

A Century of Interplay Between Islam and Christianity

In this chapter I go further into the complex and ever-evolving patterns of cooperation and conflict, of resemblance and difference, between Yoruba Christians and Muslims.¹ There is no fixed correspondence between these two pairs of terms such that resemblance must go with cooperation and difference with conflict. Chapter 7 explored the evolution of a situation wherein potential differences between Christians and Muslims were mainly overridden by resemblances grounded in the primordial values of community. If Émile Durkheim was our theoretical guide there, in chapter 8 it was Max Weber, since its focus was on how differences arising from within each religious tradition can work to challenge and disrupt communal amity, though how far this potential is realized depends on many contingent factors. The two movements described in those two chapters can be seen as working against each other, but they do not stand in a dialectical relationship such as we can see in the Yoruba reception of Christianity—missionary preaching (thesis), the “pagan” African response (antithesis), African Christianity (synthesis)—since all the time they run concurrently. So does the third movement to be explored in this chapter, continuously intersecting with the other two, so that all three must be taken together. The complex of forces of attraction and repulsion that is the Yoruba religious field may thus be viewed from three different angles. Each hinges on a particular key factor—community values, the ideological thrust of the world religions, the pragmatic values imposed on religions as they compete for popular favor—that sets limits to the historical working out of the other factors.

What concerns us now is resemblance arising from conflict rather than conflict arising from difference. There are many forms of sociation, to use Georg Simmel’s useful term, in which processes of conflictual or competitive interaction

can produce this effect.² One example would be systems of warring states, particularly those within a common cultural zone like those of ancient Greece or precolonial Yorubaland, where emulation leads to the adoption of ideas or practices from one's rivals because they appear more attractive or effective. Another would be markets, particularly as regards the competition between producers to command market share. There are ambiguities here, since at some times commercial competition has been seen as antithetical to military conflict, whereas at others it has been seen as itself a nonviolent kind of warfare.³ The religious competition that concerns us here resembles market competition rather than the outright religious war that tends to occur during periods of general social crisis, since as a routine activity it is culturally framed. In the present case, the framing is provided by Yoruba rules (which we saw affecting the general practice of Yoruba religion in chapter 7, above.) Their most significant feature is that they require the world religions to pursue their conversionary ambitions peaceably, before the court of Yoruba opinion. Islam and Christianity thus have to engage in a paradoxical double struggle: against each other to win converts, a struggle that impels them to make compromises with the ambient religious culture of the Yoruba; and against that same culture, as they strive to realize their own distinctive religious ideals. (See chapter 8.) The paradox has become even more acute since the 1980s, with the emergence of radical Islamic reformism and neo-Pentecostalism—both because they are more anxious to realize their own distinctive visions and because they are more driven by the pressure of competition to borrow from each other in order to win Yoruba favor.

Competition within a common framework creates homologies between entities that were previously more different, as with the use of a charged language of the conquest/annexation of the public space of Nigeria by the more militant forms of Islam and Christianity, or with the pattern of recurrent religious violence involving revenge attacks, such as has occurred in (say) Plateau State.⁴ But the form of competition that is most relevant to the Yoruba context is that between rival producers to supply a market. This idea carries these principal implications:

1. The overall situation is plural: that is, one with a number of religious suppliers who have to compete—not by the direct exercise of power or force on one another but by attracting the favor of the members of a religious public.
2. The members of the religious public are like consumers, disposed and able to choose between the various religious options that the suppliers make available to them.
3. Religion itself tends to be viewed instrumentally, as providing gratifications of particular kinds that the members of the religious public will judge for themselves rather than as a system of pregiven ends that obviate the need for making religious choices.

4. While the pressure of competition to meet the demands of a particular market tends to encourage convergences between the suppliers, there is also a countertendency to product differentiation, creating niches wherein general competition is reduced.⁵

As a model for the interaction of religions, the market is one that many religions will be uneasy with and that probably no religion will find entirely acceptable. It is perhaps not surprising that in Yorubaland neither Christians nor Muslims are entirely happy to acknowledge the extent of the resultant mutual borrowing that has occurred. But of all faiths, born-again Christianity is perhaps most likely to find the market congenial, since it is itself the product of the most demanding religious marketplace in the world, the USA, from which it has adopted many techniques of self-promotion. Conversely, Islam would seem likely to be more resistant to the idea of a religious market than almost any other religion, since in its heyday (and in some mainly Muslim countries to this day) Islam was able to impose a social framework for its coexistence with other faiths, which deployed the severest sanctions against Muslims' converting to them.⁶ Conversion, in Islam, was seen as strictly a one-way street. The fact that under Yoruba conditions two-way conversion between Islam and one or another faith has been common, with the *alfa* proving themselves to be highly effective religious entrepreneurs, has not erased the idea from the minds of quite a few Muslims that this is not, Islamically speaking, how things ought to be.

The notion of a religious marketplace does not merely prove useful as a model but has some anchorage within Yoruba culture. *Aiye Ẹ̀jo, ọ̀run n'ile* (The world is a market; heaven is home) runs a well-known adage. But this also serves to remind us of the countertruth that the idea of the market cannot encompass all aspects of the religious situation. Since *ọ̀run* (heaven) is the source of the Yoruba word for God (*Ọ̀lọ̀run*), the adage implies that Yoruba religion is not *just* a pragmatic search for benefits but is also a place to feel at home. There is the further implication that religions are not infinitely flexible in their capacity to respond to market pressures. They also have a built-in inclination to strive to be true to themselves, or (in other words) to be constrained by their own ideally conceived pasts, as chapter 8 showed.

EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY: MUSLIM-TO-CHRISTIAN INFLUENCES

For the first half-century of their coexistence, from the 1840s, Islam and Christianity seem to have little influenced each other. Each projected itself in its distinctive way, though the mass of Yoruba people, still unattached to either one, started to make comparisons in terms of their own criteria of religious value, which would in due course shape the interplay between them. It was not until the first decades of

colonial rule, as the two faiths came more closely into contact, especially in Lagos, that a two-way influence between them showed itself. What Islam then started to adopt from Christianity was more external: Western-style schooling (the better to counter Christianity's educational advantages), something of its organizational forms, even the imitation of its impressive church buildings. From the 1920s there emerged a distinctively Yoruba style of mosque architecture in which Muslim liturgical requirements were reconciled with Christian architectural forms, such as Gothic windows, twin western towers, pillared naves, Brazilian-style decorative features.⁷ This lasted till the 1980s, when what may be called an international Islamic style took over. The two styles can be seen almost side by side in Nnamdi Azikiwe Street in central Lagos, in the vast Central Mosque built in the 1980s, with its four lofty minarets disposed around a domed prayer hall, and the little Alli Oloko mosque, completed in 1931, whose two square towers make it look like a church.

