

Clash of Traditions: Christianity and African Traditional Religions in Ìlàṣẹ̀land

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Abstract

The populations of Ìlàṣẹ̀ theocratic communities consider themselves culturally distinct from the inhabitants of their native settlements. The inhabitants of the former predominantly originate from the latter, as before the formation of theocratic communities in Ìlàṣẹ̀land, Ìlàṣẹ̀ indigenes in their homeland inhabited villages and islands within their coastal boundaries. To escape persecution and to practice their faith without inhibition, the Holy Apostles opposed to the traditional practice of twin-infanticide and other reform groups within the C & S society in Ìlàṣẹ̀land migrated from their original settlements through a novel strategy that led to the creation of autonomous communities independent of local authorities. The Holy Apostles established Ayétòrò in 1947, while a reformist group within the C & S Society founded the Cherubim and Seraphim Zion Church at Ugbónlá in 1948. Presently, more than forty settlements founded on Christian principles are found across the Ìlàṣẹ̀ coast. The theocratic communities claim to have eliminated Ìlàṣẹ̀ traditional customs in their new settlements due to their aversion to them. They claim that the administration of their communities derives from the active presence of the Holy Spirit. This assertion should impede significant convergence between the customs and traditions of these two social systems. To test these claims, the research interrogated the cultural practices across these two ideological settings using ethnographic fieldwork. The research identified significant assimilation of cultural practices of the natal settlements in Ìlàṣẹ̀ theocratic communities. These include the institutionalisation of role substitutes like the Cherubim band replacing the civil law-enforcement agencies in Ìlàṣẹ̀ natal settlements, the hybridisation of cultural practices including marriage and burial customs deriving from Ìlàṣẹ̀ natal settlements and the improvisation or the innovative reconfiguration of age-long cultural ideas to enable them to meet the orientations of theocratic settlements in the region.

Keywords

Religion, Communities, Customs, Traditions

1. Introduction

The Ìlàjẹ people inhabit the eastern region of Yoruba territory adjacent to the Atlantic Ocean. They relocated to their present homeland from Ile-Ife following Oduduwa's acquisition of political authority over the ancient town (Falola, 2017). Upon arriving in this coastal region, the Ìlàjẹ adhered steadfastly to their ancestral religions until the introduction of Christianity by Catholic missionaries in the 16th century (Kenny, 1983). Until this point, the traditional faiths of the Ìlàjẹ people received sole patronage in their villages and communities. The populace yielded to priests and leaders of the various traditional religious groupings as they determined the course of communal worship and spirituality in their homeland. Their predominant traditional religious groups include *Malòkun*, *Ayélála*, *Orò*, *Egúngún*, *Ògún* and *Alàgwẹ*, which is specific to the Mahin tribe in Ìlàjẹland. The Portuguese missionaries had a negligible influence in Ìlàjẹland, establishing only one Roman Catholic parish at Ebute Ipape (Kenny, 1983). Starting in the 1870s, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) dispatched missionaries from Lagos to the Ondo area including Ìkálẹland and Ìlàjẹ communities (Adefi, 2017). Following the CMS, the African Instituted Churches, such as the West African Episcopal Church established their presence in Ìlàjẹland in the early 1900s prior to the introduction of the Cherubim and Seraphim (C & S) Society in 1929. Islam is not significantly practiced in the Ìlàjẹ region. Christian denominations in Ìlàjẹland coexisted with the traditional cults until about 1942, when a Puritan faction (the Holy Apostles) within the C & S society emerged to contest the local practice of twin-infanticide. Before this time and despite the presence of Christianity among the Ìlàjẹ people, traditional religious groups dominated the socio-political landscape of their region. The Holy Apostles' contest of the legitimacy of the controversial traditional practice forced the *Orò* cult tasked with the duty of upholding the historical practice to vigorously oppose the puritanical forces seeking to suppress it. The traditional institution provided active support for the *Orò* cult by utilising all mechanisms of authority to defeat the revolt (Adefi, 2020). From 1942 to 1947, when the Holy Apostles founded the settlement of Ayétòrò, the spiritual climate of Ìlàjẹland was tumultuous. The establishment of Ayétòrò aimed to guarantee that the Holy Apostles might exercise their Christian faith free from fear or intimidation by the traditional institution (Barrett, 1977). Following the foundation of Ayétòrò, they sought to eliminate any old traditions deemed insulting to their faith after liberating themselves from the constraints of the local authority. This quest for spiritual and political autonomy encouraged other groups within the C & S society to pursue independence from the authority of the traditional institution in their

homeland. By January 1951, four theocratic communities had emerged in Ilàjeland¹. This number has risen to more than forty in this precinct of Yorùbáland (Ebisemiju, 2016). Since a major reason for the emergence of theocratic settlements in Ilàjeland was the conflict arising from the traditional practice of twin infanticide, which a section of the membership of the C & S society was opposed to, the establishment of these new religious settlements, as it was claimed, was to allow members practice their faith without hindrance. Arising from their emergence as protest communities, members of the theocratic settlements make bold statements about their abhorrence of the customs and traditions in their natal settlements. They assert that their ways of life were divinely revealed and therefore are sharp departures from what operated in their aboriginal settlements. To test the validity of these claims, the study examined some common local practices across the natal and theocratic communities in the study area. This is with a view to assessing the degree of departure or convergence, if any, of these local practices one from another and to present the outcome of the study in furtherance or advancement of the body of knowledge on the impact of faith on local traditions and vice versa. We shall now analyse the emergence of the C & S society in Ilàjeland and how the opposition of a faction within the group to twin infanticide led to the formation of an alternative ideology, resulting in the emergence of theocratic communities in the region.

2. The Origin and Growth of Christian (Theocratic) Communities in Ilàjeland

The brands of the African Christian Movement or more precisely, the Aládùrà movement which dot the Ilàjè littoral are offshoots of the Cherubim and Seraphim (C & S) Society which was birthed following the religious experience Christianah Abiodun Akinsowon encountered in Lagos in 1925 (Omoyajowo, 1982). Having peeped into the chalice of a Catholic church procession, she was reported to have gone into a trance and was revived some days later only after Moses Orimolade Tunolase, an itinerant evangelist prayed for her (Omoyajowo, 1984, 1995). A praying band subsequently emerged from the visiting adventurers and tourists who learnt of the extraordinary occurrence and sought a firsthand information of the famed incident. Moses Orimolade Tunolase and Christianah Abiodun Akinsowon became the nuclei of the emerging praying band as other devout individuals began to join in the regular prayer meetings. It was in the process of this evangelistic enterprise that two men (brothers) of Ilàjè descent, Timothy and Alfred Orogbemi came in contact with the C & S Society while the duo visited Lagos². Once they joined the society, Alfred and Timothy got energetically involved in the

¹These include The Holy Apostles Community, Ayétòrò (1947), The Cherubim and Seraphim Zion Church, Ugbónlá (1948), The Holy Apostles' Community, Ori-Òké Ìwàmímó (1950) and The Episcopal Cherubim and Seraphim Community, Zion Pẹpẹ (1951).

