rio de Janeiro in

1928 or 1948. With respect to Afro-Catholic syncretism, one myth stands out as particularly telling. A couple had two sons, the elder preferred by the father and the younger by the mother. When the parents were instructed to perform a sacrifice for the elder son, the mother performed it instead on behalf of the younger. To avoid conflict between them, the father sent the younger son away to his maternal uncle, where he cared for the cattle. The boy's uncle said he would compensate the boy for his service by giving him each cow born with white spots, thinking he would get the better of his nephew. However, in a dream Exu instructed the boy to rub the cattle with special rods at noontime when they came to the water to drink. The boy followed Exu's instructions, and the newborn cattle had white spots. Perceiving that his uncle might be jealous of his success, the boy returned home. The elder brother visited a babalaô, who instructed him to make a sacrifice with a cutlass to improve his lot in life, so the younger brother, worried that his newfound wealth might be confiscated, divided his herd and sent it in different directions. When the two met, the younger offered the elder whatever he could see (knowing that the majority of his wealth was hidden from view), and they both went home happy. Agripina concluded the story by stating, "from this tale emerge the twelve tribes of the beginning of the world."[89]

Although the names of the brothers are never mentioned, this narrative is clearly a retelling of the story of Jacob and Esau within a traditional Yoruba cosmology. The success of the younger brother over the elder was explained by the altered performance of a ritual sacrifice, and because of this sacrifice, Exu was grafted in as the one who provided Jacob with the power necessary to trick his uncle and build his wealth. It preserves most of the important details from the biblical account, including the preferences of the parents, Jacob needing to flee to his uncle Laban, the use of rods in the mating of the cattle, Jacob splitting up his herd for fear that his brother would take them, the brothers' ultimate reconciliation, and the recognition of Jacob as the father of the twelve tribes of Israel.[90] Clearly, Christian sacred history did not constitute a separate, competing set of narratives, but rather additional information that could be slightly altered in order to fit into the ritual practice of Nagô/Yoruba divination.[91] The same could be done with respect to other rituals involving the saints, and this is true not only of Christianity.

Interactions with Islam

Although this topic has understandably received less attention than Afro-Catholic syncretism, the dynamics of Afro-Muslim syncretism also shed light on how Africans in Brazil reacted to and interacted with other religious traditions. Because

white Brazilian society considered Islam a serious threat to colonial order and actively surveilled and persecuted Muslims, there ostensibly seems little need to incorporate Islamic practices into Afro-Brazilian worship, and certainly not as any type of mask or disguise. However, Reis noted that an integration of Islamic elements is precisely what happened.[92] It was quite common for African-born non-Muslims to patronize Muslims who prepared amulets drawn directly from their West African traditions, and many enslaved Muslims earned significant money doing so.[93] Much as the names of saints and orixás were interchanged in ritual songs, Allah and Islam were referenced in songs from the prominent terreiro of Gantois.[94] Bastide recorded some Muslims observing the festivals of their compatriots and sometimes even incorporating Catholic and traditional Nagô/Jeje elements in divination.[95] As I argued about the practice of orișa traditions in Yorubaland, under a system of forms of worship, participation in festivals and solicitation of ritual help from different traditions was both acceptable and sometimes even prescribed, and it seems logical that West Africans coming from such a background would make similar choices in Brazil.

To take syncretism a step further, Bastide also recorded a babalaô who was referred to as "Mussurumi," and a former Yoruba ọba given the name Luis Felisberto da Silva Couve who practiced Islam and was an Ifa priest as well.[96] This strongly suggests a parallel with the common occurrence in West Africa of babalawo who also identified as Muslims at the time.[97] Furthermore, Reis documented a charm written half in Arabic and half in Latin, whose Latin section contained text from the *Song of Songs*, indicating both a relatively high level of education in Muslim and Christian traditions and their associated sacred languages, and also willingness to incorporate aspects of Christian sacred power.[98] In a move incomprehensible from a perspective of exclusive religions, the União das Seitas Afro-Brasileiras da Bahia (an umbrella organization for all African-derived religious groups formed to consolidate social and political power to address their persecution) once even listed "a Candomblé of the Mussurumim nation."[99] Verger observed that there were Muslim members of the Catholic brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary, which again suggests a willingness to engage with Catholicism even when a mask might not be needed because Muslim members were less likely than Christians to also worship African deities.[100] Despite the need for a mask, interactions occurred in both directions. Devotees of the orixás eagerly sought out Muslim rituals, incorporated aspects of Islam into their ritual practice, and perhaps even identified as Muslim, while some Muslims incorporated aspects of Christianity and traditional African practices into theirs, and this was fascinatingly also the case for Muslims who resettled in major cities along the West African coast.[101]

The narrative put forward in popular discourse and conceptions of Bastide's mask suggests that at least the first generation of African-born Brazilians maintained the facade of Catholic identity as a defense mechanism. In this case one would assume that the large number of Afro-Brazilians who returned to West Africa would drop the facade once back in their homelands. Oddly enough, the opposite occurred. Bastide also argued that the most effective way to understand the dynamics of African-derived religious traditions was "in the context of the situation of free Negroes . . . rather than the context of slavery," and not only the freedom but the sometimes elevated status of Brazilian returnees in West Africa certainly offers this opportunity.[102] African-born returnees "arrived with a sufficiently marked African identity and a practically flawless historical memory" of how their traditions existed back home, not having been raised with Catholic syncretism from birth.[103] Although the emerging colonial context in West Africa was not free from Christian hegemony, the returnees were certainly free and not obliged to identify as Catholics or to engage in any Christian rituals or practices.

However, rather than quickly shedding Catholicism, many returnees actively requested a Catholic mission.[104] They financed the building of Catholic churches at great expense to themselves, including the first Catholic church in Nigeria, built by Marcos Cardoso and named Igreja do Bonfim after the popular basilica in Salvador.[105] Bonfim maintained so much importance to this particular community that they continued to observe the festival in both Lagos and Porto Novo regardless of their primary personal religious affiliation.[106] Brazilian returnees were so central to the practice of Catholicism in West Africa that Catholic missionaries had little success in establishing the denomination before their arrival, were reliant on them as a congregation, and even opted for Portuguese as the language of communication and instruction in churches and schools.[107]

Returnees did not choose to adopt Catholicism with such zeal because of a renunciation of traditional African forms of worship: quite the contrary. Olabiyi Yai referred to the Brazilian returnees as "Catolicos a sua maneira," and a British visitor to Dahomey remarked that "though [they are] but nominal Christians, we will not insult them by calling them pagans."[108] Clearly this visitor did not know into which of his religious categories to place the returnees, and their participation in traditional rites and practices deeply troubled Catholic priests, prompting one to describe them as "exactly like pagans for the most part" practicing "a monstrous amalgam of paganism, Christianity, and fetishist superstition."[109] These returnees easily crossed perceived religious boundaries, particularly when familial relations were involved, just as described in chapters 2 and 3.[110] Furthermore, when

confronted about this behavior, Brazilian returnees responded that each people had its religion just as it had its habits and customs, and each society had its own "fetishes," which were well suited to it, implying that one could perhaps take them on as easily as new clothes or habits.[111] Similarly, the shrine of one returnee from Cuba in Abẹokuta, Nigeria, in 1869 contained images of Jesus on the cross and Saints James and John mixed in with his orisa.[112]

There are well-documented examples of prominent Brazilian returnees who were deeply attached to Catholicism alongside orisa/orixá traditions. For example, the aforementioned Marcos Cardoso, who spent a great deal of time, money, and effort constructing Catholic schools and churches, gave at least three of his children orisa names, specifically Ifagbọhun, Ifaṣotọ, and Ifabunmi.[113] The fabulously wealthy and famous merchant João Esan da Rocha, despite being a Catholic and a member of the Legion of Mary, kept an altar to Ogun in his house.[114] Another of the most prominent transatlantic merchants, Joaquim D'Almeida, built a Catholic chapel in Agoué, which he named after a church identified with his Jeje-Catholic brotherhood in Bahia, and in keeping with the nature of the brotherhood, it became a site of devotion to both the Jeje/Fon voduns and Catholic saints.[115] Rather than shedding a Catholic mask, Brazilian and other returnees to West Africa consistently maintained the practice of Catholicism coupled with the worship of African deities, and in many cases even Islam as well.[116] Like families who remained in Yorubaland, many returnee families had branches that were primarily affiliated with Christianity, Islam, or traditional forms of worship, and it was common for them to intermarry.[117] As a result, Afro-Brazilians on both sides of the Atlantic appear not to have conceptualized or treated Catholicism as a mere mask that they would remove when no longer necessary.

The currently dominant Bastidian theory of Afro-Catholic syncretism as a mask for sincere, compartmentalized devotion to African deities certainly demonstrates an understanding of the dynamics of Afro-Brazilian religiosity in contemporary and historical perspectives but is not without its own limitations. Bastide himself was aware that his informants had a totally different orientation to the topic than he did. These limitations in his paradigm were largely due to him naturally thinking within a framework of mutually exclusive religions, which would necessitate that only one religious affiliation could have been truly sincere. From the alternative perspective of multiple forms of worship, it becomes easier to understand a sincere and simultaneous worship of both saints and orixás as mutually intelligible forms of the same type of worship, and this simultaneous worship of similar powerful spiritual figures was common in West Africa. Orisa priests in contemporary Yorubaland were quick to identify several Catholic saints as the orisa that they worship and found little issue in using

Catholic rituals and practices to worship them. Devotees of the orișa/orixás from the present day to as far back as the first generation of Africans who were forcibly brought to Brazil (including those who returned to West Africa) demonstrated great devotion and zeal in their embrace of Catholicism *alongside* their worship of African deities.

Masquerading as Saints

The deep involvement of African-born Brazilians in Catholicism complicates the common narrative of their maintaining a strict and conscious difference between African traditions and Catholicism that was forgotten by subsequent generations. If anything, the opposite may be true: Many Brazilians of African descent now perceive a difference between saints and orixás that may not have been maintained by their ancestors. This should not negate the powerful resistance and ingenuity of Afro-Brazilians that Bastide's mask demonstrates so well. Given the oppressive climate of colonial Brazil, particularly toward African traditions and ways of life, the infiltration of African religiosity into the practice of Catholicism was surely an important strategy for perpetuating the traditions known as Candomblé today. If recently arrived Africans realized they could worship in relative peace by doing so through Catholic rituals, then it stands to reason they would placate white authorities in this way. I simply mean to suggest that their devotion to Catholic saints may not have been *only* a facade; it may have *also* been the Brazilian way of worshipping the same spiritual forces they knew as orixás. Catholic saints who manifest the same cosmological forces as their affiliated orixás could indeed be understood as a type of *Yoruba* mask, which remains closely identified with what lies beneath it and functions to *reveal* its true nature, albeit in a different fashion.

Bastide's notion is based on the common Western conception of a mask as superimposed over a face to *hide* its true identity, as with Erik in *Phantom of the Opera*, but his theory of a mask might be more appropriate than even he imagined if placed within a traditional Yoruba context.[118] Rather than concealing the true nature of what lies behind the mask, Yoruba masquerade traditions—like many others in Africa—are receptacles for spiritual beings whose nature they represent, often through physical similarities and imitations. This concept of a mask is pervasive in Yoruba society, can be found in multiple contexts, and is closely tied to the firm Yoruba belief in reincarnation and the immortality of the soul. For example, Yoruba ọba have beaded fringes on the edges of their crowns that cover their faces. They sometimes wear full masks that "depersonalize" the ọba and allow them to manifest the values of divine kingship and identity as the

composite of all royal ancestors in ways they could not if their individual faces were left unmasked.[119] Similarly, ritual representations and effigies are common in traditional funerary rites because these effigies house the spirits of those recently departed.[120]

This housing of spirits inside a mask is most prevalent in the popular Egungun masquerade tradition, as "it is through his mask that the soul of a departed ancestor returns to earth in a physical form to inquire about the welfare of his living descendants."[121] This process of locating or housing a spirit within the mask is accomplished through several ritual means, including ensuring continuity between the physical resemblance of the mask and masked, the invocation of the spirit's name(s), and dances and other actions that can cause spirit manifestation/possession in humans who carry the masks.[122] The ability to localize and house transcendent spirits in an appropriate vessel makes masks of central importance for ritual work, such as helping the deceased complete a smooth transition to the afterlife; attacking one's enemies; or praising, venerating, and communicating with ancestors. Egungun masquerades often take the form of multiple layers of cloth that change their appearance but not their underlying nature, and some acrobatic masquerades even turn their cloth inside out without revealing the person inside (figure 5.3).[123] Furthermore, Egungun are always eager to incorporate new types of cloth because, regardless of whether the textile was "made locally, or in Germany, Indonesia, or America, the ancestral presence is believed to be everywhere and in every fabric."[124] Rowland Abiodun refers to this dynamic artistic response to new settings as *imọju-mọra*, roughly translated as "sensitivity to the need of the moment" or the "ability to adapt and change without being formally told to do so."[125] This subtle characteristic of Yoruba art and culture effectively demonstrates that for the Yoruba, "tradition and innovation are not antithetical; indeed, innovation cannot take place without a background of tradition."[126]

Egungun masquerades provide the example par excellence for how the Yoruba traditionally would leverage a mask as ritualized material culture to interact and work with cosmological forces and spirits. However, in his work on the impressive masquerade traditions in Ẹdẹ, Ulli Beier addressed the issue of modern Yoruba who follow the lead of Christian missionaries—such as the famous Reverends Samuel Johnson and J. Olumide Lucas—in criticizing the tradition as a guileless way of deceiving the simpleminded. They adopted this position because clearly there is a person underneath the masquerade and a difference between the masquerader and the spirit or ancestor it channels.[127] However, Beier defended the practice, noting that the Yoruba were well aware there was a person underneath the mask, but this awareness does not prevent the tradition from

FIGURE 5.3. Egungun masquerade with many layers of cloth, Ẹdẹ, 2016. Photograph by the author.

invoking spirits to inhabit both the human and the masquerade, as evidenced by the otherworldly voices through which they speak.[128] The general taboo on stating that there is a person under the masquerade or mentioning the individual's name privileges one ontological understanding of a mask over another that is more literal and reductionist.

The difference Beier noted between "enlightened" Yoruba and Christian missionaries on the one hand, and traditionally minded people on the other, parallels the difference between models of masking within Afro-Catholic syncretism. While Bastide's model emphasizes the reality that a spirit identified as Iansã may have rested behind a chromolithograph of Santa Bárbara, for those engaged in the practice, this fact need not imply that one was true or real and the other false or insincere. Because Yoruba masks "localize the soul whose exact form is an unknown quantity," such as Iansã's wind, some Afro-Brazilians in both historical and contemporary times seem to have identified Santa Bárbara as a different mask used to localize this unknowable form.[129] As Abiodun argued, the Yoruba have always been "open to using . . . new images that will safeguard the spiritual continuity of the essential nature—the ìwà—of one's deceased parent" in the case of ako effigies or any other spirit such as the Egungun.[130] Furthermore, "in the context of the *Egungun*, especially, layering of new on old fabric is considered necessary because the ancestral masquerade needs to connect with, and be

responsive to, the needs of those living on earth."[131] Following this logic, Santa Bárbara may simply have been superimposed on Iansã's spirit in ritual practice like a piece of new imported cloth on an Egungun masquerade. If Santa Bárbara were merely another name for the same spirit, as many have claimed, any altar constructed to house and locate her spirit would become inhabited by her regardless of the name used to invoke her. Rather than departing from Yoruba tradition, this creative innovation employed to house Iansã in a new material form could well be understood as an excellent example of Yoruba religious and aesthetic tradition operating through the concept of imọju-mọra.

Conclusion

Bastide's theory of Afro-Catholic syncretism as a mask, while providing an explanation for how and why adherents of Afro-diasporic religions would adopt Catholic practices and identity, does not fully match the perspectives of *all* orișa/orixá devotees included in this chapter. Many are unconcerned with compartmentalizing different religions and ways of thinking or being, and they see no issue in the syncretism Bastide would define as "fusional." This could be explained by the absence of an idea of discrete "religions" in the Yoruba context and by the ways particular forms of worship and interaction with cosmological domains often were blended, reconfigured, and grafted onto one another. While Bastide, from a Western background, may have needed to explain how and why Afro-Brazilians could cross certain boundaries between religions, the Afro-Brazilians themselves may have seen similarities or analogues between forms of worship rather than any genuine divisions.

The way orișa traditions like those of Erinlẹ and Ogun or of Ṣango and Jakuta were combined in Yorubaland would certainly support this view. Furthermore, it could explain why Brazilian returnees to West Africa did not remove a Catholic mask from their true religion but painstakingly continued their Catholic-informed forms of worship. For their part, contemporary orișa priests in Nigeria were eager to identify the saints and even a Greek deity as their orișa, indicating that the links between saints and orixás may have been much deeper than mere utility. However, given the oppressive situations that Africans all over the Americas faced, Bastide's idea of a mask still offers valuable insights. If you could be arrested for serving your ancestral deity in one form but were actively encouraged to do so in a new, slightly different form, the new form would understandably be taken up with zeal. Also, as Bastide intuited, when a Candomblé devotee or priestess like Mãe Iraci enters a church and prays to Jesus, she does so in a way quite different from how a Portuguese Catholic might. She simply understands

Jesus in a broader context to be cosmologically of one being with Oxalá, but not necessarily in a utilitarian disguise.

For a mãe-de-santo like Mãe Iraci or her ancestors, Nosso Senhor do Bonfim could be an effective mask for Oxalá, as Bastide argued, but more in the nature of a Yoruba mask than a Western mask. Any image of Nosso Senhor do Bonfim would not necessarily *hide* the identity of Oxalá (although it certainly did for many white Brazilians). Instead, through invoking the Yoruba religious-aesthetic tradition of imọju-mọra, it instead constituted an additional way of manifesting or *revealing* his spirit, just as the Egungun masquerades manifest ancestral spirits through both human and sartorial mediums. This need not negate the ingenious strategy of resistance and survival observed and theorized by Bastide, but, just like the additional layers of cloth on an Egungun masquerade, it adds yet another layer of significance onto what previously existed. It also reconceptualizes Yoruba tradition as dynamic, responsive, and highly contextualized, as argued by Abiodun. Furthermore, the striking parallels between how orișa/orixá specialists in Nigeria and Brazil responded to and identified with this perspective demonstrates the resiliency of this African ontology through a long history of colonization and marginalization in a Western-oriented and hegemonic society.

The significant continuity on this issue over time and space between orișa/orixá devotees may not be unique to the Nagô/Yoruba. Because many African religious traditions regularly engage in interactions and evolutions that could be identified as syncretic in the West, the sincere devotion of many Africans in the Americas and Caribbean could be better understood as a *continuation* of a certain tradition or way of understanding the religious. Although Bastide, from a Western perspective, perceived a syncretic mixture of two separate cultures and religions, Afro-Brazilians likely understood and enacted these practices as forms of worshipping that interacted with the same cosmological domains. Hence, if you were to lift the mask of Nosso Senhor do Bonfim to find Oxalá, you might find nothing at all! Nevertheless, the understanding of Catholic saints as disguises for the orixás has certainly gained more traction among younger Candomblé practitioners and has served to dispel confusion—such as the misidentification of Exu as evil like the devil—and combatted the perception of Candomblé as simply poor, imperfect, or superstitious Catholicism. Bastide's theory of the mask is an excellent demonstration of the impact that the writings and perspectives of scholars—including Johnson, Ellis, Rodrigues, and Bastide—have on the practitioners whom they study and the way those practitioners imagine their religious communities.

While I seek to complicate the narrative of Bastide's mask, I do not intend to put forward either stance on syncretism as more appropriate or more "African."

There are clear and positive motivations for each position, and my interest is in documenting a general shift in religious perspective from an open system of forms of worship in which religious traditions often become integrated and function within one overarching cosmology to a more rigid system of separate and often competing religions and cosmologies. Much like some argue Iansã took on a form defined by her Christian context as Santa Bárbara, orixá traditions had to take on a new form in the Brazilian context, which most readily recognizes traditions that can be articulated as a "religion."[132] The transition and development of orixá traditions into a state-recognized religion and perhaps even world religion has not been straightforward or without significant friction. Aligning with Matory's description of Yoruba traditions in diaspora and the homeland as Siamese twins, this transition to a modern "religion" in Ẹdẹ has followed similar patterns, albeit articulated within the specific context of southwestern Nigeria.

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6

How Religion Is Changing the Religious

Nisiyin, oju ti la bayii o.

We have become modern [or enlightened] now. —SAKIATU ABẸKI, interview by the author, March 7, 2017

The reification in Brazil of a system of mutually exclusive religions rather than a system of ẹsin as multiple forms of worship can inform the varying perspectives on syncretism and how practitioners of Candomblé can, should, and do interact with other traditions, most significantly Catholicism. The simultaneous presence of both systems of organizing religious identity and praxis accounts for the changing perspectives of practitioners and the accompanying tensions this shift necessarily brings. The same shift in religious sensibilities is behind the rise in religious tension in Yorubaland in recent decades, and the generational shifts in religious orientation in both Salvador and Ẹdẹ are striking. Still, Ẹdẹ's citizens

are proud that amid the general climate of growing religious tension in Nigeria, their town has a long history of religious pluralism and cooperation, and this unique religious climate is even the central feature of a recent edited volume entitled *Beyond Religious Tolerance: Muslim, Christian, and Traditionalist Encounters in an African Town*, edited by Insa Nolte, Olukoya Ogen, and Rebecca Jones. Just as the book's title suggests, in Ẹdẹ religious pluralism implies much more than a mere acceptance of difference and is firmly rooted in its history of various religious traditions. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, the roots of this religiously pluralistic approach lie in the traditional Yoruba system of ẹsin as forms of worship rather than competing religions and cosmologies. While the category of religion was not native to the Yoruba, the previous three chapters have analyzed how the interactions of Yoruba people at home and in diaspora with aspects of Western society, modernity, and the Protestant and Catholic Churches have made religion a viable category in contemporary society and religious practice and have helped to form and reify a "traditional Yoruba religion." Brian Pennington argued, regarding Western debates on the appropriateness of the term *Hinduism* to describe many South Asian traditions, that "colonial modernity decisively altered the character and evolutionary course of Hindu religion," and a Hindu religion certainly does now exist in both imagination and practice.[1] The same can be said for traditional Yoruba religion. Given that there now is a traditional Yoruba religion, this chapter explains how its evolution has shaped and been shaped by the contemporary religious climate in Ẹdẹ.

Just as with the complex issue of syncretism in Candomblé, the understanding of traditional Yoruba religion and appropriate interreligious dynamics can be surprisingly uneven in Ẹdẹ, and this variation is often greater across generational lines than across religious lines. Specifically, the oldest generation is likely to operate within a system of ẹsin as forms of worship in which there is one overarching cosmology into which the various forms of worshipping God through different intermediaries fit. For them, it matters little what form of worship one practices; anyone may be able to seek assistance from other forms of worship, and they are quite conversant with traditions they do not practice themselves. Those who are middle-aged have a more acute understanding of ẹsin as "religion"; are likely to separate what falls under the purview of religion from other aspects of life such as work, culture, or traditions; and may even have practiced different religions over the course of their lifetimes. They usually do not approve of being involved in more than one religion simultaneously but have been exposed to multiple traditions through their close family members and friends. The youngest generation tends to operate firmly within a paradigm of exclusive religions, their sphere

of activity tends be located almost exclusively within their particular religious tradition, and religious diversity is less a part of their family life.

The salience of religion as a category and identity marker is becoming more pronounced, but precisely what constitutes religion is not uniformly understood. Largely because the Yoruba people do not have the same Western history and experience with the religious/secular divide, people in Ẹdẹ now might categorize the same traditions as religion, culture, tradition, work, or even medicine. Such distinctions are particularly fraught with tension for two groups of people: the custodians of ancestral masquerades (Egungun) and hunters. Most members of both groups identify as Muslim, but because people in Ẹdẹ increasingly understand the Egungun to be a part of traditional religion, both Muslims and some orișa worshippers—particularly the babalawo—do not approve of their involvement in two religions: traditional religion and Islam. For the hunters the situation is a bit different. As demonstrated in the hunters' conversation at the beginning of chapter 3, there is serious debate within the group itself about whether Ogun's tradition is a religion, and the various perspectives cause them to engage in the hunters' guild in different ways. The staunch supporters of an exclusive traditional religion do not approve of hunters' involvement in Islam or Christianity, while most Muslims do not approve of making sacrifices to Ogun but are perfectly comfortable with their coreligionists joining the hunters' guild, provided they do not participate in any traditional rituals (which many do not). Because religion is becoming an increasingly prominent part of people's lives in Ẹdẹ, these discrepancies in how people apply and configure the category constitute an uneven transition from ẹsin as a system of forms of worship to religion.

The transition from forms of worship to religions does not necessarily imply a conversion from orișa worship to Islam or Christianity. In fact, the traditional structure of chieftaincy titles has ensured that people who may have left orișa traditions at least consider returning to them. Because many important Ẹdẹ chieftaincy titles are tied to specific lineages, these lineages are connected to specific forms of orișa worship. Many of these titles carry significant prestige and political and social power, which has ensured that at least a few members of these lineages stay involved in the traditions. Furthermore, the community of traditionalists has in fact grown recently, with some orișa and masquerades that were previously thought lost or forgotten now having devotees again and being seen out in public. During my fieldwork in 2016–17, there was a significant spike in the number of people initiated into various orișa traditions, which may have been due to how many traditionalists embraced the idea of having their own religion that deserves equal status with Islam and Christianity, the boundaries of which should not be

crossed. Like their counterparts in Brazil, orișa devotees in Nigeria have had to fight official and unofficial forms of discrimination, and their employment of the category of religion has allowed them to define their traditions in contrast to Islam and Christianity and instill a sense of pride in practitioners, prompting a rise in the number of orișa devotees. This is a common experience across most if not all African religious traditions that embrace the foreign category of religion and adapt it to ensure rights, legal protection, and equal status with hegemonic traditions such as Christianity.[2]

The growing popularity of a model of mutually exclusive religions over forms of worship has had a quiet but profound effect on Ẹdẹ's society beyond the rise in orișa devotees. While lineages were previously linked to particular forms of orișa worship (such as Ogun, Ọșun, or Ifa), they were still religiously diverse in that other forms of worship, including Islam and Christianity, were also practiced within them. However, lineages have become increasingly homogenous, with almost all members practicing the same religion. Similarly, there is a great deal of anxiety around the issue of marriage and the ability of family members to choose a religious identity other than that of their lineage. There is a common traditional saying "obinrin o lẹsin" (a woman has no form of worship/religion) because it was assumed she would take on the practice of her husband and his lineage. This did not necessitate her giving up her own lineage's traditions and, in essence, it ensured families from different traditions would mix with each other without losing their own religious identity. This is rarely if ever the case in Ẹdẹ today, as interfaith marriage is becoming increasingly uncommon, and when it does occur, it is most common for the wife to adopt the religion of her husband's family and leave the religion of her family. Consequently, a strong element of individual choice has been introduced with the concept of religion. Even if this agency is limited and placed under pressure, it is increasingly difficult to say that a woman does not have her own ẹsin. Interfaith marriages are generally discouraged, parents want their children to marry only spouses who practice the same religion, and there is a constant fear that young people belonging to competing religions will try to lure young women into conversion through the prospect of marriage. This naturally translates into a fear about the religious affiliation of subsequent children, a new pressure felt most heavily by women in the family, both young and old.

Conversion has also become a contentious issue, and those who do decide to change their religious affiliation often feel the need to hide it because of how intensely the boundaries between religions can be enforced today. The ritual practices of different religions often reinforce this perspective, with burials and festivals forcing people to make important choices about what they will

do and what they will let others know they do. Because most Muslim clerics today are unable to perform final burial rites for those involved in orișa traditions, many involved in both traditions hide their involvement in one or the other. Given the importance of final rites and the intense pressure from children who tend to be exclusively devoted to one tradition, some older citizens in Ẹdẹ have begun to think about their religious affiliation and practice in ways they previously did not. Similarly, people's previous willingness to attend festivals of another religion/form of worship, which was a hallmark of Yoruba society, has declined significantly. All these familial and ritual practices have resulted in a greater separation between different religious spheres, and the people of Ẹdẹ themselves have observed this change.

Several individuals, like the woman quoted in the epigraph to this chapter, are quick to explain that many dynamics of religious life in Ẹdẹ have changed and that this occurred primarily as a result of ọlaju, or the advent of modernity. Irrespective of their religious affiliation, people in Ẹdẹ recognized that in the modern context, religious traditions and practices were increasingly separated, and, for a while, this resulted in an increase in religious tension and even violence. However, over the past thirty to forty years Ẹdẹ has managed to navigate the modern transition from forms of worship to separate religions while preserving its legacy of religious pluralism. The rearticulation of religious pluralism is demonstrated in compelling theology on the part of Muslims, Christians, and traditionalists on why and how they can, should, and must find ways to coexist respectfully. I found these arguments to transcend postmodern and highly relativistic arguments. Instead, they are the product of deep interrogations of their own traditions and are rooted exclusively within their particular religious frameworks. In this sense, Ẹdẹ can serve as an important case study for how religious dynamics can be managed in Yoruba society at a crucial moment.

Growing Tensions

Anyone familiar with Nigerian society is aware that religious tension has increased over the past few decades. The activity of Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria has drawn international attention, and the increasing conflict between mostly Christian farmers and Muslim cattle herders in the middle of the country has strong religious overtones, even if religion is not the most central factor as recent false claims of "Christian genocide" have purported. Scholars such as Alex Thurston and Olufemi Vaughan have demonstrated that these national religious crises must be understood within the larger context of the failed Nigerian state, unfulfilled promises of modernization, political corruption, regional history,

colonial policy, and several other factors in addition to purely theological or religious issues.[3] Vaughan in particular stressed that "religious forces—especially the dominant forces of Islam and Christianity—profoundly shaped the formation of the modern Nigerian state and society since the turbulent nineteenth century," which makes it impossible to understand either religion or society in isolation.[4] In Vaughan's opinion, the growing religious tensions are not only the result of a corrupt political class exploiting religion for personal gain, as many claim. Rather, issues such as the shari'ah debates beginning in the 1970s or the crisis over Nigeria's membership in the Organisation of the Islamic Conference in 1986 are a product of the long history of how religion and people's disposition to specific religions has been interwoven with the very fabric of the society at large.[5]

While the Yoruba have traditionally proven highly tolerant and conflict-averse with respect to religion and have played an important mediatory role in maintaining balance on the national scale, this situation has begun to change. In 1986 many were shocked when some members of the Muslim Students Society of Nigeria wanted to tear down a cross that stood right next to the mosque on the campus of the University of Ibadan, and since then conflict and fierce competition, mostly between Muslim and Christian groups, has become more common on prominent campuses in Yorubaland. Although such disputes usually do not result in violence, many have noted an increase in the intensity and frequency of religious conflict and tension in the area since the 1960s.[6] In fact, Jacob K. Olupona stated in no uncertain terms "all available data suggest that these notions—that religious affiliation plays no vital role in Yoruba political activity, that the Yoruba are incredibly tolerant of religious difference, and that religion constitutes no great divide among the Yoruba—can no longer be supported."[7] On a national scale, Olupona traced the transition within Nigerian society from religion constituting a bonding and unifying force due to its plurality to becoming a source of bondage that divides the nation in the late 1970s, compromising the nation's integrity and the well-being of its citizens.[8] These growing religious tensions are a result of the subtle shift from the previous model of forms of worship within a unified cosmology to a framework of mutually exclusive religions with competing cosmologies, which creates more opportunity for conflict. Ẹdẹ has not been impervious to these national, ethnic, and regional trends, and as I will explain later in the chapter, experienced its own period of religious tension. However, the town has managed to resolve these issues without compromising its strong and historical commitment to multiple religious traditions. The rest of this chapter constitutes an ethnographic account of how Ẹdẹ is currently navigating this important transition, how it affects Ẹdẹ's citizens, and how religious life is changing as a result.

Generational Shift

As was the case with syncretism in Brazil, perhaps one of the most important features of the shift from forms of worship to religion in Ẹdẹ is the remarkably different ways the various generations relate to and interpret Ẹdẹ's religious traditions. For purposes of simplicity, I have identified three separate generational approaches to religious traditions that are best characterized as an older generation (about sixty years of age and older), a middle-aged generation (between thirty and sixty years), and a younger generation (younger than age thirty). As might be expected, the older generation tends to think and operate within the framework of ẹsin as multiple forms of worship, whereas the youngest generation is firmly rooted in a model of ẹsin as exclusive religions, with the middle generation falling somewhere in between. Clearly, not all citizens of Ẹdẹ fit neatly into this schema, but I was surprised by how closely the ages of my respondents correlated with the types of answers they provided, and after a short while I could practically predict how the elderly in particular would answer my questions.

What are the perspectives of this elderly generation? To begin, they believe the different religious groups worship the same God and the apparent differences between them are largely accidental or of secondary importance.[9] For example, one woman who sold me recharge cards for my phone insisted "Ọlọrun kan naa ni a n sin; ẹsin ni to yatọ" (We are all worshipping the same God, it is just the form [ẹsin] that is different).[10] Another woman expressed the idea slightly differently, saying, "ẹsin kan naa la n jọ ṣe" (We are all engaged in the same worship/religion).[11] The Oluọdẹ (head of the hunters' guild) is fond of saying "Ọlọrun o pe meji" (there are not two Gods) and that no truth exists outside of God as a way of explaining how the various traditions serve the same purpose.[12] He added that anything a Christian says in prayer, a Muslim says in prayer, or an orișa worshipper says in prayer will reach God, but anything not directed toward God is a lie.[13] This response is striking because it is practically a word-for-word translation of what many older women in Salvador said about orixá worship and Catholicism, particularly about prayers to Oxalá and Nosso Senhor do Bomfim reaching the same spirit. Another older man was quite excited when I raised this issue with him and insisted that although he was a Muslim, he could seek spiritual help from a pastor or an orișa priest/priestess because they all had their origin in God, with each person simply inheriting a different tradition from his or her ancestors.[14]

This openness to seeking help from specialists of other traditions was another common feature, and when I asked the woman who sold me phone cards whether, as a Muslim, she could seek help from a pastor or a babalawo, she was

visibly confused and said, "Ki lo de?" (Why not?") Another Muslim woman told me she could be initiated into Ifa if that were what was needed in her life, although she had no plans to do so. This attitude also extends to religious festivals, as one woman who said she could never become an orișa devotee laughed at me when I asked whether she could attend the Ṣango festival. She reminded me that I was filming the procession when she gave the Ṣango priest some money as he passed her stall in the market.[15] Several pastors and alfa told me they usually attract to their services and events decent numbers of older people (primarily women) from other religious backgrounds.

One pastor at Christ Apostolic Church encouraged me to come see all the Muslim women who attend their open-air services as a demonstration of how they are reaching and converting Muslims. I did indeed notice several Muslim women there, but I am not entirely sure they had plans to convert. If they were anything like the women I came to know quite well, they may have had no intention of leaving Islam but thought a particular pastor or service might have something useful to offer them. This type of behavior is generally perceived by most alfa and pastors as a kind of "backsliding," or lack of faith in one's own religion, and this may well be the case in some instances. From an alternative perspective, however, these women may have believed the same God they worship wanted to touch their lives through a different tradition, and doing so need not compromise their dedication to their own form of worship.

Members of the older generation also tend to have knowledge of other religions/forms of worship because their immediate relatives practice them. Sakiatu Abẹki, for example, had Muslim parents, but her father and brothers were all involved in Ifa as well.[16] Deacon Ezekiel Oke's mother was Muslim until she married his father and converted to Christianity.[17] Meanwhile, Oseni Lawal had family members who worshipped Ṣọpọnna (orișa of smallpox and pestilence), although they have all passed on now.[18] In addition to this pluralistic background, most members of the oldest generation tend to be willing to accept their children practicing other traditions or marrying spouses who do so. One Muslim woman even told me that the little boy who had just come up to greet her was her grandson and is now a Christian because a pastor resolved a problem he had.

There is however one sensitive area of tension: the abandonment of ancestral tradition. Because many members of the oldest generation take the traditional stance that becoming a devotee of a new tradition does not necessitate abandoning a lineage tradition, they have trouble understanding the religious behavior of their younger family members. A priestess of the Ẹgbẹ society (another masquerade tradition that addresses the issue of abiku children, or children who go through a painful cycle of birth, death, rebirth, and death), called one of her

daughters a coward for abandoning her ancestral traditions to practice Islam exclusively. The Oluọdẹ often mentioned to me how disappointed he was in the younger generation for being so eager to abandon the traditions of their parents and grandparents, but he was aware that life was no longer the way it was when he was young. Amusa Balogun also noted that Ẹdẹ's older generation tends to be more open and accepting of orisa traditions and to recognize that younger people tend to be more "radical," but hoped that as the younger ones grow older, they will understand "the importance of some traditional practices."[19] Consequently, members of this generation are often the peacemakers within the lineage if there are ever instances of religious tension.[20]

One final, important point about Ẹdẹ's oldest generation is that many do not think in terms of the common "triple heritage" model of Islam, Christianity, and traditional religion. Rather, they understand each orisa as functioning like an intermediary at the head of a specific tradition in the same way Jesus or the Prophet is the central figure of Christianity and Islam, respectively. To explain why the tradition of Ogun is, in fact, a religion or form of worship (ẹsin) rather than simply work (iṣẹ), the Oluọdẹ informed me Ogun was like a prophet and, after his death, his ẹsin was established. The same happened with Ṣango and his ẹsin, and this was the case with both Jesus and the Prophet Muhammad.[21] Consequently, when I asked many orisa devotees of this generation for their ẹsin, they did not respond by saying "ẹsin ibile" (traditional religion"). They would say they *ṣe* (do/practice) or follow the tradition of a particular orisa.

Many but not all members of the middle generation are also likely to understand the various religious traditions in Ẹdẹ as worshipping the same God. They may also have practiced different religious traditions but are likely to be involved with only one at any given point in time. As mentioned in chapter 3, most heads of the various orisa traditions have practiced a different tradition before assuming their respective titles, and the Ọṣun priestess is perhaps the best example. Her grandfather was an ọba (of a different town) and a babalawo, so Ifa has always been in her family. Her father attended the Cherubim and Seraphim Church when she was young, so she was raised as a Christian, but because her father had a background in Ifa and her mother in Ọṣun, she became very familiar with traditional medicine. When she married her husband, she converted to Islam to practice with his family, but then life became very difficult for her and her children. At this point, she went back to church, and then finally began serving Ọṣun and practicing traditional medicine as a full-time occupation.[22] Bayọ Ayantunde is a Christian whose mother was a Muslim before she married his Christian father, and Bayọ has two wives, one of whom is a Muslim and the other a Christian. While he said he believes orisa devotees also worship the same

God he does, he could not marry one because he and his family should not bow down to anyone but God. This naturally would create a problem because the orișa devotees regularly prostrate themselves before their divinities.[23] For him, a firm boundary has been established because of the religious norms of his Christian identity, even though he takes no issue with orișa worship.

B. P. Michael is a pastor with Christ Apostolic Church whose babalawo father performed divination at his birth and declared that he would become a pastor. His father would accompany the children and their Catholic mother to mass a few times a year, but now that Pastor Michael is grown and has been trained as a pastor, he has nothing to do with Ifa anymore and is raising his children to be "pure Christian."[24] Alfa Hassan Alaaye had older members in his family who worshipped Ogun alongside practicing Islam, and while he certainly respected them, he is glad that his family only practices Islam now. His older relatives believed they were worshipping God in both ways, but he knows this to be shirk (polytheism, or attributing God's divinity to other entities) and that it does not please God or His Prophet.[25]

These two men grew up with exposure to orișa traditions but do not understand them to be perfectly legitimate, alternative forms of worship in the way their parents and grandparents did. None of these people practiced two traditions at once, but the Ọșun priestess could quote from the Bible and the Qur'an in answer to my questions, demonstrating how her generation is likely to be familiar with other traditions that they do not actively practice. Additionally, this generation is not as open to their children practicing a different tradition, as demonstrated by Pastor Michael's insistence on his children being raised "pure Christian," or Alfa Hassan Alaaye's declaration "Alḥamdulillah" (Thanks be to God) when he told me he practices Islam exclusively. The orișa devotees (apart from the babalawo) were usually more willing to accept their children practicing Islam or Christianity, but even Bayọ Ayantunde, who respects orișa traditions, said he would prefer for his children to remain either Muslim or Christian.[26] The opinions and perspectives of the middle generation are clearly more mixed, and they certainly perceive more religious boundaries around their activity than their parents do. Still, there are some who seem to identify with a system of forms of worship (this is most common among orișa devotees), others who operate within a model of exclusive religions, and still others who are somewhere in between.

For the youngest generation, however, religious boundaries are very apparent and apply almost uniformly across religious affiliations. Șangotunmișe Adiomi was born into a Muslim family, but his religion now is ẹșin ibile (traditional religion). His parents initially disowned him when he left Islam to be initiated in

Ṣango, now he has only two Muslim friends, and he said his children will not practice anything other than traditional religion. When I asked whether they could practice Islam like their grandparents, he said for his children "ko si nkan to jẹ mọsalasi" (the mosque means nothing).[27] Ṣẹgun, a tailor who has a shop just outside Redeemer's University, comes from a long line of Muslims and has never practiced anything else. He did go to a Christian school and has a great deal of respect for the Prophet and ʻĪsa (Jesus) because they both serve the same God. Still, he said that while he is still alive his young son must never become a Christian, and when I asked whether he would ever consider getting involved with an orișa tradition, he said, "Instead ki n bọ Ṣango, ki n ku!" (I would prefer to die instead of offering sacrifice to Ṣango!). He was willing to entertain the idea that orișa devotees also serve God, but he does not know much about them and finds this to be shaky theological ground.[28] A Christian leader of the Seventh Day Adventist youth group insisted that Christians do not worship the same God as any other groups.[29] Thus, in this generation there is a clear, common thread of an exclusive preference for one's own tradition if not outright disapproval of others'. Indeed, Akin Iwilade and Oladipo Fadayomi observed that among the students in Ẹdẹ's Federal Polytechnic, "the vast majority of students are primarily identified by their religion."[30]

Still, there is a tendency among orișa devotees to consider Islam and Christianity valid ways of worshipping God. Ṣangoyẹmi was born into a traditionalist family and was told by the babalawo that he was meant to serve Ṣango, so he could never practice anything else. He believes that Muslims follow anọbi (the Prophet), Christians follow Jesu, but Ṣango and Ọrunmila are also messengers from God. Since no one he knows has ever reached heaven, people should refrain from saying that one tradition or the other does not reach God. He, like almost every other member of his generation, did not agree with the idea that religious traditions were like languages in that each person is born with one but could become fluent in or learn just a bit of another as necessary. However, he did indicate that he and his future children were free to add any other orișa traditions to their ritual practice alongside Ṣango.[31] This indicates a fascinating development in which the previously all-encompassing cosmology that emerged from orișa traditions is retracting to cover *only* orișa worship as one traditional religion without denying the legitimacy of other religions that exist outside its ritual and cosmological framework. The growing infrequency of involvement in one or more Abrahamic traditions alongside orișa traditions seems to support this fact, as does the perception of a closer relationship between Islam and Christianity as a result of a mutual shared cosmology, while the orișa worldview is more separated.

Religion or Something Else?

As the transition from a system of forms of worship to religions is still very much underway in Ẹdẹ, one of the tricky issues currently being negotiated in the society is what in fact constitutes "religion." Daniel Dubuisson argued that "in all civilizations but our own [Western civilization], the distinctions we make between 'political,' 'religious,' 'social,' and 'civic' ceremonies scarcely have any meaning."[32] While his point is well taken, people in Ẹdẹ, and Yoruba people more widely, have certainly begun engaging with such distinctions, particularly with respect to a religious/secular divide. Jason Josephson Storm documented a similar process in Japan during its modernization in the nineteenth century through the creation of what he identifies as the "Shinto secular." As the Japanese state began to negotiate its relationship to the new, Western concept of religion and accompanying value of religious freedom, a Buddhist priest named Shimaji Mokurai divided the Shinto tradition into explicitly religious aspects versus a more "essential part of Shinto . . . compatible with Christianity and Buddhism." Thus the "Shinto secular" allowed it to operate within the realm of politics and government.[33] For many Yoruba, because the modern conception of religion places more restrictions on how they can interact with indigenous traditions, understanding what aspects of those traditions are compatible with religion because they fall under different categories is of vital importance.

Where these distinctions are drawn is obviously contested, but when distinctions are made to demonstrate how a practice or tradition is *not* religion (ẹsin), it is most often cast as aṣa (culture), oro (tradition/custom), oogun (medicine), or iṣẹ (work/occupation). The complicated nature of these distinctions is summed up well in a Yoruba song:

A wa o ṣoro ile wa o,
A wa o ṣoro ile wa o.
Ẹsin kan o pe
O yee
Ẹsin kan o pe,
Ka wa ma ṣoro ile wa o.
Eni to ba fẹ,
Ko ki wa.
Eeyan ti o si fẹ,
Ko yan wa lodi!
A wa o ṣoro ile wa o.

We will follow our lineage customs/traditions
We will follow our lineage customs/traditions
A "religion/form of worship" does not say
O yes
A "religion" does not say
That we should not follow our lineage traditions
Anyone who would like
Should continue to greet us
Anyone who does not approve
Is entitled to his/her opinion
We will follow our lineage traditions.[34]

This song clearly sets ẹsin alongside oro, stating that they are in fact compatible, while still recognizing that there are certainly people who do not approve of this perspective. I would argue that approval or disapproval of the song's message would largely depend on one's understanding of the word *ẹsin*. If it is understood as a form of worship, then it seems natural that any form of worship would not prevent one from continuing ancestral traditions even if they involve another oriṣa. If, however, one understood *ẹsin* as akin to the English word "religion," then the matter becomes debatable, particularly if one understands that each religion is mutually exclusive of others and that the ancestral tradition belongs to a different religion. The need to produce a song that lays out this distinction is a uniquely modern Yoruba phenomenon, because the distinction between ẹsin and oro was not important or contested until the transition of ẹsin as forms of worship to religion.

The first generation of Yoruba Anglican clergy, who were enthusiastically engaged in the research of indigenous traditions and Ifa specifically, were also among the first to identify aspects of their rich ancestral heritage as "religious," and thus out of bounds for them, versus others that could be practiced in a more secular fashion. With Ifa in particular, "a line had to be drawn somewhere between devils and medicine. The line was drawn generously, and what fell on its permissible side was defined as *not religious*. Many Yoruba clergymen were renowned for their knowledge of native medicine, and in some cases published pamphlets about it."[35] Some even conceptualized Ifa as a philosophy, and I have heard some Ifa practitioners explain the tradition as a philosophy to outsiders so that they might feel more comfortable incorporating it into their lives. Following the Ṣango festival, I asked the Timi's trumpeter—an Anglican—if he allowed his family to attend. He replied that it was important for his children to

know about Ṣango as their "culture" (aṣa) but that they must not get involved in performing any of the rituals because then it would become a "religion" (ẹsin).[36] In delineating how his family can interact with Ẹdẹ's tradition of Ṣango in an acceptable way (as aṣa, or merely culture) rather than in an improper way (as ẹsin, or religion), he is following closely on the heels of his coreligionists who were first faced with this dilemma almost a century ago.

