Journal for the Study of the Religions of Africa and its Diaspora

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A Special Issue Dedicated to Jan Platvoet

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Rose Mary Amenga-Etego

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Afe Adogame

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African Association for the Study of Religions

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ABOUT THE JOURNAL

The Journal for the Study of the Religions of Africa and its Diaspora is a peer-reviewed, open-access journal for the academic study of the religions of Africa and the African Diaspora. It will serve primarily as an interdisciplinary journal in which AASR members, but also non-AASR-members, publish the outcomes of their original research on the religions of Africa and the African Diaspora.

The journal will cover the wide range of religious traditions that were founded, were or are found, and exist and operate in Africa and the African Diaspora; and topics useful to scholars involved in the academic study of religions in Africa and the Africa Diaspora, and to a wider readership of academics in the general study of religions.

The journal shall be published as electronic issues only, with up to two (2) issues per year. It will be administered on behalf of the AASR by the Editorial Management Board and the International Advisory Board.

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ABOUT THE AASR

The African Association for the Study of Religions (AASR) is an academic association that promotes the study of religions in Africa through international collaboration in research, publishing, and teaching. AASR was founded in 1992 in Harare, Zimbabwe at a Regional Conference of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR). The AASR has been an affiliate organization of the IAHR since 1995.

In particular, the AASR aims to stimulate the academic study of religions in Africa in the following ways:

- By providing a forum for multilateral communications between scholars of African religions
- By facilitating the exchange of resources and information
- By encouraging international collaboration in research between scholars and institutions in Africa and those outside the continent
- By developing publishing opportunities particularly for scholars based in Africa
- By establishing a travel fund to enable scholars to attend academic conferences
- By organising conferences in Africa and panels on the religions of Africa
- By establishing a newsletter and website to increase communication between scholars of African religions
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Editor's Note

Jan G. Platvoet's encounter with Africa, first as a missionary and later as a scholar, has earned him a significant place in the academic study of religion on the continent and beyond. As a historian of religion, he has made remarkable contributions to the academic study of indigenous religions in Africa and thus contributed in launching African religion into the global academy. His works in the areas of historiography, theory and methodology in the study of African religions and religions in Africa have immensely contributed to knowledge in the field. His notable roles in the African Association for the Study of Religions (AASR), as one of its pioneers but also one of the most proactive actors, and in the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) are not only outstanding, they have earned him a conspicuous place as one who has contributed to putting the academic study of religions in Africa on the global academic map. This Special Issue comprising nine contributions is the first set of essays written to honour him for his impact and mentorship in this area of scholarship. Similarly, the variety of essays in this volume demonstrate his broader engagement in the field as well as the growing interest of contemporary scholars of religion.

The first essay by Rose Mary Amenga-Etego, 'Crossing Research Boundaries: Our Nankani Daughter in Academia' engages the challenges faced by contemporary African scholars as they cross the boundaries of object and subject with their indigenous experiential knowledge systems and demands to the Western academic sphere, where research neutrality and objectivity, based on critical 'scientific' analysis of data is upheld as the key principle of research. As researchers within their indigenous languages, cultures and religions, these scholars wrestle to skilfully navigate their multi-layered positionality, especially the women.

In 'Mamalawo? The Controversy over Women Practicing Ifa Divination,' Ayodeji Ogunnaike engages the debate on the controversy over women becoming diviners in Ifa traditions. The author argues that the understanding and application of gender is not only contextually relative, its implications for initiation rituals, especially in 'the rapidly growing number of female initiates in diaspora, will likely change the dynamics of the tradition going forward.' Thus, Ogunnaike's essay addresses the issue of fear and anxiety over the emergence of women in Ifa divination, a perspective that does not only border on the future of African spirituality, but also, whether it is innovative and transformative.

Another interesting area of this volume is its engagement with how religious themes intertwines with African novels. This set of two essays begin with Elias Kifon Bongmba who examines 'Gender and Religion in Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter*' to show how religion and gender are intricately situated within the indigenous religio-cultural setting of death; while Loreen Maseno's 'Sexuality and Sexual Scripting in African Traditional Religion: Mumbi in *A Grain Of Wheat*' brings out the sensitive themes of sexuality and sexual politics in addition to those of religion and gender. These two contributions

interweave the complex themes of religion, gender relations, sexuality and power functions within the socio-cultural reality of Africa.

Unlike the above essays, Ullrich Relebogilwe Kleinhempel's 'Retrieving African Traditional Religion from the Fringes – Umbanda and the Brazilian Traditions as a Source' draws our attention to the religious beliefs and practices of the African diaspora as viable sites and sources for the study of African religions. Using Umbanda from Brazil as a case example, the author illustrates the survival, innovative and transformative nature of Africa's beliefs and practices. The author argues that, despite the of difficulties of living in non-Bantu cultural environment, Umbanda has 'preserved a core of Bantu beliefs, ritual practices and spiritual perceptions.'

Moving into the domain of African Christianity, the next two contributions examine the dynamic nature and practices of Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana. Bernard Otopah Appiah's 'Convoluted Pentecost? An Analysis of Akan Indigenous World-Views in Ghanaian Pentecostal-Charismatic Praxes' addresses the question whether the interaction between Akan indigenous and Pentecostal world-views are complicated by the nature and variety of practices in Ghanaian Pentecostal Christianity. Unlike Appiah, Michael Perry Kweku Okyerefo argues in 'Philanthropy as Image Politics in Ghana's New Churches' that the acts of philanthropic and charitable deeds such as the provisions of health and educational institutions by Ghana's Pentecostal-Charismatic churches are an impersonation of the historic mainline churches. Drawing on the Christian Action Faith Ministries International (Action Chapel) and International Central Gospel Church (ICGC), the author, however, notes that although this is also in line with Prosperity Theology, their engagement with the media projects them into the public sphere.

The last set of essays deals distinctively with religious conflicts and religious language respectively. In 'Causes of Religious Conflict in Ethiopia,' Bekalu Atnafu, identifies religious fundamentalism, intolerance, suspicion, a new sense of Islamic identity and movement among others as the main cause of Ethiopia's religious conflicts and argues for religious tolerance in the context of the country's religious diversity. Closely related to religious conflicts is the problem of religious language. Thus, the volume rounds up with J.C. Thomas' contribution on 'Left Wing Fideism: A Critique of Non-Cognitivism.' In this essay Thomas' critically engages D.Z. Phillip's work on the "Concept of Prayer" with respect to its contribution to the complexity of religious language. He argues that there is a defect in Phillip's interpretation of the logic of religious language because of the author's reliance on Ludwig Wittgenstein's influence on religious language.

This diversely rich collection of essays provides a glimpse on the diverse ways in which Platvoet's scholarship has influenced, provoked and contributed to knowledge in the disciplinary area of religious studies, African religions and religion in Africa. Our warm congratulations to Dr. Jan Platvoet for sharing his expertise and keeping us on our toes always. We commend this Special Issue to you. *Akwaaba*!

Rose Mary Amenga-Etego (Guest Editor)

Afe Adogame (Editor-In-Chief)

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Crossing Research Boundaries: 'Our Nankani Daughter' in Academia

Rose Mary Amenga-Etego

Abstract

Western education has the tendency of blurring specific or individual socio-cultural identities in the name of knowledge and civilization, creating in the process cross-cultural or multicultural identities. Although the extent of this impact is debatable, the art and craft of research, the hub of Western education, takes a toll on who we are, as non-Western scholars. Our identity, as beings of defined locations and creativity, is drawn into a sharp negotiation process. 'Crossing research boundaries' examines some of the problems of academic research and its impact on African researchers and their religio-cultural identities from a female perspective.

KEY WORDS: Identities, Boundaries, Culture, Nankani, Africa, Research

Introduction

'Words are spirits – use them with care' they said as we were guided through the formative years of our lives.[1] It is an undeniable fact that the life of the rural African child is lived in a community of peers, although constantly under the watchful eyes and attentive ears of its elderly community members. These peer groups, generally structured according to gender and age, form smaller social units for close bonding and cultural cohesion. This also makes it easy for supervision and instruction by the elders. Thus, growing up in a rural Nankani village, Naga, in the Upper East Region of Ghana, I was constantly cautioned on my use of words. The situation reached its climax when I became fond of the chorus of a particular dirge.

Returning from the boarding school for holidays, I joyfully joined in the performance of the final funeral rites of one of our grandmothers, Akalu. Actively participating in the role of the granddaughters, I sang and danced to my heart's desire. A chorus from one of the popular dirges soon became my favourite piece. Used for the final rites of older women, it had acquired a specific religio-cultural space and timeframe and could no

NOTE: The title of this article emerged after my PhD fieldwork in 2006 at the University of Edinburgh where it was used in a seminar presentation. The content of this paper is however significantly revised and updated.

[1] Rose Mary Amenga-Etego, *Mending the Broken Pieces: Indigenous Religion and Sustainable Rural Development in Northern Ghana*, (Trenton: African World Press, 2011), 130.

longer be trespassed, not even by those who see themselves as 'insiders'. Like other dirges, it was also confined to its allotted space of ritual enactment. Creating a boundary between that which may be differentiated as sacred (ritual) space and secular (social) space, my fondness and continuous use of the dirge outside the prescribed ritual environment became an area of concern even to my peer group. Thus it was soon brought to the attention of the elders. This ended with a serious 'educational' session by the then 'grandmother of the house'.[2] The talk was meant to help me learn and understand things from the broader perspective, a process that involves some form of personal reflection, a reflection that goes beyond the individual to the group and clan or community. From then onwards, the caution on the use of words expanded to include ritually inscribed songs, poetic language as well as other forms of ritual phrases and enactments.

According to these elders, some words possess spiritual properties and one's lack of knowledge or inability to use them appropriately is a potential danger to the self and/or others; hence, a source of concern. This is because of the fear that some form of misfortune could befall the individual and, perhaps, other members of the group, family or community. Although this can be understood within the popular phrase 'prevention is better than cure,' it is important to situate such a concern within the context of what it means to teach and/or learn (educate) among the Nankani. That is, it is now common knowledge that there is no such designation as a 'school' or 'classroom' in traditional African communities. In other words, apart from the multiple usage of ritual sites, like those used for puberty rites, no designated places are set apart with specific schedules and subjects for the youth or people to go and learn, and afterwards, return to their homes or community. Rather, Africa's classroom or school is part and parcel of the daily life.[3] Specific knowledge forms may however be given on a need-to-know basis, sometimes, within the confines of rituals. This includes both the experiential and the symbolic manner in which sacred knowledge is transferred or parted with.

A question then arises as to how a 'Nankani daughter' can effectively conduct a religio-cultural study like widowhood rites within her community, where she is fully aware of the religio-cultural conventions surrounding such knowledge systems. For example, my study on widowhood and widowhood rites in 2003 was hindered for a period until the performance of the final funeral rites of a clansman created the requisite opportunity and ritual space for the research to fully ensue.[4] The concerns of the widows were that 'we are invoking the spirits of our ancestors and the Supreme Being for you our daughters not to experience early widowhood or go through the widowhood rites yet you are here enquiring of it.'[5] To understand the hesitation of these widows is to return to the above phrase, 'words are spirits.' The belief is that an in-depth discussion on the subject matter of widowhood outside the ritual space with any of the clan daughters would be contradicting their prayers. Thus, to protect their daughters, they would rather stall the study.

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[2] This refers to the most senior woman of the household, often in the category of grandparents. This form of categorization does not necessarily relate to age, it may be a generational demarcation.

[3] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1990), 1.

[4] Widowhood and widowhood rites among the people of Naga in the Upper East Region. A paper presented to the Institute of African Women in Religion and Culture, Trinity Theological Seminary at a workshop on: *Widowhood in a Multi-faith Context*, Legon, Ghana.

[5] Ayowine Awine, interview, Naga Chief House, 19th March 2003.

The above is quite significant to the transfer or acquisition of some aspects of indigenous knowledge forms as well as the subsequent usage. Yet, there is the awareness that contemporary research is engulfed in finding a balance between research objectivity and sensitivity. This awareness is nevertheless problematic. There are no clear guidelines as to how such a balance might be drawn. This is especially complicated for indigenous researchers who are not simply participant observers but are part and parcel of the research data they are dealing with and more so, if the data under discussion are confined to specific sacred (ritual) spaces and contexts. This undoubtedly becomes a problem for the researcher as he/she crosses the boundaries of object and subject, from the indigenous experiential knowledge demands to the Western academic sphere where research neutrality and objectivity– based on critical 'scientific' analysis of data is held to be the key principle of research– is required. Again, how can a religio-cultural insider negotiate the boundaries of the sacred and the secular in relation to the Western academic demands of empirical referencing? And finally, set within the African non-written (oral) data and subjective premises, in what way(s) and to what extent can these subjective data be made a substantive part of the indigenous researcher's material in the new world of Western academia?

Crossing Research Boundaries

The phrase 'Our Nankani Daughter in Academia' transforms and explains the symbolic representation of the former 'Crossing Research Boundaries'. By this, I am simply positing a case in which a 'daughter' from a rural African community, hitherto a 'non-literary' society, is crossing not just the sharp rural-urban divide of developing countries, but beyond this internal divide to an already established and institutionalized system of the academia where the rules and norms surrounding it are practically inconsistent with the society from which this daughter originates. This situation has serious geographical, religio-cultural, socio-economic as well as political implications. Even though the above factors are important, all of them cannot be dealt with in this discussion. Nonetheless, itemizing them helps to show that the discourse is beyond geographical and religio-cultural delineations or philosophies of teaching and learning. Thus, boundary crossing can be interpreted from diverse perspectives and this is often relative to the individual concerned. Even so, each interpretation will carry specific nuances relevant to the subject of study.

'Crossing research boundaries' involves physical and metaphysical boundaries. Yet, crossing these are essential for the researcher and her community, if the goal of having the daughter in the academia is to be realised. Even though this is not the focus of this study, there is a sense in which a discussion on some aspects of the researchers' crossing of physical geographical boundaries, and both the researcher and community's crossing of the metaphysical boundaries, are relevant contributions to this presentation. That the personal has become political in the academic quest for research objectivity can no longer be denied.[6] It is a fact that this researcher has traversed several geographical boundaries, in different capacities, in order to meet the varied needs of the extended African family system on one hand and to attain her desired formal (Western) education on the other. The latter is the basis for the current crossing into the world of the

[6] José Ignacio Cabezón and, Sheila Greeve Davaney. , "Introduction," in *Identity and the Politics of Scholarship in the Study of Religion*, eds. José Ignacio Cabezón and, Sheila Greeve Davaneyeds (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2005), 4.

academia. In other words, crossing geographical boundaries is an integral part of acquiring Western education in many parts of rural Africa.

Thus a discussion on crossing boundaries from the geographical perspective is incomplete if its role in the researcher's educational endeavour is ignored. As in many parts of the world, all the stages of Western education cannot be acquired from a single rural community. The individual has to cross various communities, districts or perhaps regional boundaries for the desired education. So it is in this case. My educational journey from the rural area to the University of Edinburgh took me from the village to the regional capital of Bolgatanga, Jirapa in the Upper West Region and the national capital, Accra. Yet, each and all of these geographical locations, including the present one, Edinburgh, cannot simply be looked at in terms of geographical and academic boundary crossings. As shown above, the religious and socio-cultural challenges these have posed are immeasurable. Thus, the current stance of globalization, where the world is rhetorically declared a global village, yet, unlike my rural community in northern Ghana, crossing boundaries in this global village is fraught with difficulties. Not only is distance a problem, the various forms of technicalities and restrictions have set it apart from the village identified above.

On the other hand, boundary crossing among an exogamous patrilineal society such as the Nankani, and their neighbours, is neither new nor unique. With a maternal grandmother from Shia in the Tallensi-Nandam District, a mother from Balungu in the Bolgatanga District, a paternal grandmother from Kologo in the Kassena-Nankani South District and a marital community in Kandiga in the Kassena-Nankani East District, inter-community boundary crossing is an integral part of life, negotiated constantly to maintain filial bounds. This is especially common with women who are the main negotiators of these filial bounds through marriage. This system has helped to create avenues for easy understanding within the traditional system, for the maintenance and control of individuals, through such possessives phrases as 'our' as in 'Our Nankani daughter'. It is the daughters who, through marriage, establish the networks.

Sometimes, these boundary crossings are among neighbouring African countries and this may be part of the colonial heritage. In this case, the basis for an established network for boundary crossings may not be due to marriages but the partitioning of former indigenous communities among two or more nation states. For instance, there are family relations across the Ghana-Burkina Faso boundaries, enabling members from each neighbouring community to cross over to the other for filial reasons. This calls for a critical evaluation and understanding of community or ethnic boundary creation and demarcations in Africa and the dynamic roles of such boundaries in the people's lives. It is now clear that the arbitrary colonial boundary demarcations disrupted and affected the extended African family system as well as the traditional governance systems of indigenous communities. As Ann Bahr put it, these are "national boundaries that have little or no relationship to ethnic boundaries."[7] In other words, the concept of crossing boundaries presents different meanings to different people. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which one perspective does not obliterate the other but generates multiple identities, each enriching and enabling the other. Hence, one interpretation of the phrase 'our Nankani daughter in academia' is not limited to the physical aspect but to an understanding that transcends the entire Nankani conceptual frame of thought or

[7] Ann Marie B. Bahr *Religions of the World: Indigenous Religions*, Foreword by Martin E. Marty, (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2005), 56.

worldview. It is within this framework, the metaphysical, that the translation or interpretation of indigenous languages (oral text) into the Western academic system of written text with its subsequent demands for standardization becomes a problem for indigenous researchers.

Scholars in Africa have in diverse ways called for an examination of this situation of boundary crossing and its effects on Africa's psychological and intellectual framing. Indigenous African languages, with their symbolic forms of framing, are not just embodiments of culture and identity; they are an integral part of the people's "worldview or general philosophy of life."[8] In his work on *Globalization and the African Scholar*, Kwesi Yankah shows how, "our psychological attitudes to language make possible the immediate denunciation as unacademic any discourse not articulated in Euro-American languages. Translate the same discourse into an Euro-American language, and the cross-linguistic rendition almost magically propels it into the realm of academia.[9] The key issue emanating from the above quote does not only underscore the relationship between Africans and their religio-cultural and/or socio-political setting, but also illustrates the actual dynamics of boundary crossing in the academia. Yankah's portrayal of the African "psychological attitudes to language" and how such a make-up renders its linguistic framework 'unacademic' in 'the realm of academia' illustrates some of the concerns on the problems associated with the use of indigenous languages and frames of thought in academic research. The fact that the research area requires specific forms of representation or standardization in the English diction, one that does not fully take into consideration the contextual situation, is not an isolated problem of the Nankani, but one that "transcends the boundaries of rural, urban, non-literate and elite in many parts of Africa."[10] This is irrespective of whether or not these cross-cultural encounters are processes of enrichment and development.[11] In other words, Africans lose the richness and spirituality of their constructions to the benefit of the 'Other' through the academic standardization of language.

It is quite clear from this brief overview that the formative stages of this Nankani daughter is already immersed in a trail of boundary crossings. Yet, the fact that they play a crucial role makes them significant to this study. Thus, the geographical boundary crossings with their individual socio-cultural undertones are part and parcel of her journey into the academia. This notwithstanding, the process of acquiring formal education in the field of religious studies, from the Nankani perspective, especially, by a 'daughter', is a huge leap across the traditional worldview and the community's gender dynamics.[12]

Although at present the academia is a 'neutral ground', set in motion with rules for proper conduct and governance, it is still an area of great concern for some indigenous African researchers. For many Africans who have crossed these boundaries, this concept

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[8] Amenga-Etego, *Mending the Broken Pieces*, 69.

[9] Kwesi Yankah, "Globalization and the African Scholar," in *Reclaiming the Human Sciences and Humanities Through African Perspectives, edited by* Helen Lauer and Kofi Anyidoho, Vol. I, (Accra-Ghana: Sub-Saharan Press, [2004], 2012), 53.

[10] Amenga-Etego, *Mending the Broken Pieces*, 235.

[11] Lamin Sanneh, *Encountering the West: Christianity and the Global Cultural* Process*: The African Dimension* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1993), 96 and Ngûgî Wa Thiong'o, "African Languages and Global Culture in the Twenty-first Century," in *African Visions: Literary Images, Political Change, and Social Struggle in Contemporary Africa*, eds. Cheryl B. Mwaria, Silvia Federici, and Joseph McLaren, (Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 2000), 155-161.

[12] Amenga-Etego, *Mending the Broken Pieces*, 255-256.

of 'ourness' is often lost as a result of crossing the boundaries into this new ground. It is within this general frame of understanding that this current study is being undertaken. The resultant concerns are twofold. What are some of the implications of boundary crossings and how would the theoretical and methodological demands of neutrality and detachment in the academia affect with the deep-seated community-based orientation and spirituality of the Nankani or African? That is to say, within the general frame of understanding 'Our Nankani Daughter in Academia', what would be lost and what would be gained? How would the current theoretical base of the academia deal with the involved narrative spirituality of the Nankani? Here, Yankah observes that:

> The denigration of Africa's academic discourse as unscholarly, rather descriptive, and insufficiently detached or superficial for academic purposes, appears to be a by-product of the Eurocentric perception that the 'primitive' African mind is generally incapable of abstract thinking and expression, and deals more with the concrete. This, by inference, extends to the realm of scholarly discourse, where Africans are said to indulge more in concrete descriptions than abstraction.[13]

This is rather unfortunate. As Yankah explains, this notion of the academia can be traced to Plato's *Republic*. Yankah traces Plato's epistemological viewpoint to his "the universe is no longer experienced with the senses, but is 'objectified'. Here the object separates himself from the environment in other to maintain control over it. According to this new epistemology, in order to be capable of critical thought, we must be independent from that which we wish to know-uninvolved, detached, remote."[14] How can or in what way can 'Our Nankani Daughter,' with the possessive 'Ourness,' represent as well as present the Nankani effectively in the academia?

Giving an Account of Oneself by Judith Butler provides the viewpoint of the academia from the Western perspective. The quote from Minama M. Adorna at the beginning of her first chapter on, 'An Account of oneself' depicts her desire to situate her work within the historical and theoretical context of Western academia. The quote: "'The value of thought is measured by its distance from the continuity of the familiar".[15] Positing such a statement in her first chapter from which she scholarly handles her augment on 'An Account of Oneself' presents significant insights on the one hand and raises critical questions on the other. With regards to this study, the statement raises more questions than it provides solutions. Whose 'value of thought' am I to consider? Is it the Nankani or the academia? In as much as the answer to this question is central to the measure of distance needed from the western academic perspective, it is also important in determining the extent of familiarity and/or the issue of discontinuity. Questions as to which is the familiar context, in relation to this study is vital? What do we mean by distance and what sort of distance is required in this context? On whose account is this distance to be measured and on what grounds would discontinuity be justified? All these questions are essential to our understanding of each situation.