²Interview with Eliezer Owobamirun Erukubami on August 9, 2017 on Michael Street, Ugbonla, aged 95.

activities of the group. They subsequently attained substantial clerical training concerning the tenets of the movement. With the consent of the C & S leaders, they returned to Ìlàjẹ, their homeland to advance the course of the society (Adefi, 2020).

Alfred and Timothy's relentless efforts in evangelism yielded fruits albeit not without an initial resistance from priests of the local deities and sections of the local population which felt threatened by the activities of the itinerant evangelists. The local priests and their allies became worried when it became obvious what competition Alfred and Timothy were throwing up to sway adherents whose devotion the priests of the local deities had previously secured. The success of their evangelistic campaigns was aided by their display of spiritual powers and charismatic prowess among other sterling attributes³. All these soon became catalysts for the institutionalisation of the C & S society in the region.

Aside from the initial scuffles upon their arrival, the presence of the C & S society in the Ìlàjẹ countryside did not generate such hostilities which led to dangerous confrontations between them and the religious other till well over a decade after they began their evangelistic campaign. A group of Puritans within the sect confronted the leadership of the society on their coalescence with and tolerance of the prevailing twin infanticide championed by a formidable unit (*Orò* priests) of the traditionalists in Ìlàjẹland. The twin infanticide was carried out with the full support of the traditional institution. The Puritans contended that such practices were squarely at odds with what the Christian faith teaches. This group led by notable prophets of the Society demonstrated their unwillingness to conform any further to the practices. They protested to the traditional authority and were reported to have undertaken violent actions against local institutions saddled with the responsibility of preserving the local practice (Barrett, 1977).

The Puritans soon fell out with leading members of the society who were not favourably disposed to their open confrontations. As relationships between the Puritans and the leaders of the society became strained on the one hand, their agitations also led them to incur the strong displeasure of the local authorities on the other. Leading prophets among the Puritans were arrested, fined and sometimes held in detention as the struggle escalated⁴. As a result of this strained relationship, leading prophets among the disenchanting group gathered like minds in the society together in search of an independent space—as permitted by the land tenure system in Ìlàjẹland at that time—for their religious activities. They rebuffed the traditional institution as well as the leadership of the C & S Society and were determined to settle in a geographical space devoid of their control. This attempt at political and religious independence was the beginning of the establishment of theocratic communities in Ìlàjẹland. The first attempt at establishing such village level theocracy in 1945 ended in a disaster. With the collapse of this experiment,

³Interview with Senior Boarnegie Claudius O. Omogbemi on July 24, 2019 at the C & S Zion Church, Ugbonla, aged 71. He is the General Secretary of the Ugbonla Theocratic Community worldwide.

⁴This has been discussed exhaustively in the Ph.D. thesis of one of the authors.

another bold step was taken in 1947 leading to the establishment of the Holy Apostles Community, Ayétòrò (Barrett, 1974). The community has seen the formation of more than forty other theocratic communities across the Ìlàjẹ littoral (Ebisemiju, 2016).

The Puritans considered their exit from traditional Ìlàjẹ settlements as a divine command which required urgency. The phrase in the Bible (II Corinthians 6:17) which the emigrants relied upon, claiming the same as the divine command necessitating their action was “come ye out from among them and be ye separate, touch not any unclean thing.” With their inclination to this passage, the nucleus of emigrants to Ayétòrò hurried out of their communities, leaving unwilling spouses and relations to heed the call to a life of full devotion to God in the twilight of January 12, 1947. These emigrants adopted the name Holy Apostles and christened their village The Holy Apostles Community, Ayétòrò. They severed ties with the C & S Society as a result of their differences with the leadership of the society in the build up to the establishment of Ayétòrò. Following this move, another group of devout C & S members under the leadership of Late Saint Elisha Lene Ogunfeyimi braved what has been described as a rare dangerous move to a swampy forest called Ugbonla. The swamp had been home to dreaded wild animals and was the dumpsite for corpses of lunatics and people who had been described as evil during their lifetime until it was occupied by Ogunfeyimi and his followers on February 16, 1948. The pilgrims who settled in Ugbonla retained the identity of the C & S but added the appellation, Zion to the generic name (Omogbemi, 2008). Before the end of 1951, two other prominent theocracies had emerged in Ìlàjẹland. While one was formed by a former disenchanting member of Ayétòrò, the other sprang from the C & S Zion brand (Ebisemiju, 2016). The dotting of the Ìlàjẹ littoral by village level theocracies continued till that division of the Yorúbá territory became resplendent with such faith communities which were not common in other parts of Yorubaland until much later.

With the severance of ties with their kith and kin across their homeland, members of the newly founded theocratic communities took pride in explaining their religious experiences and expressions as unique and divinely revealed. They insist that their customs and traditions reflect a sharp departure from those found in their natal settlements and that it took their prophets deliberate efforts to seek divine guidance on the ways to advance their civilization (Adefi, 2020). The people hold an opinion of themselves as being divinely led into a superlative realm of celestial existence, and thus, not polluted by heathenism. This claim of cultural purity from the customs and traditions of their neighbours which Ìlàjẹ theocratic communities ascribe to themselves requires interrogation. To address this issue, the research uses the instrument of ethnographic fieldwork to investigate the situation. It observed that Ìlàjẹ theocratic communities, having not existed ex-nihilo were influenced by the cultural practices of the natal settlements in their region. As the next section shall reveal, where possible, they improvised, adapted, modified and remoulded their ancestral practices.

3. Improvisation, Adaptation, Modification and Hybridization of Ancestral Practices in Ìlàḗ Theocratic Communities

In spite of the popular claim to sharp deviations from customs and traditions originating from their natal settlements, indications are rife that Ìlàḗ theocratic communities have assimilated customs and traditions from their aboriginal villages⁵. This category of age-long practices deriving from traditional settlements has been adopted with varying degrees of modifications before their institutionalisation in the religious settlements. Some of the customs and traditions under the spotlight include marriage customs, myths concerning witchcraft, indigenous family structures and the political systems operating in these two settings. Furthermore, the work delves into the topics of music, especially drums used in religious worship, burial customs and chieftaincy/religious titles in the study area. In addition, a practice peculiar to Ori-Oke Iwamimo, a leading Ìlàḗ village theocracy where some of the aspects of the proceedings observed during the *Malokun* festival have been adopted will be examined. Although, Ìlàḗ theocratic communities have been courageous in creating and promoting an array of new customs including festivals, carnivals and other unique celebrations for themselves⁶, they have also been ingenious in initiating role substitutes to organs and institutions responsible for driving Ìlàḗ ancestral civilization⁷, however, the focus of this study concerns ancient practices which originated from their natal settlements in particular or from the Yorùbá culture in general which have been adapted or reformed to suit the religious beliefs of these religious settlements. We will now proceed to explore some practices which fall within the latter category.

