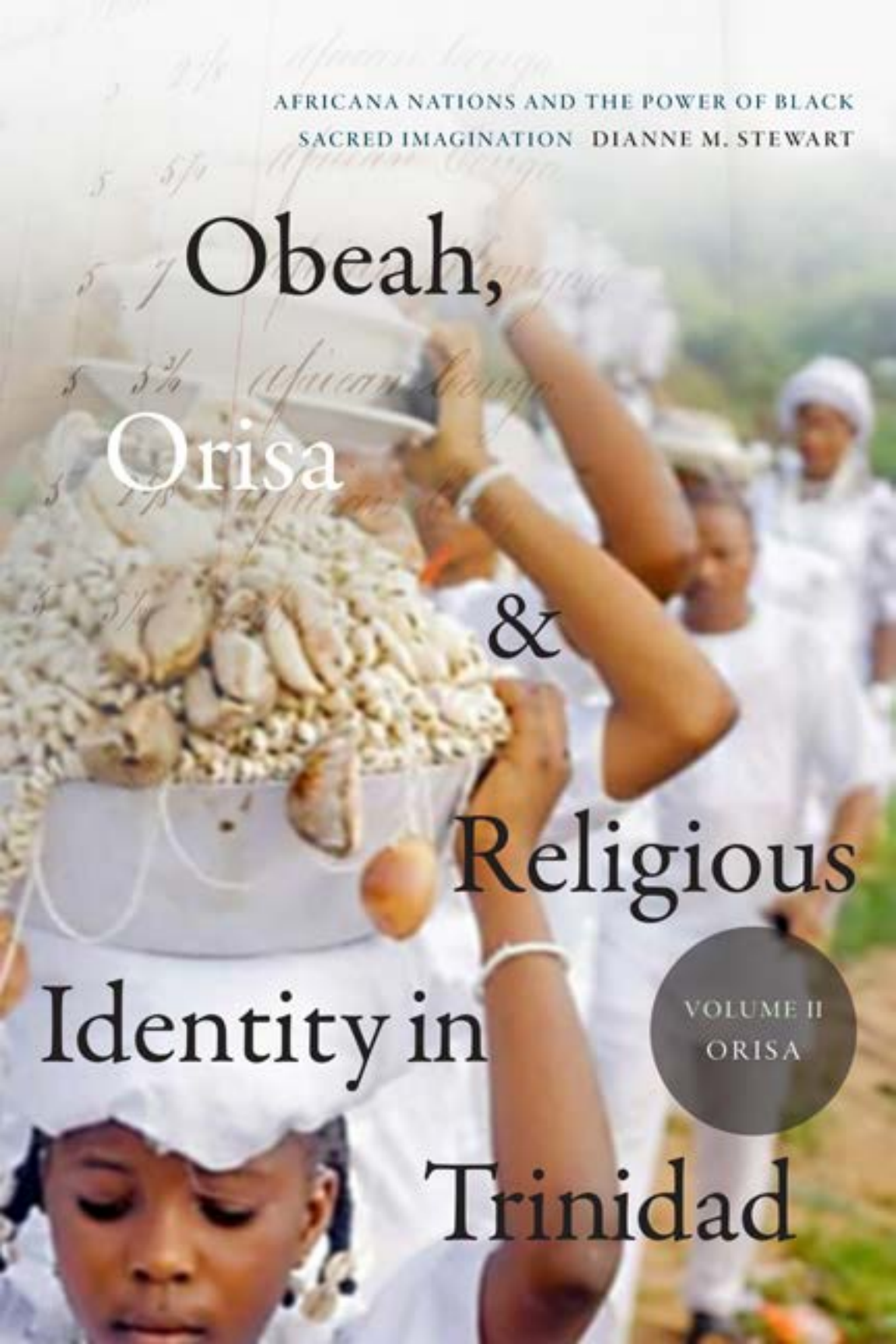
AFRICANA NATIONS AND THE POWER OF BLACK SACRED IMAGINATION

DIANNE M. STEWART

Obeah, Orisa & Religious Identity in Trinidad

VOLUME II
ORISA



Obeah, Orisa, and Religious Identity in Trinidad

Volume II

Religious Cultures of African
and African Diaspora People

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Contents

Abbreviations Used in Text

ACA	African Cultural Association
ATL	Afro Turf Limers
AUB	African Unity Brothers
BEW&CHRP	British Empire Workers and Citizens Home Rule Party
BP	Butler Party
BPM	Black Power Movement
CCCADI	Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute
CMS	Church Missionary Society
EOE	Egbe Onisin Eledumare
EOIW	Egbe Orisa Ile Wa
HID	Harmony in Diversity
IESOM	Ile Eko Sango/Osun Mil'Osa
IRO	Inter-Religious Organization
IRSC	Inter-Religious Steering Committee
ISA	Industrialization Stabilization Act
KCAII	Kenny Cyrus Alkebulan Ile Ijuba
MNDSI	Ministry of National Diversity and Social Integration
NCOE	National Council of Orisa Elders of Trinidad and Tobago
NJAC	National Joint Action Committee
OOS	Opa Orisha Shango

