

Vernacular historiography and self-translation in early colonial Nigeria: Ajiṣafẹ́'s *History of Abeokuta*

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Introduction

A vast literature exists on the Yorùbá-speaking peoples of Western Africa. Academia has long recognized its debt to homegrown traditions of historiography (Law 1976; Falola 1991). The first generation of postcolonial Nigerian historiography, the pioneering Ibadan School of African History, utilized the early vernacular historians as sources for the construction of a new national history (Aderinto 2010). Recent scholarship has demonstrated the intrinsic significance of African vernacular authors (Peterson and Macola 2009). Vernacular authors were among the first to publish in their languages, and the first to emancipate African literary expression from Christian missionary initiative. In western Nigeria, Emmanuel Olympus Moore (aka Ajiṣafẹ́) (c.1875/79–1940) was the earliest intellectual to assimilate local oral traditions with the doctrines of the Christian missionaries to publish works of history, theology, poetry, prose, music theory, philosophy, polemics, panegyrics and jurisprudence as a complete oeuvre in the Yorùbá language (Babalola 1985: 165).

According to Toyin Falola, of the early local Yorùbá intellectuals, '[t]he most prolific of them all was Ajayi Kolawole Ajiṣafẹ́, formerly known as Emmanuel Olympus Moore' (Falola 1999: 13). Ajiṣafẹ́ is regarded as the most prolific local intellectual in the history of written Yorùbá literature because of his high level of productivity and the range of disciplines he mastered (Doortmont 1994: 52–3). While he wrote across many disciplines, he did not primarily publish novels, the most popular genre of contemporary literature. Yet, Ajiṣafẹ́ was the first celebrity author of the Yorùbá language whose books were popular in his time and became local classics reprinted in multiple editions (*ibid.*: 53). Why did Ajiṣafẹ́'s ideas resonate with people in early colonial southern Nigeria? Yet, unlike some of his contemporaries, why did Ajiṣafẹ́'s renown not transcend his generation?

The oeuvre of Ajiṣafẹ́, this article argues, belongs to a wide tradition of world Christianity in which vernacular literatures arose in erstwhile church-dominated communities, giving rise to moral discourses that popularized modern conceptions of nationality and sanctioned new systems of authority (Sanneh 2008: 185–215). Vernacular authors were inherently controversial because, using the tools of modern technology, they appropriated, addressed and often transgressed traditional regimes of knowledge and authority. In so doing, they brokered the identity

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categories that, although highly contested in their own lives, subsequent generations could seemingly take for granted. Educated in a family of Abeokuta's leading nineteenth-century Anglican clergymen, Ajiṣafẹ combined local traditions of sacred authority with missiological genres (apologetics, history, ethics, hagiography, homiletics and polemics) in vernacular texts addressed to a popular audience. Ajiṣafẹ's treatises were expressions of an early public intellectual whose literary works depended on discursive engagement with a nascent popular reading audience and the informal networks of elite and British state patronage.

This article examines this discourse in Ajiṣafẹ's *History of Abeokuta* (1916) in order to capture the dynamics of West African negotiations of the social contract of empire. The article provides a report of the uses of linguistic duality in the self-translated texts' negotiation of distinct yet overlapping constituencies: the original version was devoted to the British Empire, the Church of England missionaries and the Egbá people. The original *History* was published in English, as Ajiṣafẹ aimed to explain to an anglophone audience the collapse of the Egbá-Yorùbá kingdom's sovereignty and its annexation into the protectorate of Nigeria in 1914. Ajiṣafẹ's constituents, therefore, included the rulers of Britain and Nigeria as well as reading audiences in society (especially schoolchildren), for whom he anticipated his texts would impart meaning.

The Yorùbá version, the *Iwe Itan Abeokuta* (1924), was written to vindicate the fait accompli of Nigerian amalgamation and cultivate new modes of self-government within the framework of British imperial protection.¹ The social contract of kingship would have to be made consonant with Judaeo-Christian royal ethics to establish the basis for a united Yorùbá monarchy with delegated sovereign powers within the British Nigeria protectorate (Field 1998: 103–6). Ajiṣafẹ worked with the provisional British Nigerian state to complete this unfinished theoretical work of reconciling state and society. His *History* negotiated the moral politics of royal power most profoundly in the passages on dynastic origins. The production of vernacular literature enabled Ajiṣafẹ to make coherent the moral forces that ended one order and ushered in a new world order with the Odùduwà dynasty as a constituent of a federated Nigeria.

Textuality, self-translation and the Saro-Yorùbá intelligentsia

Ajiṣafẹ began working on the *History* around 1906 while working in the Egbá United Government (EUG) (Ajiṣafẹ 1948: 3). The initial version was completed by 1912 but was postponed while he established the Native Authors' Publication Society to raise funds for publication of an eight-volume history of the Yorùbá states (Law 1976: 73). Early Yorùbá histories were published in two styles: pan-Yorùbá histories and city-state histories. Ajiṣafẹ's *History* was a city-state history with a pan-Yorùbá and pan-Nigeria rhetorical agenda. After Abeokuta's 1914 annexation, Ajiṣafẹ chose to write an apologia for Abeokuta in a unified Nigeria. The *History* renegotiated the Odùduwà dynasty's constitutional terms and sanctioned the transfer of sovereignty to Nigeria. History was an evidentiary tool, used to demonstrate flaws in the endogenous constitution in

¹This article is based on an original translation of the second edition text (Ajiṣafẹ 1972).

making the moral case for entrusting dynastic sovereignty in British protection and obeisance to the Nigerian order. Abeokuta, a constituent of the Odùduwà dynasty and fountainhead of Nigeria's Christian intelligentsia, was significant with regard to problems of self-government, which could be demonstrated in published histories.

Most histories were published in the Abeokuta–Lagos corridor, the epicentre of Nigerian print culture. This literary movement was spurred by returnees from Sierra Leone (Saro), Brazil, the Caribbean and the USA, and their assimilation into the dynamic landscape of the Yorùbá city states (Matory 2005: 63). Writing became a key part of their renegotiation of local systems of authority. In the 1890s, Saro historians, writing on the assumption that the Yorùbá polities would be united through the instrumentality of British power, wrote the first pan-Yorùbá histories.² The early histories asserted providence in history but assumed that the British Empire would consolidate Yorùbá nationality. They could not foresee the implications of *Nigeria* as their basis of corporeal protection (Peel 2016: 50–1). After the consolidation of the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria in 1906, however, the second wave of local histories peaked in the 1910s, the bulk of which were classic city-state histories.³ This generation of local historians retracted the premature projections of national Yorùbá unification and reformulated a teleological framework to fit their new political geography of south-western Nigeria.

Whereas the nineteenth-century histories were written in English, the second-generation histories were bilingual texts (Barber 2009: 34). This article uses Ajiṣafẹ's *History* to argue that bilingual texts, such as the 'history of Abeokuta', constitute single textual corpora that are negotiated in distinct lingual bodies. Jan Hokenson and Marcella Munson argue that bilingual texts have been left outside mainstream literary theory due to the consolidation of the nation state around monolingual hegemonies (Hokenson and Munson 2007). Our knowledge of the bilingual treatise in Africa's intellectual history is incomplete without comparative analysis of both versions. A bilingual text 'refers to the self-translated text, existing in two languages and usually in two physical versions, with overlapping content' (*ibid.*: 14). It is helpful to think of Ajiṣafẹ as a bilingual self-translator. Self-translators invoke materials that overlap and are profoundly distinct, because the indigene's conceptual uses of the vernacular constitute an emic renegotiation of a moral community's reality independent of an external subjectivity. Ajiṣafẹ's dialogic deliberations in the *Itan* involve an array of genres, of praise poetry and divination verses, that negotiate the vernacular subjectivity. This article discusses the areas of overlap and explains some implications of the areas where the texts diverge.