3.1. Marriage Customs

Customarily, marriage in Yorùbáland is seen as the prerogative of the families of the intending couple (Adeoye, 2010, Alowolodu & Olusanya, 2019). Marriage customs practiced in most divisions of the Yorùbá territory are analogous, only with variations which in many cases are quite insignificant (Lee & Vaughan, 2008, Omotayo, 2024). Ìlájeland, the far eastern end of the Yorùbá territory in spite of her proximity to other ethnic nations (Falola, 2017) has maintained the core Yorùbá cultural practices as it relates to marriage. As in other areas of Yorùbáland, everything pertaining to the process leading to the recognition of a marriage union among the Ìlàḗ is contracted almost exclusively between the families of the intending couple. Among the

⁵This view is held in all theocratic communities visited during fieldwork. These include Ayétòrò, Ugbónlá, Zion Pepe, Orí-Òkè Ìwámímó, Zion Igbòkòdá, Zion Orópó, Zion Ògógóró etc.

⁶Festivals in this category include: (a) the anniversary commemorating the abolition of twin-infanticide in Ayétòrò and Orí-Òkè Ìwámímó which is otherwise called twins Festival, (b) Má te ojú Iná anniversary in Orí-Òkè Ìwámímó and (c) the biennial school of theology programmes in Ugbónlá and Zion Pepe etc.

⁷The Cherubim bands were created for law enforcement and the protection of the territorial integrity of Ilaje theocratic settlements. Their establishment in Ilaje theocratic communities replaced the Police and other State sponsored Armed Forces supported by the Central government in Nigeria. Also, prophets in the newly founded communities are being consulted in place of Babalawo and other diviners who operated in Ilaje ancestral communities.

Mahin, a clan of the Ìlàjẹ people, marriage is seen as an obligation for every adult. This view explains the disposition of the society to any mature bachelor or spinster who is left unmarried for a period considered too long (Iyaomolere, 2011; Mahmud, 2022). Adeoye emphasizes the point that marriage is an elaborate ceremony spanning up to three months among the Yorùbá. He adds that the customs surrounding the act of marriage cost the man and his family a lot of money. In the past, it was fashionable to recruit a go-between or courier who would properly relay the intentions of the suitor (the man) to the lady. The courier had the duty to investigate the family history of the lady (Daramola & Jeje, 2005). S/he would be interested in knowing if the family has a history of persons diagnosed as lunatics, lepers, or those with epilepsy, thieves, chronic debtors or brawlers. Information on the personal traits and social attributes of the lady being considered for marriage was also important to the courier who was usually employed by the intending husband. The courier is to make a report of their findings which would in turn determine if the venture would be further pursued.

Following their establishment, Ìlàjẹ theocratic settlements held themselves as a people bounded together by distinct socio-cultural practices. They considered their unique practices as those which place them in a sublime realm of existence from the natal Ìlàjẹ villages. They claim that there are demonstrable differences between marriage customs practiced within these two distinct ideological settings. While marriage practices in the traditional settlements involved massive spending on the part of the groom and his family, the theocratic settlements made attempts at regulating bridal price and other gift exchanges between the families coming together through marriage. Field work revealed that in the past, in natal communities, there were instances where a bride would be held by her family and especially her mother for as long as five to seven years after the marriage formalities had been deemed completed. It happened in some of those instances that she would have been put in the family way once or twice by the husband who would keep clamouring for her total release to him having satisfied the conditions for marriage⁸.

In contrast to Ìlàjẹ ancestral customs, theocratic villages in this region instituted a less cumbersome process of marriage. Ceilings were fixed for cash payments while the burden of expensive gift exchanges was de-emphasized. In Ayétòrò, for obvious reasons, bride prices were prohibited⁹. A man and his wife would only become spouses upon a pronouncement by the *Oba* in a formal gathering. This custom was in force during the reign of *Oba* E.O. Peter Ojagbohunmi, *Ojelayinbo I* (1947-1963), the first leader of Ayétòrò. Informants who themselves became married through this process expressed the particular manner in which these events took place in Ayétòrò in the past. The *Oba* would request unmarried young

⁸Interview with Senior Boarnegie Claudius O. Omogbemi on August 15, 2019 Ugbónlá, aged 71.

⁹Ayétòrò practised communalism between 1948 and 1970. During this time, all members of the community put the proceeds of their economic enterprise into a single purse. No one was permitted to own or hold personal cash or other belongings. It was therefore impossible to impose bride prices on men who wanted to contract marriage with young ladies among them.

men (who had turned twenty years) and ladies (usually about eighteen years old) to rise in the church. He would instruct the men to form a single line on one side of the broad aisle in the middle of the church. He would request the ladies to do the same on the other side of the aisle. Once the instruction is carried out, he would then instruct that they begin to close the gap in an orderly manner. As the space is eliminated, the lady standing before any of the young men becomes his wife. This process of selecting marriage partners has been strongly criticized by Ayétòrò's neighbours. While this marriage practice was in force, their neighbours argued that the community deployed the instrument of coercion in their marriage practices. However, some of the surviving members of Ayétòrò who got married through this process expressed satisfaction with the *Oba's* innovation. They claimed that the practice in question is not different from the marriage custom in Yorubaland where parents and families played significant roles in the choice of marriage partners for their children. Informants claimed that they had good marriages and were full of praise to the *Oba* for the innovation.

In Ugbónlá, a bride price of twelve shillings was permissible in the early days of their settlement¹⁰. A reasonable quantity of wine was also allowed to be presented to the bride's family during marriage ceremonies. The community enforced compliance with this convention to demonstrate their unwillingness to place a heavy burden on prospective grooms in the spirit of the brotherhood that pervades the settlement. In contrast to what was obtainable in Ìlájẹ theocratic villages in the 1960s, the bride price payable in natal communities in Ìlájẹland was two hundred Naira. Data collected by Daramola and Jeje reveal this as the highest figure required as bride price when compared to what was in practice in other divisions of Yorùbáland covered by their work. Iyaomolere reveals that among the Mahin, a key unit of the Ìlájẹ nation, the figure ranges between two hundred and fifty and four hundred naira (Iyaomolere, 2011). The amount payable is a function of the status of the bride's family and other sterling attributes of the bride. With the exception of Ayétòrò, Ìlájẹ theocratic settlements retained the roles played by the families of the couple in the process leading to the recognition of the union. Consent to the union and the ceremonies involved were held between the families in a manner that the theocratic communities approved. After the marriage had been contracted, the couple was only required to attend a meeting in the community church where it would be announced that they were now man and wife. Prayers would then be made and blessings pronounced on the union at the religious meeting¹¹.