But the Christian borrowings were more to do with the religious essentials, particularly with what might be learned from Islam about making prayer more effective for personal needs. Already in the 1890s, in a circle around the Rev. James Johnson, a number of younger clergy had started to learn Arabic in order the better to understand and counter Islam.⁸ The most active of these were M. S. Cole, who later made the first Yoruba translation of the Koran, and T. A. J. Ogunbiyi, who wrote a number of pamphlets and tracts aimed at Muslims in English, Yoruba, or Arabic.⁹ As a Lagos indigene and the son of a chief, Ogunbiyi seems to have been more active in taking steps to counter the popular appeal of Islam than any of his contemporaries.¹⁰ We may well suppose that the example of the *hajj*, though very few Yoruba Muslims had then made it, influenced his decision to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1912, which caused a great stir—thus anticipating the many Yoruba Christians who nowadays make pilgrimages to Jerusalem. In 1908 there was a formal motion at the Anglican synod expressing concern about Islam's recent advances and speculating about the reasons for it;¹¹ but the most effective responses came spontaneously from the grass roots. It is significant that their crucibles were Lagos, where most missions had their headquarters but whose indigenous population had become predominantly Muslim; and Ijebu, which in the wake of its conquest by the British was the scene of a strong competitive surge of the two faiths. Among the Christian responses two stand out:

Powerful names of God. These have an indigenous source in the *oriki* or praise names of the deities, enumerating their powerful attributes, which were invoked to elicit their favor and support.¹² In traditional practice, they were much more commonly addressed to the *oriṣa* than to God. But the most immediate precedent was the Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God long established in Muslim devotion. Beginning with Rev. S. M. Abiodun's *Akojọ Orukọ Ọlọrun* (Collection of the Names of God, 1919), there was a flurry of little pamphlets over the next decade

or so, such as J. O. Shopekan's *The English-Yoruba Dictionary of the Names of God* (which gives no less than 209 names) or Victor White's *The Elementary Names of God*.¹³ The names are given in Yoruba and Hebrew (or apparent Hebrew), such as El-Shaddai, Yavah-Shammah, Eloī-Magen; and there is a lot of semantic overlap between the Yoruba epithets and the Yoruba renditions of the Arabic names used in Muslim prayer pamphlets down to this day, as with *Ọba Alagbara* (Mighty King) for *al-Aziz*, or *Ọba Olupese* (God the Provider) for *ar-Razaq*.¹⁴ Shopekan also provides a weekly schedule for using the names, each one to be said three times at three regular prayer times each day (which suggests the influence of Islam's five canonical daily prayers). The invocations found their way into the little booklets of prayers for personal use that also appeared about this time, such as Ogunbiyi's *Adura Tetedamilohun* (Prayers for Quick Answers) or *Awon Adura Banusọ ati ti Ọfọ* (Prayers for Private Use and Incantation). Here a prayer *fun wahala ẹjọ* (for legal troubles) is addressed to JAH-SHAFAT (= *Oluwa Onidajo*, Lord of Judgment), and one for *iponjukiponju* (every kind of need) addresses JAH-RAHAM (= *Oluwa Alanu*, Merciful Lord), perhaps with an echo of the invocation of God as *al-Rahman*, *al-Rahim* (The Merciful, the Compassionate) in the opening verse of the Koran. A positively rococo elaboration of this phenomenon was the seal names, or powerful invocations of God revealed in visions, which were a speciality of Prophet Ositelu's Church of the Lord (Aladura) in the early 1930s. Here we find unmistakable phonetic allusions to Arabic, as with *Ollahhumumjarrar* (which evokes *Allahumma*, O God) or *Arrabalhabad* (cf. *al-Rabb*, the Lord).¹⁵ What is also paralleled in Islam, and particularly in the ritual practices of the Sufi brotherhoods, is the notion that there is special power or virtue in verbal formulas of praise of God (*wird*) that have been revealed to the Sufi *wali* (saint).¹⁶

Night vigils. People nowadays, when they want to exemplify the influence of born-again Christianity on Islam, will sometimes point to the latter's adoption of vigils or watch-night services. But this is almost certainly a case of a debt being repaid. The historical question that no one has ever thought to ask is: Where did night vigils in Nigeria's churches come from, since they were not part of the parent evangelical missionary tradition? I feel the answer probably lies in the first major Aladura church, the Cherubim and Seraphim, founded in central Lagos in 1925.¹⁷ When I first saw their *ile adura* (house of prayer) at Oke Seni, in Ibadan, in 1964, I was very struck that inside it felt more like a mosque than a church: no chairs, white robes, removal of shoes and washing of feet on entry, full obeisance to the floor in prayer. Regular congregational services did not take place there but only individual prayers, as well as the climactic service of the week, a watch-night service of several hours over Saturday–Sunday. All this was said to follow the pattern set by the original Seraphim Society in Lagos. Now although there was no mission precedent for the idea that nocturnal prayer is particularly powerful, a form of optional

prayer at dead of night called *tahajjud*—quite distinct from the five canonical daily prayers—is ancient in Islam and is recommended in several *hadith* as highly efficacious. But *tahajjud* is an individual, not a communal, form of prayer, so is it likely to have served as a model? Here it is pertinent, as I learned from two Muslim informants, that the first major modernist Muslim group, Ahmadiyya (which was brought to Lagos by missionaries from the Punjab in 1916),¹⁸ introduced an innovation: to help one another realize the benefits of *tahajjud*, Ahmadis would go round in a group to other members' houses to wake them up in time to say the prayer, thus giving it a communal dimension. The adoption of a modified form of *tahajjud* fits the pattern of other Islamic borrowings by the Seraphim.

