Epilogue

In our interview in 2013, Bishop Peters of Mount Union Spiritual Baptist church insisted that 'Spiritual Baptists in Grenada have no say'. The bishop contrasted Grenada's African-inspired religious landscape with the freedom of worship that exists in neighbouring Trinidad and Tobago.[1] Grenada's political climate is starkly distinct from its neighbour Trinidad and Tobago: it is shaped in no small part by Grenadians, Uriah Butler and Elder Griffith, who laid the path for a tolerant environment for Spiritual Baptist and Orisa traditions. The repressive Spiritual Baptist legislation there was overturned in 1951, and the Black Power Movement in the 1960s significantly enhanced the visibility of the Spiritual Baptist Faith, attracting African-descended Christians to the Yoruba-Orisa nation.[2] By the 1970s, Orisa had become visible in civic life and its 'custodians partnered with or doubled as Spiritual Baptists' to lend 'ritual reinforcement and spiritual sanction to the movement for black social justice'.[3] The anthropologist Frances Henry similarly described how Spiritual Baptist and Orisa devotees emerged from an 'underground and almost secret forms of worship to overt, large-scale public celebrations of their religion'.[4]

In addition to the repeal of Trinidad's Shouter Prohibition Ordinance in 1951, two major Orisa organisations were registered and incorporated into acts of parliament in 1981 and 1991, respectively. These legislations

[1] Bishop Peters, interview with author, Moyah, 3 June 2013.
[2] Stewart, *Orisa*, 2, 84.
[3] Ibid., 115.
[4] Henry, *Reclaiming African Religions*, 50.

provided Orisa shrines with protection and state sponsorship, and assistance to worshippers in their mission to continue Orisa practices by drawing on the expertise of Africa and its diaspora. Orisa followers were given a public festival day in 1995, and the Spiritual Baptists were given a national holiday on 30 March 1996. Later that decade, the Orisa Marriage Act was passed, allowing Trinidadians and Tobagonians to celebrate marriage following Orisa rites; in 2002, the first Orisa wedding ceremony was held. In 2000, both Spiritual Baptists and Orisa adherents were granted twenty-five acres of land, shared among the various groups. The same year, the 1868 Obeah Prohibition Ordinance was repealed, thanks to the activism of Spiritual Baptist and Orisa workers. Furthermore, Orisa was recognised as an official religion when it was first included in the country's census in 2011. Trinidad and Tobago's Orisa community have collaborated with several leading spiritual groups and leaders around the world. The Ooni of Ife, Nigeria paid a visit to Trinidad and Tobago in 1988. Trinidad and Tobago played an active role in the International Congress of Orisa Tradition and Culture, and in 1987, hosted the third World Conference on Orisa Traditions and Culture (the second conference was held in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil, in 1983). Additionally, a prominent Orisa group hosted the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, on the island in 1995. The Dalai Lama visited Orisa sites and met with Orisa audiences from Trinidad and Tobago and Nigeria during his stay. Trinidadian and Tobagonian groups have also collaborated on events and ceremonies with the neo-Yoruba Oyotunji Village, founded in South Carolina in the 1970s.[5]

Trinidad and Tobago's support of Orisa worship and the Spiritual Baptist Faith signals substantial success in securing national and global acknowledgement – in stark contrast to their Grenadian neighbours. Why is the situation so different in Grenada? Trinidadian and Tobagonian politicians vied for the votes of religious communities, appeared at public events hosted by practitioners, incorporated followers into their political campaigns, and pledged and or granted land, holidays, and other forms of recognition and legitimacy.[6] Grenada experienced a similar, but thwarted effort. There, like the Grenadian-born trade unionist Uriah Butler in Trinidad and Tobago, trade unionist and emerging nationalist Eric Gairy (1922–97) sought to end the subjugation and spiritual oppression of the

[5] Ibid.; Stewart, *Orisa*, 153–5, 85, 191, 298n5, 294n98, 203, 223, 252, 254; Murrell, *Afro-Caribbean Religions*, 205.
[6] Henry, *Reclaiming African Religions*, 48.