For some decades after their founding, solemnization of matrimonies was not in practice in Ilaje theocratic villages. Some informants have attributed reasons why this practice was shunned partly to its nature as being expensive to execute.

¹⁰The authors collected a pamphlet containing information on the marriage customs in Ugbónlá during fieldwork. The community had produced the document holding other information which includes fines payable by those found to be guilty of pre-marital and extra-marital sex and witchcraft among others.

¹¹Interview with Mama Dorcas Ogunfeyimi (age 72) at Church Street, Ugbónlá on 18th August, 2019. She is one of the widows of the founder of Ugbónlá community.

Solemnization is usually an elaborate ceremony requiring provision of entertainment and the hosting and feeding of invited guests. It seems plausible that another reason for shunning this practice is that the people had been accustomed and adapted to the traditional way of contracting marriages from time. Ugbónlá, one of the most populous Ìlàḗ theocratic villages, like others, has witnessed only a few marriage solemnizations till date. From responses received during field work, one experimental solemnization was conducted in Zion-Pepe, another leading village theocracy in Ìlàḗland since its establishment in 1951¹². A section of the male populations in Ayétòrò, Ugbónlá, Orí-Òké Ìwámímó and Zion Pèpè, the four leading theocratic communities in Ìlàḗland attribute their reluctance to solemnization of marriages to its incompatibility with polygyny. It is believed by a section of the male populations in these communities that the solemnization of marriages in the Christian tradition forbade a man from engaging in polygyny. However, polygyny has been a common practice in Ìlàḗland and the custom still subsists in Ìlàḗ theocratic villages till date.

During fieldwork, it was observed that courtship and other pre-marital customs promoted by the youth population in Ìlàḗland today differ substantially from what operated in the past. In the current dispensation, Ìlàḗ youths who have attained or are gradually attaining the age of marriage mix freely within the social space. From such cordial interactions, impressions are made, affections grow, and bonds are formed. Parents no longer impose marriage partners on their children. A young man and lady who begin to take interest in each other spend time knowing each other to determine if the idea of investing their future in a marriage union would be wholesome considering that such union is expected to last a lifetime. After the period of intimate friendship and when a young man makes up his mind on marrying a lady, he makes his intention known and if such proposal is acceptable to her, she informs her parents. When the news is broken to the families of the intending couple and both families agree to the plan, they give their blessings to the union and expect the betrothal to progress steadily till both families agree on the time to consummate the union. Objections are only raised from either of the families when the prospect of such union is bleak. One major ground for such objection would be any remote establishment of blood kinship between the families of the intending couple. This will be traced up to four generations on both sides of each parent of the couple-to-be. Pre-marital sexual intercourse both in natal and Ìlàḗ theocratic communities is not usually a subject for which strict rules are set and enforced, though this was considered a serious infringement at least in the first few decades of the founding of the theocratic villages as it was in the ancestral communities in the past. Nowadays, when a young lady who is engaged to or dating a young man is found to be pregnant, no serious issues are raised owing to the view that the pregnancy could hasten the process of formalising their union beyond the status of a casual date or relationship. On the contrast however, extra

¹²One of the authors had the fortune of speaking with the man whose wedding was solemnised in this fashion. He is an educated gentleman and a teacher in a High School near Zion Pepe.

marital relationships are fought and strongly condemned in natal and Ìlàṣe theocratic communities. In fact, such activities if discovered attract severe penalties. If such allegations are proven beyond doubt in Ìlàṣe theocratic communities they attracted the observance of community service, manual labour which is rigorous and physically demanding or more stringent punishments. In addition, the parties to it, especially the man is heavily fined.

From the foregoing, it can be seen that Ìlàṣe theocratic communities have modified the marriage customs among the Yorùbá people. They have removed or refined some elements from the age-long marriage customs and retained others which satisfy their convictions. They retained the roles played by parents and families or vested such powers in their *Oba* but abolished the enforcement of huge bridal prices and other elaborate expenses. They also preserved the practice of polygyny which is a prominent feature of customary marriages in Yorùbáland.

3.2. Witchcraft

Generally, most African cultures recognize the agency of witchcraft (Parrinder, 1976; Idowu, 1991). In both the natal and Ìlàṣe theocratic communities, reference to witchcraft is quite prominent. Witches are held as evil and powerful and are therefore dreaded among the people. Significant energy is devoted to neutralising them and their powers. They are held as being responsible for the ills that sons and daughters of Ìlàṣe extraction both home and abroad suffer. It is a common belief that they are capable of impeding the progress of individuals and retarding communal development. In the natal settlements, where they are much dreaded, it is generally held that they are the cause of the poverty and misfortunes that pervade the communities. In the theocratic villages, on the other hand, spiritual interventions are often consciously carried out to overpower them so the communities could continue to maximize their potentials for unfettered prosperity (Barrett, 1974). As spirited efforts are committed to neutralizing witches regularly, members of the theocratic communities claim they live in a realm above their dominance. They attribute their successes over the malevolent beings to the glory of the celestial (Adefi, 2020).

It is held in this region that the spiritual, economic and technological advancement some of the theocratic villages enjoy are achievable due to the superior powers of the prophets over those of the witches. In some instances, witches and other harmful unseen forces are grouped together and engaged in spiritual warfare to incapacitate them and free those suffering from their spells and oppression. Many inhabitants of Ìlàṣe theocratic villages are reported to have resorted to the communities to seek protection and deliverance from witches who had inflicted them with terrible sicknesses or subjected them to oppression and affliction¹³. In Ìlàṣeland, hitches in smooth business operations or the sudden failure of a boat engine while

¹³In Zion Peṣe during the lifetime of the first *Oba*, Theophilus Erejuwa Mafo (1951-1979) notable interventions were said to have been carried out to exorcise those possessed with the spirit of witchcraft. It was his practice anytime he sensed the presence of witches in their community to call for a religious gathering where he will, by superior prophetic powers overpower them and abort their plans.

in use could be attributed to the interference of witches (Barrett, 1977). This accounts for the massive investment of time and energy in exorcizing witches of their evil spirits in Ìlàḗ theocratic communities. Prophets of the theocratic villages opine that witches must be prevented from perpetrating their evil deeds so they do not seize control of the religious settlements. It is not uncommon to host emergency or statutory religious meetings where vigorous prayers and other prophetic actions are carried out against witches consequent upon dreams or revelations reported by prophets in Ìlàḗ theocratic villages. Aside from sicknesses, sudden death and accidents are some of the other common misfortunes attributed to witchcraft activities among the people. Though none of the four oldest and most successful Ìlàḗ village theocracies (Ayétòrò, Ugbónlá, Orí-Òkè Ìwàmímó and Zion Pẹḗ) has attained eight decades since their establishment, they were the most developed communities in the entire Ìlàḗland until Ìgbókòdá became the headquarters of Ìlàḗ Local Government and consequently overtook them due to massive government investment in the town. Besides, as Igbokoda has the fortune of being on the boundary of the mainland, stilts are not required in constructing houses in most part of its territory. This makes housing construction less cumbersome in Igbokoda when compared with most of the village level theocracies as they are majorly deep along the coastal boundaries of Ìlàḗland or closer to the ocean and therefore more prone to the environmental effects of ocean surge, flooding etc.