OPO	Obeah Prohibition Ordinance
OWTU	Oilfield Workers' Trade Union
OYCO	Orisa Youths Cultural Organization
PDP	People's Democratic Party
POSG	*Port of Spain Gazette*
PNM	People's National Movement
SDMS	Sanatan Dharma Maha Saba
SJU	Saint James United
SLM	Southern Liberation Movement
SOA	Summary Offences Act
SPAO	Society of Peoples of African Origin
SPO	Shouters Prohibition Ordinance
T&T	Trinidad and Tobago
TIWU	Transport and Industrial Workers Union
TLP	Trinidad Labour Party
TWA	Trinidad Workingmen's Association
UMROBI	United Movement for the Reconstruction of Black Identity
UNC	United National Congress
UNIA	United Negro Improvement Association
WIRC	West India Royal Commission

Note on Orthography and Terminology

This volume uses concepts and words from the Yorùbá language of Nigeria and neighboring regions in West Africa. Diacritical marks are applied to Yoruba terms when referencing the phenomenon of Yorùbá-Òrìṣà religion and other phenomena on the African continent but not for generic references or for references to the Yoruba-Orisa religion in Trinidad and other parts of the African diaspora. I aimed to avoid the Anglicizing convention of forming plural nouns by adding "s" to a singular noun and used "Orisa" to represent the singular and plural forms as much as possible. At times, I do conform to the conventional pluralization of nouns such as Yoruba (pl. Yorubas). No such term appears in the Yorùbá language, and when I do use it, I do so for semantic simplicity because I am working in the English language. Consistent with volume I of this study, I adopt a semantic strategy of employing the capital "O" when referencing Africana conceptions of "Obeah" and the lowercase "o" when referencing the colonial invention of "obeah"—colonial imaginings, beliefs, discursive ideologies, and the like.

Conveying meanings is undoubtedly a slippery exercise because words fail to capture everything about a given phenomenon. I therefore introduce my own neologisms and strategies for approximating meanings of import to my conceptual analysis and explanatory frameworks. These terms include the stem concept of "*nation*" and many related words formed from this stem: *nationhood, nation-building, nationscapes, nationalism, multi-nation-al, inter-nation-al*, and so on. All such terms are printed in italics to underscore the point that I do not consider these terms to be English or Western terms. They might look similar to English terms such as nation, nationhood, nation-building, and the like, but they refer to identities and affiliations that cannot be reduced

to race, ethnicity, the nation-state, and the identities it inspires. The first "a" in the terms *multi-nation-al* and *inter-nation-al* is pronounced as a long "a" as in the name "Tracey."

Other terms, such as *creactivity*, *numenym, motherland-ing, motherlanding*, and *motherness*/*motherness*, are explained in notes or the text itself. Because I draw from theorists whose works predate the interventions of Afropessimist and black nihilist scholars, I admit I use terminology that some critics will reject as impositions from a Western metaphysical and scholastic infrastructure. I do not contest such criticisms. However, I will have to wait for another project to sufficiently deploy Yoruba and other African indigenous concepts for phenomena, thoughts, and knowledge that best translate or render irrelevant Western English terms such as human, humanity, person, world, phenomenon, ontology, relation, and being. I only experiment with a few alternative concepts in this volume that can potentially anchor a more developed conceptual paradigm in subsequent scholarship.

In the last two chapters, when the discussion exhibits a more focused awareness of Afropessimist analytical interventions in black studies, I often place terms such as "world" and "worldmaking" under erasure using the strikethrough feature (~~world~~, ~~worldmaking~~) to signal that my use of these words emerges from religious studies frameworks (rather than philosophical theories) concerning the role of sacred poetics (religious ideas, practices, symbols, myths, and invisible powers, deities, and spirits) in orienting Africana communities as they navigate their environments. Similarly, mindful of the Afropessimist argument that blacks have no access to the human, when appropriate, I experiment with the terms "~~human~~," ~~humanity~~, and "~~human being~~." I implore the reader's sympathies for the semantic nuances these terms and their orthographic inscriptions are intended to capture and hope they contribute to a more profound appreciation of the peoples and phenomena under investigation once encountered in the volume.

Terms such as Iyalorisa (Iya) and Babalorisa (Baba) are priestly titles similar to Reverend and Imam. Their shortened forms can also serve as familial and social identifiers such as "mother" and "father" or "head" (leader). Exceptions to my orthographic preferences and terminology are made when citing sources that do not follow the conventions I use.

Preface

Obeah, Orisa, and Religious Identity in Trinidad is a collaborative study, the fruition of an idea that germinated in the plush accommodations of the Hotel Nacional de Cuba in Havana, Cuba, during the spring of 1994. Tracey Hucks and I were attending *El Segundo Encuentro Internacional Yoruba*, an international conference on Yoruba religion, and among the panelists was Iyalorisa Dr. Molly Ahye, an Orisa priestess from Trinidad and Tobago (T&T). We had read about Trinidad's Yoruba tradition of "Shango" in books by George Simpson and his mentor Melville Herskovits, who received a grant of $3,250 from the Carnegie Corporation to conduct research in Trinidad in 1939, but we had much to learn about the richness of Trinidad's Yoruba diaspora. We were determined to do so after meeting Molly Ahye.