Perhaps the most surprising of all the cases of Muslim influence on an Aladura group concerns the former village theocracy known as the Holy Apostles of Aiyetoro among the Ilaje on the coast of far southeastern Yorubaland.¹⁹ Founded in 1947, this was an offshoot of the Cherubim and Seraphim, which had spread eastward from Lagos along the lagoon in the late 1920s and early 1930s, taking on in many places the character of an antiwitchcraft movement. Aiyetoro was exceptional in that it practiced community of goods and the abrogation of normal residential patterns under the Spirit-led rule of a sacred *oba*, which brought it to a high level of material prosperity. By the 1980s it had largely abandoned its "communist" features, though most of its religious practices were retained. The church's prophets speak in a form of tongues known as *ede ẹmi* (language of the spirit), which phonetically has an Arabic ring to it, and which is even referred to sometimes as *kewu* (to recite the Koran). Children's names are given through the dictation of the Spirit and include a number of Muslim ones: Sanni, Sadiku, Tawakalitu, Awawu, and so on. One of the community's founding elders was actually known as Baba Lemomu (Father Imam). The white costumes of the community's apostles and prophets, complete with turbans, have a distinct resemblance to those commonly worn by *alfa*. Burial usage diverges from Yoruba Christian norms, being notably low-key and rather like what reformist Muslims press for: plain, unmarked graves with no elaborate mourning. Yet paradoxically, the Islamic provenance of these traits is not perceived as such by the Holy Apostles. In fact, Ilaje has perhaps a lower proportion of local Muslims than anywhere else in Yorubaland, so these "Islamic" practices can hardly be a local adaptation. It is more likely that they arise from an accentuation of traits carried from the Seraphim source in Lagos, possibly enhanced by their passage along the lagoon, whose middle stretch is dominated by the strongly Muslim town of Epe.

ALADURA AND THE SUFI BROTHERHOODS

From the mid-1930s, for several decades, there was little fresh influence of Islam and Christianity on each other. After the turbulence of the Aladura revivals, a fairly stable religious dispensation came into being, wherein new developments

were incremental rather than radical and came from within each religious tradition. I need to run over these briefly if we are to understand the religious terrain on which the forces of the last thirty years have impacted.

The Aladura movement consists of a large number of churches, many of them quite small, distributed between two poles or tendencies that can be called the White-garment and the Apostolic or Old-Pentecostal. The first group, so named from the white prayer gowns that they wear to church, employ expressive rituals of a more eclectic and homegrown quality, with (as I have noted) a distinct Islamic influence. It includes the Cherubim and Seraphim, Josiah Ositelu's Church of the Lord (Aladura), and from the late 1940s, the Celestial Church of Christ, which originated in the French colony of Dahomey and is today the most widespread and typical instance of the White-garment group. The other tendency has been more continuously influenced by Euro-American sectarianism, beginning with the ascetic Faith Tabernacle in the 1920s, followed by the Apostolic Church in the 1930s, which first introduced specifically Pentecostal teaching. The Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) is now the largest church of this group. From the 1950s, successive waves of Pentecostal influence came in, increasingly from the USA, and in the 1970s this tradition melded with a new movement of interdenominational evangelical piety that had emerged on university campuses.²⁰ Thus neo-Pentecostalism or born-again Christianity was formed, growing rapidly in strength against the background of the crisis of the Nigerian state in the 1980s. Though born-again Christianity has important Aladura roots—its biggest single body, the Redeemed Christian Church of God, is actually a much-transformed breakaway from one of the oldest Seraphim congregations in Lagos²¹—it has also tended to define itself against the Aladura, especially the Celestial Church of Christ, criticizing them for having allowed themselves to be corrupted by demonic influences.

There was initially no direct Muslim equivalent or response to Aladura. It did not seem that there needed to be, since the *alfa* were already deemed effective providers of healing, protection, and guidance.²² But there are some parallels to be drawn between Aladura and a major element in Yoruba Islam that grew strongly at the end of the colonial period and into early independence: the Sufi brotherhoods, especially Tijaniyya.²³ Though these had adherents among the *ulama* from the end of the nineteenth century and by the 1930s could claim some senior figures, they were still very much limited to respected *alfa* and elders. Sufi esoteric knowledge was judged just too powerful for the *hoi polloi* and the young: "If a young man joined the *tariqa* [brotherhood], he would be loved by God, and this would cause his early death."²⁴ Only in the 1950s did a modified form of Tijaniyya, promoted by Shaykh Ibrahim Niass, from Kaolack in Senegal, become a mass movement among the Yoruba. This followed developments in Northern Nigeria, where Reformed Tijaniyya started to take off in the late 1940s.

In Ibadan, a key vector was Shehu Usman Lanase (d. 1954), who had returned as a young man from the Hausa town of Zaria.²⁵ He was a controversial figure, who fell out with the elders at the central mosque and seceded with his followers to establish his own *jumat* mosque at Aremo quarter, where he encouraged the mass of his followers to adhere to Reformed Tijaniyya. But the first major charismatic figure in the Ibadan Tijaniyya was Alhaji Shehu Ahmed, of the Bere quarter, right in the center of town, who had spent many years at Kaolack and married a daughter of Ibrahim Niass. By the early 1960s his claim to wield esoteric powers had drawn many to him—like ants around a cup of sugar, according to one witness—but eventually he got so out of hand that that he lost credit altogether.²⁶ The next major Tijani charismatic was a Hausa from Kano named Sani Awwal, also a son-in-law of Niass, who came to Ibadan, first to the Hausa quarter of Sabo; but finding Tijaniyya already well established there, he eventually settled at Madina, on the southern edge of Ibadan, a complex established by Alhaji Adebolu, a wealthy trader and zealous Muslim, not an *alfa* but still with a reputation for powerful prayer. He became Awwal's material patron, supporter, and friend: their tombs are now to be seen in adjacent rooms at Madina.²⁷ Adebolu even built a house for Shaykh Ibrahim Niass, who declared him to be his representative in Ibadan. Niass died in 1975, and when Awwal and Adebolu followed him a few years later, Madina's influence faded, and Ibadan lost what for two decades or so had been a mini-Mecca (or at least mini-Kaolack). Tijaniyya too has perhaps passed its apogee, though it remains an important presence in Muslim life in Ibadan.²⁸