These Ìlàḗ theocratic communities had embarked on the building of the first set of brick houses, storey buildings and houses with sheets of corrugated iron in Ìlàḗland. Besides, they had a well-planned community layout with streets built through the manual sand-filling of swamps. Each Ìlàḗ theocratic community has a very magnificent church cathedral, the only religious building allowed in each of the settlements. Each *Oba*¹⁴ also had a state-of-the-art palace not seen in other parts of Ìlàḗland. In addition, many of the inhabitants of the theocratic settlements became wealthy and prosperous in their businesses. Ìlàḗ theocratic communities were said to have liberated Ìlàḗland from the hold of witchcraft and other evil forces due to the superior spiritual powers attributed to prophets who led them. Another major area where they conquered popular belief regarding the hold of witches in retarding growth and development in Ìlàḗland is in the provision of large passenger boats which traversed the water ways from Warri in the east to Lagos in the west. Ayétòrò advanced the art and act of fishing by investing in large fishing boats and trawlers thereby increasing the per capita income of her inhabitants. Other Ìlàḗ theocratic settlements made their marks in advancing the fishing trade in Ìlàḗland, however, Ayétòrò was the most prosperous among them.

Natives of Ìlàḗland argue that the theocratic communities in the area overcame the onslaught of witches in their domain. This cannot be said to have been

¹⁴An *Oba* is the monarch of each Yorúbá town. Leaders of these theocracies also adopted this title in their villages. This is yet another example of the adoption of Yorúbá cultural practices in these Christian villages.

achieved without very stiff opposition from the witches as reported by Barrett and leading members of the theocratic villages. C & S Zion, Ugbónlá as noted earlier was founded on a forest strip credited to have been home to evil spirits. It had the reputation of being the dump site for corpses of evil people—including witches—and lunatics. This is in consonance with the belief in Africa that spirits occupy forests, rivers, mountains and other natural phenomena (Idowu, 1962; Mbiti, 1969). For the religious contingent to effectively take control of the dreaded forest therefore, they had to contend vigorously with the spirits which they conceived as having occupied them before the emergence of the Ugbónlá contingent in that space. In Ayétòrò and Orí-Òkè Ìwàmímó, Barrett indicates that reports are rife on attempts made by witches to disrupt the equilibrium and cause harm to inhabitants. Some of such were said to have been revealed through dreams and trances. Members of the Ìlàjẹ theocratic settlements hold that such revelations are not treated with levity. Sometimes, the individuals alleged to be involved in such activities are identified and treated harshly to dissuade them from their heinous activities.

The phenomenon of witchcraft together with the myth surrounding it is indicative of the fact that it is female dominated. Though men with similar characteristics as witches are regarded as wizards, mention is not always made of them in the same proportion as their female counterparts when those responsible for malevolent activities are being investigated. The Yorùbá as well as the Ìlàjẹ theocratic communities conceive that fewer men are involved as wizards undertaking malicious enterprise while the women are more ubiquitous and dreaded. There are certain insinuations that the agency of witches is an avenue for the women folk to take a share of the chances and recognition they have been denied in the public sphere in Yorùbáland. Since Yorùbá culture like those of many African societies are mostly male dominated, they gave more visibility to the male folk. In consequence, through witchcraft, women folk are viewed as contesting for space and control which they are denied openly. Responses obtained during fieldwork indicate that witchcraft in Ìlàjẹland thrives in line with the practice in many other African communities owing to the configuration of the family structure which is tilted in favour of the men. Men are in many African societies regarded as the heads of the family with who lay the machinery of power and control. They determined the course of action and the direction in which their homes were headed. In addition, community administration also rested significantly on their shoulder. If men had a firm grip of the direction of public life as well as governance, the women, as it is believed in these societies sought a form of balance and counter-control by wrestling spiritual powers which determines the direction of abstract phenomena from the men.

It has been established that in both the natal and theocratic communities in Ìlàjẹland the presence and the nature of the activities of these elements are recognised. Their views regarding the influence they wield and how inimical their activities are to the growth and development of the ambitions of individuals and

those of the communities remain sacrosanct. However, the only difference in the two categories of settlements in Ìlàḷeland is in their level of acclaimed success in dispelling or incapacitating witches from their activities. The philosophical orientations in the natal and theocratic communities regarding witches and witchcraft remain largely the same as they are dreaded by the average person but may be put to flight by the religious functionaries especially in the theocratic settlements. However, the attitude of the traditional religious experts to them, most often includes appeasement and persuasion from carrying out their nefarious activities. The latter seldom confront or treat them harshly.

3.3. Family Structure and Titles

Without prejudice to the power play surrounding the control of both the physical and spiritual spaces in Ìlàḷeland, it is still very clear that leadership of the family in Ìlàḷeland is vested in the menfolk. The men are allowed by tradition to practice polygyny. The practice was popular among the people as it became a mark of prestige and a symbol of male dominance. With the popular practice of polygyny, family ties became complex and intricately knitted. For example, some half dozen men who are not related by blood but who are married to ladies who are siblings or half siblings, are as a result considered extended relations of their wives' family. Such ties knit people together, increasing the circle of kindred, affinity and consanguinity.

Another local tradition in Ìlàḷeland which fosters family ties is the subscription to both patrilocal and matrilocal kinship ties. Unlike some other divisions of Yorùbáland where descent is traced mainly along the patrilineal line, Ìlàḷe people like the Ìkálẹ̀ and other neighbouring populations regard quite uniquely both the matrilineal and patrilineal family orders (Ogen, 2006). This practice increases the visibility of the average family circle. However, it impacts negatively on the range of marriage partners permissible by tradition. With the institutionalisation of this practice also comes the large circle of relations from whom young folks could take apprenticeships and other forms of assistance towards stabilizing on a course of action which had previously been trodden by their kith or their spouses. Ìlàḷe theocratic communities continued in the local practice of recognising both the patrilineal and matrilineal family ties. In most of these theocratic villages, the family bond which previously existed among relations was maintained. In Ayétòrò however, family bond was for some time, as a matter of policy played down for a more cohesive bonding of the village population (Barrett, 1977). The spurning of family solidarity was on the orders of the first *Oba* E. O. Peter Ojagbohunmi, *Ogeloyinbo I* (1947-1963). In fact, when anyone was accused of an action which contravened community statutes, it was expected that those with whom the individual was related by blood took the first and most striking steps to physically punish the fellow for the shame caused and the disrepute s/he brings to them all.