In other words, to cross over from the traditional boundary to the academia requires one to distance, and if possible, disengage oneself from the familiar to engage, in this case the 'unfamiliar', in order that his/her "value of thought" can be measured for possible acceptance. It is worth noting though, that even though there has been, in

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[13] Yankah, "Globalization and the African Scholar," 54.
[14] Yankah, "Globalization and the African Scholar," 54.
[15] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 3.

recent times, a paradigm shift on this viewpoint in scholarship,[16] placing such a quote in a 2005 publication connotes the different categories of thought on the subject matter. That is to say, the notion of a paradigm shift from scientific neutrality to ethnographic reflexivity is, to some extent, a relative discourse; hence, relevant mainly to those concerned. It is with this considerable relativity that supposedly poses the problem for this paper. It is also precisely for this conflicting stands that the phrase 'crossing research boundaries' is an integral component in this study.

'Our Nankani Daughter in Academia'

A week after this title was published in the Religious Studies Seminar Programme bulletin; I was puzzled by the choice of words and title as a whole. I was also bewildered by the binary juxtapositions in which the title was framed. I was amazed as I mentally examined each of the words within a reasonable short pace of time. As I began to unravel the title, examining the words 'crossing', 'boundaries', 'Nankani', 'research', 'academia', 'our' and 'daughter', the questions 'who and where am I, the real me?' emerged. It was soon clear that even though the topic and intended content was clear at the time of its composition, I was no longer sure of it, especially, as I considered the subject of positioning. It was, and still is, obvious that the 'I' plays the role of the 'daughter'. The 'I' is responsible for the act of 'crossing', through the medium of 'research' but then, if the 'I' does gets into the 'academia', then the 'I' becomes 'Our'. The questions: 'who are these possessive group, are they the Nankani? How and why have they emerged to take possession of the 'I' became additional issues for consideration. It soon became apparent that this can be seen as a typical phenomenon in many African societies and, particularly, in relation to people or communities and the extended relationship they hold with their daughters, within the context of marriage?

Daughters, within the context of marriage, are not just a means by which inter-clan, intertribal or interethnic relationships are established and bridged; as Ifi Amadiume points out, they are an integral part of the redistribution of resources and wealth in traditional communities.[17] It suggests that a link between the Nankani and the academia is being drawn from the traditional socio-cultural perspective. This is not only in relation to the perceived possibility of wealth or financial gain, as with bride wealth; it hinges on the people's religio-cultural and socio-political lifestyles as well. This is because the daughter's identity as a Nankani will forever be an integral part of her being, irrespective of crossing the boundary into the academia. This identity tag also makes it possible for the use of the cumulative 'Our'. It is this presupposition, based on the identity tag, that posses a serious research problem for indigenous researchers, especially, in religio-cultural studies. How does one balance these religio-cultural conditionings with the academic grammatical convention and the principles of neutrality and objectivity?

According to some Nankani elders, the advent of formal education was the beginning of discontinuity for their children and their religio-cultural tradition. The new educational system did not only introduce a physical change of scenery, it drifted their children from the familiar to the unfamiliar frame of thought. This group of children are *sekul coma* (school children), a phrase used for the educated or those who have had some

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[16] Charlotte Aull Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

[17] Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*, (London: Zed Press, 1998).

considerable amount of Western education. The phrase *sekul coma* connotes a sense in which the community is aware that their children are learners (children) in their new environment. They were, and still are, quite aware that their children will have to continually strive to care for themselves, outside the traditional extended family support system. With the understanding that these children are alienated from the local community, a process in which a majority of them will no longer be familiar with their traditional norms, they took it as a duty to instil in these children a continuous sense belonging and responsibility. Thus creating an understanding of multiple belongings for their 'educated' children, the concept of 'ourness,' is a concept that expands the words 'home' and 'family' into community and its associated membership. In other words, 'home' and 'family' are not limited references to where the individual lives or nuclear family but to the place and among the families to which such an individual was born and raised. Such a reference may relate to an entire village or ethnic group. It is a reference of belongingness; hence, the use of the words 'home' and 'family' by migrants in the Western Diaspora might be a reference to their African roots.

It is in this regard that the issue of distancing oneself from the familiar poses problems for indigenous African researchers. At present, African researchers are not only crossing geographical and academic boundaries, they are doing so also in the religious sphere. Yet in all these areas, the indigenous background, to some extent, continuous to form an underlying current in frames of thoughts and actions. Ann Bahr has, for instance, argued that:

> The majority of converts to Christianity or Islam are not purist: They not only engage in indigenous practices occasionally but also continue to be informed daily by the worldview of African indigenous religion. The institutional and social structures of African indigenous religion have weakened in many parts of Africa, but indigenous religion remains the spiritual background of all Africans no matter where or whether they attend religious services. Simply by virtue of the fact that they are culturally and philosophically Africans, they continue to believe in at least certain elements of African indigenous religion.[18]

It is in this respect that rather than distancing oneself, indigenous African scholars researching their communities may choose to identify themselves. The post-modernist approach to research, despite the criticisms against it, is a welcome addition to research.

Another issue arising from this presentation is that of 'positioning'. The questions: Who am I? Where am I? Where do I belong? Are crucial. Even though these present different opportunities for analysis, the question remains as to how these different positions can be effectively negotiated within this subject of boundary crossing? The fact that all these questions are crucial in the processes of knowledge acquisition and transmission cannot be denied by indigenous African scholars, more so, female searchers. For instance, how is the question 'who am I?'- in the context of Butler's *Giving an Account of Oneself*, processed? In what way would the 'I' pose a problem in terms of research neutrality and objectivity and, therefore, affect "[t]he value of thought" presented. Thus, the intricate involvement of a researcher and the underlying implications of such an involvement on the question of research objectivity is a constant subject for critical review. For instance, even though John S. Mbiti tried to safeguard his work, and probably himself, from potential critics, by noting that "and in any case I am

[18] Bahr, *Religions of the World*, 57-58.

by birth an African,"[19] Okot p'Bitek argues that this is not enough because he forgot or neglected to say he was also a priest?[20] In other words, what is the required level of disclosure?

Although this possess' serious constrains on every researcher, it complicates the problems for indigenous African researchers, whose desire of crossing their traditional boundaries into the world of academia entails a great religio-cultural as well as socio-political leap. As Africans, with African research topics and subjects, they are placed within the 'insider' category of the "insider/outsider" debate.[21] James L. Cox sees this position as compromising the researcher's efforts on the subject of scientific neutrality and/or objectivity; hence, the need for an honest identity disclosure.[22] It is worth noting that even though the insider/outsider debate is not the focus of this study, hence, cannot be strongly engaged in this discussion, its role on the issue of positioning cannot be overlooked.

Positioned as insiders, indigenous researchers may possess some basic knowledge of their communities like language, political and geographical landscape, religio-cultural and other social traits. In this regard, the indigenous notion of belonging and communal solidarity may also provide a degree of security and mutual trust, between the researcher and respondents. This can be facilitated by reason that 'our daughter' or 'son' will do the 'right thing' and vice versa. Yet, it is this very point that presents serious challenges to the subject of research neutrality and objectivity; thus, the crux of presentation. Straddling two different, yet contesting, worlds of intellectual objectivity and filial solidarity, indigenous researchers find themselves in a threshold. It is for this reason that the question: 'should the quest to enter the Western oriented academia present such tough stands as 'crossing research boundaries'?' becomes relevant.

This notwithstanding, there are often some internal dynamics associated with indigenous knowledge acquisition and redistribution. As shown in the introduction, this may relate to ritual spaces and time, but they could also be tied to taboo and secrecy as well as the community's gender and age restrictions. As a daughter of the research community, I am predisposed and privileged to the above-mentioned insider's knowledge systems. This notwithstanding, my gender, femaleness, as in the phrase 'our daughter' presents a different dimension to the way and manner in which some of the insider information may be divulged, understood and analysed. This does not only present a different scenario, but also, a gendered perspective in information dissemination to and by indigenous researchers. Thus, a gendered perspective in this case may still question the undue generalization of the privilege positions of insiders. Hence, the female perspective in this study would not only provide a different viewpoint to the traditional male dominated studies in this area; but would also pay specific attention to some peculiar problems of female African researchers, especially, in patrilineal communities. It is important to note that although the concept of 'daughter' is a life-long title and it's not peculiar to patrilineal societies, it's inclusion in this title seeks to stress the community's insistence on its entitlement to whatever may be derived from this

[19] Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2.

[20] Okot p'Bitek, *African Religions in European Scholarship*, (New York, Chesapeake: ECA Associates, 1990).

[21] James L. Cox, "African Identity as the Projection of Western Alterity," in *Uniquely African? African Christian Identity from Cultural and Historical Perspectives*, eds. James L Cox and Gerrie ter Haar, (New Jersey and Eritrea: African World Press, 2003), 27.

[22] Cox, "African Identity as the Projection of Western Alterity," 34-36.

crossing of research boundaries. This is irrespective of the often-mention of menstruation as a religio-cultural limitation on female religiosity and leadership roles in Africa. It is also important to note that, traditionally, the Nankani have no general religio-cultural menstrual restriction on their female. Rather, the attainment of important family, clan or community religio-cultural knowledge rests on the status and role of the female within the exogamous marriage system.

As a married woman, I have crossed the first two hurdles of the required feminine gender roles of marriage and childbearing. Considered to be reasonably matured and responsible enough, I am now deemed to be capable of accessing some traditional knowledge, relevant to my new status in the community. These traditional categorisations provide additional spaces to access other relevant research data. Bette Ekeya's explanation on the changing roles and status of the African female is not only applicable, but significantly elaborates and underpins this gender dimension.[23]

On the other hand, there is a sense in which educated females have also acquired some form of masculinity in traditional society. Although the colonial educational heritage, left females in many parts of rural Ghana at a disadvantage, the gradual education of girls provided new avenues for knowledge acquisition and self-expression. In time, the educated female acquired a place and status in family, clan and community. Thus, western education generally provided African women some masculine status. This is particularly evident in patrilineal societies. At present, it offers them privilege access into some traditional institutions and knowledge systems that are denied to non-educated women. Some educated women have become unofficial council of elders in their families, clans and communities. I have argued on this in an earlier study that such privilege statuses should be placed within the context of the financial and material assistance this group of women give to their families and communities.

The above has also affected some traditional gender roles. The primary feminine role of marriage and childbearing, although still highly desired, regarded and encouraged, is quietly and slowly relegated to the background, because of the immediate financial and/or material gains. As a result, the initial attitude of viewing educated women as bad women is also giving way. Now some families say women are better providers and carers of their families than their male counterparts.

Conclusion

In an effort to engage the complexities inherent in the multi-layered notion of boundary crossings in this study (geographical, religious, academic and gender), I have chosen to discuss aspects Yankah's *Globalization and the African Scholar and* Judith Butler's *Giving an Account of Oneself*. Although both are in the academia, one is situated in the US while the other in Ghana. Yet, both are addressing the pertinent research issues of universality verses particularity, from their respective scholarly backgrounds and contexts. *Giving an Account of Oneself* by Butler is been very significant as it epitomises the nature and demands of western scholarship. Normalised and universalised as the standard for academic research, Yankah's *Globalization and the African Scholar* questions this hegemonic stands in the academia. Arguing that in the "so-called global trends within the academy,

[23] Bette, Ekeya, "Woman, For How Long Not?" in *New eyes for reading: Biblical and theological reflections by women from third world*, edited by John S. Pobee and Bärbel von Wartenberg-Potter, (World Council of Churches: Geneva, 1986), 59-67.

we often forget that 'globalisation' is merely the promotion of another local culture and knowledge to the world stage. The question of whose local knowledge is centralised as the standard, and whose should be designated as peripheral borders on the politics of knowledge: who is in control."[24]

These different perspectives have an impact on my study among the Nankani. As a Nankani in the academia, both scholarly views are methodologically and theoretically important and problematic. That is, effectively crossing this research boundary, with both my gender-based experiential knowledge and research focus on African indigenous religions and cultures without loosing my communally binding pride of 'our Nankani daughter in the academia,' will continue to be a personal challenge, at least, for now. This is because even though Butler seems to have responded to this when she indicated that the concepts of universality are not necessarily problematic. She also noted that it may become so if a universal principle cannot easily lend itself, in a culturally responsive way, to a particular context. In other words, when this happens, "the universal precept itself becomes a site of contest, a theme and an object of democratic debate."[25] This is the bane of Yankah's argument with respect to the contextual realities of indigenous African researchers and their research concerns, hence, the many concerns raised in this article.

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[24] Yankah, "Globalization and the African Scholar," 52.
[25] Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself, 4*.

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Mamalawo? The Controversy Over Women Practicing Ifa Divination

Ayodeji Ogunnaike

Abstract

As the tradition of Ifa divination has gained increasing popularity and membership around the world, the previously male-dominated composition of its priesthood has become challenged. This article traces the origins of women who have sought the highest levels of Ifa initiation—primarily in Cuba and the US—engages the various arguments, concerns, and appeals to authority of the numerous players. Much of the debate hinges around ritual practice associated with the mysterious orịṣa Odu, and consequently the article addresses the relevant mythology and rituals associated with her in an Ifa context. It also places the male-oriented nature of Ifa within the larger context of Yoruba gender norms, contrasting Yoruba notions of gender with modern values of gender equality. Thus, it seeks to explain why male Ifa priests from West Africa have been eager and willing to initiate women. In addition, the article demonstrates that—contrary to many popular claims—several women have become Ifa diviners in West Africa, but that the important ways that gender is understood in a variety of different contexts, its ramifications for initiation rituals, and the rapidly growing number of female initiates in diaspora, will likely change the dynamics of the tradition going forward.

KEY WORDS: Ifa, Divination, Gender, Cuba, USA, West Africa

Introduction

The Yoruba tradition of Ifa divination has become arguably the most popular and recognizable indigenous African religious tradition in contemporary times, given that more has been written on Yoruba religious traditions than on any other African society and that Ifa is generally understood to be the most central aspect of traditional Yoruba religion. Ifa divination has become so prominent in fact, that some have begun to refer to traditional Yoruba religion as "Ifa-Orịṣa" religion,[1] highlighting its great importance amidst a staggeringly large number of indigenous Yoruba religious traditions. Practitioners of Ifa can be found in various places in the Americas – such as Cuba,

[1] This is fairly prevalent in common discourse in the US in particular, and can sometimes be found in academic work as well. For example see Funlayo E. Wood, "Cyber Spirits, Digital Ghosts," *CrossCurrents* 65, no. 4 (2015): 448-56.; and Ọlọmọ, Aina, "Ṣango beyond Male and Female" in *Ṣango: In Africa and the African Diaspora*, eds Joel E. Tishken, Toyin Falọla, and Akintunde Akinyẹmi (Indiana University Press, 2009), 311-21.

Brazil, or Trinidad – largely as a result of the Atlantic slave trade, but practitioners can currently be found on practically all continents.

After having studied Ifa with a high priest, Chief Ifarinwale Ogundiran the Araba of Modakẹkẹ, in Nigeria, every time I give a presentation on the tradition in the US, someone always asks if there are any female diviners because the name for Ifa priests – *babalawo* – means "father of secrets" in Yoruba and the tradition is usually presented as overtly male-centric. Over the past few decades many women – mostly but not exclusively in the United States – have sought to gain initiation into the tradition of Ifa and also to be trained to perform Ifa divination itself, causing a heated debate amongst practitioners across the Black Atlantic. Many have argued that initiation into Ifa must be limited to men, and others argue that even if women are initiated it is taboo for them to perform divination. Currently, many women have in fact been initiated and perform divination, but this has certainly not quieted the lively debate on the matter. While the debate clearly has important implications with respect to issues of gender, it is also intimately tied up in notions of power and authority as well as modernity and the proper adaptation of tradition.

As I myself am not a practitioner of Ifa, I do not intend to suggest a "correct" answer, but rather to clarify and offer some insight on the traditions practitioners refer to and draw upon and how these interpretations shape the practice of Ifa in a global context. Although no one has of yet placed all of the players from the US, Cuba, and Nigeria in a global context in scholarly work, doing so with close attention paid to Yoruba gender norms is fruitful in a number of ways. First, there is a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding in all three locations regarding the precise gendered taboos and ritual restrictions in the Nigerian Ifa tradition from both contemporary and historical perspectives, and much of the most prominent academic work on the matter can also be misleading. Clearly identifying the historical and contemporary norms through the lenses of Yoruba gender norms and Ifa mythology provides a deeper understanding of their nature, function, and why traditions may take different forms in Cuba and Nigeria today. Furthermore, taking a global perspective on the practice of Ifa demonstrates the potential issues that arise when indigenous traditions emerge from a specific cultural-religious context and gain global followings. This is particularly true with respect to American initiates and diviners who have received surprisingly little scholarly attention despite constituting one of the most fascinating and rapidly growing developments within the broader global orișa community.

Current Debate

Ifa has always been a central aspect of traditional Yoruba society,[2] but the tradition has enjoyed even more popularity in contemporary times as more academic works have been published on it than any other Yoruba religious tradition,[3] it has become quite common

[2] Bascom describes the babalawo and Ifa as "a focal point in the traditional Yoruba religion" and Abimbola identifies Ifa as "undoubtedly the most important of the numerous divinities of the Yoruba people." William Russell Bascom, *Ifa Divination: Communication between Gods and Men in West Africa* (Indiana University Press, 1991), 12; Abimbola, Wande. *Sixteen Great Poems of Ifá* (UNESCO, 1975), 2.

[3] Some of the most prominent include: E. M Lijadu, *Ifa: Imọlẹ Rẹ Ti Iṣe Ipilẹ Isin Ni Ilẹ Yoruba* (Omolayo Standard Press of Nigeria, 1898); E. M. Lijadu, *Ọrûnmila!* (Omolayo Standard Press of Nigeria, 1908); Bascom, *Ifa Divination,* Abimbola, *Sixteen Great Poems*; Wande Abimbola, *Ifá Divination Poetry* (Nok Publishers, 1977); Wande Abimbola, *Ifá: An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus* (Oxford University Press, 1996);

for babalawo to train foreigners, and as evidenced by the multiple prominent Ifa organizations, Ifa enjoys a profile that no other Yoruba deity or orişa can claim.[4] The babalawo with whom I studied Ifa has worked with a significant number of Americans, initiated at least one woman into Ifa in Nigeria, and worked with several other orişa devotees in the US and Brazil, and famous Ifa priests such as Wande Abimbọla, his son Kọla Abimbọla, and Yẹmi Ẹlẹbuibọn have developed truly international followings and constituencies. Given the importance of Ifa in traditional Yoruba religion, the high profile of Ifa priests, and the abundance of academic literature and online materials on Ifa, those who already practice traditional African religions or are interested in becoming involved in their practice often turn to Ifa. Although Ifa has traditionally been viewed as a predominantly male-oriented tradition, it has rather unsurprisingly attracted very sincere and passionate interest from female orişa worshippers over the past few decades. In fact, as one Ifa and Ọşun (orişa of fertility and wealth) devotee has remarked, initiation into the secrets and traditions of Ifa has come to be perceived as the most prestigious of spiritual positions women have sought out, particularly in the diaspora.[5]

Given the new cultural context for this exciting new enthusiasm for the Ifa tradition, it has had significant implications for how the tradition is interpreted and re-interpreted, particularly with respect to gender norms. This has generated a spirited discourse often centered around the cultural values of inclusion and equality on one hand and gender complementarity and ritual taboos on the other, although these values do not determine any particular stance as those on opposing sides often make recourse to the same values, and those on the same side may arrive at their stances from different angles. The debate specifically revolves around whether or not women should be initiated into the tradition of Ifa at all and if they should be allowed to perform Ifa divination. On all sides of the debate, frequent recourse is made to Yoruba tradition in opposition to more recent and modern "deviations". The complexity of this debate is a clear indication of the number of stakeholders involved and also that, as Stefania Capone has put it, "it constitutes the most controversial aspect [of the tradition] among orisha practitioners in the Americas."[6] While conducting research in Brazil amongst Candomblé practitioners, I have heard many traditional authorities speak out against younger female practitioners who seek Ifa initiation or males who are open to the idea of women doing so. Many women in the United States have asked me and Chief Ifarinwale Ogundiran for opinions on the issue, but nowhere has this debate been more clear and contentious than within the Cuban tradition of orişa/oricha worship, Santería.

Wande Abimbola and Ivor L. Miller, *Ifá Will Mend Our Broken World: Thoughts on Yoruba Religion and Culture in Africa and the Diaspora* (Aim Books, 2003); Afolabi A.Epega and Philip John Neimark, *The Sacred Ifa Oracle.* (Athelia Henrietta Press, 1999); Elizabeth M. McClelland, *The Cult of Ifá among the Yoruba.* (Ethnographica, 1982); and Jacob K.Olupona and Rowland Abiodun, *Ifá Divination, Knowledge, Power, and Performance* (Indiana University Press, 2016).

[4] The relatively recently founded Ifa Heritage Institute is the only institute of higher education founded on the principles of indigenous African religious traditions http://www.ifaheritage.org/, the Ifa University in Washington DC takes a global perspective to the entire orişa complex not only Ifa < https://ifa.university/ >, and there is also Phillip Neimark's Ifa Foundation in Florida < http://www.ifafoundation.org/ >.

[5] Olaoshun Victoria Alakesin, "Iyanifa:Cultural Implications, the Myth, the Reality," in *Iyanifa: Woman of Wisdom*, ed. Ayele Kumari (Ayele Kumari, 2014), 96.

[6] Stefania Capone, "Le Pai-De-Santo Et Le Babalawo," in *La Religion Des Orisha : Un Champ Social Transnational En Pleine Recomposition*, ed. K. Argyriadis and Stefania Capone (Hermann Editions, 2011), 54.