Black masses. Later in 1988, he would declare his interest in 'spiritualism, the occult, voodoo and a similar African religion called Shango'.[7]

As leader of the newly formed Grenada Manual and Mental Workers' Union, Gairy led the marginalised and disaffected peasantry in a struggle against the British plantocracy from 1950.[8] Gairy commenced his meetings in the style associated with Spiritual Baptist sermons: worshipping with practitioners, and incorporating African work imagery and devotees into his movement.[9] The healer Norman Paul became Gairy's spiritual guide.[10] Gairy enlisted other African work leaders as campaign chaplains to garner popular support for his party.[11] Christine McQueen recollected that she and other African work leaders attended meetings where they conducted drumming and dancing to support 'Uncle Gairy', as he was affectionately called.[12] One of Gairy's promises was to confer freedom of worship on Spiritual Baptists and similarly marginalised groups. He had invited the various Spiritual Baptist groups to the south of the island to True Blue, St George, and attempted to unite them under the umbrella of the Grenada United Baptist Religion.[13] Bishop Andrew recounted Gairy's pledge to give government land at True Blue to the Spiritual Baptists, along with money to build a cathedral there.[14] Gairy's promise should be viewed in the context of the worsening socio-economic conditions on Grenada. Gairy became the first leader of an independent Grenada in 1974. High unemployment and the violent repression of opposition movements by his government alienated large sections of the population, particularly the working class. Seeking to garner their support, Gairy performed several religious gestures: he proclaimed days of public prayer and erected Christian symbols in strategic locations across the island.[15] David Franklyn argued that Gairy 'manipulated the religiosity' of the Grenadian people, including followers of African-derived religions, for political gain.[16]

[7] Joseph Treaster, 'If "Uncle Gairy" Wins, Uncle Sam Won't Be Too Pleased', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 October 1988, http://archives.smh.com.au.
[8] Brizan, *Grenada*, 272.
[9] Franklyn, *Two Grenadas*, 44; W. Richard Jacobs and Ian Jacobs, *Grenada: The Route to Revolution* (Havana: Casa de La Americas, 1980), 92–3.
[10] Smith, *Dark Puritan*, 123.
[11] Polk, 'Grenada', 129.
[12] Christine McQueen, interview with author, Levera, 25 April 2013.
[13] Franklyn, *Two Grenadas*, 44.
[14] Bishop Andrew, interview with author, Moyah, 25 July 2014.
[15] Jacobs and Jacobs, *Grenada*, 69, 67, 82, 89, 107.
[16] Franklyn, *Two Grenadas*, 44.

Gairy's efforts to manipulate the people – if the accusations are true – could not overcome the people's disaffection; in 1979, Gairy and his government were overthrown by the main opposition movement, which went on to establish the People's Revolutionary Government (PRG). Under the leadership of Maurice Bishop, the PRG ruled until the US invasion in 1983. For Spiritual Baptists, the abrupt and bloodless revolution disrupted their plans for wider recognition. The money to purchase land and erect a cathedral was in the treasury, but the change of government meant that the Spiritual Baptists could not access those funds.[17] Had their plans for their own land on which to build their own cathedral come to fruition, those visible symbols of broad acceptance would have undoubtedly represented a major victory for Spiritual Baptists and African work devotees and greatly boosted their struggle for political recognition and legitimacy.[18]

Out of government, Gairy was accused by revolutionary forces of practising obeah, and African-derived traditions were shunned.[19] Because African work and obeah were seen as synonymous and thought to have helped secure Gairy his seat in power, both were considered as threats to the new regime.[20] As a result, African work, obeah, and the Rastafari movement were marginalised as Bishop's government attempted to suppress 'potential folk dissent'.[21] Although the Revolution was inspired by Trinidad and Tobago's Black Power Movement and itself had possessed a 'Black conscious' element, the Grenadian Revolution failed to lead to equality for African-inspired groups.[22]

[17] Bishop Andrew, interview with author, Moyah, 25 July 2014.