In the traditional Ìlàḷe villages, the right to ascend the throne is reserved for the male folks from recognized ruling houses of the respective Ìlàḷe clans (Iyaomolere,

2011). In addition, the avalanche of statutory chieftaincy positions favours the male against their female counterparts. While there are numerous chieftaincies men could hold, only a few are available to the women. In Mahin, only menopausal women who are seen as having become men hold the *Ayaekùn* chieftaincy title. They are placed next in rank to the *Dosù* (a title held exclusively by men) high chiefs. The *Dosù* are next in rank to the *Amapetu*, the *Oba* of Mahin. Despite their seeming high ranking, the *Ayaekùn* are excluded from discussions on important political issues and those that pertain to the *Orò* cult. The *Ayaekùn* were involved in deliberations relating to the traditional council and were saddled with the responsibility of training girls of the kingdom in the art of traditional dancing and performances. Iyaomolere asserts that apart from women appointed as *Ayaekùn*, most other women are without titles among the *Ìlàjẹ* clan. Men, on the other hand, have several positions they could occupy. Such titles reflect their wealth, age and other qualities and characteristics recognized by their people.

Taking a cue from the avalanche of titles and prominence of men in the public space in *Ìlàjẹ*land, the theocratic settlements have a more complex socio-clerical hierarchical structure than the traditional settlements. As with many other African Independent churches, the *Ìlàjẹ* theocratic communities comprise groups that find the use of religious titles quite appealing and as such have developed structures that support the practice. They have developed various religious titles for the male as well as their female members. Some of these titles, however, are reserved for and conferred on members who have completed all the requirements for full membership. Full membership of the C & S Zion churches at Ugbónlá and Zion Peṣe, for instance, is accorded to those who have successfully undertaken the six months school of theology course. The requirement for enrolment in the school is not cumbersome. Emphasis is usually laid on salvation as the essential requirement a prospective student is expected to have attained prior to enrolment. Aside from this evidence, illiteracy was not enough ground for disqualification as the training included adult classes for those who may need tutelage regarding reading and writing. Many members of the Ugbonla community who were previously not literate have attained literacy as a result of their training at the school. Each member who graduates from the school receives a title appropriate to his/her spiritual gift or calling and operates in such position till a promotion is deemed necessary by the religious authority. Each successful male graduate of the Ugbonla theology programme receives any of the five titles viz: Apostle, Prophet, Pastor, Rabbi or Evangelist. In Zion Peṣe however, no one is accorded the title of prophet by virtue of their attendance at the school of theology. This is because the title is taken as a special gift from God, and as such, no man qualifies to call or consecrate another to the position. In this community therefore, the prophetic gift exhibited by a male member is observed over time. When it has been nurtured appropriately, such a fellow is officially conferred with the title. In addition to these titles, some receive the title of Senior Cherubim which distinguishes them from their counterparts in the Cherubim band who have yet to undergo theological training.

Upon the completion of the training, women on the other hand are conferred with the titles of Mary or Martha. The attainment of other titles like Mother in Israel and Queen Esther is strictly by promotion in the clerical order. While roles and responsibilities are assigned to each band or group within the faith community, it also does appear quite evidently that political decisions and other important deliberations are taken among leading prophets and administrators in these theocratic communities, a group whose membership is comprised exclusively of men. In most Ìlàjẹ theocratic villages, the council of elders, a judicial cum legislative organ of the communities has strictly male membership. Ayétòrò is the only exception in this practice as women are included in the council of elders. Leading prophets who also hold very significant positions in the communities are almost exclusively of the male gender. There are very devout folks among the women whose spiritual gifts and endowment are quite unique as they are enviable. In spite of the evidence of their gifting and devotion, many of them are content being home makers. Others only concentrate on their business ventures due to the structure and role-sharing customs manifested in the culture of the Ìlàjẹ people. Only a few exceptions are found for women taking up significant clerical roles in these settings. Most of these roles were taken up in the early days of the establishment of the theocratic communities. Only Ayétòrò currently boasts of women who operate in the prophetic order among the leading Ìlàjẹ theocratic communities.

On the question of family structure and titles, therefore, it is evident that not much difference exists in the conventions of both the ancestral communities (Lateju & Oladosu, 2012; Oluwatumininu, 2022) and the theocratic settlements in Ìlàjẹland. Besides, the roles undertaken by women in the secular as well as the spiritual realms of existence in both categories of settlements in the study area are essentially the same. Moreover, the avalanche of traditional titles men occupy in the natal settlements are as numerous as the array of spiritual titles available to them in the theocratic settlements. The only notable difference is with the nomenclature or the titles each category of settlement adopts. Public and spiritual offices are mostly occupied by men in both settings.

3.4. Music

The Yorúbá people are lovers of music. They are known to have developed several genres of music and dance styles in their relatively long history (Yussuf & Olubomehin, 2018). Their most popular music genres include fuji, juju, apala, toyè and sakara to mention a few. Their professional groups like the hunters' guild also have their unique style of songs and dances. The people are known to have developed special types of music for special events and occasions including marriage (bridal) songs, funeral dirges etc. Being of the Yorúbá stock, members of Ìlàjẹ theocratic communities have demonstrated their endless love for music. They have developed their own unique genre of music which characterises their worship services. Their voice modulation and pitch frequencies are quite fascinating and alluring. These theocratic villages maintain that their lyrics are inspired and divinely revealed. Many of

their songs come across as assemblages of philosophical statements with spiritual insight as they bring moral lessons to congregants. Singing in these congregations is usually accompanied by various degrees of body movements ranging from a mild swing to rapid and vigorous jerking. Their response to music, they say, is as dictated by the Holy Spirit. Stories are usually told of how leading figures in the choirs who present new songs for congregational consumption derive inspiration for their performances. Music in these settings, like in many other climes is aided with musical instruments. These include pianos and keyboards, gongs, trumpets, bells, tambourines, and drums. Many locally made musical instruments which include gourds strewn with netted coral beads, cymbals and clangs also feature during special or congregational renditions. Of special interest is a particular drum in use in most Ìlàṣẹ theocratic communities. The drum in local parlance is called *baàlù*. It is spherical in shape and the parts which produce melodious sounds when correctly beaten is covered with animal skin or some other locally sourced materials. When manipulated, the drum is able to produce a number of sound pitches on both sides at the same time. As a percussion instrument, it is usually beaten with a short wooden stick comprising a rounded or cushioned end. While writing on the Aladura movement in Ìlàṣẹland, Barrett notes that indigenous musical instruments like this drum are used during services and clapping and dancing are normal features of their meetings (Barrett, 1974).