The Cuban Ifa Crisis

Although some women had been quietly initiated into Ifa earlier, the national debate about the position of women in Ifa was sparked in 2004 when the temple Ifa Iranlowo initiated a group of women. Aisha Beliso-De Jesus has written a more detailed explanation of the various aspects of this debate,[7] so a brief summary will suffice here. Many Cuban practitioners protested this "feminist" violation of the tradition, accused the *babalao* (Cuban spelling of the Yoruba *babalawo*) of crimes against Ifa, and sought their exclusion from for the global orisa community. Cuban priests who resorted to Nigerian traditions—identified as African style as opposed to Cuban style—in turn protested colonial Cuban misogyny and pointed to more open-minded Yoruba babalawo who took no issue with initiating women. However, Cuban style priests argued that Cuba rather than Nigeria should be considered the authoritative tradition because it was better preserved in Cuba than in the homeland.[8]

Belisio-De Jesus frames this debate as "primarily a contest over Cuban versus Nigerian global diasporic authority rather than over female initiations," and while this is undoubtedly of central importance the issue, it is hard to imagine why any of the women involved would risk moving outside traditional authority structures unless they firmly believed the issue of female initiation was worth the heavy price. Following my discussions with women who seek initiation and priesthood in Ifa as well as authority figures who strongly oppose the practice, I find it difficult to separate claims of authority from the specific stances each model of authority takes on this particular issue, particularly for the women seeking initiation themselves. As Matory argues, religious symbols, norms, and practices often serve as a reservoir from which people can and do draw to create and recreate their traditions in new contexts,[9] and in this debate practitioners have drawn on different aspects of their traditions and at times tried to redefine what should be within the accepted range of possibilities. Still, one perspective shared by all Cubans was that the American Ifa tradition is an "abject location of modern perversity" because of its feminist bent and perceived disregard for traditional taboos.[10]

American Iyanifa

The experience of American orịṣa practitioners is of critical importance here because not only did it provide a backdrop for the Cuban debate, but American women perhaps more than any others have expressed a strong desire to get initiated into Ifa, to study sacred Ifa oral texts, and to practice Ifa divination. Americans first were introduced to orịṣa traditions through Cuban Santeros in the 1970s, but because many African Americans sought a "pure" form of African religion without any traces of European colonialism and Christianity, they were not satisfied with some aspects of Cuban practice. More pertinently here, many African American women were frustrated with the sexist

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[7] Aisha M. Beliso-De Jesús, "Contentious Diasporas: Gender, Sexuality, and Heteronationalisms in the Cuban Iyanifa Debate," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 40, no. 4 (2015): 817-40.

[8] ibid, 817-28. In 2006, another passionate debate was launched at a global meeting in Venezuela when a female Ifa initiate was told by Cuban babalaos "there is no such thing as a woman Ifa priest," while Nigerian babalawo advocated for the acceptability of women within their number. M. Ajisebo McElwaine Abimbola, "The Role of Women in the Ifa Priesthood," in *Ifá Divination, Knowledge, Power, and Performance*, eds. Jacob K. Olupona and Rowland O. Abiodun (Indiana University Press, 2016), 247.

[9] J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomble* (Princeton University Press, 2009), 115-148.

[10] Beliso-De Jesús,. "Contentious Diasporas", 834-5.

features of Western society and religion and sought in Yoruba traditions "alternative sources of women's empowerment, leadership, and authority." [11] Indeed Yoruba traditions offered many such outlets, and African American women have quickly become prominent leaders in the American orịṣa tradition.[12]

White Americans also have shown a keen interest in Ifa, and this is perhaps best demonstrated by Phillip Neimark (Oluwo Fagbamila) and his wife Vassa Neimark (Iyalawo[13] Olufadeke) who established the Ifa Foundation of North America and Ifa College and also initiated the first female Iyanifa (a female title in the Ifa tradition) in the United States.[14] Many such practitioners who wanted to initiate women into Ifa or wanted to be initiated if they were women themselves, were not provided that option through the Cuban tradition. Eventually many practitioners learned that priests in Nigeria and Benin were open to initiating anyone, and this caused many women and men to travel to West Africa for initiation and study and to rely on African traditions as the authoritative model for their ritual practice.[15] However, many African American women faced a great deal of discrimination for seeking initiation and for speaking out on the issue. This debate came to the fore in the 1990s, and some were accused of lying for claiming that women could be initiated,[16] and another made a Cuban babalao scream when he learned that she had been initiated into Ifa.[17] Matters did change, however, and despite the fact that American practitioners resorted to African traditions to allow women to get initiated into Ifa, there are now more Iyanifa recorded in the US than in Nigeria![18]

Many Iyanifa have also begun to practice Ifa divination as well, adding yet another step of ritual complexity to the issue. Women in Oyotunji Village organized to gain the right to use the divining instruments of Ifa and practice divination on their own, and "at Oyotunji, one now finds women in the priesthood freely using what were designated traditional male-divination tools to assist them in their readings for clients, directly subverting certain gender configurations in other global Yoruba communities."[19] It is not only American women who have begun to perform Ifa divination, with the debate spreading to many areas in the Yoruba religious diaspora, but women's rights to perform Ifa divination strangely has not become much of an issue in Yorubaland itself, prompting many to identify the new movement as untraditional and having more to do with modern feminism and values of gender equality than adherence to Yoruba religious and gender practices.

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[11] Tracey E. Hucks, *Yoruba Traditions & African American Religious Nationalism*. (University of New Mexico Press, 2014), 324.

[12] Ibid.

[13] This neologism will be addressed in full later.

[14] Hucks, *Yoruba Traditions,* 287. More information about the Ifa Foundation can be found at ifafoundation.org, and they are also cited as having initiated "the first openly gay babalawo." The issue of sexuality is yet another contentious issue within the tradition, but outside the scope of this article.

[15] Hucks, *Yoruba Traditions,* 186-7.

[16] Ayele Kumari, "Tracing the Path of the Iyanifa" in *Iyanifa: Woman of Wisdom*, ed. by Ayele Kumari (Ayele Kumari, 2014), 5.

[17] Iyanifa Oyegbade has rather movingly described just how much resistance and marginalization she experienced in Oyotunji village (an African American community in South Carolina dedicated to the practice of traditional Yoruba life and religion) as a result of her own initiation and opinions about what options should be open to women within Ifa. Ifafunke Osunbunmi Alake Oyegbade, "Breaking the Glass Ceiling: A Pioneering Iyanifa in the United States," in *Iyanifa: Woman of Wisdom* (Ayele Kumari, 2014), 291-2, 292-7.

[18] Hucks, *Yoruba Traditions*, 187.

[19] Ibid.

Because the practice of many American women *performing* Ifa divination has subverted gender norms in the tradition, several American practitioners have coined the term *iyalawo* in addition to the more traditional *iyanifa*.[20] *Iyalawo* in Yoruba would mean "mother of secrets" and clearly and consciously replaces the male-gendered term *baba* or "father" in *babalawo* with *iya* or "mother." I have never heard this term in Yorubaland, and to the best of my knowledge it is a neologism that has never been in use there. Kumari defines *Iyalawo* as the "female equivalent" of *babalawo*,[21] which is significant because the more traditional Yoruba term *iyanifa* is simply the *counterpart* of the male Ifa priest, demonstrating a subtle difference in orientation toward gender roles and norms.

Dominant Discourse

While the general positions of different players in this complicated web of the Trans-Atlantic and globalizing Ifa tradition may be clear at this point,[22] it is worth clarifying what the specifics of each stance are and how these approaches are substantiated. To begin, many if not most Ifa and other orișa priests in diaspora (excluding the US), led primarily but not exclusively by Cubans, firmly reject women's initiation and involvement in Ifa divination. This primarily revolves around the fact that the mysterious and dangerous female orișa Odu is considered an essential part of the Ifa initiation process in Santería, and given the fact that it is strictly taboo for women to see or come in contact with Odu, there is no way for women to be initiated into Ifa. This stance is based on an interpretation of an Ifa verse found within the Odu (chapter not the orișa Odu) Irẹtẹ-Gbe.[23] Furthermore, in the Cuban tradition, one must be initiated *before* studying the sacred Ifa corpus as both it and the orișa Odu are closely guarded secrets.[24]

Although Nigerian babalawo have expressed their openness to female initiates, many Cubans maintain that this is a modern corruption of the tradition that has been better preserved in the diaspora than it was in the homeland. This is a fascinating assertion, and one that would be seemingly difficult to prove or disprove. As Matory has argued, since the 19th century Yoruba religious communities around the Black Atlantic have often relied heavily on ethnographic literature on orișa traditions for authority in the absence of any written scriptures.[25] This is significant because practically all of the early literature on Yoruba tradition, customs, and religion states in no uncertain terms that women are not Ifa priests. Perhaps the first comprehensive work on Yoruba religion, Rev. James Johnson's *Yoruba Heathenism*, features Ifa quite prominently, but states that women are only involved in the tradition through their male relatives or husbands.[26] The Baptist missionary T. J. Bowen noted that "the worship of Ifa is a mystery into which none but men are initiated",[27] and others such as J. Olumide Lucas and Clarke only speak directly

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[20] For example Ayele Kumari refers to herself as an Iyalawo as does Vassa Neimark.

[21] Kumari, *Iyanifa*, 391.

[22] Namely that Cuban-style practitioners are not in favor of women becoming initiated or practicing divination, that American practitioners are in favor of both, and that West African and African-style practitioners are at the very least supportive of women being initiated.

[23] Beliso-de Jesus presents a full recounting of the myth contained within this verse as well as interpretations in "Contentious Diasporas", 825-6.

[24] Ibid.

[25] *Black Atlantic Religion*, 62-4.

[26] James Johnson, *Yoruba Heathenism* (J. Townsend & Sons, 1899), 31.

[27] T. J. Bowen, *Adventures and Missionary Labours in Several Countries in the Interior of Africa from 1849 to 1856* (Frank Cass & Co., 1968), 37.

about men when they mention gender at all.[28] Although conducting his research later in the 1950s and 60s, William Bascom's works *Ifa Divination* and *Sixteen Cowries* are classics and amongst the most authoritative works on Yoruba divination. In both works Bascom states that "women are told to care for the palm nuts of their father but can never become babalawo"[29] and that "only men can practice Ifa."[30] Similarly, Oyesakin states that "women are relegated to the background in the practice of the cult…because women are… barred from knowing its secrets" and that "there are no women Ifa priests among the Yoruba people.[31] This is all very much in keeping with Peel's astute observation that in pre-colonial Yorubaland, "the main generalization is that there was a clear gender distinction in religious practice: the orịṣa mainly engaging the attention of women, and Ifa of men" and that none of the Ifa priests/diviners who appeared in the extensive CMS journals was ever a woman.[32] In short, when the prominent literature of the late 19th to mid 20th century addressed the issue of gender in Ifa, it was quite clear that contemporary and pre-colonial Yoruba society did not have a place for female Ifa priests or diviners, and this may likely have had an effect on how invested diaspora practitioners and ritual specialists came to understand their sacred past and ritual present.

At the same time, some academic literature, particularly in more recent times, does suggest a strong involvement of female powers and forces within the tradition of Ifa. Many have noted how women played an instrumental role in the establishment of the tradition.[33] More recently, Abimbọla has argued that "Ọṣun has much more to do with the origins of Ifa divination than the babalawo… are ready to admit" as she was the original possessor of the bag of wisdom (*apo iwa*) from which the tradition of Ifa divination almost certainly arose.[34] Olajubu has also recorded an Ifa verse from the Odu

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[28] Jonathan Olumide Lucas, *The Religion of the Yorubas: Being an Account of the Religious Beliefs and Practices of the Yoruba Peoples of Southern Nigeria, Especially in Relation to the Religion of Ancient Egypt* (Lagos CMS Bookshop, 1948), 72; William Henry Clarke, *Travels and Explorations in Yorubaland 1854-1858* (University of Ibadan Press, 1972), 279-80.

[29] *Ifa Divination*, 81.

[30] William Russell Bascom, *Sixteen Cowries: Yoruba Divination from Africa to the New World* (Indiana University Press, 1993), 3.

[31] Although he rather interestingly does remark that there was a white American woman *learning* Ifa at the time he was writing. Adefioye Oyesakin, "The Image of Women in Ifa Literary Corpus." *Nigeria,* 141 (1982): 16.

[32] This is significant because European missionaries would likely have taken note of such an event that would have challenged their own gender norms and expectations for the most respected priestly office and form of divination. Peel does recognize that some CMS papers describe women gaining access to some of Ifa's power through marriage into an Ifa lineage, which is a likely a reference to the position of *Apẹtẹbi* or women who are born or marry into Ifa lineages and support the tradition by cooking, cleaning, and participating in worship. J. D. Y. Peel, "Gender In Yoruba Religious Change" *Journal of Religion in Africa* 32, no. 2 (2002): 147, 147-51.

[33] This is either through a woman named Orịṣabi who helped to collect the primordial palm nuts and carry them to Ọrunmila or through the female orịṣa Odu teaching her husband Ọrunmila the secrets of divination and giving him the power to do so.

The first myth was first recorded by Baudin, and likely later copied by Ellis. Noël Baudin, *Fétichisme Et Féticheurs* (Séminaire Des Missions Africaines, 1884), 34-5. A. B. Ellis, *The Yoruba-speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa, Their Religion, Manners, Customs, Laws, Language, Etc* (Curzon Press, 1974), 58-9; Henry John Drewal and Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Gẹlẹdẹ: Art and Female Power among the Yoruba* (Indiana Univ. Press, 2000), 9; Pierre Verger, *Artigos* (Corrupio Ed., 1992), 29-31.

[34]. Wande Abimbola, "The Bag of Wisdom: Ọṣun and the Origins of the Ifa Divination," in *Osun across the Waters*, ed. Joseph M. Murphy and Mei-Mei Sanford, (Indiana University Press, 2001), 141, 146-50. He also makes an interesting connection between Ọṣun and the camwood powder *iyerosun* that is used by babalawo in divination because it is her sacred color, yellow. Ibid, 149.

Eji Ogbe which speaks about the first iyanifa who was Ọrunmila's daughter.[35] Given that the sacred oral literature of Ifa is understood to cover every aspect of life, it should also be little surprise that some of the chapters of the corpus are specifically gendered female and address clearly feminine aspects of life.[36]

Even from a more historical rather than mythological perspective, the male orientation of Ifa did not at all negate the role of women in the tradition. In fact, Law records that the Ifa tradition was brought to the Ọyọ Empire before the 17th century by a woman called Aruigba (calabash carrier) the mother of the king.[37] Subsequently in the court of the Alaafin (king of the Ọyọ Empire), the position of Iya Mole was created for a woman who was at the head of the Ifa tradition in the palace.[38] As mentioned before, Abimbọla and Onifade have also noted the existence of iyanifas within Ifa in contemporary Yorubaland, although they are relatively few in number.[39] Clearly the power of Ifa, like that of most aspects of Yoruba culture, is closely linked to the feminine, and there is a clear precedent for at least a certain degree of women's involvement in the tradition.

Although Nigerian and West African babalawos are commonly understood as more open-minded than their Cuban counterparts, not all agree that women should be initiated or perform divination. One very knowledgeable babalawo and late Araba (high priest of Ifa) in the Yoruba city of Ẹdẹ told me that he did not encourage his daughters to become too involved in the study of Ifa. When I asked him why, he responded that it would cause chaos during the very crucial training period. Because the novices are usually young men, introducing a girl would likely cause conflict if two or more of them showed an interest in her at the same time not to mention the fact that the training is so rigorous that they cannot afford any additional distractions. Because babalawo have such strong spiritual power, introducing conflict between them could be disastrous, and he "does not want anyone to place his daughters in harm's way." By the same token, this male attention, wanted or unwanted, would also detract from the girl's ability to learn the sacred verses, rituals, and pharmacopeia necessary to become a full priest.[40] In addition, arguments are made both by some in Nigeria and within Santería that it is taboo for women to touch the divining instruments, whether the sacred palm nuts (*ikin*), divining chain (*ọpẹlẹ*), or divining board (*ọpọn*).[41]

Another common argument is drawn from the general Yoruba emphasis on gender complementarity and suggests that male forms of divination are specifically for men to practice, but there are female forms of divination that are more appropriate for women. The more common form of cowrie shell divination (*Ẹẹrindinlogun* in Yoruba) is well

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[35] Olajubu, Oyeronke. *Women in the Yoruba Religious Sphere* (State University of New York Press, 2003), 115-7.

[36] Abimbola, "The Role of Women", 256.

[37] Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire C. 1600 - C. 1836: A West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Oxford University Press, 1977), 44.

[38] Although it is unclear whether or not she herself performed divination. Biodun Adediran and Olukoya Ogen, "Women, Rituals, and Politics of Precolonial Yorubaland," in *Shaping Our Struggles: Nigerian Women in History, Culture and Social Change*, ed. Obioma Nnaemeka and Chima J. Korieh, (Africa World Press, 2011), 150.

[39] *Ifa Will Mend Our Broken World*, 62; Onifade, "Women in Ifa", 1.

[40] However, it is interesting to note that the Araba did not state that women were incapable of studying and becoming Ifa priests, rather that it would simply cause complications that make it impractical. Chief Ṣangodokun Alamu Onifade. Interview by author. March 31, 2017.

[41] Onifade, "Women in Ifa", 1; Abimbola, "The Role of Women", 256-7.

established as being owned by Ọṣun, the quintessential female oriṣa, and completely open to women, although even men are allowed to practice this form of divination as well.[42] The sacred history and ritual practice of *Ẹẹrindinlogun* is quite fascinating in this regard because it almost mirrors that of Ifa from a gender perspective. It is generally believed that Ọṣun received the power and knowledge of *Ẹẹrindinlogun* from a man (her husband Ọrunmila), and the tradition is clearly gendered female as those who practice it, even when they are men, are understood to be "wives" of Ọṣun.[43] The gendered nature of both forms of divination is quite reminiscent of the Chinese yin-yang symbol in that Ifa and Ẹẹrindinlogun are clearly associated with one gender, but contain a central aspect that is intimately linked to the other half of the whole (both in terms of positions in the tradition and also the ultimate source of their ritual power). This argument of male and female modes of divination clearly has some merit and congruence in Yoruba tradition, but it also cuts both ways.

Gender Trouble

Traditional Yoruba notions of gender relations certainly add another level of complexity to this already thorny issue, because on the one hand the Yoruba tradition of Ifa has been appealed to as more open, equitable, and inclusive by those who are in favor of women's initiation and practice of Ifa divination.[44] On the other hand gender equality has not traditionally constituted a major value in these traditions, and specifically gendered spheres of activity are often quite well defined in Yoruba society. Much in the same way that Ifa divination is itself based on a series of binaries,[45] one of the hallmarks of traditional Yoruba society and cosmology is its system of cooperating rather than conflicting binaries, which "explains the Yoruba preference for complementary gender and power relations."[46] Consequently, "all facets of the peoples' cosmic experiences manifest the principle of gender complementarity, and this has a profound bearing on the role of women in society."[47] It is not my intention here to provide an apologetic for the Yoruba ideal of gender balance and complementarity as the lived reality did and does not ensure fair and proper treatment for women in all circumstances. Furthermore, while many African American women were attracted to Yoruba traditions because they did provide areas for them to exercise more authority and leadership, they often experienced these complementary gender norms "and their rhetorical uses [as] subtle forms of sexism that strategically [cloaked] authority in discourses of the 'traditional.'"[48] The experience

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[42] For more information see Bascom, *Sixteen Cowries*; and David Ogungbile, "Ẹẹrindinlogun: Seeing Eyes and Sacred Shells and Stones," in *Ọ̀ṣun across the Waters: A Yoruba Goddess in Africa and the Americas*, ed. Joseph M. Murphy and Mei-Mei Sanford (Indiana University Press, 2001), 189-212.

[43] Abimbola, "Bag of Wisdom," 141-3; Olajubu, *Women in the Yoruba Religious Sphere,* 87-8.

[44] Ayele Kumari, "Tracing the Path of the Iyanifa," 2-16; and one item of the Ifa Foundation's statement of worldview is that "men and women are equal and walk the same road to empowerment < http://www.ifafoundation.org/world-view > and stresses "inclusion" with respect to female diviners. < http://www.ifafoundation.org/women-ifa/ >

[45] Each divinatory sign in Ifa is composed of a series of 8 binary sets of lines with a right-hand side (male) and a left-hand side (female). Furthermore additional inquiry is carried out through the use of binary possibilities such as the client holding a cowrie shell in one hand (indicating yes) and a bone (indicating no) in the other with two casts of the divining chain revealing which hand should be opened. For more information on the binary structure of Ifa divination and its practice see Bascom, *Ifa Divination*, 29-31, 40-59.

[46] Olajubu, *Women in the Yoruba Religious Sphere,* 127.

[47] Ibid, 23.

[48] Hucks, *Yoruba Traditions,* 324.

of women who had to travel to West Africa to seek initiation in Ifa is certainly an excellent example of this dynamic. The Yoruba ideal has its own complications, and matters became even thornier when transposed into new cultural settings, particularly as another more subtle aspect of Yoruba gender norms is often overlooked.

Although traditional Yoruba society contains clearly "delineated roles for the female as well as for the male… these were context bound and not rigid," allowing for a significant degree of fluidity.[49] In fact, a person's gender was not always the most important factor in determining appropriate behavior, and the generally expected roles could at times be traversed with appropriate justification.[50] Yoruba conceptions of gendered spaces and behavior are moderated by other characteristics such as seniority, wealth, knowledge, social status, descent and lineage identity, etc.[51] As a result of this important confluence of factors that contribute to gender norms, "it is difficult to find areas of social life from which either men or women were completely barred in Yoruba society."[52] Hence, although uncommon, it was not improper or unheard of for women to operate in definitively male spheres such as hunting or war or even hold titles in the explicitly male masquerade traditions of Egungun and Oro.[53] The Yoruba tradition of sacred kingship is also quite famous, and although the overwhelming majority of ọba (Yoruba kings) have been male, a considerable number of female ọba have been documented as well.[54] In some parts of Yorubaland when a king dies, a female regent is appointed before the installation of the new king as well, but the position of regent is usually gendered male despite a female occupying it.[55]Despite the fact that Yoruba gender norms have often been quite clear and explicit they are always balanced by the sense of gender complementarity which ensures at least some place for the opposite gender.

The central importance of gender complementarity also causes the articulation of gender norms to be largely relational and contingent upon the other half of the larger whole. Peel draws attention to this dynamic with relation to the orișa themselves as cosmic powers whose gender was of secondary importance and to a certain degree determined by context.[56] Oduduwa (the cosmic ancestor of the Yoruba people and famous Ifẹ divinity) and Ṣango (royal orișa of lightning) are some of the most iconic

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[49] Olajubu, *Women in the Yoruba Religious Sphere*, 23.

[50] Ibid, 9; Olademo, *Gender in Yoruba Oral* Traditions, 50.

[51] Olajubu, *Women in the Yoruba Religious Sphere,* 8.

[52] Ibid, 23.

[53] Given corporate conceptions of identity, women can even play the role of "husband" to other women who married into their paternal lineage, although these "female husbands" did not need to exhibit traditionally male-patterned behavior in these roles. Ibid, 8, 22; Olademo, *Gender in Yoruba Oral Traditions*, 56. Female chieftaincy in Oro is particularly informative as women are not allowed to see the Oro masquerade at all and usually stay inside when it comes out into the town. Henry John Drewal, "Art and the Perception of Women in Yorùbá Culture" *Cahiers D'études Africaines* 4th ser. 17, no. 68 (1977): 547.