The Saro intelligentsia consolidated the Yorùbá ethnicity and language that they concurrently worked to renegotiate (Peel 2000). They codified oral traditions that preceded print yet set in motion a series of signs that would transcend their private lives as written text. According to Barber, 'Text represents the capacity

²See John Payne's *Table of Principal Events in Yoruba History* (1893), John George's *Historical Notes on the Yoruba Country and Its Tribes* (1897) and Johnson (1921 [1897]).

³See Isaac Akinyele's *Iwe Itan Ibadan* (1911), J. B. O. Loṣi's *Itan Eko* (1912) and *History of Abeokuta* (1917), M. C. Adeyemi's *Iwe Itan Oyo* (1914), and Ajiṣafẹ's *History of Abeokuta* (1916).

to produce meaningful forms outside any individual's immediate volition ... and it can thus provide a model for all reflection upon social institutions and social action' (Barber 2007: 101). The anthropological aim of vernacular authors was to bridge the gap between orality and textual literacy. The reconciliation of the regimes of orality and textuality hinged on their pursuit of political sovereignty. The ambiguity of texts necessitated ongoing self-translations as a model for engagement and self-governance.

No institution made self-translation as imperative as religion. Religion constituted the outstanding domain for the articulation of Yorùbá oral traditions. The Ifá oral literary corpus is the most significant traditional expression of religious devotion in the Yorùbá states (Bascom 1969). The Ifá system and the institution of *oriṣa* worship, as expressions of the divine, are the locus of authority in the Yorùbá kingdoms. The Ègba kingdom was thus a kingdom of the Odùduwà dynasty with its system of sacred kingship articulated in the Ifá oral corpus (Law 1973; Adepegba 1986). It was also the first Yorùbá kingdom to welcome Protestant missionaries into its architecture of self-governance in the early 1840s (Biobaku 1957: 27–37).

After the late nineteenth-century Anglo-African treaties, the British government worked to consolidate the Odùduwà '*Ọba Alade*' sovereign crowns into a centralized House of Chiefs/Lords built around the kings at Abeokuta, Benin, Ifẹ and Oyo, among other places (Atanda 1973: 85–127; Asiwaju 1976: 118–19).⁴ However, the potential of the *Ọba* institution to form the basis of a centralized monarchy remained unrealized. The British adopted the sacred kingship traditions that the *Ọoni* of Ifẹ used to determine the legitimate Yorùbá crowns, yet this was fiercely contested and obstructed monarchical unification.⁵ Each polity had a distinct status that did not neatly correspond to the imperial project of an Odùduwà constitutional monarchy. The ecclesiastical foundation of the Westphalian nation state had been central to the era's partition of West Africa, and missionary institutions were essential to the negotiation of African polities in the Family of Nations (Anson 1892; Alexandrowicz 1974; Peel 2000). Western ecclesiastical authority, therefore, was crucial to the bureaucratic rationalization of charismatic networks of authority such as the Odùduwà dynasty (Weber 2004).⁶ Following Abeokuta's annexation into Nigeria, Ajiṣafẹ's *History* discursively negotiated sacred Yorùbá kingship and the British Empire's established Church as part of this generational effort to consolidate the House of Odùduwà and proffer a model of a centralized Nigeria. The textual corpus of Ajiṣafẹ's *History*, therefore, narrates a history of Abeokuta as the recipient of divine grace and providential sanction in the newly unified Nigeria.

⁴The Benin Expedition of 1897 abrogated the Anglo-Benin Treaty of 1892, and the Anglo-Ègba Treaty of 1893 was abrogated after the Ijẹmọ Unrest of 1914.

⁵Due to the dynastic contestations, the Western Region House of Chiefs legislature was not developed until the Macpherson Constitution of 1951, then based on *regional* federalism (Ezera 1960: 72, 132; Vaughan 2006: 57–62).

⁶Relatively few monarchies achieved bureaucratic rationalization (i.e. modernization) in this period, independently or in the framework of imperial protection, to ensure self-governance and representation in the United Nations. Examples include Ethiopia, Eswatini (Swaziland) and Japan (Pallinder-Law 1974: 65).

Biography, world religion and Christian historiography

Emmanuel Olympus Moore was born in Lagos in about 1875 (or 1879) (Doortmont 1994: 52) into a prominent family, members of the Eḡba–Ijẹmọ lineage, of Anglican missionaries repatriated from Sierra Leone. His grandfather, the Reverend William Oduşina Moore, was among the first generation of Eḡba Christians. Moore was captured in his Eḡba village in 1824 and sold into the Atlantic slave trade (Anderson 2020: 203). The British Royal Navy's West Africa Squadron intercepted the ship that Moore was on, and he spent twenty-five years at Freetown, Sierra Leone. After returning to Abeokuta in 1851, the Revd Moore served as an Anglican evangelist, and from 1868 to 1880 he directed the Anglican mission to the Eḡba kingdom. S. J. Ajişafẹ Moore, Ajişafẹ's father, established, along with Emmanuel Lijadu, the pioneering Christian Yorùbá literary society, the Abeokuta Patriotic Society, in about 1883. Ajişafẹ was a third-generation Christian, born into a community deeply rooted in the history of Christianity and vernacular literature in Nigeria.

Emmanuel Moore embodied the Saro who sought to reconnect with an imagined indigenous Yorùbá identity and shed the European names that they were given in colonial society in Sierra Leone. Indeed, the Lagos in which he came of age in the 1890s was a cosmopolitan centre of the African 'cultural nationalism' movement (Farias and Barber 1990). The adoption of an indigenous African name became a key aspect of their identity politics, which signified their new-found authenticity. In the 1910s, Moore adopted 'Ajayi Kọlawọlẹ Ajişafẹ' as his new public name. He first publicized Ajişafẹ as his cognomen, which his father embraced in the early 1880s, in the 1916 first edition of the *History of Abeokuta*. He used 'Emmanuel Olympus Moore' on the title page and 'Ajişafẹ' in brackets underneath. The name originates from *A ji* (to wake up) and *şafẹ* (to adorn oneself, to live beautifully) (Doortmont 1994: 52). He developed a passion for European church music while a student at St John's School, Lagos, which he attended from 1883 to 1888. He finished his primary education at St Peter's Anglican School in Abeokuta's royal court of Ake.

Ajişafẹ achieved a licentiate at the Victoria College of Music in Lagos and was inducted as a fellow of the Incorporated Guild of Church Music (Doortmont 1994: 53). He was a composer of a vast repertoire of Yorùbá music using the Western system of music theory and notation (Stone 2017: 404). Regarded as a 'genius of music', Ajişafẹ pioneered live performance on broadcast radio, the unionization of musicians and the recording industry in Nigeria (Gbilekaa 1997: 15). He joined the EUG as a customs officer in 1900; from 1905 to 1911, he was the director of the EUG penal system.⁷ Ajişafẹ's investments in the EUG influenced the way in which he wrote the *History*, which he began writing as part of his critique of the EUG. He was concerned with linking the EUG's politics to Christianity as a world religion.

Doortmont argues that Yorùbá historiography developed according to three interlocking epistemological principles: classicism, traditionalism and pragmatism (Doortmont 1993: 52–63). Classicism referred to the influence of the Greco-Roman classics, a hallmark of missionary education in British West

⁷See *Eḡba Government Gazette* (1911), National Archives of Nigeria, Abeokuta.