This drum was used by votaries of the *Ògún* deity in their religious worship before the advent of the Aladura movement in Ìlàṣẹland. They are the local equivalent of the *bátá* drums their counterparts use in *Sàngó* worship in other parts of Yorùbáland (Jacob, 2023). Ìlàṣẹ theocratic communities adopted the use of *baàlù* as it became the most readily available musical instrument accessible to them once they began to establish their religious cum political independence. Informants are unanimous in their view that many of the members of the Ìlàṣẹ theocratic communities had previously followed the *Ògún* deity and were knowledgeable in the making of the drums. These individuals therefore deployed their skills towards producing the drums for Christian worship. The drums have continued to play a central role in the liturgies of Ìlàṣẹ theocratic communities. During their religious and cultural rallies, they constitute one of the most attractive instruments the theocratic communities utilise as devotees dance on the streets of their villages in demonstration of their religious beliefs and devotion. It is believed that the beating and sounding of this drum provide inspiration to song leaders while they help electrify and charge the sacred atmosphere where worship is being held. Devout and skillful drummers are usually elevated and singled out in these theocratic settlements as choice men when quality worship is anticipated.

By the vigorous beating of the drum which produces sounds congruous with the lines and tunes of known songs during musical interludes, the song leader is availed the choice of piloting the congregation in singing in line with the beats of the drum. Though they emanated from the worship of the traditional deity of *Ògún*, these drums play a central role in worship in Ìlàṣẹ theocratic communities

as they have been imbibed, incorporated and accorded a special place in the religious encounters of these communities. Their significance lay in their indispensability during fellowship as the *baálù* is crucial to quality worship among the people. It has been shown that this element (*baálù*) utilized during worship in theocratic communities in Ìlájeland was clearly adopted from the traditionalists who deployed them for their ancestral worship. This is in spite of the fact that the original users had been described as idol worshippers who were unworthy of followership and patronage.

3.5. Significance of the Sea to Orí-Òkè Ìwámímò Belief System

Just as the local drums used in the pre-Aladura Ìlájẹ era served the theocratic villages whose orientation, as they professed, was clearly against the traditional religious practices of its original users, a religious ceremony held by the seashore at Orí-Òkè Ìwámímò community akin to the *Malòkun* worship is known to be a major religious observance in that theocratic community. The ceremony is brought underway by the demarcation with a rope of a small space by the seashore. Within this sacred space is placed a table on which a big bowl containing water is mounted. During the ceremony, the *Oba* and a group of prophets while speaking in tongues pray vehemently for members of the community. They shake feverishly and vigorously as they offer the prayers. After the prayers for the community, the *Oba* and the prophets proceed to pray on the water with the same intensity. They thereafter sprinkle the sanctified water on the congregation. The congregants believe the sanctified water has the capacity to heal the sick and cure every distress as it is sprinkled on them. In this ceremony, those elements which characterise the worship of and sacrifices to fertility gods generally (Murphy & Sanford, 2001) and *Malòkun* in particular are incorporated. The expected results of the ceremony, which include healing, safety and prosperity have long been associated with fertility gods in many communities in Africa (Badejo, 2001; Haule & Njewe, 2016). During this ceremony, there is usually an invocation of the sea by the *Oba*. Upon this action, the sea responds by causing its waves to rise while flooding the entire area occupied by the congregants. When the sea responds in this manner, it is assumed that it has given its blessings to the occasion while favourable results were anticipated. This religious festival benefits from the material and spiritual wealth associated with the sea, an equivalent of the invocation of the sea goddess as a fertility deity which the popular *Malòkun* festival in Ìlájeland is known for. Again, Orí-Òkè Ìwámímò, a leading theocratic community in Ìlájeland, by the institutionalization and celebration of this religious festival has demonstrated their capacity for retaining the gains previously derived from an ancestral devotion by incorporating elements of the autochthonous worship into their new found faith.

3.6. Glossolalia and Potent Words

Glossolalia (the act of speaking in tongues) is held as a sign of spiritual maturity in Ìlájẹ theocratic communities. *Èdè*, as it is called in local parlance is therefore

common place among prophets and others who hold important religious titles in these faith communities. Though glossolalia—as reported in the Bible—has been a common experience in Christianity from the time of the apostles, there are indications its occurrence in Ìlájẹ theocracies stems from their acculturation with Islam and traditional religious practices of the Ìlájẹ people and their neighbours (Peel, 2016). Speaking in tongues seems to be a somewhat prevalent practice among both traditional and indigenous Christian groups across Africa. For example, while Sundkler remarked that glossolalia is practiced in traditional Zulu society (Sundkler, 1961), Baeta writes of an indigenous Christian movement in Ghana where the practice is prevalent (Baeta, 1962). Like in the Zulu example, Ayétòrò and Orí-òkè Ìwámímò for instance practice glossolalia. Their *édè* consists of several local languages combined. Hausa, Ijaw and Urhobo formed part of those languages which *édè* is comprised. This was proven by Barrett when he reports an incident where a Hausa fellow from Northern Nigeria, who, during a visit to Ìlájẹland stumbled on some prophets who had no prior knowledge of his language but were witnessed uttering intelligible words in Hausa language during worship. In some cases, individual prophets in these theocracies are known with their different tongues signifying their signature tunes. The differences in the structure of tongues across Ìlájẹ theocracies and among individual prophets in these communities do no harm to the belief of members in the efficacy of their utterances. Moreover, their vocalizations, in some instances, are well understood by congregants in their domain. This phenomenon is comparable to the use of esoteric languages/words by priests and other religious specialists in the Yorùbá ancestral religions (Nosonovsky, 2022). Consultations in the Yorùbá religions involve processes in prescribed manners (Olupona & Abiodun, 2016). These processes often-times require the use of potent words which are only known to the initiates. These words are not those generally spoken by all and sundry but those which have antecedents, a history and are followed because of the assurance of their infallibility when properly dispensed and accurately discharged. Evidence gathered during fieldwork suggests that this form of religious practice had been associated with the traditionalists in Ìlájẹland before the advent of Christianity in the area. *Édè*, potent words or esoteric languages are therefore commonplace both in the Yoruba traditional belief system and in the Ìlájẹ theocratic communities. Certainly, their occurrence in the Ìlájẹ-Yoruba traditional milieu predates their appearance among theocratic settlements in the area and their use by the latter has been partly influenced by the former who had utilized it in their worship and divination practices for a long time.