Iya Molly lectured on the Yoruba-Orisa religion in Trinidad and Tobago. In addition to describing the ritual and ceremonial life of the Orisa community, she discussed Orisa devotees' struggle for religious freedom, a struggle they seemed to be winning—at least to a much greater degree than their counterparts in other regions of the African diaspora. By the end of our trip, we began to envision a womanist approach of "harmonizing and coordinating" our scholarly efforts to coproduce a volume on the Orisa religion in Trinidad and the role of women in the tradition's transformation during the latter decades of the twentieth century.[1] We were graduate students at the time and knew this book idea would be a future project for both of us.

We made our first research trip to Trinidad in December 1998 and over two decades conducted archival and field research that resulted in not one but two volumes, which we both expected and did not expect. Our two-volume project, as the title suggests, expanded beyond a focus on Orisa to incorporate

a study of Obeah, an opaque repertoire of African spiritual systems that has been practiced throughout the Caribbean and regions of the Americas. In our first monographs, I wrote about Obeah and Tracey about Orisa; in this case, we switched subjects because Tracey was better suited to address the historical framing of Obeah in early colonial Trinidad. We determined too that I was better suited to explore how Orisa devotees intellectualize and make meaning out of their beliefs and spirituality. In this endeavor, I address our original aim for this project by engaging womanist and feminist discourses to examine institutional developments within the Orisa tradition and shifts in both internal and external narratives of Orisa presence and practice in post-1980s Trinidad. During this period Molly Ahye and other contemporary Orisa mothers held prominence as local and global leaders in this rapidly changing religious culture, and we discovered that a proper treatment of their contributions required me to flesh out other pertinent themes. Thus, volume II expanded into a study of the religious imagination and sacred poetics of African descendants—"Yaraba" *nation-builders*, Black Power sacred scientists, and women-mothers—in Trinidad who over a century and a half have held together "a moving continuity"[2] they have called "Ebo," "the Yaraba Dance," "Yaraba Work," "African Work," "Orisa Work," "Shango," "Ifa," and "Orisa."

While the project unfolded, we developed new perspectives as a result of our wider scholarly activities. We also offered direction to the field of black religious studies, especially through our 2013 article, "Africana Religious Studies: Toward a Transdisciplinary Agenda in an Emerging Field," which appeared in the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Africana Religions*. In that article we revisited the Herskovits/Frazier debate, its cultural and ideological context, and its impact on theoretical and methodological norms in the scholarship of academics trained in black religious studies/theology. We specifically explored roughly seventy-five years of knowledge production that, with few exceptions, had reduced black religion to black church studies and black Christian theology. Far too many works had missed opportunities to conceptualize black people's African religious heritage. The scholarship gave little attention to the "image of Africa" in the black religious imagination, limiting our understanding of the polyreligious and polycultural realities that indeed characterized the spiritual lives of enslaved Africans in the United States and elsewhere.[3] We concluded our article by providing some of the conceptual architecture and theoretical justifications for transdisciplinary Africana Religious Studies research as a way forward in twenty-first-century scholarship on African-descended peoples—their religions and cultures—in the Americas and the Caribbean.

While seeking to enrich Caribbean and Africana studies, we imagine this project as a contribution to a developing body of research in religious studies on the methodology we began to formulate in our 2013 article. Tracey approached the archives with the intention of examining Obeah as an assemblage of Africana sacred practices and cosmologies. Instead, what she unearthed in the archives on Trinidad was a colonial cult of obeah fixation operating as a lived religion.[4] Our most salient definition of religion in this project rests within the tradition of Charles H. Long. For Longians, religion is "orientation in the ultimate sense, that is, how one comes to terms with the ultimate significance of one's place in the world."[5] The colonial cult of obeah fixation "comes to terms" with its "place in the world" through imaginations and persecutions of Obeah/African religions. In the colonial imagination, obeah functions as *cultus* (derived from the Latin words to inhabit, habitation, toiling over something; variant stem of *colere*, meaning till—the Old English word for station, fixed point).

With this etymology in mind, *cultus* encompasses the concept of inhabiting a fixed point. Tracey discovered a singular and fixed approach to Obeah in the colonial archives that reduced it to an imaginary terrorizing supernatural blackness. African Obeah was virtually eclipsed by colonial obeah, a set of beliefs, rites, practices, and meanings mapped onto an imaginary enfleshed terror—the black body. Within this fixed orientation, ridding colonial Trinidad of obeah became of vital (and violent) significance to its civic, social, and public tapestry. Such devotion is what bound members of the colonial cult of obeah fixation one to another. Volume I courageously interprets the cult's lived religion by taking up the topic of obeah and African religious repression. Thus, refracted through a chronological account of African religious repression (volume I, authored by Tracey E. Hucks) and struggles for religious freedom (volume II, authored by Dianne M. Stewart), our study of Trinidad attends to the problem of religious identity as an outgrowth of colonial "racecraft":[6] it excavates the authentic religious identity of colonial whites and offers a textured theoretical interpretation of Africana religion as a healing modality that has provided blacks with authenticating narratives, identities, and modes of belonging. Bridging phenomenology of religion, indigenous hermeneutics,[7] and black affect theory, our interpretation pioneers an affective turn in Africana Religious Studies and underscores haunting insights of Afropessimist and black nihilist conversations that never lose sight of the black "death-bound-subject."[8]