Bayọ Ayantunde, a prominent member of Ẹdẹ's celebrated drumming tradition, is of the opinion that some people have trouble differentiating between culture (aṣa), work (iṣẹ), and religion (ẹsin). He said, "Awọn elo mii, wọn ti gbe ẹsin yen kari" (Some people have taken the idea of religion too far). As a drummer and a Christian, he will play the drums for Egungun masquerades, for Muslims, or for Christians because that is his occupation. Others, however, refuse to play drums at orisa festivals because they understand doing so to be taking part in another religion. Still, Ayantunde thinks that if people became better educated about the history of their traditions, the number of those unable to understand the differences between these various categories would decrease.[37] In the 1990s John Pemberton and Funso Afọlayan observed that the king of Ila-Ọrangun was faced with this very dilemma of a "dichotomization . . . [that] appears to have been introduced by Western, as well as Islamic and Christian modes of thought." The ọba stated, "I do not want that all these traditions should perish, because that is our history and they provide a link between us and our ancestors. . . . The way to preserve many of these cultural practices [specifically Egungun masquerades] is to present them as '*àsà*' [tradition] and not as '*èsìn*' [worship]. . . . If we present and sustain these customs as a mark of our identity with the past, with our ancestors, and as a part of our history and heritage, not as a religious obligation, then they will survive."[38] Pemberton and Afọlayan recognized this perspective as being tied to "Western concepts" rather than a "Yoruba way of thinking," although it was becoming common among educated classes.[39]

Masking Religion

Hunters and participants in Egungun masquerades feel the most immediate need to distinguish between "religion" and other categories because of all indigenous traditions, their traditions fit the category of religion the least neatly. Although the vast majority of Muslims in Ẹdẹ do not practice orisa traditions, almost all participants in the Egungun masquerades are Muslim. When I interviewed the chief caretaker of Ondoru, a famous masquerade who throws ritually charged tree branches that used to kill Ẹdẹ's enemies in battle, he explained that his whole lineage is Muslim and has no other religion. If I had not seen the masquerade in his room, this would have been no surprise, given the Islamic prayer beads hanging

on nails in the house and the many Arabic prayer formulas written on the walls. However, when I asked whether he would accept his children practicing Ifa, he responded that all people could seek Western education if they desired, could learn to be a bricklayer or a tailor or anything else. To him, becoming a babalawo was the equivalent of learning a trade, which should be open to anyone. He also mentioned that they had Ogun in their lineage because blacksmithing was their traditional occupation.[40] For him, the boundaries between religion (ẹsin), tradition (oro), and occupation (iṣẹ) are not well defined, but this does not pose a problem for him.

For other, younger Eleegun (Egungun devotees), the boundaries may be clearer, but this clearer distinction does not necessarily result in different ritual practice. For example, the main caretaker of the Egungun Epete identifies as a Muslim but says he "cannot chose to practice Islam exclusively" because Epete would not allow it and would afflict him terribly. He knows this because another member of his family completed the Hajj and stated publicly that he would no longer be part of Epete's tradition. The man became very ill, and it was not until he carried the masquerade for a few steps at an annual festival that he recovered. Furthermore, the man who founded the neighborhood mosque carried Epete in the past, and Epete used to go to that mosque to pray when it came out to dance. Recently, however, members of the mosque begged the Eleegun not to bring the masquerade in, and they agreed.[41] Similarly, members of the famous and frightening Tẹẹrẹ Egungun lineage say being Muslim "ko di wa lọwọ rara" (does not at all prevent them) from practicing Islam because the spirit of Tẹẹrẹ itself is a Muslim. That is why it also used to go to the mosque to pray, but this now offends members of the mosque, so they have similarly stopped the practice. However, one elderly woman in the lineage chimed in to assert that Tẹẹrẹ's spirit still goes there to worship God, whether people see it or not![42]

That caretakers themselves articulate some Egungun spirits as Muslim makes it more acceptable for the Eleegun to practice both traditions as well. This is particularly true when the spirits afflict the lineage or specific members within it until they conform or dictate the boundaries of religious action as analyzed in chapter 3 with respect to orisa traditions constituting a type of "living" religion. Furthermore, according to the chief caretaker of Gbajẹro, the Egungun always choose at least one member of the lineage to carry on the tradition, even if the person does not initially agree. This man told me his religion (ẹsin) is Islam and that his son, who now carries the masquerade, is also a Muslim, but their religious affiliation clearly does not preclude them from engaging in their lineage tradition (oro ile) of Gbajẹro. One could argue that the distinction between ẹsin and oro may be irrelevant and foreign to Gbajẹro itself, which is precisely why it

takes no issue with recruiting Muslim family members to serve it and allowing them to continue practicing Islam. Furthermore, an Egungun such as Tẹẹrẹ must approve because it is itself understood as a Muslim spirit and also a traditional masquerade. This naturally creates tension when the masquerades operate in a model of forms of worship, but their devotees think more within a framework of exclusive religion.

At the same time, the vast majority of Muslims in Ẹdẹ, and all alfa with whom I spoke, do not share this perspective. Many orisa devotees also do not approve, and the members of the various Egungun traditions are acutely aware of this. The perpetuation of the Egungun tradition is contentious not only in Ẹdẹ; in many places in Yorubaland, members of masquerade lineages refuse to participate or contribute money for their upkeep.[43] The man who currently carries one prominent masquerade resides outside Ẹdẹ but returns to perform this function, and many Eleegun and Muslims claim this situation is quite common because it prevents anyone from protesting that person's involvement in both traditions. Within some lineages that do not approve of combining Islam and Egungun, those who are engaged with it keep the Egungun shrine outside the family compound, as Mãe Stella did with Catholic items in her terreiro.[44] A group of students at the Islamic Institute—one of the foremost among Ẹdẹ's many Muslim schools—said they were aware most Eleegun identify as Muslim but were adamant this only proves that "they are Muslim in name only." It is because of this type of pressure that many Eleegun (and other orisa devotees) no longer go to the mosque but prefer to pray at home, making the public practice of Islam with orisa traditions increasingly rare.

There is however also pressure from orisa devotees not to mix Islam and Egungun. The late Araba (chief Ifa priest) of Ẹdẹ was very aware that both hunters and Eleegun often go to the mosque, and he stated emphatically that it was not appropriate, an opinion shared by every babalawo I met.[45] Munirazeez Dẹbẹẹ, the caretaker of the Ariayọ Egungun, is quite insistent that he is a traditionalist who never has nor ever will practice Islam. He does not approve of Eleegun being involved in Islam, despite his own father doing so, and he made the conscious decision to return to the religion of his grandfather (Egungun/traditional Yoruba religion). One of his objections to the simultaneous practice of Islam and the Egungun tradition is that when such people die, they do not know where they will go.[46] Although the Eleegun and hunters are the most prominent and visible examples of this dynamic, they are not the only ones. The Aṣẹda (third most senior Ifa priest) complained about the dual allegiances of these groups, insisting that "only we [babalawo] and the Ṣango priests have remained faithful."[47]

Still, the majority of the Eleegun also participate in Islam, and one even stopped going to the meetings for all Oloriṣa because the other oriṣa titleholders kept telling him to stop going to the mosque. As the boundaries between different religions become more rigid, the Eleegun seem to be stuck between two different traditions because their living ancestral tradition still largely operates within a system of forms of worship, and no straightforward resolution to this tension has yet been found.

Hunters Wear Many Hats

Chapter 3 opened with the hunters' discussion about whether Ogun's tradition and the hunters' guild should be categorized as ẹsin (religion) and how each person's different perspective dictated the nature of his involvement with hunting, so I will not tread over the same ground again. Most of the hunters are Muslims, and many choose not to participate in any sacrifices the guild makes to Ogun, although they must still make financial contributions to all guild activities. As paramount chief of hunters and Ogun's tradition, the Oluọdẹ finds this to be a reasonable compromise. Because of the important security function hunters traditionally serve for the Timi every time he leaves the palace (they usually precede him to clear the way of any danger and warn his entourage of any potential issues), hunters literally wear many hats on many occasions. I observed the Oluọdẹ and the other Ogun chiefs wearing the long Yoruba hunter's caps with traditional medicine inside them during the Ogun festival and the Timi's festival, then I saw them wearing the Hausa hats identified with Islam or less religiously linked traditional Yoruba hats on 'Eīd al-Kabīr (see figures 6.1 and 6.2). In addition to Ogun's tradition potentially being conceptualized as an occupation by some, it also serves an important civic function, which forces its leaders to wear many religious and categorical hats.

The Oluọdẹ himself considers Ogun's tradition to be ẹsin, but unlike the younger hunters who are of the opinion that one ẹsin should not be practiced with another, he never gave up practicing Islam when he took the title as head of Ogun's tradition. Still, he does not make a point of attending oriṣa rituals unless he is called by the Timi as part of his official duties as Oluọdẹ. Generally, he merely oversees the activities of the hunters; that is, someone else sacrifices the dog to Ogun or offers the sacrifices at the shrines. Despite being a devout Muslim who intentionally limits his involvement with oriṣa traditions, he nevertheless respects them and does not approve of abandoning ancestral traditions that have been in his lineage for as long as anyone can remember. Several individuals sang a popular hunter's song to me to explain this point:

FIGURE 6.1. Ẹdẹ hunters wearing traditional hunters' hats at the Ogun festival, 2016. Photograph by the author.

FIGURE 6.2. Ẹdẹ hunters wearing Muslim caps on Ileya ('Eīd al-Kabīr), 2016. Photograph by the author.

Igbagbọ o pe ka ma ṣe ọdẹ
Igbagbọ o pe ka ma ṣe ọdẹ
Ba ba kirun tan, a ya gbe ibọn wa
Igbagbọ o pe ka maa ṣe ọdẹ.

Christianity does not prevent us from being hunters
Christianity does not prevent us from being hunters
When we are finished performing (Muslim) prayers,
we will go carry our guns.
Christianity does not prevent us from being hunters.

While it is generally assumed this song is targeted at Muslims and Christians who do not approve of many hunters' religious practice, it could just as easily be directed toward other orișa devotees—particularly babalawo—who likewise do not approve.[48]

Hunters and Eleegun are not the only groups whose traditions do not fit neatly or exclusively under the categories of religion, ancestral tradition, culture, or occupation. Indeed, the Ogboni society (a secret society linked to the earth that has considerable membership in Ẹdẹ) also contains Muslim and Christian members, many of whom across Yorubaland have identified it as a civil institution akin to freemasonry rather than a religion.[49] The tradition of Orișa Oko (orișa of the farm) seems to have all but disappeared in Ẹdẹ, but its links to traditional agriculture could allow it to be configured as an occupation like hunting. The main issue is that some traditions (such as Ogun or Egungun) do not fit the Western category of religion as neatly as others (such as Ifa), and people involved in traditions that resist neat modern categorization face increasing pressure from all sides as the category of religion becomes increasingly salient and entrenched in the minds and ritual practice of Ẹdẹ's population.

Orișa Reawakening

There is a general perception among many non-African scholars and Africans alike that traditional African religions—including traditional Yoruba religion—are slowly and perpetually giving ground to Islam and Christianity. With respect to Ẹdẹ, Nolte and Ogen observed that if one compares the current state of orișa traditions to those recorded in Ulli Beier's *A Year of Sacred Festivals in One Yoruba Town* from 1959, "the celebration of traditionalist events in Ede has declined."[50] On the other hand, they do note that a younger generation has revitalized traditional worship in Oșogbo, and my findings suggest that a similar phenomenon is taking place in Ẹdẹ. It appears that the youngest generation

perceives their ancestral traditions as a "religion," opts to become involved in it exclusively, and subsequently asserts their religious rights in the broader society rather proudly. This recent development is strikingly similar to the statement made by Mãe Stella in the 1980s about why it was important to insist on the separation between Catholicism and Candomblé as a way of instilling pride in the youngest generation of orixá worshippers in Brazil and ensuring the societal recognition of Candomblé as a full religion. The two movements are clearly linked by their shared experience of religious prejudice and the growing transnational emphasis on Yoruba traditions constituting their own religion separate from Islam or Christianity.

Still, it cannot be denied that since Islam took root in Ẹdẹ (in the mid to late nineteenth century), and even since the late 1950s when Beier conducted his fieldwork, the number of people actively practicing orișa traditions in Ẹdẹ has declined sharply. Some traditions, such as those of Orișa Oko, Eșu, Șọpọnna, and Yẹmọja, appear to have disappeared almost completely, but a few factors have ensured the perpetuation of orișa traditions. As noted earlier, Egungun spirits sometimes actively chose a lineage to maintain their traditions or select at least one individual from the lineage as their primary caretaker, and the Egungun are not alone in doing so. According to the Jagun Șango, even if a Șango lineage abandons his tradition, sooner or later Șango will come back and claim one of the children to practice it again.[51] Similarly, the Ọșun priestess describes her coming to the priesthood as Ọșun selecting her and denying her any success in life until she assented.[52]

Another crucial factor is the importance of traditional chieftaincy titles linked to specific orișa traditions. The head of each major orișa tradition in Ẹdẹ except for Ifa (i.e., Șango, Ọșun, Egungun, Ọbatala, and Ogun) practiced Islam and/or Christianity at some point before accepting the title. Most of these titles are hereditary and are passed down and/or rotated through a small number of lineages. Thus, even if the entire lineage has converted to Islam or Christianity, when the chieftaincy becomes vacant, the lineage is asked to nominate a candidate. In some cases, such as that of the Alagbaa (the head of the Egungun tradition), the current chief "stopped going to the mosque" when he assumed the title, as did his father before him.[53] Similarly, the Oluọdẹ and Ajagẹmọ (heads of Ogun's and Ọbatala's traditions, respectively) were both Muslims before taking their titles, and while they both still identify as Muslims, they and their immediate families have become much more involved in the orișa traditions since they were selected for their titles. Lineages do not always put forward a candidate, however, as happened with the title of Olunwi (the second ranking priest of Ọbatala). Because there has not been an Olunwi for some time in

Ẹdẹ, an important (and moderately prominent in academic literature) ritual from the annual Ọbatala festival no longer takes place and has been partially forgotten.[54]

Even titles less explicitly tied to orișa traditions have contributed to their continued survival. The title of Balogun (the paramount war chief) is tied to the staff of Ọranmiyan (an Ọyọ ancestral warrior divinity), and one of his duties is to perform the annual sacrifices to propitiate this powerful war standard for the safety of the entire community.[55] Similarly the Mọgaji (heads of individual royal families/lineages) have certain functions they must perform during the public festivals of the various orișa, which ensures that these lineages at the very least support their practice and interact with their traditions even if no one in the lineage takes an active part in them. In short, the very structure of traditional titles and chieftaincies and their links to the adjacent—but not explicitly religious by modern standards—categories of ancestral lineage, civics, and politics have ensured a place for the orișa traditions in Ẹdẹ's society regardless of conversion trends.

I first noticed a small but growing prominence within the community of orișa devotees when the Jagun Ṣango expressed his excitement about how successful the Ṣango Timi festival had been. There was some anxiety before the festival because it was his first year as the chief possession priest of Ṣango, and the previous Jagun Ṣango had been quite famous and successful. However, that year's festival attracted significant attention, a large number of outside visitors, and a great deal of money for the town, and many described it as the best they had ever experienced. Apart from the positive attention, what stood out to the Jagun Ṣango was that he had only ever initiated five people into the worship of Ṣango and Ọya, but during this festival alone, he had initiated seven and even more were scheduled for the following year.[56] Similarly, the guardian of the Egungun Epete was excited that more and more Egungun are coming out during the annual festival compared to the previous several decades, and the guardian of Gbajẹro, who has been serving the Egungun for many years, remarked that several Egungun he had only seen in photographs from long ago have begun to make appearances as well.[57] Given the very difficult economic situation throughout Nigeria, some have suggested this resurgence is occurring because desperate people will seek answers from all quarters, and while this is surely a factor, I believe there are also deeper systemic reasons behind it.

Osun State—where Ẹdẹ is located—was the only Yoruba state to recognize traditional religion officially alongside Christianity and Islam, which consequently provides for an official organization—TRWASO (Traditional Religion Worshippers Association, State of Osun)—and a state holiday every August 20 called Iṣẹṣẹ (a term now commonly used to refer to traditional religion) Day.[58]

Unsurprisingly, the Olorișa in Ẹdẹ applaud former Osun State Governor Ọgbẹni Rauf Aregbesọla for taking this bold step, and they believe that irrespective of his Muslim identity, it is the orișa themselves who were working through him to create room for their traditions, as has been done for Muslims and Christians for some time. Ifaṣọla Onifade, a middle-aged and prominent babalawo from Ẹdẹ and member of the executive council of TRWASO, strongly identifies with this movement to reassert pride in traditional religion. He remembers a time as a child when orișa devotees wore their ilẹkẹ (beads indicating a person's membership in a specific orișa's tradition) on their left hand so that no one would see them when they shook hands. He was one of the first to wear his ilẹkẹ on his right hand, despite warnings that it might change the way people interacted with him. As a result of this assertion of pride, he says, "[Now] our children are not afraid . . . to call themselves Olorișa. Immediately, when you see them, you will hear [orișa] names, you will see on their necks, on their hands, their beads. And they . . . have confidence and they are proud of Ifa now, unlike in the olden days."[59]

Onifade argues people are more accepting of babalawo now than when he was younger because Olorișa and Ifa devotees in particular have managed to incorporate themselves effectively into ọlaju/modernity. From small issues such as adopting clothes like those of society at large to paying close attention to modern sensibilities toward blood in ritual sacrifices and broadcasting recitations and expositions on Ifa orature on the radio as Pentecostal churches do, these steps have gone a long way toward changing the popular perception of their traditions. Furthermore, as babalawo have been able to prove that their lifestyle can be both compatible with and profitable in the modern context, some women have become more open to marrying Ifa devotees.

Finally, although modern, secular education was first embraced by Christians and subsequently by Muslims in Yorubaland, the youngest generation of Olorișa are currently enrolled in both public and private schools and wear the markers of their religious identity in those settings more proudly than previous generations did. Once, while walking around town, I noticed a young boy back away from the Jagun Ṣango's son, who is a very sweet boy. Surprised, I asked the Jagun Ṣango's son about it; he responded that everyone knows he is a Ṣango devotee and the son of a prominent priest, and some are afraid of him.[60] Apart from his father's high profile, his schoolmates know him as a son of Ṣango because he and his father successfully petitioned his school to allow him to grow out and plait his hair (generally contrary to school codes) as part of his religious practice. This petition demonstrates the emergence of Olorișa in the current and heated debates around religious freedom in Osun State and Nigerian society, such as allowing young women the right to wear the hijab in all public schools.[61]

These examples demonstrate how orișa traditions and those who practice them have recently begun to close ranks and engage with modern society just as Muslims and Christians have. Because the state recognizes "religions" and affords space and certain rights to those who practice them, taking on such a form—consciously or not—ensures orișa devotees at least some access to the benefits of modern Nigerian society. Practicing traditional religion exclusively fits this model much better than the previous model of forms of worship. Particularly for the youngest generation, the framework of traditional religion set up against the alternative religions of Islam and Christianity would seem natural because they have grown up practicing only orișa traditions and have been instilled with a sense of pride in them specifically. Being able to articulate orișa traditions in a form that is acceptable to modern Nigerian society, even if some Muslims and Christians find the *content* of that form to be objectionable, has begun to change how they are perceived and has given practitioners a greater sense of pride in their identity and claim on the Osun State government. It may even have attracted others to "convert" in a way that would have seemed impossible to previous generations.

Family Matters

The generational shift from forms of worship to the contemporary system of exclusive religions has had several significant and contentious effects on Ẹdẹ's social and familial life. Several major areas stand out: religious identity within lineages, marriage, child-rearing, conversion, and ritual practice. People in Ẹdẹ are fond of saying "ọmọ iya kan naa ni wa" (we are all one family/children of the same mother) to explain their high level of religious harmony, with the underlying assumption that conflict along religious lines would result in internal familial conflict, providing a powerful deterrent. The same logic undergirds Laitin's explanation for the general Yoruba preference for constructing identity through lineage and ancestral cities and Akinjogbin's notion of lineage (ẹbi) constituting the most salient identity marker. Each area listed above touches on these claims and demonstrates how the transition in religious models has generated serious, novel complications.

As Akinjogbin's concept of ẹbi demonstrates, identification through and responsibility to one's family/lineage is of paramount importance in Yoruba society.[62] In a model of multiple forms of worship, religious identity and familial identity were configured as mutually reinforcing if not synonymous. Each lineage kept its own traditions and usually one form of worship, but any individual member could become involved in any other form of worship as long as when

it came time to perform the necessary rituals as a unit, she would participate. This created the popular dynamic of Yoruba lineages containing people involved in certain orișa traditions, Islam, and Christianity and feeling very comfortable if not obliged to attend each other's festivals as important family events. However, under a system of exclusive religions and the introduction of personal choice into religious identity, this was no longer a given, and one of the fundamental sources for Yoruba religious tolerance and pluralism became tenuous.

Among the most apparent changes in modern Yoruba family life is the increasing homogenization of religious identity. Even Laitin's research in the 1980s indicated that "although most commentators on Yoruba society contend that there is religious heterogeneity within the Yoruba family, religious homogeneity is the normal pattern," and he provided overwhelming statistical evidence from Ile-Ifẹ to support his argument.[63] In a survey conducted in Ẹdẹ in 1974, seven of the ten major town lineages polled were at least 95 percent Muslim, and all indications are that the level of homogeneity has only risen.[64] In 2013, Olatayo found that 65 percent of Muslims in Ẹdẹ said they would not even allow family members to practice Christianity if they wanted to, and 90 percent of Christians said the same of Islam.[65] It would be easy to identify such attitudes as mere religious intolerance, but I believe the situation is more complicated. When religious identity came to be understood as exclusive and a matter of choice (at least to a degree), many lineages came to be identified with *only one* religious tradition. Consequently, any decision to deviate from the lineage's official religion became an active choice *against* one's family and fundamental identity (ẹbi), which violates a central value of Yoruba life. For the first time, it became possible for religious identity and familial identity to be at odds, and Balogun argued that various lineages in Ẹdẹ are currently developing a variety of different ways of negotiating this new tension between "biological descent and religion."[66]

Although lineages may previously have been religiously homogenous in the sense that all members took part in certain important aspects of the worship of a particular orișa or ancestor (but may have also been involved in additional traditions), the new type of religious homogeneity in which lineage members are involved in *only* one religious tradition is a direct result of the sharp decline in interfaith marriages. As Oyeronke Olajubu notes, historically women brought exposure to and involvement in different forms of worship into lineages through marriage: "At marriage, the daughter moves to her marital home with her personal *orisa* and her family/lineage deities. A space is provided for the worship of these deities in the compound. . . . It thus becomes clear that over the years a cumulative ensemble of deities brought into the compound by wives will inform significantly the total sum of family lineage deities."[67] Women have traditionally

been at the heart of "introduc[ing] heterogeneity into the patrilineage" because "they multiply the diversity of spiritual beings that are served in each lineage and in the town as a whole."[68] Particularly when some of her own children are required to carry on the worship of her ritual objects or gain a title through her position in an orișa tradition, the mother is the most important in "ensuring that no *ilé* [lineage or compound] has a homogenous religious composition."[69]

Consequently, women were central to a process of religious cross-fertilization in which a lineage would be exposed to and involved in multiple different forms of worship, particularly because of the traditional practice in which a woman adopts the form of worship of her new family. This is epitomized by the saying "obinrin o lęsin," which literally means "a woman has no religion/form of worship." The saying does *not* indicate that women were not involved in ęsin, but rather that traditionally, a woman was understood and expected to be religiously mobile through joining her husband's lineage and accepting and taking part in its various traditions.[70] The saying is nonetheless shocking to modern sensibilities and modern notions of gender equality, as individualism has presented a very strong challenge to this tradition. The root of the emerging tensions around marriage is not only one of patriarchy and enforcing women's submission, as it may appear to some.[71] Patriarchy is clearly the main force at play, but behind this particular manifestation of patriarchy and conflict is the shift in expectation that a person could simply take on another form of worship to the assumption that doing so was no longer acceptable.[72] Given this new, modern framework, at marriage a woman is inequitably placed in a bind by being expected to adopt the traditions of her new lineage while simultaneously *abandoning* those of her own, which would alienate and separate her from either her new family or her family of origin. Oddly enough, this transition to the modern conception of individual choice in religious affiliation and exclusive religious identity further disenfranchised women by placing great pressure on them to abandon important aspects of their previous identities in favor of those of their husbands. A woman is, of course, free not to adopt her husband's religion, but even if he accepts her choice, it is likely to create significant friction with his lineage.

When I asked older women if they would ever consider practicing another religion, they usually responded that they would not because it would separate them from their husbands and family, but younger women were more likely to *choose* their husbands based on religious identity. Bayọ Ayantunde's mother, for example, converted to Christianity from Islam when she married his father, but after her husband died, she returned to practicing Islam. This shifting religious identity need not indicate a lack of conviction but rather suggests a strong belief in the legitimacy of both as valid forms of worship. If both Islam and Christianity

were legitimate ways of worshipping God for her, then adopting one while she was joined to her husband and his lineage would not constitute a significant problem, and neither would returning to Islam after he had passed. Deacon Oke of the First Baptist Church also had a mother who converted from Islam to Christianity, and when I asked if there was any conflict over this interreligious marriage, he responded, "No, no. At that time there wasn't anything like that. It is in the present day that you now have [people saying], 'Ah! You want to marry a Christian?' But then it was not so."[73]

Although Sakiatu Abẹki, another older Muslim woman, is perfectly comfortable with her children practicing any religion appropriate for them, when I asked about interreligious marriage, she said she would not practice anything but Islam because it is her husband's religion as well as that of her own family. However, she believed marrying across religious lines is no longer possible because "nisiyin, oju ti la bayii o" (we have become modern/enlightened now).[74] She did not intend—as the English word *enlightened* implies—that modern norms are superior, only that times have changed definitively. Along similar lines, another Eleegun said he should in theory be able to marry a woman of any religious background, but he would not want to marry a Christian because she would likely not approve of his worship of the orisa given many Christians' orientation toward religion.[75] For many older women, there was little if any price to pay for adopting the ẹsin of their husband's family, but in contemporary times, marriage can force a choice between identifying with her own lineage or her husband's.

Given how challenging interfaith marriages are in modern Yoruba society, the easiest way out of this bind is to marry within one's religious group. In Jones and Nolte's survey in Ẹdẹ, about half the respondents indicated that they would not wish to marry someone of a different religion, and there are multiple forces acting against even those open to an interreligious marriage.[76] While it is well known among Ẹdẹ's numerous well-educated religious scholars that marriage between Christians and Muslims is permissible, it was strongly discouraged by every Muslim cleric I interviewed. As the chief imam put it elsewhere: "According to the Qur'an, in the olden days, Muslims were allowed to marry from Christianity because Christians have their own Holy Book, but in this generation, it is not advisable at all, and I have my reasons for it. . . . The training given to the Christian girl is that she should try to convert her husband to Christianity. If she fails, she would convert the children, but she would first start with the husband. . . . It is dangerous for such a man."[77]

The chairman of the Ẹdẹ Muslim Council, Al-Hajji Abdulrahman Ẹlẹsin, added that marriage across religious lines is particularly dangerous because children

will usually spend more time with and become closer to their mothers, so if the mother practices a different religion, it will likely shift the religious identity of the entire lineage in the coming generation.[78] Indeed, the fear of wives convincing their husbands to convert is not entirely unfounded, as many pastors said they hoped such women would "win their husbands for Christ" while expressing identical fears about Christian men marrying Muslim women.[79] However, I never heard or witnessed anything to suggest either Muslims or Christians harbored secret strategies to convert youth of the other religion through marriage, and if anything, each group strongly discouraged such action. In addition, the role of romantic love in these modern tensions should not be overlooked, because the increasing importance of personal feelings rather than familial authority complicates matters further.[80] Among Muslims and Christians alike, it is quite common to hear people perceive their children marrying outside of their religious communities as akin to death, or at least expressing that it must not happen while they are still alive.[81] In short, marriages and families are now far less diverse than they used to be, and consequently, what diversity still exists is primarily intergenerational, explaining the increasing levels of distance between religious groups as time goes on.

Again, it is women who feel the pressure and friction generated by the changing perspective on interreligious marriage and children's religious identity most acutely. One woman who converted to Islam from Christianity was told by her father she could marry a Muslim "over his dead body," and he repeated twice that he would rather die than allow it to happen. A Muslim woman who converted and married a Christian man said her father's reaction to her choice was "terrible and violent."[82] Similarly, the Jagun Ṣango and one of his wives were taken all the way to the Timi's palace by her Muslim family because they did not approve of her marrying a Ṣango priest.[83] When I asked a friend whether there was any trouble when she decided to marry her husband and convert to Christianity. She responded, "Heeey! There was. A serious one." Her father rejected her decision, asking how an imam could follow his daughter into a church, and both her parents refused to attend the wedding. She was visibly saddened that her late father never accepted her decision. Understanding that this complex, gendered issue is primarily structural and not merely about individual men manipulating women, my friend said she was grateful she only had sons because she would worry about what might happen to a daughter when it came time to get married. She said, "Maybe that is why God did not release [a] girl for me. So that I will not have that problem. [A] male child can marry any religion, so he will convert the wife."[84] When such conflicts arise in a family setting, it is usually the women, and

the older women in particular, who shoulder the burden of keeping or restoring the peace, likely because they have more experience straddling religious divides and lineage groups.[85]

Pastor Bennett Irogbalam of Living Faith Church Worldwide International is similarly against Christian women marrying Muslim men but believes under normal circumstances a woman should begin to attend the church of her husband.[86] His is a telling stance because while it in part affirms the importance of a woman's choice in religious identity (namely Christianity), it in fact contracts the belief that "women do not have a religion" to the realm of Christian denominations. Because Pastor Irogbalam's church teaches that Jesus is the only way to salvation, all other traditions do not constitute "real" or "true" religion, and thus are not viable options for women (or men for that matter). Consequently, as the cosmology of his religious community has come to encompass only Christianity in its various denominations, the same principle of women adopting the religious affiliation of her husband was applied within that narrower context.

The small number of women still willing to marry across religious lines indicates that even despite the pressure from their families to marry within their own religion and pressure from a potential husband's family to convert to their religion (if different from her family's), the women themselves practice a great deal of agency and do not simply accept the saying "women do not have a religion" uncritically. In fact, many simply reject it. Alhajjah Hajarat Ọlasunkanmi agreed that it is better for a husband and a wife to practice the same religion and that women were expected to change their affiliation in the past, but she asserted that "obinrin ti lẹsin bayii!" (women have religion now!). Because she had seen me at several religious events in Ẹdẹ, she asked, "Isn't it true that when you go to the mosque, you usually find more women there than men? Aren't there more women at prayer meetings than men? If there are ten men, you'll find fifty women. So can you say women don't have/own their religion?"[87] Similarly, Mrs. Funmilayọ Oyesomi, a lifetime member of the Baptist Church, agreed that people used to say that "women do not have religion," but when I informed her I met many women who still believed that, she shook her head. She responded, "If we take Christianity seriously, we can't allow our children—male *or* female—to marry Muslims or idol worshippers."[88] As the people of Ẹdẹ have slowly moved away from the previous tradition of a woman simply adopting the form of worship of her husband's lineage, women have been given more agency with respect to their religious choices. At the same time, however, their ability to exercise this freedom has become contentious and subject to immense pressure, and this is in large part a result of the patriarchal nature of Yoruba society and the anxiety it produces about the identity and salvation of her children.

Again, this anxiety is a recent development, and the oldest generation does not share Mrs. Oyesomi's strong objections to the possibility of her children practicing a different religion. For example, Mariyeba Ifabunmi has been Muslim all her life but is happy her first-born child and grandson are Christian because it has been a positive force in their lives. Similarly the Baba Mọgba (senior non-possession Ṣango priest) practiced both Islam and Christianity before taking the title of Mọgba, and he takes no issue with his children practicing Islam, although he hopes one of them will take the Mọgba title when the time comes.[89] In general, the Olorișa are more open to their children practicing different religions—and the older generations are likely to have been or currently to be involved in more than one tradition themselves—but the younger generation is very insistent on their children worshipping *only* the orișa.

Awofakunle Ojo comes from a prominent Ifa lineage in Ẹdẹ, and when I asked him about the religious future of his child, he responded, "ọmọ tẹmi ba bi, mo n bẹ Ọlọrun, loju aye mi lati igba ti mo ba tun lọ tan o, ko si nkankan to le kirun" (as for any of my own children, I beg God, that from the time I am alive until I pass on, none of them will practice Islam).[90] Ṣangoyẹmi Ayefadun expressed a sentiment similar to Pastor Irogbalam's: He is open to his children practicing any variety of traditional religion but would not allow them to become Christian or Muslim.[91] Just as Pastor Irogbalam applied the principle of obinrin o lẹsin to his exclusive cosmology, Ṣangoyẹmi's cosmology has shrunk to encompass only traditional religion, and the acceptability of different types of religious practice and identity is confined to its boundaries.

Because of the great anxiety over children's religious identity and pressure for them to adhere to a particular religion as a central part of their lineage identity, the modern phenomenon of conversion is highly contentious.[92] Marriage is an important instance in which conversion occurs and is arguably the most visible. However, in other situations it is difficult to know how often conversion may in fact take place because many feel the need to conceal their new religious affiliation from their families. Mrs. Oyesomi believes that because many parents now have very strict attitudes about religion, children who convert are unlikely to tell their parents. One of her friends changed religious affiliation many years ago and began traveling to another town to attend religious services to avoid family conflict. She believes this situation likely played a role in the friend's ultimate decision to leave Nigeria, although the person still contributes resources for all family events, expenses, and religious holidays.[93] Deacon Oke similarly had a friend who converted to Christianity, chose to live outside Ẹdẹ, and begged him not to reveal his secret.[94] Again, the negative reaction to the *choice* to convert to a new religion is not only the result of shifting orientations toward religion but

is also a direct result of the continuing importance of ẹbi and family identity. Hence the introduction of personal choice in religious identity paired with the advent of exclusivist cosmologies has introduced a potential conflict between lineage and religion where one previously could not have existed.

Ritual Trouble

The ritual practice of people in Ẹdẹ has naturally undergone changes and complications as they have moved away from the system of forms of worship. Previously, Muslims and Christians attended each other's religious services with relative frequency, but over the past fifty years or so, steps have been taken to prevent this practice. For example, Adeniyi cites Muslims attending church as a major motivating factor for the establishment of modernizing Muslim movements such as the Ansarul Islam and Ansar-Ud-Deen Societies, which sought to further members' knowledge of Islamic theology and teaching, establish greater unity among Muslims, and limit the Western/Christian influence on their children by offering educational opportunities.[95] Similarly, several Muslim and Christian organizations schedule meetings and events at times when they know some of their members might be tempted to attend the services of another religious group. This has effectively served to create separate religious spheres of activity with restricted opportunity for overlap, and it has indeed become rarer for Christians to pray in a mosque or Muslims to attend church.

There is another important ritual practice performed by the alfa in Ẹdẹ called atunwẹ (rewashing). When members of a specific mosque have been involved in orișa activities, the members must perform a full ritual ablution, confess what they have done, promise that the practice is now behind them, and recite the Shahāda; the imam is then informed so that he can watch out for any "backsliding" which might take place. Some alfa said that they may perform this ritual for several dozen people within a period of weeks, and atunwẹ is generally perceived as a ritual of purification, forgiveness, and enforcement of orthodoxy. While it is undoubtedly performed for people who simply have chosen to enlist the spiritual help of orișa devotees for specific purposes, it could also take on the additional significance of marking and enforcing the model of religion rather than multiple forms of worship. For those who may not previously have seen anything wrong in practicing Islam alongside the tradition of an ancestral orișa, for example, atunwẹ takes on not only the significance of an admission of having committed a sin (namely shirk), but an important acceptance of and submission to the system that *articulates* such religious behavior in that way.

Perhaps the most important ritual that has become multivalent and affected people's religious choices is burial. Ọlọngbele Ọlaiya is an elderly Muslim man who does not necessarily take issue with people continuing their ancestral traditions alongside Islam but believes that if they do so, they should not make it widely known because they would not be able to have the alfa come to their house at landmark moments in life such as the naming of a child and burial.[96] According to some, this is precisely why many of the Eleegun hide their involvement in the masquerade, and because they are usually underneath many layers of cloth, people usually cannot identify them. It may also be sufficient reason to choose to practice one tradition exclusively, as burial rituals have a strong influence on one's afterlife in both Islamic and traditional Yoruba cosmologies.

Another source of pressure related to burial rites is the desires of children who are likely to make and pay for many of the arrangements. Abidi Abegunde worships several orișa but is also a Muslim, and he believes fewer people openly practice multiple traditions as he does because their children practice Islam exclusively and only want their parents to be buried by an alfa. On the other hand, he also believes that some people may simply *add* Christianity or Islam to their ritual practice to make it possible for their children to select the type of burial that they would prefer.[97] If true, this fascinating theory would constitute an ironic instance of increasingly rigid religious boundaries resulting in additional cases of people practicing multiple religions at once. Still, some like the Oluọdẹ or Sakibu Ọdẹwale, who could be buried either as Muslims or as hunters, know their children would prefer that they be buried as Muslims, but they do not care much because they believe they will end up before God one way or the other. At times, however, the matter can be much more contentious. Sakibu Ọdẹwale informed me that three prominent hunters had died recently, but the alfa did not want to bury them because they were deeply involved in Ogun's tradition. The families insisted that they were in fact Muslims, and it took the intervention of the Timi to mandate that the wishes of the family should be respected.[98]

The interreligious dynamics of important rituals and festivals such as burial have similarly become more complicated and less uniform. For example, Jones and Nolte found that Christians and Muslims were generally willing to attend or invite each other to important social events or festivals, but there was a variety of opinions about how involved members of a different religious group could be in such events, particularly with regard to aspects that they defined as religious. In fact, only about half their respondents found it acceptable for religious outsiders to participate in the activities rather than simply to attend passively. Furthermore, only 36 percent were comfortable with Olorișa attending such

events, and the inclusion of traditional elements depended to a certain degree on whether the occasion was perceived as entertainment, culture, or religion.[99] Olatayo's findings were even more extreme. He reported that only one-third of Muslims were willing to celebrate Christmas with Christian friends, and only 6.7 percent of Christians were willing to celebrate Ileya ('Eīd al-Kabīr) with their Muslim friends.[100]

I similarly found that while Muslims and Christians were generally fairly open to having each other at least attend, if not participate in, their events, the strongest boundary existed between these two and traditional religion. Alhajjah Ọlasunkanmi would never allow her children to attend the Ṣango festival and was curious as to why I, a Christian, took so much interest in it.[101] A female member of Christ Apostolic Church warned me to be very careful when I was with Olorișa, and when I asked whether she would attend their festivals, her shocked response was, "It has nothing to do with my religion!"[102] As I followed many of the orișa processions around the streets of Ẹdẹ, it was not uncommon to see parents shepherding their children inside as the procession passed. Even a brief comparison between the impressive pictures taken by Ulli Beier of Ẹdẹ's festivals in the 1950s and the attendance at orișa festivals now reveals that the number of participants and observers has declined significantly. However, the Timi's festival of Ipedi and Ṣango's festival still draw enormous crowds that include both Muslims and Christians.

Ọlaju

When I asked people in Ẹdẹ why perspectives on religious matters and related family dynamics have changed so much and become so varied, the common refrain was that it was a result of modernity, or ọlaju. Peel, who has engaged with the Yoruba concept of ọlaju more than any other scholar, identifies it as having "begun with the missionary metaphor of bringing light to darkness, and missionaries have always stood as the paradigm of imposing external, in fact relatively global, definitions of value," although these external values were woven into the history and idioms of the Yoruba people and been widely accepted.[103] One of the most significant external values was the Protestant-centric perspective on the nature of religion and religious identity that has slowly replaced the traditional system of forms of worship. This, of course, does not mean the practice of Islam has not also had a significant effect on the religious culture of modern society in Ẹdẹ; the existence of the many modernizing and reform movements such as the Ansar-Ud-Deen Society, Ahmadiyya movement, Tablighi Jamaat, and Salafi community clearly demonstrate this fact. However, these movements constitute

efforts to engage in an *external* tradition of modernity from an Islamic perspective. Furthermore, no Islamic scholars have produced the type of modern literature that drew on Western and Christian categories and ideas in the way the Reverends James and Samuel Johnson, E. Moses Lijadu, or J. Olumide Lucas did. In this sense, the foundational contours of the religious domain in Yoruba modernity were largely defined by Protestant Christians, although Muslims and Oloriṣa have engaged in this process to make their own meaning out of it.[104] While my respondents in Ẹdẹ identified ọlaju as the source for the subtle but significant changes I observed, they did not necessarily believe it to be a bad or good development. While certain value judgments could be inferred from some responses, they were mostly matter-of-fact statements that in the world of ọlaju, or enlightenment, this is simply how the world now works.

The Oluọdẹ was quick to identify missionaries as the pivotal influence because it was only after the introduction of Christianity in Abẹokuta (the first site of a permanent CMS mission) that people forgot they are all children of Oduduwa and their ẹsin became separated.[105] Sakibu Ọdẹwale similarly believes that there were "at least a dozen" ẹsin (here meaning "forms of worship" such as Ifa, Ọṣun, and Ṣango) in Ẹdẹ before ọlaju, and it was only after its introduction along with Islam and Christianity that people became very concerned about ẹsin (meaning "religion") the way they are now.[106] Because he is the caretaker of an Egungun masquerade and a Muslim, I asked Abidi Abegunde if he had any hesitancy about reciting the Shahāda and affirming that there is only one God and that Muhammad is His Prophet. Abegunde's response was that the same God created the oriṣa traditions, but it was not until the advent of ọlaju that people began seeing conflict where it did not previously exist.[107]

Once again, with respect to more concrete, relational matters, recall that Sakiatu Abẹki believes the reason people are no longer free to marry someone from any religious background is because "oju ti la bayii" (we have become modern/enlightened now).[108] Her observation is insightful because it is both prescriptive and descriptive; that is, it is now discouraged to marry outside one's religious group, and if one were to do so, the nature of ẹsin in the context of ọlaju suggests there would inevitably be significant tension as a result. Gbenga Fọlayan is a middle-aged Christian who married a Muslim but is aware interfaith marriages are not common anymore. I asked if he believed the saying "obinrin o lẹsin," and he answered that it was true in the past, but "ọlaju ti de" (modernity has arrived) so a woman must make that decision for herself. Hence, his wife wanted to remain a Muslim, which did not bother him because they both serve the same God.[109] Bayọ Ayantunde believes the number of people in Ẹdẹ who are open to marrying across religious lines or to their children becoming involved in different religious

traditions is now quite low and only dropping. This, along with the rising homogeneity of families, is a direct result of ọlaju, as is the need to distinguish between what truly constitutes religion as opposed to other areas of life such as occupation, culture, or tradition.[110]

Reflecting on modern changes in Ile-Ifẹ's religious life, Olupona observed "this newer negotiation of modernity is driven by generally exclusivist religious movements whose theology . . . renders implausible the older order," creating distinctions and divisions that previously could not exist or be salient.[111] While modernity is often associated with a decrease in the salience of religion in people's lives in the Western world, it appears that in Yorubaland (and many other areas of Africa), the exact opposite is true.[112] Despite the era of ọlaju making religious difference more salient in contemporary Yoruba society, Ifaṣọla Onifade found the babalawo's ability to domesticate it, engage with it, and adapt to it has been one of the major reasons why Ifa has been able to flourish in recent times.[113] Hence, ọlaju has introduced new ways of thinking and ordering people's lives, with each successive generation finding a new way of interacting with it, if not always in the same fashion.

A Rocky Transition

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, Ẹdẹ has not been impervious to the rise in religious tension in Nigeria and Yorubaland. Although the town is well known for its culture of religious harmony, citizens from all religious backgrounds remember a period about thirty or forty years ago when peace was not as commonplace. For example, several Eleegun complained their processions used to be confronted regularly by Muslims seeking to disrupt their public practice of the tradition.[114] This conflict with Egungun masquerades was not unique to Ẹdẹ, and sometimes bloody confrontations occurred in several places in Yorubaland in the 1980s.[115] On the other side, some Muslims complained about the Egungun masquerades intentionally playing their music loudly when passing by mosques and using the talking drums to taunt those inside, and Shaykh Salahuddin faced significant resistance from orịṣa devotees when he established the Islamic Institute in the 1960s.[116]

Christians also experienced their fair share of religious conflict. Deacon Oke from the First Baptist Church remembers rocks being thrown at members in open-air services and the glass windows of some churches being broken during this period.[117] The grounds of St. Peter's Anglican Church now contain a student hostel because Christian students at the polytechnic had so much trouble finding rooms to rent in Ẹdẹ that the church had to step in and provide housing.[118]

In 1998 there was a physical conflict in the royal palace itself between the Reverend A. A. Yakubu, a former Muslim who became a Baptist pastor, and some Muslim chiefs, which left the pastor injured.[119] The conflict mentioned in chapter 1 between Muslims and Oloriṣa over the location of the Ṣango statue next to a mosque also occurred during this period. Between the 1970s and 1990s, several people were killed and movement around parts of the city was locked down.

While Ẹdẹ citizens of all religious identities agree the town can boast a proud tradition of religious harmony, they also agree that for at least a period, this was not the case. Although there are still minor instances of conflict, harmony is very much the order of the day again. When there was a brief confrontation between an Egungun masquerade in front of the Islamic Institute, the Egungun chiefs were quick to defend Shaykh Salahuddin Ọlayiwọla and assert that, if anything, he worked to defuse the situation, which the shaykh later confirmed.[120] One of the Egungun chiefs even insisted he could never say a negative word about Shaykh Salahuddin—whom he called his baba (father)—because when he was just getting started in life, the shaykh gave him a generous gift of money to help him establish himself.[121]

Muslims and Eleegun have worked out a system by which the masquerades know when people will be praying in the mosque, and they do not beat the drums when they pass by out of respect. Because Muslim parents are understandably concerned about their children attending a school on church grounds and the majority of the school's students are Muslim, the First Baptist Church sought to move their school outside church grounds to make it be more accessible to everyone.[122] Similarly, despite Adeleke University in Ẹdẹ having strong institutional ties and identification with the Seventh Day Adventist Church, a mosque was also constructed on campus to serve the large number of Muslim students who study there.[123] Mutual respect, familiarity, and consideration are quite prominent in Ẹdẹ today, and each religious tradition has developed its own deep theology around this issue that transcends a mere "live and let live" approach.

Current Pluralistic Theology

In her work on religious pluralism in the United States, Diana Eck joined voices like that of Ashis Nandy in pushing back against the way media and scholars tend to focus more on religious conflict and violence than on effective pluralism.[124] She stressed how abundant historical and contemporary evidence, such as the situations in Mughal and much of present-day India or al-Andalūs in Iberia, illustrates how many societies have transcended mere religious diversity to make an interacting plurality of religious traditions part and parcel of their identity.