3.7. Burial Practices

In many Ìlájẹ theocratic communities, elements of Yoruba cultural practices manifest in local burial rites in spite of the claims of aversion to the indigenous cultural practices of their forebears. In Ugbónlá, for example, there are no reserved cemetery grounds for the internment of human corpses (Adefi, 2020). As done in

ancient Yorùbá communities, graves are dug out around common areas within family compounds as well as under the grounds of the rooms the deceased lived in their lifetime (Abiose, 2021). It is commonplace in this community to find sepulchres in veranders, in a room or other parts of the compound. This Yorùbá cultural practice which has been embraced in these theocratic settlements stems from the fact that the dead, although translated from the physical realm, are considered part of the living community (Jimoh, 1985). As such, burying the dead around homes is an indication that the dead have not been cut off from the living (Opeyemi & Omigbule, 2019). As part of their burial rituals, the Yorùbá hold a series of ceremonies which culminate in the internment of their dead (Adeboye, 2016). In fashions reflective of their belief systems, Ugbónlá, Orí-Òkè Ìwámímó, Zion Pẹpẹ and many other Ìlájẹ theocratic communities pay their last respect to their dead through programmes and ceremonies which reflect their beliefs. In these theocratic settings, commendation services, wake-keeps and processional/musical performances in commemoration of the life and times of the dead form parts of the burial rituals. The only difference is that the ceremonies were more elaborate and spanned a longer period in ancient times. Up until the early 1980s, there was no cemetery in Zion Pẹpẹ. It was not until this time that the community designated a separate ground away from the town centre for burying their dead. This recent practice is in line with the historical evidence on the adoption of cemeteries in other parts of Yorùbáland (Onwuzuruigbo, 2014). This practice was introduced to towns and other communities in the Yorùbá region by missionaries beginning in the 19th Century (Morton-Williams, 1960; Awolalu, 1979; Dopamu, 2001; Abiose, 2021).

On the other hand, the coastal (perennially waterlogged) environment of Orí-Òkè Ìwámímó has been a significant barrier to the prospect of creating a burial ground in the community. After a late evening and sometimes an all-night funerary rite held for a deceased member, the community proceeds to bury the remains of the deceased at Èbúté Ìpàré a settlement further ashore in Ìlájẹland. The late evening burial rite consists of a Service of Songs held in honour of the dead. Individuals whose lives were touched by the late member are usually given the last opportunity to recount the impact(s) the deceased had on them in their lifetime. Members are allowed to express their grief and pain at the loss of the dead with the hope of reuniting with them in the afterlife. A short exhortation is given on the occasion. Members are taught that their momentary grief should not overshadow the hope they have in the resurrection of the dead. The message usually centres around themes relating to proper Christian conduct which guarantees saints a place in heaven after death. Only two graves (one for the founder of the theocratic settlement and the other for his brother) exist in the community. These graves were specially built and fortified with a generous quantity of cement to retain its integrity and keep water away from doing damage to them and the corpses placed in them.

Following the pattern of gifts presentations to the dead in Yorùbá customs, it was observed at the burial service held for one of the deceased female relations of the founder of Ugbónlá community in February 2018 that children of the deceased

were handed offertory bowls and were made to stand before the congregation as friends and sympathizers danced to drop their offerings (cash gifts) in the bowls. This practice is indeed similar to the ancient Yoruba tradition where the deceased children present gifts to the departed parent while they are laid in state. After their personal gifts, they welcome relations and sympathizers who also present their gifts to the deceased. In the past, those gifts were in many cases buried alongside the departed one. Such occasions were also utilized by others whose parents had long departed the earth to send gifts—which will be buried with the corpse—to them (Abiose, 2021). Although tangible gifts to the dead are no longer frequent features in Yorùbá funerary rites, there are occasions when the dead are buried with their academic certificates and other personal belongings which are not transferable or beneficial to their children. It is only in Ayètòrò where formal burials are not held. This community disposes of their dead under the cover of the night and details of the rites have been closely guarded from the public space (Barrett, 1977).

From the above illustrations, it is evident that Ìlàjẹ theocratic communities have undergone the process of voluntary and partial cultural assimilation of marriage customs of the Yoruba people. They also acknowledge the existence of malevolent spirits and destructive powers of witches and wizards which the Ìlàjẹ-Yorùbá people hold. Their family structures and titles as well as the importation of ancestral musical instruments say a lot about their acceptance of these customs from their natal villages. Besides, the sea invocation at Orí-Òkè Ìwámímó, the use of sacred words and adaptation of customary burial rites from the Ìlàjẹ ancestral system into the theocratic settlements in the area show that certain cultural practices of the Yorùbá have survived in Ìlàjẹ theocratic communities notwithstanding their claims to the contrary. This study has therefore provided some context through the tools of ethnographic fieldwork and interviews which have proven very useful to the work of cultural anthropologists. This method has also been very instrumental in interrogating the position of the members of Ìlàjẹ theocratic communities that their cultural practices were developed distinctly without any influence from their aboriginal neighbours and found the same in varying degrees to be inaccurate and inconsistent with reality.

4. Conclusion

Ìlàjẹ theocratic communities, in their bid for self-governance and the actualization of the totality of their set objectives, have developed codes, ethics, and guidelines necessary for proper conduct. Most of their innovative cultural practices, which have contributed to the advancement of their ideologies were founded not *ex-nihilo*. Their quest for the translation of their various religious experiences and expressions to reality brought about the need to adapt and improvise from existing codes practiced in natal settlements in their homeland. Those modifications which were perceived as necessary to their existence were codified and institutionalized. Although Ìlàjẹ theocracies boldly declare their distinctiveness and identity

as unique from local practices in their natal settlements, it is quite evident that their practices are either a hybrid or a fusion of their perception of the realm of reality with existing practices in their immediate environment. Though the theocracies sprang up basically as protests against what was perceived as unacceptable traditional practices, they have borrowed from well-established practices in natal settlements and redefined the same in contexts that suit their ideologies.

Through the hybridisation of local practices in Ìlàjẹ natal settlements with those which suit the orientations of the theocratic communities, Ìlàjẹ theocracies have continued to advance their ideologies and cultural preferences for well over seven decades unabated. It has been established how the cultural practices of the Ìlàjẹ, which predate the establishment of the theocracies, have diffused into the theocracies in spite of their claim for the rejection of anything emanating from the local traditions. The fusion of these local practices with those developed by the theocracies themselves has brought conspicuous embellishments to the original traditions inherited from Ìlàjẹ progenitors. The resultant effect is a manifestation of culture mix and acculturation, casting upon Ìlàjẹ Aladura movement a distinct identity. This further adds to the mix, another shade to the forms of African Christian practices already known. As seen among the Ìlàjẹ, other peoples across Africa have embellished their local belief system with Christian, Islamic/Muslim and other adopted traditions. As Christianity in local places continues to interact with local practices, various forms of Christian and traditional practices continue to emerge, leading to distinct religious expressions.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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