Equally significant, our volumes contribute to the wider fields of religion and Africana/black studies in several respects. First, through explorations of

colonial obeah, African Obeah, and Orisa, they excavate the phenomenon of relationality to expand the definitional and theoretical terrain for conceptualizing religion as sites of black care *and* black harm. An analytic of relationality has considerable implications for the broader study of religion.[9] It provides a lens for investigating contacts, interactions, and exchanges among and across seen and unseen persons/entities. Whether within the context of religious traditions or within social structures broadly speaking, relationality is an indispensable guiding category for assessing intimacies that reveal and conceal individuals' and groups' authentic religion. Our collaborative study demonstrates that although orientation is the first step in the creation of a religious ethos, it is relationality that sustains a religious ethos and actually gives rise to religion, whether that religion is established through intimate care, intimate terrorism, or something else. Orientation determines positionings and suggests locative awareness, while relationality operationalizes the perceptions and affects that substantiate them. Considering the singularity of whites' collective soul-life, we take seriously William James's designation of religion as "the feelings, acts and experiences of individual[s] . . . so far as they apprehend themselves to stand *in relation to* what-ever they may consider divine."[10] This understanding of religion accords with our privileging of affect and its mobilizing power in the making of religion. Interpreting colonial affects, however, led us to conclude that what white colonists considered divine was the image of themselves tethered to the mutilated black body; and the black body was a divine mirror of the white soul—the sacred fetish whites needed and created to live, breathe, and have their being. Sadly, as innovative as James was in theorizing religion, he was terribly shortsighted in his impoverished understanding of African religions. Our study both invalidates James's shortsightedness and embraces his privileging of affects, experiences, and relationality which help us to interrogate dimensions of religiosity that James himself could not perceive, namely *white racecraft as lived religion*.[11]

Second and relatedly, in its investigation of the white colonial imagination our study offers a new theoretical interpretation of lived religion. Third, using indigenous hermeneutics, it theorizes *nationhood* in the Americas and the Caribbean as an autonomous Africana index of identity. Fourth, it contributes to Africana Religious Studies a foundational methodological imperative and method of applying indigenous hermeneutics within comparative assessments of African and African diasporic cultures/religions. Fifth, it elevates the Africana concept of *work* as a religious studies category for ritual practice and spiritual intervention. Sixth, it advances a mode of theological

reflection that privileges religious imagination and cultural values rather than systematic approaches to doctrine. Seventh, its analysis of white colonial responses to African heritage religions and its interrogation of the religious nature of antiblackness establish a new point of departure for theorizing white libidinal power. Eighth, it connects threads of continuity among African and African diasporic womanisms and feminisms through the non-gendered Africana concept of *motherness* and establishes an arena within Africana/black studies for further comparisons of womanist and black feminist intellectual lineages.

Book-length studies on Trinidadian Obeah and Orisa are still quite sparse, but to our knowledge, anthropologists and other social scientists have produced them. To help balance the growing number of important ethnographies that focus on Orisa ceremonies and rituals, and to expose the religious dimensions of white colonial power, we emphasize what religious studies scholars are trained to examine: the symbols, originary narratives (myths), performances, practices, rituals, and experiences that orient religious persons as they confront limits and shape possibilities for themselves. As scholars in the humanities—a trained historian of religion and a theologian—we treat interiority perhaps as much as we do the exterior worlds of the figures and personalities the reader will meet throughout each volume. Privileging their sacred poetics and self-narrations whenever possible, we offer what we believe is a new way to think about black religion, black religious imagination, black love, and religious belonging in the African diaspora.

Bringing this project to completion involved numerous field trips to Trinidad between 1998 and 2013 and one continuous year of ethnographic fieldwork (2000–2001), during which we visited Orisa shrines across the nation; frequented rituals, ceremonies, and educational workshops; and conducted more than forty interviews and two oral histories. Our research also involved combing through disparate sets of archives in Trinidad, Nigeria, Cuba, Jamaica, France, England, and the United States. Most of these trips were undertaken to conduct archival research at the National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago; Heritage Library of Trinidad and Tobago; University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica; University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad; Bibliothèque Nationale de France; Bibliothèque du Saulchoir; British Library; National Archives in Kew Gardens; Lambeth Palace Library; School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London; Northwestern University Archives; and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. We also gained access to Hansard Reports, Bills, and Acts of Parliament from the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, as well as unpublished

correspondence, minutes, devotional literature, and educational materials at various Orisa shrines in Trinidad. Nonetheless, although we believe both volumes reflect our careful historical and ethnographic work on Obeah and Orisa, they are not intended to be comprehensive histories or ethnographies of these traditions. Rather, they bear witness to the dynamic endurance of African heritage religions among Trinidad's pluralistic black diasporas, identifying Africa as the epistemic source of an enduring spiritual legacy and potent religious orientation across three centuries. This theoretical move propitiously anticipates productive scholarly frameworks in the future of Obeah and Orisa studies. But it also demands a sea change in how scholars analyze global antiblackness and account for the foundational pillars of religions in the Americas and the Caribbean.