This distinction between diversity and true pluralism is quite important and enlightening with respect to Ẹdẹ and merits quoting in full: "Pluralism is not just the enumeration of difference, and pluralism is certainly not just the celebration of diversity in a spirit of good will. Pluralism is the engagement of difference in the often-difficult yet creative ways that we as scholars can observe, investigate, and interpret. In investigating the deliberate construction of multireligious relationships, we might find a set of paradigms for pluralism, a set of practices, each of which expands the social space of religious encounter."[125] Despite real challenges, Ẹdẹ's citizens have found ways not merely to "tolerate" each other and their differences but to find important methods of engaging with and respecting those differences. Furthermore, they do so not by appealing to notions of a secular space that allows people of conflicting worldviews to interact in a theoretically neutral sphere, but instead by drawing from their own religious traditions for guidance.

For example, the chief imam cited the popular Qur'anic verse "there is no compulsion in religion" to argue that it is senseless to attempt to force people to practice any religion against their will, despite this being all too common in contemporary Nigerian society.[126] The chairman of the Ẹdẹ Muslim Council, Al-Hajji Abdurrahman Ẹlẹṣin referenced Sūrat al-Kāfirūn, which emphasizes that some people will not believe the message of the Prophet, but Muslims should not join them, and ended by stating, "You have your religion [dīn], and I have mine."[127] Similarly, when confronted with religious perspectives or behavior of which he did not approve, Shaykh Salahuddin Ọlayiwọla would often make reference to a recurring phrase in the Qur'an: "yahdī Allāhu man yashā'" (God guides whom He wills).[128]

While these are common features many invoke in an interfaith context, Muslims in Ẹdẹ are often familiar with less widely known aspects of the tradition because of their particular pluralistic society and history and the new meaning these aspects of the tradition take on in this context. For example, when speaking about how some elders in his family used to worship the oriṣa, another Muslim cleric cited a ḥadīth (saying of the Prophet) regarding the permissibility of giving money to unbelievers who ask for it. He then continued to cite Sūrat al-Isrā', which states, "Your Lord has ordained that you do not worship anyone except Him, and treat your parents with kindness; if either of them or both reach old age in your presence, do not say 'Uff' to them and do not rebuff them, and speak to them with the utmost respect."[129] This cleric identified a convergence between the fundamental Yoruba value of respect for elders and Islamic tradition. His cultural background reinforced the Islamic injunction that in the context of Ẹdẹ, where elders may have been involved in oriṣa worship—perhaps alongside

Islam—a faithful Muslim must not speak ill of them or treat them with contempt, but rather must give them honor and respect.

Some might believe that overly strict adherence to Islamic—or indeed any religious—principles may hinder peaceful coexistence and promote a clash of civilizations à la Samuel Huntington.[130] However, this cleric and several others besides asserted that the reason Boko Haram and other extremist groups have difficulty gaining traction in this area is in fact because of a *lack* of deep knowledge and understanding of their religious traditions. Hence, greater knowledge and more sincere adherence to Islam does not imply a greater risk of fanaticism or conflict, but precisely the opposite.[131] They are quick to point to Ẹdẹ's proud history of Islamic education as a major force behind its present and positive religious climate. Generally, northern Nigeria is assumed to be home to the more prominent and knowledgeable Muslim scholars, but some of Ẹdẹ's schools draw many students from the north and employ teachers trained in Ẹdẹ and others from as far away as Saudi Arabia and Egypt. When the brief altercation broke out between some young Muslim students and one of Ẹdẹ's masquerades at the Islamic Institute, leaders on both sides of the conflict were quick to assume those students must have been boarding students from outside Ẹdẹ because their own children would surely know better. Any child of Ẹdẹ would grow up within this type of religious climate and environment of proper education.

Although no scholars cited him to me, the Malian Tijani shaykh Tierno Bokar expressed similar perspectives in exhorting his disciples to speak with and learn from adherents of other religious traditions to deepen their own practice of Islam. When asked about such religious exchanges, Tierno Bokar replied, "Do not be like those who have gone astray. . . . Certain truths only seem to be beyond our acceptance because, quite simply, our knowledge has not had access to them. . . . Avoid confrontations. When something in some religion or belief shocks you, instead seek to understand it. Perhaps God will come to your aid and will enlighten you about what seems strange."[132] Tierno Bokar similarly rooted his valorization of non-Muslim traditions in the Qur'an and revelations, demonstrating that Yoruba Muslims cannot claim a monopoly on this conciliatory emphasis on deeper knowledge of religious others and Islam naturally producing harmony.

Apart from the theological roots of such orientations, practical concerns, such as those of Muslims with Orișa parents, have certainly contributed to a great degree of familiarity with aspects of the tradition that allow for positive interactions with other religious groups. One of the most common responses I heard from Muslims, Christians, and Orișa alike was that if an imam or pastor were to get into a fight with someone wearing a traditional masquerade, there is a

good chance he would be fighting his own brother or relative. Given this level of religious diversity, for a family lineage to function properly, members of different religious groups have to learn to interact peacefully with each other, and this is particularly the case when there might be differences of opinion with elders.[133] Even if such religious diversity is increasingly rare today as lineages become progressively more religiously homogenous, the historical experience of lineage heterogeneity and pluralism has undoubtedly left a mark on the way Ẹdẹ's Muslims engage with their theology.

Similarly, Muslims in Ẹdẹ are also familiar with Christian theology and practice, and in some ways have a better relationship with Christians than with Oloriṣa. Christians' categorization as "people of the book" is certainly a relevant factor here, but more important is the long history of Ẹdẹ's most prominent Muslim families with Christian educational institutions. The most prominent Muslim lineage in the town, whose name Ile Imọle literally translates to "compound of Islam," was one of the first to send its children to an Anglican primary school.[134] The Adelekes—another prominent family that includes the famous late senator and first governor of Osun State, Isiaka Adeleke—has a long history of Christian education, particularly through the Seventh Day Adventist Church, even for its Muslim members.[135] The current Timi in Ẹdẹ, HRH Ọba Munirudeen Adeṣọla Lawal, was also educated in and has worked in Baptist educational institutions.

A friend of mine said that while he would not tolerate his children converting to Christianity, he believes it is a good way of life revealed by God because he learned about it when he attended a Christian school. However, when it came to the oriṣa, he could not say the same because they are not part of his tradition and he has little firsthand knowledge of them.[136] Again, this is a common sentiment among Ẹdẹ's population, particularly the youngest generation: Christians and Muslims worship the same God, and there are slight—although perhaps still very important—differences between the religions, whereas there is more room for debate when it comes to traditional religious practices.

At the same time, there is a sizable, but generally much older, section of the population that interprets the matter differently. Many Oloriṣa in Ẹdẹ, especially the priests of Ṣango, are very familiar with the narrative about Ibrahīm and Ismaʿīl from Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt but believe it was Ṣango who provided the sacrificial ram to Ibrahīm to take the place of his son. As a result, they believe the ritual sacrifice of a ram at ʿEīd al-Kabīr, while Islamic, is also done in honor of their oriṣa, particularly because the ram is Ṣango's iconic sacrificial animal. To return to the perspective of Oseni Lawal from chapter 2, he did not see understanding Ṣango to be Jibrīl as a violation of tawḥīd (the unity and uniqueness of God). He forced me to agree with him that within the oriṣa cosmology, God created Ṣango and

gave him his aṣẹ (power), which meant Ṣango was a divine minister and could not compromise God's unity. As noted earlier, even some well-educated alfa identified Luqmān from the Qur'an with Ọrunmila in Ifa, which they argued could be understood from an Islamic perspective as a revealed wisdom tradition God gave to the Yoruba before the coming of the Prophet and Islam.[137] Most Muslims in Ẹdẹ, however, do not share this perspective, and those who have devoted the most time to studying Islamic theology would not be so quick to insert indigenous Yoruba traditions or oriṣa into an Islamic theological framework. At the same time, there is a relatively small number of Ẹdẹ's Muslim citizens who are involved with the oriṣa and simply do not conceptualize this activity as kufr (disbelief) or shirk precisely because it does not fall under the category of religion.

Christians also have their own diverse ways of contributing to the pluralistic religious climate in Ẹdẹ. Some from the mainline Protestant denominations take a fairly conciliatory stance on oriṣa traditions, also understanding them as another way of praising and serving God. The Reverend Nathaniel Oyewole of the First Baptist Church asserted that before Yoruba people were exposed to Christianity, they "had their own way of reaching God" through traditional intermediaries or oriṣa, even if he does not believe this system to be completely well informed or appropriate.[138] The Venerable Julius Ọjọmọ, the archdeacon of St. Peter's Anglican Church, follows in the tradition of Anglican clergy who took an interest in oriṣa worship, particularly Ifa. Following his research, he believes, "the person we call Ẹla [either another name for Ọrunmila or a similar intermediary oriṣa of wisdom within Ifa] had the same attributes with Jesus. It is the name that is different. The way they see Jesus is the same way . . . Ẹla has no beginning."[139] He still believes Christianity is a more complete and appropriate way of worshipping God but does not believe that the Yoruba were not in touch with God's Truth before the arrival of missionaries. Not all pastors shared this opinion. For example, Pastor Irogbalam of Living Faith Church Worldwide International believes that because John 14:6 states, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh to the Father, but by me," he cannot accept that any religion not based on Jesus truly worships God.[140]

The chaplain at Redeemer's University, Pastor Alakija, was hesitant to say whether non-Christians are indeed worshipping God but, like his Muslim counterparts, stressed that the difference between them lay in another important area: knowledge. Quoting Hosea 4:6, Pastor Alakija said, "God's people are destroyed for lack of knowledge," such as the belief that God can be contained in wood or a stone. Hence, from his perspective, the only solution is knowledge rather than conflict and violence, and this perspective underlies the university's approach to providing knowledge and education without any expectation of or

emphasis on conversion.[141] The Reverend Oyewole similarly believes the resolution to the rising religious tension in the country is better religious education. According to him, "Nobody should force anybody to follow whatever [religion]. Enlighten them and teach them."[142] While Archdeacon Ọjọmọ does not condone the mixing of traditional religion with Christianity, he believes the common intolerance to orișa traditions exists because people have not taken the time to acquire sufficient knowledge about them.[143] These clergymen all emphasized a type of positive engagement with enlightenment and education, including about religious others, demonstrating the conciliatory potential also present in ọlaju and modern education if carried out properly. These clergymen also shared the perspective of their Muslim counterparts that conflict is not the result of an excessive devotion to one's religion but rather the exact opposite.

For example, Pastor Alakija referred to 1 John 4:20 and Matthew 22:39, respectively, stating that if we are to love a God we have not seen, we must learn to love our brother and our neighbor as ourselves. He added "there is no condition attached to it. We must love our neighbors no matter who they are or what religion they practice."[144] Pastor Irogbalam expressed the same perspective, although drawn from Romans 12:18, which states, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." He added that by "all men" Paul was referring to everyone regardless of religious background.[145] Appealing to the same passage in Romans and Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, the Reverend Oyewole argued that even if evil is done to Christians, peace can only be maintained if they respond in love and "repay evil with good."[146] In a very reflective turn, he regretted that among many Christians, "hatred is resounding in our prayers. . . . Everything is an enemy." He believed the emphasis placed on calling down divine fire and death on one's enemies does not please Jesus and is one of the primary reasons why so many prayers are going unanswered in Nigeria today.[147]

Christians' minority status in Ẹdẹ has made it imperative that they negotiate methods of interacting with religious others in a peaceful manner. Much like Ẹdẹ's Muslims, they have turned to their religious tradition not only to find appropriate ways of doing this but also to articulate ways their particular theologies compel them to go beyond simply tolerating each other or "getting along." It was because of his training in Christian theology that Archdeacon Ọjọmọ found and recognized value in the tradition of Ifa (even if he does not practice it), and the educational efforts of the Baptist Church and Redeemer's University—and the many other educational and medical services supported by churches in Yorubaland—are a direct result of their call to service and brotherly love.

For those who practice orișa traditions, this type of pluralistic theology is perhaps much more uniform and straightforward because they assume Oloriṣa,

Muslims, and Christians all worship one God. In fact, in many Ifa narratives, all the various traditions are placed within the same cosmology. As elaborated in chapter 2, an Ifa narrative from Odu Ogunda-Tẹtuala recounts how Ọrunmila predicted the coming of Jesus and informed Mary and Joseph how they could prevent their son from being killed.[148] The Odu Otura Meji is full of various accounts of the life of the Prophet and how Islam was founded. The senior Mọgba, Ṣangoyẹmi Ọlayiwọla, posited that with respect to Islam and Ṣango, "ẹsin kan naa ni" (it is all one/the same religion), but many have not studied the Qur'an enough or learned enough about its meaning to realize that.[149] Similarly, the Akọda (second most senior title in Ifa), took no issue with the Anglican Church because, in his opinion, most of its practices were borrowed directly from Ifa.[150]

Many Olorișa referred to Muslims and Christians as "their children" because from the traditionalist perspective and mythology, those religious traditions emerged from or at least came after those of the orișa. The Aṣẹda articulated this position by referencing an Ifa verse in Odu Iwori-Ọrin Kan that is quite similar to that of Ibrahīm/Abraham. A man named Onișẹṣẹ had trouble having children, but the babalawo told him that if he made a sacrifice, he would have so many children he would not be able to count them. Onișẹṣẹ offered the sacrifice, and his descendants were those who practiced all the different religious traditions. The verse ends, "Those who recite Ifa, the priest made it so. Those who practice Ṣango's tradition, the priest made it so. Those who practice Ogun's tradition, the priest made it so. Those who practice Islam, the priest made it so. Those who practice Christianity, the priest made it so." Hence while there may be an order of importance in the verse that clearly privileges Ifa first and then the other orișa traditions/forms of worship, the babalawo ensured all traditions would come into being.[151] Consequently, there is no perception that Islam or Christianity are "wrong" or "false" religions, as these concepts are still largely foreign to the traditional Yoruba cosmology.

Olorișa families are more likely than Muslim or Christian ones to have members who practice other religions as well, and hence, any move to attack members of a particular religion would likely risk attacking one's family members, as used to be the case in all lineages. Ifaṣọla Onifade identified orișa traditions as fundamental to establishing the order of religious harmony and maintaining it because one rarely hears of instances of Olorișa attacking other religious groups. Apart from the overarching religious framework that is willing to accept new traditions, he attributes this to the marginalization of orișa communities and their knowledge that any aggressive stance they take will be interpreted in a negative light, give rise to accusations of "black magic," and perpetuate negative stereotypes.[152] Another factor is that, given the relatively small number of orișa priests and priestesses, Muslims

and Christians form the vast majority of their clientele, and the orișa traditions are there to serve all people, regardless of their religious affiliation.

Another important reason behind the acceptance and even valorization of Islam and Christianity among orișa devotees was their great deal of knowledge of and personal experience with the two, much as some Muslims, and to a lesser extent Christians, had a deep knowledge of other religious traditions. Again, the vast majority of the prominent orișa priests, priestesses, and titleholders had in fact practiced either Islam or Christianity at some point. Many are at least somewhat literate in Arabic, and in our interviews, it was common for them to make allusions and references to the Bible and Qur'an, and in some cases, they would simply quote verses off hand. This type of engagement is nothing new or unique, as Ifa's extensive reinterpretive tradition with the Bible and the Qur'an demonstrates. Although the youngest generation seems less eager to gain an extensive knowledge of Christian and Muslims traditions, orișa devotees echoed Muslims' and Christians' view that a better and deeper knowledge of one's own tradition alongside familiarity with others is an essential part of Ẹdẹ's current harmony.

Clearly, the often-complex ways Ẹdẹ's citizens conceptualize and enact the relationships between Islam, Christianity, and indigenous traditions go much deeper than a mere syncretic mixing. Whether as a result of a deep commitment to and study of Islamic traditions, engagement with Christianity, extensive familiarity with indigenous traditions, familial ties to other religious groups, or some combination of these, they are remarkably reflective and support their generally harmonious interactions. Given Ẹdẹ's history and current demographics, there is an assumption that its citizens will have to interact with people of other religious backgrounds. Despite living in a period of heightened religious tension in Nigeria, and contrary to what many outsiders might believe, the people of Ẹdẹ are practically all in agreement that religious conflict—particularly in its violent form—is usually the result of a *lack* of religious knowledge and devotion rather than the result of it. To them, Ẹdẹ's reputation as a deeply religious community is precisely why there is relatively little conflict in this area. Although there are significant and fascinating theological disagreements between Ẹdẹ's many religious traditions, their claims are very consistent with its proud history of education, religiosity, religious education, and religious harmony.

Conclusion

The growing religious tension across Yorubaland should be understood within the broader context of a transition from the traditional system of forms of worship to exclusive religions and competing cosmologies. Although Ẹdẹ managed

this transition particularly well, it can be observed in the different religious orientation of each generation. The oldest generation still operates primarily within a framework of ẹsin as forms of worship in which they believe the various orisa traditions as well as Islam and Christianity are comparable and acceptable ways of worshipping God. Even if they do not actively practice more than one tradition, they are often open to involvement in other traditions, tend to be open to their children practicing whatever tradition is best for them, and likely have had family members involved in different traditions. They have a strong attachment to lineage traditions in line with the Yoruba concept of ẹbi, and do not look favorably on abandoning them, whatever they may be. The middle generation also has decent exposure to other religious traditions and may even have practiced more than one, but rarely simultaneously. They feel the restrictions imposed by the newer system of exclusive religions more immediately, and they are more likely to differentiate between religion, tradition, culture, work, and other related categories that may not have required disambiguation in a premodern context. They also tend to be less accepting of their children practicing other religions, even if they do not disapprove of these other traditions in theory. The youngest generation, however, tends to have less experience with other religions or family members who practice them. They strongly resist the ideas of interfaith marriage and children converting to a different religion. Their own religious activity and identity are defined almost exclusively by an Islamic, Christian, or orisa cosmology. It is in this generation that the transition from forms of worship to religions seems most complete.

Because religion has become such a central and important part of Ẹdẹ and Yoruba society, it has become essential for people to distinguish between what is religious activity and what is not. For some traditions categorization as religion as opposed to tradition, culture, or work can be both contentious and divisive. This is particularly true for the Eleegun, who often find themselves trapped between Muslims and Olorisa who both reject them as dedicated members of their respective religions because the Eleegun are often involved in both. The Egungun themselves seem not to operate within the framework of exclusive religions, as some are Muslim spirits and frequently claim Muslim members of certain lineages as their caretakers. The hunters' guild also presents an interesting case because the ways members engage in the occupation and society differ widely depending on whether they understand Ogun's tradition to be a religion, an occupation, a lineage tradition, or some combination thereof. Again, because some are involved in both Ogun's tradition and Islam, many Olorisa and Muslims do not approve of their perceived straddling of an important religious boundary. Despite the common perception that orisa traditions may be slowly giving way

to Islam and Christianity, it appears that several orișa traditions in Ẹdẹ are in fact slowly and modestly gaining strength, members, and prominence. This may have a great deal to do with orișa devotees now actively organizing, presenting their traditions as a unified religion, and instilling a sense of pride and exclusive identity in its youngest members, much like their counterparts in Brazil have done.

The conventional explanation for the widespread religious tolerance of the Yoruba was the religious heterogeneity of lineages which meant that conflict along religious lines would also disrupt familial structures. However, families in Yorubaland and Ẹdẹ specifically have become more religiously homogenous over the past few generations. This change has largely been due to the decline in interfaith marriages as women were previously the main source of religious heterogeneity when they married into their husband's patrilineage. With the renegotiation of the traditional view of obinrin o lẹsin, or women not having their own religion, women have generally been granted the freedom to choose a religion (generally that of her lineage), but this has placed a great deal of pressure on them to convert to their husband's religion if they are different. Not only does this development decrease religious heterogeneity, it also places an immense strain on women in interfaith marriages who have to choose between acceptance in their families of origin or their husbands'. It follows naturally that there is much anxiety about how marriage may affect the religious identity of children because religious identity is now understood as a choice more than simply a fact of birth/biology.

The often-intense familial pressure around issues of religious identity renders conversion an understandably touchy and sometimes secretive issue. Another is burial, which causes some people to become involved in certain traditions and/or hide their participation in others and to give in to pressure from younger family members to receive a specific type of burial. Even people's attendance at such important rituals as marriage or burial are more religiously proscribed now, as many are no longer comfortable attending rituals of another religion or having people who practice different religions attend their own rituals and festivals. Many in Ẹdẹ have identified all these changes as having their roots in ọlaju, or modernity, and while it has certainly engendered more religious separation and the need to distinguish between what is and is not religion, engaging this new modern order has offered some benefits. Through all these ritual and family dynamics, Ẹdẹ's society has undergone a siloing of religion in which the previously intertwined forms of worship have become separate, parallel religions whose boundaries give important structure to their adherents' lives.

However, this transition was rocky at first, with religious tensions and violence flaring noticeably between the 1970s and 1990s.[153] Following this period

of heightened tensions, the people of Ẹdẹ and their religious leaders have developed deep theologies of religious pluralism that have allowed them to maintain a level of harmony uncommon in Yorubaland today. These theological perspectives all stress that conflict is the result of poorly ordered religious practice and a lack of religious knowledge rather than an over-adherence to religion, and each group relies on its own traditions rather than a sense of secularism or neutral ground to relate with each other harmoniously. There is, however, another factor that is even more central in fostering these types of religious dynamics, and that is the tradition of Yoruba sacred kingship, the subject of chapter 7.

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7

The Timi

SACRED KINGSHIP, MANAGING MODERNITY, AND NEW RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

The Ọba is a living representative of his subjects, "he is the symbol and totality of his people and country," and as such he is responsible for their destiny. —JACOB K. OLUPONA, *Kingship, Religion, and Rituals in a Nigerian Community*

Bi onișelu ti șelu to ni yi, ko gbọdọ ma fi aye tọba lẹ!

No matter how good a politician is, (s)he must never take the place of an ọba!
—THE LATE ARABA ṢANGODOKUN ONIFADE, interview by author, March 31, 2017

The modern transformation of Yoruba society—of which the transition from forms of worship to religion is a part—has been a complicated process, and with respect to religion, the most central player in this transition is the ọba, or sacred king. In many recent instances of religious conflict and violence in Yorubaland, the ọba of the town often has himself embraced a modern, exclusivist perspective on religion, but the experience of Ẹdẹ has clearly been different. Although

religious tensions certainly have flared in Ẹdẹ at times, the Timi (Ẹdẹ's ọba) has found creative ways of navigating them and articulating the role of an ọba in a modern context without compromising the foundation of the office or its most important civil functions. This has been no small feat, and this chapter offers an analysis of the nature and function of Yoruba sacred kingship. It does so through an account of how the Timi of Ẹdẹ—predominantly the reigning Timi, HRH Ọba Munirudeen Adeṣọla Lawal Laminisa I—have managed to balance tradition and modernity in this unique and difficult time.

The Yoruba tradition of sacred kingship has been at the heart of many scholarly works, and all engage with the ọba's role as ọba onigbogbo ẹsin, usually translated as "the patron of all religions."[1] This title is often understood in the context of the ọba's validation of and participation in the Yoruba "triple heritage" of Islam, Christianity, and traditional religion. However, a more literal translation of the phrase paired with the framework of forms of worship yields an additional, and perhaps deeper, meaning. Specifically, just as an individual could be an Ọlọṣun and Onifa (a devotee of Ọṣun and Ifa) at the same time, the ọba could be understood as a devotee, member, or active participant in all major forms of worship present in his town. This interpretation seems likely if, as I argue in this chapter, the ọba is a physical and symbolic embodiment of his entire kingdom across time, space, and religious traditions. The way the ọba concentrates the entire community within his personage allows him to create an important civil religion that unites all citizens by providing a shared set of values, symbols, and rituals central to their identity.[2] Furthermore, an ọba is instrumental in creating a sacred canopy, as described by Peter Berger, through projecting and establishing a pluralistic religious order that his citizens then internalize and use to structure their thinking about religion and ritual practice.[3] Ethnographic accounts of Ẹdẹ's most prominent festivals and the role of the Timi within them will demonstrate how these theories are translated into practice in Ẹdẹ's religious life through the personhood of its ọba.

HRH Munirudeen Adeṣọla Lawal, the Timi of Ẹdẹland and the first ọba from the Laminisa royal lineage, has reigned in Ẹdẹ since 2008 and enjoys significant popularity and support both within and outside Ẹdẹ. When I asked why Ẹdẹ was so peaceful, many of my respondents answered it was largely due to the Timi and his handling of religious affairs. Even those who offered other reasons, such as the tightly knit nature of Ẹdẹ or its citizens being like members of the same family (ọmọ iya kan naa), were quick to agree that behind these dynamics lay the guiding hand of Ẹdẹ's royal father. Timi Lawal is a compelling figure who has a strong Islamic background, attended Christian educational institutions, acquired several advanced degrees from secular institutions of higher education, and

never expected to become ọba. Although he is still relatively young compared to many ọba, much of his success clearly lies in how he embodies the traditions of Ẹdẹ, which might seem contradictory or paradoxical to outsiders. These include the balance between valorizing both modernity and tradition, the synthesis of secular and religious education, and of course, the deep engagement with multiple religious traditions without conflict or antagonism.

As a highly educated man, the Timi is acutely aware of the contemporary need to categorize the Yoruba ancestral heritage appropriately in modern categories (such as religion, culture, or tradition) to ensure the flourishing of the people, survival of their values, and harmonious existence of a pluralistic community. He has also upheld and instituted several innovations unique to Ẹdẹ that have enabled and supported the continuation of Yoruba religious harmony. Despite the deployment of such strategies and awareness of the shifting cultural/religious landscape, the Timi has faced substantial pressure from quarters that have departed from the traditional and accommodating perspective he upholds. The way these conflicts are negotiated sheds light on the process through which the Timi creates and maintains the current religious order and how religious newcomers and newer perspectives on long-standing religious traditions challenge this important legacy. Timi Lawal's success in Ẹdẹ also demonstrates the continued importance of traditional kingship in Yoruba society and throws into sharp relief the advantages this religio-political system has over the current and nominally secular democratic government of contemporary Nigeria. He effectively demonstrates how the interaction between religious and political power can be a more effective method for ensuring religious harmony and pluralism and how this form of sacred kingship can resolve conflict and ensure minority rights in a way that is difficult for competing interests to accomplish in a secular, democratic system.

Ọba Onigbogbo Ẹsin

In the first major book-length work on Yoruba sacred kingship, Jacob K. Olupona translated the title ọba onigbogbo ẹsin as "patron of all religions" and offered a compelling argument regarding how this important mediatory role of the ọba "probably developed in response to social changes in Ondo society, such as the introduction of Christianity and Islam" as a need emerged for a "focus for the plurality of religions."[4] If, however, each orisa tradition is understood as its own form of worship rather than as part of one unified religion that came into contact with two new religions, this mediatory role of the ọba would have been necessary long before the introduction of Islam and Christianity. In that sense,

as each new form of worship came into a town, it would fall under the patronage of the ọba, with Christianity and Islam constituting not so much a radical social change as merely the most recent in a long string of forms of worship introduced into the society. Historically in Ẹdẹ, the Timi clearly patronized Ogun, Ṣango, Egungun, and Ifa from the time of the town's foundation, but other forms of worship such as Ọṣun, Ọbatala, Ogboni, or Orișa Oko were likely introduced later, and Islam and Christianity subsequently followed. Hence, the expansive dynamic of Yoruba sacred kingship was likely not a new development or innovation necessary to accommodate Islam and Christianity, but rather the continued application of an older tradition, albeit in a rapidly changing context.

In addition, the etymological structure of the title onigbogbo ẹsin suggests that the ọba could be more than a mere "patron," particularly within a framework of forms of worship. As discussed in chapter 2, the most common way to refer to a devotee of any particular orișa is to add the prefix oni- in front of its name. Hence, an Ifa devotee can be called an Onifa, a Ṣango devotee an Onișango, and so on. In addition, one person could simultaneously be an Onifa, Onișango, and Ọlọṣun as there was generally no barrier to adding additional forms of worship. At least before the advent of Christianity and Islam, Yoruba ọba owned their own specific and ritually prepared orișa that corresponded with every major form of worship within their kingdom. The most prominent example in Ẹdẹ is the Ṣango Timi that was brought from Ọyọ for Prince Ajeniju when he was born and brought Ẹdẹ's new royal form of worship with him from heaven.

While discussing the vast array of religious traditions in which the Timi is implicated, the Jagun Ṣango and Baba Mọgba stressed that the Timi must be involved in all of the various ẹsin present in Ẹdẹ in a kind of universal way that is not possible for a regular human being.[5] According to them, some people may be able to participate in multiple traditions at once, but no one except the ọba will be able to practice them all simultaneously. Consequently, in historical perspective, the phrase "ọba onigbogbo ẹsin" could mean "the king who possesses all forms of worship [or all the orișa]," or alternatively, "the father who is a devotee of all forms of worship/orișa." His physical possession of the orișa themselves and ritual obligations to *all* of them suggest additional roles on top of that of patron, such as devotee and active member of the religious community.

However, just as the meaning of the word *ẹsin* has undergone significant change over the past 150 years, the meaning of the term *onigbogbo ẹsin* has likely changed with it. While I argue the way the ọba were able to encompass the new religious traditions of Christianity and Islam within their sacred office was *not* new, what *was* new was the way they managed to integrate traditions that placed the ọba outside the traditional cosmology and system of multiple forms of worship. This new

capacity of the kingship to transcend the traditional setting and apply its traditions to new cosmological frameworks is precisely what Olupona referenced in his study of Ondo religion and society, and it is indeed remarkable that Yoruba sacred kingship has been robust enough to expand and encompass foreign traditions *and* their potentially competing cosmologies—that is, at least until recently.

Given that virtually all ọba are now Muslim or Christian, their more recent religious affiliations are often incompatible with an identity as not just an Onifa or Onișango but as the most universal of Olorișa. Hence, in the same way they have historically and almost imperceptibly maintained religious balance by integrating new traditions, the ọba have subtly recast their role as "patrons" of all religions rather than "devotees" or "practitioners" of all religions. There is a natural tension observed in all recent studies of Yoruba sacred kingship over just how involved Muslim and Christian ọba can be in orișa traditions, and a perfectly legitimate reinterpretation of the tradition as mere patronage allows them to remain more firmly aligned with new religious boundaries and orthodoxy.[6] The relatively recent advent of this important shift from ọba as active owners/devotees of all forms of worship is further underlined by the traditional and ontological identity of the ọba.

Corporate Structure

To understand the nature and identity of ọba, it is important to gain a clear perspective on Yoruba notions of identity and ontology in a general sense. Building on the arguments of Karin Barber and Helen Verran, Andrew Apter provided perhaps the most insightful and concise work on this topic.[7] In Barber's work on oriki (Yoruba praise poetry), she interrogated how oriki could help to define kinship groups, which are generally taken as the bedrock of Yoruba society. She noticed that in constructing their kinship identity, the Yoruba "do so in terms of a common town of origin, and not, in the first instance, in terms of ancestry. . . . The members of a group assert that they are 'one' because they all came from the same place of origin."[8] Verran demonstrated that for the Yoruba, nouns are in fact not separate and independent objects or ideas, but rather specific instances or manifestations of an immaterial potentiality.[9] This is very similar to the notion of Platonic forms, as "five oranges are not five individual oranges forming a group, but 'orangeness' divided into a plurality of five." Apter combined these two principles to demonstrate that "the meaning of *ilé* [lineage or compound] becomes less a question of what 'is' than of how—in what mode—it manifests."[10]

Although scholars before Apter tended to start with the familial lineage or compound as the fundamental building block of Yoruba society and identity

and move from there to city quarter, town, and ethnic identities, Apter flipped this logic on its head, suggesting "we thus start from the town as it subdivides into *ilé*, not from the *ilé* as they combine to form towns . . . every *ilé* is a manifestation of *ìlú* [town], a microcosm, as it were, of the kingdom at large."[11] He expanded this theory to apply not only to specific lineages but to the orișa traditions themselves, which are also configured somewhat like microcosmic ritual kingdoms.[12] Although Apter does not speak directly about the ọba but instead about the town, an ọba does in fact unite all lineages within a town and their respective chieftaincy titles, as Lloyd argued in the first study of Yoruba sacred kingship.[13] However, he does so not by drawing together fragmented groups but instead by serving as the ultimate and original source from which each lineage and religious tradition is derived and differentiated.

Most scholars have noted the close identification of the ọba with the town or kingdom, but this mutual identification runs deeper than conventional Western notions of symbolism.[14] In a reaction to Olupona's *City of 201 Gods*, Nimi Wariboko drew on Kantorowicz's *The King's Two Bodies* for an analogy with how in medieval Europe, a king's "body politic"—as opposed to the body natural—formed a transcendent union between the kingdom and its people.[15] Wariboko noted how "in medieval European art forms representing the physical body of the king, the torso is made of little persons and the whole body is fused with the land" demonstrating the firm ontological link between the physical body of the king and every aspect of his kingdom, human, natural, and otherwise.[16] Pemberton and Afọlayan fascinatingly analyzed doors on the palace in Ila-Ọrangun that closely mirror this depiction of a king (figure 7.1). The panels place the ọba at the very center with other figures representing the various important cultural activities of Ila-Ọrangun and all its important orișa traditions and Islam around him, almost emanating from his sacred being.[17]

Olupona argued that with respect to his town, the ọba functions much like the Supreme Being in that both are the source for their respective ministers and traditions and the origin of their authority and power.[18] Consequently, he "is a living representative of his subjects, 'he is the symbol and totality of his people and country,' and as such he is responsible for their destiny."[19] Here, *country* refers to both the sociopolitical entity and the physical land. This close link is perhaps best demonstrated in Ile-Ifẹ, the origin of the Yoruba civilization and institution of sacred kingship. "The *Ọọni* [king of Ile-Ifẹ] is the image of his father, Oduduwa" the literal creator of the physical world and first ọba according to Yoruba tradition and mythology.[20] All land, Yoruba traditions, and kingdoms emanated and became differentiated from him, which is likely why his clothes are all white and his sacred crown, the Are, possesses almost every color.[21] In

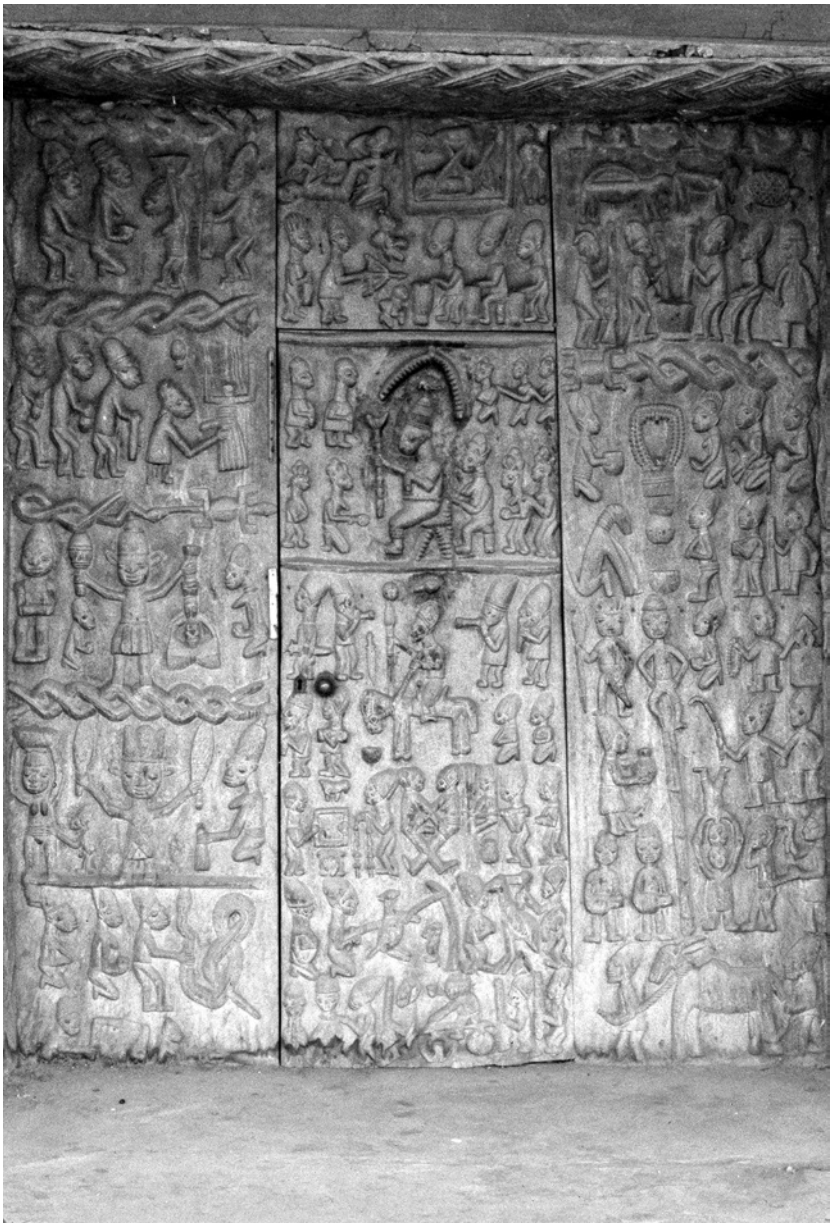

FIGURE 7.1. Panels of the palace door in Ila-Ọrangun, ca. 1927. Artist: Akobi Ogun Fakeye. Photo courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

his analysis of beaded royal crowns in Okuku, Ulli Beier hypothesized that the inclusion of all the different colored beads associated with the various orișa indicates that they are all interwoven and united in the personhood of the ọba.[22] However, one could also argue that each individual color finds its source in the ọba and *then* subsequently manifests itself in society.

A Christological parallel between the Ọọni as the son and image of Oduduwa is quite apt, as the link between the two is far greater than an arbitrary sign and its referent with the son existing as homoousious (of one being) with the Father. In their breathtaking study of Mouride art in Senegal Allen and Mary Roberts stressed that in the devotion of members of the Mouride Sufi brotherhood to images of their saint, Shaykh Ahmadou Bamba, the baraka, or divine force, power, or blessing of the shaykh—if not the shaykh himself—is present in each and every image.[23] Their various physical actions and spiritual practices with respect to these abundant images must be understood in light of the fact that the images "*present* rather than *re*present," and these visual symbols allow devotees to interact directly with the shaykh through his symbol or image.[24] Ọba, either as the image of Oduduwa or simply as the image and symbol of their kingdoms, should be interpreted in a similar fashion. While the ọba is a symbol of his entire community, his body quite literally becomes and *presents* his land and citizens, both the living and those who have become ancestors. The ọba encompasses the entirety of his community across space, time, and religious traditions, concentrating them all in his royal and cosmic personage.

An understanding of the ọba as the complete totality of his kingdom can explain some otherwise very curious taboos and norms surrounding Yoruba sacred kingship. For example, Beier noted that "there is only one eternal oba and that the divine force merely makes use of a succession of mortal carriers" to explain why installation rituals often involve symbolic contact with or ingestion of some part of a previous ọba.[25] This is also why it is taboo to say that a ọba has died; instead, the Yoruba say he has "ascended into the rafters" (waja) or has "departed" (gbese), because the death of the ọba (as opposed to the physical embodiment of the ọba) would mean the destruction of the entire kingdom. Although not all kingdoms followed this rule (Ẹdẹ did not when Timi Lagunju was exiled), if the people rejected an ọba, he might have to be killed rather than abdicate because the kingdom existing in two bodies would divide it, and the successor would have to pass through rituals that included physical material from his predecessor's body.

Also, an ọba must be free from any physical defects and must be neither too tall nor too short.[26] Any blemish on the ọba's royal body would imply a defect in the fabric of his kingdom, and an ọba who is very tall or very short would be

out of alignment with his people, causing one to have to look down on the other. This is also why a person must never stand above an ọba when addressing him but must always bend lower out of respect that the ọba has become more than a mere man. Lloyd provides examples of several other taboos and prerequisites for a person to become an ọba, but the most important remaining feature of an ọba's unique nature is the necessity of his setting aside his previous identities in age-grade societies and even his lineage, as his elders are required to prostrate themselves before him.[27] Because he has effectively transcended every possible division within his society, he cannot be held or contained by any one of them and is senior and ontologically prior to everyone and everything within his domain.

Considering the transcendent nature of the ọba, it is fitting that the various orișa have shrines within the palace and that Muslims and Christians also come to the palace for important rituals, particularly those undertaken for the good of the whole town.[28] The office of a sacred king as ọba onigbogbo ẹsin served to unify and reconcile any differences or conflict between religious groups. Because he is the literal embodiment of the entire cosmos of the kingdom, if all religious traditions are reconciled within the ọba, then they will naturally be reconciled within the kingdom as well. This is why Lloyd observed that "under a good oba the town is said to be 'improved' . . . under a bad oba the town is 'spoilt.'"[29] That is, the internal nature of the ọba becomes externalized as the nature of the kingdom in the same way that a potential physical defect would become a defect in the kingdom. While this symbolic ontology may seem strange to Western sensibilities, it is hard to deny in practice, as ọba who are able to reconcile multiple religious traditions and perspectives within themselves enforce this order in their kingdoms. For example, during the turbulent period of the 1980s, the ọba of Ila-Ọrangun chased away and banished some youths who had cut down a tree sacred to Olorișa, and when a potential clash between Christians and an Ọsanyin festival loomed in Ile-Oluji, the ọba had only to send a message stating that "he is still in town" to ensure that a peaceful resolution was found.[30]

However, the relationship between the ọba and his people and chiefs works in both directions. If the ọba should fail to reconcile and unite all traditions within himself *or* fail to embody the values and opinions of all his people, he would lose his authority. The various titleholding chiefs also exercise considerable power as representatives of the various factions of the town, and if their concerns and values are not upheld and embodied by the ọba, then conflict would surely ensue. Apter and Lloyd both noted this delicate balance of power between the ọba and his people.[31] Indeed, Apter astutely drew attention to the fact that the ways the ọba wields power have a direct and strong effect on the authority invested in the ọba that allows him to wield the power in the first place.[32] For

example, when Muslims in Ẹdẹ were concerned that Timi Laoye (a Christian) showed too much preference to his coreligionists in a town with a strong Muslim identity, he had to contend with protest songs that threatened with banishment an ọba who did not love Islam.[33] While Timi Laoye was able to make amends, Timi Lagunju's use of strong force against orisa traditions caused him to be deposed for his failure to reconcile all religious traditions and perspectives.

The Changing Nature of Kingship

The previous section provided a general overview of the traditional role and nature of Yoruba sacred kingship, but as early as 1960, Lloyd observed that "many Yoruba . . . conceive the roles of their oba not as those of the sacred king, but as the secular roles of the constitutional monarch."[34] In the modern Yoruba context, a potential conflict has emerged between the expected functions and roles of the ọba and his modern Christian or Muslim identity much as it has within family lineages. Ogungbile and Awoniyi analyzed this tension with respect to the change in attitude of born-again ọba in recent years, while Olupona argued that the "pluralistic ideology and ethos as a centralizing and unifying force, which had previously survived on the strength of the old structure, are gradually crumbling under the weight of globalization and modern religious ideology."[35] This tension manifests itself in small ways such as concerns over burial practices. Muslims are usually buried without delay, but the ọba and their remains are traditionally taken through an elaborate and secretive process after they have "departed." The son of the first Muslim ọba in Ila-Ọrangun raised this issue when his father departed, and when the Awujale (paramount ọba of the Ijẹbu subethnicity) decided that Ijẹbu ọba should be buried according to their individual religious traditions rather than have their bodies surrendered to the traditional chiefs, the decision generated significant controversy, which was extended in 2022 when Ogun state passed the bill he proposed to ensure individual preference for burial rites and the removal of traditional installation rites.[36] Interestingly, most of the other ọba and politicians who supported this position alluded to modernity, civilization, and opening people's eyes—all of which could be rendered as ọlaju in Yoruba.

Not all ọba feel this tension to the same degree, however, as Muslim ọba seem to negotiate it more easily than many of their Christian counterparts do.[37] More specifically, it is the born-again Christian ọba who face the most difficulty navigating their traditional roles and expectations. The number of born-again ọba has recently grown considerably, and they have formed their own organization

called the Association of the Born Again Christian Obas.[38] Because of the general Pentecostal perspective that orișa traditions are satanic and the insistence on a "break with the past," these ọba find it particularly difficult to engage with and actively support the orișa traditions within their kingdoms. Adeboye argued that "their unbridled denunciation of other religious persuasions stands in sharp contrast to the tolerance and mediatory position which the royal fathers are expected to exemplify," and "Pentecostal rulers overtly or covertly have been promoting the erosion of traditional religious practices that negate their own faith."[39] Wariboko asserted that Pentecostalism may offer valuable options for religious pluralism and dialogue without challenging the foundation of sacred kingship.[40] However, I find more convincing Olupona's observations and position that the exclusivist nature of much Pentecostal theology and outlook, along with the oppositional stance it takes to orișa traditions, undermine the very keystone of Yoruba religious pluralism in the ọba.[41]

Olupona's perspective is borne out in the numerous recent examples of Pentecostal ọba who are either no longer able or willing to serve the function of ọba onigbogbo ẹsin. In Ogbagi in Ondo state, an ọba was attacked for his continued refusal to partake in the traditional festivals and because he "vowed that as a born-again Christian, he will never indulge in or encourage such traditional rites throughout his reign."[42] The king's life was saved only following the intervention of several prominent ọba. In Ayetoro-Ekiti, the ọba made Pentecostal Christianity the royal (and perhaps state) religion, refused to take part in any other religious rituals, and even prayed that "evil should befall" participants in a traditional masquerade.[43] Ogungbile and Awoniyi recorded many other instances of conflict generated by the exclusivist perspectives of born-again ọba, including an open and violent conflict with Ifa devotees, another being driven out of the palace with cutlasses and war songs, and a third who got into a heated debate with prominent babalawo Ifayẹmi Ẹlẹbuibọn after destroying ritual objects used in orișa worship.[44]

There is indeed a range of ways Pentecostal ọba navigate their sacred kingship, with the recent appointment of Redeemed Christian Church of God pastor Afolabi Olaoye as the Ṣoun of Ogbomọṣọ constituting one example of an ọba who pledged to support all religions in his kingdom. Olufunke Adeboye places this negotiation mostly within the framework of conversion and private/public religious identity, but I would argue that the issue is better framed as dependent on how willing an ọba is to embody the dynamics of participation and identity in multiple forms of worship in his royal personhood. The previous Ọọni of Ifẹ had to deal with this tension, but he never reneged on his traditional

responsibilities.[45] And it appears that when the Ataọja (ọba of Oṣogbo) converted to Christianity, he relinquished the position of high priest of Ọṣun to another and simply negotiated a more appropriate ritual involvement for himself.[46] The late ọba of Ila-Ọrangun similarly stated, "Christianity does not hinder one from practicing one's tradition," and also argued that if one were to feel uncomfortable performing a certain rite, a substitute could often be employed to perform those functions in his place.[47] In Ẹdẹ, Timi Laoye was a dedicated Baptist and Christian but nonetheless was one of the greatest supporters of the Ṣango and Egungun traditions.