Africa. British missionaries to West Africa educated Christian converts in Hebrew, Attic Greek, New Testament Greek and Latin, in order to prepare Christians to read the Bible in the original languages (Goff 2013: 25). At the turn of the century, local intellectuals drew on their missionary education to craft 'a Yorùbá written literature that could stand alongside the classics of antiquity and modernity' (Barber 2009: 32). To validate their identity politics and epistemic authority, Yorùbá intellectuals referenced only two textual traditions: the sacred Ifá oral corpus and the Holy Bible. The global tradition of Christian historiography thus provides a useful way of understanding their historicism (Peel 2000: 281).

For Law, Ajişafẹ's annalist presentation of the past differentiated his *History* from his contemporary Yorùbá historians, whose histories were embedded within either the mythological or ethnological typologies of the oral traditions (Law 1976: 80). The discipline of church history, which figures such as Eusebius and Socrates Scholasticus pioneered, was another source of Ajişafẹ's historicism. Ecclesiastical history developed a Christian approach to the past that adhered to the scholastic tradition of Greco-Roman philosophy, while maintaining fidelity to the Church. Ajişafẹ wrote a history of the Ègba state that vindicated its spiritual past, while also vindicating the introduction of Christianity into the kingdom. Ajişafẹ utilized annalist historiography to articulate a Christian philosophy of history as 'the meeting point of time and eternity', in which the creator deity does the work of creation but grants to the creation personal responsibility for their actions in time (Dawson 1951: 318). The Christian philosophy of history enabled Ajişafẹ to assimilate dynastic claims into his construction of the overall destiny of the Ègba/Yorùbá regime, yet not efface the *orişà* devotion nor negate his faith in Christianity. When he began writing the *History*, the EUG was in decline, and he searched for a spiritual explanation for the political failures of his generation. A precedent for this apologetic enterprise existed in the early history of Christianity.

The archetype for Ajişafẹ's apologetical Christian historicism is Orosius's *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans* (1964). Augustine of Hippo commissioned Orosius to write the historical counterpart to his *City of God*. Orosius's *History* charted world history from a Christian perspective. Ajişafẹ's apparent appropriation of the Orosian epistemology demonstrates a conceptual link of English and Yorùbá Christianities, through the royal patronage of Christian historiography (Hurley 2013). Although the Ègba kings did not commission Ajişafẹ to pursue this undertaking, he urged the state to subsidize similar scholarship. Ajişafẹ's rhetoric of history, like Orosius's, was concerned with the objective, to demonstrate 'what difference Christianity makes in this world' through the framework of sin and punishment (Van Nuffelen 2012: 186–206). In this Christian view, the human past was understood as deservedly unfavourable because of the human condition of sin, a result of the fall of Adam and Eve. In the present, Christianity and foreign imperial rule have, by Olorun's⁸ grace, provided the tools for people to rectify the corrupt human condition.

⁸Olorun is 'the owner of the heavens'. Protestant evangelists identified Olorun with the Hebrew deity, and translated Olorun as 'God'. In the Abrahamic traditions, the YHWH (Olorun) is understood as Yahweh, the Elohim, God the Father and Allah (Peters 2004: 1).

Classical Christian historiography was concerned with clarifying the ways in which human conduct, devotion and desire can justify a theology of state power. Due to the innate sin condition, in the Christian view, all human beings are naturally incapable of righteous self-governance and deserve eternal damnation. Through Ọlọrun's mercy, however, Ajiṣafẹ asserts in the *History* (and other texts) that European imperialism brought to West Africa the possibilities of peace, the rule of law, and salvific emancipation from the dominion of sin. Ajiṣafẹ's Christian epistemic presupposition aimed to conserve traditional authority by imposing stringent procedural limitations on the exercise of regal power. The doctrine of providence provided Ajiṣafẹ with a conceptual way of vindicating the chiefly aristocracy⁹ while mediating empire. For patristic thinkers, Constantine's legalization of Christianity signified that, with the *Pax Romana*, Western imperialism would serve as God's vehicle for the gospel and his rod of chastisement for kings (Kofsky 2000: 286; Van Nuffelen 2012: 189). Consequently, Ajiṣafẹ's rhetoric frames Ọlọrun's imposition of the *Pax Britannica* as a redemptive force and civil obedience the penitential reward for the chieftains whose sovereignty might otherwise have been lost in the Yorùbá civil wars to the African slave trade.¹⁰

Ajiṣafẹ diverges from patristic theology in his mediation of the oral Ifá corpus. In the nineteenth century, the West African kings refused to renegotiate the terms of their sovereignty with the Western Church. Ajiṣafẹ, therefore, wrote from a context in which he selectively appropriated but did not strictly adhere to Anglican Christian doctrinal orthodoxy. Where patristic national Christian conversion was premised on the rejection of the national deity, Ajiṣafẹ makes it clear that the arrival of Christians in Abeokuta fulfilled the national oracular Ifá prophecy (Johnson 2006). Ajiṣafẹ corroborates Apter's theory that Saro intellectuals 'rewrote' the Christian dogma on 'paganism' into a concept of Yorùbá empowerment (Apter 1992: 195). However, the unfinished objective, imperative for the unification of the Yorùbá monarchy, was to explain, in the vernacular, the spiritual meaning of the *Pax Britannica*.

Western European imperialism had to be understood as part of the chain of God's plan for all humanity. According to Ajiṣafẹ, therefore, the arc of his biography, including the spiritual fall into the transatlantic slave trade, his family's return to Egbaland and West Africa's ultimate annexation into the Western empires, were direct revelations of Ọlọrun's unmerited grace that would make possible the conditions for West Africa's ethnonational repentance and salvation. The African states would not make the existential transformation necessary for national self-government without the subjective understanding of the divine economy¹¹ of

⁹That is, anyone vested with authority premised on claims of royalty.

¹⁰The work of the Church Missionary Society and the British and Foreign Bible Society confirmed for Ajiṣafẹ the 'British Nation's' providential destiny as Ọlọrun's (God's) covenant empire in history (Carey 2011; Rowley 2011: 74). He constructed a secular and sacred narrative of the British imperial intervention, itself an extension of the Christ event, as the framework of West Africa's salvation history.

¹¹'Divine economy' refers to the transactional relationship of the Christian deity to humanity: the creation, the deity's dealings with humanity in history, the mechanisms of redemption, and the ultimate reconciliation of the deity and the creation. The European rule of Africa, in this view, was

European rule of Africa.¹² By invoking the established Church's patristic epistemes, Ajiṣafẹ explains in the vernacular moral economy¹³ the implications of its historical intersection with the imperial 'divine economy'; the rule of law and the monarchical order to come in British Nigeria would be contingent on the individual's voluntary subjectivation to an imperial British Crown whose royal dignity was founded on the deity. The civil subject's justified obedience to the British Crown in Nigeria, therefore, irrespective of personal faith, was an act of penitential devotion to the deity (Ọlọrun) that undergirded the endogenous moral economy (Ifá) and the Abrahamic faiths (Hooker 1874: 456).