[54] In Ondo mythistory, a daughter of Oduduwa named Pupupu founded the kingdom and is credited with the subsequent long legacy of women's important involvement in Ondo politics despite the fact that most chieftaincy titles including the kingship are now held by men. An ancient monarch named Sungbo in what is now Ijẹbuland is also described as a woman, there may also have been two female kings in the Ọyọ kingdom, and three in Akure with one ruling as recently as the 19th century! Olupona, *Kingship, Religion, and Rituals,* 24-6; Adediran & Ogen, "Women, Rituals, and Politics", 152-3, 157; A. R. I. Doi, "A Muslim-Christian-Traditional Saint in Yorubaland," *Practical Anthropology* 17, no. 6 (November 1970): 261-68; P. C. Lloyd, "Sungbo's Eredo," *Odu* 7 (1959): 15-22

[55] For example, she inherits the wives of the previous king and serves as their "husband" and wears male clothing. Olajubu, *Women in the Yoruba Religious* Sphere, 90-2.

[56] "Gender in Yoruba", 139; Olajubu, *Women in the Yoruba Religious* Sphere, 26.

Yoruba deities, and although they are widely considered to be male, there is abundant evidence that in various places and times, both have been or are worshipped as a woman in some contexts, and this is true of other deities such as Olokun (orișa of the ocean) and Oșumare (orișa of rainbows and snakes).[57] Oduduwa and Ṣango were still understood as the same deities in all contexts, but their gender could at time be fluid. This gender fluidity in the Yoruba cosmos caused Peel to remark that "one would be hard put to insist that any deity's gender was unalterably fixed."[58]

At this point it is clear that in both Yoruba society and cosmology it is almost impossible to make any absolute statements with respect to gender restrictions despite the fact that complementary gender norms are themselves quite clear. The fact of the matter is that orișa traditions are open to a great deal of diversity because of their context-specific nature. Thus, Ṣango and Oduduwa may be male in some places, and female in others, and these norms may shift over time as the context changes. This is due in no small part to the fact that orișa traditions are not dogmatic, allowing for the same tradition to be articulated and re-articulated in multiple ways without causing crisis. To return quickly to Ifa, when speaking with babalawo about various aspects of the tradition, they always refer back to their sacred texts, but are aware of the fact that they do not know all of the sacred verses of Ifa, that the recitation of the same verse may be different in different places, and that at times there are even different interpretations of the same verse. As a result, they often say, "this is how it works here" or "only Ifa knows what it is like somewhere else."[59] With these perspectives on Yoruba gender norms and orișa traditions in mind, it will now be much easier to understand precisely how the issue of gender and women's levels of involvement factor into the tradition of Ifa.

Nigerian Perspective

Given the above reflections on the ubiquitous nature of female power within even the most male-centric of Yoruba institutions, it is little surprise that there are quite a few examples of not only female initiates but diviners in West Africa, although this has gone largely unnoticed by most scholarship and practitioners. To begin, in the related tradition of *Fa* in Bénin the deity is also at times understood to be female,[60] and based on information gathered in the 1930s, Maupoil's *La Géomancie à l'ancienne Côte des Esclaves* records four Yoruba female diviners, one of whom was brought by the Dahomean king Glele specifically to divine for him.[61] McClelland also recorded an instance of a woman who had undergone a certain level of initiation who performed divination,[62] and between

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[57] Mark Schiltz, "Yoruba Thunder Deities and Sovereignty: Ara versus Ṣango," in *Ṣango: In Africa and the African Diaspora*, ed. by Joel E. Tishken, Toyin Falọla, and Akintunde Akinyẹmi (Indiana University Press, 2009), 78-108; , J. D. Y.Peel *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba.* (Indiana University Press, 2003), 112.

[58] "Gender in Yoruba", 140.

[59] This is again why I have opted not to take a normative approach to what is proper or "traditional" but instead prefer to analyze the history and internal dynamics that lead to each ritual model.

[60] Elizabeth Allo Isichei, *The Religious Traditions of Africa: A History* (Praeger, 2004), 272-3.

[61] Maupoil also notes that Fa is "theoretically reserved for men", and it is interesting to observe that at least one if not more of these women were highly mobile in their practice of Ifa just as men traditionally are. Bernard Maupoil, *La Géomancie À L'Ancienne Côte Des Esclaves.* (Institut D'Ethnologie, 1988), 153.

[62] Significantly, McClelland also notes that there was a limit to how far into the mysteries of Ifa this woman was able to go, and also the shock her presence as a woman among babalawo evoked. McClelland, *The Ifa Cult,* 88.

1990-91 Omari-Tunkara observed two women in Nigeria who "practiced Ifa divination professionally."[63]

Karin Barber provides perhaps the best and most complete account of a female Ifa initiate and diviner, Fakẹmide—mother of one of Barber's chief interlocutors, a renowned babalawo,[64] and the only female diviner in the history of their town, Okuku. Fakẹmide's grandfather (a high priest of Ifa) had no sons or grandsons who could carry on his legacy, and Barber implies that this may be why Fakẹmide stepped into the role. She was well-known for her impressive gift for the recitation of Ifa verses, traveled widely to gain more knowledge of Ifa, took full part in the diviners' association, performed before the king, and trained students of her own. What is perhaps every bit as noteworthy as this truly exceptional woman is Barber's remark that "no-one ever suggested that there was anything odd about [her successful professional practice of Ifa]. Men and women alike asserted that no code was transgressed by her actions and that no disapproval was directed at her."[65] It is also worth quoting in full the perspective of a male former babalawo on Fakẹmide:

> She learnt Ifa. If a woman goes to school she becomes an educated person; if she learns Ifa, she becomes a *babalawo*. Her father was a babalawo, so was her husband, so she picked it up little by little from them. There was never a time when the association of babalawo said she had no right to participate in their activities. She would go to the cult and participate in meetings just like the others. They would ask her about a certain verse of Ifa: if she answered correctly, they would accept that she was a babalawo. The verses she learnt were the same as those of the other babalawo. Once she learnt them, she was a babalawo. Then she also had the right to examine other people on their knowledge, just as they had examined her. Both men and women would come as clients to consult her.[66]

In keeping with this perspective of a former babalawo, several contemporary babalawo in Yorubaland agree that there is no reason why a woman could not be both an initiate and a diviner. When I asked Chief Ifarinwale Ogundiran for his stance on the matter, he was a bit confused and responded, "You know that Ifarọnkẹ [his daughter] has been taught Ifa and she makes money off of it too." Given his ready acceptance of women into the ranks of the Ifa divination and priesthood I asked him why there are so few women doing so in Nigeria today.[67] He responded that even men struggle to become fully-trained babalawo because the intensive training requires total dedication for oftentimes over a decade. "Usually" he said, "training begins when a child is young, and by the time a girl would finish studying, she would have gotten married and maybe had

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[63] Mikelle Smith Omari-Tunkara, *Manipulating the Sacred: Yoruba Art, Ritual, and Resistance in Brazilian Candomble* (Wayne State University Press, 2005), 39.

[64] I have used the term *babalawo* here because that is the term used by Barber and her respondents. Although Iyanifa is the term generally used to refer to a woman who is an Ifa initiate and practitioner, the term may not be used universally and again women are sometimes understood to fill male roles such as that of a "husband" as well.

[65] Karin Barber, *I Could Speak until Tomorrow: Oriki, Women, and the Past in a Yoruba Town* (Edinburgh University Press for the International African Institute, London, 1991), 289.

[66] Ibid.

[67] The Araba of Ẹdẹ, Chief Ṣangodokun Onifade, also agreed that women can perform divination despite the fact that he did not encourage his daughters to do so. His response to the rarity of female diviners was the complications and potential conflict that could arise during the training process. Interview by author March 31st, 2017.

children."[68] Reflecting on the perhaps remarkable openness of Yoruba babalawo to women's participation in the tradition and more fluid gender norms, Barber remarked that "there are few situations in which women are told they *cannot* pursue a certain course because they are women… despite the disadvantages that weigh down an ambitious woman, if she decides to do something, it is accepted that she can do so."[69]

However, this perspective is balanced at the same time by certain ritual restrictions that are much more rigid and firmly rooted in biological sex rather than gender. First and foremost are the restrictions around ritual activity when a woman is on her period. This restriction is not at all unique to Ifa as women are generally prohibited from touching any orișa or their instruments at that time, and this is perhaps the original source of the opinion that women could *never* touch the implements of Ifa. Some have argued that these restrictions were put in place because the Yoruba often understand menstruation to be a spiritual contaminant. Adogame and Olademo have noted how the touch of a menstruating woman reduces or nullifies the power of traditional charms and medicines,[70] and this is also why female kings and caretakers could not wear a ritually empowered cloak during this time.[71] The belief that menstrual blood depletes aṣẹ (spiritual power, authority, and force)[72] lies behind the general taboo of menstruating women entering orișa shrines in general,[73] proving that this dynamic is not unique at all to Ifa despite its general patriarchal nature. However, menstrual blood is not merely understood as a negative, polluting substance, for as Olajubu notes, "it is regarded as a vehicle of power, because embedded in it is potential life. It should therefore be kept away from any other source, as a clash of 'powers' may give explosive results."[74] Therefore, contact with spiritually charged and living objects such as Ifa and Ifa divination tools should be prevented at all costs not because of the negative nature of menstrual blood, but rather because of its power that may clash with these objects to devastating effect.

The danger associated with the clash of potent powers is surely related to the taboo of women observing the orișa Odu,[75] which is a crucial element of the highest stages of initiation in the Ifa tradition. Odu is perhaps one of the most mysterious of all of the orișa and is only present within the tradition of Ifa. Only a very few select babalawo actually posses Odu, and even those who do will do not speak in great detail about her and cannot show her to anyone else. There are several myths about the sacred history of

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[68] Ogundiran, Ifarinwale. Interview by author. February 10, 2017. Abimbọla also stressed this point by pointing out that "women can also be members of the cult and can be initiated as priestesses of Ifa but in most cases, there are very few women who can undergo the long years of training demanded… This is primarily due to the demands of marital and parental life on women." Abimbọla, *Sixteen Great Poems of Ifa*, 8. Onifade shares this opinion, adding that because women achieve maturity earlier than men do, this leaves even less time for them to potentially devote to the study of Ifa, resulting in the rarity of Iyanifa in Nigeria. Onifade, "Women in Ifa", 1.

[69] *I Could Speak*, 288.

[70] In fact, Olademo cites this as a major factor in why there are so few women hunters in traditional Yoruba society as hunters rely heavily on their traditional charms in their long spells outside of town and social life. Olademo, *Gender in Yoruba Oral Traditions,* 101; Afeosemime U. Adogame, *Celestial Church of Christ: The Politics of Cultural Identity in a West African PropheticCcharismatic Movement* (Lang, 1999), 128.

[71] Olajubu, *Women in the Yoruba Religious Sphere,* 91.

[72] Drewal, "Art and the Perception of Women", 550.

[73] Emanuel Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (Wazobia, 1994), 139.

[74] *Women in the Yoruba Religious Sphere*, 92.

[75] This Odu is not to be confused with the name for the chapters of the Ifa oral corpus which are called by the same name.

Odu,[76] but the uniting thread amongst them all is that she was a ritually powerful wife of Orunmila who made him promise never to allow either anyone else, any women, or at least any of his other wives to see her. Babalawo in Nigeria are in agreement that if a woman were to look at Odu she would either go blind, lose the ability to have children, or both.[77] However, improper contact or even proximity to Odu amongst *men* can lead to blindness and even death as well![78] The frightening female potency of the orișa Odu is behind both its efficacy and inaccessibility for most men and for all women who also possess the power of life and death within their very nature. As a result, this final level of initiation is not open to women in West Africa and is also why Cuban babalaos refuse to allow women to undergo their form of initiation, which involves Odu. In West Africa, however, women are still able to become *ẹlẹgan* or those who become initiated without seeing Odu.[79] The fact of the matter is that although Ifa in West Africa may be more open to women's participation and priesthood, there are nevertheless a few serious restrictions based on biology and spiritual ontology.

The restrictions around access to Odu as a powerful female spiritual force within an overtly male-centric tradition demonstrates the way many Yoruba institutions assume a yin-yang-like form. Although there are some babalawo who are not inclined toward initiating women into Ifa in Yorubaland, the male gendered nature of Ifa does not preclude women from becoming involved and even initiated to a certain level. Furthermore there is a significant—if not abundant—amount of historical evidence of Yoruba women becoming initiated and practicing Ifa divination professionally just like men, demonstrating that female initiation is not merely a modern innovation or deviation from tradition. Still, the strong Yoruba sense of gender complementarity does insist on some differences between male and female involvement in the tradition primarily with respect to when divination tools and sacred objects can be handled as well as who can see and possess the potent female power of Odu. Because Odu is not a central aspect of certain levels of initiation in Ifa in West Africa unlike in Cuba, the only real barriers to women's entry is the long time it takes to learn and practice Ifa. Some Yoruba babalawo are aware and open to the fact that with modern life and changing expectations in gender norms, some women, particularly in different cultural contexts, may have the freedom to study and practice Ifa in ways previously accessible almost exclusively to men and thus may become increasingly involved in the tradition.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article is not to suggest a correct or orthodox stance on the position of women within the tradition of Ifa in a global perspective, but rather to examine the claims and dynamics of the various facets and players in the lively debate, address common misconceptions, and analyze the origins and functions of the relevant rituals

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[76] Abimbola, *Ifa Will Mend*, 86-7; Verger, *Artigos,* 29-31; Drewal *Gelede*, 9; Maupoil does not record full myths but does include comments and perspectives of some priests on the matter. *La Géomancie*, 87-9.

[77] Women can perform a special sacrifice when undergoing initiation, which allows them to see Odu without going blind. This, however, results in the loss of the ability to bear children, likely because of the clash with Odu's incredible creative power which robs the woman of her similar power and renders her much like a man who is unable to reproduce, restoring a type of gender complementarity between Odu and the Ifa devotee. Ogundiran, Ifarinwale. Interview by author. May, 28 2018.

[78] Maupoil, *La Géomancie,* 87-9.

[79] Johnson, *Yoruba Heathenism,* 31; Bascom, *Ifa Divination,* 81 although it seems as though some aspects of Bascom's observed hierarchy may have changed since he conducted his research in the 50s and 60s.

and gender norms. Within the Cuban Ifa tradition the initiation of several women into Ifa in 2004 created a very contentious situation as well as a schism that divided practitioners into "Cuban" and "African-style" Ifa. The claims on authority are not as straightforward as simply relying on norms in the spiritual homeland, and from the Cuban perspective on Ifa, "the older (pre-slave-trade rule) may be that no woman is permitted to be a Babalawo and in this the practitioners in the West may be more traditional" than the West Africans.[80] However, despite the fact that most of the prominent and earlier academic work on the subject strongly suggests that only men practiced Ifa, some women have clearly been both initiates and diviners. However, Yoruba religious traditions are so diverse that the specific traditions of Ifa brought to Cuba from specific locations in Yorubaland may in fact not have been open to these practices. Additionally, as orișa traditions are so prone to change and adaptation, perhaps the inclusion of Odu in all initiations was an important adaptation to protect and perpetuate the tradition in a colonial context, which would have made female initiation impossible.

Although many Cuban practitioners (male and female) were split on this issue, all agreed that Americans had brought their own cultural orientations and background into the tradition as they had initially learned it from Cubans. Indeed some African American women had begun pushing for initiation and the right to perform Ifa divination even *before* the issue boiled over in Cuba. Despite a significant amount of initial resistance and through contact with West Africans, iyanifas have become quite common in American orișa communities and certainly more common than in Yorubaland itself. A new term of *iyalawo* (mother of secrets) has been coined and put to use largely if not exclusively by American practitioners in a push to make Ifa more inclusive as the number of women who were trained in the art of Ifa divination has increased over recent years.

Despite the fact that American women found a greater opportunity for spiritual instruction, formation, practice, and expression within the West African-based Ifa tradition, I find this largely to be a result of Yoruba conceptions of more fluid and complementary Yoruba gender norms not notions of equality. The founder of Ifa, Ọrunmila, is practically always understood to be male, and the training of Ifa priests is clearly structured for young men rather than young women. Still, Ifa mythology and rituals with the orișa Odu suggest that the feminine does have an important role to play in the metaphysical foundations of the power and efficacy of the tradition and that women are to be afforded a place in its practice. However, the importance of the dangerously powerful feminine power contained within the orișa Odu also precludes women from undergoing the highest level of initiation, and their possession of similar potent power prevents them from being able to handle sacred Ifa objects when they are menstruating. At least this is true within the tradition in Yorubaland as it has traditionally been practiced. In this sense, West African Ifa is perhaps more open than its counterpart in Cuba, but it is neither based on a modern ideal of equality nor is it entirely inclusive and concerned with making itself totally open to all different kinds of people.

At this point, I would like to be careful not to link the dynamics of this debate to common narratives of progress and liberation from patriarchy and male hegemony to a more equitable and inclusive future or configuration of previous traditions. As Olajubu has stated, "notions of equality and parity could be at best misleading in the Yoruba

[80] Mary Cuthrell Curry, *Making the Gods in New York: The Yoruba Religion in the African American Community* (Garland Publishing, 1997), 52.

context."[81] Although the increasing number of women getting initiated into Ifa and performing Ifa divination in diaspora is undoubtedly linked to contemporary conceptions of gender equality and inclusion, as evidenced by many women being attracted to Ifa following frustration with their experiences of sexism in other religious communities, the tradition does not present a perfectly "inclusive" foil to the gendered exclusion of many contemporary religious groups. Furthermore, Cuban and West African practitioners on either side of the debate do not understand their stances to be "progressive" or transcending outdated gender norms, but rather articulate them as maintaining an important traditional model.[82] Cuban Iyanifa Niurka actively resists being labeled "feminist", "democratic", "liberal", or "modern" and emphasized her adherence to traditional gender norms.[83] West African Ifa priests who are open to women's initiation and divination understand it not as moving the tradition forward, but rather as women in some contemporary settings being more able to take advantage of options that have always existed for them, and the priests are quite insistent on maintaining the gendered terms and norms that have always been a part of the tradition. Many American practitioners view the matter in the same way, but there are certainly others who bring notions of gender equality rather than complementarity into the tradition of Ifa, and this could lead to even further debate in the future.

The Cuban tradition of Ifa has clearly been deeply important and positively influential for centuries. Whether or not the Cuban practice of including Odu in all initiations and allowing the study of the sacred texts only after that point is a product of misogynistic colonial and modern governmental influence, as some have claimed,[84] is more traditional, or is some other form of adaptation is a matter that is very much up for debate. In its current form, however, it does seem impossible for women to become initiated and to practice Ifa divination within their tradition. This leaves women within these communities with the choice of abandoning further involvement in Ifa or moving outside the Cuban tradition and aligning themselves more with West African models. The latter has clearly been the choice of most American women, and given the rise in the "Africanization" of global orịṣa traditions and the prominent role played by babalawo in this movement,[85] it seems likely that a larger rift will continue to form with two parallel traditions of Ifa. This has already been the case as African-style Ifa priests can be found in Cuba and also in places like Brazil, but what will be most interesting in the future is what kind of effect the influx of women of various different cultural backgrounds primarily in the diaspora may have on the tradition of Ifa as it becomes increasingly global. Perhaps only Ọrunmila and Odu in their infinite wisdom can know that!

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[81] *Women in the Yoruba Religious Sphere*, 10.

[82] Although there is not enough room to fully delve into the issue of what constitutes the "traditional" within global Ifa communities, it is understood and employed here as the imagined original Yoruba model that has not been influenced by "outside" or "foreign" factors. Hence every argument that refers to "tradition" depicts the factors it opposes as a more recent and foreign influence such as modern feminism or colonial misogyny.

[83] It is worth noting that in Cuba the last three terms also have connotations for sexuality in addition to a general political or cultural disposition. Belisio-De Jesus, "Contentious Diasporas", 832.

[84] ibid, 824; Abimbola, "The Role of Women", 246, 257.

[85] Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*, 115-148*;* Stefania Capone, "The Pae-de-santo and the Babalawo" in *Ifá Divination, Knowledge, Power, and Performance*, eds. Jacob K. Olupona and Rowland O. Abiodun(Indiana University Press, 2016), 223-45; Beliso-De Jesús, "Contentious Diasporas."

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Gender and Religion in Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter*

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Abstract

In this essay, I argue that Mariama Bă's *So Long a Letter* unveils a social reality in which gender and religion take center stage in a difficult dialogue played on the stage of a family. This drama unfolds in the context of death, and it is ensuing to ă sense of loss and grief in which the main character deploys religion and her resolve to address gender biases and claims her selfhood.

KEY WORDS: Religion, Gender, Literature, Death, Mariama Bâ

Background

Mariama Bâ's *So Long A Letter* invites the reader into a drama in which gender and religion take center stage of a deeply personal, yet social contestation of the personal virtues and social conventions which ground marriage, family, and friendships. While the novel remains for many readers the quintessential feminist novel, it is fair to claim that *So Long a Letter* was a breakthrough because the text brought to the surface, in a woman's voice, intimate details of gender contestation, power dynamics in the home, and a sense of self when the ethics of family life no longer works. In the novel, the world of Ramatoulaye, the main character, suffered irreparable damage earlier, finally collapses with the death of her husband, Modou Fall. The drama that unfolds reveals one of the most engrossing narratives of gender and religion. The themes of gender have been explored, and I add to that discussion, religion because it is clearly the most important tool the protagonist uses to overcome her lot as a woman in a patriarchal society. Very little work has been done on Bâ's appreciation of religion in a society that uses religion to oppress women. In this essay, I will focus mainly on the use of religion in the novel, and I do not intend to discuss Islam in African or Senegalese writing. Others have attempted such an enterprise.[1] I use the term religion broadly to refer to personal and social values and practices which people hold as part of their relationship to sacred beings. Such values may be codified in sacred books or the mythology and cultural practices of the community and in the institutions that have been set up to provide support and enable

[1] See Ahmed S. Bangura, *Islam and the West African Novel: The Politics of Representation,* Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000; Kenneth W. Harrow, ed. *Faces of Islam in African Literature,* Portsmouth, NH.: Heinemann, 1991.

people to to live out those values. I consider *So Long a Letter,* an important text whose account is structure around how individuals see their relationship to a sacred community.