Dianne M. Stewart and Tracey E. Hucks

Introduction to Volume II

This text completes a two-volume collaborative project on *Obeah, Orisa, and Religious Identity in Trinidad.* Continuing where Tracey E. Hucks concluded her discussion of African Obeah and colonial obeah in volume I, this volume's treatment of Orisa explores the appearance of Yoruba religious cultures in Trinidad within two conflicting orders: (1) the intimate universe that organized Yoruba people-groups into a unified *nation*[1] and (2) the long horizon of colonial obeah. Whereas volume I contended with uncovering African understandings of the numinous in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century colonial records, volume II analyzes a range of source material to provide an intellectual forum for African voices—their narrations of spiritual cohesion and dynamism and their achievements in the struggle for religious freedom in Trinidad from the mid-nineteenth to the early twenty-first century (see figure I.1 and map I.1).

Emphasizing two critical periods in the history of Yoruba-Orisa religious formation in Trinidad—the settlement period (1840s–90s) and the expansion period (post-1960s), the volume attends to the shifting status, visibility, and intelligibility of the Yoruba-Orisa tradition within both "primordial public" and "civic public" arenas.[2] Benefiting from studies of continental Yorùbá religion and culture, I historicize Orisa beginnings in Trinidad by considering the

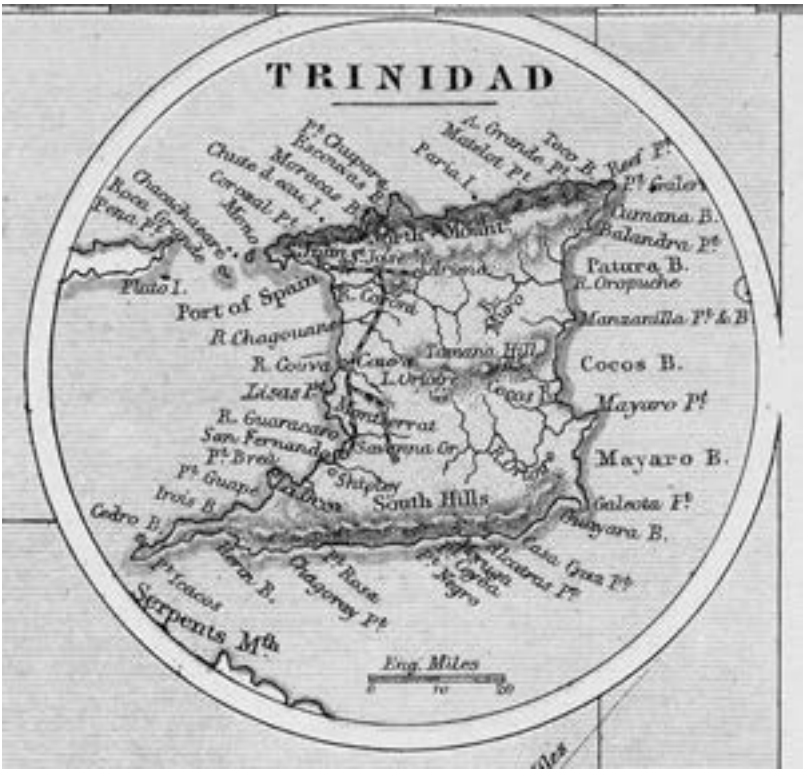

FIGURE 1.1 Luscombe, S. 2021. Map of Trinidad, 1892 [online], britishempire.co.uk /timeline/19century.htm [Accessed 1/21/2021]

cultural conventions that oriented custodians of a dynamic religious heritage. In the early twentieth century this African religious heritage carried different designations—the "Yaraba Dance," "Ebo," "Orisa Work," "African Work," and, most commonly, "Shango." Its devotees garnered no sympathy from the Euro-Christian establishment during the colonial period and remained stigmatized on the margins of society, even in the minds of many black Christians.

By the height of Trinidad's Black Power Movement (BPM) in 1970, some Christians of African descent would rethink their estimation of Shango. Awakened by a powerful ethos of black consciousness and decolonial politics, they severed ties with Catholic, Anglican, and other ecclesial institutions they began to associate with an antiblack colonial regime. They looked to Trinidad's African religious heritage for spiritual inspiration and reorientation. However, Obeah was too controversial and inaccessible as an organized religion to

MAP I.1 Map of Trinidad and Tobago, 1969. (Prepared by Bill Nelson.)

address the quest for African spiritual authenticity that some BPM advocates led. Instead, the Yoruba-Orisa religion came to represent Trinidad's originary source of African spirituality—a religious heritage that has endured.