[18] So great was Gairy's relationship with the Spiritual Baptist community that at his funeral in 1997, Spiritual Baptist members were reportedly in attendance, see Beverley Steele, 'Grenada', in Frederick I. Case and Patrick Taylor (eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Caribbean Religions: Volume 1: A – L; Volume 2: M – Z* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 303.

[19] 'Gairy: I Had No "Bad" Books', *Grenada Newsletter*, 18 May 1985, 7–8, http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00000053/00303/7.

[20] Gloria Payne-Banfield, interview with author, St George's, 29 July 2014.

[21] Ronald Segal, 'Review: Background to Grenada: When the Social Scientists Invaded', *Caribbean Review* 12, no. 4 (1983): 40.

[22] Franklyn, *Two Grenadas*, 81. On the surveillance and harassment of the Rastafari community, see Laurie R. Lambert, *Comrade Sister: Caribbean Feminist Revisions of the Grenada Revolution* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2020), 93, 97–8. Rastafari were also stigmatised under the Gairy government (ibid., 97), which is also discussed at length by Arthur Newland, see Newland, 'Rastafari in the Grenada Revolution', *Social and Economic Studies* 62, no. 3/4 (2013): 205–26. On Black Power in Trinidad, see Kate Quinn, 'Conventional Politics or Revolution: Black Power and the Radical Challenge to the Westminster Model in the Caribbean', *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 53, no. 1 (2015): 71–94.

Bishop Andrew of Mount Union Spiritual Baptist church recalled that period as one immensely challenging for Spiritual Baptist and African work devotees.[23] Religious persons and others who were considered threats to the new regime were regularly rounded up and imprisoned, and at times, 'whole families' were incarcerated. In total, 3,112 persons were imprisoned.[24] Curfews were imposed, which meant cultural and spiritual workers who travelled around the island to conduct and attend ceremonies were restricted in their movement. Bishop Andrew noted that they could no longer conduct 'work [ceremonies] during the nights'.[25] Gloria Payne-Banfield, who served as cabinet secretary under Gairy, stated that as a result, African work 'went underground during the Revolution'.[26]

To further understand the difference between the Trinidadian and Grenadian legitimation movements, the ethnic and religious diversity of both islands must also be considered: people of South Asian heritage represent 35.4 per cent of Trinidadians and Tobagonians, compared with 2.2 per cent for Grenada. Notably, a quarter of Trinidadians and Tobagonians identify their religion as Hindu, Muslim, or Orisa, and the country's national holidays celebrate these multicultural realities and diverse religious affiliations, which leads to a more 'harmonized vision of citizenship' in which all those religions are integrated into mainstream civil society and their adherents are granted religious freedom.[27]

Gairy observed the role of both traditions in neighbouring Trinidad and Tobago's independence movement, and similarly incorporated African work and the Spiritual Baptist Faith into his political strategy, albeit with different outcomes. Independence from the colonial legacy of religious stigmatisation and oppression was far from realised in Grenada, where devotees were unable to secure legitimation and full recognition. It is clear that the recreation of Yoruba-based religious traditions must be seen as part of an ongoing process of change and cross-fertilisation, one which is incomplete and uneven.

[23] Bishop Andrew, interview with author, Moyah, 25 July 2014.
[24] Gloria Payne-Banfield, interview with author, St George's, 29 July 2014.
[25] Bishop Andrew, interview with author, Moyah, 25 July 2014.
[26] Gloria Payne-Banfield, interview with author, St George's, 29 July 2014.
[27] Stewart, *Orisa*, 252; Henry, *Reclaiming African Religions*, 50; Danielle N. Boaz, *Banning Black Gods: Law and Religions of the African Diaspora* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2021), 152; N. Fadeke Castor, 'Shifting Multicultural Citizenship: Trinidad Orisha Opens the Road', *Cultural Anthropology* 28, no. 3 (2013): 475–89.