Mariama Bâ was born in Dakar, Senegal in 1929 and died in 1981 after a distinguished career in education and public life. She attended the French School in Dakar, and later trained as a teacher at the Ecole Normale in Rufisque. She married a former Information Minister of Senegal, and they had five children. She played an active role in women's organization and the feminist movement in Senegal. She was a devout Muslim. Bâ first published *So Long a Letter* in 1980 in Dakar, a good indication that the first audience was Senegalese readers. Modoupé Bodé-Thomas translated the novel into English and Heinemann published it in 1981.[2] Critics have hailed Mariama Bâ's So Long Letter as a truly feminist novel.[3] It received the Noma Award in 1980 because the book offered a refreshing view of the female condition in Senegal and Africa.[4] *So Long a Letter,* gave voice to women, breaking a silence that overshadowed women's perspectives on basic questions of fairness and dialogue, issues that I would argue were more significant to women than polygamy, which many critics rightly condemn.

I read this text as a compelling account of gender relations and the religious experience. As a personal memoir, it gives us the gender themes that frame family life, but it also allows the reader to see in the protagonist's views on religion and deploys the rituals of that religion to address her distress, and makes difficult decisions about how to respond to these distressing situations.[5] Bä constructs a text that gives us a biography of sorts, of the main character, Ramatoulaye. That account is not a biography in a strict sense of a biographical novel, but what shines through the text is the main character's world in which she is a woman, though highly educated, but is subjected to certain practices that are gender biased. Central to those practices is the fact that, she has not voiced, and is not consulted on the significant changes that would affect her family life. This among other things is the gender dimension of the novel that is also its moving feminist critique. Also, religion plays an important role in the life of the main character. In the narrative, the reader gets the impression that religious dogmatism is not involved as an évolué, since the main character and her family celebrated other holidays. But she is a devout Muslim who knows the words of the Qur'an by heart and follows all the prescriptions of the religion throughout the mourning period.

So Long a Letter is an epistolary novel, a genre of literature which Bâ has used effectively to demonstrate that fiction can and often addresses the personal in a way that has profound implications for the broad social context in which the work appears.[6] The protagonist, Ramatoulaye writes to Aïssatou, her friend who is divorced from her

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[2] Mariama Bâ, *So Long a Letter.* Translated from the French by Modoupé Bodé-Thomas. London: Heinemann, 1981. The English references will be taken from this text, hereinafter referred to as SLAL.

[3] Blair, p. 139

[4]Susan Stringer *The Senegalese Novel by Women: Through their Own Eyes*, New York: Peter Lang, 1996. 49

[5] Azodo has explored reading *So Long a Letter* as a confessional work. Azodo uses the idea of confessional texts here broadly referring to a broad genre of literature that includes Saint Augustine's *Confessions,* to personal memoires. Azodo is careful to point out that one cannot also take *So Long a Letter* as a memoir of personal biographical work because of the differences between the main character, Ramatoulaye Fall and Mariama Bä the author. Ada Uzoamaka Azodo, Ada Uzoamaka Azodo, "Lettre Sénégalaise de Ramatoulaye: Writing as Action in Mariama a's *Une si Longue Lettre,"* in *Emerging Perspectives on Mariama Bâ: Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Postmodernism,* edited by Ada Uzoamaka Azodo, (Trenton, NJ." Africa World Press, 2003) p. 6.

[6] Ada Uzoamaka Azodo, 2003, p. 4.

husband and is working at the Senegalese Embassy in Washington DC. This communication invites the reader to read a private mail, in which the writer opens up to her friend, talks about her distress, and explains boldly, freely, and eloquently on the nature of that distress.[7] The novel opens with Ramatoulaye acknowledging receipt of a letter from her friend Aïssatou. Ramatoulaye then adds: "By way of reply, I am beginning this diary, my prop in distress," and in doing so, the narrator gives the reader a simple, yet bold statement of the purpose for writing this letter and with that, she gives notice to the reader that this is a deeply personal matter. This is a diary which also serves as her "prop in distress," an idea which suggests that writing the letter is a therapeutic activity. While the actual writing would be, the fact that this is a diary, signals that this is a journey back in life to give an account in her voice. She will tell her own story. Such positioning is described as a "prop" because of the immediate circumstances but could be seen as a hint that what unfolds will be even greater engagement with the issues of love and family. The narrator continues: Our long association has taught me that confiding in others allays pain."[8] These opening words present us with some of the hallmarks of epistolary writing in which "the writing itself is action and plot, action and plot which refuse the kind of closure informing other narratives."[9] Other devices mediate the epistolary form of this novel.

The epistolary has the hallmarks of a letter and includes several elements: it is a response to Aïssatou's letter; she writes to inform Aïssatou of the death of Modou. We do not know the content of Aïssatou's letter, but we have what Renee Larrier and others describe as "*journal in time*" which makes the work a memoir.[10] It is a memoir that takes the reader through the pleasures and challenges of life; the surprising turns, and the deliberate ones who break promises disrupts, destroys, and leaves one wondering, how she should respond to such destructive turns. The letter invites the reader into the world of an individual whose world has been disrupted and the reader learns that the entire funeral rite and mourning period offers Ramatoulaye an opportunity to go back in time and review her life as a friend, wife, mother, a member of a religious community, and a member of an extended family. This is the world of one woman, but a world that most readers could be sympathetic to if similar social relations surround their lives. The reader gets a broad picture that indicates that the distress the protagonist suffers now have been part of life story for a long time.

So Long a Letter remains an engaging text whose style, and subject matter, is explored in broad themes that opens up multiple worlds for the reader. *So Long a Letter* explores romantic love, marriage, raising children as a professional family, betrayal, death, culture, and religion, in a postcolonial society where culture and religion shape people's lives and the boundaries are not always clear as some would like us to think. The responses to different events in a family and one's life are not always predictable. *So Long a Letter* addresses how the protagonist and her friend grew up, fell in love, and married professional men in postcolonial Senegal. One could argue that regardless of the multiple levels of meaning, *So Long a Letter* will always be appreciated for inviting the reader to

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[7] Ada Azoamaka Azodo, p. 5.

[8] SLAL, p. 1. Bahktin argues: "A characteristic feature of the letter is an acute awareness of the interlocutor, the addressee to whom it is directed. The letter, like the rejoinder in a dialogue, is addressed to a specific person, and it takes into account the other's possible reactions, the other's possible reply." See Bahktin, *Problems of Doestoevsky's Poetics,* p. 205.

[9] Elizabeth Campbell, "Re-Visions, Re-Flections, Re-Creations: Epistolarity in Novels by Contemporary Women," in *Twentieth Century Literature,* Vol 41, Issue 3 (Autum, 1995): 332-348, p. 333.

[10] See Renee Larrier, "Correspondence et Creation Litteraire: Mariama Bâ's Une si Longue Lettre," *The French Review* Vol 64, Issue 5 (747-753) p. 748;

consider what Elizabeth Campbell has identified as: "love and seduction, women's consciousness of their freedom, response to oppression and silence."[11]

Gender in *So Long a Letter*

So Long a Letter gives the reader a biting critique of gender inequality in the family context and by extension, the broader society. Bâ creates a character that is a modern woman, who is responsible, raises a family, gainfully employed, and contributes to society. All of these things operate under the canopy of patriarchy that has ordained society, a man's world.[12] Ramatoulaye speaks to herself and takes time to engage in self-examination. She is a woman who is ready to offer a criticism of the prevailing social conventions of her society. This positioning is necessary because it offers her the necessary building blocks that would be used to reject her circumstances and resolve to do something different. Thus, we have a character who writes about her circumstances because she has taken a good look at her past and present and knows that in articulating the injustice in which she has found herself, she reclaims her life and resolves to do things differently.[13] The critique of gender that is presented is very effective. First, Ramatoulaye carries on a dialogue with her friend, Aïsstou, who have experienced gender discrimination and stigma because the mother of her husband did not like Aïssatou. Secondly, the idea that this is a diary and her prop suggests that Ramatoulaye reflects on her own experience and does a critical self-analysis of the situation in which she finds herself. She then offers a rational account of the events of her life and the injustice which she had been through. In a sense, she is talking to herself. She has looked into the mirror, and the person she sees is Ramatoulaye. Ann McElaney-Johnson has argued:

> Aïssatou, the addressee of the missive, represents a double for Ramatoulaye. Aïssatou's experiences as a young woman . . . Her decision to choose her husband and her experience of betrayal by her spouse [and her divorce] parallel Ramatoulaye's own life. Aïssatou's role has even been defined as an alter ego to Ramatoulaye. Although the bond between the two women is reinforced through this structural device of doubling, it is crucial that we not ignore the fact that Bâ's text posits this internal reader whose life, although parallel in many ways to the narrator's remains distinct at the diegetic level.[14]

Even when Ramatoulaye addresses Modou, she demonstrates that she can distinguish clearly between the role of her husband and her role as wife and mother. The reader can be sympathetic to Ramatoulaye's perspective because she comes across in her self-analysis as a believable character. When she wonders why Modou introduced another woman into their family and detached himself from her and their children, the focus here is on Modou's actions and his choice to detach himself from his family and not Ramatoulaye's objection to polygamy.[15] I must add here that by focusing on the betrayal

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[11] Elizabeth Campbell, p. 334-335.

[12] Anne Hermann, argues that as a woman and writer, Bä, "offers an analysis of a hegemonic male culture but also examines the nature of the writing that has kept women marginal."Anne Hermann, "Intimate, Irreticent and Indiscreet in the Extreme": Epistolary Essays by Virginia Woolf and Christa Wolf," in *New German Critique,* Vol 0 Issue 38 (Spring-Summer 1986):161-180, p. 161.

[13] See Helena Parente Cunha, *Woman Between Mirrors,* Translated by Fred P. Ellison and Naomi Lindstrom, Austin: University of Texas Press.

[14] Ann McElaney-Johnson, "Epistolary Friendship: *La prise de parole* in Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre"* in *Research in African Literatures* Vol. 30, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 110-21; p. 111.

[15] I am indebted to Stratten for this point. p. 56.

Ramatoulaye reinforces what could be said to be at the heart of gender critique; the exclusion of women from important decisions.

Towards the end of *So Long a Letter,* Ramatoulaye writes, "My heart rejoices each time a woman emerges from the shadows," and by so doing also expresses the concern for other women in a text that addresses the voicelessness of the woman. This voicelessness becomes clear when she tells the reader that Modou married Binetou secretly. A male delegation came to her house to announce this marriage. Also, Ramatoulaye articulates views that may be shared by other Senegalese women who share common concerns about the way women were perceived in their families and the society. Later on, Ramatoulaye recalls that she and Aïssatou, "being the first pioneers of the promotion of African women. . . Men would call us scatter-brained. Others labeled us as devils. However, many wanted to possess us. How many dreams did we nourish hopelessly that could have been fulfilled as lasting happiness and that we abandoned to embrace others, those that have burst miserably like soap bubbles, leaving us empty-handed?"[16] This critical reflection rejects the assumption that a woman is helpless, or cannot find fulfillment on her own. The bold claim here is that they would have succeeded and done great things, but they became attached to men, who disappointed them and brought them grief. One could argue here that to say they were disappointed in life would be an understatement. Early in their lives, they saw themselves as "true sisters destined for the same mission of emancipation."[17]

These statements provide a commentary on the state of the woman and decry practices that placed the wife at the whims of the man and his family. Bâ carefully presents a picture of women in Senegal, who are subjected to some things, which hold them back and keep them silent. The voice of Ramatoulaye is the voice of many women who seek to break their silence.[18] Ramatoulaye recalls that their teachers wanted to "lift us out of the bog of tradition, superstition, and custom, to make us appreciate a multitude of civilizations without renouncing our own, to raise our vision of the world, cultivate our personalities, strengthen our qualities, to make up for our inadequacies, to develop universal moral values in us: these were the aims of our admirable headmistress."[19] This agenda opened the door to an emerging world, which they had to enter without abandoning their traditions and values. Some of the new values certainly forced them to call into question some of their practices, but it did not mean they were going to abandon everything they knew as Senegalese women. It is for this reason that she pointed to practices that kept women as second-class citizens.

I must underscore here that the gender critique of patriarchy in the text must first be seen in context, of the Senegalese society. The ideas that are contested are local ideals, and the grounds on which they are contested are the experiences of women in Senegal. One could see different influences on the character of the novel, such as a good education, the urban environment in Senegal, and the social circle they were associated with in a cosmopolitan society. Even if one were to consider all those things, one would still argue that this is a Senegalese centered critique and rejection of patriarchy. This position does not rule out certain common themes that are shared by people across

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[16] P. 14-15.

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] Ella Brown argues: the author has implicitly embraced western notions about the place of women in society and protested against those of her own society." Ella Brown, "Reactions to Western Values as Reflected in African Novels." *Phylon,* XLVIII.3 (1987): 216-28; p. 218.

[19] SLAL, p. 15-16.

cultures and contexts. Bä's text indeed appeals to human values and challenges the betrayal of those values. Glenn W. Fetzer has argued that Bâ's work has a wide appeal because of the universal character of its appeal to human issues: The novels of Mariama Bâ continue to have wide-reaching appeal. [As] literature by an African woman about African women, the novels develop themes common to all cultures-themes of love, happiness, choice, and self-expression."[20] While I recognize the broad human as well as gender issues which Bä has articulated, my emphasis on local context is important to underscore the fact that African women did not have to learn western ideals to understand injustice.[21] My position is similar to that of John Champagne who emphasizes the need to see universalism as general principles, and as general themes that frame postcolonial subjectivities and identity and in that sense, the character, Ramatoulaye subscribes to perspectives of "global feminism [which] convinces Ramatoulaye that 'all women have almost the same fate, which religions or unjust legislation have sealed,' although she 'remain[s] persuaded of the inevitable and necessary complementarity of man and woman,' with heterosexual love remaining as 'the natural link between these two beings'."[22] One could make a case for particularism and universalism from Bâ's novels. She has created a character in Ramatoulaye and supporting characters like Aïssatou, and Jacqueline who face issues, which many women in Africa and other places can identify with. The question about feminism/womanism is best resolved when we look at the diverse agendas and ask what is at stake? The marginalization of women in different forms is what is at issue in *So Long a Letter,* and its critique is a local one.

In contesting gender biases, Bä also opens up other themes that complement the gender issues that are at the center of the novel. When I taught this book to a religion and literature class in 2013, we identified several themes. First, there is the theme of friendship. Ramatoulaye writes to Aïssatou because she is her friend and she can afford to confide in her at a difficult time. She calls Aïssatou her friend and repeats it to make the point. For example, one cannot miss the theme of friendship that binds Ramatoulaye to Aïssatou. They became friends in childhood, went to school together, and married upper-class men in their society. Aïssatou decided to leave her husband when he took a second wife. She studied translation and took up an appointment at the Senegalese Embassy in Washington DC. This distance did not break their friendship. She addresses her as "Aïssatou my friend" 3 times, "my friend" 4 times", my best friend", and my sister.[23] At the end of the novel, Aïssatou is coming to Dakar on a visit, which Ramatoulaye anticipates. We learn that there are several things, which kept that bond of friendship alive. It is a friendship, which began in childhood and continued through school and their professional life. Secondly, education is an important theme for women in the novel. Bâ offers details about the education of the protagonist, her husband, their circle of friends, especially, Aïssatou.[24] Again modernity is another theme that is hinted at and which one assumes because of the importance of education. The text more than anything presents one with the irrefutable agency of women. This is clear when Ramatoulaye refuses marriage proposals from Tamsir, her brother-in-law and from

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[20]Glenn W. Fetzer, "Women's Search for the Voice and the Problem of Knowing in the Novels of Mariama Bâ." In *CLA Journal,* 35.1 (September 1991):31-34.; p. 41.

[21] In a similar critique, Charles P. Sarvan has argued that Bâ's feminist perspective is based on assimilation because she is influenced by European ideals, and her characters are elites who have been educated in the western tradition. Charles P. Sarvan. "Feminism and African Fiction: The Novels of Mariama Bâ," in *Modern Fiction Studies* 34.3 (1988), p. 457.

[22] John Champagne, "A Feminist Just Like Us? Teaching Mariama Bâ's so Long a Letter." In *College English,* Volume 58, Issue 1 (Jan., 1996): 22-42, p. 28, 30.

[23] The number of times these addresses occur in the French text is taken from Larrier, p.750.

[24] P. 33-35

Dauda Deming, the member of Parliament who works very hard to persuade her to marry him. The novel also offers a remarkable example of how one woman handles conflict. When her daughter becomes pregnant, Ramatoulaye, teaches her, thereby introducing a different way of handling conflict, in this case providing sex education. It is now also clear that the novel is a commentary on how women have survived and thrived under patriarchy. We find that Ramatoulaye 's husband betrays her. The imam, her spiritual leader is complicit in this, and one would think she would collapse under the weight of this abandonment, but she survives. Where her friend Aïssatou decides she cannot take such betrayal, Ramatoulaye is able to survive. What makes her cope? She depends on her friend. She depends on the teachings of her religion. This novel also introduces one to the theme of love and marriage. On love, one finds descriptions of romantic love in the novel. Their generation, of young, educated Senegalese men and women, married because of love. This romantic love is described as complementary engagement. If marriage is an institution, it is not an institution where someone dictates, but one intended for two people who complement each other. In addition, the novel also gives the reader an insight into the difficult task a widow faces in organizing a funeral. Funerals for some people are a time to find entertainment and therefore Ramatoulaye who was abandoned, is expected to provide entertainment and meet the demands of many people including the demands of her in-laws, and the family of Benito, her young rival.

Finally, the commonest reading of *So Long a Letter* that carves in sharp relief gender issues is the implied and devastating critique of the institution of polygyny. From this perspective, the narrative moves into the discussion by describing the secret desire that brings polygyny into the home of Ramatoulaye and her family; the surprise; betrayal; a sense of hurt; abandonment that follows and are drawn to show sympathy to Ramatoulaye on this issue.[25] The other conflict in the novel is why she did not get a divorce and leave her husband as her daughter counseled. Ramatoulaye chose to stay. There is obviously a clash of values, which Bä highlights in the novel very well. Modou chose to betray what they had together and marry the friend of their daughter. Modou chooses to abandon them and live his life with his new wife. However, Ramatoulaye in contrast, choose to stay in her marital home, although betrayed and abandoned by Modou.[26] It is not easy to resolve the critique of polygamy in this novel because of the actions of Ramatoulaye, but the work certainly portrays a heroine who is bold, has a strong sense of justice, understands patriarchal manipulation of family practices, and sees how men can take over divine powers and serve as spokespersons for Allah. I think the main character chooses to resist in a non-militant way by refusing to be broken by the system. Other critics see a courageous woman, but others as Femi Ojo-Ade see a victim.[27] I am not sure I can answer the question posed by Elinor Flewellen who wonders if Ramatoulaye's character as portrayed in *So Long a Letter* reflects a choice between assertiveness and submissiveness.[28]

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[25] Obioma Nneameka, 1997, p. 162 ff.

[26] Mildred Mortimer argues: "Critics who focus on the socio-political dimensions of polygamy in the work agree that Ramatoulaye, the heroine, is a victim of a society that endorses and encourages polygamy, but disagree as to whether she uses her energies heroically to overcome obstacles or to reproach bitterly the patriarchal structure." Mildred Mortimer, "Enclosure/Disclosure in Mariama Ba's Une si longue lettre" in *The French Review,* Vol. 64, Issues 1 (Oct., 1990) 69-78, p. 69-70.

[27] Femi Ojo-Ade, "Still a Victim? Mariame Bâ's Une si longue letter." *African Literature Today* 12 (1982): 71-87.

[28] Elinor C. Flewellen, "Assertiveness vs. Submissiveness in Selected Works by African women Writers." *Ba Shiru: A Journal of African Languages and Literature* 12.2 (1985): 3-18.

I think African women are aware of polygamy and the injustice inherent in the system. They have also lived with competing perspectives on the question offered by the two major religions that have shaped the lives of Africans for good or bad, Islam and Christianity. On this question, I am inclined to follow Obioma Nneameka's caution that critics of polygamy in African tend to ignore the subjectivity of African women and speak as if African women cannot make choices.[29] I agree with Nneameka that in *So Long a Letter*, the problem is not the institution of polygamy but its subversion by self-centered philandering men who have used "*instincts polygamique* (53/34), *domaine polygamique*, (69/46) and *probleme polygamique* (100/68)" to subvert Islamic law and turn a legitimate institution into a manipulative and oppressive practice.[30]

Bâ provides a critical view of polygamy in the complaints of Ramatoulaye, who states that the institution of marriage and polygamy is a place where individuals can practice "equity, justice, harmony, and sharing responsibility". The important thing for Ramatoulaye is "presence." The husband ought to be there physically for the entire family.[31] Hence, Ramatoulaye is critical of the vulgar attitude of a man who after thirty years of marriage forgets that he once assured her *C'est to que je porte en moi. Tu es ma négresse protectrice.* Ramatoulaye states that Modou has abandoned her and the children because "his new found happiness gradually swallowed up his memory of us."[32] In doing so, Madou has destroyed his past "morally and materially."[33] Nnaemeka argues that Ramatoulaye not advocate monogamy and presents a rather ambivalent position of about polygamy. The passage below from *So Long A Letter* is Aristophenesque ~~and~~ in some places.

> I remain persuaded of the inevitable and necessary complementarity of man and woman. Love, as imperfect as it may be in its content and expression, remains the natural link between two beings. To love one another! If only each partner could move sincerely towards the other! If each could melt into their other! . . . The success of the family is corn of a couple's harmony, as the harmony of multiple instruments creates a pleasant symphony. The nation is made up of all the families, rich, or poor, united or separated, aware of unaware. The success of a nation therefore depends inevitably on the family.[34]

The protagonist points to the reader what is problematic about polygamy. In the case of Ramatoulaye, polygamy has expanded the context of humiliation, especially when your husband moves out because he has married your daughter's friend who came to your home frequently.

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[29] Nneameka comments on the case of polygamy from the Utah, where a man lives together with several wives. All the wives made the choice to marry him because they believe the arrangement has its benefits such as freedom, friendship with other women, security, independence, and the sheer fact that polygamy empowers women rather than weaken them as people tend to think (166)

[30] P. 168, 170.

[31] P. 173.

[32] P. 179.

[33] *Ibid.*

[34] Quoted on in Nneameka, p. 180. See *So Long a Letter* p. 89. Nneameka argues appropriately that one could read this an endorsement of monogamy only if several things are true. (1) complementarity between a man and woman applies only in a one man one wife situation, (2) two people love one another and melt into one only in monogamy, (3) "partners exist only in monogamy; (4) partners can sincerely move toward one another only in monogamy; (5) successful families and harmonious couples are prerogatives of monogamy; (6) couples exist only in monogamy." (180)

In the end, Ramatoulaye resolved that she would not turn a blind eye at injustice or support oppression based on gender, even if it is one woman oppressing another woman. These issues work out intricately in the text, and we see that one cannot stop thinking, especially thinking about the things that have brought her to the point she is. She cannot just ignore that and claim, I have forgiven everything, and it is time to move on. That is why she raised her voice in criticism of Tamsir's marriage proposal. "My voice has known thirty years of silence, thirty years of harassment. It burst out, violent, sometimes sarcastic, sometimes contemptuous. . . You forget that I have a heart, a mind, that I am not an object to be passed from hand to hand."[35] This part of the broad gender critique that affirms in very specific terms that a woman should think and make her own decisions. In the section of the text where Ramatoulaye has forgiven Modou and is ready to move on, one could say that forgiveness also involves taking back the voice that was lost. Ramatoulaye stated that she considered marriage, faith, love and a definite choice. She did not choose Tamsir. Forgiveness does not also mean dropping one's guard to please those who claim to be on one's side.