In volume I, Tracey Hucks untangled the mythical and historical narratives that once collapsed categories of "enslaved" and "liberated" and "preemancipation" and "postemancipation" in popular accounts of African Trinidadian experience. This volume revisits these social locations and temporalities in conversation with archival and ethnographic sources. It also adds to the late Baba Sam Phill's experiential and inherited knowledge of Yoruba "beginnings" that frames the introduction to volume I. Presuming that first-generation Yoruba custodians of the Orisa religion in Trinidad did not arrive as blank slates ready to be filled with Western Christian cultural material, I take seriously African indigenous hermeneutics and African continental

sources of Trinidadian Yoruba-Orisa religious and cultural production from the mid-nineteenth to the twenty-first century and deconstruct the supremacy of syncretism frameworks in theorizing Orisa religiosity. Despite the scarcity of reliable sources, transdisciplinary methods allow me to recover overlooked indigenous perspectives. They illuminate enduring yet flexible Yoruba orientational structures that have provided continuity to Trinidad's Orisa heritage across time and memory.

I identify five motifs that are essential for understanding the inner workings of the Orisa tradition in Trinidad: (1) sovereignty, (2) *nationhood*, (3) kinship/family, (4) social belonging, and (5) *motherness*. I conclude volume II with thoughts on the appearance of these themes across wider Africana religious and cultural traditions in the Caribbean and the Americas, making the case that African religions in these regions partake in a shared Africana spiritual heritage.

This volume also engages the conflation of the sociocultural identifiers *Yoruba* and *African* in the post–Black Power period for many Afro-Trinidadians invested in the project of "African" spiritual recovery. Initially a Yoruba Trinidadian *nation* phenomenon, the Orisa tradition became after 1970 an African Trinidadian phenomenon (of Yoruba heritage). Orisa replaced Obeah as the principal religious repertoire of African heritage and identity. To be precise, different constituents—"older heads,"[3] Pan-Africanists, black *nationalists*, Afrocentrists, and so on—emphasized distinct aspects of this religiocultural inheritance, whether Nigerian Yorùbá, Anago, African, Trinidadian, or combinations of these. Consequently, a productive tension has existed between Orisa shrines that deliberately incorporate *christianisms*, *hinduisms*, and other external religious elements within their practice and those that eliminate them. The former are quite satisfied with the expertise inherited from Yoruba Trinidadians since the nineteenth century. The latter seek additional sources of instruction and authority from Nigerian Yorùbá religious experts. At times, these different approaches have led to contestation over theological beliefs and ritual protocols.

I assess this tension as generative because old and new custodians of the Yoruba-Orisa religion needed one another's knowledges, strategies, and resources to take steps toward arresting the legacies of violence and persecution that African heritage religions have endured in Trinidad since the slave period. However, I deliberately illuminate the innovations introduced into Orisa in the aftermath of Black Power, especially given that, until recently, established scholarly portraits of Orisa communities in Trinidad featured Yoruba-Orisa lineages founded on pre-1960s cultural and theological norms.[4]

Today, after four decades of cooperative efforts across ideological camps and spiritual families, Trinidadian Orisa is arguably the most civically engaged and legally protected African religion in the Western Hemisphere. To understand how the Orisa community overcame colonial obeah and colonial imaginations, I had to explore the emergence of what I term *Africana religious nationalism* among post–Black Power Orisa shrines.

I frame my theorization of colonial terror and the Orisa community's struggle for religious freedom and national inclusion through my training as a theologian with primary commitments in this project to the undertheorized domains of Africana religious imagination and sacred poetics. Luis León coined the term "sacred poetics" to capture how "religious actors . . . manage the often harsh and potentially overwhelming conditions they confront—the battle for survival and more, dignity, love, freedom—by deploying the most powerful weapons in their arsenal: signs, myths, rituals, narratives, and symbols."[5] Amplifying the contributions of phenomenologists of black religion, this volume offers an interpretation of *Africana sacred poetics* in Trinidad and other geographies of the African diaspora. In so doing, it underscores the important interventions a religious studies approach is poised to make in Trinidadian Obeah and Orisa studies, as well as the wider study of African heritage religions in the Caribbean and the Americas.