Perhaps the best example of the modern tensions facing ọba is born-again ọba Matthew Oyekale, who only accepted the crown in Masifa because "the chiefs and elders assured him that they would allow him to carry on with his religion." However, they were deeply upset when he categorically refused to take part in traditional festivals.[48] I doubt either side tried to manipulate or deceive the other. Instead, the chiefs and elders—operating within a framework of multiple forms of worship in which an ọba can maintain one religious affiliation while acquiring and supporting the others—did not understand why his "carrying on with his religion" should prevent him from engaging with all the others. Ọba Oyekale likely believed "carrying on with his religion" necessarily entailed refraining from involvement in any other religious tradition because that is simply how he understood the nature of ẹsin. Before the advent of modernity, there could have been no conflict between the office and individual religious identities, but now some potential ọba feel the need to choose between one or the other.[49]

Perhaps the greatest reason why Ẹdẹ has been able to maintain its high degree of religious harmony is precisely because its modern ọba have either fully embraced the traditional role of ọba onigbogbo ẹsin or at the very least been able to navigate the switch to modern religion effectively by rearticulating the meaning and function of ọba onigbogbo ẹsin. This was the opinion of the Jagun Ṣango, who pointed to another nearby town with a fair amount of religious conflict because the ọba no longer supported all religious traditions. The Jagun Ṣango insisted Ẹdẹ was different precisely because the previous and current Timi would never behave in such a manner.[50] Because the Timi traditionally has had little conflict about affording a place to each religious tradition within his own personal cosmology, the town as a whole follows suit and functions the same way. The one follows the other so naturally because the Timi constitutes a microcosm and symbol of the entirety of Ẹdẹ—including its sacred past—and also functions as a unifying force and tradition to which all Ẹdẹ citizens can appeal and with whom they can identify communally.

Olupona was the first to explore how such a "religiously and culturally pluralistic society" could be explained and sustained through the ọba's "sacred canopy under which the entire society takes refuge."[51] Employing Robert Bellah's notion of civil religion, in his studies of Ondo and Ile-Ifẹ, Olupona articulated how "the king joins his subjects in celebrating their objects of worship, be it orịsa worship, Islam, or Christianity, thus unifying all Ondo [and Ifẹ] citizens in celebrating the king's festival."[52] Pemberton and Afọlayan made similar observations.[53] The office of the ọba and his particular festival constitute a type of Yoruba civil religion by providing a set of symbols, rituals, and values that all groups—religious and otherwise—can hold in common and use to construct a shared sense of identity. When the ọba is the symbolic embodiment of the entire kingdom, it follows naturally that royal symbols (such as the bow and flaming arrows of Agbale Ọlọfa Ina in Ẹdẹ), the ọba himself (the Timi), and the royal festival (Ipedi) would provide this unifying framework.[54] The ọba's festival presents an opportunity for all religious groups (and all other groups, such as lineages and occupational guilds) to show their devotion to the ọba and to affirm his position in the society. As a result, the tradition of the ọba creates a civil religion that binds all citizens together and creates a sacred canopy under which they have a guaranteed position.

As Olupona noted, the shared values, symbols, rituals, and myths of origin (such as the saga of Agbale Ọlọfa Ina as the founder of Ẹdẹ) that constitute a town's civil religion traditionally have correlated quite closely to Foucauldian notions of discourse and episteme.[55] This particular episteme was drawn out of the orịsa traditions and the pluralistic framework of forms of worship, but in modern and contemporary times, there are other competing epistemes that pose subtle challenges to the overarching civil religion.[56] In Ẹdẹ's case, the conflict over the Ṣango statue mentioned in chapter 1 is a perfect example of the competition between epistemes and the shift in civil religion. Previously, under the system of forms of worship, Ṣango represented a central and unproblematic symbol of Ẹdẹ's civil religion that represented the sacred history and identity of all Ẹdẹ citizens regardless of religious affiliation. However, as Ṣango came to be understood not only as an explicitly religious entity but also as one that fell outside the acceptable cosmology of many Muslims, the location of the Ṣango statue next to the mosque and the electrical cord drawing power from the mosque to light the statue became serious points of contention.

The orịsa devotees had difficulty understanding why their compatriots would want to remove an important symbol that should be shared by all in Ẹdẹ, but this insistence deeply offended the religious sensibilities of many Muslims. Again,

only the Timi could resolve this issue by relocating the statue to the palace, which served as a location where the competing understandings of Ṣango's nature and function in society could be reconciled verbally, ideologically, and physically.[57] This incident clearly demonstrates that while a civil religion may exist, it can be and oftentimes is contested, much like how different groups in the United States have wrestled over the meaning and purpose of Indigenous Peoples' Day/Columbus Day. While control and interpretation of these symbols may be contested, all parties are engaged with the same symbols and place them within the same episteme, drawn from the traditional cosmology and Timi in Ẹdẹ.

What is fascinating about the traditional system of forms of worship and the office of ọba is that each seems to support the other in a type of positive feedback loop, functioning precisely like Peter Berger's "sacred canopy." Berger described the sacred canopy as operating through three moments of externalization, objectification, and internalization, respectively. The process of externalization describes the outward projection of internal ideas and states that contribute to the creation of society and social features that then can exist on their own beyond individual human activity. This process of "world-building" results in the objectification of a society or set of ideas that is then able to affect and influence how people think and behave within it, completing the third moment of internalization.[58]

By accepting, creating, and ensuring a space for all religions in his domain, an ọba enforces and normalizes the patterns of religious, public, and civil life of his subjects and plays the most important role in externalizing this religious sensibility. This religious disposition of the ọba allows him to open and expand the sacred canopy as necessary (for example with the arrival of Islam, Christianity, or a new oriṣa tradition), and in so doing, he externalizes the circumstances under which such a religious system can flourish and objectifies it as a social reality. This is best exemplified in his protection of all religious groups, his participation in the festivals of every religion, and the expectation that adherents of every religion will take part in his sacred festival every year.

These festivals, along with royal rituals and functions, are objective social realities that naturally encourage the ọba's citizens to accept and participate in the civil religion and the religious pluralism the ọba embodies. This process of internalization in the citizens further solidifies the sacred canopy and religious pluralism along with the power of the ọba to enforce and perpetuate it. While the activity of each party influences that of the other, the ọba lies at the center of perpetuating the cycle, again underlining his importance as a literal and effective symbol of his entire kingdom. If the ọba is not willing to function as ọba onigbogbo ẹsin (either as patron of or participant in all religious traditions), the

conflict present within his royal personage or personal cosmology will become reflected in the society at large, and the sacred canopy and civil religion may begin to crumble. This has been the case with many born-again ọba mentioned earlier, but the Timi has traditionally served as one of the best examples of how the civil religion and sacred canopy could be renegotiated effectively in a modern context without the ọba losing his important function of uniting all religions or forms of worship within himself.

A New Year of Sacred Festivals

I have already alluded to some ways the Timi and Ẹdẹ's festivals demonstrate these important points of the symbolic function of Yoruba sacred kingship, civil religion, and the sacred canopy, but an analysis of the most important festivals and the Timi's role within them will make these points clearer and more concrete. Although space will not allow for a detailed analysis of all festivals that take place in Ẹdẹ, what follows will focus on Ẹdẹ's most prominent festivals. These are the Ipedi group of festivals, the Ṣango Timi festival, and the Muslim holidays of Ileya and Itunu (ʻEīd al-Kabīr and ʻEīd al-Fitr, respectively). Ulli Beier's description of the ritual processes involved in the Ipedi festivals and Ṣango festival are still appropriate descriptions of the contemporary festivals, and consequently, I will instead analyze the relevant rituals of each festival, with a particular focus on the role of the Timi within each one.[59]

Ipedi

The Ipedi group of festivals is a ritually packed four days (constituting a traditional Yoruba week) that comprise the Timi's festival and the start of the sacred calendar in Ẹdẹ. Ipedi is held in July and is opened with the Ogun festival, beginning early in the morning on Ogun's sacred day. The hunters' guild processes from the house of the Oluọdẹ (head of the hunter's guild) to the top of the hill in the Timi's market (located directly in front of the palace) amid much commotion and women singing Ogun's praise songs. After greeting the Timi and the chiefs and praying for everyone in Ẹdẹ, the hunters begin the important sacrifice. All Ogun's favorite foods are offered in the sacrifice including roosters, salt, and palm wine, but the most important elements are the yam and dog. The yam is the first of the new harvest, and traditionally no one could eat of the new crop of yams until it had been consecrated to Ogun and the Timi had eaten his yam. After the sacrifice of the dog—performed by stretching it between two wooden sticks and decapitating it in one fell swoop—the hunters dance counterclock-

wise around Ogun's shrine seven times. Then they proceed to the palace to greet the Timi and congratulate him on a successful festival.

The second day, sacrifices are made to the ọpa Ọranmiyan, or the staff of Ọranmiyan, the warrior-ancestor of all Ọyọ people. The ọpa Ọranmiyan is the war standard of Ẹdẹ, and as a previous military outpost proud of its martial tradition, Ẹdẹ residents invest the ọpa with considerable cultural and religious meaning. The ọpa Ọranmiyan is housed within a large enclosure in the palace, and none but the Timi and senior chiefs are allowed inside to witness and take part in the ceremony. Later in the afternoon, another ceremony for the deceased Timi takes place mostly within the palace. The leading chiefs and members of the royal family gather to make sacrifices on the graves of the previous Timi—practically all of which are located within the palace grounds. The ayaba (wives of the Timi past and present) take charge of offering a sacrifice including salt, yams, kola nuts, and entire cows on the grave of each previous Timi, performing divination with sections of the kola nuts and yams to determine whether the sacrifices are accepted. With each sacrifice, the women pray for the Timi and all of Ẹdẹ. When they have finished, the Timi leaves the palace surrounded by his chiefs but must enter again through a side gate all on his own while the others enter through the main gate. After the last set of sacrifices, the Timi processes back into the throne room, where the ceremony is concluded.

Just before midnight on the same day, the Ifa festival begins. All night, the ayaba tend to a sacred iron staff with sixteen lamps that hold sixteen flames which must not go out until the night's rituals are completed. The lamp is planted in the ground on top of a hill in the palace compound, and the Timi—dressed in immaculate all-white garments—and his chiefs are seated below opposite the babalawo. The youngest babalawo recite and sing Ifa verses accompanied by drums and bells, beginning with the section of the Ifa corpus that "founded" Ẹdẹ, and continuing through all the sixteen major Odu, praying for the Timi and Ẹdẹ after reciting verses from each one.[60] Prior to the recitation of verses from each of the sixteen major Odu, the Timi must remain seated. At this time, only the babalawo dance up the hill to the lamp, moving around it three times in a counterclockwise direction, reciting the verses along the way. After the recitation of each second major Odu, the Timi leads the entire group around the lamp three times. However, when the babalawo recite verses from Odu Irosun Meji, no one must get up to dance. During the recitation of Odu Otura Meji, some of the babalawo leave for the top of the hill in the Timi's market to perform another set of secret sacrifices at a tree where sacred Ifa palm kernels were buried at the foundation of Ẹdẹ. This ceremony takes several hours and lasts until very early in the morning of the next day. The following morning, the babalawo assemble and

go to greet the Timi in the palace before visiting the houses of the ruling royal lineage and some of the most prominent chiefs to be fed and entertained. They pray for each of the chiefs and set a date to perform the official Ifa divination ritual for the town with the Timi.

The third day is the day of Ipedi itself and is the climax of the festival complex. Different religious, cultural, occupational, and performance groups all prepare themselves for the Timi's procession. When the Timi emerges from the palace, he is surrounded by his chiefs and preceded by his musicians and the hunters (figure 7.2). He then proceeds to stop at the former locations of each of the four old gates of the city, where a sacrifice has been performed and prayers are said for him and Ẹdẹ by the Jagun—the most senior civil chief who is also in charge of caring for the Timi's orișa and traditional rites.[61] Although the ancient walls of Ẹdẹ are no longer standing, each site of the four original major town gates is still ritually marked by a throne being placed there for the Timi and the gathering of his people for prayers. Moving counterclockwise around the town again, the Timi is met by the various types of groups in Ẹdẹ, who crowd the streets to catch a view of their ọba, provide him with tokens of their appreciation, and prostrate themselves before him. While some other festivals are not heavily attended, it is difficult to move through the streets during Ipedi because practically all Ẹdẹ's citizens come out to participate.

After the fourth stop, the Timi returns to the palace, where he is met in the throne room by a few more groups of citizens who want to pray for and celebrate with him. In 2016, the Timi made one additional stop to visit the prominent members of the Ansar-Ud-Deen Society and receive prayers from them as well. Additionally, for the previous few years Ipedi had been held later in July because Ramadan ended earlier in the month, and the Timi set the date in consultation with the Muslim lunar calendar.

On the Thursday after Ipedi, a set of masquerades called Ẹgbẹ come out, dance around the town, and process to their shrine outside the city. Ẹgbẹ is a tradition developed to address the problem of abiku children, or children who are born only to die, return to their mother's wombs, and then die again/return to heaven. The association of these children is called Ẹgbẹ, and those involved in the tradition use it to break this cycle and keep such children alive and present in the world. During this festival, the spirits of the abiku come out underneath the masquerades, and offerings can be made for services rendered over the past year. The Ẹgbẹ masquerades offer akara (fried black-eyed pea cakes) to some of the prominent chiefs and receive money and prayers in return.[62] The Ẹgbẹ tradition is considered female, as opposed to the Egungun masquerade tradition, which is considered male. Over the following two days, several of the prominent Egungun come

FIGURE 7.2. Ipedi procession, Ẹdẹ, 2016. Photograph by the author.

out in the afternoon and dance around the streets until late at night, collecting money and alcohol from those they pass by. When the ancestral Egungun return to their compounds, the Ipedi set of festivals is officially completed.

The Ipedi festival opens with Ogun because he is the trailblazer of the orișa, and he has long been associated with political authority and Yoruba kingship. Sandra Barnes and Paula Ben-Amos drew a connection between the formation of centralized states in West Africa and iron traditions such as Ogun's, making explicit reference to the Ọyọ Empire and its military expansion.[63] Adeboye Babalola argued Ogun, in particular, is often linked with the formation of polities and specifically with their mythical founder and primordial ọba.[64] This is clearly the case in Ẹdẹ, as Agbale Ọlọfa Ina, being a great general, was a devotee of Ogun, but in a more cosmological sense, military expeditions and operations were the cause and purpose of Ẹdẹ's foundation, making Ogun the sacred origin of the town. J. D. Y. Peel and P. C. Lloyd each argued that Ogun's importance extends beyond political authority and centralization to cosmic renewal and fecundity, as demonstrated by the rituals related to the new yams and his role as an orișa of agriculture.[65] As a result, although the patron orișa of Ẹdẹ and the Timi is now Șango, the festival of renewal and reconnection with the town's sacred origins must always begin with Ogun, much as is it does in many other Yoruba cities.[66] Like in Ẹdẹ, Ogun festivals—whether or not they are the ọba's festival—have

often lasted for more than one day, because a complex set of rituals is always required when the transcendent and immanent worlds are brought together again, with the ọba forming the focal point as the transcendent being who exists in both realms simultaneously.

The Timi's role as the embodiment of all Ẹdẹ across sacred and historical time and space, as well as the link between these realms, becomes clear in the subsequent rituals of the Ifa festival. The festival begins at the absolute darkest time of night precisely because it represents pure potentiality and undifferentiation, a feature which can be found in practically all myths of origin, including those of the Yoruba. According to Ifa accounts of the creation of the cosmos, the world first existed in complete and total darkness until Ọrunmila was taught by sixteen ajẹ (literally witches, but more akin to powerful—but not necessarily evil—female spirits) to sing a song to bring the light of the sun and moon into existence. These sixteen female spirits are each linked to one of the principal sixteen Odu of the Ifa corpus and are represented in the Ifa festival by the sixteen flames burning on the iron staff at the top of the palace hill. They are also present in the recitation of verses from these sixteen Odu to introduce light and order into the former void and chaos, just as Ọrunmila did in illo tempore.[67] The Yoruba have always understood women to be the creative vehicle through which potential life and existence is translated into reality, hence the ayaba, or female consorts of the Timi and all of Ẹdẹ, are the ones who introduce light into the darkness and tend and care for it throughout the ceremony.

The darkness of night is also the time when the ajogun (malevolent spiritual forces) come out and are most active, but according to Ifaniran Ojo, the Akọda awo in Ẹdẹ, the light of the sacred Ifa flames also has a purifying effect. This is why after each major section of the Ifa oral corpus has been invoked, the Timi dances around the staff three times in order that the power of the Ifa verses will rid the Timi, and thus all of Ẹdẹ, of any negative influences of the ajogun that may have arisen over the past year. Because the ajogun introduce disorder (such as Arun/illness, a breakdown in the proper functioning of the body), the light of the lamps effectively dispels them by reestablishing light, form, and proper order. The Timi and all ritual participants in Ipedi's various traditions move in a counterclockwise direction because the righthand side and movement to the right are more fortuitous, properly ordered, and benevolent in Yoruba cosmology. The Akọda explained that Ifa signs are read and drawn from right to left like Arabic script, while it is only the Western style of writing that runs in the opposite direction.[68]

There are the two instances in which the Timi does not dance around the sacred flames. First, during the recitation of the Odu that "founded" Ẹdẹ

(Ogunda-Wọnrin), only the babalawo get up to dance because its invocation recalls a time when Ẹdẹ had not yet come into being, and only the prior and timeless truth of Ifa—represented by the babalawo in the festival and Ọrunmila in Yoruba mythology—was in place. Ifa divination poetry and mythology function as a type of sacred and timeless archetype that manifests in the world when its specific signs are revealed and invoked. Hence, it would not be appropriate for the Timi, as the embodiment of Ẹdẹ, to perform this ritual while his and the town's very existence is being (re)called into being through the timeless and sacred words of Ifa. Additionally, during the recitation of Odu Irosun Meji, the deceased previous Timi come out to dance around the lamp, and because of the importance of maintaining the order of the linked but separate living and ancestral realms, none of Ẹdẹ's living citizens ascend the hill or dance. Moreover, because the Timi encompasses all Ẹdẹ in his sacred personhood, he cannot possibly meet another Timi. The same logic underlies the taboo of the Timi encountering the royal Egungun Andu in the palace, as Andu is likewise understood to be a Timi, and if two such beings were to encounter each other, one would cease to exist in this realm. The entire history of Ẹdẹ and its past Timi must be involved in the total regeneration of its cosmos, and their silent participation in this important ritual follows their reception of sacrifices several hours earlier at their respective graves around the palace.[69] The entire complex of rituals from the first harvest of the year to the (re)establishment of the cosmos, the recitation of sacred words that bring this existence into being, and the possibility of the dead crossing over into the realm of the living closely mirror Eliade's conception of the regeneration of sacred time and the cosmos.[70]

After the wisdom of Ifa has laid the foundations of Ẹdẹ, the Timi's festival day of Ipedi can commence. During this festival the Timi goes through the symbolic process of establishing the physical town of Ẹdẹ and offers each group or society within the town an opportunity to take part in this process. The Timi's four ritual stops at the former locations of the old town gates is quite significant because the wall previously demarcated the literal limits of the town itself and it closely mirrors another important cosmogonic myth from Ifa. In the creation account in Odu Eji Ogbe, after the world was created, Oduduwa placed four pillars on the four corners of the world, and Olodumare rested half a calabash—representing the heavenly realm—on top of them.[71] Also during the ritual process of Ifa divination, the babalawo call attention to and establish these four cardinal positions on the divining board with their hands and divining chains before calling down Ọrunmila's primordial wisdom to reestablish divine order in the particular situation at hand. If the activity of the Timi is interpreted like the movement of the babalawo's hands or Oduduwa's primordial creative act, he is ordering and establishing his kingdom in proper orientation to heaven.

Throughout this process, he offers religious groups, lineages, occupational guilds, and other groups the opportunity to pay homage to him, demonstrating Apter's theory of the primary identity of the town (embodied by the Timi) taking subsequent and secondary instances of differentiation. This is also how the Ipedi festival has—perhaps necessarily—become more of a secular festival, in that it is not at all limited to what might today be described as religious groups, such as the Ifa priests, but is centered around participating in the larger identity of Ẹdẹ as a single community.[72] Consequently, it is one of the few events in which no one would object to Muslims, various orișa devotees, and Christians all taking part simultaneously. This is surely why Ipedi is so widely popular in Ẹdẹ and so well attended across all quarters. Given the increasingly limited opportunities for religious groups to unite in the modern/contemporary era, unity is also one of the most important functions of the festival.

One more noteworthy aspect of the Ipedi festival is that because of Ẹdẹ's unique religious history, it is central to the town's civil religion as the Timi's festival but is not the only civil religious festival. Following the reign of Timi Ajeniju, who famously became a Șango devotee, the Șango festival became the festival for the ọba's orișa (and Ẹdẹ's by extension). Perhaps because of the importance of Ogun in the foundation of the town, the weight of tradition, the additive nature of much of Yoruba religion and culture, or some combination thereof, the Șango festival simply became yet another festival that contributes to Ẹdẹ's civil religion. At the same time, separating the Timi's festival day from that of his patron orișa allows the festival day to be understood beyond the context of orișa worship in a way that, to my knowledge, is unique among prominent Yoruba towns and cities.[73] This naturally makes the festival more accessible and unobjectionable to Christians and Muslims who might otherwise be hesitant to participate in a traditional festival on religious grounds.

Șango

The Șango festival is the most prominent traditional festival after Ipedi, and it takes place at the end of the rainy season in October. The festival technically begins the night before with an aisun (or night of prayers and ritual), just like the Ifa festival does. Much like the Ifa festival, there is a sacred lamp, and the Timi—dressed in all white again—walks around it seven times counterclockwise. This must be repeated around 5 a.m. before the sun comes up, after which the lamp is allowed to go out, and the Timi and Șango worshippers make their way to the Șango shrine located next to the Ọșun River. The arugba (a young woman who carries the calabash with secret materials for sacrifice) leads a procession down to the shrine. After performing the sacrifice there, water from the river is brought

back in a calabash, which the Timi will have to touch to his head three times and the senior chiefs will each touch once.

The Timi receives all attendees for a celebration that involves Egungun dances, prayers from the Ṣango priests and babalawo, and music and dance performances from the Ṣango devotees and possession priests. Then, the Timi proceeds back to the palace, preceded by the arugba and followed by the Ṣango devotees, who are in turn followed by the rest of those in attendance. Much like during Ipedi, many different groups or organizations come together to attend the opening of the Ṣango festival and to participate in the procession afterward. At the palace, the Mọgba washes the ritual elements of Ṣango and the Timi must invoke all his predecessors. With this, the festival is officially open, and the Ṣango possession demonstrations begin.

Beginning that day and continuing for seven days, a different ẹlẹgun Ṣango (possession priest of Ṣango, different from the Mọgba, or non-possession priests) comes out and, through him, Ṣango performs magic demonstrations and dances in the Timi's market each evening in the presence of the Timi and a large crowd of spectators (figure 7.3). Following the performance and prayers for the Timi and Ẹdẹ, the Timi returns to his throne room, where he is later met by Ṣango manifest in the priest. Ṣango moves to his shrine within the palace, where he is offered additional sacrifices, and then he moves out into the market, where he collects money from those present. This continues each day, until on the last day a man named Agbajere (the one who carries the ritual container) comes out in the Timi's market, where the Ṣango priests light a fire inside the ajere (container) he must carry on his head. The Agbajere prays for the Timi and all of Ẹdẹ before slowly walking counterclockwise seven times around the place where the Timi and his chiefs are seated. The Timi then returns to the palace and the Agbajere and his followers walk to the Ṣango shrine inside the palace to perform divination and discover whether Ṣango has accepted the rituals. Then they greet the Timi in his throne room and the Agbajere carries the fire in the ajere all around Ẹdẹ throughout the rest of the night, collecting money from those he passes.

In the afternoon of the following day, the most prominent Egungun in Ẹdẹ come out to dance through the town and greet the Timi in his market. Each comes before the Timi and his chiefs to pray for him during the coming year, and on the following day, a set of acrobatic Egungun called Agbegijo come out to entertain the Timi and his chiefs in the palace with their tricks and social satire.[74] Later that day, a very warlike Egungun called Ondoru comes to the palace to greet the Timi in his throne room before running furiously into the market, throwing large sticks and collecting money.[75] After Ondoru returns home, the Ṣango festival is complete, al-

FIGURE 7.3. Ṣango manifest and performing through his ẹlẹgun (possession priest), Ẹdẹ, 2016. Photograph by the author.

though the Ṣango priests will return several weeks later to receive a message from Ṣango and perform a final set of sacrifices placed at various points in the town.

The Ṣango festival interestingly seems to repeat several of the important features and rituals of Ipedi, particularly in terms of the involvement of the Timi. The aisun the night before closely mirrors the Ifa festival, and the Timi's walking around the lamp likely contains the same function and meaning as it does in the Ifa festival. The Timi's procession through the town and assemblage of different groups within Ẹdẹ on the subsequent day is reminiscent of the Ipedi festival, and the Egungun masquerades are able to come out again (albeit in larger numbers) at the closing of the festival period only after the heavenly and ancestral realms have been connected to the renewed earthly Ẹdẹ. There are, however, some important differences between the two festivals.

First, Ṣango manifests himself in his priests on multiple days to perform demonstrations of his esoteric knowledge and magic, which is naturally specific to Ṣango's tradition. Still, these demonstrations play a similar role in Ẹdẹ's civil religion to that of Ipedi, as Ṣango is at the very least part of the historical heritage of all Ẹdẹ citizens, and the very popular demonstrations are attended by people of all religious backgrounds. Fascinatingly, as seen in figure 7.3 the demonstrations take place right next to the central mosque in the location where the large Ṣango statue used to be before it was removed. Second, the rituals

associated with the Agbajere are completely unique to the Ṣango festival, although they do share similarities to Ipedi. During Ipedi, no fire is ever brought around the Timi himself, but the opposite occurs during the Ṣango festival, when the Agbajere circles the Timi and his chiefs while carrying the sacred fire, which is intended to cleanse them of all malevolent forces. Third, rather than the Timi moving throughout the town, as he does during Ipedi, it is the Agbajere who does so. This could be understood as the power of Ṣango (closely associated with that of the Timi) traveling around the town in the form of the sacred fire in the ajere.

There are close parallels with the lamps at the aisun for the Ifa and Ṣango festivals, and even the ajere itself serves a role similar to Ifa. According to the Agbajere and Ṣango worshippers, when Agbale Ọlọfa Ina left Ọyọ, he followed one of his companions who carried this sacred fire in the ajere on his head, illuminating their path until they reached the correct location. Interestingly, the babalawo in Ẹdẹ do not fully accept this story, but rather view the wisdom transmitted by Ifa as the guide that led the people of Ẹdẹ both to the town's original site and its current location. The difference between the Timi circling the fire at Ipedi and the fire being carried around him and his chiefs in the Ṣango festival could very well have to do with Ipedi (and to a degree the Ṣango aisun) already having established the proper order for the earthly Ẹdẹ and, consequently, the fact that the ajere is brought out during the day. In my own interpretation, if the Timi circles the flames at night as the embodiment of his kingdom in potentiality, during the day the kingdom has become fully actualized and materialized. Consequently, the cleansing flames of the ajere are carried around his whole body and then the entire physical town in parallel fashion. Again, this is quite reminiscent of what the Timi himself does during the Ipedi festival to establish his material kingdom in the physical realm. Although enacted through slightly different rituals, the Timi's role in the Ṣango festival also demonstrates his sacred nature and role of encompassing and embodying the entirety of the Ẹdẹ community—living and dead—and demonstrates the interesting parallel dynamics of having two festivals linked to a town's sacred kingship and civil religion.

Ileya and Itunu

The Muslim festivals of Ileya and Itunu ('Eīd al-Fitr and 'Eīd al-Kabīr, respectively) involve an almost identical process with respect to the Timi's involvement and thus will be treated together. On the morning of each festival, hundreds to thousands of Muslims begin gathering in the official Yidi (Muslim prayer ground), located on the grounds of Ẹdẹ's Muslim Grammar School. Families and religious groups or organizations often arrive together and fill in the area by placing their prayer mats beginning at the front of the prayer ground. However,

room is left for the Timi, his chiefs, and several of Ẹdẹ's most prominent citizens, most of whom return for these important holidays if they live elsewhere. As with the other festivals in Ẹdẹ, the Timi leaves the palace preceded by his chiefs, musicians, and the hunters farthest ahead. While walking to the prayer ground, the Timi is greeted by the many people gathered on the sides of the road to see him, and many of these individuals and groups join in behind him, causing the procession to grow as it advances.

The Timi is always the last to arrive—usually shortly after the chief imam, and after the chief imam has led the community in prayer, the Timi and perhaps a few others address those gathered. A khuṭba (sermon) is delivered by the chief imam, and the Timi is the first to leave. Once again, a large procession follows the Timi as he exits, and the streets are lined with those who come out to prostrate themselves before him during his return to the palace. Following the completion of the prayers, the Muslim titleholders (the Muslim clerics who hold official titled positions in Ẹdẹ, not the traditional chiefs who practice Islam) come to the throne room to pray for the Timi before returning home.

Although both Muslim festivals are clearly separate from the traditional religious festivals mentioned earlier, they do still demonstrate some similarities with respect to the nature of the Timi.[76] For example, the Timi must always arrive last, and perhaps a bit late, not simply to remind everyone of his power to determine when proceedings will commence, but because his arrival represents the arrival of the entire community. Thus, he must complete the attendance after the entirety of the community has already gathered. From another, quite literal and physical perspective, he takes a position at the front and center of the prayer ground, with the most important chiefs, titleholders, and citizens beside and behind him, and other important lineage and religious groups behind them (figure 7.4). In keeping with Islamic custom, the chief imam naturally leads the entire community in prayer, but the arrangement of the faithful around and behind the Timi is reminiscent of a prism refracting and separating different colors of light from its original, unified stream.

With the hunters' guild preceding him, the Timi is greeted along the route to and from the palace by various groups (who may or may not come to the prayer ground) to pay homage to him, precisely as happens during the other civic festivals such as Ipedi or the Ṣango festival. Finally, just as occurs at the completion of the rituals for the Ṣango or Egungun devotees, the Muslim titleholders come to greet the Timi in his throne room to congratulate him and pray for him one last time. As noted by T. G. O. Gbadamosi, as Islam spread in Yorubaland, Muslim leaders found ingenious and effective ways to establish Islamic traditions and observe orthodox rituals while simultaneously adapting them to important

FIGURE 7.4. The Timi (*front, center*) at the Yidi (prayer ground), with Senator Isiaka Adeleke to his right and Prince Al-Hajji Rasheed Ọlaolu, Baba Kekere of Ẹdẹland, on his left, Ẹdẹ, 2016. Photograph by the author.

cultural features, most notably with respect to the ọba.[77] Due to the strong Islamic history and identity of Ẹdẹ, Ileya and Itunu have also taken on important features of Yoruba civil religion and demonstrate a strong continuity with the role and nature of the Timi's place in the town's religious life and ritual.

HRH Ọba Munirudeen Adeṣọla Lawal, Timi of Ẹdẹland

Until this point, I have intentionally discussed the Timi in general terms to highlight the function of the office and because, as a sacred being and the cosmos of the entire town, the Timi does not die but simply inhabits the physical bodies of those who wear the crown. However, the particular personality of the individual who becomes the Timi is also of crucial importance, and the current Timi, HRH Ọba Munirudeen Adeṣọla Lawal, is a compelling example and embodiment of many of the best qualities of Ẹdẹ and Yoruba sacred kingship in contemporary society (figure 7.5). He effectively straddles the traditional and modern Yoruba worlds and the various religious traditions present within his kingdom. As a result, he devises creative and delicate means of balancing these varied and often-competing interests and articulates the role and office of the Timi in ways that can be widely understood and accepted.

FIGURE 7.5. HRH Ọba Munirudeen Adeṣọla Lawal, Timi of Ẹdẹland, 2016. Photograph by the author.

Born in 1956 in Ẹdẹ, then-Prince Munirudeen Adeṣọla Lawal had royal ancestry on both sides of his family: His mother was the granddaughter of famous Timi Lagunju and his father was from the Laminisa royal family. Growing up, however, he was not aware that his father's lineage was in fact a royal lineage, and he consequently never imagined he might one day become Timi.[78] His educational background excellently represents the various values and traditions of Ẹdẹ and demonstrates the common convergence of Islamic education and Western/secular education in West Africa described by Ousmane Kane.[79] Because both sides of his family are Muslim—his mother came from the prominent Ile Imọle compound—he was destined to receive the traditional Islamic education for which Ẹdẹ is famous, but he also excelled in the Western educational system. He studied at several Christian institutions, such as the Seventh Day Adventist Grammar School and the Baptist High School, Ẹdẹ. He also received advanced degrees from the Adeyemi College of Education, where he studied mathematics and chemistry education (1980); Bayero University, where he studied library science and mathematics (1984); and Obafemi Awolowo University, where he received his MBA (1990). An excellent student, he was honored with a merit award from the federal government after finishing as the top student in library studies.

In between earning these degrees, he began his career as an educator, teaching at several institutions in Ẹdẹ, including Timi Agbale Grammar School, his alma

mater Baptist High School, and Oba Laoye Grammar School. He later worked as a lecturer at the newly established Osun State Polytechnic, Iree, where he rose up the ranks to become chief lecturer in the Mathematics Department. It was while he occupied this position that he was selected from within the Laminisa royal family to be its first representative as Timi. Given his high level of academic achievement and background, he presented a very attractive choice, as Yoruba towns have increasingly sought ọba who could bring development to their communities.[80] In this sense, he possesses many of the same qualities that made Timi Laoye a successful ọba, and he also shares Timi Laoye's experience with Christian education and religion, but his background from strong and prominent Muslim lineages makes him more representative of the broader population.

The current Timi is also a staunch defender of tradition and Yoruba culture but is able to blend them with his familiarity with the modern world and the Yoruba concept of ọlaju. For example, he has identified the Ṣango festival as a major opportunity to bring cultural prominence, development, and economic prosperity to the community, although his efforts faced resistance.[81] When I asked about this particular project, he insisted Ẹdẹ must not lose its strong Islamic heritage but that need not imply undermining the place of Ṣango in its culture and history. According to him, "Egungun and Ṣango, all of these are a cultural heritage that we inherited, and we know their origin . . . the moment we see it as entertainment, the better for the entire community."[82] He does not agree with Muslims who believe watching the Ṣango demonstrations or Egungun masquerades is in itself a sin, asserting instead that it is simply improper for Muslims to perform rituals, make sacrifices, and pray to Ṣango as their lord. He even made a religious argument similar to that of Alfa Alaaye, that a dutiful Muslim son with an Olorișa father should provide his father with whatever assistance he needs out of love for him and familial duty.[83]

In addition to the benefit of enhancing Ẹdẹ's common sense of history, identity, and civil religion, he believes tourism could bring important economic and developmental benefits to Ẹdẹ, citing Oṣogbo's Ọṣun festival as an example. Indeed, the Ṣango Timi festival in 2016 attracted a great deal of money and many participants and spectators from inside and outside Ọṣun state. This complicated process of linking orișa/orixá religion to tourism and entertainment is precisely how Candomblé began to gain greater public visibility and recognition from the government in Brazil. Although the Timi likely did not have this particular history in mind, it is significant that he observed the same potential benefits and opted to act on them in a similar but more respectful fashion.

However, accomplishing the elevation of Ṣango Timi requires a delicate balance and intelligence. Timi Lawal was careful to identify the Ṣango festival as

both "culture" (aṣa in Yoruba) and entertainment rather than religion (ẹsin) so that Muslims and Christians would not need to violate modern religious sensibilities by attending and taking part. He leaves the possibility for it to be an explicitly religious event for the Ṣango devotees but opens the door for it to become polysemic in a modern context by categorizing it as culture or entertainment for some groups but potentially religion for others. Pemberton and Afọlayan recorded Ọba Ayeni of Ila-Ọrangun trying to strike the same balance when he stated, "The way to preserve many of these cultural practices is to present them as '*àṣà*' and not as '*ẹ̀sìn.*' . . . If we present and sustain these customs as a mark of our identity with the past, with our ancestors, and as part of our history and heritage, not as a religious obligation, then they will survive."[84] This, however, requires identifying the modern categories in which these traditions will be acceptable to many Christians and Muslims, because "religion" would clearly not fit the bill.

In addition to negotiating a balance with respect to how festivals like Ṣango's may be rearticulated for different groups in a modern context, he has done the same with his own religious practice as a devoted Muslim. When the time comes for oriṣa festivals and rituals, he always provides everything the priests and priestesses request and a bit of extra money and supplies. He does this to "let them [Oloriṣa] know that I love them, I love their religion, but I will not totally take part in it. The same happens with Christians. I don't go to their churches."[85] Like many other Muslims in Ẹdẹ, he cited Sūrat al-Kāfirūn, stating, "lakum dīnakum wa līya dīn" (You have your own religion, and I have my own).[86] On both personal and societal levels, he believes it has become crucial to determine what falls within the scope of religion as opposed to culture. Much like Bayọ Ayantunde (see chapter 6), the Timi is troubled by the inability of some Muslims and Christians to identify where these lines should be drawn and has found "it has affected our cultural beliefs. People are so dogmatic about these religions that they don't see anything good in any other thing."[87]

This, of course, raises the issue of the ọba, as the embodiment of the entire community, engaging in oriṣa festivals and rituals as something other than religion, potentially defining them entirely within the new modern categories of culture or entertainment rather than religion as oriṣa practitioners engage with them. If he participates in them strictly as culture or entertainment, then oriṣa traditions potentially exist only within these categories in Ẹdẹ's society at large. This tension, however, is precisely the purpose of having the ọba as the embodiment and source of reconciliation of these diverse, competing viewpoints. Just as the white color of the Ọọni's clothes can be broken down into the multitude of colors on his crown, the Timi's actions and involvement with oriṣa traditions

can be understood in different ways when analyzed from the fragmented perspectives of different religious groups. What is important is that the function and action of the ọba leaves room for acceptable interpretation by all traditions within his kingdom, even if his own personal paradigms appear different from those of the various invested parties that must come together under his divine personage.

Although previous Timi may have taken an active part in all the various orișa traditions as ọba onigbogbo ẹsin, the current Timi has limited his own personal identification and ritual activity to the confines of Islam. This, however, has not prevented him from supporting and fostering positive relations with Christians and Olorișa. Much as they celebrated Timi Laoye for his knowledge of indigenous traditions and support of the Șango festival, the Șango devotees praised Timi Lawal for his support. Similarly, Christians in Ẹdẹ are impressed with Timi Lawal's knowledge of their religion and support of its practice. When Pastor Nathaniel Oyewole presided over his first service for Ẹdẹ Day (a modern, civic holiday supporting community development), the Timi came to the First Baptist Church and led a series of prayers to open the festivities. Pastor Oyewole was not expecting to see a Muslim ọba lead Christians in prayer, but he was so impressed with the Timi's knowledge of Christian liturgy, prayer traditions, and respect for the sacred identity of Jesus that he invited the Timi to address the congregation from the pulpit (figure 7.6).[88] Naturally, some Muslims do not approve of such close relations with other religious traditions and question the Muslim orthodoxy of the Timi, but this has not stopped him from using the knowledge of Christianity and orișa traditions he gained during his upbringing to foster positive relations with all religious groups.

In particular, the Timi is acutely aware that although they no longer constitute the numerical majority they did in the past, orișa devotees are the foundation of the office of the Timi and therefore of crucial importance. He stated, "The origin of [the office of the] Timi is Șango, and one should not allow religion to blindfold him," and "I know I am going to give [an] account of my stewardship for all the religious beliefs of my people in Ede before my Creator as their burden is on me."[89] As the father or patron of all religious groups, he has the same responsibility to Olorișa as to Muslims or Christians, but he recognizes that the sacred office of the Timi is inherently linked to orișa traditions and, in the particular case of Ẹdẹ, to Șango. The late Ọọni of Ile-Ifẹ viewed the matter in a similar way. According to him, "There is something upon which our kingship is based. . . . If the 'little little' ọba claim that they no longer want to participate in this [orișa] tradition, then they are deceiving themselves."[90] This creates a difficult tension: If the Timi, who embodies the

FIGURE 7.6. Timi leading a prayer session at First Baptist Church, Ẹdẹ, 2016. Photograph by the author.

entire town, is unable to participate *fully* or *actively* in the worship of Ṣango, then that means the community as a whole may not be fully present and actively participating in the worship of the deity on whom the office of sacred kingship rests. The Ọọni and Timi have been involved in a process of balancing a sincere relationship with these indigenous traditions with more modern religious sensibilities, and the stakes in managing this apparent paradox have only become higher in the modern era.

The Ọọni made a clear reference to the type of ọba cited earlier who agreed to assume the title, only to either disengage from or oppose orișa traditions. Both he and the present Timi see a clear contradiction in this type of behavior. These sacred offices are linked to specific orișa traditions such as Ṣango or Ogun, the various rituals of installation involve orișa specialists and titleholders, and the very nature of the ọba embodying his entire kingdom and functioning as ọba onigbogbo ẹsin is firmly rooted in the traditional Yoruba cosmology and perspective on religious pluralism. Militating against this cosmology and perspective on religious issues in fact undermines the very nature of the office of sacred kingship itself. The Timi believes such exclusivist approaches to Yoruba kingship are "just bringing conflict," again demonstrating how the religious harmony or conflict present within the ọba's own avowed cosmology becomes manifest in the broader society.[91]

Modern Innovations

Timi Lawal has found several ingenious ways of adapting the worship of the orișa in Ẹdẹ to better fit the modern context of his kingdom. Perhaps the most interesting—and to the best of my knowledge unique—strategy he has employed is to shift the ritual/liturgical calendar of orișa festivals. Every year, the Timi holds meetings with the highest-ranking traditional chiefs and leaders of the respective religious groups, and because the vast majority of Ẹdẹ's citizens are Muslim, the dates of some of the orișa festivals are shifted so that they do not fall during Ramadan or around 'Eīd al-Kabīr. In 2016, the Egungun festival was moved just before the beginning of Ramadan in June, and the Ipedi group of festivals was scheduled for just after the end of Ramadan in July.

The Timi prefers to shift the orișa festivals in part because they do not need to fall on a specific day but have a certain degree of leeway within the month in which they are celebrated. In contrast, the dates on the Muslim lunar calendar are fixed, observed on a global scale, and cannot be shifted. The ritual calendar in Ẹdẹ has clearly always been open to additions or modifications, because the Șango festival likely was a much smaller affair before the reign of Timi Ajeniju, when Șango became Ẹdẹ's patron orișa. Also, determining the date of certain festivals based on those of others is not a new phenomenon in Ẹdẹ. The Ajagẹmọ/Ọbatala festival in March serves as the anchoring date from which the date for the subsequent Ogboni festival is calculated. What is different, however, is the way the Timi has balanced potentially conflicting calendars and the strong Islamic identity of the community to allow all Ẹdẹ citizens to participate in traditional festivals and observe their own religious obligations. In fact, according to the Șango worshippers, it was the ẹlẹgun Șango who initially went to Timi Laoye to present the potential conflict between their festival and Ramadan. Because at that time practically all the Șango priests and their wives were Muslim and intended to fast, preparing and eating all the necessary food during the festival presented a significant conflict. Furthermore, most of the town's citizens would likely not come out to observe and take part in the festival. After some consultation, the Timi simply shifted the Șango festival until after the end of Ramadan, to the pleasure of the Șango devotees.[92]

Timi Lawal stated, "If the traditional worshippers want to have the Egungun festival during Ramadan, they know that nobody will even come"; hence, for them to collect money and engage effectively with the whole community, "either we shift it to after Ramadan or before Ramadan, and we have been doing that successfully. . . . We have been enjoying the cooperation of everybody."[93] This is, of course, not only good for the Olorișa, who are able to attract greater participa-

tion in their festivals, but it also avoids the potential conflict of orișa rituals and performances taking place during times that could potentially anger some Muslim citizens. Just as the issue of Egungun processions disrupting those praying in mosques has been effectively resolved, so has the potential for a conflict between an Egungun procession running into worshippers praying at or returning from a prayer ground on Muslim holidays.

Indeed, one of the Egungun chiefs, Ojetunji Olukolo, is very pleased with Ẹdẹ's unique solution to this situation. He believes it is better for the Egungun tradition to reach as many people as possible, but he did add that at times there is a problem if they cannot propitiate the Egungun at the right time because of the Islamic calendar. However, the Timi had recently offered to double the resources made available for the sacrifices, the Egungun have actively expressed their acceptance of this compromise through divination, and the festivals have gone well.[94] Similarly, the Jagun Ṣango took no issue with one of their more minor festivals being shifted because it coincided with Ileya ('Eīd al-Kabīr). As part of the festival, the Ṣango priests need to perform in front of the Timi and all the senior chiefs, but if these men were all at home with their families, they would not be able to perform for anyone, and an important and essential element of the ritual would be lost.[95] The orișa ritual schedule is based on a solar calendar, so the schedule modifications are temporary, because after a few years the potential conflicts disappear as events in the lunar Muslim calendar fall progressively earlier each year relative to the solar calendar.

Still, a very small number of Olorișa is not pleased with the creative scheduling of orișa festivals. Munirazeez Dẹbẹẹ, an Egungun titleholder, does not approve of this arrangement because Muslims would never accept shifting Ramadan, and he does not believe that Olorișa should have to make concessions where Muslims would not. When I asked about the problem that few if any Muslims would come out to dance with them and give them gifts if the festival were held during Ramadan, he responded that he would rather just go out by himself with the Egungun, even if nobody else joined him.[96] Awofakunle Ojo, a young babalawo, is not comfortable with adjusting the orișa calendar to accommodate Muslims for the same reason. His response to the concerns about Muslims not attending and offering them gifts was to ask the valid question, "Did they create the Egungun masquerade for money?"[97]

Despite the legitimate concerns of that small minority, if Muslim and orișa festivals were held at the same time, there is little doubt which Ẹdẹ's citizens would choose to observe if forced to make a choice. However, by reframing the Egungun and Ṣango festivals as more cultural affairs, along with the Ipedi festival becoming more of a civil festival, and by making certain that none of them

overlap with important Islamic holidays, Timi Lawal has ensured that his people are able to remain involved in as many of Ẹdẹ's traditions as they would like. Although Timi Lawal was not the originator of this tradition of shifting the dates for festivals, he has embraced it enthusiastically and made a very conscious effort to involve each individual orișa group in the setting of dates each year and compensating them with extra support if the resultant compromise causes any complications for them.