Daouda Dieng, who had proposed to Ramatoulaye when they were both younger was now serving in the National Assembly and still wanted to marry Ramatoulaye. He claimed that in the National Assembly he was called a feminist because of his stance on women's issues. He argued: "women should no longer be decorative accessories, objects to be moved about, companions to be flattered or calmed with promises. Women are the nation's primary, the fundamental root from which all else grows and blossoms. Women must be encouraged to take a keener interest in the destiny of the country."[36] When Daouda finally made his proposal, Ramatoulaye also turned him down. "My heart does not love Daouda Dieng. My mind appreciates the man. However, heart and mind often disagree."[37] She decided to inform Daouda of her decision in a letter. "My conscience is not accommodating enough to enable me to marry you, when only esteem, justified by your many qualities, pulls me towards you. I can offer you nothing else, even though you deserve everything."[38]

Ramatoulaye wrote a letter to Daouda in which she rejected his marriage proposal. When Aïssatou left her husband, she wrote to inform him that his decision to take a second wife was unacceptable and she had decided to leave. Writing in this work is not only a therapeutic device but also a firm weapon in the struggle against the domination of women. It is not the only tool, but it is a powerful tool in the struggle for emancipation from domination.[39] In the rest of the work, Ramatoulaye tells of her decision to remain single despite other proposals. She discusses problems encountered in child rearing, and the struggles she experiences with her children.

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[35] SLAL, p. 58.

[36] P. 62.

[37] P. 66.

[38] P. 68.

[39] Jeanette Treiber has argued: "Bâ's insistence upon the importance of literacy, writing, and feminism is not a naïve adaptation of or fascination with western culture and the glorification of individualism, but is first of all a realization that literacy, writing, and the construction of a feminist discourse are tools for empowering women in postcolonial Africa. It is precisely the exclusion from education and discourse that has kept women in vulnerable and exploitative positions."Jeanette Treiber, "Feminism and Identity Politics: Mariama Bâ's *Un Chant écarlate*" in *Research in African Literatures,* Vol. 27 No 4 (1996):109-123, p. 110.

Religion in *So Long a Letter*

So Long a Letter is a religious text because it offers the readers insights into how Ramatoulaye draws on her Islamic faith to deal with her crisis. I must confess that this reading is not without problems. Some critics of Bâ argue that Ramatoulaye is oppressed because she is devoted to Islam, which permits polygamy. Her commitment to Islam hindered Ramatoulaye from leaving her husband when he married a second wife. Ella Brown has argued: "It is obvious that [her] religion is the cause of the many ills she complains of. Her life would be much happier in a society that gave greater consideration to the needs of women."[40] Ramatoulaye's problem is not Islam, but the manipulation of Islam. Bâ like Nawal El Saadawi is critical of the way people have proclaimed the values of Islam but used the religion for their purposes. The difference with Saadawi's is that the unfair treatment of women continues to the point where in *The Innocence of the Devil,* divinity also participates in the manipulation of women. However, in *Song Long a Letter,* Ramatoulaye turns to Islam to deal with her pain and problems. The text suggests that she emerges from her problems as a strong woman because of her devotion to Islam.

The sudden death of her estranged husband, Modou makes her write this letter to Aïssatou. The opening passage demonstrates that this is no ordinary letter. She introduces her pain by recalling Aïssatou's past difficulties. "Yesterday you were divorced. Today I am a widow." In doing this, Ramatoulaye not only solicits her sympathy, but she also identifies with her on two issues that could be the nightmare, and are in this case, of many women, divorce, and widowhood. They may have slightly different experiences, but they are linked together through their childhood friendship, which will also be unfolded in the narrative as well as in pain. She continues with these grave somber words:

> Modou is dead. How can I tell you? One does not fix appointments with fate. Fate grasps whom it wants when it wants. When it moves in the direction of your desires, it brings you plenitude. However, more often than not, it unsettles, crosses you. Then one has to endure. I endured the telephone call which disrupted my life. A taxi quickly hailed! Fast! Fast! Faster still! My throat is dry. There is a rigid lump in my chest. Fast: faster still! At lasts, the hospital: the mixed smell of suppurations and ether. The hospital-distorted faces, a train of tearful people, known and unknown, witnesses to this awful tragedy. A long corridor, which seems to stretch out endlessly. In the end, a room. In the room, a bed. On the bed, Modou stretched out, cut off from the world of the living by a white sheet in which he is completely enveloped. . . Death, the tenuous passage between two opposite worlds, one tumultuous, the other still.[41]

This lyrical description of what one could call an ultimate tragedy is made complex by the revelation that Ramatoulaye is confounded, weak, and wants to lie down but in her own words "Middle age demands dignity." The question then is what does one do in such a situation? This is where our first inkling about the role of religion comes in. Ramatoulaye states:

> "I hold tightly on to my prayer beads. I tell the beads ardently, remaining standing on legs of jelly." As she stands on those legs of jelly, her "loins beat as

[40] Ella Brown, p. 218.
[41] SLAL, p. 1-2.

> to the rhythm of childbirth." It is not only the small material symbol of her religion which she holds on to that makes her conscious and acts as if she wants to understand the new world that is opened up to her and to that Ramatoulaye has another "prop" and she tells Aïssatou: "Cross-sections of my life spring involuntarily from my memory, grandiose verses from the Koran, noble words of consolation fight for my attention."[42]

With these words in the first two pages, the reader is introduced to what in addition to all the ideas of *So Long a Letter,* the religious images and the religious experience of the main character.

These descriptions paint several images. Religion offers ways of dealing with a tragedy that has taken Ramatoulaye by surprise. She was separated from Modou, but it was an earthly separation, a different situation from what she now faces-death. Modou is dead and is no longer here. She goes to the hospital only to find the dead body ~~of that~~ of her husband. In her world she has experienced abandonment and now the catastrophe of death, we find that religion pervades that world, making it possible for her to find composure and determination to live as well as be her person. She faced gross injustice in her life but remained silent. Aïssatou her friend was betrayed once, and Ramatoulaye will recall this in the poignant flashback ahead. Modou betrayed them by abandoning them.

The death of Modou triggers events and reflections that would be difficult to handle, but the text demonstrates that she depends on religion and can speak for herself, and resists marriage proposals from Tamsir, Modouo's brother, and Douda Deing. Rather, than serve as a hindrance, Islam provides the resources she needs to cope with her difficulties and emerge as a new person. Religion is used as a resource to soften the blows inflicted by death and give her the courage to understand the younger generation. Ramatoulaye comes to terms with death by drawing on the power and symbols of religion in several ways.

First, Ramatoulaye depends on prayer. Early in the novel as she stands beside the body of Modou, she holds her prayer beads. As Ramatoulaye struggles with her feelings, she also counts the beads and says her prayers. What she is saying at the time may not be eloquent, but every single bead that she allows to fall on top of the others, as she counts them is a prayer, in which she asks help to deal with the major changes in her life. Death is difficult to deal with, let alone the fact that she was going to endure forty days of mourning rites. Furthermore, it is not only memory and prayers, but also the words of the sacred text, which she describes as: "noble words of consolation [which] fight for my attention."

In saying her prayers, she hangs on to a material element of her religion. Muslims carry and use beads when they say prayers. By itself one cannot make very much out of it. However, Bâ calls attention to a tough situation in which Ramatoulaye depended on those beads. Confused in the hospital room, she could not bend because of her age. In such a moment, something very material, something that has religious significance was her support. Furthermore, Ramatoulaye depends on the power of the Koran. In the third chapter, as she describes the coming of the people to mourn Modou's death, she points out that words of comfort from the Koran were given at the occasion. The mourner said

[42] SLAL, p. 2.

prayers at rituals organized to mourn ~~for~~ her late husband. Describing the crowded scene at her house, Ramatoulaye refers to the impact of religion: "Comforting words from the Koran fill the air; divine words, divine instructions, impressive promises of punishment or joy, exhortations to virtue, warning against evil, exaltation of humility, of faith. Shivers run through me. My tears flow and my voice joins weakly in the fervent 'Amen' which inspires the crowd's ardour at the end of each verse."[43]

When Ramatoulaye thinks about her fate and the fate of many victims of death, she writes: "thinking of you, I thank God for my eyes which daily embrace heaven and earth. If toady moral fatigue makes my limbs stiff, tomorrow it will leave my body. Then relieved, my legs will carry me slowly, and I shall again have around me the iodine and the blue of the sea. The star and white could will be mine. The breath of wind will again refresh my face. I will stretch out, turn around, I will vibrate. Oh, health, live in me. Oh, health…"[44] This is a meditation on health and life that is grounded in her religious imagination and experience that the narrator has cultivated for most of her life.

Secondly, Ramatoulaye invokes and depends on the words from the Koran. Islam is a religion of the Word. In her darkest day, that Word of Islam which she learned in childhood when she attended the Koranic school, and which were said at her house gave her comfort. The reader may notice the prolepsis that Ramatoulaye displays early in the text. The choice of words here in some way prefigures her account of the injustice that Modou has done to her. In effect, Ramatoulaye is telling Aïssatou and the reader that she has lived in a state of loss for a long time. The death of Modou is a different kind of loss, but she has known what it means to loose for a while. Later on in the narrative, Ramatoulaye implies that although Modou is dead, he needs help because the tough words from the Koran in which she takes comfort to apply to Modou. The prayers people offer are a source of peace and comfort to her. However, the word of the sacred book is a source of critique of excess in the midst of pain. Ramatoulaye points out an irony in all of this "partying" that is going on at her house in the name of mourning. Her religious sensitivity becomes critical. As she observes the carnival atmosphere that reigns at her house, she writes to Aïssatou:

> Moreover, yet we are told in the Koran that on the third day the dead body swells and fills its tomb; we are told that on the eighth day it bursts; and we are also told that on the fortieth day it is stripped. What then is the significance of these joyous, institutionalized festivities that accompany our prayers for God's mercy? Who has come out of self-interest? Who has come to quench his own thirst? Who has come for the sake of mercy? Who has come so that he may remember?

Further, Ramatoulaye employs religious ritual to reflect on her life together with Modou. In section four of the text. The ritual she employs is the obligatory *mirasse* "commanded by the Koran requires that a dead person is stripped of his most intimate secrets; thus exposed to others what was carefully concealed. These exposures crudely explain a man's life. With consternation, I measure the extent of Modou's betrayal. His abandonment of his first family (myself and my children) was the outcome of the choice of a new life. He rejected us. He mapped out his future without taking our existence into account."[45] This section continues for several chapters. She uses it to provide the reader

[43] SLAL, p. 5.
[44] SLAL, p. 12.
[45] SLAL, p. 9

with a powerful flash back about her pain, her friendship with Aïssatou, and what emerges is not only the portrait of Modou, but the socio-economic reality of the post-colonial state.

In her flashback, Ramatoulaye recalls their childhood days, the beginning of the love. She remembers when he wrote to her stating: "It is you whom I carry within me. You are my protecting black angel. Would I quickly find you, if only to hold your hand tightly so that I may forget hunger and thirst and loneliness."[46] Despite the pressures from in-laws, they lived a good live, Christmas parties, music, trips to the beaches to escape the city, picnics at the farm, but the two women remained devoted to their families as well as their teaching jobs. The world around them did not move in the same direction. That is why Mawdo's family brought pressure on him to take another wife. Aïssatou chooses to leave rather than accept polygamy. In a letter to Mawdo, she wrote: "I cannot accept what you are offering me today in place of the happiness we once had. You want to draw a line between heartfelt love and physical love. I say that there can be no union of bodies without the heart's acceptance however little that may be. . . I am stripping myself of your love, your name. Clothed in my dignity, the only worthy garment, I go my way."[47] Reflecting on how Aïssatou's life changed after the divorce, Ramatoulaye remembers that things were going well for her, her children, and she did not care about Mawdo. "There you were, an innocent victim of an unjust cause and the courageous pioneer of a new life."[48]

Ramatoulaye recalls that her own troubles started three years later. It was not a conspiracy from the family, Modou her husband cooked it all. He became a "sugar daddy" to Binetou who was friends with their own daughter Daba. She details Modou's scheme that included seeking financial independence so that he would do extravagant things for his new wife and her family. He took loans to buy a house for his new in-laws, and send them on pilgrimage to Mecca. He withdrew Binetou from school and paid her an allowance, and made a commitment to pay it for a long time. Binetou's mother was expecting that even after his death the payments would continue from his estate. When Modou died, they made an inventory of the things they have in the house but did not list all the things, because they secretly removed some of the furniture.

Later on when he married Binetou, a delegation made up of Tamsir, Mawdo Bâ, and the local *Imam* announced Madou's secret marriage to Binetou. "Modou sends his thanks. He says it is fate that decides men and things: God intended him to have a second wife; there is nothing he can do about it. He praises you for the quarter of a century marriage in which you gave him all the happiness a wife owes her husband."[49] Ramatoulaye did not react negatively but beneath; she was in great pain. From her own judgment, "Binetou, like many others, was a lamb slaughtered on the alter of affluence." Ramatoulaye's daughter Daba urged her mother to break with Modou as Aïssatou did. Ramatoulaye thought of leaving after twenty-five years and twelve children! She had seen the sordid side of marriage and was not going to run away from it.

She contemplated leaving, forgiveness, and assessed her physical condition, and that of many women who were abandoned because they had grown old-they were "like a

[46] SLAL, p. 14.
[47] SLAL, p. 31-32.
[48] SLAL, p. 34.
[49] SLAL, p. 37.

worn-out or dated *boubou*."[50] There were other women in similar situations, they handled it differently, and some succumbed to pressure. Ramatoulaye thought of Jacqueline who had a nervous breakdown because her husband was seeing another woman. Ramatoulaye recalls, "I chose to remain. Modou and Mawdo were surprised, could not understand."[51] It was a difficult choice because she cried every day, was forced to share her husband according to the precepts of Islam. Modou avoided them. "He never came again; his new found happiness gradually swallowed up his memory of us. He forgot about us."[52] It is important to emphasize that Ramatoulaye decided to stay.[53] She told Aïssatou, she refused to give in to pressure. "My mind and my faith rejected supernatural power. They rejected this easy attraction, which kills any will to fight. I looked reality in the face."[54] This is a difficult passage to interpret because she states she rejected this supernatural power, but one gets the sense that she rejected it because of her faith. One way of making sense about this is to suppose that what Ramatoulaye rejected were the supernatural power of men and the Imam. The imposition of that power on her constituted an abuse of supernatural power itself, especially coming from her husband who did not behave in a manner that was recommended by the Koran. Ramatoulaye tried to understand where she failed as a homemaker. She asked why Modou put Binetou between them. In a moment where her humanity also shines, she confessed she was still in love with Modou.

Bâ has also worked the theme of betrayal into her second novel, *Un chant écarlate.* During his school days, Ousmane falls in love with Mireille, the daughter of a French diplomat who works in Dakar. Mereille's parents disapprove of this relationship and send her to France to go to school. Both lovers continue to exchange letters and write about different things including the 1968 student riots in Paris and Dakar. When Ousmane completes his university education, he flies to Paris and marries Mireille against the wishes of his parents. Then the challenges began with the nagging of his mother who did not like that marriage, the demands of an educated Mireille, and his Senegalese traditions, Ousmane marries Ouleymatou, without the knowledge of Mireille. This part of the story resembles what happens in *Une si Longue Lettre.* In this second novel, Bâ takes the consequences of this duplicity much further.

Ramatoulaye ponders her pain and slowly acknowledges the fact that Modou has abandoned her and the children. In *Un chant écarlate* Ousmane moves back and forth between the two women. Mireille is disappointed and cannot take it any longer. She has no place to return to, and in pity for their son, because French society will not accept a child of mixed race, she kills her son and stabs Ousmane. In a confrontation with her father, Mireille took her to stand on the side of Ousmane.

> "The father of 'that object' as you call him, fought for our country at the risk of his life. He is disabled from the wound he received, a victim of somebody else's cause. Ousmane's father defended our history and protected our safety. What have you done for him in return? Your presence here? That is not out of any altruism. You're in the service of your own country, as an unarmed soldier in

[50] SLAL, p. 41.

[51] SLAL, p. 45.

[52] SLAL p. 47.

[53] See I. A. d'Almedia, "The concept of Choice in Mariama Ba's Fiction" in C.B. Davies and A. A. Graves, eds. *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature,* pp. 161-171, Trenton, N.J.: African World Press, 1986.

[54] SLAL, p. 49.

> civilian garb keeping a watchful eye on someone else's business. You're still the same old colonizer, just disguised as a humanitarian, still playing your own game, which is simply and solely to exploit this country. But I am not playing your game; I'm on the other side, and I'm not going back on that, you understand."[55]

The tragedy of Ousmane and Mireille comes about from abandonment. Mireille abandons her family for romantic love. Ousmane refuses to listen to the voice of reason, and marries her only to betray her and yield to tradition and marry another woman behind her. Ousmane in response to the philosophy of Negritude, declared that he favored returning to one's roots, but also being open, meaning he would be open to other ideas and people of different races such as Mireille. He did not live up to his openness, in much the same way as Mudou Fall did not live up to the romantic promise he made to Ramatoulaye. The novel criticizes colonial and racist ideologies. Treiber argues that the novel also demonstrates: "that an indiscriminate reliance on tradition will reestablish patriarchal power and is ultimately collaborative with colonial ideology."[56] However, *So Long a Letter* presents a difficult picture because religion plays an important role in the life of Ramatoulaye.

Ramatoulaye used the ritual *mirasse* to detail Modou's betrayal and abandonment. Ramatoulaye use~~s~~ this ritual very carefully to detail not only her pain, oppressive aspects of culture, and restate Aïssatou's friendship and loyalty, but to take a stand about her situation. Mbye B. Cham argues: "In extending the conceptual boundaries of 'mirasse,' the novelist is able to provide Rama with the structural and, indeed, cultural framework within which to undertake a comprehensive exposition (dðpulyrllement) of intimate secrets of married life with Modou Fall, particularly the latter's weakness as a human being and the effect of such on their relationship. Being such a devout Muslim, Rama sees this stalk taking as a religious duty mandated by the Qu'ran. . . Mirasse, therefore becomes the principle that legitimizes and regulates Rama's act of systematic personal revelation which simultaneously constitutes a systematic analysis of the most pressing socioeconomic and cultural issues challenging women and society."[57] We must see Ramatoulaye's decisions beyond conformity because she uses the *mirasse* to confront not only her husband's betrayal and abandonment but emerge from the ordeal as a strong woman.[58]

The rite she observes and writes about in her flashback allows her to carry on the process of disclosure. Ramatoulaye takes this opportunity, and the result is an engagement in a provocative ritual. In carrying on the ritual of *mirasse* Ramatoulaye not only grasps on religion to deal with the past, but to prepare for the future. Regarding the past, she begins: "With consternation, I measure the extent of Modou's betrayal. His abandonment of his first family my children) and (myself was the outcome of the choice

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[55] Mariama Bâ *Scarlet Song,* Translated by Dorothy Blair, London: Longman, 1986, p. 28.

[56] Treiber, p. 119.

[57] Mbye B. Cham, "The Female Condition in Africa: A Literary Exploration of Mariama Bâ." In *A Current Bibliogaphy on African Affairs,* 7.1 (1984-85):29-51' quote taken from p. 29, 32-23.

[58]Uzo Esonwanne argues: "With the *mirasse,* Bâ boldly redefines the relationship of (African) women to the secular and the sacred, to the European epistolary and to Afro-Islamic ritual mandated by the Koran."Uzo Esonwanne, 1997, p. 84. Esonwanne also notes that Miller thinks that the use of the epistolry undecuts Bâ's project because there is not real exchange with the interlocutor. (84-85) He argues that given the reading offered by Cham, Ramatoulaye actually circumvents an Islamic custom by using a ritual effectively to create and artificial exchange. (85) However Esonwanne argues that one ought to look at what Bâ attempts here as a form of production in which Bâ is engaged in a hybridity that can be described as poaching in order to manufacture contesting meanings.(86)

of a new life. He rejected us. He mapped out his future without taking our existence into account."[59] The religious ceremony provides a very powerful moment in which to pour out one's grief. While I do not want to jump into a simplistic comparison, one familiar with the traditions of the Hebrew Bible sees in this use of the *mirasse* something the Psalmist did do a lot. Many times when the psalmist goes before Yahweh, he lays out his heart and pain. Ramatoulaye does a similar thing here. The catalog is so long. Modou is "dead without a penny saved. Acknowledgments of debts? A pile of them: cloth and gold traders, home-delivery grocers and butchers, car-purchase installment." There are all the lavish expenses and the loans he owes because he needed the money to send his new mother-in-law on a pilgrimage to Mecca. The most painful reflections during this period certainly are when she reflected: "And to think that I loved this man passionately, to think that I gave him thirty years of my life, to think that twelve times over I carried his child. The addition of a rival to my life was not enough for him. In loving someone else, he burned his past, both morally and materially. He dared to commit such an act of disavowal."[60]

However, Ramatoulaye forgave Modou. Ramatoulaye wrote: "Yesterday I celebrated, as is the custom, the fortieth day of Modou's death. I have forgiven him. May God hear the prayer I say for him every day. I celebrated the fortieth day in meditation. The initiated read the Koran. Their fervent voices rose towards heaven. Modou fall, may God accept you among his chosen few."[61] I must add here that I am not claiming that forgiveness is always a religious act. However, religion has an impact on decisions to forgive other people their faults, and this seems to be the case. I must point out that I have not undertaken a systematic study of forgiveness in Islam. I only point out that in the context of *Une si Longue Lettre,* we can read forgiveness as a religious act, which reflects what Arendt calls a "constant mutual release from what they do can [people] remain free agents, why by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can they be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new."[62]

Ramatoulaye made the conscious decision to free herself from the past which Modou created; thus, she demonstrated the willingness to change and start afresh. She recalls how she pulled herself out of this deception and abandonment, a thing that resonates with many women who have experienced similar things. Ramatoulaye tells Aïssatou "I try to spot my faults in the failure of my marriage. I gave freely, gave more than I received. I am one of those who can realize themselves fully and bloom only when they form part of a couple. Even though I understand your stand, even though I respect the choice of liberated women, I have never conceived of happiness outside marriage." This further explains why she chooses to stay in her marriage, even though all she got was betrayal and rejection. Then, there is this painful confession: "The truth is that, despite everything, I remain faithful to the love of my youth. Aïssatou, I cry for Modou, and I can do nothing about it."[63] This is an important claim which raises the question, is she living a delusion? Is Ramatoulaye also imposing textual and religious constraints on marriage by determining to remain in marriage when the husband has long moved on? If one wants to remain in the marriage and the other person is no longer interested and has abandoned you, when does it make sense to call it quits? Is it the case that religion forbids divorce to the extent that when one has been abandoned, he or she cannot take

[59] SLAL, p. 9.
[60] SLAL, p. 12.
[61] SLAL, p. 57.
[62] P. 240.
[63] SLAL, p. 56.

that next step and say, this marriage is broken, and I must move on? One also wonders if it was a question of timing. It might not have been the right time for Ramatoulaye to move on.