A brief overview of Ajiṣafẹ's oeuvre illustrates his *Abrahamic* formulation of religious dialogue as the mode of Nigerian self-government. By 1904, he completed the *Ofin ati Ilana* (On Law and Order) and was known for selling original sheet music for organ in Lagos.¹⁴ A series of undated works possibly date from his pre-1911 period in the Eḡba government. The early texts include the *Ekun Iyawo* (The Rites of the New Bride); a translation of the *Asaro Kukurú Fun awon Imale* (A Treatise Devoted to the Muslims); the hagiographic *Life of Fadipe*, the earliest published Yorúbá biography by a Nigerian (Peel 2000: 292); and the *Aḡbad'owo Re* (Honour Thy Elders). In 1911, Ajiṣafẹ won the 'Competition for Native Plays' in the Lagos press for his drama *Aṣika bi Aparo* (1910).¹⁵ Despite his astonishing productivity, he remained financially insecure. He depended on the patronage of wealthy Lagosians, such as Herbert Macaulay, the *Olori* Charlotte Olajumoke-Ọbasa, and the Lagos councilman (his cousin) Eric O. Moore, to finance his publications.

Between 1916 and 1923, Ajiṣafẹ published eight books in England with Richard Clay & Sons and Routledge; he was the only living Nigerian author to publish abroad in this period (Doortmont 1994: 47). In this, his most significant period, Ajiṣafẹ introduced the *History of Abeokuta* (1916) and a bevy of treatises. An announcement for the *History* in the *Lagos Standard* described Ajiṣafẹ as a bona fide writer who 'has lately blossomed into an author whose writings have proved satisfactory as sale of his brochure *Aiye Akamara*, and other patriotic works printed in our vernacular shows'.¹⁶ The Revd Adelakun Howells, later the Bishop of Lagos, recommended the *Aiye Akamara*, Ajiṣafẹ's most popular achievement, for the school curriculum on moral instruction and self-discipline. Ajiṣafẹ's *History* manuscript won the 'Ibadan History Competition'. The most notable books of this period included the *Iḡbadun Aiye* (On the Good Life¹⁷);

a providential part of the constitution of the divine order. Justified obedience to the European empires was, in turn, obedience to the sovereign deity (Romans 13.1–7).

¹²This problem was chronicled in Chinua Achebe's pre-Biafra War 'African Trilogy': *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and *Arrow of God* (1964). In the trilogy, the *Pax Britannica* frustrated the divine order, rather than reflected God's providential continuity across the cosmic order.

¹³'Moral economy' refers to the affective contractual relationships of civil ethics and obligation within an ethnic community (Carrier 2018). In the context of Odúduwà dynastic authority, Ifá divination and *oriṣa* devotion sanction contractual relations and mediate civil subjecthood.

¹⁴See *The Lagos Weekly Record* (Lagos, Nigeria), 23 January 1904, p. 3.

¹⁵See *The Nigerian Chronicle* (Lagos, Nigeria), 26 May 1911, p. 1.

¹⁶See *Lagos Standard* (Lagos, Nigeria), 19 April 1916, p. 6.

¹⁷Or 'On the Enjoyment of the World'.

the *Enia Šoro* (On Human Nature¹⁸); the *Tan't' Olorun?* (Who is Equal to Olorun?) (c.1919); the *Kil' E P'Oyinbo Še?* (What is Your Accusation against the Europeans?) (1921); the *Gbadebo Alake* (King Gbadebo) (1922); the Trinitarian *Akanše Adura* (A Special Prayer for the Black Nations and Especially the Yorùbà) (1922); the *Orúnmilà* (1923);¹⁹ the *Laws and Customs of the Yoruba People* (1924); and the *Iwe Itan Abeokuta* (1924).

Throughout the 1920s, Ajişafè petitioned the government of Nigeria for research funds. From his appeals to Sir Hugh Clifford, Governor of Nigeria, Ajişafè secured state funding for his book projects (Cookey 1980: 532).²⁰ The Clifford Constitution of 1922 was premised on the Lugardian doctrine of the preservation of the indigenous systems of authority with the provision that Nigeria's national development was contingent on the discursive interaction of indigenous groups (*ibid.*: 533). The challenge was to consolidate the entire Nigerian protectorate around the federal capital (at Lagos or Kaduna), yet maintain delegated sovereignty throughout the indigenous states in the Nigerian legislative council. The Clifford reforms spawned party politics with the Nigerian National Democratic Party in Lagos under Herbert Macaulay, the putative 'father of Nigerian nationalism' (Ezera 1960: 30). The problem of representative government in Nigeria, however, could not be resolved unless the production of legislation was subordinated to the hegemony of the kings. The indigenous sovereigns would have to enter into covenant for Nigeria to function. According to Governor Clifford, the educated African intellectuals (such as Ajişafè) were imperative to this centralization of the Nigerian body politic (Cookey 1980: 540). Only an African intelligentsia could theorize the constitutional reforms of the indigenous groups that would facilitate coequal legislative and judicial self-government (under the British Crown's royal prerogative) in a federal nation state (Ezera 1960: 23–7).

During the 1925–35 period, therefore, Ajişafè embarked on an ambitious state-supported research scheme in cities such as Benin, Ibadan, Ile-Ife, Ilorin, Minna, Kaduna, Kano and Onitsha in a bid to renegotiate the 'natural' constitution of *Nigeria*. According to I. W. Oshilaja, Ajişafè visited the major city-state capitals of the Western Region and drafted 'laws and customs' for each polity.²¹ He collected data, met with the chiefs and kings, conducted interviews, notated the local music, and prepared manuscripts. He completed the history manuscripts for Lagos and Ile-Ife. He finished his most comprehensive manuscript, *The Yorùbà People of Nigeria: their creed, arts & sciences, and superstitious observations*, which he submitted to Routledge. His musical performances and book promotions helped pioneer the rich literary traditions of Onitsha²² and Benin City, which would take off only after World War Two (Obiechina 1973; Falola and Usonianle 1994: 304). Ajişafè's notable publications of the 1930s included a series of treatises in defence of constitutional monarchy that constitute historically significant documents of West African political thought. Only one manuscript

¹⁸Or 'Beware of Humankind'.

¹⁹Orúnmilà is the *orişà* of wisdom and destiny.

²⁰See Ajişafè's correspondence with Sir Hugh Clifford, Governor of Nigeria, 30 March 1926, in the Hebert Macaulay Papers, Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan.

²¹See 'Forward' in Ajişafè (1945).

²²See *The Nigerian Pioneer* (Lagos, Nigeria), 7 December 1917, p. 7.

from Ajiṣafẹ's state-funded research scheme, however, was published posthumously, as the *Laws and Customs of the Benin People* (Ajiṣafẹ 1945).

The Western tradition of Anglican Christian scholasticism provided the framework for what Ajiṣafẹ achieved by combining ethnography and philosophy in his attempt to consolidate Nigerian nationality. As a scholastic, Ajiṣafẹ's effort to study each Nigerian regime type was Aristotelian with the caveat of his Christianity. In extending his renegotiation of Ẹgba ethn nationality onto the larger stage of the Nigerian body politic, Ajiṣafẹ staked the legitimacy of Nigeria on an Abrahamic doctrine of divine providence (Peters 2004: 2). Ọlọrun's (God's) providential intervention in the arc of history was what united the polities of Nigeria. Nigeria became the divine fulfilment of their past and the precondition for their national destiny. In the *History*, Ajiṣafẹ's articulation of Abẹokuta's incorporation as preconditional to Nigeria's national destiny is part of the tradition of anglophone political thought, in which representative government and civil liberties depend on national unity under divine providence (Clark 1994).