Chapter 1 shifts the discussion of African religions in Trinidad from volume I's treatment of Obeah to a focus on Orisa. Glossed as obeah in the colonial imagination, the African heritage religions dotting the Trinidadian landscape by the mid- to late nineteenth century continued to exist within an atmosphere of anonymity. By the early twentieth century, however, popular culture and the courts started to register at least one of those religions by name. Yoruba-Orisa spiritual repertoires had anchored alongside the ships that a half-century earlier began delivering thousands of liberated Yorubas to the shores of Trinidad. Following this *Extended Middle Passage* period, Yoruba-Orisa tradition, widely known as "Shango" for nearly the entire twentieth century, arguably became the most conspicuous, influential African heritage religion in postemancipation Trinidad.[6]

Methodologically blurring the lines between historical and ethnographic investigation, chapter 1 places nineteenth-century documents—newspaper accounts, missionary journals, and slave registers—in conversation with twentieth-century oral histories and ethnographies, both those original to my research and those accessed through archives. Most useful are the 1939 archived ethnographic fieldnotes and papers of Melville Herskovits, the first scholar to produce a book-length study of African-inspired religious and

cultural traditions in Trinidad. Chapter 1 particularly considers how sovereignty and *nationhood* qualified Yoruba-Orisa ritual and cultural life before the era of independence and explores the Yoruba-Trinidadian diaspora as an archival site of West African religious and political history. The Orisa religion then is theorized as an institutional space for the simultaneous creation of diaspora*ed* Yoruba culture and consciousness, the preservation of West African archives, and an extension of Trinidad's wider Africana spiritual heritage.[7]

Chapter 2 takes up the motifs of kinship and social belonging and brings theoretical substance to the volume's departure from standard social science studies of Yoruba-Orisa religion and other African heritage spiritual traditions in the diaspora. It analyzes aspects of Yoruba cosmology, theology, and ritual life phenomenologically to situate kinship as an orientational ethic and primal relational structure that furnishes commonsense Yoruba values. It draws on studies of both continental and Trinidadian Yoruba societies to reexamine the well-known personality of Ebenezer Elliott, aka "Pa Neezer" (1901–69). Chapter 2 offers an alternative exegesis of this celebrated Shango priest, Baptist, Obeah healer, and "lodge man" and posits an emic interpretation of Yoruba approaches to social belonging that reframes patterns and behaviors heretofore reductively conceptualized as syncretic.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the Victorian aesthetic and spiritual mood that deemed African heritage religions deplorable and historicizes the expansion and transformation of the Shango cult into the Orisa religion during the period of black nationalist consciousness and Black Power mobilization among Trinidadian youths, beginning around 1968. Black Power staged the conditions for a new era of African religious cultures in Trinidad. Chapter 3 documents this transition, particularly how exchanges among religious, social, and political entities inspired new concepts of Africana *nationhood* and a black nationalist consciousness that borrowed from and brought into public view long-overlooked Yoruba-Orisa traditions of identity-making in Trinidad. The chapter examines the sacred significance of continental Africa for African Trinidadian religious and cultural thought, particularly authenticating accounts of African heritage that inspired the creation of new Yoruba-Orisa families formed through spiritual kinship and what I term *territorial poetics*. Chapter 3 closes by considering how the influential Black-Power-inspired Egbe Onisin Eledumare (EOE) community intellectualized its faith and practice for the past half-century.

Chapter 4 probes the last of volume II's central motifs, motherness, by exploring Yoruba-Orisa spiritual mothers' contributions to the tradition. Assessing their activism and accomplishments through an Africana feminist-

womanist lens prioritizes the insights of African and African American thinkers whose explanatory frameworks extend to Caribbean contexts of African spiritual preservation and construction. Distance from the African continent did not signal a break with the long meta-tradition of mothering in Africa, with its matricentric consciousness and social ethics. Rather, Africa's "matri-archive"[8] diffused that heritage throughout the Americas and the Caribbean.

The mothers (iyalorisa) featured in chapter 4 epitomize this Africana cultural legacy of matricentricity in Trinidad and exemplify the labor and accomplishments of women-mothers whose status and leadership strengthened Orisa practice and public presence during the last quarter of the twentieth century. From the legal struggle for the civil right to religious freedom and protection during the 1980s to the founding of the National Council of Orisa Elders in the 1990s, and the representation of Trinidad's Yoruba-Orisa tradition on the global stage over the past four decades, Yoruba-Orisa mothers have helped open a third space of citizenship that blurs *nation-al* and national belonging. Their matricentric ministries continue to invigorate the tradition and expand its significance and influence within and beyond the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Chapter 4 also develops the discussion of black affective politics in theorizing "heritage love" as an *Africana affect* that mobilizes the black religious imagination and its *nationalist* expressions. Concentrating on a post–Black Power shrine with pan-Africanist leanings, the chapter analyzes Iyalode Sangowunmi's motherness innovations within Ile Eko Sango/Osun Mil'Osa and their import for the wider nation.

Chapter 5 synthesizes the volume's argument that Trinidad is a fertile diasporic context in which to theorize the nature, effects, and affects of black religion. It summarizes the modal operations of an Africana sacred poetics Obeah experts and Orisa devotees in Trinidad privileged across three centuries. Revisiting pivotal rituals, religious symbols, axiological principles, technologies of belonging, and originary narratives, the chapter frames my conviction that an Africana religious studies approach to research on African heritage religions in Trinidad yields resources for the following: (1) the continued theorization of and responses to what black nihilist philosopher Calvin Warren calls "ontological terror," (2) a phenomenological interpretation of black religion and its relational infrastructure as an "interruptive invention"[9] in conversation with the Longian tradition in black religious studies, (3) a new Africana womanist perspective analyzing the religious leadership and activism of Caribbean mothers who love the *African* Spirit, and (4) the next stage of comparative religions research in the development of Africana religious studies. The chapter calls for future studies that explore the reli-

gious dimensions of black abjection and diaspora analogues of the motifs that thematize this volume. It closes by analyzing one analogue (the black church) from one of the most undertheorized sites of the African diaspora (the United States).