Finally, Ramatoulaye turns to religion to provide support to her children. When she finds out to her shock and consternation that her daughter Aïssatou is pregnant, she is overcome with emotions, and she states: "I sought refuge in God, as at every moment of crises in my life. Who decides death and life? God, the Almighty!"[64] As she reflects over the fact that this pregnancy will slow down her studies at school, she can only turn to God again and pray for the expected child "may God smooth the new path of this child's life. What a path."[65] Bä in many ways authored a profoundly mystical text that people of different religious traditions can relate to this work. Ramatoulaye speaks of seeking refuge in God. In the midst of storms, God is as a hiding place. The idea of refuge suggests protection against danger but also implies a place of stability, a place to gain a new perspective and a new engagement with other people. Seeking refuge in God is not hiding. It is a posture, which re-orients the individual to other people. Ramatoulaye's theology, if I can call it that, sees God as the one who makes the final decision on death and life. The statement could mean that she accepts the Death of Modou as the will of God and then accepts the pregnancy of her daughter as an act of God. Seeking refuge in God does not always mean asking for answers. She accepted the death of Modu and went on to do everything required by Islamic teachings to give Modou respect even in his death. As she seeks refuge in God, she accepts and anticipates the birth of a grandchild. Given what she had gone through, she only prays that God will make the path of this child smooth, yet with a certain irony, she wonders, what path? Therefore, seeking refuge in God does not answer all questions. One may be resting in God, but future remains uncertain. This might be what believers call faith.

I have argued that *So Long a Letter* offer a critical perspective on gender relations and on the use of religion to respond to crisis and survival. These are not the only themes one can highlight from this rich novel, but they lie at the center of the dialogue in this short, complex, and moving epistolary which remains fresh each time one picks it up.

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[64] P. 82.
[65] P. 86.

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Sexuality and Sexual Scripting in African Traditional Religion: Mumbi in *A Grain of Wheat*

Loreen Maseno

Abstract

The African novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o in his novel *A Grain of Wheat* introduces a female character Mumbi. Mumbi resides in a village of pre-independence Kenya and shares the same name with the first woman in the Agikuyu myth of origins. In the novel, her life story brings to the centre stage religious, sexual and gender politics in the realm of everyday life. Whilst her husband Gikonyo is in detention, she gets pregnant by Karanja. Upon his release, Gikonyo swears never to talk about the child, continue with life as if nothing had happened, but never enter Mumbi's bed. Eventually out of frustration, he becomes violent to Mumbi to the extent that she leaves him to return to her parents. Using narratological text analysis and the sexual scripting approach, this paper examines Mumbi's sexuality in the context of her traditional village deeply immersed in Agikuyu traditional religion to explore the dilemmas of women's autonomous sexuality in African traditional societies. Sexual scripts existing at the Agikuyu traditional societal level are contrasted with those arising from both the interpersonal and intrapsychic levels in order to examine processes of transitions related to family, Agikuyu religion and sexuality and how Mumbi adopts new ways of negotiating sexual life.

KEY WORDS: Agikuyu Traditional Religion, Sexuality, Mumbi, Sexual Scripting

Introduction

The novel *A Grain of Wheat* was written by Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Ngugi was born in 1938 in Kenya. He studied at Makerere University and also at the University of Leeds. He is a leading African writer who has been awarded several literature prizes. His literary career started in 1962 and his book, *A Grain of wheat* was first published in 1967. Before 1914, British settlements had begun in the central highlands of Kenya. This was a time of forceful eviction of people from their land leaving many as squatters or forced laborers. These events were not very far from Ngugi and are replayed in the novel. The characters of his novel in a rural setting are tremendously affected by colonialism in different ways.

Mumbi in the novel is a young Kenyan woman from the Agikuyu community living in Thabai village. She is compared to Wangu Makeri because of her looks, one of the most beautiful women in all the eight ridges, admired by many and has two brothers, Kihika, and Kariuki. She eventually marries Gikonyo who outsmarts other suitors. Whilst Gikonyo is in detention, she gets pregnant by Karanja and bears a child. The context in which part of her life is lived is presented in the novel through flashbacks, indicating a somewhat uncertain future for herself and her marriage.

Ngugi delves deeply into the complicated thinking of the main characters both as individual subjects and community members who must negotiate the conflation of religio-cultural heritage and colonialism. In the novel, Ngugi does not compartmentalize language, religion, politics etc.[1] Deep reverence to traditional religion and culture is exemplified in the novel. Ngugi shows how though Kihika may carry a pocket bible around; he also draws inspiration from traditional religious beliefs. In essence, he brings together Christianity and African traditional religion and fuses them to get a version that speaks to his struggle against colonial domination.[2] The core ideas that emanate from traditional religio-cultural heritage are those of self-sacrifice and justice which later inspire Kihika to give his life to fight for his people.

Agikuyu traditional religion provides sexual scripts at societal level which arise from the existing cultural discourses on sexuality. Further, Agikuyu culture carries messages regarding sexual power, appropriate sexual expression and sexual normalcy. However, these are not the only scripts available to use when negotiating sexual activities and behavior (Simon and Gagnon 1984, 1986). Mumbi, at the individual and interpersonal levels acquires sexual identity dependent on her particular stage in life. The sexual scripts she adopts as displayed in part result from her emergent relationships or situations rather than those guidelines provided by traditional culture.

In general, this paper demonstrates through sexual scripting the implicit rules of sexual scripts at different levels. It shows that these scripts are not the exact duplicate of each other at the Agikuyu religio-cultural level and at Mumbi's individual level. A critical analysis of these different scripts enables us to understand how Mumbi in the context of African traditional religion and culture develops and determines her own sexual behavior and activities.

Introducing *A Grain of Wheat*

In this novel, there are different temporalities with flashbacks used to narrate changes in time. These changes intersect with the individual as well as the collective historical consciousness adding complexities to the characters of the novel. The many flashbacks provide a way in which memories and histories are brought to the present.

The novel follows the life of an orphan named Mugo, who was brought up by Waitherero, his aunt. The setting of this novel is Thabai and Rungei villages in Kenya, from the colonial period moving to the state of emergency and into Kenya´s independence. Troubles and problems abound beyond the struggle for independence.

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[1] Peter Mwikisa (2000). The Limits of Difference: Ngugi Wa Thiongo's Redeployment of Biblical Signifiers in *A Grain of Wheat* and *I will Marry when I want*. In: Gerald West and Musa Dube. (eds.) *The Bible in Africa. Transactions, Trajectories and Trends* Leiden: Brill, 164.

[2] Peter Mwikisa (2000). The Limits of Difference, 168.

Kihika, a freedom fighter and brother to Mumbi dropped out of the Mission school in order to join other freedom fighters. Kihika kills a colonial officer, DO Robson and is regarded by other fighters as a hero. A manhunt is issued for him and Mugo, the protagonist betrays him. Kihika is found and hanged in public by a District Officer Mr. Thompson in order to teach the other fighters a lesson.

Instead of Mugo being rewarded, he is arrested and detained for tying to protect a pregnant woman who was being hit by a home guard. Like many other young men, he is detained for a couple of years. When he comes back, the people of Thabai consider him a hero because he never confessed the oath, although he was beaten many times. "You were brave not to confess. We admired your courage, and hid our heads in shame" (Wa Thiong'o 2002: 66). This earns Mugo respect among other detainees and the community as one who never confessed though no one knows that he is actually the one who betrayed Kihika in the first place. The community is convinced that Mugo should be the one to make a speech at the Uhuru celebrations.

As youth, Gikonyo is friends with Kihika and Karanja. They visit each other and spend a lot of time together. Gikonyo together with many other young men from Thabai village are arrested and taken to detention at the primacy of their marriage. Since there is no communication whatsoever between Gikonyo and Mumbi, she is unsure of his being alive or ever returning alive. Gikonyo had stayed in the detention camp for over six years. Community members were never really sure whether he and others were dead or whether they would ever return. Gikonyo, while in detention confesses and is released. His love for Mumbi inspires hope in him to live and be reunited to Mumbi. "His longing for her [Mumbi] is so all-consuming that he betrays his oath of loyalty to the cause of freedom in order to return to her" (Cook & Okenimpke 1997: 77). However, after returning he learns that in his absence many things had changed. Mumbi had betrayed him with Karanja and got pregnant. Through the years, Gikonyo is saddened because of Mumbi´s unfaithfulness and to find out, "….that a friend, or a man you always trusted, has betrayed you" (Wa Thiong'o 2002: 119).

Though betrayed, he tries to be polite to Mumbi but soon gets distanced. Gikonyo chooses to follow Agikuyu traditional conventions by staying with his wife in the same house. However, he sleeps in a different room, determined never to touch her, to ignore Mumbi's child and expend all his efforts on getting rich. Mumbi's attempts to have him talk about the child are shunned by Gikonyo who will hear none of this.

> Mumbi left her seat and stood in front of her husband. She put her small hands around his neck, resting them on his shoulders. Her eyes glowed. Her lips trembled. 'Let us talk about it', she whispered. 'About what?' He asked and raised his head. 'The child'. 'There is nothing to talk about,' he said with acid emphasis. 'Then come to my bed tonight. I have waited for you only, these years.' 'What is wrong with you?' Gikonyo pulled her arms from around his neck and slightly pushed her away. (Wa Thiong´o 2002:33)

As he continues to gain wealth, he opens a shop 'Gikonyo General Store'. Then he went on and built a house, one of the best and most modern in the village demonstrating he had wealth, albeit small. Later, he got a political position in the land. This cast a big difference from his days of the poor carpenter. He also bought a five-acre farm (Wa Thiongo 2002:28). When Gikonyo becomes violent, Mumbi separates from him. But how can Mumbi tell her family that part of the reason she left her marital home is

because Gikonyo had never touched her since he returned from detention. Would they not say that he was impotent and start spreading dangerous rumors? (Wa Thiong´o 2002:196).

Karanja was never detained but served the colonial authorities as a home guard and later as chief, therefore he was always in proximity to Mumbi. He still admired her and hoped to win her heart. On many occasions he gave Mumbi a helping hand.

> Mumbi was depressed because there was no man of the house. In the end, she tied a belt around her waist and took on a man's work. Together with Wangari, they cleared the site. Karanja came and helped them draw the plan of the hut on the ground...Men, finding women like Mumbi on the roof hammering in the nails, stopped to tease them. (Wa Thiong´o 2002:154)

Later, a big trench was dug around the village to isolate it, as the villagers are forced to dig the trench and prevented from escape. Nobody is allowed out. This punishment comes so as to teach other villages a lesson, a warning that they must never give food or any help to the freedom fighters. The food supply in the village dwindles to levels that some people are starved to death. Mumbi's body bears the brunt of this until she states, "For me, I felt I could not live another day" (Wa Thiong´o 2002:159). Karanja however, brings her food when all hope is gone. He sneaks to bring her food in darkness. This food saves herself, her mother-in law, her parents and her younger brother. "To this day, I've never told anybody about the food which saved us" (Wa Thiong´o 2002:160).

Most characters in the novel think that it is Karanja who actually betrayed Kihika yet, it is Mugo. General R. and Lt. Koina want to find the traitor who betrayed Kihika and make it public at the celebration day. Mugo has to bring himself to confess he betrayed Kihika. At first he does not want to give a speech as he feels very guilty. Later he agrees and in his speech, he confesses to being the traitor. This way he saves Karanja who was considered the traitor even as he served the colonial administration as a home guard.

On Uhuru day, there is a last race and this race is between the rivals, Karanja and Gikonyo, in order to win back Mumbi. Mumbi once again is the object of competition. At the end of the novel, Gikonyo seems to again win the last race for Mumbi, although he lost the actual race against Karanja. It is at this point that he gets a change of heart and regrets his behavior towards Mumbi. While in hospital he considers to rescue his marriage as well as his love for Mumbi. "He thought about the wedding gift, a stool carved from Muiri wood. I'll change the woman's figure. I shall carve a woman big- big with child" (Wa Thiong´o 2002: 243).

Method and the Sexual Scripting Approach

In order to present Mumbi in her particular context, this paper employs the method of narratological text analysis. This method includes the analysis of different character features, their characterization and their constellation in the text. This method offers several possibilities which help to deconstruct the text into important components; thus teasing out the direct and indirect characterization (Bal 1997; Toolan 2001). Mumbi in the novel is described through the voice of the narrator, self-reflection or through other characters which comprises direct characterization. Similarly, there are aspects of indirect characterization as her character is also developed through emotions and thoughts,

actions and speeches or stream-of-consciousness. In general, Mumbi as an important character in the novel is selected, characterized and analyzed within the collection of the novel.

The sexual scripting approach proposes that people's sexual lives are governed by socially learned sets of sexual desires and conduct, rather than by biological imperatives. It asserts that sexual scripts are implicit rules which determine the who, when, what and how of individuals' sexual activities and behaviors (Baber 1994:60). Scripts, thus serve as specific rules of guidelines that individuals use regarding their sexual behaviors (Simon and Gagnon 1986). These scripts often arise from the existing cultural, religious and social discourses on sexuality and carry messages on appropriate sexual conduct.

The sexual scripting approach suggests that sexual scripts exist at three interrelated levels. The individual level which is also the intrapsychic level refers to how people may have their individual fantasies and desires which are often influenced by cultural scenarios. The interpersonal level refers to how people may write interpersonal scripts at the level of social interaction. These people's ideas mutually influence each others' beliefs and sexual conduct through consensus and compromise. The third level is the societal level. This refers to how social institutions and cultural moulds affect people's choice on when, why and with whom to relate to sexually. Cultural scenarios play a large part in influencing people's behavior and people consult these to guide their choices (Carpenter 2010: 161-162).

In ordinary life, there are inevitable sexuality and family related transitions which range from illness, divorce, incarceration, separation, sexual abuse, death and the like, of which people necessarily have to adopt or reject certain sexual scripts.[3] Studies have shown how the termination of marital and cohabiting relationships represents a life transition. This further makes it possible for people to adopt new sexual scripts (Wade and DeLamater 2002). Sexual scripting helps to indicate the change processes in individual sexual lives and continuity in sexual lives as people reject and select certain scripts. Due to individuals experiences in particular socio-historic contexts, individuals tend to accumulate sets of experiences which guide them in adoption and rejection of sexual scripts (Carpenter 2010:156). In general, through this approach, it is possible to explore the ways in which Agikuyu religio-cultural heritage along with personal experiences and Mumbi's interpersonal relations influenced the sexual scripts displayed.

Sexual Scripts Arising from Agikuyu Traditional Religion

The Agikuyu believe that Ngai is the creator and giver of all things. Ngai created the first man Gikuyu who is the founder of the Agikuyu communities. According to Jomo Kenyatta, the Agikuyu peoples' daily lives are infused with constant commune and relationship with spiritual entities. To him, there is a distinction between Ngai and other deities. He adds that *gothaithaya Ngai*, which means to beseech God was never said to

[3] Marsiglio and Greer also proposed to examine older men's sexuality and their sexual behavior in terms of scripts. See Marsiglio, William and Richard A. Greer (1994). A Gender Analysis of Older Men's Sexual-ity. (eds.) J. Edward, H. Thompson, and M. S. Kimmel. *Older Men's Lives*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 130.

other deities.[4] The Agikuyu believe that Ngai's abode is on Mount Kenya, who made the mountain his resting place. Ngai took the first man, Gikuyu and gave him a view of all the land he would bestow to him. Upon descending the mountain, Gikuyu met a woman named Mumbi. They married and gave birth to ten[5] daughters. They desired husbands for their daughters and so they made a sacrifice at the Mugumo tree and ten men appeared who later married the ten daughters.

Ngai is not to be disturbed unless it is really necessary (Kenyatta 1961:234-237). During prayer, the Agikuyu face Mount Kenya. This is also done whenever a sacrifice is to be made, which was commonly done under a *mugumo* tree (Kenyatta 1961:249). Traditionally, the dead were buried with their heads facing the mountain and houses also had their main entrances facing the mountain.

Agikuyu traditional pre-initiation ceremonial dances and sessions was a period when the initiates were taught the rules relating to sexual indulgence (Kenyatta 1961:155). These rules form the corpus of sexual script blueprints and guidelines at societal level and carry with them messages of what is normal and appropriate sexually. Agikuyu's traditional sexual scripts allowed for free sex between boys and girls only before circumcision and not after (Mugo 1982:20). Yet, in some instances, Agikuyu culture encouraged men and women to follow different scripts. One example is that before initiation, it was considered proper for boys to masturbate as a preparation for future sexual activity. However, masturbation among girls was considered wrong (Kenyatta 1961:162). Such is a gendered process precluding certain sexual options for women and men.

During the waiting period for boys or girls to be circumcised, parents would appoint a certain man or woman to act as a sponsor to their own son or daughter on the day of circumcision. One sexual script that was very clear is that, the sponsor was to abstain from sex for the whole period until his or her candidate is fully healed. To ensure compliance, the sponsor was required to live in close proximity to their candidate (Mugo 1982:18). Further, another sexual script was that initiates who had undergone circumcision were obligated to marry and get children. The bloodshed from their reproductive organs was a profound religious act which meant that the young people accepted to become bearers of children (Mbiti 2004:104). It was only after circumcision that boys and girls were admitted into the privileged class of womanhood and manhood. They could now be allowed to court in readiness for marriage (Mugo 1982:19).

Yet, another sexual script encouraged restricted intercourse. For this, circumcised boys and girls would mix freely and spend nights in groups together in one place. In the selected hut, they would pair up and the boy would remove all his clothing. The girl would remove only her upper garment and retain her soft leather apron pulled back

[4] Jomo Kenyatta (1937). Kikuyu Religion, Ancestor-Worship, and Sacrificial Practices. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*. Vol. 10, No. 3, 308.

[5] The prevalent confusion between having nine or ten daughters is well explained by Mugo. Mugo in his outline of Kikuyu people customs and traditions asserts that no Kikuyu would dare openly tell you that there were ten clans within the Kikuyu tribe as Kikuyu's were not used to mention living things by exact numbers let alone the number of their children. It was believed to be bad omen to whatever was being counted. Therefore, people were discouraged to say that the clans were ten for fear that this could bring a slow end to the whole tribe. See E. N. Mugo (1982). *Kikuyu people: A brief outline of their customs and traditions*. Nairobi: Kenya literature Bureau, 3.

between her legs and well fastened to effectively protect her private parts.[6] The two would then fondle each other, rubbing their breasts together and engaging in sexual conversations until they fall asleep (Kenyatta 1961:158). Mugo adds that during such encounters, a girl would never allow a young man to break her virginity, so she would sleep with her legs tightly placed together. She intentionally secured her private parts with a very tight protective covering of hard cloth or soft goat skin. To him, this was one reason why in those times it was impossible to find any fresh matured young girl bearing an illegitimate child (Mugo 1982: 21).

Another sexual script occasioned in these times was that neither a boy nor girl was to sleep with their back turned against each other, or the girl lie on top of the boy or touch his penis (Kenyatta 1961:160). Further, another sexual script from Agikuyu tradition forbade sexual relations among blood relatives or distant relatives (Mugo 1982:25; Kenyatta 1961:161). Also, any form of sexual intercourse other than that between women and men acting in the *normal way* (Italics mine) was forbidden. Kenyatta maintains that it was considered taboo to have sexual intercourse with a woman in any position except the regular, face to face (Kenyatta 1961:161).

Agikuyu religio-cultural heritage sexual scripts frown upon adultery. Many taboos and social stigma are attached to cohabitating with a married woman. One such taboo, *megiro* is of a wife having any sexual intercourse outside the homestead as it is regarded as bringing bad luck to the homestead. Nor can a wife have any sexual intercourse while her husband is away on a journey or other activities. Doing so is bringing misfortune on the husband (Kenyatta 1961:183). If a woman commits adultery, the husband is to quietly return her to her parents and claim a refund for all his bride-wealth (Mugo 1982:36). It is an offence for a wife to invite a man secretly to her hut, even a member of the age-group. Any man who breaks this rule, is punished severely. The wife is punished and taken back to her parents. If this is a repeat offense, the wife is divorced and the husband is to be refunded what he had given as bride-wealth. One saying has it that,

> Before a man embarks upon such an adventure of visiting another man's wife, it is advisable for him to arm himself, for there is no mercy for one who entices another man's wife or steals his cow (Kenyatta 1961:182).

In general, Agikuyu religious traditions prescribe sexual scripts which may be said to be traditional, those which perpetuate gender and power differences. These scripts tolerate men's infidelity but taboo any infidelity on the part of women (Brinkman 1996). The script of abstinence by girls until marriage was for the relatives and neighbors to highly value the girl. These scripts also weigh heavily on the centrality of marriage and childbearing as the focus of life, which may be overwhelming for a couple like Mumbi and Gikonyo who were childless. Indeed, it was bad fate for a Kikuyu family not to have children and even more, the blame was directed at the woman. The woman would be regarded as a useless creature who has failed to fulfill an important requirement for her life (Mugo 1982: 6).

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[6] Kenyatta states that the main concern in this relationship was to enjoy warmth and breasts. He adds that missionaries found it unbelievable that two young people would sleep together in such a manner without copulation. Jomo Kenyatta (1961). *Facing Mount Kenya.* London: Mercury, 158-159.

Mumbi's Individual and Interpersonal Sexual Scripts

Mumbi rejects Agikuyu sexual scripts which advocate for restricted intercourse in groups of age-sets. She is fully undressed by Gikonyo, pulled to the ground and caressed in the woods before marriage. Mumbi negotiates her sexual life on the basis of her individual desires which determine her sexual behavior.