In nineteenth-century Britain, people thought of Abẹokuta as the providential seat of Christian civilization in sub-Saharan Africa (Tucker 1854). British missionaries assumed that Abẹokuta would become, as Canterbury is to England, the archiepiscopal seat of a united Nigerian Church. That movement was derailed as the early Yorùbá clergy failed to effectively negotiate the local cosmology. How could Abẹokuta be the ecclesiastical seat of a united kingdom when Ile-Ife is the sacred centre of dynastical power? In the Odùduwà dynasty's *oriṣa* 'civil religion', does the Ẹgba kingdom possess any royal prerogatives (Olupona 1991)? As it stood, the provisional social contract of the colonial state was tenuous, but so was the royal hegemony of the indigenous kings. Ajiṣafẹ ingeniously weaved traditions of dynastic origins and ecclesiastical historiography to renegotiate divine kingship in order to make royal power consonant with the modern state.

The Revd Lijadu's 'Fragments of Ẹgba national history', published in the *Ẹgba Government Gazette* (1904–05), formed the basis of Ajiṣafẹ's reconstruction of the mythological origins of the Ẹgba polity (Law 1983: 112). Ajiṣafẹ's work, therefore, reflected discourses already circulating among the Ẹgba intelligentsia. What he accomplished was the collation and reinterpretation of the data, in light of subsequent history, in order to narrate a complete account of the role of providence in the Ẹgba state formation. The vindication of the new order could best be done in separate English and Yorùbá texts. Ajiṣafẹ rooted his rhetoric of Ọlọrun's providence in the Ile-Ife charter of dynastic power (Munoz 1977: 18–19). In both texts, the Ifá corpus is the locus of revelation. According to the corpus, the Ẹgba kingdom is a sacred state with ritual prerogative in the confirmation of regal power. The section below examines Ajiṣafẹ's discourse on religious ethnography and the constitutionality of royal power in the early Ẹgba polity.

Ajiṣafẹ's construction of religion in the early Ẹgba polity

The early Ẹgba history consists of narratives of cosmology and oral traditions of the eighteenth-century Ẹgba origins in the Ọyọ Empire. Ajiṣafẹ develops three major doctrines to substantiate his assertion of the constitutionality of the

Ègba–Yorùbá dynasty's royal authority: (1) the Odùduwà doctrine of dynastic origins; (2) a systematic model of Yorùbá civic religion; and (3) the Ifá oracle's prophecy of the unique destiny of the Ègba dynasty in history. If we think of self-translated texts as distinct, the distinction is in how Ajişafẹ defends the work of Ọlọrun's providence in time. The work of providence in Ajişafẹ's argument is clear: Abẹokuta is the *constitutional* heir to the Ile-Ifẹ cosmogony. The Ifá oracle confirms that Abẹokuta will spearhead modernization and redeem the sovereignty of the Odùduwà clan. Whereas Ile-Ifẹ has royal hegemony in the sacred origins of royal power, Abẹokuta has royal supremacy in the confirmation of kings and in ecclesiastical matters. Above all, the social contract of regal power is contingent on consensual obedience. The *Pax Britannica*, which book-ends Ajişafẹ's *History*, is fashioned as a divine grace period until constitutional self-governance in West Africa could be achieved.

The reader is introduced to Ajişafẹ's rhetoric on the dedication page. The reader learns that the *History of Abẹokuta* is dedicated to 'The British Nation and the Missionaries' for their 'protection of' and beneficence towards 'the Ègba Nation' (Moore 1916: 2). The book was also dedicated to 'all the Ègba children' of the rising generation who would have a key role to play in the annals of their nation. The annals of past British beneficence towards the Ègba, the author asserts, would be instructive to future leaders of the nation. The dedication page establishes Ajişafẹ's view of the 'British Nation' and Church as a single covenantal entity, for which his text is an apologetical history. He was keenly aware that this work would be presented to a polity newly reconstituted within the British Empire. Ajişafẹ's dedication vindicates British historical relations with the Ègba and points towards a future Anglo-Ègba sovereignty. The nature of African sovereignty was the past, the contents of the book; the future is what the youth will do with his prescriptions.

Ajişafẹ begins with a narration of the Odùduwà dynasty's genealogy. He provides a cosmogonical account that fuses the oral traditions of Yorùbá kingship with an assumed cosmology from the Hebrew Bible. In the cosmogony, Ajişafẹ appropriates the historicist and theological typologies of the Bible: in historical time, the Yorùbá are the lineal descendants of Ham, and the dynasty's civic religion proceeds from an Afroasiatic or Semito-Hamitic religious culture. This approach enabled Ajişafẹ to defend Ọlọrun through his identification with the Hebrew deity, but also to defend the Odùduwà dynasty's religious culture as a natural postlapsarian innovation. According to this classic Semito-Hamitic typology of religious culture, divine providence was understood as national and not personal (Smith 1889: 64, 246). Divine providence was experienced through the divine kings via the consultation of oracles, divination and ritual sacrifice for divine oblation. Many authors superimposed the Hamitic framework onto the Ifẹ sacred centre and its endogenous cosmogony (Lange 1995).

With this rhetorical framework, Ajişafẹ positions Nimrod²³ as the Odùduwà dynasty's progenitor and allows the Ifá oracle to advance the ritual narrative to the British encounter. Ajişafẹ's cosmogony allows both the endogenous Ile-Ifẹ and Hamitic epistemologies to cohabit, whereby the latter explicates but never

²³Nimrod was the son of Cush and grandson of Ham, the progenitor of the African nations in the biblical cosmology.

effaces the former. The Orosian epistemology, which regards divine kingship as a corruptible ‘City of Man’ and the spiritual church an eternal ‘City of God’, becomes central *after* civil order is established in history under the Odùduwà regime. Britain’s providential introduction of the catholic Anglican Church and universal empire as modes of protection makes possible the fulfilment of Ajişafè’s Hamitic model of dynastic self-government. The *History*, ultimately, fulfils the oracular prophecy of the consummation of national providence through the internal collapse of the EUG. Ajişafè’s embodied testifying to Ọlọrun’s grace under British Nigeria’s protection renders fulfilled the foregoing sacred kingship modality. In Ajişafè’s texts, the Hebrew Bible and the Gospels become the reformed model of Odùduwà dynastic power – a royal standard of self-governance that, through civil obedience, the British Empire will help cultivate in the protectorate of Nigeria.²⁴

The Odùduwà traditions of origins fall into two categories: first, the endogenous creation stories locate Ile-Ifè as the cradle of humanity; and second, the migratory traditions assert that the dynasty occupied Ile-Ifè and later migrated to conquer other African communities. In each tradition, there are elements of conquest, but the distinction is in the configuration of Ifè. Christian historians, using the ‘Hamitic hypothesis’, typically rejected the Ile-Ifè cosmology.²⁵ The Hamitic hypothesis held that historians were motivated by the Hamitic theory, which considered all states in sub-Saharan Africa to be established by Eurasian invaders from the north (Zachernuk 1994; Law 2009). More than a racialist framework, this Hamitic hypothesis presented an Abrahamic cosmology. Ajişafè employs the Hamitic doctrine, but, in the Yorùbá text only, he distinguishes the royal Hamitic bloodlines with sovereign powers from the rest of the sub-Saharan African population, who, he claims, constitute a diverse population of Afroasiatic peoples (Ajişafè 1972: 7–8). In so doing, his articulation of the Hamitic typology of dynastic lineage does not compromise the aristocracy’s Ile-Ifè cosmology. The Ile-Ifè cosmogony is assimilated into a biblical typology, without claiming Ifè as ‘Eden’.