One prescient innovation that was initiated by the current Timi was the foundation of a special association for the Olorișa. After Osun State officially recognized orișa worship as a formal religion, Governor Aregbeṣọla created TRWASO (Traditional Religion Worshippers Association State of Osun) in 2013 as the counterpart to the state chapters of CAN (Christian Association of Nigeria) and NSCIA (Nigeria Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs). However, before this organization was formed, Timi Lawal had created a similar body in Ẹdẹ. When I asked him why he did this, he responded:

> [Early in his reign he] realized that . . . the Egungun people were doing their own separately; the Ifa people were doing their own separately; the Ṣango people were doing their own separately, and as a result of that, they were unable to benefit like the other two religions. So, it was at a meeting one day that I called them to the palace and said, "You people, you are losing. I do give Muslims every Friday some money. The first Monday of the month, the Christian people come, and I give them something. But you, because you are fragmented, you have divided yourselves . . . you are unable to benefit from me unless you too choose a particular day of the month so that you come here and have a meeting. So, the Egungun people, the Ifa people, the Ṣango people, everybody should now converge in the town hall and have their own meeting, so you can be given a token, say, 10,000 naira every month." That was how they agreed, and they have been working together.[98]

Apart from anticipating the broader organization established at the state level, this was a keen observation on the part of the Timi from his current position in Yoruba modernity and the shifting nature of orișa traditions from forms of worship to a more unified religion. To begin, he recognized that the members of the various orișa traditions did not conceive of themselves as one cohesive unit and certainly did not operate in the way the Christians and Muslims did. Furthermore, he observed that the way Christians and Muslims had organized themselves and imagined their religious communities allowed them to derive some benefits from his office.

The previous configuration of the orișa traditions as fairly disparate forms of worship left them poorly adapted to the modern context in Ẹdẹ, and the Timi suggested bringing them together into a single, overarching religious organization. In theory, each orișa tradition could have lobbied for equal status and recognition with Islam and Christianity, but it would have been incredibly difficult to provide each orișa tradition with the same type of material support that Christians and Muslims enjoyed. Furthermore, it is significant that the issue of the royal support of individual religions never arose until Muslims and Christians appealed to the Timi for support on those grounds, an idea that had never occurred to orișa devotees, who imagined their communities and relationship to the Timi quite differently.[99] One of the reasons the Timi cited for reimagining the way orișa traditions were structured in Ẹdẹ was that they now needed a forum to discuss issues that affected all of them specifically as Olorișa.[100] Before the advent of Islam and Christianity in Ẹdẹ, such discussion would have been configured as a meeting of all citizens, but with the practice of Christianity and Islam now falling under separate and largely distinct cosmologies, many new issues arose that were unique to Olorișa, and this was one part of the royal response to the shifting religious landscape of the town.[101]

The creative, balanced, and well-informed way the current Timi manages and supports all religious traditions in modern Ẹdẹ without necessarily actively practicing each of them is without a doubt a—if not the—major factor in the remarkable level of religious harmony Ẹdẹ has been able to maintain. Although Ẹdẹ is not the only harmonious Yoruba community, most have struggled in this regard, and Ẹdẹ is a clear outlier to this trend. The Reverend Nathaniel Oyewole said in no uncertain terms, "We [Nigerians] are crying for religious tolerance now . . . the Kabiyesi [ọba/king] himself is leaving that legacy of tolerance."[102] Still, challenges to both the religious dynamics and the authority of the Timi have emerged and resulted in conflict from time to time.

The Timi and other religious leaders are quick to place contemporary instances of minor conflict within the broader context of Ẹdẹ's history and traditions as a way to counteract them. For example, the Timi and all the alfa were eager to recount the way Islam first rose to prominence in Ẹdẹ through a cleric protecting all its citizens when the Ibadan army threatened to attack, and later through cultivating good relations with nonbelievers and offering to educate their children. As the Timi put it, sometimes "our younger ones, they don't see things that way; they believe in force. You cannot force people. That is [not] how Ede's people became Muslim."[103] Indeed, the chief imam stressed the same point by quoting Sūrat al-Baqra, which states "there is no compulsion in acceptance of the religion" (Qur'an 2:256) to demonstrate the traditional and contemporary

approach to the spread of Islam in Ẹdẹ and interreligious interactions.[104] However, just as Olupona noted in Ile-Ifẹ and Yorubaland more generally, more recent religious movements have sought to undermine the authority of Yoruba sacred kingship.[105]

In recent times, such resistance and conflict have emerged in a few minor ways in Ẹdẹ, such as resistance to the promotion of the Ṣango festival as supporting idolatry, along with a handful of more serious instances that have tended to follow the growing regional and national tensions between Muslims and Christians.[106] One of the most significant ways the Timi's authority has been challenged related to the establishment of the Redeemer's University campus. Although the project had been agreed upon and begun under the previous Timi's reign, the university was only officially founded in Ẹdẹ in 2012. Many citizens were unhappy that lands owned by Muslims were being given to a Christian university and that such a university was being founded in a town with a strong Islamic heritage. Some members of reformist Islamic groups within Ẹdẹ brought the case before the Supreme Court of Islamic Affairs, accusing the Timi of not being a true Muslim and of bastardizing the religion.[107] He was summoned to Ibadan for the case and cleared his name by producing all the documents demonstrating the process and purpose of developing the community, but the legal possession of the land was still being contested in secular courts in 2017.[108] Despite the initial opposition to the establishment of the university on religious grounds, many people in Ẹdẹ have come to view it as a positive development, particularly because many Muslim-owned businesses have greatly benefited from the patronage of students, staff, and faculty.

Another contentious event in recent history was the Dag Heward-Mills Healing Jesus Crusade referenced in chapter 1. Held in July 2011, the crusade was led by Dag Heward-Mills, a Ghanaian-Swiss evangelist who initially visited Ẹdẹ with a team to seek permission from the Timi to carry out the crusade there. The Timi asked for time to consult with the chief imam, leaders of the major Muslim organizations such as Ansar-Ud-Deen and Nawair-ud-Deen, the president of CAN in Ẹdẹ, and his chiefs because he did not want to create controversy by approving an event that would not be welcomed by important segments of the community. The Timi asked all these parties how they wished him to respond given that Ẹdẹ is a predominantly Muslim town. After all parties agreed to allow Heward-Mills to carry out his crusade, the Timi informed everyone that it would move forward, but instructed Heward-Mills and his team not to interfere with Ẹdẹ's Muslim population. Shortly before the crusade took place, Heward-Mills's team began putting up posters and advertisements all over town, and as

the Timi put it, "The day he came with the posters . . . our people started fighting. If he placed his own poster here, the Muslims would place their own there."

Indeed, many Muslims were upset at the intensity of the publicity campaign and the fact that some posters and messages were posted or painted on property owned by Muslims, seemingly without their consent.[109] It was not difficult to see how and why some of these posters could be taken as inflammatory; for example, some carried messages such as "only Jesus can save," which runs counter to standard Muslim orthodoxy. Consequently, a counter-publicity campaign was organized, and Muslim posters began emerging close to those of the Healing Jesus Crusade that read: "Allah is the healer," "Don't be deceived, Islam is the truth," and "If your Lord is dead, Allah lives forever."[110] Plans for a counter-crusade were also hatched, primarily under the initiative of Muslim youth. By all accounts, the situation came close to open physical confrontations, but it was defused primarily by traditional leaders in Ẹdẹ. The Timi, along with the League of Imams and Alfa led by Chief Imam Alhaji Mas'ud Hussayn Akajewole met, agreed that all parties had approved the plans for the crusade, and these leaders (most of whom are of Ẹdẹ's middle-aged and elder generations) calmed the youth protesters and ensured that the crusade could continue as planned.[111] As the ọba onigbogbo ẹsin, the Timi attended part of the crusade, although his support of a Christian event did draw some criticism from some Muslims.

What is significant in all these cases is not merely that it is primarily the continued authority of the Timi that externalizes and objectifies the social norm of religious pluralism and harmony and maintains Ẹdẹ's sacred canopy, as Berger would put it. It is rather that such conflict would have been incredibly unlikely before the transition from forms of worship to religion. For example, the idea that *only* Jesus could save would have been more confusing than offensive within the pluralistic oriṣa-centered cosmology. Furthermore, the competing message "Allah is the healer" would not have been interpreted as competition because all parties would agree that the power Jesus used to heal came from the same God, also called Allah, God, Ọlọrun, or Olodumare, depending on the context. Furthermore, the idea that Jesus could heal would not be perceived as deceitful or as implying that Islam was not "the truth," because both could be true and a Muslim or Ṣango devotee could easily consult a pastor for healing if needed. This is clearly demonstrated by the oldest generation in Ẹdẹ, who still understand their religious worship and practice in these terms and often do visit specialists of other traditions for assistance. Most fundamentally, however, the very idea of a crusade to *convert* people from one religion or tradition to another clearly runs counter to the previously dominant idea that one's primary religious identity is innate and foreordained. With the emergence of this new type of conflict—whether over

a traditional festival, the establishment of a Christian university, or the ardent evangelization of a crusade—the most effective, and perhaps the only, available means of reconciliation remains the ọba.

The Ọba in Modern Governance

Although many in the contemporary West take the separation of religious and political power to be an inherent good, scholars such as Talal Asad and William Cavanaugh have argued that the development of secularism and the religious/secular divide itself are unique products of Western history. While the European wars of religion following the Reformation caused a separation between a secular, political power and a newly defined religious sphere to appear to be an effective way to prevent religious conflict, this perspective and experience is far from universal.[112] Yoruba sacred kingship interestingly presents exactly the opposite situation from historical, contemporary, and modern perspectives: The best check against religious conflict has been and still is the ọba precisely because of how that office is articulated within the traditional Yoruba cosmology.

During the post-independence period, many scholars actively embraced secularization theory and ideas of liberal modernization that predicted the declining relevance of traditional and indigenous social and religious structures as African societies continued to "develop." Within these frameworks, long-standing traditional institutions were precisely what would hold African societies back from taking their rightful place on the global stage.[113] However, just as secularization theory has been proven inaccurate in describing the trajectory of African societies, traditional institutions such as that of the ọba have proven remarkably resilient as demonstrated by recent scholarship such as that of John and Jean Comaroff and Olufemi Vaughan.[114] In fact, Vaughan argued we can observe "a complex pattern of continuity and change, as chieftaincy structures [have] responded to the rapidly shifting sociopolitical and economic conditions of the twentieth century."[115] Although the secular Nigerian state (or at least individual dominant political parties) has at times been at odds with some traditional rulers, many ọba agree with the Timi that when Yoruba people are faced with serious problems, they are more likely to turn to the traditional rulers than the secular government for solutions. They have more faith in traditional political structures than they do in more recent, secular forms of political organization. In fact, the Timi suggested if anyone were to try to do away with the office of the ọba, Yoruba people would simply not accept it.[116]

The Timi may well be correct. In the words of Olufemi Vaughan, "Given the fragile, contingent character of colonial and postcolonial institutions, the

Nigerian state has hardly functioned as an effective structure of governance and administration" and has largely served to further the interests of specific ethnoregional allied groups rather than the general public.[117] In 1984, Professor Saburi Biobaku argued, "The meaningful form of leadership in most parts of Yorubaland resides in traditional chieftaincy and not in the modern form of government . . . the paradox of [the] contemporary situation lies in grassroots support and recognition, and their lack of formal political functions."[118]

One could easily argue that not much has changed; when I informed the late Araba of Ẹdẹ that there were only secular politicians and no ọba in the United States, he was shocked and had me repeat myself. His immediate response was to pray, "the politician must never take the place of the traditional king in Yorubaland!"[119]

Given the general lack of trust in the secular government, politicians, and in their accountability to the public, the late Ọọni of Ifẹ called for ọba to be given a greater role in the governance of southwestern Nigeria.[120] Timi Lawal similarly agreed that in Ẹdẹ people naturally come to him for effective rule, but all levels of the Nigerian government fail to recognize and appreciate the importance and status of the ọba. For him, even small issues such as recognizing local government chairmen and forcing ọba to stand up for these politicians demonstrates not only a disregard for ancient Yoruba custom but also a lack of appreciation for the respective importance of politicians and ọba in the lives of their citizens. At the same time, Timi Lawal, a highly educated man, is acutely aware of the complicated history of ọba getting involved in politics during decolonization and Nigeria's first republic and how their involvement in secular politics had compromised their power in some ways, including some having their salaries cut to almost nothing.[121] Consequently, Timi Lawal argues not for the direct involvement of ọba in secular politics but for greater mutual respect and cooperation with tradition and traditional titles because politicians cannot succeed at the local level if the ọba are not involved.

Interestingly, when I asked the Olorisa in Ẹdẹ about the Timi's position as ọba onigbogbo ẹsin, several responded that Osun State Governor Ọgbẹni Rauf Aregbesọla operated in a similar way, despite being a secular politician, because he was the first governor of any Yoruba state to officially recognize traditional religion alongside Islam and Christianity. Just as the Timi formed an overarching council for Olorisa in Ẹdẹ, Governor Aregbesọla formed TRWASO and created an official state holiday for orisa devotees on August 20. The orisa devotees saw no conflict with Governor Aregbesọla's identity as a Muslim, citing the fact that an ọba's individual religious identity need not prevent him from actively supporting other traditions. In fact, the chief Ọṣun priestess even said it was the orisa *themselves* who were increasing their profile through Governor Aregbesọla

and called him "ọmọ Ooṣa" (child of the oriṣa).[122] Regardless of Governor Aregbeṣọla's policies on religious issues, the broader point that can be drawn is that traditional political structures are often understood and experienced as more authoritative and effective than the official, secular system. Given the various crises faced by the Nigerian government at all levels, a greater integration of the two—either through affording traditional rulers more respect and power, as Timi Lawal suggests, or incorporating traditional approaches to certain issues the way Governor Aregbeṣọla has done with religion—may be an important part of the solution.

Conclusion

This chapter shed new light on the nature, function, and crucial importance of the Yoruba tradition of sacred kingship historically and in the present in both Ẹdẹ and Yorubaland more broadly. With respect to religion, it is the ọba's identity as ọba onigbogbo ẹsin that is most central. *Ọba onigbogbo ẹsin* is most commonly translated and understood today to mean "patron of all religions," but before the reconfiguration of Yoruba traditions as religion in the age of ọlaju, it could just as easily have been understood to mean "the king who owns/participates in all forms of worship." This subtle shift in meaning is quite significant because it indicates that the introduction of Islam and Christianity were not radical events that forced the Yoruba and their ọba to find ways of embracing religious pluralism. Instead, they had always operated within an inherently pluralistic framework of multiple oriṣa. Islam and Christianity were merely added as the two most recent forms of worship embraced by the ọba and community.

The notion of the ọba as a devotee or member of each form of worship present in his kingdom is supported by his embodiment and representation of the entirety of his kingdom, including the physical land and the various identities of the people who live on it. The ọba serves as the source of all religious, lineage, occupation, and other traditions, and represents them less as an arbitrary sign than as an ontological symbol who physically possesses the nature of the whole within himself. The Timi's role in Ẹdẹ's many festivals is rendered more comprehensible in light of this understanding of the ọba's nature, as are many of the taboos attached to the office. Consequently, as a microcosm of the whole community, all religious traditions must be reconciled within him.

However, the shift from forms of worship to religions has subtly changed the nature of Yoruba sacred kingship. Given that the office developed within a framework of multiple forms of worship, all of which counted on his active participation, the predominant framework of exclusive religions has generated

a certain amount of tension around the ọba's personal religious identity and relationship with other religious traditions. This is precisely why it is now more expedient to understand the term *ọba onigbogbo ẹsin* as a patron rather than an active practitioner, because it allows the ọba to remain faithful to Islam or Christianity without necessarily having to take an active part in orișa worship. Still, even participation in traditional festivals or support for orișa traditions is objectionable to some ọba, particularly among the born-again Christians.

Olupona demonstrated how the office of the ọba, and his festival in particular, function to create a civil religion by generating or reinforcing a set of symbols, myths, narratives, and values that all members of the community can share regardless of their varied identities, religious or otherwise. In the case of Ẹdẹ the shared myth of origin around the great generals Agbale Ọlọfa Ina and Alapo Tiẹmi Tiẹmi, the symbol of the flaming arrow, and participation in the Ipedi festival are all central aspects of Ẹdẹ's civil religion. Șango previously was also part of this universally accessible set of symbols, but as Muslims and Christians began to understand his tradition as outside the bounds of accepted orthodoxy, it and the location of the Șango statue in front of a mosque became more controversial.

The ọba stands at the center of the Yoruba sacred canopy. In this role, he helps to externalize a certain disposition toward religious traditions and phenomena, establishes it as an objective social reality, and causes it to be internalized—at least to a degree—by the society at large. In this sense, when the ọba's personal theology contains little conflict between different religious traditions, this pluralism is enforced and normalized within his kingdom. However, when the ọba's personal theology contains conceptions of a cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil embodied in specific religions, this conflict often is externalized in the kingdom. My contention is that the function of the ọba in creating the sacred canopy is precisely why the Yoruba were previously able to maintain such a high degree of religious pluralism and harmony and why the shift from a system of forms of worship to exclusive religions has opened the door for this tradition of pluralism to become compromised. Furthermore, as the cases of several Muslim and Christian Timi in Ẹdẹ demonstrate, it is not the individual religious identity of an ọba that determines whether this pluralism is upheld, but rather his orientation toward religion and/or forms of worship.

The specific rituals performed during Ẹdẹ's important religious festivals and the Timi's role within them demonstrate his nature as the microcosm of the entire kingdom, the material used to construct Ẹdẹ's civil religion, and how the Timi articulates the meaning of ọba onigbogbo ẹsin within a modern context. The Ipedi festival is the most informative and central in this respect, but the unique historical shift in royal orișa from Ogun to Șango has had the interesting

effect of providing Ẹdẹ with another orișa festival that contributes to the civil religion, if only when presented as culture rather than religion. The other interesting effect of this shift in royal orișa is that it rendered the Ipedi festival more accessible to Muslims and Christians who might have reservations about participating in the Șango festival. In addition, the Muslim festivals of Ileya and Itunu demonstrate some very similar features, which seems quite natural as Islam has now become the dominant religion defining Ẹdẹ's communal identity.

While the transition from the system of forms of worship to modern religion has been uneven and contentious in many places within Yorubaland, Ẹdẹ has been able to maintain the previously common tradition of religious pluralism and harmony precisely because the Timi have found effective ways to rearticulate their traditions within the new framework of ọlaju. The current Timi, HRH Ọba Munirudeen Adeșọla Lawal, has furthered this tradition and embodies many of the unique attributes of Ẹdẹ's society. He is a product of both Ẹdẹ's strong history of traditional Islamic education and its tradition of secular/Western education. Although a committed Muslim with maternal links to the prominent Ile Imọle compound, he nonetheless has a great understanding of Christianity as a result of attending Christian educational institutions and is a strong proponent of orișa and other Yoruba traditions. Finally, as a man well educated in secular institutions of higher learning who simultaneously holds the most important traditional title, he is well positioned to find ways to articulate Ẹdẹ's various traditions in a manner that suits modern Yoruba life and can defend these positions on Islamic grounds as well as through appeals to Yoruba tradition. It is precisely this balance and synthesis of multiple cultural and religious influences—Islamic, Christian, modern, secular, Yoruba, and Ẹdẹ specifically—that enabled him to maintain a high degree of pluralism and harmony increasingly rare in contemporary Nigeria.

Innovations such as publicizing the annual Șango festival as culture and entertainment rather than religion, or shifting the dates of orișa festivals to prevent conflicts with Muslim holidays, have given Ẹdẹ's citizens greater access to the town's traditions without compromising their own religious convictions. Furthermore, it has recast many orișa traditions in a way that benefits even those who do not understand it as religion through the revenue generated by tourism and the higher profile and sense of pride brought by showcasing Ẹdẹ's impressive drumming, dancing, and masquerade traditions. While allowing some citizens to understand orișa traditions as part of their culture or heritage, Timi Lawal has also helped the orișa traditions within Ẹdẹ reconfigure themselves as a unified traditional religion so that they could benefit from his financial support (and

later from the Osun State government), just as Muslims and Christians had done for quite a while.

Despite Ẹdẹ's proud history of religious harmony, Timi Lawal has faced resistance from some quarters. Prominent examples are the controversies over the Dag Heward-Mills crusade and the establishment of Redeemer's University, both of which would have been difficult to imagine under a model of forms of worship. However, the Timi's institutional power has so far remained strong enough to avert any open conflicts. The Timi and other leaders have identified the fact that while the oldest generation is quite familiar with other religious traditions, embraces religious pluralism, and holds the office of the Timi in high regard, the youngest generation is less accepting of religious difference and more likely to resist or challenge the authority of the Timi on this issue. Consequently, this will likely remain an important and central issue the Timi and other Yoruba ọba will face, but the Timi in past and contemporary times have proven quite effective at working with Ẹdẹ's various traditions to bring them to bear on new situations in a way that benefits everyone.

This impressive power of the ọba, and particularly the Timi, constitutes a strong critique of or alternative perspective on the commonly held view in the modern West that secularism and the separation of religious and political power are integral to a well-ordered and functional society. Despite some speculation to the contrary, the ọba have certainly not lost their relevance in modern Yoruba society, and in many regards actually play a more important role in the lives of their citizens than the secular state does. This, of course, is a product of the unique history of the Yoruba people with their own traditions, the introduction of the modern category of religion, and the secular postcolonial state, but it also supports the arguments of Asad and Cavanaugh that secularism is itself a unique product of modern, Western history.[123] Furthermore, it provides an alternative model to the type of competitive, representational democracy that is common but increasingly questioned all over the world today. The sacred canopy of the ọba is specifically designed to reconcile necessary differences and preserve diversity within society—including for minority groups—while representative democracy is based on majority rule and competition between diverse interests rather than their institutionalized reconciliation.

Recent times have been characterized by increasing religious intolerance in the United States and Europe; violent attacks against practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions; the Rohingya crisis; growing tensions between Muslims, Christians, or Boko Haram and the secular government in Nigeria; and the religiously charged rise of Hindu nationalism in India. In this environment it is perhaps more important than ever to understand how the idea of religion is

articulated in modern contexts and then deployed in relation to politics, as well as how modern forms of politics are conditioned to engage with religious traditions. Pennington argued, "The ghosts of [India's] colonial past have not seen fit to lurk quietly in the shadows but have brought the force of the troubled past to bear on the present," linking the British interventions in molding the "religion" of Hinduism in the nineteenth century to the often violent reactions to other religions, including Christianity and more recently Islam.[124] Particularly outside the Western world, the separation of secular and religious spheres has not proven an adequate framework for social, political, and religious order and is being actively contested. If secularism cannot provide a satisfactory model, then perhaps indigenous traditions such as Yoruba sacred kingship could provide more effective, acceptable, and peaceful options.

Sadly, the same ghosts that have returned to visit India seem to be eroding the previously celebrated Yoruba tradition of religious pluralism. Still, Ẹdẹ and the Timi have found an effective way to negotiate the transition into the modern era of multiple religions (rather than forms of worship), demonstrating the critical importance of the religious and political power of the ọba in exorcising these ghosts. Indeed, both the Timi and many of his citizens did not credit the peace and harmony they enjoy to the *separation* of political power and religion but rather articulate it in explicitly religious terms and are of the opinion that the more dedicated they are to their religious traditions, the more harmony will prevail.[125] Perhaps Ajibade is correct in his suggestion that Ṣango's role as Ẹdẹ's tutelary orișa and his identity as an ọba who historically and ritually transcends religious boundaries "contributes to the peaceful relationship between Islam and Christianity" (and I would add traditional Yoruba religion).[126] Each specific orișa cultivated by a person, family, or community has its own characteristics and features, and the royal Ṣango Timi brought by Ajeniju seems to be particularly adept in this regard and has manifested this powerful and important disposition through the successive individuals who have occupied Ẹdẹ's royal throne.

Conclusion

This book has provided a history of the modern concept of religion in Yoruba society and of the development of traditional Yoruba religion through studies of the cities of Ẹdẹ, Nigeria, and Salvador, Brazil. Understanding this history is critical for many reasons. First, by touching the lives of millions of people and religious communities on every continent, traditional Yoruba religion has become perhaps the most iconic and successful of indigenous African religious traditions on the global stage and the first to claim the status of a world religion. Second, it challenges many Western assumptions about what religion is, how it functions, and how it can relate to governance, and can even give a glimpse into life in a world without religion itself. Third, this history helps to answer several important questions about Yoruba society at a critical time. Following from Olupona's observation that "a formerly tolerant Yoruba culture is transitioning into a culture less tolerant of others' religions," two of the most pressing questions are, Why precisely was Yoruba society so religiously tolerant in the past? and What has changed to make this no longer the case?[1]

As the title of this book suggests, my starting point has been to address how the Yoruba word most often used as a translation for "religion"—*ẹsin*—carries a meaning closer to "form of worship," and it is in the transition from forms of worship to religion in Yoruba society that the answers to these questions lie. Tracing this transition sheds light on what the nature of Yoruba forms of worship was and how it differs from modern conceptions of religion, how these plural forms of worship became understood and deployed as a unified traditional religion, and what were the broader effects of this change. This conclusion offers some thoughts on what the future holds now that the transition from forms of worship to religion is almost complete for most individuals and for Yoruba society as a whole.

Ẹdẹ was the main site of my ethnographic and historical research not because it was the greatest player in the global development of a traditional Yoruba religion, but because its culture and history highlight many useful paradoxes that have been historically characteristic of Yorubaland. For example, while Ẹdẹ and several of its ọba have eagerly embraced aspects of modernity, the town is also widely recognized for its deep attachment to and expertise in traditional Yoruba culture. Also, Ẹdẹ boasts one of the proudest and strongest histories of Islam in Yorubaland but also houses prominent indigenous religious traditions such as Ṣango and Egungun. In addition, a major part of Ẹdẹ's modern culture is its long history of strong Western/secular educational institutions balanced by several excellent Islamic educational institutions. Ẹdẹ was founded as a military outpost, and its citizens are fiercely proud of their impressive military history, yet it is one of the most peaceful places in Yorubaland. While many claim Ẹdẹ is a bit remote compared to other major Yoruba cities such as Ibadan or Lagos, it has always been integrated into broader networks of trade (as under the Ọyọ Empire) and global religious movements.[2] What is more, Ẹdẹ's citizens have a reputation for being very religious, and as a result of the combination of their firm attachment to religious traditions and the religious pluralism in the city, religious conflict is quite rare—certainly much rarer than in contemporary Yorubaland as a whole. Finally, and most importantly, the current Timi of Ẹdẹland, HRH Ọba Munirudeen Adeṣọla Lawal, embodies all these apparent contradictions in his own history and personage, providing an excellent example of the functions, roles, and tensions inherent in the office of Yoruba sacred kingship. In many ways Ẹdẹ has preserved the Yoruba tradition of religious pluralism and harmony in a manner most of the region has not.

Salvador also features prominently in this book because of the critical roles it has played and continues to play in the transatlantic dialogues that have given the worship of Yoruba oriṣa/orixá international prominence. Just as important is that the transition from forms of worship to religion has followed a similar pattern and timeline in both Salvador and Ẹdẹ, despite different geographic, societal, and historic settings. Brazilian Candomblé, centered in Salvador, has also had an immense effect on the scholarship of African and Afro-diasporic traditions, and applying the lens of forms of worship to Candomblé helps in understanding the phenomenon of Afro-Catholic syncretism in both practice and academic discourse. Finally, the development of traditional Yoruba religion in Salvador demonstrates how very complex the relationship between a diaspora and its homeland can be and the multifaceted ways each forms and informs the development of the other.

Ẹdẹ's Religious History

Ẹdẹ has always had a dynamic religious history, adopting new traditions fairly readily and integrating them into its broader culture. From its beginning, the most prominent religious tradition or form of worship in Ẹdẹ was that of Ogun, the orișa of war and iron, because the original settlement was a military outpost and its leader, Agbale Ọlọfa Ina, was an important Ọyọ general. Because Ẹdẹ's original inhabitants came from Ọyọ, other traditions such those of Ṣango, Egungun, and Ifa were also present, but Ogun reigned supreme. However, as Ẹdẹ's oral history records, during the reign of Timi Ajeniju, the royal orișa changed from Ogun to Ṣango because Timi Ajeniju was declared a devotee of Ṣango when he was born clutching emblems of the orișa in his hands. Once again, the religious identity of the Timi and the broader community shifted when Timi Lagunju was declared a Muslim at birth and went to great lengths to establish Islam as the state religion in Ẹdẹ. Each of these transitions was mediated through Ifa divination indicating that a newborn child would follow a particular tradition, a fact that offers insight into indigenous Yoruba notions of religious identity. Christianity was first introduced to Ẹdẹ when the Baptist missionary W. H. Clarke visited in 1857, but it was not until Joseph Akerele founded his own Christian community there in 1900 that many Ẹdẹ citizens began to practice that religion. Much like Ṣango worship and Islam, Christianity gained a higher profile in Ẹdẹ when Timi Laoye (himself a Baptist) became Timi, but Christianity never replaced Islam as the dominant religious tradition.[3]

Several other orișa traditions, such as those of Ọșun and Ọbatala, were also introduced when new groups settled in Ẹdẹ, and more recently, new forms of Islam and Christianity have taken root as well. Traditionally, new religious groups have become integrated into Ẹdẹ society with relative ease.[4] Even when conflict arose following Timi Lagunju's efforts to replace orișa traditions with Islam, it was only his position as Timi—rather than the position of Islam within Ẹdẹ—that was questioned. Then, around the 1980s Ẹdẹ, like many other Yoruba towns, experienced a crescendo of religious tension, but unlike many other places in Yorubaland, Ẹdẹ has managed to return to and stabilize the previous order of religious harmony for which it is famous. It is Ẹdẹ's unique ability to restore and maintain its tradition of religious pluralism and harmony that makes it the ideal location to study this fading aspect of Yoruba society.

Forms of Worship

I intentionally did not recount Ẹdẹ's religious history through the lens of a "triple heritage" of Islam, Christianity, and traditional religion, because from

an indigenous perspective, Yoruba society (and likely many other African societies) could more appropriately be understood as pluralistic even before Islam and Christianity were introduced.[5] While some academics, particularly those on the African continent, debate whether it is more accurate to conceptualize indigenous religious traditions in Africa as part of one overarching traditional religion (African Traditional Religion) or to study them as ethnically defined traditional religions (e.g., traditional Yoruba or Xhosa religion), the Yoruba framework of forms of worship offers a third option. During precolonial times, many indigenous religious traditions spread across fairly wide geographical areas, sometimes overlapping and blending with one another. Consequently, devotees of a given spirit or tradition such as Ogun could be found across several populations who would only later be identified as a unified ethnicity, with each community possessing its own unique plurality of active traditions. Focusing on specific traditions rather than ethnic or continental "religions" allows for a more vibrant view of the religious history of African societies and is more in keeping with the Yoruba language and cosmology itself. The tradition of each orișa can be described as an ẹsin, or form of worship, in its own right, and the concept of religion in the modern, English sense of the word was until recently completely foreign. If ẹsin is in fact different from religion, then what precisely is it?

Perhaps one of the greatest differences between religion and ẹsin is that in the Yoruba system of forms of worship, one's religious identity has little if anything to do with belief and is instead a cosmic fact. That is why Ifa divination can determine the primary religious identity of a child at birth, and this religious identity is usually linked to one orișa and/or family lineage. One person could also be involved in the worship of multiple orișa to varying degrees, implying that all forms of worship existed within one dynamic cosmology rather than each being associated with a set of exclusive and conflicting claims on divine Truth and theology. Forms of worship, then, could be understood to function a bit like language, in that each person has a native language or tradition but can learn and acquire new ones, and some languages or traditions are more closely related or intertwined than others. Central to the worship of the orișa was also the notion of creating or cultivating a specific type of proper character (iwa) through the relationship with and emulation of that orișa in a manner similar to Augustinian notions of piety.

Worship Becomes Religion

This orientation toward religious traditions began to shift during the latter part of the nineteenth century as missionaries both native and foreign began writing about Yoruba traditions and nationalists reacted against British racial discrimination by

researching and valorizing their ancestral traditions. However, this process took on Western forms, influences, and categories such as nationhood, enlightenment, and of course religion. Many of these researchers and writers had either experienced a pan-Yoruba ethnicity and pantheon of orișa in diasporic settings in Sierra Leone, Cuba, or Brazil, or they relied on informants who had for their material and information, and Lagos emerged as the hub of a modern renaissance of Yoruba tradition. Yoruba clergymen and graduates from mission schools such as the Reverends James and Samuel Johnson, J. Olumide Lucas, and E. Moses Lijadu dominated this literature and constructed it with implicit and explicit reference to Protestant Christianity. In these modern scholars' pursuit to find a pan-Yoruba pantheon, they relied heavily on Ifa oral texts and the babalawo because Ifa contains information on the worship of each individual orișa. Ifa verses were the closest equivalent to sacred scriptures or a Bible, Ifa involves rational exegesis of these texts, and the babalawo were perhaps the closest parallel to Christian and Protestant clergymen. This collaboration between Ifa priests and modern scholars of Yoruba tradition ultimately gave Ifa a heightened and privileged position within the new order of the traditional Yoruba religion while also drawing lines around what this religion would include and how it would function in ways that Ifa traditionally had not done before the advent of modernity (ọlaju).

Going Global

Following the massive, forced transportation of Yoruba-speaking people to Brazil in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Salvador emerged as one of the most important sites in a burgeoning Yoruba diaspora. As J. Lorand Matory argued, this diaspora and its homeland functioned like Siamese twins, operating and developing in tandem.[6] Many members of the Brazilian diaspora traveled back to West Africa, with Lagos emerging as the central hub of migration. Figures such as Martiniano do Bonfim and Philip (Filipe) José Meffre played central roles in leading religious communities, performing their own research, and serving as informants for the most important literature on Yoruba religious traditions on both sides of the Atlantic. The contributions of these Brazilian returnees to the most seminal work on traditional Yoruba religion in Yorubaland and the diaspora should not be underestimated because they had a massive impact on the praxis and social order of their religious communities.

However, Candomblé and its practitioners faced severe repression and persecution from the Brazilian government and struggled to get the government to recognize their traditions as a religion and afford them the same constitutional rights as other religious groups. It was not until 1976 that the government officially

recognized Candomblé, and even then, it fell under the aegis of folklore and tourism rather than being categorized as a proper religion. Motivated by the rampant discrimination against and marginalization of Afro-Brazilian traditions, Mãe Stella led a movement in the 1980s to disentangle the worship of African deities from Catholicism and to put an end to the long-standing tradition of syncretism. Influenced by a discourse of African authenticity supported by Nigerian babalawo, she employed Roger Bastide's theory of the mask to argue that syncretism had been a survival strategy to preserve African traditions under the conditions of slavery but was no longer necessary. This movement sought to assert Candomblé's equal status with Catholicism as a religion in its own right rather than simply as a degraded form of Catholic superstition, as some claimed. This important moment in Candomblé's history has striking parallels with the Lagosian Renaissance, during which babalawo influenced a new articulation of Yoruba tradition in reaction to racial discrimination and in conversation with Anglican Christianity.

Even as the struggle to claim an identity for Candomblé as a religion was underfoot, many Afro-Brazilians from older generations did not and still do not identify with the anti-syncretism movement and discourse. The historical record demonstrates that many recently arrived Africans in the colonial period had little if any problem blending their traditions with Islam, Christianity, or even other African traditions, and even practitioners fortunate enough to return to West Africa often maintained their practice of Roman Catholicism.[7] Furthermore, many current orișa specialists in Ẹdẹ identified relevant Catholic saints as *being* specific orișa/orixá just as some older Candomblé practitioners did. Using the Yoruba tradition of Egungun masquerades as a model, the identification of Catholic saints with Yoruba orișa/orixá could be understood as a mask that both conceals *and* reveals the identity of a transcendent being instead of a mere ruse of no further use if a rigid division were asserted between Catholicism and orișa/orixá worship as different religions. Older generations in both Salvador and Ẹdẹ are more likely to understand and practice their traditions through the lens of forms of worship that can easily be blended as opposed to exclusive and separate religions, a perspective more likely among younger devotees. In addition, it has often become easier and more expedient to understand orixá worship as a religion in the contemporary, modern context.

Dynamics in Ẹdẹ

A generational shift from forms of worship to religion appears to be taking place simultaneously in Yorubaland and Salvador, and many important differences between the two systems—such as the possibility of choice and conversion,

exclusive claims on divine Truth and theology, and increased importance of religious boundaries—have opened the door to heightened religious conflict in contemporary Yorubaland. Although Ẹdẹ has managed to avoid this conflict to a great degree, it is going through the same transition. The oldest generation is more likely to believe that all religious groups worship the same God, that it matters little which form of worship God has ordained for each person, that marriage across religious lines is not problematic, and that engaging in the rituals of other traditions—at least to a certain extent—is perfectly acceptable. The middle-aged generation in Ẹdẹ is less likely to be comfortable participating in rituals from traditions other than their own because they perceive the boundaries between religions to be salient, although they still have a certain degree of respect for all religions. The youngest generation, however, tends to limit their activity to their specific religion, to reject interfaith marriages, to question the validity of religions other than their own, and to have considerable anxiety about their children potentially choosing a religion other than theirs. With respect to their orientation toward religious traditions or the religious, members of a given generation tend to have more in common with others of the same age group regardless of religious affiliation than with coreligionists of different ages.

In the modern era it has become increasingly important to be able to categorize Yoruba traditions because the category of religion carries weighty importance and strong assumptions with it. Hence, one's ability to engage in a certain tradition or activity could depend on whether it is categorized as culture (aṣa), custom (oro), work/occupation (iṣẹ), religion (ẹsin), or medicine (oogun). Many traditions, such as the Egungun masquerades, are variously understood as culture, entertainment, or religion, depending on the person and context.[8] Members of the hunters' guild often determine their level of participation in its Ogun traditions based on whether they understand those traditions to be part of their occupation or a religion.

In Ẹdẹ, the slowly shifting perspective on ẹsin from forms of worship to modern religion has had wide-ranging effects on society. First, the previous religious heterogeneity within families, which some have cited as the source of Yoruba religious tolerance, has become quite rare as lineages increasingly practice only one religion exclusively.[9] Consequently, this has generated anxiety over interfaith marriage, particularly as children seek to assert more control over their religious choices. Further anxiety about the religious affiliation of children and grandchildren naturally follows from this issue, and with the ability to choose one's religious affiliation, those who choose to convert often feel the need to hide their conversion from their family or lineage. Burial rites have also become complicated for older family members who may have participated in multiple traditions

or whose affiliation differed from that of their children. In short, a large number of issues have arisen rather quickly as the perceived nature of ẹsin and its practice has changed over generations. Many people, both old and young, recognize that modernity (ọlaju) has dramatically changed fundamental elements of society, and while this transition to modernity has given rise to conflict across Yorubaland, Ẹdẹ has managed to navigate it remarkably peacefully.

Sacred Kingship

The main cause of Ẹdẹ's effective and peaceful management of the transition from forms of worship to religion is the Timi, Ẹdẹ's ọba or sacred king. The ọba is a central institution in Yoruba society, particularly with regard to religion, as each ọba carries the title of ọba onigbogbo ẹsin, usually translated as "the king/patron of all religions." However, this title could be interpreted more literally, suggesting that the ọba possesses or is involved in all forms of worship. Like Wariboko, I argue that ọba are a literal and symbolic embodiment of their entire kingdoms and all people and traditions that exist within them, unifying all religious traditions within their sacred personhood.[10] As Olupona argued, the ọba constitutes a civil religion to which all citizens belong and in which they all take part through his symbolism and his annual festival.[11] As the embodiment of the entire community, the ọba also operates like Peter Berger's sacred canopy, externalizing a certain cosmic order and making it a reality that the people can subsequently internalize.[12] The analysis of Ẹdẹ's major festivals in chapter 7 demonstrates these various and important roles and functions of the Timi in Ẹdẹ's religious life and how when religious harmony is maintained within the ọba's personal cosmology, it becomes externalized to the broader community.

Specifically, the current Timi of Ẹdẹ, HRH Ọba Munirudeen Adeṣọla Lawal, offers an excellent example of how an ọba's navigation of the transition from forms of worship to religion in Yoruba modernity dictates the overall culture of the town. Because of his high level of education and deep familiarity with modern categories, he is able to articulate a distinction between culture and religion within Ẹdẹ, allowing him to maintain many traditions by rendering them accessible to Muslims and Christians who might otherwise abandon them altogether. In addition, he is distinctly aware of how his sacred office is rooted in orisa traditions, how this fact ties him to those traditions, and how he can negotiate his involvement in them so as not to run afoul of his own identity as a devout Muslim. The delicate and tricky nature of the newly salient religious boundaries and practice has given rise to the need for creative innovations, such as harmonizing the Islamic and orisa ritual calendars by shuffling some orisa festivals and

creating a pan-orișa organization to give Olorișa the same access to state benefits as Muslims and Christians have. It is the ọba who mediates between tradition and modernity in Yorubaland, and it is precisely because the Timi of Ẹdẹ has managed this mediation so well that so many Yoruba traditions persist within the new, modern order of society.

Another important lesson to be learned from Yoruba sacred kingship in general, and the Timi in particular, is that this institution poses a strong challenge and alternative to secular models of governance and the assumption that religious and political spheres must be separated in order for religious harmony and peace to flourish. Oddly enough, it is in fact the introduction of these ideas that has opened the door to greater conflict and instability in Yorubaland, particularly given that the populace has little faith in the secular government, its legitimacy, and its effectiveness. This is not to suggest, of course, that secularism and democracy *cannot* be effective responses to issues of diversity, religious and otherwise. Yet ọba who effectively embody and reconcile all aspects of their society into their royal personhood have proven a more reliable and effective method of governance in Yorubaland by merging the political and religious rather than struggling to disentangle them. David Gordon argued that Africans have always challenged the idea that spiritual forces are not or may not be at play within the political realm, which suggests the way Africans perceive politics "emerges from an ancient history, engages with colonial and neocolonial modernities, and insists on the invisible inspirations of our actions."[13] Ruth Marshall has made much the same argument with respect to Pentecostal theologies around politics, and Ebenezer Obadare has done so with Pentecostalism and the Nigerian state.[14] Just as secularization theory has proven inadequate in describing African societies, Yoruba sacred kingship has demonstrated its continued if not heightened relevance in contemporary times, offering a useful and productive alternative for understanding the nature of religion and its interactions with political power.

After Worship Has Become Religion

Having provided an account of how Yoruba forms of worship transitioned into discrete and separate religions, an important remaining question is, What effects will the establishment of the new orientation to religion have on Ẹdẹ and Salvador? Although Ẹdẹ has managed to maintain the Yoruba tradition of religious harmony, the contours of this tradition will continue to change slowly. For example, in the modern era one's religious identity is no longer a cosmic reality. In addition, specific theologies of religious pluralism or tolerance of other religions is increasingly replacing the view of religious traditions as enmeshed components of

one pluralistic cosmology. This impressive tradition of pluralism rooted within the teachings of one's own religion is different from the previous pluralism in that it is assumed that one religion has a greater claim on ultimate Truth but commands the toleration of less orthodox belief and practice—although it certainly does not condone participating in them. As such, the divisions between religions are ossifying, and the potential costs of crossing religious boundaries in terms of identity, participation in rituals, and other factors will likely continue to rise. Wilfred Cantwell Smith predicted the decline in the use and salience of the term *religion* in the 1960s, and religion plays less of a role in the lives of many Westerners in contemporary times.[15] In Yorubaland, by contrast, the salience of the term and the necessity of understanding and applying it in everyday life have only increased and become weightier since the advent of modernity (ọlaju).

In addition, the authority of the Timi and the religious order he embodies, demonstrates, and enforces is likely to come under increasing strain in the near future because of the rise in modernizing and exclusivist Muslim and Christian groups. Olupona argued, "Due to the increasing pressure on the sacred kingship from the new religious movements (including reformist Islam and Pentecostal Christianity), the notion of religious pluralism in Yoruba society is being turned on its head right before our eyes. These circumstances will undoubtedly have dire consequences for Yoruba interfaith tolerance and even for its ancient culture."[16] In Ẹdẹ, this challenge will likely come from the traditions of Pentecostalism, the Tablighi Jamaat, and the Salafi or Ahl as-Sunna community. Membership in all these groups has been growing rather quickly in Ẹdẹ, as demonstrated by the rapidly expanding mosque of the Salafi community in the sawmill area between Ẹdẹ's center and Akoda; by the large number of recently established Pentecostal churches such as the Winner's Chapel, Christ Embassy, and RCCG (Redeemed Christian Church of God); and of course, by the establishment of Redeemer's University. Jones and Nolte noted the higher degree of reluctance on the part of Christians in Ẹdẹ to get involved in aspects of indigenous tradition and linked this attitude to the rise in Pentecostal perspectives on the potentially corrupting influence of other religions, particularly traditional religion.[17] The Timi has already noted that in response to his support of the establishment of Redeemer's University, the staunchest opposition came from young members of the abovementioned reformist Muslim communities; however, his institutional power has so far proven more than sufficient to meet all such challenges.

While Peel raises some interesting differences between Salafi and Pentecostal theologies in their orientation toward issues of prosperity and politics, I find more convincing the arguments of Meyer, Larkin, and Marshall, who view the two movements as "doppelgangers."[18] Although Peel claimed Pentecostals

are less interested in politics than their Salafi counterparts are, the attitudes of both groups are quite diverse, with many Salafis being completely uninterested in politics and many Pentecostals being quite interested in reforming politics and challenging the secular/religious and private/public divides.[19] In addition, both groups view the time and culture before their religions were accepted as dark and potentially demonic, with Pentecostals identifying it with the devil and Salafis invoking the precedent of the pagan jāhilliyya in Arabia.[20] Consequently, Pentecostal groups often affirm that "culture and religion are virtually impossible to disentangle and hence potentially demonic."[21] Meanwhile, members of Ẹdẹ's Salafi community disapprove of many Yoruba traditions, including sacred kingship, precisely because they come from a non or at least pre-Islamic past and can be found nowhere in the Qur'an or ḥadīth. It naturally follows, then, that each group would strongly resist the efforts of some mainline churches, Sufi orders, and the Timi to take a more conciliatory approach to certain indigenous traditions that could potentially (but not necessarily) be placed in the modern category of religion, particularly as that category becomes more rigid and consequential. Each new form of orthodoxy—whether Muslim or Christian—"mediates a particular kind of religious modernity" and does so within a much broader, global context rooted almost exclusively within its own sacred scriptures and associated canon.[22]

Ẹdẹ takes part in a wider trend in Nigeria of promising young Islamic scholars traveling to the Islamic University of Medina, particularly when their access to established leadership positions is limited, in order to receive further education in a distinctly Salafi context.[23] Many Salafis, including those in Ẹdẹ, prefer to call themselves Ahl as-Sunna (people of the Prophet's tradition) because it marks them as custodians of *the* orthodox tradition that all Muslims should follow as opposed to just one group among many potentially legitimate others. Closely linked to these claims of normative orthodoxy is the central importance of da'wa, or "call to Islam," which involves drawing in both non-Muslims and other Muslims whose practice they find nonnormative.[24] In public discourse and even in some academic literature, Salafism is often closely linked to Jihadism. In fact, the vast majority of Salafis are explicitly nonviolent, although many do challenge Muslim rulers (traditional and secular) who do not embrace worldviews in line with Salafi doctrine, and this is precisely the approach taken by the Salafi community in Ẹdẹ.[25] This community also adopts the triumphalist view common among Salafis that they have revived Islamic orthodoxy and that the orthodoxy of their practice will conquer the entire world and establish right and proper devotion to God. They point to the rapid growth of their community locally and globally as evidence of this opinion.[26] These aspects of the Salafi worldview

clearly challenge the legitimacy of the office of the Timi and of any specific Timi, regardless of whether he identifies as a Muslim.