Tijaniyya is not so much an organization as a loose network of initiates, spiritual clientages of individual *muqaddams* (initiating masters, otherwise styled shaykhs) who trace their authority back through a chain of initiators to the founder. Some of these have a *zawiya* (lodge) where the initiates meet for their spiritual exercises, but in most cases in Ibadan Tijaniyya initiates simply attend their local mosque and perform these exercises together after routine Friday or evening prayers. Tijaniyya has no regular head in any town, though a particular shaykh may enjoy exceptional prestige and influence, as happened with Sani Awwal at Madina in the 1960s and 1970s. The perennial irony of Sufism is that what began as a search for a closer relationship with God, through ascetic disciplines leading to esoteric knowledge, was converted under the pressure of popular demand into an attributed mystical power that was available for all the usual mundane objectives of Yoruba devotion. What had been a technique of spiritual empowerment largely confined to the *ulama* acquired a mass character—appropriate to the age of nationalist mobilization in which it occurred—as a flood of lay initiates looked for material benefits from their masters. When Ibrahim Niass visited Ibadan around 1971–72 and attended Friday prayers at the central mosque, people are said to have fought one another—non-Muslims as well as Muslims—to capture some of the water from his ablutions, as a medium of his *baraka*. The source of this demand

lay much more in Yoruba than in Islamic culture. It recalls nothing so much as the power attributed to the water blessed by Prophet Babalola in the Aladura revival of 1930–31, known as *omi iye* (water of life)—or, going further back, to the water of the river Ogun at Abeokuta sanctified by the prophetess Akere in 1855–56, which attracted large crowds over many months.²⁹

In the 1980s, the Sufi brotherhoods came under sustained attack as a corruption of Islam. The onslaught came from various groups of Salafist inclination that are now grouped in a body calling itself Ahl us-Sunna (People of the Way [of the Prophet]). The main influences came from the growing number of graduates returned from Saudi universities and from Izala, the Northern organization directed to the eradication of *bid'a* (innovation).³⁰ A great many *alfa* in Ibadan have been initiated into Tijaniyya and even when they are not active any more in its collective exercises, they still see value in it and may still recite the *dhikr* (pl. *adhkar*: the verbal formulas of remembrance that are the substance of the ritual) privately for their own spiritual benefit. Apart from the ritual innovations that attract vehement condemnation from Salafists,³¹ even mainstream *ulama* have reservations about several features of Tijaniyya that have a definite resemblance to what can be found in Aladura churches: extraordinary claims to charisma by some of its shaykhs, the demand for efficacious prayer and the performance of miracles, and the attainment of ecstatic states through its rituals. One educated cleric, who had been an active Tijani in his youth, told me he became deeply worried by the trancelike condition that the repetitive chanting of the *dhikr* induced among initiates. For him, this kind of ecstasy did not sit well with a proper conception of Muslim worship.

The treatment of the Sufi brotherhoods by Yoruba Muslim scholars is ambivalent. On one side, they have misgivings about the impact of popular demand on them:³²

Many people accepted the Shaykh [Ibrahim Niass] because they wanted to know God . . . some others accepted [him] in order to acquire *sirr* (secrets) about God's name which they wanted for efficacious prayers . . . others because they thought they would become rich . . . [who] were eventually disappointed. . . . The Shaykh used to discourage his followers from praying to God for material needs and advised them to render a selfless service to God.

On the other side, they are aware that the permeation of the religious life of the brotherhoods by these pragmatic values has served to attach people to Islam:³³

The Qadiriyyah clerics contributed in no small scale to the conversion of mysticism to local traditional practices . . . [as a result] the high ambitions of the classical Sufis have been watered down to a large extent. It however serves as a means to retain within the fold of Islam some converts who if failed by the Muslim clergy would not hesitate to seek aid even from heathen priests and may get attracted to other religions.

The unidentified competition alluded to here must have been mainly the Aladura. They and the Sufis did not so much imitate each other as draw each on its own tradition's resources to meet the same popular demand. The born-againists would present a more direct and formidable challenge.

The shift in the religious climate, as seen from a Salafist Muslim perspective, can be gauged from the successive introductions to a best-selling Muslim prayer manual, Abdul-Raheem Shittu's *Muslim Prayers for Everyday Success*.³⁴ In the first edition (1985), he wrote (p. 10):

There is no doubt that in the last fifty years or so, a great majority of Muslims have fallen victim to the devilish antics of non-muslim spiritualists and jujumen such as 'Aladuras', Celestial Churches, 'Babalawos' and other magicians in their quest to solve the myriads of social, economic, matrimonial, spiritual and other problems which inevitably confront man in everyday life.

The opposition here is still seen as a mixture of Aladura-Christian and traditionalist agencies. In the preface to the fourth edition (2007), Shittu makes two points that show the current of things in the intervening two decades (p. 41):

In contemporary times, one observes the evolution of many so-called 'Muslim Prayer Groups' in the name of *Alaslatu* and so on. It is unfortunate that when you watch what goes on in some of these prayer-sessions, there is hardly any difference between them and Christian Revival Services with the peculiar characteristics of singing, dancing, free-mixing between males and females, improper and inadequate covering of the *awra* or beautiful parts of the female participants and so on. These are all *Bid'a* and/or sins as Muslims are not permitted to copy Christians in their mode of prayers and other acts of worship.

Shittu also apologizes for some *bid'a* of his own in the earlier editions that he has now removed, namely "the interpolation of the names of certain evil Jinns with those of Allaah and His Prophet . . . and certain prayer-methods objectionable to the true spirit of Islam" (p. 34). It is noteworthy that, although he clearly sees the problem posed by Christian initiatives, Shittu refuses to respond by slavishly imitating them. Rather, he sees the only way forward as being to cleave even more strictly to prayer texts that are explicitly authorized in the Koran or in *hadith*. These are given in the Arabic original, in a roman transliteration of the Arabic, and in an English translation, but not in Yoruba. Supplicants without a serious command of Arabic (i.e., nearly everyone, including Shittu himself) thus have to select the text that addresses their problem from the English and to use the Arabic transliteration in uttering the prayer.