Ajişafè states that a group of ‘oriental hunters’, under Lamurudu, migrated from the east. The ‘Lamurudu’ name was traditionally understood as a linguistic corruption of the Canaanite ruler Nimrod. The hunters settled in the Lake Chad and River Niger regions of West Africa before proceeding to western Nigeria. He described the progenitors as having lived for some time at Tapa and Bornu (Moore 1916: 2). Both texts assert an exogenous narrative, although the *Itan* paints a more detailed picture. The Yorùbá text remains a self-translation, as the rhetorical objective of a Hamitic Anglo-Yorùbá kingship is the same, but the vernacular enables an emic negotiation. In Yorùbá, Ajişafè states that ‘the Yorùbá are of Asiatic lineal descent, and they sprang from an ethnic Kanuri stock’ (Ajişafè 1972: 8). His specification of Kanuri heritage suggests the typical form of political

²⁴Ajişafè refers to ‘Southern Nigeria’ in the 1916 text. Although the amalgamation of Nigeria was proclaimed on 1 January 1914, Abeokuta was not annexed until September 1914. Following the amalgamation, the northern and southern protectorates were governed as distinct ‘provinces’, with the Lagos Colony as the provisional capital (Ezera 1960: 20–1).

²⁵Johnson (1921 [1897]) accepts the migratory narrative but does not reconcile the Ile-Ifè and Hamitic cosmologies, as Ajişafè does, through the articulation of the endogenous cosmogony as an *historical* fact.

propaganda used to keep Yorùbá statecraft in dialogue with Islam. Ajiṣafẹ́ insists, nonetheless, that the peculiarities of the Yorùbá cosmology originate in proto-Afroasiatic animism.

Ajiṣafẹ́ explains that, en route to their new home, the emigrants assumed a tribal formation and had a leader who ‘assumed the title Odudua (i.e., Odu ti o da wà, “A self-existing personage)”’ (Moore 1916: 2). So, the progenitor ‘Odùduwà’ is two things: a ‘title’, under which a leader assumes a corporate identity; and a ‘self-existing personage’. According to Ègba oral traditions, Odùduwà was raised up from the ‘Almighty’ Olodumare. Odùduwà was sent down from the sky by his father and planted the first soils on the earth, which was covered with water (Biobaku 1957: 1). Eventually, Odùduwà reigned as the first king in world history. Ajiṣafẹ́ described Odùduwà as ‘the father and progenitor of the Yorùbá dynasties’ (Moore 1916: 2). Ajiṣafẹ́ accepts the sacred claims of Odùduwà acting in a patriarchal corporate capacity as *the* Odùduwà. He does so in accordance with the tradition of post-mortem kingly deification (Lloyd 1960). For Ajiṣafẹ́, Odùduwà is the incarnate corporate identity of the monarchical line, but he is a man who reigns in the name of the Odùduwà in time. Ajiṣafẹ́ subjects himself to the sovereign power of the Odùduwà, in a way that clarifies the majesty of dynastic power as a delegated authority from the pre-existent Ọlọrun. Humanity thus experienced the creation of representative government in time.

Royal power was, consequently, an expression of the divine on earth. From 1903, the British government elevated the *Ọṣoni* of Ile-Ifẹ́ as the ritual head of the future united monarchy (Olupona 2011: 77–85). For the *Ọṣoni* to sustain his ritual authority over the bureaucratic structure of western Nigeria, however, the nature of his divinity vis-à-vis the other Odùduwà kings needed to be clarified. In the *History*, Ajiṣafẹ́ reinterprets the Odùduwà title as a consolidated Ile-Ifẹ́ dynastic office that was only assumed ‘by the deified personage Ọbàtálá several hundred years afterwards’ (Moore 1916: 2). There was a dilemma with the Ile-Ifẹ́ dynasty, Ajiṣafẹ́ insists, because Ọbàtálá, another dynastic progenitor, means ‘[t]he personage who created existence’ (*ibid.*: 2). For Ajiṣafẹ́, Ọbàtálá assumes the personified manifestation of the creative force of divine reason that creates humanity in time. This means that the Odùduwà must be anterior to the Ọbàtálá as a constitutional teleological precedent, although each sired separate dynasties in Ifẹ́ and the Ọbàtálá clan claims autochthony (Obayemi 1979). The *Ọṣoni* is thus the guardian of the sacred space of ritual sanction that is reciprocal to the wider dynastic repertoire rather than necessarily adjudicative for the wider Odùduwà clan. To cohere constitutionally, the Odùduwà and the Ọbàtálá lines would have to be consolidated, or else the Ọbàtálá dynasty would have to forfeit political sovereignty (Lawuyi 1992: 371). It is Ọlọrun, therefore, who confers sanctity *onto* Ifẹ́, through whom the Odùduwà kings act in obedience as vessels of the royal dignity.

Although Ajiṣafẹ́ has yet to mention Ifẹ́, Ifẹ́ as a physical place is irrelevant for this antediluvian Afroasiatic typology of the royal bloodlines. ‘Ifẹ́’ (like Eden) is wherever the dynasty was at the moment of embodied existence. Ajiṣafẹ́ resolves the constitutional contradiction by sanctioning the Ile-Ifẹ́ cosmology as the *historical* self-articulation of a people, and making Ifẹ́ ritually reciprocal to Abeokuta. He brokers an annalistic depiction of the deities that situate them in time in accordance with ritual custom, which leaves intact their (now consolidated)

ritual claim to political authority once representative government is constituted on earth. He introduces another divine personage, Ọmọnde, wife of Odùduwà. At Ile-Ifẹ, now a place, Odùduwà and Ọmọnde sired seven children, constituting the first monarchy. Odùduwà's sons would migrate and establish kingdoms in neighbouring regions, establishing a commonwealth (Smith 1969). Odùduwà (or the man who reigned as *the* Odùduwà) retreated to and died at Ifẹ, in Ajiṣafẹ's narrative, initiating legitimate kingship on earth.

Ajiṣafẹ proceeds to link the Ẹgba monarchy to its divine progenitors. Ẹgba traditions held that the polity consisted of three separate kings.²⁶ Throughout the *History*, Ajiṣafẹ depicts the *Alake* of the Ake clan as the providential head of the Ẹgba kingdom. According to Ajiṣafẹ, Odùduwà and Ọmọnde sired seven children. As time progressed, these children migrated to establish dynasties: at Benin, the *Olibini* was entitled; at Ketu, the *Alaketu*; at Ake, the *Alake*; at Ila, the *Orangun*; and at Ṣabẹ, the *Oniṣabe* was enthroned (Moore 1916: 2). The youngest son of the royal family became King Ọlọyọ at Oyọro, and, later in the narrative, he usurps this sacred constitution to become the emperor of Ọyọ (*ibid.*: 5–6). The daughter and eldest child of Odùduwà and Ọmọnde became the mother of the *Olowu* of Owu, the last king to join the Ẹgba at Abẹokuta. Ajiṣafẹ speculates: 'Historians say that the Alaketu was the father of the Alake, and that the Alake was only a grandson of Ọmọnde and Odudua, as the Olowu' (*ibid.*: 2). Whether the *Alake* was entitled by way of agnatic primogeniture is irrelevant, ultimately, because 'the Ọmọnde removed and settled in the Ẹgba Forest, and she died there' (*ibid.*). We learn that the 'Odudua died at Ifẹ ... Thus, the grave of the father and progenitor of [the] Yorùbá dynasties lies at Ifẹ, and that of the mother [of the Yorùbá dynasties is at] Orile Ake' (*ibid.*: 3). The *Alake* of Ake (Abẹokuta) joins the *Ọoni* of Ile-Ifẹ, in Ajiṣafẹ's historicism, as the two ritual sites of constitutional sanction in the Odùduwà dynasty.