REVIVING EGUNGUN IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

In the twenty-first century, the prestige of Yoruba spirituality continues to be imported from Trinidad and Tobago by Grenadian returnees. In 2018, Universal Empress Iya Ifatokie (also known as Bishop Yvonne Drakes), a Spiritual Baptist, Orisa practitioner, and leader of a cultural collective, The Shrine of the Seven Wonders of Africa Inc., introduced the Ifa Festival to Grenada. Just two years earlier, Universal Empress Ifatokie had been initiated into Ifa in Nigeria, which increased the reputation of her practice.[28] The Universal Empress is a Grenadian returnee from Trinidad and Canada; her great-grandmother was an Orisa practitioner who was trafficked to Grenada during enslavement. The unyielding desire of organisers of the Ifa festival is to revive the 'pure' form of the Yoruba culture in Grenada, which they declared had 'lost its original rites and precepts'.[29] The following year, the festival was held again, over a period of three days, and supported by spiritual leaders from Nigeria who worked with Trinidadians to offer various rites and ceremonies.[30] In 2023, American, Canadian, and Trinidadian delegates, including those of Grenadian descent, once again travelled to Grenada. The following year, American delegates delivered 'Ifa 101', a series of educational workshops explaining Ifa and its divination system, which are absent in the Grenadian pantheon.[31]

In 2023, the organisers restored a long-lost *egungun* ritual last observed in mid-twentieth-century Munich that was recorded by Norman Paul (Figure E.1). The *egungun* parade was facilitated by one Araba Ifakolade Atinumo of Lagos, Nigeria, who lent his ritual expertise. As in Yorubaland, the identity of the newly initiated *egungun* was concealed because *egungun* represents spirits of departed ancestors. The 2023 newspaper article revealed that the initiate was born in North America to Grenadian and Trinidadian parents and their upbring was 'rooted' in Islam and the Spiritual Baptist religion. The initiate declared:

> I hope to attend every Ifa festival in Grenada going forward. I will assist in growing this African tradition wherever it connects with people … I recently found out I have Yoruba ancestry through my mother, who is Grenadian, so it is no surprise I was called back to my roots. Ifa is not a religion, more a way of life,

[28] Universal Empress Iya Ifatokie, interview with author, Corinth, 29 August 2023.
[29] Curlan Campbell, '3 Days of Fasting and Prayer to Precede the IFA Festival', *Now Grenada*, https://tinyurl.com/44h9pn8e.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Smith, *Dark Puritan*, 139.

FIGURE E.1 The *Egungun* parade at the 2024 Ifa Festival. *Egungun* masquerade, Araba Ifakolade Atinumo of Nigeria (rear), Universal Empress Iya Ifatokie (front left), Iya Alison (center), and a second *egungun* figure. Photo by author, Corinth, St David, 11 July 2024.

more connected with nature and our ancestors, a better understanding of who you are. I hope to see many more Grenadians returning to their roots and finding clarity to some of the questions of life.[32]

That the initiate stressed his newly discovered Yoruba ancestry – who he identified as 'Ijesha' at the 2024 event – through his Grenadian mother, emphatically underscores how Yoruba-based customs in Grenada are situated within multi-generational, local, transregional, and transatlantic genealogies. The Ifa Festival and African work represent a confluence of the legacies of liberated Yoruba in Grenada *and* the movement of peoples and ideas around the Eastern Caribbean Sea and across the Atlantic.