Here market behavior is limited by constraints arising from within the religion itself. The idea of prayer handbooks for people's quotidian practical use, written in Yoruba or English, was pioneered by Christians, in the form of little pamphlets like those written by T. A. J. Ogunbiyi and others before 1920. Over the years, these

got more elaborate and at some point started being emulated by Muslims. Shittu found a niche in the market waiting to be filled. With its successive editions, his *Muslim Prayers for Everyday Success* got longer and longer, and it is now (at 482 pages) the most substantial such handbook in either religion that I have come across. But Shittu's increasingly Salafist views have set limits on how far he is prepared to supply people with what they want. He told me that he had turned down the request of a woman who had wanted him to reprint an earlier edition that had included a prayer invoking some powerful jinns, which she had found highly efficacious. His decision to stick to scriptural prayer texts in Arabic may perhaps have a declining appeal in a market wherein the educated urban young, in particular, are attracted to the prayer styles of Pentecostalism.

MUSLIM ENTREPRENEURS OF THE SPIRIT

One can hardly exaggerate the variety of products on offer in the Yoruba religious marketplace,³⁵ adapted to a range of tastes and different contexts—though what is common to most of them is their concern to offer spiritual solutions to people's mundane needs. For the last thirty years the flow of influence has definitely been from Christianity to Islam—yet though this has coincided with the rise of born-again Christianity, Aladura models are still widely emulated. It appears that the former appeal more to a younger, better-educated constituency, whereas the latter speak more to older, more traditional-minded people, particularly women. This has apparently been accompanied by a significant net flow of converts from Islam to Christianity, to which Muslims have responded, both “through the introduction of Islamic alternatives”³⁶ and through the direct but selective appropriation of Christian idioms and practices.

At the top of a dusty side street in Ibadan, I used to pass a tiny mosque—barely more than a room—though at first I thought it was a church of some kind, since it had a board outside announcing its services, which *ratibi* mosques in Ibadan do not usually have:

Below a line of Arabic script, it announces itself as *Jamuiyatu Qudiratu Lilhai Fidini Isilamu*, a rough transliteration adjusted to Yoruba pronunciation of Congregation of the Power of God through the Muslim Religion, and under that, in Yoruba, as *Ijo Şehu Fatai Agbara Qlorun Oşupa Imoḷe* (Church of Shehu Fatayi of the Power of God, Moon of Muslims). Below is a heading *Eto Isin* (Order of Service), a phrase normally used in Christian contexts at the top of the program for a funeral or commemorative event but here used to refer to the weekly services held at the mosque, which are then listed. Over Saturday night is *Aisun Adura* (Prayer Watch night); on Sunday morning is *Asalatu* (Public Prayer); on Friday late afternoon is a prayer session for pregnant women, and at Thursday noon is one for those seeking employment, children, or the like. There is no mention of the canonical prayers of Islam. The format of the services is what one might find in any small Aladura church, and (with the exception of

the word *Asalatu*) the terminology and spelling used are Christian throughout (e.g., *aisun* rather than *tahajjud* for “watch night”). The Christian idiom of it all is not surprising, granted that Fatayi, the leader of the group, is a young man whose spiritual mentor was a prophet of the Celestial Church of Christ. He encouraged Fatayi by telling him of a vision that his little building would one day become a *jumat* mosque.

The active Christian input here is perhaps unusual, though it surely indicates the sense of common objectives, pursued within shared assumptions about the world of spirit, that underlies the religious quest of all Yoruba.³⁷ It shows that many Yoruba people, of either world faith, are perfectly ready to see divine power as manifesting itself through practitioners of the other one.³⁸

Elsewhere, the adoption by Muslims of Christian, especially Aladura, models arises more spontaneously—as if they have become parts of a common Yoruba stock, just as over a century ago a significant part of the Muslim religious lexicon was adopted by Christianity. Moreover, this is facilitated by the fact that underlying it are templates for religious action derived from *oriṣa* religion (though this is something that neither Muslims nor Christians are very ready to admit).

A case in point is the Fadilullah Muslim Mission, founded in Osogbo by Alhaja Sheidat Mujidat Adeoye in 1997.³⁹ She was twenty-seven when one day at work—trading in rice and beans—she became possessed. Her shouts and screams subsided into a recital of *Lahi lah illah ʾllah* (There is no god but Allah), and after regaining normal consciousness she fasted and prayed for seven days. Mujidat interpreted her experience as a sign from God to leave her trade and instead to pray and prophesy for those who came to her for help: women more than men, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Her following grew to the point that she and her husband built a mosque (able to accommodate two thousand people) and engaged an imam to lead Friday prayers. But many of Fadilullah’s ritual activities strongly resemble those of an Aladura church. Petitionary prayer (*adura* rather than *salat*) is the keynote of what Mujidat offers, whether on an individual basis or at prayer services that have lively choruses or in sustained cycles of prayer lasting seven, twenty-one, or forty-one days. Whereas Fatayi calls his Sunday-morning service *asalatu*, Mujidat gives hers the very Aladura-sounding name of *Adura Iṣegun* (Victory Prayer). Her assistants are called *afadurajagun* (prayer warriors), a term common in Aladura churches;⁴⁰ and as with the Aladura, water and olive oil—drunk, anointed, or bathed in—are used as physical media for the healing power of prayer.

Although Muslim women’s praying societies (known as *egbe alasalatu*) have existed for decades, and senior women were given titles at the mosque, female Muslim charismatics like Mujidat seem to have emerged only in the past two to three decades, mostly with small and local followings. A similar phenomenon emerged in Christianity much earlier: in Lagos in 1925 a fifteen-year-old girl, Abiodun Akinsowon, fell into a trance and had celestial visions that led to the

founding of the Cherubim and Seraphim. The phenomenology of possession in Yoruba Christianity and Islam has clear precedents in *oriša* religion, where women were the main charismatics.⁴¹ The irruption of charisma into the scriptural monotheisms always creates problems for them, the more so for Islam, because its absolute insistence that God spoke his last words to humanity through the Prophet Mohammed means that it cannot have prophets in the sense that Christianity still can. So how do Yoruba Muslims understand their own charismatics? The charismatic gifts may be regarded simply as talents or natural endowments, to be fortified by disciplines like fasting and prayer; and at the same time as signs (*ami*) of a divine commission. I have even been told by an educated *alfa* that women are by nature spiritually more powerful than men (which must be a carryover from pre-Islamic notions). Then a role may be claimed for the assistance of subdivine beings such as angels (*maleka*) or jinns (*anjōnu*), though this is treacherous, morally ambiguous ground, open to the charge of associating other beings with God, which is idolatry (*shirk*). Here the critique that Salafists (and indeed many mainstream educated *ulama*) direct against the practices of popular Yoruba Islam parallels that of some born-again Christians against White-garment Aladuras (notably the Celestial Church of Christ), for having spiritual truck with demonic forces.