Pentecostals and Salafis share many similarities with respect to their stance toward politics and Yoruba traditions. Most salient are how they understand their specific practice as free from the impurities and unorthodoxy of other denominations. Most Pentecostals I met in Ẹdẹ were suspicious of some other Christian groups, particularly the "white garment," or Aladura, churches, considering them to be syncretic or too influenced by pre-Christian culture and religion. Naturally, this makes evangelization and conversion an issue of great importance with regard not only to non-Christians but also Christians from other denominations. Again, the vast majority of Pentecostals are explicitly nonviolent, but they nonetheless challenge all cultural or religious practices that could be considered non-Christian. This leads to the crisis faced by many born-again ọba (see chapter 7) and the question commonly posed by Yoruba Pentecostals: Can an ọba truly be a Christian if he must get involved with traditional rituals and practices?[27]

Clear and sometimes insurmountable lines have been drawn between Salafi and Pentecostal theologies and Yoruba sacred kingship, creating a situation in which "the king can no longer remain neutral, since he has been challenged by evangelical Pentecostals and Islamists to take a stance to become a disciple of one of the two traditions."[28] Both groups share a remarkably similar perspective on what religion is, how it should be practiced, and what role it should play in individual and societal life, and it is no coincidence that this perspective shares little in common with the traditional Yoruba conceptions of ẹsin. Hence, the position of the Timi as ọba onigbogbo ẹsin is more contentious than ever before, and at the same time, given the near-complete transition from forms of worship to religion, has become even more central and important in terms of the management of his kingdom's religious diversity, climate, and harmony.

In northeastern Nigeria, Thurston has drawn attention to Borno State's belated realization that the decline in the power and authority of its hereditary/traditional rulers (who perform a different sacred function than the Timi) is linked to the rise in chaos and conflict in the region.[29] The Timi of Ẹdẹ has so far demonstrated his ability and power to prevent similar events from taking place within his kingdom, but going forward, this task will face new challenges. If the secular government is invested in counteracting the type of religious crises that have plagued the country in recent years, it should support and take a more sympathetic interest in such traditional rulers. The current Timi's dedication to rearticulating the Yoruba disposition toward religious pluralism within a modern setting has established a firm sense of religious harmony that is unlikely to be

upset soon. Still, much will depend on how subsequent Timi decide to approach this challenge.

Given the close ties between Islam and Ẹdẹ's history and culture, it will surely remain the dominant religion for the foreseeable future. In addition, the strong Islamic educational institutions and lineages that have afforded Ẹdẹ a privileged position within the Yoruba Islamic world will certainly guarantee the centrality of Islam in Ẹdẹ's religious and civic life. However, the power structures within Ẹdẹ's Muslim community may face changes in the near future, particularly with the growing Salafi influence. I share Thurston's reluctance to embrace a prediction of the inevitable "Salafization" of Islam in Nigeria, particularly given the powerful establishment of certain Sufi orders—most notably the Tijaniyya—of traditional Islamic titleholders and the prominent Muslim lineages from which these titleholders are chosen, the Timi, and the ways these institutions mutually reinforce each other.[30] Rather than accomplishing a full Salafization of the entire Muslim community, Salafis will likely form a numerous and vocal minority among a number of other Islamic groups present within Ẹdẹ. While they have yet to pose much of an open challenge to the authority of the Timi or the chief imam, they are likely to become more outspoken and active if their numbers grow large enough. So far, however, the people of Ẹdẹ, the Timi, the chief imam, and Muslim titleholders have always managed to find ways to resolve differences within the Muslim community, whether it be with respect to the Dag Heward-Mills crusade, the dispute about the Ahmadi mosque, or even issues with Timi Lagunju's approach to governance.

Christianity has enjoyed the position of a firmly established religious minority in Ẹdẹ, privileged because of its tradition of secular education beginning with Jacob Akerele in 1900 and continuing to the present day with Redeemer's University. Given the importance of Ẹdẹ's Baptist tradition, its central place in the Christ Apostolic Church, and Ori Oke Baba Abiye's importance as a prominent regional pilgrimage site, Christianity will continue to play an important role in Ẹdẹ even outside the educational sector. Perhaps because of Ẹdẹ Christians' awareness that they are a minority within a staunchly Islamic society or because many of them are not indigenes of the town, they have largely sought not to disrupt the religious balance that has generally allowed them to practice and preach in peace.[31] At the same time, Christianity in Ẹdẹ has until recently been dominated by the mainline churches (particularly the Baptist Church), whose members and clergy tend to take a more conciliatory approach to Yoruba tradition at large and Islam than do members of more recently founded churches. This may change as the number of Pentecostals grows, but most members of this group

are either recent immigrants to Ẹdẹ or previously belonged to other Christian denominations rather than being converts from Islam or traditional religion.[32]

The adherents of traditional religion are numerically by far the smallest religious group in Ẹdẹ but will continue to constitute a prominent and important minority. While the increasing rigidity of religious boundaries has obviously caused some people to abandon orișa traditions altogether, it has also had the opposite effect of solidifying a small orișa community that intentionally limits itself to participation in orișa rituals, particularly as they imagine themselves as practicing their own unified religion. As argued in chapter 6, the transition from forms of worship to religion has proceeded unevenly across the orișa traditions, with some adapting to the contours of modern religion more readily and easily than others. For the reasons elaborated in chapters 3 and 6, Ifa and the babalawo most naturally fit the expectations held for a religion, constitute the most populous orișa group in Ẹdẹ, and are the undisputed leaders among the Olorișa. The Șango devotees also enjoy a privileged position in Ẹdẹ's traditional religion as the guardians of the patron orișa of the community, and although aspects of their tradition are considered to be culture or tradition by many in Ẹdẹ, for them it falls firmly within the realm of religion.

The matter is much less clear for those involved in Ogun's tradition/the hunters' guild and those involved in the Egungun tradition. In addition to some in Ẹdẹ interpreting both traditions as something other than religion (usually an occupation or tradition), the way many members of both groups straddle commonly perceived religious boundaries will likely only increase the pressure put on them to adopt modern religious categorizations and limit their involvement to one group. However, if one takes the claims of many Eleegun seriously, then these ancestral spirits will likely continue to choose caretakers regardless of how much pressure is put on them to conform to modern Christian or Muslim notions of orthodoxy, and many people may continue to hide their involvement with Ogun and/or Egungun. The ways these groups ultimately categorize themselves and their subsequent composition will largely determine their future in terms of both their number and involvement and the potentially drastically different nature of their activities and place in broader Ẹdẹ society.

At the same time, some relatively minor orișa traditions, such as Ọșun and Ẹgbẹ, are still present and widely understood to be religious in nature but have limited membership. Ọya's tradition is in a similar situation, but it and others have experienced a modest resurgence in numbers despite having almost disappeared in public practice. This is a fascinating, if still fledgling, change in the general trend, observed even when Ulli Beier conducted his research in the 1960s, that the orișa traditions were in steep decline.[33] Some traditions, such as those of

Orișa Oko and Eșu, seem to have faded entirely from public practice, while others such as Ọbatala, Ọya, and Ọșun have survived with small numbers of committed adherents. All this may be changing, however, as devotees increasingly understand and articulate their traditions as one religion and their numbers increase. Ironically, the guaranteed place many orișa traditions and their religious practice now occupy in Ẹdẹ and Yoruba society at large has come about precisely because of their categorization as culture and tradition for religious outsiders, much as the Mevlevi order in modernizing Turkey secured a place for itself through its performances of ritual dance and music becoming defined as cultural.

The traditional structure of many orișa traditions will also likely ensure that they continue to find members. Because there are cultural, social, and even financial benefits associated with many of the titles in orișa traditions, they continue to hold a certain allure for lineages that have a claim on them, particularly in Nigeria's increasingly dire economic situation. With the hardening of religious boundaries, it will become increasingly unlikely that new titleholders will leave Islam for a title in an orișa tradition or combine the worship of an orișa with Islam, as the current Oluọdẹ, Alagbaa, and Ajagẹmọ have done. However, with the modest growth in the number of Olorișa and those born into a context of orișa traditions constituting their religion, there will likely also be more traditionalists who have much to gain and nothing to lose from accepting these titles. Regardless of some individual groups' belief in their ultimate and universal acceptance as the one true faith, Ẹdẹ's religious future will surely continue to be pluralistic, and it will be left primarily to the Timi to continue to manage their relations, support religious minorities, and negotiate future areas of potential conflict.

In Salvador, Candomblé and the worship of the orixás is more vibrant and intertwined with Bahian culture than is the case in Yorubaland. The strong connections Candomblé has to the Afro-diasporic identity ensure a degree of respect and attachment even among many Afro-descendants who do not actively practice it, not to mention the numerous ways it is leveraged for the purposes of cultural and religious tourism. The close historic and contemporary associations of Candomblé with folklore and tourism are understandably troubling for many practitioners but have simultaneously ensured public recognition, governmental support, financial resources, and prestige for religious leaders who successfully manage to navigate these issues in contemporary society. A pai-de-santo told me that his sisters and brothers in Africa could learn a few survival lessons from Candomblé in terms of how effectively it has employed media coverage and economics to secure a place in Bahian culture while simultaneously trying to limit the negative effects of Western capitalism on their traditions. Candomblé's

connection with tourism and culture is much longer and better developed than that of orișa traditions in the Yoruba homeland, and although he has not intentionally used Brazil as a model, the current Timi's efforts in this regard are quite similar. Increased transatlantic dialogue on this issue could bear much fruit for scholars and practitioners alike.

While the transition from forms of worship to religion has followed a similar timeline and taken a similar form in Brazil and Nigeria, the diasporic setting has introduced an important element that has been gaining increasing salience. In part because of modern perspectives on religion and the orientation of much academic literature on both Yorubaland and Candomblé in Brazil, the issue of African authenticity or purity has gained heightened importance. Somewhat ironically, the insistence on a return to purer African practices, evident within and beyond the debate around syncretism, is itself a subtle way of changing Yoruba traditions while trying to be more faithful to them. The modern attempt to return to an exclusively African way of worship runs counter to the perspectives of many of Ẹdẹ's orișa specialists and the previous Yoruba orientation toward religious traditions. However, as Rowland Abiodun argued, "In Yoruba aesthetics, tradition and innovation are not antithetical; indeed, innovation cannot take place without a background of tradition."[34] Thus, given the hostile climate in which Afro-Brazilian religions have existed since their inception, this change carries with it distinct advantages in terms of access to government resources, dignity and pride, and interreligious relations. In fact, weighing the costs and benefits of rearticulating ancestral tradition to claim the category of religion and the likelihood of establishing that claim is a tricky business that every African and African-derived religious tradition must navigate in its own unique way.[35]

An important factor that will likely have a great impact on the future of Candomblé is the rapidly expanding presence of Ifa and babalawo in Brazil. The reintroduction of Ifa into or parallel to Candomblé has introduced yet another vector of authority that complicates the current regional and even gendered orientation of power.[36] Over the past few decades many enterprising babalawo have either traveled to or settled in Brazil, holding up Ifa as the central standard for a global orișa/orixá religion, offering an alternative to the largely female authorities mostly centered in Bahia and Salvador. Much as Ifa played a central role in unifying orișa traditions during the creation of the traditional Yoruba religion in Nigeria, the babalawo seek to serve a similar function here, this time uniting traditions across the globe. Still, the hegemony of Ifa and the suspicious stance of some babalawo to local adaptations of orișa traditions—including Afro-Catholic syncretism—in places like Brazil or Cuba do not go unchallenged. These negotiations and the role Ifa does or does not play in mapping

out the future of Candomblé will undoubtedly make it an—if not the most—important factor in determining Candomblé's position relative to global orișa/orixá communities.

The pro-syncretic perspective on Candomblé and Catholicism, with its roots in the Yoruba system of forms of worship, is certainly fading as time passes but will likely not disappear entirely in practice. Because of the important role syncretism plays in the anti-syncretic narrative of resistance, it will always have a place in Candomblé's history and memory. However, as the oldest generation, whose views and religious practice do not conform to the privileged anti-syncretic discourse, grows older and ultimately returns home, those who identify saints and African deities as the same will likely become fewer and fewer in number but not disappear entirely.[37] This is both a cause and an effect of the familiar hardening of religious boundaries between Catholicism and Candomblé, and mirroring what has taken place in Nigeria, it could potentially compromise the deep degree of familiarity many practitioners currently have with both religious systems. At the same time, practically all Candomblé practitioners adopt a conciliatory stance toward Christianity similar to that of the Olorișa in Ẹdẹ, and the challenges to the compatibility of the two traditions will likely not disrupt this dynamic. However, shortly after finishing my fieldwork I received the sad news that at a terreiro I visited and where I conducted interviews, a ceremony was disrupted, the terreiro robbed and burned, and the pai-de-santo violently attacked. Despite the decades spent fighting for Afro-Brazilian religious freedom and rights, examples abound of their violation.[38]

Another similar challenge faced by orixá/orișa devotees in Brazil and Nigeria is the growing antagonistic stance of some but certainly not all Pentecostals, commonly called *evangelicos* in Brazil. Particularly because many Brazilian Pentecostals are highly active in politics, recently holding as much as 14 percent of the seats in the national legislature, and as their numbers continue to creep closer to one-third of the population, their approach to relations with Candomblé may become as important if not more so than that of the Catholic Church.[39] Danielle Boaz analyzed the disturbing growth of religious intolerance and violence in Brazil, the vast majority of which is directed against practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religion despite their accounting for only 1 percent of the population. The incidence of religious violence, ranging from harassing and attacking schoolchildren to throwing incendiary devices into temples and murdering practitioners, has been growing each year, and according to one report, between 2000 and 2019, 100 percent of instances of religious intolerance against Afro-Brazilian religions were carried out by Christians and 80 percent were perpetrated by evangelicos specifically.[40] While it might be easy to assume that Candomblé is on a trajectory of increasing

security and respect in Brazilian society, the rise in Pentecostalism has fueled narratives and discourse casting all Afro-Brazilian religions as demonic and an evil force holding the country back, the same narratives that circulated around the turn of the twentieth century. The government's failure to investigate and prosecute perpetrators has generated complaints to bodies such as the United Nations, and without a sensitive and sympathetic authority rooted in a system of religious pluralism such as the ọba, Afro-Brazilian religious communities—not just Candomblé—need every tool at their disposal to protect themselves in a religious climate increasingly characterized by hostile cosmologies.[41]

Candomblé practitioners in Brazil and Oloriṣa in Nigeria shared many of the same concerns around these issues, but in Ẹdẹ the sacred office of the Timi serves as an important institutional force in regulating interreligious relations. In Salvador, there is no ọba to create a sacred canopy over the entire society, and the mainstream social and religious order is not rooted in Yoruba tradition. However, the general lack of access to national political power suffered by Candomblé practitioners has not gone unnoticed, and it is likely behind the great deal of excitement and support that was generated around the ultimately unsuccessful campaign of Pai Robinho, a recognized pai-de-santo, to become the only practitioner of Afro-Brazilian religion among Bahia's federal deputies.[42] While many challenges certainly do still exist for those involved in Candomblé, the tradition has survived and even thrived under much more severe conditions and will certainly continue to do so in the future.

A Traditional World Religion

I have argued that Yoruba society should be understood as deeply religiously pluralistic throughout its history, beyond the common model of a triple heritage of Islam, Christianity, and traditional religion, and indeed this is likely true for many other African societies as well. For example, several traditional deities and their associated rituals, such as those of Ogun, Ifa, Eṣu, and many others in the Yoruba pantheon, cut across ethnicities and the general perspective of different traditions existing within the same cosmology as different but effective ways of serving the same God is certainly not limited to the Yoruba. The Swahili polymath Muhamadi Kijuma (1855–1945 CE) expressed this clearly by describing the Abrahamic traditions as "ships each one having a different captain, Musa (Moses), Isa (Jesus) and Muhammad, but all of them heading towards the same port."[43] Much like some of the older generation in Ẹdẹ and Salvador, some believed he had converted from Islam to Christianity, and because of the fluidity with which he understood religious boundaries, his own religious identity is

still up for debate to a degree. However, the order of forms of worship is rapidly giving way to the framework of exclusive and separate religions to the degree that the traditional Yoruba religion not only exists but is perhaps the traditional African religion par excellence.

Yoruba forms of worship became this traditional religion through their encounter with modernity and diaspora, heavily mediated by foreign and indigenous missionaries, and especially the scholars who published written texts on them. The work of figures such as Roger Bastide, the Reverend Samuel Johnson, the Reverend James Johnson, and William Bascom have strongly influenced the way people understand and practice global orișa traditions up to the present day, demonstrating how scholar and field (or knower and known) are often not as distinct as might be assumed. This shift in religious orientation—if not religious identity—is happening quickly in countries outside Nigeria and Brazil as well. A few years ago I had a fascinating conversation with a former student whose family comes from the Caribbean about how her grandmother sincerely believes Ogun is, in fact, Saint James, an idea that was at first very confusing to her, as was her grandmother's simultaneous deep devotion to Catholicism and African deities. While this book focuses on Ẹdẹ in Yorubaland and on Salvador as one of the most important religious centers of the Afro-diasporic world, the trends and phenomena common to both areas have parallels in many Afro-Atlantic societies and populations.

I contend that thinking across the diaspora is profoundly helpful, and perhaps necessary, when studying many indigenous religious traditions in certain parts of West and West Central Africa. The experiences of diasporic communities, their continued links to African homelands, and the perpetual effects each has had on the other for centuries makes fully understanding one without the other nearly impossible. In the 1960s and 1970s many scholars, such as Pierre Verger, Melville Herskovits, and William Bascom, intentionally studied African and diasporic communities together, and while some such as Professors J. Lorand Matory and Kyrah Daniels have continued to do so, this practice of carrying out fieldwork in a transatlantic context has sadly become less common. The importance of African indigenous religious traditions in diaspora and diasporic contexts is well established, but the same approach could easily be applied to the important but greatly understudied place of Islam in the Black Atlantic world.[44] For example, the transatlantic flow of African Muslims, notions of religious cosmopolitanism, and sacred art and architecture resulted in prominent early twentieth-century mosques all over West Africa adopting the architecture of colonial Brazilian Catholic churches.[45] John Thornton's groundbreaking studies of Kongolese Catholicism demonstrate the potential influence that Africans

who already practiced Christianity may have had on American societies.[46] Similarly, the thousands of predominantly Cuban and Brazilian repatriates in the Bight of Benin demonstrate how essential the Atlantic diaspora has been in the establishment of Catholicism in that region. Furthermore, while scholars tend to separate the academic study of these traditions, I have attempted to demonstrate that divisions between religious traditions were not always salient in historical perspective. Many Yoruba were involved in the practice of Islam, Christianity, and/or oriṣa worship before being taken into diaspora, during that period, and after returning to Yorubaland, so expanding the scope of study across religious as well as international borders can prove to be insightful and necessary.

The tradition of the ọba, however, is primarily operative only in Yorubaland, and the way the Timi of Ẹdẹ executes this sacred office provides critical insight into traditional Yoruba ways of living.[47] Most importantly and fundamentally, the ọba quite literally is the embodiment of the entire community and the ontological source from which the subsequent diversity and different elements of society emerge. This demonstrates a very different approach to supporting and reconciling pluralism than Western forms of diversity, democracy, and competitive representation. Similarly, the important role of the ọba in preserving religious, political, and societal harmony highlights the irony that the introduction of modern conceptions of religion, including the attempted separation between religion and government, has only fomented more conflict rather than less. This stands in stark contrast to the standard narrative that religious and political power must be separated in order for peace to flourish, particularly in areas of high religious diversity. Cavanaugh argued persuasively that this understanding of the fundamental and universal importance of secularism and its implied assumption of the potentially violent nature of religion is largely a function of the justification for the power invested in nation-states and has little basis in reality, and the Yoruba traditions of sacred kingship provide excellent support for that argument.[48] Furthermore, questioning the necessity of separation of church and state would allow governments to approach "the participation of churches, mosques, and other groups and individuals in civic life . . . with more pragmatism than paranoia" and "Western governments could adopt a more open approach to Muslim experiments with government that do not enforce a strict separation of mosque and state."[49] This could have massive implications for the perpetually contentious involvement of Western powers in Muslim-majority countries as well as for the ways non-Western societies attempt to find political systems that are relevant to the lives of their citizens.

Along with the "myth of religious violence" as Cavanaugh calls it, this book challenges several other modern Western ideas and models that are often as-

sumed to be universal in nature. In addition to disproving the idea that religion incites more violence than any other aspect of life, the religious history of the Yoruba and Ẹdẹ in particular poses an important challenge to the type of thinking demonstrated in Huntington's famous *Clash of Civilizations*. Although interfaith relations have not always been perfectly smooth, the way Ẹdẹ's society has drawn deeply upon aspects of Islam, Christianity, and various orișa traditions to guide the current forms of everything from culture, music, and multiple forms of education to, of course, religious practice suggests that aspects of Western civilization, Christianity, modernity, Islam, and even African traditions need not be understood as irreconcilable and diametrically opposed forces. In fact, much like I argued with respect to religion in Yoruba society, any perceived conflict likely has more to do with a particular group's *orientation* to those issues than to the phenomena themselves. Following Asad, I argue that this is why any serious study of "religion" must be historically and culturally grounded and contextualized to prevent serious misrepresentation and misinterpretation.[50] Like Dubuisson argued, the particular form and nature often assumed to constitute a religion is clearly Christian- and Protestant-centric as a result of the origins of the category of religion and its intended purpose.[51] While I challenge the universality of these assumptions, they have had a profound effect on Yoruba religion and religion in Yorubaland, and it is the interplay of these traditional and modern issues that lies at the heart of this book.

While the advent of modernity, or ọlaju, has certainly changed the nature of orișa traditions and been characterized by a steep decline in the number of Olorișa and in diversity within orișa traditions, this is not the whole story. The common narrative of decline in traditional religion may need to be revised as orișa traditions, both within Yorubaland and especially in diaspora, are increasingly finding their footing and place within society.[52] This could be a result of orișa traditions completing their transformation to the position and form of religion in modern Yoruba and global society, allowing them to flourish to a greater extent. Particularly outside Nigeria, orișa traditions and religion are enjoying growing prominence and status. In Brazil they are a crucial part of the important Bahian tourism industry, but the orixá and Candomblé also feature prominently in broader aspects of Brazilian culture even if their roots are in Bahia. For example, orixás and pais- or mães-de-santo are commonly found in cultural expressions such as the highly acclaimed movie *City of God* (*Cidade de Deus*), the praised literature of Jorge Amado, or the samba music of musicians such as Zeca Pagodinho or Arlindo Cruz.

Indeed, wherever Black arts are celebrated, the orișa seem to make their mark, as exemplified in the name of the successful Cuban rap group Orishas or

Beyoncé's deliberate nod to Ọṣun in her 2017 Grammy performance.[53] In fact, it was a Cuban community of Santeros in Florida who fought for the religious freedom to sacrifice animals in 1993, taking their case to the Supreme Court and winning. This landmark ruling in favor of the Church of Lukumi Babalu Aye was the legal precedent invoked to repeal President Trump's "Muslim travel ban," citing regulations against animal sacrifice as legislation unfairly and purposefully targeting a group on religious grounds, thereby inhibiting the exercise of the First Amendment.[54] While church membership in the Western world has decreased, Afro-diasporic traditions—particularly orișa-derived traditions—are growing rapidly, even beyond African-diaspora communities. Orișa traditions and communities, including in the United States, are not only embracing the idea of their traditions as a religion, but constitute a powerful force in many areas such as the fight for religious freedom, cultural expression, racial and ethnic pride and solidarity, tourism, medicine, and beyond.

This book constitutes an attempt to provide a historical account, focused on Ẹdẹ and Salvador, of how a set of indigenous traditions from a proto-ethnic group has forced governments and societies to change their perception of what religion is through the transformation of these traditions from forms of worship to religion. In a sense, this work also documents the recession of the traditional system of forms of worship, but change and adaptation have always been central to why orișa traditions have proven themselves practical and useful for their adherents. The change in the meaning of the Yoruba word *ẹsin* from "forms of worship" to "religion" is an adaptive response of Yoruba tradition to modernity that allowed a large number of disparate orișa traditions to become a successful, unified religion with all the benefits and complications of that title. Along the way, the nature and role of the ọba have also been transformed, but effective ọba fascinatingly can facilitate this transition, ensuring that the Yoruba heritage of religious harmony can be rearticulated in the language of modernity and survive the slow and silent, but profound, religious revolution taking place across the Yoruba religious world. As the worship of the orișa makes increasingly strong claims on the status of a world religion, new sets of challenges—such as the centrality and overarching authority of Ifa, contrasting cultural norms on issues such as gender, racial identity, and economic disparity to name just a few—will certainly emerge and there may be yet more transformations to come.[55] While Yoruba forms of worship have produced some of the most significant contributions to the religious and artistic culture of humanity on a global scale through traditional Yoruba religion, I believe they have something else of equal, if not greater, value to offer the world: a simultaneously and fundamentally different conception of what a religious tradition is and how it can operate, creating an

opportunity to decenter modern, Western models of religion and place their unique particularities into sharper focus. With this in mind—and despite being sure he would prefer an unofficial gift of a few dollars—if I were to be stopped again by that customs agent who asked me what on earth I hoped to learn in Nigeria that I could not at Harvard, now I would tell him the story of how forms of worship became religion.

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Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. Peel, *Christianity, Islam, and Oriṣa Religion*, 216–17.

2. Here I do not mean *premodern* in a pejorative sense, nor do I suggest that it naturally must lead to modernity. It refers to the fact that these traditions and the religious order associated with them immediately predate the modern era even if some people maintain them, not fully integrating modern conceptions of religion into their lives.

3. Abiodun, *Yoruba Art and Language*.

4. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," 269.

5. Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*.

6. Smith, *Meaning and End of Religion*, 50.

7. Nongbri, *Before Religion*.

8. Prominent examples include Josephson, *Invention of Religion in Japan*; Masuzawa, *Invention of World Religions*; Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented*?; Almond, *British Discovery of Buddhism*; Peterson and Walhof, *Invention of Religion*.

9. William Cavanaugh also provided cogent critiques of how some traditions and systems are categorized as religious while others are not and of the motivations for such distinctions when it is so difficult to even define what counts as religion. Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*, 4–12.

10. Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture*, 109–35.

11. Akinjogbin, *Dahomey and Its Neighbours*, 15–17.

12. Peel, *Islam and Christianity*, 4.

13. Vaughan, *Religion and the Making of Nigeria*, 1.

14. Kukah, *Religion, Politics, and Power*, 9–11.

15. Abiodun, *Yoruba Art and Language*.

16. I use English translations to specify the meaning of *ẹsin* in each context because the term is inherently polysemic, and its meaning is dependent on the context and speakers, who frequently have fundamental differences in the way they understand its connotations.

17. Abiodun, *Yoruba Art and Language*, 307.

18. Smith, *Meaning and End of Religion*, 196.

19. Mazrui's argument is still remarkably helpful in understanding contemporary African cultures in general, even beyond the field of religion. Mazrui, *Africans*.

20. Nolte and Ogen, "Beyond Religious Tolerance," 3–6.

21. Ẹdẹ's citizens are fond of saying "ọmọ iya kan naa ni wa" (we are children of the same mother) or "Ẹdẹ, yara kan naa ni" (Ẹdẹ is just one room).

22. Matory, "English Professors of Brazil" and *Black Atlantic Religion*.

23. Olupona, *City of 201 Gods*, 3; Abiodun, *Yoruba Art and Language*.

24. Smith, *Meaning and End of Religion*, 60–62.

25. Bastide, *African Civilisations in the New World*; Capone, "Transatlantic Dialogue."

26. Olupona was the first to articulate this way of interpreting Yoruba sacred kingship through the concepts of the sacred canopy and Robert Bellah's civil religion. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America"; Olupona, *City of 201 Gods*, 261–62, 282; Olupona, *Kingship, Religion, and Rituals*, 81–82. Berger, *Sacred Canopy*.

27. Horton and Peel, "Conversion and Confusion," 481–98.

28. Fisher, "Juggernaut's Apologia," 153–73.

29. Ogunnaike, *Deep Knowledge*.

30. Chittick, *In Search of the Lost*, 313–25; Nair, *Translating Wisdom*.

31. Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture*, 91; Zolberg, "Moments of Madness," 205–6.

32. I do not mean to imply a teleology in which modern, exclusive conceptions of religion must necessarily steamroll a previous Yoruba-inspired orientation to religion, as even some young practitioners operate within a forms of worship paradigm and will likely continue to do so. However, this population is shrinking, and their worldview is becoming less visible and more marginalized in the traditions themselves and in the scholarly discourse published on them.

CHAPTER 1. FROM MYTH TO MODERNITY: A RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF ẸDẸ

1. Specifically, see Olunlade, *Ẹdẹ*.

2. This perception of Ẹdẹ as particularly religiously pluralistic was echoed both by Ẹdẹ's citizens of all religious backgrounds and by my friends and interlocutors from outside Ẹdẹ. See Nolte et al., *Beyond Religious Tolerance*.

3. Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture*, esp. chap. 8.

4. This argument assumes a certain level of religious diversity within a lineage or family, which is what produces the necessity for positive relations across religious traditions. Akinjogbin, *Dahomey and Its Neighbours*, 15–17.

5. Quotations from Laitin, "Conversion and Political Change," 181, and *Hegemony and Culture*, 159, respectively.

6. Reichmuth, "Education and the Growth of Religious Associations," 392.

7. Olupona, *City of 201 Gods*, 284.

8. Olupona, *City of 201 Gods*, 287.

9. Ogungbile and Awoniyi, "Indigenous Tradition in Transition," 82, 88.

10. Banji Aluko, "Ayetoro Ekiti: Banished Born-Again King Converts Community," *Nigerian Tribune*, March 28, 2010.

11. Ogundiran, "Formation of an Oyo Imperial Colony," 229–30; Ogundiran, "Material Life," 358.

12. Ogundiran, "Formation of an Oyo Imperial Colony," 225.

13. For example, see Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, 156; Olunlade, *Ẹdẹ*, 9.

14. Ogundiran, "Formation of an Oyo Imperial Colony," 243; Ogundiran, "Material Life," 358.

15. Olunlade, *Ẹdẹ*, 9; Mọgaji Yẹrinsa, Al-Hajji Prince Oyebayọ Lawal, personal interview, February 28, 2017.

16. Olunlade, *Ẹdẹ*, 10. Note however, that the tree and the city are pronounced differently as the words carry different tones in Yoruba.

17. Ogundiran, "Formation of an Oyo Imperial Colony," 238.

18. Ogundiran, "Material Life," 370.

19. Ogundiran, "Material Life," 362.

20. Ogundiran, "Formation of an Oyo Imperial Colony," 240.

21. This myth, certainly known by all citizens of Ẹdẹ and by most Yoruba people elsewhere, is the subject of one of the most celebrated Yoruba plays, Duro Ladipo's *Ọba Koso*. Accounts of this myth differ slightly; for other recorded versions, see Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, 156–58; Olunlade, *Ede*, 9–12; Farias, "'Yoruba Origins,'" 117–18.

22. See Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, 156.

23. Babalola, "Portrait of Ògún," 167.

24. Beier, *Year of Sacred Festivals*, 42; Peel, "Comparative Analysis of Ogun," 277.

25. Ogundiran, "Material Life," 374. Sieber, "Ede," 46.

26. Olunlade, *Ede*, 18; Law, *Ọyọ Empire*, 280.

27. Law, *Ọyọ Empire*, 291. There were other Ọyọ towns, such as Ijaye and Ibadan, that were never subjugated by Ilọrin, but they were founded by Ọyọ refugees after and as a result of the collapse of the empire.

28. Ogundiran, "Material Life," 359.

29. Oyeweso, "Ede Participation," 65; Olunlade, *Ede*, 18.

30. Araba Ṣangodokun Alamu Onifade, interview by author, March 31, 2017; Ifaṣọla Onifade, interview by author, March 4, 2017. See also Olunlade, *Ede*, 18–19.

31. The meaning of this title is "to sleep soundly and stretch one's limbs" because Laawọn was only able to sleep well after he had moved a certain distance away from Timi Kubolaje. Olunlade, *Ede*, 18–19.

32. Ojo, "'Heepa' (Hail) Òrìsà," 38.

33. Atanda, "Ogboni Cult."

34. It is possible that the Ogboni tradition existed in Ẹdẹ prior to that point, but Owu is much closer to the geographical origin of the tradition, and it seems more likely that it was brought by Owu refugees or perhaps even by the queen herself. Beier, *Year of Sacred Festivals*, 9.

35. In this ritual the Ajagẹmọ, head of the Ọbatala tradition in Ẹdẹ, is captured by his second-in-command, the Olunwi, who takes him prisoner and carries him away from the palace. After some time, the Ajagẹmọ returns to the palace in a triumphant fashion.

See Beier, *Year of Sacred Festivals*. While Beier believes this ritual might be a reenactment of an Ifẹ narrative of conquest, Andrew Apter believes it represents the Ọyọ history of subjugating other indigenous groups. Apter, "Historiography of Yoruba Myth," 13–16.

36. Ajagẹmọ Tijani Adeleke, interview by author, March 22, 2017.

37. Oyeweso, "Ede Participation," 65–66.

38. Oyeweso, "Ede Participation," 65–66. This view can be contrasted to Apter's analysis in "Historiography of Yoruba Myth," although in this case it could be the ethnically Ọyọ settlers who conquered the Ifẹ indigenes. Hence it may simply be a historical event that follows the mythological contours of the more general narrative of Ṣango and Ọbatala as rival centers of power.

39. Olupona, *City of 201 Gods*, 169–73.

40. Oyeweso, "Ede Participation," 71.

41. Ilesanmi, "Traditional Theologians," 222.

42. Peel, *Christianity, Islam, and Orisa Religion*, 54.

43. According to some, the baby could have been a reincarnation of Ṣango himself.

44. The term "making Ṣango" refers to the ritual preparation of materials that become or house the spirit of the deity itself and will receive the devotee's sacrifices and prayers.

45. Beier, *Year of Sacred Festivals*, 42; Olunlade, *Ede*, 15; Jagun Ṣango Ṣangoniyi Ṣangosogo, interview by author, July 11, 2016; Araba Ṣangodokun Alamu Onifade, interview by author, March 31, 2017; Akọda Ifaniran Ifatayọ Ojo, interview by author, July 16, 2016.

46. On Ile-Ifẹ see Olupona, *City of 201 Gods*. For Oṣogbo see Olupona, "Yoruba Sacred Kingship," 54–63.

47. Ajala and Nolte, "Ambivalence and Transgression"; Ajibade, "Ṣango's Thunder."

48. Ajala and Nolte, "Ambivalence and Transgression," 60.

49. Ajala and Nolte, "Ambivalence and Transgression," 40.

50. The fact that Timi Ajeniju, believed by some to be an incarnation of Ṣango, was the first to introduce Islam to Ẹdẹ is particularly fascinating because the worship of this oriṣa is intimately entwined with Islam in several interesting ways. See Oyeweso, "Kingship and Religion." In contrast, Johnson records that Ibadan merely considered attacking Ẹdẹ but did not do so. Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, 284.

51. Olunlade, *Ede*, 22–23.

52. Akande, *"Baba Abiye,"* 15.

53. For example, according to Al-Bakri the first West African king to convert to Islam was the king of the ancient Kingdom of Mali (Malal) when a Muslim guest in his court brought about the end of a severe drought by persuading the king to convert, clothing him in a cotton garment, teaching him the rudimentary rites of Islam, and praying for rain on a hill. Hopkins and Levtzion, *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources*, 82–83.

54. Balogun, "Compound Life and Religious Control," 96.

55. Olunlade, *Ede*, 38.

56. Gbadamosi, "Odu Imale," 92.

57. Araba Ṣangodokun Alamu Onifade, interview by author, March 31, 2017.

58. Gbadamosi, *Growth of Islam*, 92.

59. Ifaṣọla Onifade, interview by author, March 4, 2017.

60. Akinjobi, "Roles of Sheikhs and Imams," 196–99.

61. Olunlade, *Ede*, 24.

62. Gbadamosi, *Growth of Islam*, 72.

63. Oyeweso, "Kingship and Religion," 43.

64. Oyeweso, "Timi Abibu Lagunju," 10.

65. Oyeweso, *Eminent Yoruba Muslims*, 20–21.

66. Olunlade, *Ede*, 26.

67. Clarke, *Travels and Explorations*, 115.

68. For example, he makes reference to "Mohammed in his wicked propagation of error" and to Ẹdẹ's "Mohammedans" as "deceitful and unworthy of credit." Clarke, *Travels and Explorations*, 114–16, 115.

69. Before Jacob Akerele there *were* many citizens who were highly literate in Arabic, and as such, he was not the first literate citizen, as has sometimes been claimed. *Century of Practical and Expansive Evangelism*, 25–26.

70. *Century of Practical and Expansive Evangelism*, 4–7.

71. High, *Outlined Notes*, 28–29.

72. *Inauguration of Ede Archdeaconry*, 64.

73. Oyeweso, "'Jesus Is a Stranger Here,'" 3.

74. *Century of Evangelism*, 10; Ogen and Balogun, "Baptist Church in Ede," 157.

75. Oyeweso, "'Jesus Is a Stranger Here,'" 5; Akande, *"Baba Abiye,"* 32.

76. Vaughan noted a high degree of anxiety about the effects of Western education on society in Ibadan during the first few decades of mission activity, and while some Muslims were hesitant to send their children to Western schools in Ẹdẹ, it appears that doing so was generally accepted, at least initially. Vaughan, *Religion and the Making of Nigeria*, 73.

77. The adoption of a new but often related name after changing one's religious affiliation has been quite common in Yorubaland for a long time. For example, Bishop Odutọla, the former Anglican bishop of the diocese of Ibadan, changed his name from Suleiman to Solomon when he converted from Islam to Christianity as a boy.

78. Akande, *"Baba Abiye,"* 32–39.

79. Akande, *"Baba Abiye,"* 39–40. A strikingly similar narrative is recounted by members of the very successful Islamic Institute regarding how it overcame the power of the ancestral masquerades who used to be propitiated in the forest where its complex now stands.

80. Akande, *"Baba Abiye,"* 55.

81. Akande, *"Baba Abiye,"* 49–50.

82. Akande, *"Baba Abiye,"* 130. Even the soil on which Prophet Samson Akande sat is believed to have cured a Muslim man's wife of her infertility, and it is interesting to note that in his hagiography (and that of others as well) these miracles are often offered and expected without the condition of conversion on the part of the recipient or beneficiary. Akande, *"Baba Abiye,"* 111.

83. Laoye, *Story of My Installation*, 3–14.

84. Laoye, *Story of My Installation*, 15.

85. This prophecy is reminiscent of Shaykh Nuhu Adekilekun's prediction that Timi Lagunju would become king of Ẹdẹ. Laoye, *Story of My Installation*, 16; Mọgaji Yẹrinsa, Al-Hajji Prince Oyebayọ Lawal, personal interview, February 28, 2017.

86. Laoye, *Story of My Installation*, 19.

87. Oyeweso, "Kingship and Religion," 51–52.

88. Oyeweso, "Kingship and Religion," 52–53.

89. The Ahmadiyya movement is a Muslim reform movement begun in South Asia that emphasizes Muslim responses to modernity, particularly in the form of secular education. It enjoyed moderate success in many areas of Nigeria but was declared unorthodox and its members were banned from going on Hajj by the Saudi government because it regarded its founder, Ghulam Ahmad, to be a messenger who came after the Prophet Muhammad. The ban caused some members to abandon the movement and others to view it less positively, even though it still has a significant following in the region. Afowowe, "Growth of Ahmadiyya Movement," 314.

90. Adeniyi, "Growth and Development of Islamic Societies," 367.

91. Oyeweso, "Kingship and Religion."

92. Laoye, "Yoruba Drums," 5–14.

93. Laoye, *Story of My Installation*, 20–21; Femi Kehinde, "Oba Laoye: Timi of Ede," *Vanguard*, January 2, 2016, https://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/01/oba-laoye-timi-of-ede/.

94. Ṣango's tradition has always had curiously close links to Islam, however. See Ajala and Nolte, "Ambivalence and Transgression"; Ajibade, "Ṣango's Thunder," including a brief account of this statue crisis on pp. 36–37.

95. Jagun Ṣango Ṣangoniyi Ṣangosogo, interview by author, September 15, 2016; Al-Hajja Hajarat Ọlasunkanmi, interview by author, September 24, 2016.

96. Wahab Yusuf, interview by author, December 13, 2016; Ọladeji Afolabi, interview by author, December 16, 2016.

97. Deacon Ezekiel Oke, interview by author, December 27, 2016.

98. For the verse, see Qur'an 2:256.

99. This is the common account I heard across Ẹdẹ, and even if one were to doubt its full veracity, what is most significant is that it is *currently* accepted as the appropriate model for engaging with religious others. Hassan Alaaye, interview by author, September 10, 2016.

100. Hassan Alaaye, interview by author, September 10, 2016.

101. Al-Hajji Salahuddin Ọlayiwọla, interview by author, August 30, 2016.

102. 1 Peter 3:9; Matthew 5:12–13; 1 John 4:8. Reverend Oyewole believes repaying evil with good is how Christians should behave even in the face of their enemies, which Ẹdẹ Muslims certainly are not, and he did not believe that Christians are currently treated as the enemies of Muslims in Ẹdẹ either. Nathan Oyewole, interview by author, September 7, 2016.

103. 1 John 4:8 and 4:20.

104. Mark 12:31.

105. Pastor Oluseyi Alakija, interview by author, November 30, 2016.

106. Romans 12:18; Pastor Bennett Irogbalam, interview by author, March 29, 2017.

107. This is a very common refrain among all the orisa devotees, as well as many prominent Muslims and Christians. The differences in particular Muslim and Christian perspectives on this crucial point will be addressed in greater detail later.

108. Ifaṣọla Onifade, interview by author, March 4, 2017.

109. Although religion may actually be at the heart of the conflict, it is noteworthy that an argument *on religious grounds* was never invoked because this is not recognized as a valid basis for disagreement.

110. Oyeweso, "'Jesus Is a Stranger Here.'"

111. Munirazeez Dẹbẹẹ, interview by author, December 19, 2016.

112. Whether or not this is true does not detract from the public perception that children of Ẹdẹ would know that such action is unacceptable. Ojetunji Olukolo, interview by author, August 2, 2016.

113. Akinjogbin, *Dahomey and Its Neighbours*, 15–17.

114. Peel, *Islam and Christianity*, 4.

115. Jones and Nolte, "Everyday Inter-Religious Encounters," 251. In my own interviews, practically all Muslims and Christians said they would not want their children to marry outside their religious group, and almost all young people, regardless of religious affiliation, said they would be disinclined to do so themselves.

116. "Islam in Ede" cited in Oyeweso, "Growth of Islam in Ede," 15–16.

117. Reichmuth, "Education and the Growth of Religious Associations," 392.

118. Jones and Nolte, "Everyday Inter-Religious Encounters," 253; Adẹṣọla Akinpelu, interview by author, October 31, 2016.

119. Gbadamosi, "Odu Imale," 90.

CHAPTER 2. FORMS OF WORSHIP, NOT RELIGION

1. Ryan, "'Arise, O God!,'" 161.

2. Josephson, *Invention of Religion in Japan*, 9.

3. Smith, *Meaning and End of Religion*, 53.

4. Smith, *Meaning and End of Religion*, 19.

5. Judge, "Absence of Religion," 264–75.

6. Perhaps most notably by Jonathan Z. Smith in "Religion, Religions, Religious"; Wilfred Cantwell Smith in *The Meaning and End of Religion*, and more recently and in great analytical detail by Brent Nongbri in *Before Religion*.

7. Smith, *Meaning and End of Religion*, 54.

8. Dubuisson, *Western Construction of Religion*, 9.

9. Smith, *Meaning and End of Religion*, 79.

10. Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 15.

11. Olupona, *City of 201 Gods*, 3.

12. Lucas, for example, recognizes the bewildering diversity of divinities and the various articulations of their hierarchy, but then promptly goes on to provide a clearly structured pantheon of major and minor orịṣa along with other important spirits such as the ancestors. Lucas, *Religion of the Yorubas*, 31.

13. For example, Elizabeth Isichei's excellent book *The Religious Traditions of Africa* also begins with Yoruba and Igbo conceptions of the High God and moves on to lesser divinities and ancestral spirits afterward; see pp. 227–52.

14. Verger, *Notes sur le culte*, 11; Barber, "Oríkì, Women."

15. Barber, "Oríkì, Women." P. R. McKenzie provides a more in-depth exposition and analysis of these two models as well as others, and suggests that in attempting to theorize them, we should start from "below" and allow for more fluid, adaptable categories, which is precisely what this chapter seeks to achieve. McKenzie, "Yoruba Òrìṣà Cults," 199.

16. See Ray, *African Religions*, 25–27, for an effective summary of the debate over monotheism and its development. Parrinder's "Monotheism and Pantheism in Africa" offers an excellent overview of monotheism versus polytheism, and p'Bitek's *Decolonizing African Religions*, 19–20, and Ray's *African Religions*, xi–xii, place this debate within its ideological and historical context. Regarding a Supreme Deity, see Peel, "Gender in Yoruba Religious Change," 141.

17. This would be particularly true for a lineage oriṣa that played an important role for the entire community, as is sometimes the case. Oyeweso, "Kingship and Religion," 46–47.

18. For a more complete treatment of this interesting topic see Balogun, "Compound Life and Religious Control," particularly p. 101.

19. Balogun, "Compound Life and Religious Control," 101.

20. Dubuisson, *Western Construction of Religion*, 24.

21. Dubuisson, *Western Construction of Religion*, 106–12, 109.

22. Gbadamosi, *Growth of Islam*, 68–69.

23. Olupona, *Kingship, Religion, and Rituals*, 173.

24. Ifaṣọla Onifade, interview by author, March 4, 2017.

25. Abimbola, *Ifa Divination Poetry*, 18–37.

26. Ephesians 5:22–25; 2 Corinthians 11:2–3.

27. But the same is true for Muslim clerics as the word is derived from the Arabic *wa'iz* (sermon).

28. Ajibade, "Ṣango's Thunder," 82.

29. The "Great Mother" here is the deity Ọṣun, and the singer is expressing confusion and disbelief at the suggestion that she should abandon Ọṣun. Furthermore, the portion of the song translated as "Who want to convert me to Islam" could just as easily and more literally be translated as "Who says I should come do/practice Islam." This highlights how strange and foreign the idea of converting to one tradition and abandoning another is. Olupona, "Yoruba Sacred Kingship," 64–65.