The Abẹokuta Patriotic Society (c.1880s) first published this Odùduwà–Ọmọnde constitution. Following Ajiṣafẹ, Biobaku maintained that the dominant lineage of Ẹgba Ake claimed descent from the House of Odùduwà (Biobaku 1957: 3). Ajiṣafẹ's use of this doctrine explained to his Yorùbá audience, allegorically, why the erstwhile Ọyọ Empire was unable to broker a united Yorùbá kingdom. The prevailing Ọyọ–Ibadan hegemony was, Ajiṣafẹ argues, absolutist and unconstitutional according to divine law (the Ifẹ constitution) (Moore 1916: 6–9; Atanda 1973: 85–127).²⁷ A legitimate regime must constitutionally cohere with divine right. The idea of absolutism was a rhetorical strategy that intellectuals deployed to reinvest in traditions of divine law (Anderson 1974: 49–50). In Ajiṣafẹ's 'divine right of kings' view, kingship must be constitutional through divine law. The Ọyọ polity owed ritual obeisance to Ake, but it ruled Ẹgba through a distortion of the constitution. Ajiṣafẹ proffered this Yorùbá constitution, through adherence to divine right and British imperial protection, as imperative to the restoration of constitutionality to the Odùduwà dynasty.

²⁶A fourth king (of Owu) was added to the polity after the conquest of Abẹokuta.

²⁷Under 'indirect rule', the *Alafin* of Ọyọ was deemed 'the Supreme Head of the Yoruba people', which had profound implications for the constitutional destiny of Yorùbáland (Atanda 1973: 113).

The Ègba kingdom entered the British Empire without royal hegemony and with an unconstitutional configuration of royal power. Ajiṣafẹ was consequently forced to vindicate various modes of civil devotion. He attempts to balance the demands of Western Christendom with his subjectivity and takes the typical approach of defending monotheism as the basis of both mission and tradition. Beyond identity politics, however, there is a theological claim at the core of Ajiṣafẹ's religious ethnography. In English, Ajiṣafẹ asserts: 'The early religion of the Ègba people could not be correctly called Fetishism or Paganism, for they were aware of and did acknowledge the existence of the Almighty God, whom they worshipped as Olorun' (Moore 1916: 17–18).²⁸ Ègba religion, according to his logic, was not technically 'paganism' as the Christians had claimed, because the Ègba had foreknowledge of the supreme deity. The linkage of Ọḷorun's monotheist monarchy to the aristocratic hierarchy was contingent on the earlier Anglican identification of Ọḷorun with the יהוה (YHWH). If the Ọḷorun deity was shown to be sovereign, the early Anglicans reasoned, it would facilitate a Trinitarian (i.e. Christian) Yorùbá political theology to negotiate a unified Yorùbá monarchy.²⁹

Ajiṣafẹ nuances his defence of the Ọḷorun deity's providential government with an essential caveat: he distinguishes different spheres of religious theory. The Ifá oracle is vested with a sanctioning power, and the civic sects with a devotional power. The Ifá corpus is the oracular catalyst of divine truth in the narrative (Moore 1916: 34). Religion, nonetheless, has anthropological dimensions that are distinct from Ifá's civic sovereignty as doctrinal truth (Peel 2016: 78). Ajiṣafẹ distinguishes religion as an instrument of government, in its institutional form, from religion as divine truth in its doctrinal form. Although loath to refer to ancestral religion as 'paganism', Ajiṣafẹ vindicates the fundamental Augustinian/Orosian epistemic distinction between divine sovereignty and civic religion. Ọḷorun is sovereign and blameless; all *religion*, however, is temporal and subject to a fallen human nature.

Therefore, the institutional aspect of Ègba devotion, according to Ajiṣafẹ, is as an instrument of the government. It is a constitutional entity exemplified in the *Ile* (earth deity) of the *Ogboni* senatorial class; an ancestor reverence component in the *Egungun* masquerade society; and the *Oro* secret society that maintains law and order (Moore 1916: 13–17; Ajiṣafẹ 1972: 23–30). In the Yorùbá text, Ajiṣafẹ situates the civic religion's development in the cosmic narratives of the consolidated Odùduwà–Ọbàtálá entity. He utilizes the lyrics of chants, poems, dreams, biblical scriptures and *oriki* (praise poetry) as sources for the Yorùbá narrative. He discusses the range of deities revered and includes the *Odù Ifá* verse given by the *Babalawo* chief priests to the Ègba in anticipation of their conquest of Abẹkuta. The Yorùbá materials reveal the rich negotiation of the vernacular moral economy. As a self-translation, the texts cohere in their overlapping defence of Ọḷorun's providence over the arc of history. The civic religion is an ethnological

²⁸In the Yorùbá text, he affirms *animism* as the central feature of devotion to Ọḷorun, thus implying that animism does not necessarily contravene Ọḷorun's sovereignty.

²⁹The Anglican promotion of the monotheist Ọḷorun hierarchy was a patristic doctrine used to unify the *ethnos* and *polis* via oracular appropriations of the Hebrew deity (Johnson 2006: 153–76).

project, while the oracular prophecies are revealed in time. Ajişafè's rhetoric, therefore, depends on his selective differentiation and identification of the Ọlọrun deity with the civic religion.

Ajişafè's discourse aimed to induce an appreciation of a Christian ethic of state power. After reiterating Ọlọrun's sovereignty, he associates civic religion with the authority of political elites. He discusses the economy of ritual sacrifice, where ritual killing serves the purpose of divine oblation yet poses moral dilemmas.³⁰ For example, he depicts the *Oro* system as often harsh, as 'the ceremonies were performed absolutely without any girl or woman' (Moore 1916: 18). The consequences for transgressing customary law could be punitive: 'If any of this sex of any rank or nation were to enter the grove at all, or should say or show that she had some knowledge about the making of Oro, the penalty was death' (*ibid.*). Ajişafè gives an example of the intersection of capital punishment and human dignity. In his anecdote, a man brought his three-month-old daughter to witness the play and she was summarily executed (*ibid.*: 19). He notes that the 'Oro play was used in the public management of the affairs of the Government in order to exclude the women from tampering with the functions' (*ibid.*). Ajişafè's contractarian rhetoric uses the girl's execution (and its implied gender inequality) to illustrate an example of an illegitimate capital punishment that would not be justifiable in the *Nigerian* public sphere or in the international community vis-à-vis the British Empire.³¹

The Yorùbá text on civic religion presents a more textured story. It explains the philosophical rationale behind civic institutions, the jurisprudential purposes of civic religion, and its role in the constitution of authority. Why does the *History* oversimplify the dynastic religion and focus on its challenges? In English, Ajişafè needed only to demonstrate the existential problems of civic religion. In Yorùbá, he had to negotiate the ontological distinction between the 'City of Ọlọrun' and the 'City of Èniyàn (Humanity)'.³² The Yorùbá text asserts that the problems of civic religion, which intersected with issues of political economy and the warfare ravaging Yorùbáland, would soon be resolved by a divine intercession in time.

³⁰Globally, sacrifice constituted the essential means of divine oblation, atonement and the reconciliation of humanity and deity (Smith 1889: 251–333; Idowu 1962: 118–21).