The cross-pressures—the impulse of religious inspiration, popular thaumaturgical demand, social pressure to conform with orthodox norms—work themselves through to varying outcomes. They may be more intense because, as all these cases suggest, charismatic inspiration and Arabic learning are so often inversely related. In 1982 Shaykh Abdul-Hamid Olohungbemi set up what in born-again parlance may perhaps be called a ministry, Shamsuddin ul-Islamiyya, to preach the Oneness (*Tawhid*) of God. His target was the traditional *alfas* of his home town, Ado-Odo, not far from Lagos, at whom he directed ferocious criticism for the *shirk* implicit in their healing and divinatory practices. So far, so orthodox; but Olohungbemi did acknowledge the support of visionary unseen helpers; and his own spiritual techniques sound as Aladura as Mujidat's, since he used holy water and castor oil for healing. He is a great preacher in Yoruba, but the "delivery of the sermon has striking resemblance of the method adopted by Christian preachers because everything is rendered in native indigenous language"—"usually spiced up with beautiful . . . hymns"—including portions of the Koran "with little or no recourse to the Arabic text." But he was persuaded by colleagues to moderate some of his procedures.⁴²

More disconcerting to members of the mainstream *ulama* were the claims of another Muslim charismatic, Alhaji S. A. Olagoke. A lecturer in engineering with an Islamic background in Ibadan but with no formal Arabic education, he was inspired in 1983 to found a movement devoted substantially to healing, called Shafaudeen-in-Islam. Guided by visions and trances, in which he was directed to biblical as well as Koranic texts, he interpreted their source as the Holy Spirit. But the real problem

was that he described himself as *Rasool* or Messenger—a title usually reserved for the Prophet Mohammed—as apparently revealed in a dream to one of his followers. When this became publicly known through the media, there were protests and questions from various Islamic parties ranging from the Muslim Students Society to the League of Imams and Alfas. Olagoke was called for questioning at the Ibadan central mosque. Anxious to retain Islamic respectability (and no doubt mindful of what had happened to Ahmadiyya), he toned down his claims: he was *Rasool-Shafau* (Messenger of Healing), thus prudently distinguishing himself from the Messenger of God. It must have helped that he is politically astute and an effective networker, even getting an endorsement for his book from the *Alafin* of Oyo, who is quoted as calling him an anointed man of God (a *very* born-again expression); and being appointed as a Justice of the Peace or lay magistrate. Shafaudeen-in-Islam now has a substantial mosque complex in Ibadan, the center of a network of more than a dozen branches and various social-development projects.⁴³

Olohunbemi and Olagoke are both men of little Arabic learning, and their Christian point of reference is more Aladura than born-again. The next case involves an Arabic literate whose Christian bearings are toward the neo-Pentecostal surge of the last thirty years. This is Shaykh Rasheed Akinbile, who has led a Sufi group through many changes over more than two decades. I first became aware of him in 2002, when I saw the following proclamation on a banner advertising a meeting at the Ibadan University mosque:

In the name of Allah, the Beneficient [*sic*], the Merciful. Caring and Sharing Sufi Centre (Inc.) Nigeria. Present *RAMADAN CELEBRATIONS* (30 Days of Spiritual Renewal and Manifestation of Miracles). Theme: *OPEN THE FLOODGATES OF PROSPERITY*.

This thoroughly born-again expression of what was evidently a Muslim undertaking had a complex history behind it. Akinbile is the son of an Ibadan imam; he had learned to recite the Koran by the age of nine and went on to some study of *hadith*. He was school imam at Ahmadiyya Grammar School, in Ibadan, and later a leader of the MSS at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife, where he completed a B.A. in demography and statistics. His Muslim fellow students presented him with such problems as what prayers would help them to pass exams, and why did they lack “self-sufficiency in prayer,” being unable to pray on their own, unlike their Christian compeers. His feeling that there “must be something deeper” than the “external part” of Islam (as he expressed it to me in interview) naturally pointed him in a Sufi direction, and he sought initiation into Tijaniyya (though he says he was also influenced by the writings of Inayat Khan, the Indian Sufi teacher, whose ten volumes he found in the university library). His own meditations on divine unity led to mystical experiences, and in 1989, the year he graduated from Ife, his followers urged him to form a group, which he called the Islamic Brotherhood of Sufism. During the 1990s

he began to attract wider notice, at one point having his own TV program called *Fountain of Wisdom*, funded by a wealthy Muslim well-wisher.

Akinbile gradually came to feel that Sufism extended beyond Islam; he renamed his organization the International Brotherhood of Sufism, and he became active in interfaith dialogue. The activities of his group more and more came to echo born-again practices: meetings on Sundays, sitting on chairs, night vigils, men and women sitting together, testimonies and trances, the use of oil, water, handkerchiefs, and *tasbeih* (Muslim rosary) as vehicles of power through prayer, a choir (wearing robes and accompanied by organ, guitar, and drums) singing songs such as these in Yoruba:⁴⁴

Alasalatu, ki l'a gbojule? Lahila ilalahu l'a gbojule, t'o ba d'ojo ikehin o!

Praying people, who shall we depend on? It's "There is no god but Allah" we'll depend on at the last day.

Kurani mi ni ng o maa ke, ošo o lagbara lori re, aje o lagbara lori re, eniyan o lagbara lori re, Kurani mi ee, Kurani ni ng o maa ke.

It's my Koran I'll recite, wizards have no power over it, witches have no power over it, evil people have no power over it, this is my Koran, it's my Koran I'll recite.

Or the following chorus in pidgin English:

Winner o, winner, Allah you don win [have won] o, winner *patapata* [completely],
you go
[will continue to] win forever, winner.