It may be instructive to ask: did the original singers of 'Yoruba people are on an island', mentioned in the introduction to this book, envision

[32] Curlan Campbell, 'New Egungun Initiated at Grenada Ifa Festival', *Now Grenada*, https://nowgrenada.com/2023/08/new-egungun-initiated-at-grenada-ifa-festival.

their new surroundings as part of the vast Atlantic Ocean region, or did they understand themselves as inhabiting a distinct part of the Atlantic?[33] To put it differently, what physical spaces did recaptured Africans and their spiritual and biological descendants actively engage with? On arrival on Grenada, some liberated Africans discovered that they shared ethno-linguistic similarities with other Africans, particularly Yoruba and West Central Africans. They organised independent communities around those similarities, practising Yoruba-derived and other cultures of African origin. Recaptured Africans also reinvigorated local cultures established during slavery, such as the Nation Dance, and combined their African languages with French Creole and drew from Roman Catholicism.

The Atlantic Ocean, which poses a formidable barrier to an African return, features prominently in oral narratives by descendants of recaptives whose ancestors yearned for their homelands. Revealingly, such yearnings are embedded in African work and saraka rituals on Grenada. Further, recaptive Africans engaged with ideas that originated across the Atlantic: Orisa veneration and esoteric literature emerged in the South and North Atlantic, respectively. Yet these components were also introduced to Grenada and strengthened through sustained contact with Trinidad and Tobago, thus magnifying the significance of social and cultural networks within the Eastern Caribbean. Inter-island dialogue between Grenada and its neighbour Trinidad and Tobago underpins the religious worlds of Grenada devotees.

Grenadian African work adherents are largely isolated from direct participation in larger Black Atlantic religious networks with Orisa communities in West Africa, Brazil, and the United States. The Ifa Festival offers recent examples of engagement with West Africa, albeit via Grenadian returnees and other transnational delegates. An Atlantic history perspective – a single, coherent unit of investigation – does not fully represent how African-descended peoples in Grenada rethought and exchanged their cultural and political ideas. Such a perspective flattens the Atlantic space, failing to consider the relevance of distinct spheres or subsections of the larger Atlantic oceanic space. As the historian David Armitage usefully pointed out, smaller seas possess their own 'infra-Atlantic histories before trans-Atlantic contact and their inhabitants would continue to live such histories even when they became more deeply implicated in an

[33] Alison Games, 'Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities', *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 3 (2006): 743.

emergent Atlantic world'.[34] As it had been for their Indigenous predecessors, the Eastern Caribbean Sea was meaningful to post-slavery arrivals and figured prominently in their diasporic imaginary. By visiting loved ones, searching for better wages, trading in provisions and animals, and engaging with new spiritual and political ideas, indentured workers, their descendants, and African work devotees actively participated and shaped commercial, cultural, and political currents in the Eastern Caribbean.

Refocusing attention from islands to archipelago, island studies scholars 'un-island' histories and ideas, conceptualising island spaces and cultural traditions such as African work as 'mutually constituted, co-constructed, and inter-related'.[35] Grenadian and Trinidadian and Tobagonian cultural custodians interacted with Yoruba-based cultures in their respective territories, and in doing so, shaped cultural and political expressions in both islands. African work also made an impact on nearby Carriacou through inter-island migration, where, African work specialists were required for functions, and elements of African work were incorporated into the Nation Dance. Vincentian Spiritual Baptist adherents carried their faith to Grenada and Trinidad and Tobago, and the Trinidad and Tobago variation made its way to Grenada. In this way, St Vincent, Carriacou, mainland Grenada, and Trinidad and Tobago are inextricably related, each functioning as key nodes in the African-derived religious networks of the region.

[34] David Armitage, 'The Atlantic Ocean', in David Armitage, Alison Bashford, and Sujit Sivasundaram (eds.), *Oceanic Histories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 99.

[35] Elaine Stratford, Godfrey Baldacchino, Elizabeth McMahon, Carol Farbotko, and Andrew Harwood, 'Envisioning the Archipelago', *Island Studies Journal* 6, no. 2 (2011): 124.