Trinidad's unique *multi-nation-al*, multicultural, multiracial, multiethnic, and multireligious heritage has presented omorisa (orisa devotees) with platforms for advancing their activist and spiritual agendas that remain out of reach for their counterparts in the United States. The afterword comments on the distinct locations of omorisa in Trinidad and the United States who embrace Africana religious *nationalism*, underscoring the invaluable work that Orisa devotees in Trinidad have done to enhance their nation, their position within it, and their efficacy across the transatlantic Yoruba-Orisa *nation.*

Transitioning from volume I's concentration on the white colonial imagination, this volume addresses why and how the black religious imagination resides in the tension between primordial beginnings and black abjection. It makes no pretense of resolving that tension but depicts how, in the midst and "afterlife"[10] of colonial chaos, Africans in Trinidad have navigated that tension through praxes of *nation-building*—communal caretaking, uncooperative endurance, re-creation, and love.

Notes

Preface

1 Layli Maparyan discusses "harmonizing and coordinating" as an important component of womanist methodology in *The Womanist Idea*, 56–57.
2 Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests*, 258.
3 Long, *Significations*.
4 "Within the discipline of religion, David D. Hall and Robert Orsi have for close to two decades been at the forefront in pioneering 'a history of practice' in American religious history through the heuristic rubric of 'lived religion.' Inspired from the French concept *la religion vécue*, Hall and Orsi sought to encourage new innovations in 'cultural and ethnographical approaches to the study of religion and American religious history' by 'enlisting perspectives' that privilege human practice as an important lens for determining how humans 'live with and work through multiple realms of meaning.' Through examining 'modalities of practice' over and against normative theologies, doctrines, or elite orthodoxies, lived religion sought to recast the disciplinary representation of religion into a more flexible, 'complex and multifaceted phenomenon.' Lived religion expanded the interpretive gaze of American religious history to include not only practice as a crucial site for engaging religious meaning but also the inclusion of non-elite popular communities as significant actors in religious production." Quoted in Hucks, "Perspectives in Lived History," 3.
5 Long, *Significations*, 6.
6 Fields and Fields, *Racecraft*, 5.
7 Olúpọ̀nà, *City of 201 Gods*, esp. 1–5.
8 JanMohammed, *The Death-Bound-Subject*.
9 Scholars such as Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*; Tandberg, *Relational Religion*; Mwale, *Relationality in Theological Anthropology*; Harris et al., "Womanist

Theology"; and Krech, "Relational Religion," have proposed the need for developing relational theories of religion and theology. Our approach to relationality is distinct from these perspectives in that it takes its point of departure from a Longian conception of orientation.

10 Italics mine. James, *Varieties*, 31–32. On "soul-life," see chapter 3, n. 65 of this volume.

11 See James, *Varieties*.

Introduction

1 *Nation*, *nationhood*, and related word compounds are italicized in this study to indicate Africana constructions of sociocultural networks and institutions that include governing offices and micropolitical activities but are not political state structures. For more information, see n. 3 of Hucks's "Introduction" in *Obeah, Orisa, and Religious Identity in Trinidad*.

2 On concepts of primordial and civic publics, see Ekeh, "Colonialism."

3 Trinidadian term for elders. Here it references elders in the Orisa religion, especially those who grew up socialized in the tradition before the rise of the Black Power Movement and black consciousness.

4 At this writing, only Castor's *Spiritual Citizenship* has offered a book-length treatment of Orisa religious formation since the 1960s.

5 León, *La Llorona's Children*, 5.

6 The Spiritual Baptist tradition is the other conspicuous, influential African religious complex that overlaps Orisa religion in Trinidad. Whether the Spiritual Baptist repertoire is considered an African-*heritage* religion might be debatable. Although I think it certainly is, in this context I refer to the religious heritages transplanted in Trinidad by the African *nations* during and immediately after slavery.

7 I invoke Tracey Hucks's concept of "diaspora*ed*" to emphasize the fact that, when discussing the African captives of the transatlantic slave trade and slavery in the Western Hemisphere, which led to the formation of an African diaspora, central to our analysis should be the fact that the "diaspora" *happened* to those African captives who found themselves involuntarily exiled from their African homelands and enslaved or indentured in the Caribbean and the Americas. See n. 24 in Hucks's "Introduction" in *Obeah, Orisa, and Religious Identity in Trinidad* for her concept of "diaspora*ed*."

8 Grillo, *An Intimate Rebuke*.

9 Fernheimer, *Stepping into Zion*, 4.

10 I borrow Saidiya Hartman's term "afterlife" throughout this text, perceiving its double meaning as apt for a religious studies investigation such as this that attends to conceptualizations of afterlife (postdeath). See "Venus in Two Acts," 13.