30. Olupona, "Yoruba Sacred Kingship," 65.

31. Barber, "Oríkì, Women," 317–19.

32. Barber, "How Man Makes God," 737.

33. Wilfred Cantwell Smith documented how the idea of "true religion" slowly changed from referring to an ideal and archetypal sense of personal piety and orientation to a correct, orthodox system of belief and ritual. Smith, *Meaning and End of Religion*, 26–50; Dubuisson, *Western Construction of Religion*, 5–27.

34. Dubuisson, *Western Construction of Religion*, 28.

35. Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*, 70.

36. Peel, *Christianity, Islam, and Oriṣa Religion*, 52; see also Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 107–15.

37. For example, Ogun worshippers and the people of Ileṣa were not initially open to the tradition of Ṣango. Peel, *Christianity, Islam, and Oriṣa Religion*, 66–67.

38. Barber, "Oríkì, Women," 317.

39. Barber, "Oríkì, Women," 318–19.

40. Barber, "Oríkì, Women," 320.

41. Ilesanmi, "Traditional Theologians," 220–21.

42. In typical Ifa fashion, the babalawo resist rejecting competing claims and instead reconcile these divergent views by suggesting that she could have been married to Ṣango before, but she left him for Ọrunmila because Ọrunmila had more spiritual power and was a much better husband.

43. Zuesse, "Meditation on Ritual," 524–30.

44. Beier, *Year of Sacred Festivals*, 13.

45. The Jagun Ṣango also closely resembles the deity of thunder and lightning in build, and Ṣango devotees usually plait their hair in the same way that Ṣango is said to have done.

46. I have also heard this from other babalawo and seen the bowls containing the ikin, or palm kernels, that constitute the Ifa these babalawo made for their Christian and Muslim clients.

47. This was especially common among people of older generations, while younger people were more likely to simply say "Muslim" or "Christian."

48. McKenzie, "Yoruba Òrìṣà Cults," 192.

49. Barber, "Oríkì, Women," 317.

50. McKenzie, "Yoruba Òrìṣà Cults," 198.

51. Jagun Ṣango Ṣangoniyi Ṣangosogo, interview by author, July 11, 2016.

52. Ajibade, "Ṣango's Thunder," 83.

53. There are some fascinating parallels between initiation rituals of the Muslim Nupe and some of Ṣango's rituals, and every twenty-eight days when the sacred day of Ṣango in (the four-day Yoruba week) falls on a Friday in the Semitic week, the Ṣango devotees hold a particularly elaborate celebration with food, drumming, and dance in honor of their orișa. Matory, "Rival Empires," 506.

54. Ajibade, "Ṣango's Thunder," 84.

55. Ajibade, "Ṣango's Thunder," 93.

56. Oseni Lawal, interview by author, March 22, 2017.

57. See Ogunnaike, *Deep Knowledge*, 337–50. Similarly, a babalawo once informed me that the mysterious figure called Melchizedek in the Bible (Genesis 14) was likely Ọrunmila.

58. Akọda Ifaniran Ojo, interview by author, July 16, 2016.

59. However, the degree to which Muslim traditions have been reinterpreted in Ẹdẹ is *much* greater.

60. This observation is fascinating and telling, as Arthur Ramos recorded orixá devotees in Rio de Janeiro identifying Saint Michael with Xangô in precisely the same way. Ramos, *O negro brasileiro*, 156.

61. I have also heard more Ifa-centric retellings of the story of the Tower of Babel from Genesis as well as about the devil, recast as the Yoruba Eṣu, tempting Jesus in the desert. For more examples and in-depth analysis of Ifa and orișa-centered interpretations of Christian tradition, see Ogunnaike, "Ifa and Traditional Yoruba Interpretations."

62. Akọda Ifaniran Ojo, interview by author, July 16, 2016.

63. This observation, however, does not mean that Joseph and Mary must necessarily have been poor, and there could be additional explanations. See Luke 2:24 and Leviticus 12:8 for the Jewish law in question.

64. See Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, 1–7; Farias, "'Yoruba Origins,'" 121–22.

65. Doi, "Muslim-Christian-Traditional Saint," 261–68.

66. The Ka'ba, of course, was initially the holding place for pre-Islamic divinities. However, several orișa devotees in particular maintain that there are still orișa or traditional deities inside, and this is what gives the Ka'ba its ritual power.

67. Conrad, "Islam in the Oral Traditions of Mali," 35–48.

68. Josephson, *Invention of Religion*, 84.

69. Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 66.

70. Dubuisson, *Western Construction of Religion*, 43.

71. Jagun Șango Șangoniyi, Șangosogo, interview by author, December 29, 2016.

72. Sakibu Alimi Ọdẹwale, interview by author, November 28, 2016.

73. Smith, *Meaning and End of Religion*, 26–39, quotation on p. 26.

74. Smith, *Meaning and End of Religion*, 178.

75. Al-Ghazali, *Al-Ghazali on Disciplining the Soul*, 7.

76. Al-Ghazali, *Al-Ghazali on Disciplining the Soul*, 8. Al-Ghazali provides numerous more citations from the prophetic tradition, connecting Islamic practice and theology to the development of good character.

77. Smith, *Meaning and End of Religion*, 76.

78. Reverend Nathaniel Oyewole, interview by author, September 7, 2016.

79. "Every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he had done, whether it be good or bad." Oluwatoyin Salaudeen, interview by author, July 30, 2016.

80. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*.

81. Abidi Ojewumi, interview by author, August 22, 2016.

82. Mariyeba Ifabunmi, interview by author, November 28, 2016.

83. Madame Ẹgbẹyinka, interview by author, August 22, 2016.

84. Madame Ẹgbẹyinka, interview by author, August 22, 2016.

85. Ajagẹmọ Tijani Adeleke, interview by author, February 24, 2017.

86. Șangoyẹmi Ayefadun, interview by author, September 19, 2016.

87. Green, *New Nigeria*, 111.

88. Green, *New Nigeria*, 115.

89. Peel, "Pastor and the Babalawo," 347.

90. Hinderer, journal entry of February 12, 1850, CA2 049, in Peel, "Pastor and the Babalawo," 349.

91. Pastor B. P. Michael, interview by author, December 12, 2016.

92. Green, *New Nigeria*, 117.

93. Peel, *Christianity, Islam, and Orișa Religion*, 66–67; Schlitz, "Yoruba Thunder Deities."

94. Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria*, 111.

CHAPTER 3. HOW WORSHIP BECAME RELIGION: DIASPORA, HOMELAND, AND THE LAGOSIAN RENAISSANCE

1. In this discussion I used the Yoruba term *ẹsin* as the best translation for "religion."

2. The answer to this question clearly has to do with the way each person understood the meaning and nature of religion. In my opinion they all inherently assumed that one

could not practice two religions simultaneously, hence the need to have only one religion, whatever it might be. Additionally, the hunter who did not consider Ogun's tradition to be a religion drew a clear line between occupation or required actions in a sphere of life versus religious worship, which enabled him to take part in Ogun's tradition for hunting while remaining a Muslim. For the other two men, performing rituals such as sacrifice, offering prayers, and invoking the name of Ogun as a spiritual entity seemingly indicated that the practice was a religion, and this is what led them to choose between Ogun or one of the Abrahamic traditions.

3. Dubuisson, *Western Construction of Religion*, 10.

4. Dubuisson, *Western Construction of Religion*, 15.

5. See Olupona and Rey, *Òrìṣà Devotion*; Cohen, "Orisha Journeys," 17.

6. Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?*, 170.

7. Smith, *Meaning and End of Religion*, 61.

8. Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 312, 317.

9. Josephson, *Invention of Religion in Japan*, 76–77.

10. Bowen, in particular, draws parallels to Roman Catholicism. Bowen, *Central Africa*, 310–20; Clarke, *Travels and Explorations*, 276–77.

11. Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 171.

12. Sarkozy famously stated, "Le drame de l'Afrique c'est que l'homme Africain n'est pas assez entré dans l'Histoire" (The tragedy of Africa is that the African man has not sufficiently entered into history) and suggested that Africans are trapped in their past without a sufficient orientation toward a better, more modern future.

13. This was very much the case with Hinduism and the discourse about that tradition when it too began to emerge as a religion in the nineteenth century. Issues of idolatry, violence, and sexuality were perhaps not central to Hindu traditions, but they were very relevant and prominent issues in nineteenth-century Anglicanism. Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?*, 59–100.

14. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," 276.

15. Matory, "English Professors of Brazil"; Peel, "Cultural Work of Yoruba Ethnogenesis," 202–7; Law, "Ethnicity and the Slave Trade," 205–6; Law, "Local Amateur Scholarship," 55–90.

16. Barber, "Discursive Strategies," 200–207; Abimbola, *Ifá*, 8; Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 120.

17. Smith, *Meaning and End of Religion*, 59.

18. Law, "Ethnicity and the Slave Trade," 205–6.

19. *Lukumí/Lucumí* was primarily used in Spanish-speaking areas, was generally used in an earlier period, and also referred more to a geographical area, while *Nagô* was primarily used in Portuguese-and French-speaking areas, came into use beginning around the eighteenth century, and referred more to a group of people than to a specific territory. Law, "Ethnicity and the Slave Trade," 208; Awoniyi, "The Word Yoruba," 104–7.

20. Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*, 38–114; Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 283–88; Law, "Local Amateur Scholarship."

21. Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 281; Law, "Ethnicity and the Slave Trade," 206.

22. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

23. Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 284.

24. Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 278–309.

25. Matory, "English Professors in Brazil," 85; Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 288–94.

26. Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil*, 45; Alonso, *Development of Yoruba Candomblé Communities*, 2–3.

27. Ojo, "'Heepa' (Hail) Òrìsà," 31–34.

28. Ojo, "'Heepa' (Hail) Òrìsà," 49–50.

29. Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria*; Ajayi, "Nineteenth Century Origins," 199.

30. Law, "Local Amateur Scholarship," 58–59.

31. Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*, 70.

32. Ajayi, "Nineteenth Century Origins," 203–7. For the details of the history of this discrimination and the rise of native churches see also Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria*, chap. 8.

33. Prominent examples include Payne, *Table of Principal Events in Yoruba History* (1893); George, *Historical Notes on the Yoruba Country and Its Tribes* (1895); Samuel Johnson, *History of the Yorubas* (1921); James Johnson, *Yoruba Heathenism* (1899); Lijadu, *Ifa* (1898), *Ọrûnmila!* (1908), and "Fragments of Egba National History"; and the CMS series *Iwe Kika Ẹkẹrin Li Ẹdẹ Yoruba* (1911) and *Iwe Kika Ẹkarun Li Ẹdẹ Yoruba* (1915). See also Law, "Local Amateur Scholarship," 55–57.

34. Law, "Local Amateur Scholarship," 65.

35. Matory, "English Professors in Brazil," 74.

36. Matory, "English Professors in Brazil," 83–84.

37. Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria*, 51.

38. Vaughan, *Religion and the Making of Nigeria*, 28.

39. Law, "Yoruba Liberated Slaves," 360–61.

40. Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria*, 51.

41. Matory, "English Professors in Brazil," 84.

42. Law, "Yoruba Liberated Slaves," 350.

43. Lindsay, "To Return to the Bosom," 42–43.

44. Falola, "Mapping and Conceptualizing," 25.

45. Ojo, "'Heepa' (Hail) Òrìsà," 36–37, 43.

46. Matory, "English Professors in Brazil," 81.

47. Ryan, "Arise, O God!," 161.

48. Dubuisson, *Western Construction of Religion*, 10.

49. Johnson, *Yoruba Heathenism*, 1–2.

50. Johnson, *Yoruba Heathenism*, 10–18, 12.

51. Johnson, *Yoruba Heathenism*, 51–54.

52. Chidester, "African Christian Communities," 350.

53. However, Ellis is likely to have lifted this work from Noël Baudin, a French Catholic missionary, and he also did not consider Ọlọrun to be equivalent to the Christian God, as the Yoruba had not achieved quite that level of enlightenment or sophistication in his opinion. Ellis, *Yoruba-Speaking Peoples*. The Baptist missionary R. H. Stone also begins his treatment of Yoruba "superstitions" with the belief in Ọlọrun, followed immediately by the place of the orisa. Stone, *In Africa's Forest and Jungle*, 86.

54. Lucas, *Religion of the Yorubas*, 33.

55. Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, 26. Johnson also refers to Islam as "Mohammedanism," as was the norm in the Western world at the time.

56. Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, 26–39; Lucas, *Religion of the Yorubas*, 33.

57. Vaughan, *Religion and the Making of Nigeria*, 39.

58. Matory, "English Professors in Brazil," 89.

59. Muller, quoted in Masuzawa, *Invention of World Religions*, 217.

60. Ajayi, "Nineteenth Century Origins," 200.

61. Josephson, *Invention of Religion in Japan*, 76; Dubuisson, *Western Construction of Religion*, 14.

62. Dubuisson, *Western Construction of Religion*, 114. William Cavanaugh similarly documents how Christianity was held up as the standard against which other traditions were "found wanting," making specific reference to South Africa, where this type of thinking conveniently served the colonizing mission. Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*, 86–87.

63. Johnson, *Yoruba Heathenism*, i, 54, 29.

64. Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 213.

65. Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*; Lucas, *Religion of the Yorubas*.

66. Masuzawa, *Invention of World Religions*, 125–31.

67. Peel, "Syncretism and Religious Change," 128.

68. Matory, "English Professors in Brazil," 94.

69. Law, "Local Amateur Scholarship," 70, emphasis mine.

70. Matory, "English Professors in Brazil," 86.

71. Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*, 62–64. Ellis, *Yoruba-Speaking Peoples*.

72. I am thinking here specifically of Tsuda Mamichi's view of the introduction of irrational fears and creatures into a "purer" Buddhism and the process of classifying various traditions as religions or not. Josephson, *Invention of Religion in Japan*, 197, 206–9.

73. Barber, "Oríkì, Women," 314.

74. Barber, "Oríkì, Women," 315–18.

75. See Ogunnaike, "Ifa and Traditional Yoruba Interpretations."

76. Peel, "Syncretism and Religious Change," 124.

77. Quotation from Peel, "Syncretism and Religious Change," 124; Gbadamosi, "Odu Imale," 90.

78. Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture*, 159.

79. Ajala and Nolte, "Ambivalence and Transgression," 64–65.

80. Smith, *Meaning and End of Religion*, 26.

81. McKenzie, "Samuel Crowther's Attitude," 254; Cole, "Liberated Slaves and Islam," 393–95.

82. McKenzie, "Samuel Crowther's Attitude," 254–55.

83. Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 161.

84. Edward Wilmot Blyden even argued extensively that Islam was better suited to Black people on the basis of their racial identity. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro*. See also Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 187–214. Matory, *Sex and the Empire*, 134–35.

85. Indeed Wilfred Cantwell Smith locates the development of a Muslim community within the context of preexisting Manichaean, Jewish, and Christian theological and

ritual systems in the contemporary Middle East, as well as of the Prophet's unique position as originally a bit of an outsider who was sent by God to bring systematic reforms. This allowed for a conception of a specific community centered around him and his teachings as well as a somewhat distinctive systematic theology and tradition defined among and against others. However, it was still not until an encounter with the West that a conception of a fully separate, discrete religion emerged. For his part, Brent Nongbri demonstrates how the terms *Muslim* and *Islam* carried very different meanings in early Muslim communities—at times referring to Christians and Jews as well—and the term *din* was closer to "law" or "custom" until at least some point in the twentieth century. Smith, *Meaning and End of Religion*, 80–118. Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 38–44, 57–64.

86. Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 203, 218.

87. Smith, *Meaning and End of Religion*, particularly chap. 2.

88. Furthermore, just as language is the medium through which people communicate with each other, the various orișa traditions are the ways devotees and practitioners commune with each orișa and ultimately with Olodumare/God.

89. Thiong'o, *Moving the Centre*, particularly chap. 2; Mugane, *Story of Swahili*, 269–74.

90. Horton, "On the Rationality of Conversion."

91. Law, "Local Amateur Scholarship," 75.

92. Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 317.

93. This, naturally, is linked to the intellectualist theory of conversion that Peel promulgated. Horton and Peel, "Conversion and Confusion," 481–98.

94. Ojo, "'Heepa' (Hail) Òrìsà," 50.

95. Nolte and Ogen, "Beyond Religious Tolerance," 10–11.

96. Ellis was writing only with respect to the areas of what became Yorubaland that he had visited, and the importance and prevalence of the orișa varied widely across the broader region. Ellis, *Yoruba-Speaking Peoples*, 56.

97. Matory, *Sex and the Empire*, 8–25.

98. The term *Ifa-Orișa* is fairly prevalent in common discourse, particularly in the United States, and can be found in academic work as well. See, for example, Wood, "Cyber Spirits, Digital Ghosts," 448–56; Ọlọmọ, "Ṣango Beyond Male and Female," 311–21.

99. Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 18.

100. Dubuisson, *Western Construction of Religion*, 37.

101. See Peel, "Pastor and the Babalawo."

102. Peel, "Pastor and the Babalawo," 347.

103. Masuzawa, *Invention of World Religions*, 132–33, 213.

104. Barber, "Discursive Strategies," 202. It is, of course, significant that there was also a *need* for some tradition to stand in for the Scriptures.

105. Peel, "Syncretism and Religious Change," 127.

106. Ajayi "Nineteenth Century Origins," 208.

107. The Venerable Julius Ọjọmọ, interview by author, November 15, 2016.

108. Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 1–24, and "Making History," 121–29.

109. Johnson, *Yoruba Heathenism*, 13.

110. Fascinatingly, the Ifa message that suggested he convert to Christianity articulated this as an *action/ritual* in the form of "reading the white man's books" rather than mentioning a specific religion, religious identity, or conversion. Peel, "Pastor and the Babalawo," 352.

111. Johnson, *Yoruba Heathenism*, i.

112. Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 302–3.

113. Peel, "Between Crowther and Ajayi," 75.

114. I also recognize the irony that more than a century later I, as a Christian and an academic, was also first drawn toward Ifa as the best representation of traditional Yoruba religion and undertook my own type of education in "native theology" with a babalawo like Johnson and Lijadu did.

115. Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*, 90–92, quotation on 93.

116. More information about the Ifa Heritage Institute can be found on its website, http://www.ifaheritage.org/ (accessed April 30, 2026).

117. Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu*, 119–59; Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge*. With respect to the Yoruba in particular see Reichmuth, "Education and the Growth of Religious Associations," 365–405 and Oyeweso, *Islam and Society in Osun State*, chaps. 16, 20, 21.

118. Barber, "Discursive Strategies," 203.

119. As a result of its engagement with Islam, Ṣango's tradition is the only other that has internalized the Semitic week when Ṣango's Yoruba day aligns with Friday.

120. Awofakunle Ojo, interview by author, August 15, 2016.

121. These buildings, called Ile Ijuba (houses of worship/reverence) can be found in many Yoruba cities, and as Ilesanmi has noted, although they are technically open to all orișa devotees, they are always headed by babalawo because of "their committed ambition to unite all orișa traditions under Ifa, and uplift the religion from the low position to which it has been relegated by awakening the consciousness of moribund practitioners." Ilesanmi, "Traditional Theologians," 224.

122. Works that do address the Ijọ Ọrunmila movement include Oye-Laguda, "African Religious Movements," 49–59; Adegbola, "Ifa and Christianity Among the Yoruba; Barber, "Discursive Strategies"; Sowande, *Ifa*; Janson, *Crossing Religious Boundaries*, 124–53. Quotation from Barber, "Discursive Strategies," 199.

123. Oye-Laguda, "African Religious Movements," 52; Ogungbile, "Dynamics of Language," 76; Barber, "Discursive Strategies," 211–12.

124. Idowu, *Olodumare*, 214.

125. Oye-Laguda, "African Religious Movements," 52.

126. Oye-Laguda, "African Religious Movements," 53.

127. Oye-Laguda, "African Religious Movements," 54–55.

128. In Ẹdẹ, the babalawo even created a type of Sunday school for the children. For a more detailed description of this Ifa liturgy, see Oye-Laguda, "African Religious Movements," 53.

129. Barber, "Discursive Strategies," 212.

130. Barber, "Discursive Strategies," 200, 220.

131. Barber, "Discursive Strategies," 220–21.

132. Barber, "Discursive Strategies," 212.

133. Barber, "Discursive Strategies," 213.

134. Reichmuth, "Education and the Growth of Religious Associations," 376–77.

135. Idowu, *Olodumare*, 214.

136. Idowu, *Olodumare*, 214–15; Simpson, "Religious Changes," 81–82.

137. Oye-Laguda, "African Religious Movements," 54.

138. Oye-Laguda, "African Religious Movements," 57.

139. Oye-Laguda, "African Religious Movements," 58.

140. Akọda Ifaniran Ojo, interview by author, September 20, 2016.

141. See, for example, Ryan, *Imale*, 85–89: Abimbola, "Literature of the Ifa Cult"; Olupona, "Odu Imole" 168–78; Gbadamosi, "Odu Imale," 78–85.

142. For example, in Odu Otura-Yapin, Ọrunmila marries Aafa's (the Prophet's) daughter, and Aafa marries Ọrunmila's daughter after the two worked together to save humanity.

143. Olupona, "Odu Imole," 173–75; Akọda Ifaniran Ojo, interview by author, August 3, 2016.

144. This verse is found in Odu Otura-Sa, Ifaṣọla Onifade, interview by author, June 14, 2009.

145. Ifaṣọla Onifade, interview by author, March 4, 2016; Awofakunle Ojo, interview by author, August 15, 2016.

146. Gbadamosi, "Odu Imale," 87–93.

147. One babalawo in the mid-nineteenth century even assumed that each babalawo worked with a Muslim alfa, and vice versa. Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 115; Peel, "Pastor and the Babalawo."

148. Orsi, *Madonna of 115th Street*; Hall, *Lived Religion in America*. This perspective has been welcomed and actively employed in the study of African and African diasporic religion from many angles, including ecology; see Jacob K. Olupona, "Religion and Ecology," 259–82.

149. Ojetunji Olukolo, interview by author, September 8, 2016.

150. Ajala and Nolte, "Ambivalence and Transgression," 70–71.

151. Ajala and Nolte, "Ambivalence and Transgression," 71–72.

152. Atanda, *The Journey So Far . . .* , 18–19.

153. Iya Ọṣun Oluwatoyin Salaudeen, interview by author, July 30, 2016.

154. Iya Ọṣun Oluwatoyin Salaudeen, interview by author, August 15, 2016.

155. This also assumes an exclusivist religious paradigm in which involvement in Islam and Christianity inherently entails the abandonment of indigenous forms of worship. Horton, "On the Rationality of Conversion"; Fisher, "Juggernaut's Apologia." Robert Baum has provided a very welcome challenge to this narrative through his description of the Diola experience of a societal movement *toward* ancestral traditions after the introduction of Christianity. Baum, "Emergence of a Diola Christianity."

156. Oyebisi Yusuf Wahab, interview by author, December 13, 2016.

157. Ọlọngbele Ọlaiya, interview by author, August 17, 2016.

158. Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?*, 1–7, 168–70.

159. Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 289.

CHAPTER 4. HOW RELIGION BECOMES INTERNATIONAL

1. Parés, *Formation of Candomblé*, 118.

2. Parés, *Formation of Candomblé*, 122.

3. Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil*, 45; Alonso, *Development of Yoruba Candomblé Communities*, 2–3.

4. The most popular being Irmandade da Nossa Senhora do Rosario (Congo and Angola), Irmandade da Nossa Senhora da Boa Morte and Nosso Senhor do Martirio (Nagô), and Nosso Senhor das Necessidades e de Redenção (Jeje). Selka, "Mediated Authenticity," 8.

5. Law, "Yoruba Liberated Slaves," 349; Reis and Mamigonian, "Nagô and Mina," 80.

6. The growth also resulted from the number of enslaved people brought to Bahia at that time increasing dramatically. Verger, *Bahia and the West African Trade*, 31; Reis and Mamigonian, "Nagô and Mina," 82.

7. Quotation from Reis and Mamigonian, "Nagô and Mina," 80; Rodrigues, *Os africanos no Brasil*, 121–52.

8. Turner, "Some Contacts of Brazilian Ex-Slaves," 66.

9. Capone, "Le-pai-de-santo," 59.

10. For example, Miguel Alonso notes how practitioners of traditional forms of worship in the terreiro Bogum were happy to help Muslims in a slave revolt. Alonso, *Development of Yoruba Candomblé Communities*, 30–32. João José Reis stresses this issue repeatedly and references how all Nagô regardless of religious identity afforded an imprisoned Nagô Muslim named Licutan a great deal of respect and collectively gathered enough money to secure his freedom. Furthermore, although the famous rebellion of 1835 was led by Muslims, Yoruba non-Muslims were also very much involved. Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil*, 131.

11. While this is true to a certain extent regarding the development of the Yoruba ethnicity, in Brazil, Yoruba or Nagô identity has now taken on more significance in terms of the religious traditions and affiliation an individual adopts rather than biological ancestry. Matory, "English Professors in Brazil," 98.

12. Alakija, "Traditional Yoruba Nobility," 190.

13. Alonso, *Development of Yoruba Candomblé Communities*, 5, 48; Falola, "Mapping and Conceptualizing," 25.

14. Parés, *Formation of Candomblé*, 122.

15. Matory, "English Professors in Brazil," 74.

16. On Lagos, see Law, "Yoruba Liberated Slaves," 356–37; on education and literacy, see Matory, "English Professors in Brazil," 38–39.

17. Brazilian returnees accounted for about one in seven residents of Lagos in 1889, or about five thousand people. Amos, "Amaros and Agudás," 66.

18. Ralston, "Return of Brazilian Freedmen," 584; for some excellent and detailed examples of individuals and families who traveled back and forth between continents, see Turner, "Some Contacts of Brazilian Ex-Slaves."

19. Another fascinating aspect of Bonfim's life, which is outside the scope of this work, is how his personal history poses a strong challenge to the popular present-day assumption in Nigeria that Yoruba traditional religion is incompatible with modernity. Having

come from a prominent family in Brazil, he received the best Western education available at the time, combined it with the study and practice of the preeminent Yoruba tradition of the time (Ifa), and subsequently found great success through merging the two systems. Parés, "Birth of the Yoruba Hegemony," 149–50.

20. Capone, "Re-Africanization," 485.

21. Rodrigues also worked with the famous Lourenço Cardoso, who resided in Lagos but visited Bahia while Rodrigues was there. Cardoso is said to have referred Rodrigues to Ellis's work. Bonfim also provided Rodrigues with a copy of the CMS primer *Iwe Kika Ẹkẹrin Li Ẹdẹ Yoruba*, translated it, and critiqued it and Ellis's work for him, primarily on these books' assertions that the orișa Șango was in fact a mere mortal human. Matory, "English Professors in Brazil," 93.

22. Parés, "Birth of the Yoruba Hegemony," 151–52; Rodrigues, *O animismo fetichista*; Ellis, *Yoruba-Speaking Peoples*, 43–46.

23. The works of Ellis and subsequently Rodrigues are also cited in the foundational studies on Afro-Cuban religion as well, making it a truly transatlantic phenomenon. Matory, "English Professors in Brazil," 93; Parés, "Birth of the Yoruba Hegemony," 149; Carneiro, *Candomblés da Bahia*; Landes, *City of Women*; Turner, "Some Contacts of Brazilian Ex-Slaves"; Pierson, *Negroes in Brazil*.

24. Parés, "Birth of the Yoruba Hegemony," 153.

25. Parés, "Birth of the Yoruba Hegemony," 154; Alonso, *Development of Yoruba Candomblé Communities*, 6.

26. Rodrigues, *Os africanos no Brasil*, 225.

27. Ellis, *Yoruba-Speaking Peoples*, 56. It is interesting as well that the most prominent babalaôs in Salvador at the time, such as Martiniano do Bonfim or Felisberto Sowzer and other members of the Sowzer-Bamgbose family, were also those most deeply engaged in the modern world and Lagosian Renaissance as "English professors."

28. Parés, "Xangô in Afro-Brazilian Religion," 254.

29. Ajibade, "Șango's Thunder."

30. This also seems quite credible given the association of Catholic saints with Yoruba orixás as well as the tendency of Yoruba religious traditions to borrow features from other traditions with which they came into contact. Reis and Mamigonian, "Nagô and Mina," 99.

31. Parés, *Formation of Candomblé*, 123; Matory, "English Professors in Brazil."

32. Alonso, *Development of Yoruba Candomblé Communities*, 83.

33. Alonso, *Development of Yoruba Candomblé Communities*, 91. There were also many men like Martiniano do Bonfim who served this role as well, but in a fascinating series of developments outside the scope of this work, women came to be the most central and authoritative figures within Brazilian orixá traditions. See Alonso, *Development of Yoruba Candomblé Communities*, particularly chap. 3, and Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*, chap. 6.

34. Bastide, *African Religions*, 173–219.

35. Interestingly, despite Nagô/Yoruba traditions now being understood as the most central within Candomblé, both the terms *calundú* and *Candomblé* are likely Bantu, not Yoruba, in origin. Parés, *Formation of Candomblé*, 88.

36. This division, however, is not absolute or always observed by practitioners. Still, the worship of the eguns is centered on the island of Itaparica rather than in the city of Salvador itself where the worship of the orixás is concentrated. This is nevertheless certainly a difference with Yorubaland given that the Egungun there are very much considered part of the larger orișa complex, even if some worry that they may be too willing to be involved with other traditions as well. In addition, some temples have even maintained their Nagô subethnicity, the most prominent being Quêto/Ketu and Ijexá/Ijeșa. Omari-Tunkara, *Manipulating the Sacred*, 89; Santos, *Os nago e a morte*, 102–4.

37. Bastide, *African Religions*, 191.

38. Pierson, *Negroes in Brazil*, 278.

39. For some examples, see Rodrigues, *Os africanos no Brasil*, 239–50; Alonso, *Development of Yoruba Candomblé Communities*, 73–81.

40. Terreiros relocated to areas less accessible to police and thus subject to less scrutiny and attention but close enough to the center for members and clients to be able to reach them. Alonso, *Development of Yoruba Candomblé Communities*, 92.

41. Doté Amilton Costa, interview by author, January 31, 2017.

42. Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*, 260–61.

43. Alonso, *Development of Yoruba Candomblé Communities*, 141–43; Capone, "Le pai-de-santo," 62.

44. Boaz, *Banning Black Gods*, 19–30.

45. "Ao público e ao povo do Candomblé," *Journal da Bahia*, June 29, 1983. Translation mine. The last line of the original document is in modified Yoruba, the rest in Portuguese.

46. Alonso, *Development of Yoruba Candomblé Communities*, 145. For more information on how the major houses were able to ignore or find ways around government restriction and oppression, see chap. 4 in Alonso.

47. Alonso, *Development of Yoruba Candomblé Communities*, 74. This prejudicial perspective and repressive police and media action was directed against most Black Atlantic religions during the early twentieth century and was not limited to Brazil. Ogunnaike, "Damned If You Do."

48. Britto, *A proteção legal*, 181–82, emphasis mine.

49. Note the implicit assumption of only Catholicism being a real "religion" to which these devotees were not sufficiently or exclusively dedicated. Padre Edson Menezes da Silva, interview by author, January 29, 2017.

50. This ruling was ultimately overturned thanks to a great deal of public pressure, but it still demonstrates how the public and official perspective on Afro-Brazilian religion is quite prejudiced in addition to ill-informed and that this ignorance can lead to direct and immediate disenfranchisement of the communities involved. Fabio Brisolla, "Umbanda é Candomblé não são religiões, diz juiz federal," *Folha de São Paulo*, May 16, 2014, https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2014/05/1455758-umbanda-e-candomble-nao-sao-religioes-diz-juiz-federal.shtml; Alonso, *Development of Yoruba Candomblé Communities*, 10.

51. Britto, *A proteção legal*, 188.

52. "Todo esse nosso esforço é por querer devolver ao culto dos orixás, à religião africana, a dignidade perdida durante a escravidão e processos decorrentes da mesma: alienação

cultural, social e econômica que deram margem ao folclore, ao consumo e profanação da nossa religião." Britto, *A proteção legal*, 191. Translation mine.

53. Selka, "Mediated Authenticity," 24.

54. See, for example, Rodrigues, *O animismo*; Ramos, *O negro brasileiro*.

55. Britto, *A proteção legal*, 183.

56. Britto, *A proteção legal*, 190.

57. Significantly, the products of the Lagosian Renaissance had a large and lasting impact on this second Afro-centric movement on the other side of the Atlantic.

58. Pierson, *Negroes in Brazil*, 308.

59. Capone, "Le-pai-de-santo," 61–63.

60. Capone, "Le-pai-de-santo," 63–66.

61. Although Ifa was not reintroduced to Cuba at the same time, it is worth noting that there is also a division in that country between houses that are Orula-centric (based on Ọrunmila's tradition) versus oriaté-centric (based on the collective traditions of the other orishas). Capone, "Le-pai-de-santo," 72–77.

62. Capone, "Re-Africanization," 479, 478.

63. Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*, 171.

64. This is quite an apt comparison because Abimbola is in fact a professor (albeit of the Yoruba language not English) who made his name through international travel and instruction as an expert on Yoruba culture and religion. In fact, he holds the official title of Awịsẹ Agbaye, or the global spokesperson for Ifa, and Martiniano do Bonfim appears to have assumed a very similar role within the context of Salvador. Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*, 127.

65. This is a significant point, because if Brazilian Candomblé is considered in isolation, the tradition of Ifa has had a comparatively smaller effect than those of other orixás such as Xangô, Oxóssi, or Iemanjá. But despite the relatively small numbers of Ifa practitioners and initiates in Brazil, the more global scope of Ifa has indeed had a strong impact even on those not directly involved in its practice.

66. Capone, "Re-Africanization," 475.

67. Capone, "Re-Africanization," 485–86.

68. Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*. While Gilroy tends to be more Anglo-centric and focused on a shared sense of exclusion from Western, capitalist society, I invoke the idea of the African continent and African diaspora centered around the Atlantic as unified by inherited Afro-centric traditions and cultural features more in the sense that Matory does in his *Black Atlantic Religion* and Robert Farris Thompson did when he first coined the term Black Atlantic in his *Flash of the Spirit*.

69. Tisa Joy Wenger documents the similar way that Pueblo Indians struggled to ensure the protection of many of their traditions and way of life by articulating them in the form of "religion" for a Protestant-oriented American government and public. The similar timing (early twentieth century) and the advent of modernity and Western education paired with the general disdain for Indigenous traditions provide interesting parallels to African and African-diaspora traditions that were forced to undergo a similar process at roughly the same time. Wenger, *We Have a Religion*, particularly chaps. 4, 5, and 6.

CHAPTER 5. MASKING TRADITION(S): INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES ON SYNCRETISM

An earlier version of this chapter appeared in my "What's Really Behind the Mask?," *Journal of Africana Religions* 8, no. 1 (2020): 146–71.

1. Stewart and Shaw, *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism*, 3.

2. Examples are the celebration of cultural "Indianness" of various groups in Central America or the nevertheless contested and theoretical conception of the United States as "the great melting pot." These examples tend more in the direction of cultural or national identity, and the term tends to have much more negative connotations in religious contexts. See Stewart and Shaw, *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism*, chaps. 7 and 10.

3. Capone, "Re-Africanization."

4. On the corruption of African traditions by Catholicism, see for example, Rodrigues, *O animismo fetichista*, 170–72. This was also stated as part of his motivation for conducting very extensive fieldwork with the last generation of African-born Brazilians. On Baianos' alleged unfitness as Catholics, see *O animismo fetichista*, 199.

5. Rodrigues, *Os africanos no Brasil*, 238–39.

6. Herskovits also presents these ideas with specific reference to syncretism in "African Gods and Catholic Saints" and *Myth of the Negro Past*, particularly chap. 7.

7. Arthur Ramos, *O negro brasileiro*, 147–58.

8. Capone, "Transatlantic Dialogue," 344–45.

9. Bastide, *African Civilisations in the New World*.

10. Ramos, *O negro brasileiro*, 137–40.

11. While there is merit to Bastide's observations about the greater degree of integration between Catholic and Central African religious traditions, many Central Africans had either converted to Catholicism or at least been exposed to Portuguese Catholicism in their homeland *before* reaching Brazil. Additionally, that population had spent significantly more time in Brazil than the more recent West African arrivals.

12. Capone, "Transatlantic Dialogue," 357.

13. Bastide, *African Civilisations in the New World*, 162, see also 49, 283.

14. Bastide, *African Religions*, 283.

15. Rodrigues recorded the attachment of African-born Brazilians to both Catholic and African traditions, and Ramos cited their genuine embrace of syncretism *before* and *after* arriving in Brazil. Herskovits found that Haitians often identified the saints as *loa* along with the natural phenomena associated with them. Capone, "Transatlantic Dialogue," 350; Ramos, *O negro brasileiro*, 148–49; Herskovits, "African Gods and Catholic Saints," 639.

16. Herskovits, "African Gods and Catholic Saints," 637.

17. Desmangles, *Faces of the Gods*, 11.

18. See Ogunnaike, "Myth of Purity"; Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*, chap. 3.

19. Frigerio, "Re-Africanization in Secondary Religious Diasporas," 50–57; Capone, "Re-Africanization."

20. For a detailed summary of the circumstances surrounding these statements as well as text from them, see Josildeth Consorte, "Em torno de um manifesto."

21. Capone, "Transatlantic Dialogue," 363.

22. Valente, *Sincretismo religioso afro-brasileiro*, 19. "Os negros . . . desfarçaram conscientemente os seus próprios conceitos religiosos. . . . E mais do que isso: iludiram a ingenuidade dos padres na obra apostólica da catequese" (69).

23. Verger, *Orisha*, 27.

24. Berkenbrock, *A experiência dos orixás*, 137.

25. Palmié, *Cooking of History*, 126, 128.

26. Palmié, *Cooking of History*, 145.

27. Ferretti, "Sincretismo afro-brasileiro"; Ferretti, *Repensando o sincretismo*.

28. For example, one of the most celebrated authorities on Candomblé tradition and an important reformer and defender of the tradition, Martiniano do Bonfim, remained a devoted Catholic his whole life, as did many others. Silva, "Reafricanização e sincretismo," 153–56.

29. This was even true of the way in which Greek philosophy enriched Christian theology. When syncretism has taken on more positive connotations in Afro-Atlantic traditions, it is often in conjunction with regionalist or nationalist movements. Stewart and Shaw, *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism*, 3; Palmié, *Cooking of History*, 78–112, 132–34.

30. Apter, "Herskovits's Heritage," 245–50.

31. Apter, "Herskovits's Heritage," 254.

32. Roca, "Catholic Saints, African Gods," 187.

33. Apter, "Herskovits's Heritage," 255.

34. Apter, "Herskovits's Heritage," 256, italics mine.

35. Verger, *Notes sur le culte,* 19–20, translation mine.

36. For more examples of this standard perspective see Alonso, *Development of Yoruba Candomblé Communities*, 23, 54; Omari-Tunkara, *Manipulating the Sacred*, 3, 21, 51; Mattoso, *To Be a Slave in Brazil*, 126.

37. Menininha do Gantois, Stella de Oxossi, Tete de Iansã, Olga de Alaketo, and Nicinha do Bogum, open letter, *Jornal da Bahia*, August 12, 1983.

38. Iyalorixá Maria Stella de Azevedo Santos, interview by author, January 26, 2017.

39. Doté Amilton Costa, interview by author, January 29, 2017.

40. Jorge Silva Martins and Apokan Junior Silva, interview by author, February 1, 2017.

41. Babalorixá Rychelmy Imbiriba, interview by author, January 27, 2017. When Samuel Ajayi Crowther translated the Bible into the new proto-Yoruba language, he translated *Devil* and *Satan* as "Ẹṣu" as well, which has caused a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding in Yorubaland to the present day, as Satan and Ẹṣu occupy very different positions in their respective cosmologies. This lends much support to Pai Rychelmy's observation, but it could also be interpreted in the other direction, indicating not what Satan has to do with Exu, but rather a more African-centric interpretation of the devil that is interestingly in line with his depiction in the Old Testament. For an analysis of an indigenous Yoruba commentary on the complex relationship between Ẹṣu and the Christian devil see Ogunnaike, "Ifa and Traditional Yoruba Interpretations."

42. Doté Amilton Costa, interview by author, January 29, 2017.

43. Britto, *A proteção legal*, 187–89.

44. Roca, "Catholic Saints, African Gods," 187.

45. He also suggests that some Muslims may have as well and documents several examples of interactions between the traditions of Islam, Christianity, and the orixás. Bastide, *African Religions*, 128.

46. Bastide, *African Religions*, 271.

47. Bastide, *African Religions*, 271.

48. Bastide, *African Religions*, 112. Several decades later, Mãe Stella recounted a similar story to me about a good friend of hers who is quite knowledgeable and respected within Candomblé. When she asked her friend why she was going to mass, her friend responded that she had to go because the consecrated host was the source of her axé (sacred power). Maria Stella de Azevedo Santos, interview by the author, January 26, 2017.

49. Bastide, *African Religions*, 89, 93, 257.

50. Bastide, *African Religions*, 272.

51. Bastide, *African Religions*, 140.

52. Sophie Oluwole makes this connection from the perspective of philosophy, identifying Ọrunmila as the "patron saint" of Ifa, comparing the Yoruba orișa to Catholic saints in several fascinating ways, and suggesting that this is what happened with diasporic traditions that drew upon Yoruba models. Oluwole, *Socrates and Ọrunmila*, 15–16. See also Alonso, *Development of Yoruba Candomblé Communities*, 53–54; Bowen, *Central Africa*, 311.

53. Rodrigues, *O animismo fetichista*, 168.

54. Rodrigues, *O animismo fetichista*, 182.

55. Maria da Conceição Carvalho, interview by author, January 29, 2017.

56. Peel, "Comparative Analysis of Ogun," 271–75.

57. Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 112.

58. Peel, "Comparative Analysis of Ogun," 148–49; Armstrong, "Etymology of the Word 'Ògún,'" 30.

59. Barnes and Ben-Amos, "Ogun, the Empire Builder," 58.

60. Babalola, "Portrait of Ògún," 149–50.

61. Ajibade, "Ṣango's Thunder," 76.

62. Brown, *Santería Enthroned*, 116.

63. Barber, "Oríkì, Women," 316.

64. Barber, "Oríkì, Women," 320.

65. Berkenbrock, *A experiência dos orixás*, 135.

66. Kloppenburg, "O sincretismo afro-brasileiro," 208.

67. Berkenbrock, *A experiência dos orixás*, 136.

68. Valente, *Sincretismo religioso afro-brasileiro*, 87.

69. Jagun Ṣango Ṣangoniyi Ṣangosogo, interview by author, December 29, 2016.

70. My choice of words, reminiscent of the Greek *homoousious* taken from the Nicene Creed, is not entirely accidental because the idea of God the Father and God the Son being of the same substance in Trinitarian theology will appear again later.

71. His name, Tijani, references Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani, an Algerian saint and the founder of the Tijaniyya Sufi brotherhood, which has become the most popular in West Africa and has a particularly large following in Nigeria.

72. Ajagẹmọ Tijani Adeleke, interview by author, February 24, 2017.

73. Araba Ifarinwale Ogundiran, interview by author, August 25, 2014.

74. In the 1940s Ramos observed the striking similarities between the hagiography of prominent saints and popular Catholicism and African mythology in precisely the same manner. Ramos, *A acculturação negra*, 249–51.

75. Iyalorixá Dona Iraci Borba da Conceição, interview by author, January 25, 2017.

76. Maria da Conceição Carvalho, interview by author, January 29, 2017.

77. Ekedi Ernice Menezes Oliveira, interview by author, January 30, 2017.

78. Rodrigues, *O animismo fetichista*, 196–97; Herskovits, "African Gods and Catholic Saints," 637.

79. There were other Catholic elements to initiation as well, but Mãe Stella was one of the first to stop this practice about seventy years ago, and many prominent terreiros have subsequently followed suit. Iyalorixá Maria Stella de Azevedo Santos, interview by author, January 26, 2017.

80. Ekedi Ernice Menezes Oliveira, interview by author, January 30, 2017.

81. In "Catholic Saints, African Gods," Roca provides a good description and analysis of this festival and its history in Bahia. Verger also observed that Afro-Brazilians who participated in this ritual were equally devoted to Christ and Oxalá, which again seems natural if they were simply understood to be one and the same. Verger, *Orisha*, 259.

82. Pierson, *Negroes in Brazil*, 280; Parés, *Formation of Candomblé*, 105.

83. This also greatly aided in the cementing of pan-ethnic identity among the various African groups in Bahia. Selka, "Mediated Authenticity," 8.

84. Parés also cites the "double participation" of both Africans and creoles (Black people born in Brazil) in African religious and Catholic rituals as a "beneficial juxtaposition" in very difficult circumstances. Parés, *Formation of Candomblé*, 76–77.

85. Roca, "Catholic Saints, African Gods," 191–97.

86. Bastide, *African Religions*, 259.

87. Pierson, *Negroes in Brazil*, 308–9.

88. It may also demonstrate a deep level of engagement with Western culture and history as Saint Lazarus is the patron saint not of Venice but of the island of San Lazzaro just outside the city.

89. Verger, *Dílógún*, 124–26.

90. For this narrative in the Bible, see Genesis 25–33.

91. For more on this process of indigenizing biblical narratives and its theological significance, see Ogunnaike, "Ifa and Traditional Yoruba Interpretations."

92. Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil*, 124–26.

93. Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil*, 98–103. See also Turner, "Some Contacts of Brazilian Ex-Slaves," 64–65; Amos, "Amaros and Agudás," 89.

94. Ramos, *O negro brasileiro*, 89.

95. Bastide, *African Religions*, 145.

96. *Musulumi* being the Yoruba word for "Muslim." Bastide, *African Religions*, 153; Alakija, "Traditional Yoruba Nobility," 196.

97. There is also a remarkably rich mythology surrounding the cosmological links between these two traditions. See Ogunnaike, "God, Gods, and Prophets."

98. Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil*, 103.

99. This nation, however, seems to have been composed of devotees to African spirits who happened to be Muslim rather than "Muslims" practicing Candomblé. Ramos, *O negro brasileiro*, 82n96.

100. The ethnic dimension of the brotherhood certainly would have appealed to them as well, but if this were the primary motivating factor it would again suggest either that ethnic and/or family ties were more salient to these members than any differences in religious identity or that religious affiliation could still be relatively fluid. Verger, *Flux et reflux*, 520.

101. Yai, "Identity, Contributions, and Ideology," 77–78; Parés, "Afro-Catholic Baptism," 187–88.

102. Bastide, *African Religions*, 394.

103. Yai, "Identity, Contributions, and Ideology," 73.

104. Lindsay, "To Return to the Bosom," 31–32.

105. This church is now known as the Holy Cross Church. Turner, "Some Contacts of Brazilian Ex-Slaves," 61; Amos, "Amaros and Agudás," 71–72.

106. The festival included the procession of a masquerade called Burrinha, and Muslims also participated in it. Guran, *Agoudas*, 147–89; Law, "Yoruba Liberated Slaves," 360; Amos, "Amaros and Agudás," 96.

107. The colonial languages in these areas were French and English. Law, "Yoruba Liberated Slaves," 358–59; Ralston, "Return of Brazilian Freedmen," 589–90.