³¹In this case, custom dictates child execution to maintain the ritual harmony of the state, whereas the Abrahamic faiths assert the *Imago Dei* doctrine, which claims that the sanctity of the person is inviolable (Solomon *et al.* 2005). Justifiable capital punishment requires personal culpability in contravention of the state. In Christian thought, Christ became the 'living sacrifice' who restored the *Imago Dei* (Genesis 1) prerogatives lost in the Fall and fulfilled the Hebrew covenant's propitiatory sacrifice legislation. Although the Mosaic legislation was binding only for the Hebrew states, in the Christian texts all nations would consummate it through the covenantal relationship with Christ (Acts 10.34–37) (Wines 1853: 124). From the fourth century, the edicts of Constantine and Theodosius, pursuant to a covenantal Christian kingship, abolished all animal sacrifices/ritual killing as obsolete in soteriology and inimical to the *Imago Dei* throughout the Western world (Field 1998: 96–103) – the precedent of which profoundly shaped Western discourse on the ethics of imperial conquest in West Africa.

³²In revised editions of the *History*, Ajişafè used the phrase 'City of God' to characterize the Abeokuta ecclesiastical project in Nigeria's history, demonstrating his long interest in this epistemology (Ajişafè 1948: 75).

As a self-translation the texts overlap, but the English text lacks the complete oracular repertoire that constitutes the *History*'s divine metanarrative. Peel argued that Yorùbá Christians utilized modes of 'Christian inscription' to 'find ways to represent Christianity as the realization of Yorùbá historical destiny' (Peel 2000: 295). In Ajişafẹ's *History*, the prophecy doctrine works to profoundly disrupt the foregoing moral economy – ironically, through the consummation of both the Ifá and Judaeo-Christian modes of divine providence. The Ifá oracle sanctions the *Alake* dynasty and the establishment of Abẹokuta to consecrate the Ile-Ifẹ charter ideal of covenantal monarchy (Ajişafẹ 1972: 53–4). In the prophecy, change will come from the Egbá diaspora, providentially, working with the Western powers in Abẹokuta to proclaim national repentance. The Egbá monarchy was saved by God's providence (under British Nigeria) in order that it may consummate the Mosaic legislation through civil obedience and ecclesial absolution to achieve the ethnonational sanctification necessary to constitute covenantal relationships within and between African states (Smith 1999: 338; Moore 1916: 79, 127–8).³³ In Ajişafẹ's *History*, West Africa was vindicated through Olórún's providence. Providence was the underlying thread that connected Africa's history in a single web of national destiny.

Conclusion

This article has examined Ajişafẹ's *History of Abẹokuta* as a bilingual text. The *History* was written during the era of the unification of Nigeria. The Egbá kingdom was the last indigenous polity to join the Nigerian protectorate and the *History* was Ajişafẹ's Christian apologia for the incorporation of the Egbá kingdom into Nigeria. Envisioned as one volume of a comprehensive history of the Yorùbá states, Ajişafẹ's corpus articulated a federalist vision of those states.³⁴ Yorùbá intellectuals utilized the tools of Western classicism and vernacular literature to renegotiate authority in Nigeria. The *History* was, therefore, a thorough renegotiation of received traditions of religion and cosmology. The production of bilingual vernacular texts was an essential strategy for negotiating distinct spheres of moral and divine economy, while maintaining an imagined sacral fidelity to each. The doctrine of providence provided the epistemic framework for the reconciliation of traditions of authority and Christianity as a world religion.

Ajişafẹ's work is part of a global tradition of Christian historiography. Early Church figures such as Eusebius, Orosius and Bede were antecedents who articulated literary models that reconciled the claims of Church and empire, which, through the negotiation of sacred ethnic cultures, paved the way for ethnonational unification within Western Christendom. The Yorùbá Christian intelligentsia were highly original in their application of those missiological frameworks in their local contexts. Despite their century of mission labour, however, they did not build a

³³In his conclusion, Ajişafẹ uses the figure of Solomon to signify the obligations of kingship and the pitfalls of monarchy in a united kingdom.

³⁴Ajişafẹ was the pioneering *Nigerian* monarchical federalist. For that reason, Chief Obafemi Awolowo cited Ajişafẹ as his jurisprudential authority in the *Path to Nigerian Freedom* (Awolowo 1947: 73).

national church nor a united kingdom. Ajiṣafẹ, therefore, embraced the federated Nigeria as the manifestation of their national destiny on the road to ethnonational self-government in the Westphalian international system. The Ègba–Yorùbá intellectual enterprise hinged on their anthropological renegotiations of sacred kingship cosmologies and dialogue with their fellow Abrahamic faith of Islam. As a Christian existentialist and theorist of Nigeria, Ajiṣafẹ was in many ways ahead of his time. As a great Nigerian Christian polemicist during the interwar years, Ajiṣafẹ's zeal and renown were eclipsed by the subsequent generation. His literary works remain valuable because they addressed enduring problems of authority in Africa.

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Abstract

Emmanuel Olympus Moore (aka Ajiṣafẹ) (c.1875/79–1940) was a pioneer of Nigerian Yorùbá literature and popular music. Ajiṣafẹ was one of the most significant Nigerian popular cultural figures of his generation. Written during the amalgamation of Nigeria, his *History of Abeokuta* (1916) (*Iwe Itan Abeokuta*, 1924) is a seminal text for our understanding of Abeokuta and the Ègba kingdom. This article examines the bilingual passages of the *History* in which Ajiṣafẹ invokes oral history to construct a religious ethnography of the early

Ègba polity. Self-translation enabled vernacular authors to mediate constituencies. The English and Yorùbá texts of the *History* differ in their engagement with Yorùbá cosmology. Ajiṣafẹ́'s texts converge in his defence of the Odùduwà dynasty; Abẹokuta, in a constitutional Yorùbá united kingdom, would be the seat of ecclesiastical power. Civil authority in Nigeria could be stabilized through an Abrahamic renegotiation of divine kingship. To establish his treatise within a genealogy of world Christianity, Ajiṣafẹ́ utilized self-translation as a rhetorical device to reconcile the working of providence in precolonial and colonial African history. Ajiṣafẹ́'s *History*, ultimately, is an Abrahamic exposition of the role of God's providence in bringing about the complete unification of Nigeria in September 1914.

Résumé

Emmanuel Olympus Moore (alias Ajiṣafẹ́) (c.1875/79–1940) était un pionnier de la littérature et de la musique populaire nigériennes yoruba. Ajiṣafẹ́ était l'une des plus importantes figures culturelles populaires nigériennes de sa génération. Rédigé pendant la réunification du Nigeria, son *History of Abeokuta* (1916) (*Iwe Itan Abeokuta*, 1924) est un texte fondateur pour la compréhension d'Abeokuta et du royaume Ègba. Cet article examine les passages bilingues de cet ouvrage, dans lequel Ajiṣafẹ́ invoque l'histoire orale pour construire une ethnographie religieuse de la politique Ègba à ses débuts. L'autotraduction a permis aux auteurs vernaculaires de rapprocher les parties prenantes. Les textes en anglais et en yorùbá de cet ouvrage diffèrent dans leur façon de traiter la cosmologie yorùbá. Les textes d'Ajiṣafẹ́'s convergent dans sa défense de la dynastie Odùduwà; Abeokuta, dans un royaume uni yorùbá constitutionnel, serait le siège du pouvoir ecclésiastique. L'autorité civile au Nigeria pourrait être stabilisée à travers une renégociation abrahamique de la royauté divine. Pour inscrire son traité dans une généalogie du christianisme mondial, Ajiṣafẹ́ a utilisé l'autotraduction comme un dispositif rhétorique pour réconcilier le mécanisme de providence dans l'histoire africaine précoloniale et coloniale. L'ouvrage d'Ajiṣafẹ́ est en définitive une exposition abrahamique du rôle de la providence de Dieu dans l'unification complète du Nigeria en septembre 1914.