For such things to be done in the name of Islam was just too much for the radical activists of MSS—the more so, perhaps, because Akinbile had once been one of them. They declared jihad against him and broke up an interfaith meeting at the University Conference Centre, where his Sufi singers were performing in the presence of the Oyo state governor and his wife, both Muslims. By then Akinbile's drift toward heterodoxy was causing concern among the Ibadan *ulama* at large, who surely were behind the personal plea of *Arẹ Musulumi* Arisekola, the wealthy lay chief of Ibadan's Muslims, for him to join the League of Imams and Alfas, their professional body. But he did not wish to be subject to the restraints of clerical collegiality that this would have brought. Finally he announced in a newspaper that he was neither a Muslim nor a Christian but just a Sufi. Much of his following fell away, but Akinbile has continued to offer what he now calls spiritual counseling.⁴⁵

NASFAT: MUSLIM BORN-AGAIN'S?

Many of the factors that drove Akinbile's career are present in this final case, though they produced a very different outcome. This is an altogether more solid organization, in fact the most striking new movement to have emerged in Yoruba Islam

during the last fifteen years: namely the Nasrul-Lahi-l-Fatih Society of Nigeria, always known by its acronym, NASFAT.⁴⁶ Sometimes (but superficially) referred to by outsiders as Muslim born-again, it is probably the most effective response to the born-again phenomenon, from which it has consciously adopted many practices and strategies. More than any other Muslim body, NASFAT has a distinct class base: modern-educated, urban professionals. It was founded in 1995 by a group of lay Muslims working in the commercial sector in Lagos, the key figure being Alhaji Abdul-Lateef Olasupo, now retired from his post as a senior manager with one of Nigeria's largest banks but still chairman of NASFAT's Board of Trustees. Its chief missionary, Alhaji Abdullahi Akinbode, is the son of an imam at Ibadan and, like Akinbile, went to its Ahmadiyya Grammar School. The perspective of NASFAT's founders was that of the educated Muslim laity, lacking Arabic literacy, who felt that their own "[Islamic] knowledge was not so deep" and wanted a means to close the gap between "enlightened people and alfas."⁴⁷ The contrast between the two distinct status hierarchies, based on different kinds of knowledge, that divide the *umma* is very evident here. But Akinbode is ideally qualified to bridge that gap, since his credentials include both a B.A. in Arabic and an M.A. in international relations and diplomacy. In the 1980s he served on the Mission Board of MSS and—for he also has a fine singing voice—was the lead vocalist of its singing group, which released fourteen disks of what is somewhat incongruously known as Islamic gospel music.⁴⁸

The challenge and example of the born-again, while not averred as the primary stimulus for NASFAT,⁴⁹ are nevertheless very evident in much of what it does. Its main regular events are an *asalatu* (prayer) session on Sunday mornings from 8:30 to 12:30 and a *tahajjud* (night-vigil) session twice a month, between midnight and the dawn prayer. Their timing, length, and format are much more like the born-again Christians' than are the canonical *salat* prayers of Islam. While NASFAT's website speaks discreetly of the intention "to maximise favourably the leisure time that exists among Muslims who laze away Sunday mornings," the real problem was that this was when young Muslims were all too likely to go along with their Christian friends to the uplifting and entertaining services of the various born-again ministries. *asalatu* begins, as born-again services do, with praise worship: with praise of God and the invocation of blessings on the Prophet Mohammed, for which Arabic texts (in roman transliteration) from an official *NASFAT Prayer Book* are used, chanted in unison. Sometimes there may be a guided recitation of the Koran (known as *tankara*) and hymns in Yoruba. There is a sermon—an hour or more, which is much longer than the sermons given at the regular Friday prayers—often given by a visiting preacher, and proceedings conclude with an extended session of individual prayer requests. Similar elements occur in the nocturnal *tahajjud* service, though they are deployed less formally and there is a much more fervent and ecstatic quality to the prayers.

Many members of the *ulama* have severe misgivings about NASFAT's innovations, though they concede that they have done something to stem the appeal of rival religious attractions: "If they were not there, our people would flock to the mountain grounds and rivers," as one mainstream imam put it to me.⁵⁰ But for those who think that all forms of Muslim worship must be strictly authorized by the Koran or *hadith*, such as the members of Ahl us-Sunna, the NASFAT initiative is deeply problematic. Aware of this, NASFAT carefully justifies its activities as *mustahabb* (recommended but not compulsory, in terms of the Sharia's fivefold classification of actions) and as supererogatory, in that they do not—as its critics suspect—release their members from the obligation to perform the five daily prayers and the other pillars of Islam (all of which are set out clearly in its prayer book). NASFAT's aim, its leaders insist, is simply to make its members better Muslims without taking sides between Islam's various tendencies, from Tijaniyya to Ahl us-Sunna (though the supposed excesses of the former evoke stronger disapproval than what is thought of as the extremism of the latter). That is not surprising, since NASFAT and Ahl us-Sunna, despite their differences, both aim to modernize Yoruba Islam, whereas the popular devotional practices of Tijaniyya are seen as part of its unenlightened heritage. Even so, NASFAT's notably irenic tone toward radical Islamists is not much reciprocated by them, who sometimes disparage it as a ceremonial organization or charge its members with being mere social Muslims.

This conscientious Islamic orthodoxy is also combined with much use of a managerialist language that strongly recalls some of the larger born-again organizations. NASFAT's website offers both vision and mission statements, and refers to its stakeholders. Leaders spoke to me of "marketing our product . . . in line with Sharia," of the need to "strategize" their activities, of NASFAT "showcasing itself . . . as an enlightened Islamic organization" and of offering a "free market" to different Muslim groups; and even, in response to a question of mine about the prominence at the beginning of the *asalatu* service of the invocation of blessings on the Prophet Mohammed, of its "adding value" to their prayers.⁵¹ A more extended instance of this blending of Islam with business values may be seen in a book entitled *Leadership Strategies of the Prophet Mohammad* by Mudathir Abdul-Ganiyu, a journalist and lecturer, with a foreword by NASFAT's chief missionary, Alhaji Akinbode.⁵² It is difficult to tell how far such expressions arise directly from the jargon of the world of business, media, and administration, where so many leading NASFAT activists are employed, or whether they are partly mediated through born-again Christianity, which came from its American sources already well saturated with the idioms of corporate business.