108. Yai, "Identity, Contributions, and Ideology," 77; Lindsay, "To Return to the Bosom," 32.

109. Law, "Yoruba Liberated Slaves," 358.

110. Guran, *Agoudas*, 110.

111. "On a une religion comme on a ses propres habitudes et coutumes. Chaque pays a ses propres fétiches." Guran, *Agoudas*, 110.

112. Ojo, "'Heepa' (Hail) Òrìsà," 47.

113. This does not necessarily mean that they practiced Ifa, however.

114. Amos, "Amaros and Agudás," 84.

115. Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*, 94.

116. For example, some Muslims would still be baptized in the Catholic Church, and some practiced Islam in Lagos but Catholicism in Bahia. Law, "Yoruba Liberated Slaves," 360; Guran, *Agoudas*, 110–11, 148.

117. Law, "Yoruba Liberated Slaves," 360; Lindsay, "To Return to the Bosom," 33.

118. I am very grateful to Professor Kimberley Patton for this insightful observation.

119. Lawal, "Living Dead," 56.

120. Lawal, "Living Dead," 52–56.

121. Lawal, "Living Dead," 57; Fitzgerald et al., "Transformation through Cloth," 56–57.

122. Lawal presents an insightful and convincing argument on how, in traditional Yoruba society, the human body functions as a physical mask crafted by the orișa that houses the spirit which must ultimately leave it. Lawal "Living Dead," 51–52; Beier, "Egungun Cult," 34.

123. Drewal, "Arts of Egungun," 18–19. See also Beier, "Egungun Cult," 35.

124. Abiodun, *Yoruba Art and Language*, 176.

125. Abiodun, *Yoruba Art and Language*, 275.

126. Abiodun, *Yoruba Art and Language*, 175.

127. See Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, 29; Lucas, *Religion of the Yorubas*, 139–40; Clarke, *Travels and Explorations*, 117–18, 282–84.

128. Beier also observed that many members of the Egungun tradition were also involved in other religious traditions, likening it to the syncretism found in African diasporic traditions in the Americas. Beier, "Egungun Cult," 34, 36; Beier, *Year of Sacred Festivals*, 27–28.

129. Lawal, "Living Dead," 54.

130. Abiodun, *Yoruba Art and Language*, 203.

131. Abiodun, *Yoruba Art and Language*, 175.

132. The reaction and adaptation to the modern category of religion is a process practically all Africana religious traditions have been forced to undergo; however, they have done so in myriad ways and with varying degrees of success depending on contextual factors. Ogunnaike, "Damned If You Do," 100–128.

CHAPTER 6. HOW RELIGION IS CHANGING THE RELIGIOUS

1. Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?*, 170.

2. Ogunnaike, "Damned If You Do."

3. Thurston, *Boko Haram*; Vaughan, *Religion and the Making of Nigeria*.

4. Vaughan, *Religion and the Making of Nigeria*, 7.

5. Vaughan, *Religion and the Making of Nigeria*, particularly chap. 5.

6. Nolte and Ogen, "Outlook," 263; Olupona, *City of 201 Gods*, 263–67, 28.

7. Olupona, *City of 201 Gods*, 287.

8. Olupona, "Bonds, Boundaries, and Bondage," 20–30.

9. This is an expression of the common "God talk" that Olupona refers to as one of the major bonds uniting all Nigerians in the 1960s and 1970s. Olupona, "Bonds, Boundaries, and Bondage," 27.

10. Mariyeba Ifabunmi, interview by author, November 28, 2016.

11. Sakiatu Abẹki, interview by author, March 7, 2017.

12. Oluọdẹ Ileadi Ogundigi, interview by author, July 30, 2016.

13. Oluọdẹ Ileadi Ogundigi, interview by author, December 20, 2016.

14. Although this man's approach was very open, he did not believe people could just try whatever they liked and treat religion like a spiritual buffet, but rather that one's religion needed to be rooted in one's inherited tradition or way of worship and perhaps follow directives from specialists for discrete purposes or periods of time. Oseni Lawal, interview by author, March 22, 2017.

15. Although this woman was happy to give the priest money, I noticed in practically all orisa processions around town that the majority of the shop owners (who are younger than this woman) were visibly reticent or reluctant to welcome the orisa devotees and give them money.

16. Sakiatu Abẹki, interview by author, March 7, 2017.

17. Deacon Ezekiel Oke, interview by author, December 27, 2016.

18. Oseni Lawal, interview by author, March 22, 2017.

19. Balogun, "Compound Life and Religious Control," 109.

20. Nolte and Akinjobi, "Marrying Out," 220.

21. Oluọdẹ Ileadi Ogundigi, interview by author, December 20, 2016.

22. Iya Ọṣun Oluwatoyin Salaudeen, interview by author, August 15, 2016.

23. Here he referenced Exodus 20:5: "Thou shalt not bow down to them [graven images/idols], nor serve them." Olubayọ Ayantunde, interview by author, February 11, 2017.

24. Pastor Michael's father also predicted through Ifa divination that his son should always wear white, a ritual taboo that he still observes to this day. Pastor B. P. Michael, interview by author, December 12, 2016.

25. Alfa Hassan Alaaye, interview by author, September 10, 2016.

26. Olubayọ Ayantunde, interview by author, February 11, 2017.

27. Ṣangotunmiṣe Adiomi, interview by author, November 26, 2016.

28. Oluwaṣẹgun Ajala, interview by author, December 8, 2016.

29. Olatayo, "Religious Fundamentalism," 60.

30. Iwilade and Fadayọmi, "Freedom and Control," 174.

31. Ṣangoyẹmi Ayefadun, interview by author, September 19, 2016.

32. Dubuisson, *Western Construction of Religion*, 43.

33. This, in turn, also led to the development of a depoliticized Buddhism that could fit more neatly into the category of religion alongside Christianity and provide an alternative, which of course, was necessary to ensure the realization of religious freedom in Japanese society. Josephson, *Invention of Religion in Japan*, 219–20.

34. Akintunde, "Vestiges of Indigenous Spirituality," 160. Interestingly, Akintunde translates *oro* as "ancestral religion" and "worship of the gods of our ancestors" rather than as "ancestral tradition."

35. Peel, "Syncretism and Religious Change," 127, italics mine.

36. He also falls into the middle generation, and consequently has a tolerant view toward orịṣa traditions, although he has never practiced them and does not want his children to either. Gbenga Fọlayan, interview by author, March 7, 2017.

37. Olubayọ Ayantunde, interview by author, February 11, 2017.

38. Pemberton and Afọlayan, *Yoruba Sacred Kingship*, 206, 205.

39. Pemberton and Afọlayan, *Yoruba Sacred Kingship*, 206.

40. Tiramiyu Oyetunji, interview by author, December 16, 2016.

41. Ọladeji Afolabi, interview by author, December 16, 2016.

42. Wahab Yusuf, interview by author, December 13, 2016.

43. Pemberton and Afọlayan, *Yoruba Sacred Kingship*, 203.

44. Balogun, "Compound Life and Religious Control," 108.

45. Araba Ṣangodokun Onifade, interview by author, March 31, 2017.

46. This is a very interesting objection because it indicates an adoption of salvation and the afterlife, which is much more characteristic of Islam and Christianity than of orịṣa traditions. Munirazeez Dẹbẹẹ, interview by author, December 19, 2016.

47. Aṣẹda Adeleke Ojo, interview by author, April 6, 2017.

48. In fact, the Aṣẹda informed me that any hunter who says that Ogun's tradition is not a religion doesn't really know what he is talking about, and he certainly does not

approve of hunters going to the mosque or church. Aṣẹda Adeleke Ojo, interview by author, April 6, 2017.

49. Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 269–70.

50. Nolte and Ogen, "Beyond Religious Tolerance," 19. In fact, Beier himself recognized this trend in the 1950s, when he observed that the festivals of Ọṣun, Eṣu, and Oriṣa Oko were "no longer celebrated—or no longer celebrated with great pomp and state occasion. Yet this was still done within the memory of the reigning Timi [Timi Laoye]." Beier, *Year of Sacred Festivals*, 6.

51. Jagun Ṣango Ṣangoniyi Ṣangosogo, interview by author, September 15, 2016.

52. Iya Ọṣun Oluwatoyin Salaudeen, interview by author, July 30, 2016.

53. Again, this phrasing is interesting because it does not necessarily reveal whether the Alagbaa either no longer identifies or still does identify as a Muslim. It merely demonstrates a different way of understanding and articulating religious affiliation through what one does. Alagbaa Lamidi Ogunkanmi, interview by author, December 27, 2016.

54. In this ritual the Olunwi carries out a mock battle with the Ajagẹmọ and captures him, then the Ajagẹmọ is later released with much fanfare. Several scholars have commented on how this ritual demonstrates the centrality of the power of peacefulness and reconciliation in Ọbatala's tradition and have suggested it may be a dramatization of a prominent myth in which Ṣango inadvertently captured, imprisoned, and subsequently released Ọbatala, mimicking the power struggle between the powerful city-states of Ọyọ and Ifẹ respectively, or at least Ọyọ military expansion. Beier, *Year of Sacred Festivals*, 14; Apter, "Historiography of Yoruba Myth," 13–16. This myth is also cited as the source of the uniquely Bahian Aguas de Oxalá ceremony, in which Candomblé temples are washed in honor of Oxalá at the beginning of the calendar year. It is also linked to the Catholic festival of the Lavagem of Nosso Senhor do Bomfim. Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*, 140–43; Verger, *Orisha*, 258–59.

55. Hassan Ọlabiyi, interview by author, July 15, 2016.

56. The worship of Ọya had almost disappeared because there was only one priest dedicated to the tradition and very few devotees. Jagun Ṣango Ṣangoniyi Ṣangosogo, interview by author, October 24, 2016.

57. Ọladeji Afolabi, interview by author, December 16, 2016.

58. In 2023 Oyo, Ogun, and Lagos states joined Osun in recognizing August 20 as Iṣẹṣe Day and an official government holiday.

59. Ifaṣọla Onifade, interview by author, March 4, 2017.

60. He also humorously said he is fine with some people being afraid of him, because it allows him to pretend to have special powers and makes people leave him alone when he wants them to!

61. See Gbenga Olarinoye, "Hijab Crisis: How Osun Schools Turned Religious War Theatres," Vanguard, June 15, 2016, https://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/06/hijab-crisis-osun-schools-turned-religious-war-theatres/; Femi Abbas, "The Hijab Saga in Osun State," The Nation, June 24, 2016, https://thenationonlineng.net/hijab-saga-osun-state/; and "Nigerian Law Graduate Denied Call to Bar over Hijab," Al Jazeerah, December 16, 2017, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/nigerian-law-graduate-denied-call-bar-hijab-171216084329791.html. The issues of hairstyles and headwear are also a broader

struggle for practitioners of Afro-diasporic religions as documented by Boaz, *Banning Black Gods*, chap. 5.

62. Akinjogbin, *Dahomey and Its Neighbours*, 15–17.

63. A full 90 percent of both Muslim and Christian nuclear families were religiously homogenous, and extended families were also overwhelmingly homogenous if not to the same degree. Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture*, 141–43, 144.

64. One of the remaining three was in fact more than 89 percent Muslim. Dokun, "Islam in Ede," cited in Oyeweso, "Growth of Islam in Ede," 15–16.

65. The significantly higher percentage among Christians may reflect the fact that a sizable portion of Ẹdẹ's Christian population is not indigenous and thus came from a different religious environment. Alternatively, it could have to do with the fact that Yoruba modernity and its associated perspectives on religion are more closely identified with Christianity. Olatayo, "Religious Fundamentalism," 84.

66. Balogun, "Compound Life and Religious Control," 101.

67. Olajubu, *Women in the Yoruba Religious Sphere*, 32.

68. Barber, "Oríkì, Women," 328.

69. Barber, "Oríkì, Women," 328.

70. If Timi Lagunju's strategy of getting prominent members of Ẹdẹ society to convert to Islam through marriage to his daughters is interpreted in this light, it may also have contributed to his subjects' bewilderment because it ran contrary to their traditions around religion and marriage.

71. Nolte and Akinjobi, "Marrying Out," 215.

72. Of course, religious mobility was not unique to marriage or women, as people regularly needed to adopt new forms of worship for any number of reasons and others would opt to do so voluntarily.

73. Deacon Ezekiel Oke, interview by author, December 27, 2016.

74. Sakiatu Abẹki, interview by author, March 7, 2017.

75. Ojetunji Olukolo, interview by author, August 2, 2016.

76. Jones and Nolte, "Everyday Inter-Religious Encounters," 251.

77. Nolte and Akinjobi, "Marrying Out," 213.

78. Al-Hajji Abdurrahman Ẹlẹṣin, interview by author, September 10, 2016.

79. Although in Nigeria I did not hear about the role of love in prompting individuals to convert, a similar (and similarly largely unfounded) fear is currently prevalent in India and is referred to as "love jihad." See Gupta, "Hindu Women, Muslim Men"; Rahul Bhatia, "The Year of Love Jihad in India," *New Yorker*, December 31, 2017, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/2017-in-review/the-year-of-love-jihad-in-india.

80. Nolte and Akinjobi, "Marrying Out," 216.

81. Nolte and Akinjobi, "Marrying Out," 219; Oluwaṣegun Ajala, interview by author, December 8, 2016.

82. Nolte and Akinjobi, "Marrying Out," 219.

83. Jagun Ṣango Ṣangoniyi Ṣangosogo, interview by author, September 5, 2016.

84. Adeṣọla Akinpelu, interview by author, October 31, 2016.

85. Nolte and Akinjobi, "Marrying Out," 220.

86. Pastor Bennett Irogbalam, interview by author, March 29, 2017.

87. Al-Hajja Hajarat Ọlasunkanmi, interview by author, September 24, 2017.

88. Funmilayọ Oyesomi, interview by author, November 19, 2016.

89. Ṣangoyẹmi Ọlayiwọla, interview by author, November 21, 2016.

90. Awofakunle Fatayọ Ojo, interview by author, August 15, 2016.

91. Ṣangoyẹmi Ayefadun, interview by author, September 19, 2016.

92. The conception of conversion as entailing the abandonment of one religious identity in favor of the exclusive practice of a different religion did not exist in the previous model of forms of worship, so religious affiliation was more flexible. I am also aware that in many societies such as that of the Yoruba, conversion is not necessarily a discrete event and may be more of a process or fluid state.

93. Funmilayọ Oyesomi, interview by author, November 19, 2016.

94. Deacon Ezekiel Oke, interview by author, December 27, 2016.

95. Adeniyi, "Growth and Development of Islamic Societies," 356–62.

96. Ọlọngbele Ọlaiya, interview by author, August 17, 2016.

97. Abidi Agbegunde, interview by author, August 22, 2016.

98. Sakibu Ọdẹwale, interview by author, September 20, 2016.

99. Jones and Nolte, "Everyday Inter-Religious Encounters," 253.

100. These statistics again suggest that, in Ẹdẹ at least, Muslims are more open to engaging in other religious traditions and perhaps have a greater degree of adherence to a system of ẹsin as forms of worship. Olatayo, "Religious Fundamentalism," 84.

101. Al-Hajja Hajarat Ọlasunkanmi, interview by author, September 24, 2016.

102. Adeṣọla Akinpelu, interview by author, October 31, 2016.

103. Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 317.

104. There is a relatively small but very promising body of literature on Muslim perspectives and history with the category of religion, but it is sadly outside the scope of this work.

105. Oluọdẹ Ileade Ogundigi, interview by author, February 9, 2017.

106. Sakibu Ọdẹwale, interview by author, November 28, 2016.

107. Abidi Abegunde, interview by author, August 28, 2016.

108. Sakiatu Abẹki, interview by author, March 7, 2017

109. Gbenga Fọlayan, interview by author, March 7, 2017.

110. Olubayọ Ayantunde, interview by author, February 11, 2017.

111. Olupona, *City of 201 Gods*, 263.

112. Benjamin Wormald, "Importance of Religion and Religious Beliefs," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, November 3, 2015, http://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/chapter-1-importance-of-religion-and-religious-beliefs/.

113. Ifaṣọla Onifade, interview by author, March 4, 2017.

114. Wahab Yusuf, interview by author, December 13, 2016; Ọladeji Afolabi, interview by author, December 16, 2016.

115. Adebayo, "Role of Traditional Rulers," 75.

116. Al-Hajji Abdurrahman Ẹlẹsin, interview by author, September 10, 2016; Shaykh Salahuddin Ọlayiwọla, interview by author, August 30, 2016.

117. Deacon Ezekiel Oke, interview by author, December 27, 2016.

118. Ogen and Balogun also note the difficulty some Christians have had in finding apartments to rent in Ẹdẹ. Ogen and Balogun, "Baptist Church in Ede," 153.

119. Reverend Yakubu went to the palace to urge the Timi to convert to Christianity, and when he refused to prostrate himself before the ọba because he was a minister of God, the chiefs were outraged at the lack of respect. This particular conflict demonstrates how culture, religion, and tradition are all intertwined, as practically all of Ẹdẹ's citizens are required to prostrate themselves before the Timi, and this refusal violated the tradition with strong religious overtones. "Letter Regarding Pastor A. A. Yakubu," First Baptist Church to HRH Tijani Ọladokun, Timi of Ẹdẹland, 1998, archives of First Baptist Church, Ẹdẹ, Osun State.

120. Ojetunde Olukolo, interview by author, September 8, 2016; Munirazeez Dẹbẹẹ, interview by author, December 19, 2016.

121. Munirazeez Dẹbẹẹ, interview by author, December 19, 2016.

122. Pastor Nathaniel Oyewole, interview by author, September 7, 2016. The Baptist schools in Ẹdẹ were supposedly the first not to require students to convert to Christianity (Ogen and Balogun, "Baptist Church in Ẹdẹ," 157), but this may have been true only in theory because Shaykh Salahuddin Ọlayiwọla was removed from a Baptist school when school officials attempted to baptize and convert him. Shaykh Salahuddin Ọlayiwọla, interview by author, August 30, 2016.

123. Tijani, "Religious Accommodation," 199.

124. Eck, "Prospects for Pluralism," 744–45; Nandy, *Time Warps*.

125. Eck, "Prospects for Pluralism," 758–59.

126. Qur'an 2:256; Chief Imam Mas'ud Hussayn Ajakewole, interview by author, March 3, 2017.

127. Al-Hajji Abdurrahman Ẹlẹṣin, interview by author, September 9, 2016. The Arabic word *dīn* is not a perfect translation for the English "religion" because it can also carry the alternative meanings of "sect," "custom," or "godliness."

128. Shaykh Salahuddin Ọlayiwọla, interview by author, August 30, 2016.

129. Qur'an 17:23; Alfa Hassan Alaaye, interview by author, September 10, 2016.

130. Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations*.

131. Al-Hajji Abdurrahman Ẹlẹṣin, interview by author, September 9, 2016; Alfa Hassan Alaaye, interview by author, September 10, 2016.

132. Bâ, *Spirit of Tolerance*, 128–29. The Tijaniyya also has a strong presence in Ẹdẹ, and it relates more positively to other religious traditions than modern reform movements analyzed in the conclusion.

133. As a result, it was not uncommon for people to either adopt or abandon religious practices after their parents passed away because it would be considered disrespectful to their elders to ignore their wishes while they were still alive.

134. Akande, *"Baba Abiye,"* 32.

135. Tijani, "Religious Accommodation," 191, 197–98; Tijani, "Truly Nigerians," 2–19.

136. Oluwaṣẹgun Ajala, interview by author, December 8, 2016.

137. He is at times also associated with the Prophet Idrīs or merely as an unidentified prophet in the Qur'an. See Ogunnaike, *Deep Knowledge*, chap. 9, particularly pp. 337–50.

138. He also stated there are still some Christians who understand Jesus and the Prophet Muhammad to be equivalent as intermediaries to God, but his church teaches

that Jesus has no equal or rival in this sense. Pastor Nathaniel Oyewole, interview by author, September 7, 2016.

139. His emphasis on the primary difference being between English and Yoruba names for the same figure is reminiscent of the perspective of many others in Ẹdẹ and Salvador, although this time it was invoked not by a person who identifies primarily as an orisa devotee but by an Anglican clergyman *not* involved in orisa worship. Archdeacon Julius Ọjọmọ, interview by author, November 15, 2016.

140. Pastor Bennett Irogbalam, interview by author, March 29, 2017.

141. Pastor Alakija recognizes that one of the main concerns Ẹdẹ's citizens had when the university was established was that it would be used to convert their children and families. With this in mind, the university tries to be sensitive to this fear. Pastor Oluseyi Alakija, interview by author, November 30, 2016.

142. Pastor Nathaniel Oyewole, interview by author, September 7, 2016.

143. Archdeacon Julius Ọjọmọ, interview by author, November 15, 2016.

144. "If a man says, 'I love God,' and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" and "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Pastor Oluseyi Alakija, interview by author, November 30, 2016.

145. Pastor Bennett Irogbalam, interview by author, March 29, 2017.

146. Matthew 5:39. "But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."

147. Pastor Nathaniel Oyewole, interview by author, September 7, 2016.

148. Akọda Ifaniran Ojo, interview by author, August 3, 2016.

149. Ṣangoyẹmi Ọlayiwọla, interview by author, November 21, 2016.

150. Even if this was historically speaking not the case. Akọda Ifaniran Ojo, interview by author, September 20, 2016.

151. Aṣẹda Adeleke Ojo, interview by author, April 6, 2017.

152. Ifaṣọla Onifade, interview by author, March 4, 2017.

153. Again, this is precisely the period Olupona identifies in "Bonds, Boundaries, and Bondage," 27–28, as the beginning of the contentious and competitive religious climate in Nigeria as a whole.

CHAPTER 7. THE TIMI: SACRED KINGSHIP, MANAGING MODERNITY, AND NEW RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

1. See, for example, Olupona, *Kingship, Religion, and Rituals*; Olupona, *City of 201 Gods*; Pemberton and Afọlayan, *Yoruba Sacred Kingship*; Apter, *Black Critics and Kings*; Beier, *Yoruba Beaded Crowns*; Lloyd, "Sacred Kingship and Government."

2. While women have historically occupied the office of ọba, I use the masculine gender here because the overwhelming majority have been men and some complementary monarchal institutions are explicitly gendered female, suggesting the ọba is an implicitly male-gendered office. For examples of female ọba, see Afonja, "Women, Power, and Authority." For an example of a female-gendered royal title, see Olupona, *Kingship, Religion, and Rituals*, chap. 2.

3. Berger, *Sacred Canopy*. Olupona was the first to take this approach in his study of the Ondo. Olupona, *Kingship, Religion, and Rituals*, 81–82;

4. Olupona, *Kingship, Religion, and Rituals*, 84, 171, 170.

5. Jagun Ṣango Ṣangosogo Ṣangoniyi, interview by author, July 11, 2016.

6. Olupona, *City of 201 Gods*, 251–97; Pemberton and Afọlayan, *Yoruba Sacred Kingship*, 201–6; Ogungbile and Awoniyi, "Indigenous Tradition in Transition."

7. Apter, "Yoruba Ethnogenesis."

8. Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*, 145. This demonstrates the strong correlation between origins in the land, ancestry, and the physical body of the king.

9. Verran, *Science and an African Logic*.

10. Apter, "Yoruba Ethnogenesis," 364.

11. Apter, "Yoruba Ethnogenesis," 365.

12. Of course, many of these orișa traditions are controlled and dominated by specific lineages, making the distinction between a lineage and an orișa tradition negligible at times. Apter also traces how the configuration of a royal microcosm was carried over into diaspora in places such as Brazil and Cuba and reinstituted within the Catholic brotherhoods that played such an important role in the development of Yoruba diasporic communities and religious traditions. Apter, "Yoruba Ethnogenesis," 367–82.

13. Lloyd, "Sacred Kingship and Government," 229.

14. For example, Lloyd notes a saying, "Without the ọba, the town would cease to exist." Lloyd, "Sacred Kingship and Government," 229.

15. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*.

16. Wariboko, "King's Five Bodies," 484.

17. Pemberton and Afọlayan, *Yoruba Sacred Kingship*, 95–97.

18. Olupona, *Kingship, Religion, and Rituals*, 170.

19. Olupona, *Kingship, Religion, and Rituals*, 62.

20. Wariboko, "King's Five Bodies," 484.

21. For a detailed description and analysis of the Ọọni's Ọlọjọ festival in Ile-Ifẹ, see Olupona, *City of 201 Gods*, chap. 4.

22. The devotees and priests/priestesses of these deities all wear these colored beads, but only the king's crown contains them all together. Beier, *Yoruba Beaded Crowns*, 31.

23. Roberts and Roberts, *Saint in the City*, 24–27. The authors also compared this understanding of religious images to many other traditions, including those of Catholic saints, and this type of symbolic logic closely parallels the reasoning of the orișa/orixá devotees who identified Catholic images as appropriate (re)presentations of the nature of their own orișa/orixá.

24. This relationship can also be understood as that of symbol rather than sign, although in contemporary times, even a symbol need not contain the same ontological link to or very nature of its referent. Roberts and Roberts, *Saint in the City*, 27.

25. Beier, *Yoruba Beaded Crowns*, 18. Oftentimes ingestion could involve eating part of the previous king's tongue, the part of the body that releases his aṣẹ (spiritual power), or drinking from his empty skull. Lloyd, "Sacred Kingship and Government," 233.

26. Pemberton and Afọlayan, *Yoruba Sacred Kingship*, 78.

27. Pemberton and Afọlayan, *Yoruba Sacred Kingship*, 82. Although Lloyd does not address this, the ayaba, or wives of the ọba, remain the wives of the ọba even after the individual they married has died because the ọba himself cannot die. Olupona explained this tradition within the Ifẹ context. Lloyd, "Sacred Kingship and Government," 227; Olupona, *City of 201 Gods*, 136.

28. Pemberton and Afọlayan, *Yoruba Sacred Kingship*, 97.

29. Lloyd, "Sacred Kingship and Government," 230.

30. Pemberton and Afọlayan, *Yoruba Sacred Kingship*, 202; Olupona, *In My Father's Parsonage*, 36.

31. Apter, *Black Critics and Kings*, 86; Lloyd, "Sacred Kingship and Government," 232.

32. This dynamic is not merely a "chicken or the egg" situation, but rather a means of establishing a type of check on potentially errant ọba and a means of replacing them with others who more appropriately embody the identity and values of their community. Apter, *Black Critics and Kings*, 94.

33. Oyeweso, "Kingship and Religion," 51–52.

34. Lloyd, "Sacred Kingship and Government," 236.

35. Ogungbile and Awoniyi, "Indigenous Tradition in Transition"; Olupona, *City of 201 Gods*, 283.

36. Olufemi Atoyebi, Femi Makinde, and Kunle Falayi, "Yoruba Monarchs, Ijebu Indigenes Support Awujale over Kings' Burial," *Punch*, January 20, 2018, https://punchng.com/yoruba-monarchs-ijebu-indigenes-support-awujale-over-kings-burial-monarchs-shouldnt-eat-dead-kings-body-parts-alara-of-aramoko/; Oludare Olawin, "Finally, Ogun Governor Signs Bill Stopping Traditional Rites for Installation, Burial of Obas," *Daily Post*, January 10, 2022, https://dailypost.ng/2022/01/10/finally-ogun-governor-signs-bill-stopping-traditional-rites-for-installation-burial-of-obas/.

37. Still, many Christian ọba—particularly in the past—have found ways of fulfilling their duties as ọba and as Christians. Ogungbile and Awoniyi, "Indigenous Tradition in Transition," 73; Adebayo, "Role of Traditional Rulers," 76.

38. Ogungbile and Awoniyi, "Indigenous Tradition in Transition," 78–79; Adeboye, "'Born-Again' Oba."

39. Adeboye, "'Born-Again' Oba," 2, 14.

40. This, of course, is not to say that Pentecostalism might not offer other methods and models of pluralism, but these have yet to be made widely evident and implemented. Wariboko, "King's Five Bodies," 492–93.

41. Olupona, "Response to Comments," 507–11; Olupona, *City of 201 Gods*.

42. Sunday Aborisade, "Youths Chase Away Monarch for Shunning Traditional Festivals," *Punch*, November 6, 2012.

43. Banji Aluko, "Ayetoro Ekiti: Banished Born-Again King Converts Community," *Nigerian Tribune*, March 28, 2010.

44. Ogungbile and Awoniyi, "Indigenous Tradition in Transition," 86–87, 87–88, 81–82.

45. Olupona, *City of 201 Gods*, 251–81.

46. Probst, "Celebrating Indigeneity," 251.

47. However, such attitudes are usually held by an older person who does not perceive or take issue with the religious boundaries that carry such importance for most Yoruba

people today. I would suggest therefore that it is not a permanent solution, and that within a generation or two, it may be quite difficult to find individuals who are able and willing to perform this function. Pemberton and Afọlayan, *Yoruba Sacred Kingship*, 203.

48. Adeboye, "'Born-Again' Oba," 12.

49. Although not Yoruba, the most famous case is that of the Olu of Warri, who refused to take his traditional title Ogiame because he believed it to be pagan in origin. It was only after a lengthy and forceful protest by his subjects and traditional masquerades that he was forced to rescind his statement and retain the title. Jethro Ibileke, "Born Again King: Olu of Warri Bows to His People," PM News, September 10, 2013, http://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/2013/09/10/born-again-king-olu-of-warri-bows-to-his-people/.

50. Jagun Ṣango Ṣangoniyi Ṣangosogo, interview by author, July 11, 2016.

51. Olupona, *Kingship, Religion, and Rituals*, 21.

52. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America"; Olupona, *Kingship, Religion, and Rituals*, 84.

53. Pemberton and Afọlayan, *Yoruba Sacred Kingship*, chap. 7.

54. Ipedi is officially the Timi's festival, but when the royal oriṣa of the Timi was changed from Ogun to Ṣango, the Ṣango Timi festival also began participating in Ẹdẹ's civil religion, albeit to a slightly lesser extent. Again, this is almost unique in Yorubaland because the ọba's festival normally is the festival of the royal oriṣa, or patron deity of the town, because of the close link between town and deity. This is the case with the Ọlọjọ festival for Ogun in Ile-Ifẹ, the Ọṣun festival in Oṣogbo, the Agẹmọ festival in Ijẹbu-Ode, and the Ṣango festival in Ọyọ.

55. Foucault, *L'archéologie du savoir*.

56. Olupona, *City of 201 Gods*, 285.

57. This issue of how the oriṣa Ṣango is understood in Ẹdẹ is at the heart of the current Timi's campaign to get his citizens to recognize the Ṣango festival as an important cultural and civic event that celebrates Ẹdẹ's history and ancestral tradition rather than as a religious ritual that lies outside the purview of Muslim or Christian orthodoxy. Although many Muslims and Christians find it difficult to share the Timi's view, the high level of attendance at the Ṣango Timi festival would suggest that his efforts have indeed been successful. This is yet another instance of how the Timi has rather deftly negotiated the new religious landscape of the modern Yoruba world without abandoning tradition on one hand or giving into religious exclusivism on the other.

58. Berger, *Sacred Canopy*.

59. Beier, *Year of Sacred Festivals*.

60. The section that founded Ẹdẹ means the divinatory sign that was cast at the founding of the outpost and reveals the nature and future of the town.

61. This Jagun is distinct from the Jagun Ṣango, the chief possession priest of Ṣango.

62. For more on the Ẹgbẹ tradition in Ẹdẹ, see Beier, *Year of Sacred Festivals*, 63–64.

63. Barnes and Ben-Amos, "Ogun, the Empire Builder," 43–48.

64. Babalola, "Portrait of Ògún," 167.

65. Peel, "Comparative Analysis of Ogun," 277; Lloyd, "Sacred Kingship and Government," 223.

66. An example is the Ọlọjọ festival in Ile-Ifẹ. See Olupona, *City of 201 Gods*, 111–43.

67. This particular perspective on both the mythology and ritual of Ifa remarkably closely mirrors the arguments of Mircea Eliade in his *Myth of the Eternal Return*.

68. Interestingly, the earth rotates counterclockwise, and this is one of the reasons why the famous Mevlevi whirling dervishes spin in this direction during their invocatory dance/prayer. Akọda Ifaniran Ojo, interview by author, July 28, 2016.

69. Notably, one of the other significant Odu recitations during this ceremony is that of Otura Meji, the Odu of Islam. That some babalawo get up to perform another set of secret rituals with sacred palm kernels recalling the very origins of the town is almost certainly linked to the central place Islam holds in Ẹdẹ's history and identity.

70. Eliade, *Myth of the Eternal Return*, 49–92.

71. The other half of that calabash is the earthly realm here below.

72. This, of course, does not imply it is secular in the sense of having nothing to do with religion, but rather that it has come to exist outside the previous religious context and cosmology of the orișa and has been articulated in a civil sense to render it accessible to everyone.

73. For example, it is impossible to separate the ọba's festival from Ogun's in Ifẹ, Ọșun's in Oșogbo, or Șango's in Ọyọ.

74. This particular type of Egungun is popular among the Ọyọ people. For more on these impressive, comical Egungun see Beier, "Agbegijo Masquerades," 188–99.

75. The sticks thrown by Ondoru were used as weapons in war, because they would kill Ẹdẹ's enemies on impact. People avoid being struck by them even now, but the sticks are sometimes also used to make medicines, but only after they have fallen to the ground.

76. The Șango priests contest the separation of the Muslim and traditional festivals on the basis that the sacrifice of the ram at Ileya is a sacrifice for Șango. This is in keeping with their inclination to view Islam not as a rival/competing cosmology but as another tradition within the larger, traditional orișa cosmology.

77. Gbadamosi, *Growth of Islam*, 204–6.

78. It was not until the Osun State government launched an inquiry into the history of Ẹdẹ's royal families that the Laminisa ruling house was declared a royal family. Jimoh Babatunde, "I Never Dreamt of Being the King—Timi, Paramount Ruler of Ede," *Vanguard News*, March 10, 2013, https://www.vanguardngr.com/2013/03/i-never-dreamt-of-being-the-king-timi-paramount-ruler-of-ede/.

79. Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu*, 3–10, 119–39.

80. Ogungbile and Awoniyi, "Indigenous Tradition in Transition," 91.

81. Babatunde, "I Never Dreamt."

82. HRH Munirudeen Adeșọla Lawal, Timi of Ẹdẹland, interview by author, April 10, 2017.

83. This, of course, could be extended by analogy to contemporary Șango worshippers who represent and continue Yoruba ancestral traditions.

84. Pemberton and Afọlayan, *Yoruba Sacred Kingship*, 205.

85. On important or festival days, he attends Christian events on behalf of the whole community, but he does not attend any church regularly as a Christian. HRH Munirudeen Adeṣọla Lawal, Timi of Ẹdẹland, interview by author, April 10, 2017.

86. Qur'an 109:6.

87. HRH Munirudeen Adeṣọla Lawal, Timi of Ẹdẹland, interview by author, April 10, 2017.

88. Reverend Oyewole cited Romans 10:9: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" to suggest that if the Timi, a Muslim, was willing to lead Christians in prayer in Jesus's name, he may well "be a candidate for heaven." Reverend Nathaniel Oyewole, interview by author, December 17, 2016.

89. Babatunde, "I Never Dreamt."

90. Olupona, *City of 201 Gods*, 258.

91. HRH Munirudeen Adeṣọla Lawal, Timi of Ẹdẹland, interview by author, April 10, 2017.

92. Jagun Ṣango Ṣangoniyi Ṣangosogo, interview by author, November 21, 2016.

93. HRH Munirudeen Adeṣọla Lawal, Timi of Ẹdẹland, interview by author, April 10, 2017.

94. Ojetunji Olukolo, interview by author, August 2, 2016.

95. Jagun Ṣango Ṣangoniyi Ṣangosogo, interview by author, September 15, 2016.

96. Munirazeez Dẹbẹẹ, interview by author, December 19, 2016.

97. Awofakunle Ojo, interview by author, August 15, 2016.

98. HRH Munirudeen Adeṣọla Lawal, Timi of Ẹdẹland, interview by author, April 10, 2017.

99. However, every twenty-eight days when Ọjọ Jakuta (Ṣango's sacred day in the four-day traditional Yoruba week) falls on a Friday, the Timi provides food and drinks for the Ṣango worshippers who come to make sacrifices to the orisa in the palace, dance, and play Ṣango's Bata drums. This special event is called Jimọ Oloyin.

100. HRH Munirudeen Adeṣọla Lawal, Timi of Ẹdẹland, interview by author, April 10, 2017.

101. The Timi has developed several other ways to support Muslim and Christian groups as well, such as inviting prominent pastors and Christian leaders to hold a service in the palace on the first Sunday of every year or a similar event on important Muslim holidays such as Laylat ul-Qadr in Ramadan, but these types of ceremonies are fairly common across Yorubaland and not specific to Ẹdẹ.

102. Reverend Nathaniel Oyewole, interview by author, September 7, 2016.

103. HRH Munirudeen Adeṣọla Lawal, Timi of Ẹdẹland, interview by author, April 10, 2017.

104. Chief Imam Mas'ud Ajakewole, interview by author, March 3, 2017.

105. Olupona, *City of 201 Gods*, 260.

106. Babatunde, "I Never Dreamt"; HRH Munirudeen Adeṣọla Lawal, Timi of Ẹdẹland, interview by author, April 10, 2017.

107. I was not able to confirm precisely which groups were involved in this specific issue, but members of the Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria were definitely involved,

and the town chiefs and Timi identified many of the agitators as members of the small but growing Salafi movement or perhaps the Tablighi Jamaat movement, which will be addressed more in the conclusion.

108. HRH Munirudeen Adeṣọla Lawal, Timi of Ẹdẹland, interview by author, April 10, 2017.

109. Oyeweso, "'Jesus Is a Stranger Here,'" 15.

110. Oyeweso, "'Jesus Is a Stranger Here,'" 16.

111. HRH Munirudeen Adeṣọla Lawal, Timi of Ẹdẹland, interview by author, April 10, 2017; Chief Imam Mas'ud Ajakewole, interview by author, March 3, 2017; Oyeweso, "'Jesus Is a Stranger Here,'" 17.

112. In fact, even after centuries, a fully satisfactory relationship between church and state has largely proven elusive, and Cavanaugh argued rather persuasively that the development of a religious/secular binary accomplished little in terms of curbing violence but rather served the interests of nation-states by effectively transferring loyalty and acceptable violence to their domain. Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*. See also Asad, *Formations of the Secular*.

113. Vaughan, "Chieftaincy Politics in Nigeria," in Vaughan, ed., *Indigenous Political Structures and Governance*, 49.

114. Comaroff and Comaroff, *Politics of Custom*; Vaughan, *Indigenous Political Structures and Governance*; Vaughan, *Nigerian Chiefs*.

115. Vaughan, *Nigerian Chiefs*, 210.

116. HRH Munirudeen Adeṣọla Lawal, Timi of Ẹdẹland, interview by author, April 10, 2017.

117. Vaughan, *Nigerian Chiefs*, 213.

118. Saburi Biobaku, "Political Leadership and National Development: Traditional Leaders in Contemporary Nigeria," paper presented at the Conference on Leadership and National Development in Nigeria, Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1984, pp. 8–9.

119. Araba Ṣangodokun Onifade, interview by author, March 31, 2017. Furthermore, the term for *politician* (onișelu) used to be somewhat pejorative during and immediately following the colonial era, as it implied that politicians were more like managers or administrators lacking sacred and genuine authority.

120. Abiodun Fagbemi, "Ife, Ilorin Monarchs Want Greater Role for Tradition in Governance," *Guardian*, August 11, 2016, https://guardian.ng/news/ife-ilorin-monarchs-want-greater-role-for-tradition-in-governance/.

121. For more on this history see Vaughan, *Nigerian Chiefs*, chaps. 3, 4, and 5.

122. She even suggested that the recent resurgence in orișa traditions in the state was likely due to his actions, or rather to the orișa "using" him to accomplish their goals. Iya Ọṣun Oluwatoyin Salaudeen, interview by author, August 15, 2016.

123. Asad, *Formations of the Secular*; Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*.

124. Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?*, 184.

125. For example, the Timi was reluctant to claim credit for Ẹdẹ's reputation as a peaceful town and instead said that it was the work of Almighty God.

126. Ajibade, "Ṣango's Thunder," 93.

1. Olupona, "Response to Comments," 504–5.

2. Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse, one of the most important Muslim leaders in African history, even spent time in Ẹdẹ, and the important place of Ẹdẹ within the Christ Apostolic Church and its associated pilgrimage site is addressed in chapter 1.

3. There is no record of Ifa divination proclaiming Timi Laoye a Christian or future ọba, but a Christian prophet did declare he would one day ascend the throne in Ẹdẹ. Laoye, *Story of My Installation*, 15.

4. However, early Muslim communities did face discrimination before Timi Lagunju took the throne. Balogun, "Compound Life and Religious Control," 96.

5. Mazrui, *Africans*.

6. Matory, "English Professors of Brazil," 98.

7. This still continues to a degree with Muslim Brazilian families participating in important Catholic festivals such as the feast day of Nosso Senhor do Bomfim. Law, "Yoruba Liberated Slaves," 358; Lindsay, "To Return to the Bosom," 37.

8. This categorization of traditions is unsurprisingly similar to what has taken place in Brazil with Candomblé's problematic and close association with folklore, tourism, and regional/historical culture.

9. Peel, "Islam and Christianity," 4.

10. Wariboko, "King's Five Bodies," 483–90.

11. Olupona, *Kingship, Religion, and Rituals*, 83–85, 169–73.

12. Berger, *Sacred Canopy*.

13. Gordon, *Invisible Agents*, 202.

14. Marshall, *Political Spiritualities*; Obadare, *Pentecostal Republic*.

15. Smith, *Meaning and End of Religion*, 195.

16. Olupona, "Response to Comments," 504.

17. Jones and Nolte, "Everyday Inter-Religious Encounters," 241.

18. Peel, *Christianity, Islam, and Orișa Religion*, 192–213; Marshall, *Political Spiritualities*, 222; Larkin and Meyer, "Pentecostalism, Islam and Culture."

19. Thurston, *Salafism in Nigeria*, 10; Larkin and Meyer, "Pentecostalism, Islam and Culture," 310–11. The relatively recent declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation also poses a challenge to this view. See Obadare, *Pentecostal Republic*, for a thorough explanation of how the rise of Pentecostalism in Nigeria is enmeshed in a struggle for political power.

20. Larkin and Meyer, "Pentecostalism, Islam and Culture," 293, 299.

21. Larkin and Meyer, "Pentecostalism, Islam and Culture," 294.

22. Larkin and Meyer, "Pentecostalism, Islam and Culture," 309.

23. Thurston, *Salafism in Nigeria*, 92–95.

24. Ahl as-Sunna is a shortening of the phrase Ahl as-Sunna wa-l-Jama'a, or "People of the Prophet's Tradition and Muslim Community." Thurston, *Salafism in Nigeria*, 5; Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 17.

25. Although the distinctions between categories within Salafism have been strongly challenged recently, a popular model separates them into three groups: "purists" who

prefer to separate themselves from the messy business of politics, "politicos" who view it as their responsibility to reform politics along Salafi lines in a nonviolent manner, and "jihadis" who are willing to use violence to establish their perceived order of Islamic orthodoxy. Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," 207–39.

26. One Salafi leader in Ẹdẹ said this global conversion had already begun, as Salafism was growing in all corners of Africa and even taking over Europe too.

27. While this tends to be the standard theology of most Pentecostal churches and members in Nigeria, some who are involved in Pentecostalism are much more fluid in how they understand their ability to combine Pentecostalism with other traditions, religious and not, as demonstrated in Mozambique. Premawardhana, *Faith in Flux*, 93–115.

28. Olupona, "Response to Comments," 505.

29. Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 64.

30. Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 268. For example, many if not most of the holders of traditional Islamic titles in Ẹdẹ are Sufi, their lineages have been linked with the power of the Timi and Islamic offices for generations, and the Timi must approve and install these titleholders.

31. Ogen and Balogun, "Baptist Church in Ede," 152.

32. Recent figures estimate the Pentecostals' numbers at anywhere between 25 percent and 36 percent of Christians in Ẹdẹ. Jones and Nolte, "Everyday Inter-Religious Encounters," 232.

33. However, Beier did note that the Ọṣun festival was either no longer celebrated, or at least was not celebrated with as much pomp as some of the other festivals in Ẹdẹ. Beier, *Year of Sacred Festivals*, 6.

34. Abiodun, *Yoruba Art and Language*, 175.

35. Ogunnaike, "Damned If You Do."

36. For more see Capone, "Le pai-de-santo."

37. At the same time, many of those who are not part of Candomblé's elite circles are more likely to embrace syncretism, and change in these communities will likely occur at a slower rate. They, of course, lack the type of institutional power to change the tradition from within and to project an image of it to the outside world.

38. Up-to-date information on this increasingly important issue can be tracked on the website of the International Commission to Combat Religious Racism and the Working Group on Race, Justice, and Africana Religions, https://www.religiousracism.org (accessed April 30, 2026).

39. Boas, "Expanding the Public Square," 371.

40. Boaz, *Banning Black Gods*, 23.

41. Boaz, *Banning Black Gods*, 23.

42. His religious identity and emphasis on religious freedom formed an essential part of his campaign. "Deputado Federal—Pai Robinho," Blogspot.com, http://deputadofederalrobinho.blogspot.com/2018/?view=classic (accessed April 30, 2026).

43. Kijuma also criticizes the exclusivist tendencies of some in each boat who "consider themselves to be the chosen ones, sending the others to hell." Mugane, "Odyssey of ʿAjamī," 206.

44. Sylviane Diouf, Michael Gomez, and Edward Curtis are among the few who have attempted such a methodology and scope. See Diouf, *Servants of Allah*; Gomez, *Black Crescent*; Curtis, *Call of Bilal*.

45. Ogunnaike, "Transatlantic Genealogy."

46. Thornton, *Africa and Africans* and "Religious and Ceremonial Life."

47. However, the office of the ọba was re-created in Yoruba/Aku communities in Sierra Leone in the nineteenth century and likely played an important role in the reconfiguration and reimagination of primarily Yoruba communities in Cuba and Brazil. See Ogunnaike, "Yoruba Political Ontology."

48. Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*.

49. Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*, 227.

50. Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 15.

51. Dubuisson, *Western Construction of Religion*, 14.

52. Humphrey Fisher, for example, describes Islam as a "juggernaut," and while he does not argue that Islam did not need to sweep away all other traditions in its wake, it does parallel the triumphalist perspective often ascribed to the expansion of Islam and Christianity in Africa. Fisher, "Juggernaut's Apologia."

53. Matthew Wright, "Revealed: African Goddess of Water and Fertility That Blesses Mothers with TWINS Who Beyoncé Paid Homage to at Last Night's Grammy's (and in Lemonade)," *Daily Mail* (US edition), February 13, 2017, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4221100/Was-Oshun-Beyonce-s-Grammy-Award-inspiration.html.

54. Kristine Phillips, "The Role an Old Case About Ritual Goat Sacrifices Played in Blocking Trump's Travel Ban," *Washington Post*, February 12, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2017/02/12/the-role-an-old-florida-case-on-ritual-goat-sacrifices-played-in-blocking-trumps-travel-ban/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.ad51743c475f.

55. On gender, see Ogunnaike, "Mamalawo?"

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