The self-conscious modernity of NASFAT also shows in the wide range of its extraritual activities: visiting prisons, microfinance for small businesses, educational programs (including its Fountain University, at Oshogbo), empowerment schemes for women, vacation camps for students, guidance and counseling

services for young people, medical outreach, a soft-drink manufacturing business,⁵³ and so on. Once more a born-again comparison is irresistible, especially with the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), whose parachurch activities are so extensive and well known that they must serve as a major point of reference. RCCG, like NASFAT, successfully projects itself as an organization that aims to attract an elite membership. In building up a portfolio of welfare and development activities that offer on a small scale what citizens tend to expect from an effective modern state—an ideal that Nigeria professes but conspicuously fails to live up to—NASFAT follows a trail that RCCG has blazed. A few miles down the Lagos-Ibadan expressway from RCCG's Redemption Camp, with its vast auditorium and many facilities, NASFAT now has a campground of its own, a Muslim facility rubbing shoulders with several Christian ones strung along the expressway.⁵⁴

But the bottom-line commonality between NASFAT and RCCG is due not to the contingencies of recent history—the aspirations of the Yoruba professional class, the neoliberal context, NASFAT's need to pay attention to what the religious market leader is doing—but to the age-old Yoruba demand that religion provide them with answers to the practical problems of human existence, particularly sickness and poverty. Both bodies contrast their own ways of responding to this demand with what they see as the doctrinally compromised practices prevalent within their respective faiths. The self-conscious modernity of their critique is expressed in the insistence that the basis of healing practices must be scriptural, biblical or Koranic as the case may be, not corrupted with elements specific to the Yoruba cultural repertoire: the immediate past of Yoruba tradition is to be negated by the distant foundational past of a world religion. So the born-again denounce the errors of the White-garment churches (*alasofunfun*)—as they disparage the Aladura, particularly the Celestial Church of Christ, and the myriad of small autonomous or breakaway *woli* or prophet—for adopting illicit means to supplement Christian prayer. An exactly analogous point is made in modernist Muslim criticism of the healing and divinatory practices of the mass of ill-educated but often popular *alfa*.⁵⁵

In the tangled undergrowth of popular religion, where pragmatism outweighs doctrine, there is now so much borrowing between Muslim *alfa*, traditional *babalawo*, and Christian *woli*, all engaged in much the same task, that the boundaries between them become blurred. Yoruba Islam differs from Christianity in that it harbors both a more elaborate corpus of syncretistic practice and a broader set of guidelines, mainly to be found in the *hadith*, for a theologically correct Muslim system of healing. Mr. Mustapha Bello, until lately a senior administrator at NASFAT headquarters, has written a fascinating short book, part theological and part ethnographic, advocating reform to what he terms the practice of *jalbu*, defined as “the process of offering spiritual guidance and counselling to [a] distressed and troubled clientele on multifarious issues involving more than physical/medical attention.”⁵⁶ Bello does not doubt that personal problems can have

mystical (or, as he would have it, metaphysical) causes, which need mystical solutions, but he wants to see them tackled in ways that do not subvert the principle of *tahwid* or faith in the unity and all-sufficiency of God. At the same time, the born-again influence is discreetly yet unmistakably present, not just in the language of counseling and consultancy but in his concluding assertion (p. 87) that man needs “a personal relationship with God.”

Yet just how significant is this partial adoption of a hegemonic discourse? For Bello has no sooner used this hallmark evangelical phrase—“personal relationship with God”—than his argument turns in quite another direction from where evangelical Christianity would have taken it, for he immediately speaks of it as requiring a “soul receptive and submissive to divine rules and regulations as enunciated in the Revealed Books and exemplified by His chosen Messengers.” This contrast says much. The born-again ideal of a personal faith rests on the theology of an incarnate God who has offered Himself as a personal savior: “What a friend we have in Jesus,” as the words of an old evangelical hymn put it. It is not easy to imagine Alhaji Akinbode addressing God in a NASFAT *asalatu* service as “Daddy,” as Pastor Adeboye of RCCG does. This whole doctrinal and affective complex is radically alien to Islam. Yet the austerity of the orthodox Sunni ideal espoused by Bello—that it is obedience to His revealed rules and regulations that brings a Muslim personally close to God—has often proved too arid for individual Yoruba Muslims, who have sought something more emotionally vibrant. This is a source of the perennial appeal of Sufism (as witness the career of Shaykh Akinbile) and may perhaps underlie the fervency of the collective invocation of blessings on the Prophet that is such a striking feature of the *asalatu* session. Still, one’s overriding impression of *asalatu*—the main congregation all men, sitting shoulder to shoulder in rows on the floor, wearing white gowns—is of a sober solidarity, of a characteristically Muslim aesthetic of worship.⁵⁷

The individualism and free emotionalism of born-again Christianity not only contrasts systematically with the restrained and collective ethos of NASFAT’s worship, as of Muslim prayer more generally, but seems to correlate with other, organizational, features. To be born again, with its main external token speaking in tongues, is understood as to receive a divine charisma; and charisma, qua the reception of extraordinary spiritual gifts, is the condition of leadership in the large born-again or neo-Pentecostal churches. Their founders and leaders—men like the late Benson Idahosa, E. A. Adeboye, W. F. Kumuyi, David Oyedepo, Matthew Asimolowo—are celebrities, variously credited with powers of healing, prophecy, deliverance, and so forth. In Muslim terms, they are more like great Sufi shaykhs than the leaders of an organization like NASFAT. Akinbode is a respected leader who can certainly give a forceful sermon, but as he says, he likes to work behind the scenes, as the chief clerical appointee of the board of trustees. NASFAT is set strongly against “hero worship”—whether more of the Sufi than of the born-again

kind is not clear—an attitude that fits well with something common among Muslims, a particular distaste, alike for the noisy, ecstatic quality of Pentecostal worship and for the kind of personality cult that envelops prominent born-again pastors. Despite the much-remarked resemblances between NASFAT and neo-Pentecostal Christianity, the differences show the strength of what is distinctive of Islam. Indeed, if NASFAT realizes its founders' religious aims, its long-term impact should be to make those who attend its services more aware of the Islamic tradition and of the options available within it.