Mumbi adopts Agikuyu sexual scripts that encourage wives to wait for their husbands who are away. She actually remains alone for the years that Gikonyo is in detention. Separation, incarceration and the like serve as transitional moments which present moments to create new scripts. Mumbi was well able to seek out other partners secretly but she did not. She lets Gikonyo know that she had waited for him all these years (Wa Thiong'o 2002:33). Agikuyu religio-cultural scripts have unfaithfulness on the part of the wife as an unknown (Mugo 1982:36). Mumbi was therefore expected to remain faithful in as long she was the duly married wife to Gikonyo. Regardless of his period away, she was to wait. The appropriate sexual expression required by Agikuyu culture is faithfulness on the part of wives.

Mumbi does not get pregnant by Gikonyo before his detention. The centrality of motherhood in this Kenyan community cannot be underestimated. Indeed, village life exerts pressure on married women who are childless (Maseno-Ouma 2014). According to Mbiti, marriage and childbearing are the focus of life (Mbiti 2004:106). To him, the crucial events in one's life involve the groups of basic significance to the person. A person's kinship group may involve the dead and the yet to be born.

> The arrival of a child in the family is one of the greatest blessings of life…If it is the first pregnancy for her [a woman], it assures everyone that she is able to bear children. Once that is known, her marriage is largely secure and the relatives treat her with greater respect than before (Mbiti 1975:81).

Mumbi and Gikonyo's marital sexual experiences do not yield children as yet. By the time Gikonyo is detained, Mumbi has not assured the community that she can get pregnant, neither has Gikonyo that he can father a child. Such a situation at village level brings in insecurity for the marriage at large and diminishes the level of respect that would normally be accorded such couples. The myths of creation in many communities in Africa indicate that human life started with husband and wife and it must therefore continue this very same way even as children come into the picture (Mbiti 2004:104).

Further, given that Mbiti addresses childbearing within the African context of marriage, he states,

> Marriage fulfils the obligation, the duty and the custom that every normal person should be married and bear children… Failure to get married is like committing a crime against traditional beliefs and practices… The supreme purpose of marriage according to African people is to bear children, to build a family, to extend life, and to hand down the living torch of human existence (Mbiti 1975:104-105).

The societal sexual scripts expect the couple to have children and increase the extended family. Customarily, women are looked upon solely as child bearers and servers and are often cruelly oppressed if they cannot bear children. African cultures often present a

woman as one who has to fulfill her destiny being a mother. Women without children are not accorded respect (Nasimiyu 1992). In becoming a mother, a woman renounces her personality or personal identity, she is simply referred to as 'the wife of--'or the 'mother of--'. She belongs to her husband and is thus possessed by him (Nasimiyu 1997).

Clearly, Gikonyo is childless and this is bad fate but even more to Mumbi (Mugo 1982:6). After his release from detention, he resents any physical intimacy with his wife Mumbi. He decides to live with her in the same house but never touch her. Gikonyo is unhappy in all this. In Mbiti's collection of practices and popular beliefs, he notes,

> In our traditional Society, where procreation is at the center of marriage, a childless marriage can become a most painful and embarrassing situation…traditional attitudes and philosophy of marriage make it extremely hard for a childless man to be successful and happy (Mbiti 1987:43).

Accordingly, Mbiti adds that through marriage and procreation a person becomes immortalized in African society. Indeed, this position by Mbiti has been critiqued by women writers who question what it means for an African woman to be in community and further question the link between immortality and procreation.

Mumbi lives out another sexual script at the interpersonal level. Here, she abstains from sexual relations, in the presence of her husband Gikonyo. The tensions in her marriage at the time and of which others are oblivious, leads her to renegotiate her sexual behavior. Mumbi and Gikonyo have a dysfunctional marriage after his return from detention. Though husband and wife, they live under the same roof but do not share sexual relations. What is considered usual as per Agikuyu culture and should be habitual has broken down and Mumbi now finds herself having to adapt in this situation. She does not leave Gikonyo even under such situations and lives with this for a long while. Whereas she knows what is going on, she does not tell anyone of the predicament she finds herself in as indicated below,

> Mumbi had found it difficult to tell her parents why she had left her husband. She had never told her own mother or father about the tension in which she lived: how do you go telling people that your husband has refused to sleep with you? Might they not think that he was impotent and spread damaging rumors? (Wa Thiong´o 2002:196).

This interpersonal script is clearly a rejection of Agikuyu traditional religion script that would have it otherwise, husband and wife actively seeking to bear children and nurture them together. How are Mumbi and Gikonyo going to have children if they continually abstain from sexual activity and this remains the state of affairs in their house?

Another interpersonal script becomes evident when Mumbi and Gikonyo's relationship degenerates. Violence and abuse against Mumbi becomes the order of the day. Often times, violence is tolerated by women to their own harm (Kirk and Okazawa-Rey 2004). 'Shut your mouth, woman!' Gikonyo shouts at Mumbi, also standing.

> "I'll make you shut this mouth of a whore", he cried out slapping her on the left cheek, and then on the right. ….He trembled with excitement outside the house. Nobody would hold him back. He would thrash Mumbi until she cries for mercy (Wa Thiong´o 2002:192).

Though she is physically attacked by Gikonyo who wants to beat her, his own mother intervenes and dares him to hit his wife. In Mumbi's attempts to change the situation, she takes a rebellious stance where she actively desires to be something more. This tension adds to the trouble already in the marriage and affects appropriate sexual behavior between the two.

Mumbi's encounter with Karanja highlights another sexual script at the interpersonal level. After her sexual encounter with Karanja, she confesses,

> When I woke and realized fully what had happened, I became cold, the whole body. Karanja tried to say nice things to me….I took one of his shoes and threw it at him. I ran out and could not cry…. I went to Wangari and this time I cried and I could not clearly tell her what had happened (Wa Thiong´o 2002:165).

Mumbi confesses to Mugo that she gave herself to Karanja at the time when he gave her the news of Gikonyo´s release from detention camp. This sexual encounter in her terms was but an ultimate extension of her supreme joy in hearing of her husband´s release and Karanja merely was an agent in the process. She had waited for years for her husband to return, therefore she reacts with a kind of hysteria to Karanja´s news. According to Rutere, Mumbi is redeemable. By picking Karanja´s shoe and throwing it back to him, she demonstrates her remorsefulness about the sexual encounter and disapproval for Karanja the chief, who has tormented her for quite a while (Rutere 2009).

In general, Mumbi's individual and interpersonal scripts emanate from individual desires, emotion and fantasies, though religio-cultural and social influences permeate such scripts to some degree. Mumbi's scripts help explain her construction of sexuality and the ongoing process of acquiring sexual identity. Sexual scripts are traditional when they seem to reinforce the power relations between individuals. In this case, Karanja who is now a chief in the colonial context has power over Mumbi and has information that is very important to her- the return of her husband. At the same time, these are traditional in that they decrease Mumbi's power over the sexual situation, developed through less than positive experiences (Baber 1994).

Conclusion

Sexual scripts emanating from Agikuyu religio-cultural constellations provide implicit rules and guidelines to determine sexual behavior and activities. These scripts as shown generally carry messages regarding sexual power and normalcy. However, many societies including Agikuyu culture continue to encourage women and men to follow different scripts in certain instances. The scripts offered to women being more restrictive and punitive. The whole arena of sexuality is closely linked to security as Mumbi's sexuality becomes a source of vulnerability and societal restriction. Her sexual autonomy, activities and identity meet restriction in the Agikuyu patriarchal culture even as she is branded a whore and beaten by Gikonyo. Mumbi's individual and interpersonal sexual scripts in some instances defy and antagonize those scripts provided at the Agikuyu societal level. Her life's trajectory, opportunities and constraints influence her preferences for particular scripts at the individual and interpersonal level. The sexual scripts emanating from Agikuyu culture seems to be continually contested and in some cases rejected as Mumbi negotiates her sexual life. In the end, she constructs her own scripts that signify

her needs for protection and affection. In all, she acquires a sexual identity emergent in situations and relationships that she encounters.

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Retrieving African Traditional Religion from the Fringes – Umbanda and the Brazilian Traditions as a Source

Ullrich Relebogilwe Kleinhempel

Abstract

"Bantu Religion" is an abstraction, an ideal-type of the consensus between different forms among the Bantu peoples. With the arrival of Bantu people in Brazil five centuries ago, a process of amalgamation began. Core features and structure have reasserted themselves interacting with non-Bantu religios and cultures around, assimilating ideas and practices. According to a systemic theory of syncretism this follows definite rules. It will be shown that Umbanda has preserved a core of Bantu beliefs, ritual practises and spiritual perceptions, in spite of all syncretistic adoptions. Thus Umbanda remains essentially a vital and complex Bantu Traditional Religion in a largely non-Bantu cultural environment persevering in an ongoing syncretistic process. It is thus a source for the retrieval of an ideal-type of African Traditional Religion. In this analytical perspective the comparison of rituals by the water in Umbanda and in South African Bantu culture presented in this study discloses a deeper understanding of their meaning and essence.[1]

KEY WORDS: Syncretism Studies, African Traditional Religion, Bantu Traditional Religion, Umbanda, Ritual Studies, Bantu Divination

History of Umbanda

In Brazil, Umbanda arose by creative adaptation to changing environments in a process which continues to this day. During the first 250 years of Brazil, the Bantu cultural and religious traditions fused to become a common stratum of the majority of Brazil's population, settled mostly on the coast from Rio de Janeiro in the south to the northeast. From the late 18th century onwards, the main sources of manpower shifted to West Africa. Among them the Yoruba became the most influential in Brazil.[2] Yoruba culture

[1] Originally prepared as a presentation for the *Global Africa Symposium on Africa's Indigenous Religions: Africa's Indigenous Religions: Critical Approaches to its Philosophies, Doctrines, Scholarship, Documentation and Survival through Oral and Written Traditions from Theoretical and Historical Perspectives*, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, 8th – 13th August, 2016.

[2] Pierre Verger. *Flux et reflux de la traite des Nègres entre le Golf de Bénin et Bahía de Todos os Santos du XVII au XIX siècle.* Paris, 1968.

came to supersede the Bantu stratum focused on "healing"[3] with its priestly element and cultic ritual[4] However, the Bantu elements persisted in significant structures and rituals. We will focus on these.

On Syncretism

We follow the syncretism model of Ulrich Berner.[5] Processes of syncretism follow rules determined by the systemic character of religions, distinguishing between "structural" and "semantic" elements of a religion. The concepts of "God", "deity", "spirit", "ancestor", "person", "spirited thing", "spirited place" etc. can be understood as categories and structural elements. The "semantic" aspect indicates how the specific category is filled in any concrete culture and situation. The two categories are interdependent. Usually one system becomes the "receiving system" or the dominant one, which adopts elements – semantic and also structural elements – from another. It is modified through this contact.

Complementary elements can be fused to effectively create a new system. This process might be called "synthesis".[6] The encounter can lead to a reaffirmation of the distinct identity of a system after the stage of encounter and of assimilation of elements of another system.[7] It appears that in the formation of Umbanda both processes can be observed. The Bantu religious element forms the structure and rules the subsequent processes of assimilation and integration of heterogeneous elements, of the Yoruba, the Portuguese Roman Catholic, the Amerindian and the European Esoteric elements. Umbanda, which can be understood as the result of several processes of syncretisation:

- The foundation, which is preserved in the basic structure – such as the spirit classes, and in forms of ritual - and in some "semantic" elements of ritual and of specific spirits have remained soundly Bantu, which has persisted as the "receiving" or organizing structure.
- The addition of the Yoruba Orixá deities has both semantic and structural features since Bantu (Angola/ Congo) deities have been substituted.
- Roman Catholic Christianity has added iconography and elements of ritual, such as sacraments (baptism, confession), liturgy, and most importantly, the structural element of a "parish" organisation.[8] This operates on a local level, since, by African tradition, every community ("terreiro") is independent, organised around the spiritual leader, the Pai oder Mae de Santo resp. the Babalorixa or Yalorixa, which gives Umbanda its decentral form of organisation.
- The Amerindian contribution has been disputed since there has been little direct cultural contact. The ritual use of tobacco as a semantic replacement of herbs for ritual inhalation in Bantu practise, may be a result. The adoption of a distinct class of spirits represented as (mestizo) Amerindians, the "Caboclos", indicates the recognition of "spirits of the land". This follows the Bantu mode of

[3] Claudio G. Mattes. *Afrikanische Religiosität und die Neureligionen in Brasilien*. Tübingen / Porto Alegre: Diss. Phil. Univ. of Tübingen, 2004, 79ff.

[4] idem, 105ff.

[5] Ulrich Berner. *Untersuchungen zur Verwendung des Synkretismus-Begriffs*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1982 (Veröffentlichungen des Sonderforschungsbereichs Orientalistik an der Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, vol. 2).

[6] idem, 85.

[7] ibidem

[8] Claudio G. Mattes. *Afrikanische Religiosität und die Neureligionen in Brasilien*, p. 121ff.

incorporating non- Bantu spirits, such as those of the Khoi-San,[9] a vital element of Bantu ATR, which can be seen to be still active here. The vitality of this structural element can be observed by its fluid adaptation to changing environments up to the present time, adopting and generating new spirit classes, as shown in the following.

- The incorporation of non-African classes of spirits in Umbanda, following the Bantu pattern, has brought forth a variety of spirit classes in Umbanda – understood as emanations of God supreme[10] - leaving only one class being African also in appearance: The "Old Blacks" ("Pretos Velhos/Velhas)" represent the collective spirits of the own people in the Bantu system. However, the "child spirits", the "Crianças" are also genuinely African. A new development is the class of spirits of (black) urban "shady characters", the „Malandros". Non-African are the spirits of the seafarers („Marinheiros"), the cowboys, ("Boiadeiros"), the farmers ("Baianos"), the vagrants ("Ciganos") and the Oriental people ("Orientais"), dear to Esoteric "Orientalism". Although these classes have individual representatives, identified by name, they are "collective spirits in character. "Nature spirits" and "personal ancestral spirits"[11] are lacking. These Bantu spirit categories have gone lost (almost completely).
- European Esotericism has influenced Umbanda through Kardecism, the spiritual spiritist doctrine established as a powerful religious community in Brazil form the late 19th century onwards. The African world view resonated well with European Spiritism. In the early 20th century Umbanda surfaced from the Afro-Brazilian sphere into the Kardecist circles,[12] thus entering "European" discourse.
- The "Orientalist" current of Esotericism introduced Hindu elements, like the notion of a fine-mattered sheath, in Kardecist terminology: the "perispirito",[13] or the idea of "chakras". Likewise the Esoteric idea of an "informational field" of a person which may be "purified".
- "Nature spirituality" of late 20th century Esotericism with its ecological ideas and its pantheistic/panentheistic view of the divine, entered Umbanda, reinterpreting the African religious ideas.

Yet Umbanda remains solidly of ATR character. Neither is it the result of processes of deterioration of the African cultural heritage experienced by urbanised populations, and a sociologically determined "invention" of the early 20th century, as suggested by Roger Bastide,[14] nor a "fusion" between Kardecism and Candomblé as suggested by

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[9] David Lewis-Williams and David Pearce. *San Spirituality – Roots, Expressions and Social Consequences*. Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2014, 215ff.

[10] Francisco Rivas Neto (Babá Rivas T'Ogyion). *Religioes Afro-Brasilerias - A Divindade Suprema-Espíritos*

[video]. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Oeh0hd2ec4 (uploaded on: 9. 10. 2011).

[11] John S. Mbiti. *Introduction to African Religion*. Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1991 (2nd rev. ed.), 70ff.

[12] Diamantino Fernandes Trindade (Hanamatan). *Umbanda e a Sua História*. São Paulo: Ícone Editora Ltda., 1991,

53ff.

[13] Manoel Lopes, (ed.). *Textos Doutrinários do Núcleo de Estudos Espirituais Mata Verde, publicados no Blog de Estudos durante o período de 2010 a 2014*. Santos, S. P., 2014, 111. URL:

http://mataverde.org/arquivos/livro_textos_doutrinarios.pdf

[14] Roger Bastide. "Mémoire collective et sociologie du bricolage". 1970. URL: http://classiques.uqac.ca/contemporains/bastide_roger/memoire_collective_socio_bricolage/memoire_collect ive_socio_bricolage.pdf

Diana DeGroat Brown,[15] which would make Umbanda a product of sociological movements of the 20th century,[16] essentially without consistency and self-assertive identity in history, reaching far back into the African past. These studies ignore the systemic properties of African Traditional Religion leading to a misrepresentation of Umbanda as a historically disconnected epi-phenomenon of an identity crisis of marginalised urban poor.[17]

Consequences for Interpretation

Umbanda has creatively integrated various environmental influences into African Traditional set of structure, ritual, cosmology and anthropology. Inevitably some features have been lost or diminished in this process. In view of this dynamic development of Umbanda with it recurrent movements of realigning with the African "roots",[18] there is no need to assume a "fraying out" or distancing from the African origin as inevitable. Such tendencies do occur in the migration of Umbanda from predominantly ethnically "African" milieus to those of mainly European descent.[19] However, deliberate intents to re-establish the African essence are observable in the instructional videos of the founder of the first academic institution of Umbanda, the *Faculdade de Teologia Umbandista* (FTU) in Sao Paulo, Francisco Rivas Neto (Babá Rivas T'Ogyion).[20] Here Umbanda enters the field of academic studies through the Umbandistic scholars, as in instructional video of the FTU on the position of Umbanda to the role of the body.[21] Positions of Umbanda are introduced to contemporary psychology[22] or anthropology – whereby an integration of positions of both West African and Bantu positions of African Traditional Religion is pursued.[23] The implications of this process of "academization" of Umbanda[24] are reflected by the actors themselves.[25]

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[15] Diana DeGroat Brown. *Umbanda: Religion and Politics in Urban Brazil.* New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1986.

[16] Diana Espirito Santo. "Entités fluides. Une ontologie de la transformation des terreiros d'Umbanda à Rio de Janeiro" [conference presentation]. [date: before 2013]. URL: https://www.academia.edu/13295224/Entit%C3%A9s_fluides

[17] Fernando Giobellina Brumana and Elda Gonzales Martinez. *Spirits from the Margin. Umbanda in Sao Paulo.* Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Uppsaliensis, 1989.

[18] Véronique Boyer. "Le don et l'initiation. De l'impact de la littérature sur les cultes de possession au Brésil". In: *L'Homme*, 1996, tome 36 n°138, 16f. URL: http://www.persee.fr/docAsPDF/hom_0439- 4216_1996_num_36_138_370072.pdf

[19] Ullrich R., Kleinhempel. "The socio-cultural migration of Umbanda - challenges for interpretation". Presentation at the XXI Quinquennial World Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR), Erfurt, Germany, August 23-29, 2015. URL: https://www.academia.edu/15353533/Presentation_The_socio-cultural_migration_of_Umbanda_-_challenges_for_interpretation._at_XXI_Quinquennial_World_Congress_of_the_International_Association_for_the_History_of_Religions_IAHR_Erfurt_Germany_August_23-29_2015

[20] Francisco Rivas Neto (Babá Rivas T'Ogyion). [videolist], URL: https://www.youtube.com/user/pairivas/videos (as of 8th July, 2016).

[21] Francisco Rivas Neto (Babá Rivas T'Ogyion). *Religioes Afro-Brasileiras: sacralização do corpo* [video]. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iKO3miUSck (uploaded on 23.08.2012).

[22] Francisco Rivas Neto (Babá Rivas T'Ogyion). *As religiões afro-brasileiras e o inconsciente* [video]. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KgbLc9Sq45Q (uploaded on: 23. 10. 2010) and idem: [video] 0:02 / 9:41 *Iniciação como terapia da alma*, URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mGuRG0DOsl0 (uploaded on: 16. 06. 2010).

[23] Francisco Rivas Neto (Babá Rivas T'Ogyion). *Teologia Afro-Brasileira: Ori-Bara* [video]. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nsO_lTBzp-A (uploaded on 11. 6. 2011).

Observations on the Sources of Studies on Umbanda and on Bantu African Traditional Religion: the Issue of Secrecy and of Ritual Knowledges

Over the course of the 20th century a body of literature about Umbanda has been written, mostly by adherents of the faith, covering belief, history and cultural aspects. However little has been written about the details of ritual, due to the "arcane discipline" by which the secrets of Umbanda are safeguarded by the ritual communities and passed on through personal initiation to cult leaders. This is sacred knowledge which is not to be divulged to the uninitiated. Accordingly even knowledgeable books for the instruction of adherents of the faith[26] remain vague when it comes to details of ritual practise.

Fortunately a need is being felt in Umbanda to safeguard its coherence and to remedy deficits of knowledge. A manual of Umbanda of 1984, reinterpreting the ritual and doctrine in esoteric terms,[27] provides details on the rites by the waterfall, which are essential to Umbanda and to Bantu ATR. The same applies to the huge body of video recordings of sequences of Umbanda ritual which are available on the internet. Some familiarity with Umbanda is necessary to locate them in their context.

Bantu Traditional Religion has the same principles of secrecy. Practises have a degree of fluidity, with forms like the possession cults spreading in the southern Bantu realms over the past decades,[28] Instead of one "canonical" form, archetypes of ritual may rather be identified. Literature on details of Bantu rituals of traditional religion is quite sparse. The comprehensive bibliography "African Traditional Religion in South Africa"[29] yields few titles dedicated to these issues.

The Rites by the Waterfall: a Traditional African Ritual in Umbanda and in Bantu Traditional Religion: Common Features and Diversity

The hermeneutical model of understanding Umbanda ritual by comparison with rites of African Traditional Religion in a mutual process of elucidation can be applied to a central rite both of Umbanda and of Bantu traditional religion, the rites by the waterfalls. They appear in two contexts: as part of initiations of individuals experiencing a special

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[24] Ullrich R. Kleinhempel. "Contemporary Mysteries' Cult of Umbanda - video lecture, 8th ASEM conference".

[presentation delivered at:] *The 8th ASEM International Conference "Mystic and Esoteric Movements in Theory and Practice: Mysticism and Esotericism in the World of Technology", St. Petersburg, 24. – 26. 3. 2016*, АИЭМ (eds.). URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5g2E7glQyAs&list=PLJM0tVbQE3ubVNQQSFYEqA68ho1J-MCe&index=18

[25] Rivas Neto, Francisco (Babá Rivas T'Ogyion), *Religiões Afro-Brasileira – os terreiros na academia* [video], URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YK6xJQvK7pg (uploaded on 31. 3. 2013).

[26] De Campos Vieira , Lurdes and Rubens Saraceni. *Manual doutrinário, ritualistico e comportamental Umbandista*. Sao Paulo: Editora Madras, 2009.

[27] Vera Braga de Souza Gomes. *Umbanda sem Estigmas – Fundamentos Esotéricos do Ritual da Umbanda*. Rio de Janeiro: Mudra, 1984.

[28] Johann Kriel. "Be(com)ing a cult member or spirit medium: the Malopo cult in South Africa revisited". Paper presented at the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) conference EASA08 on: *Experiencing diversity and mutuality,* 26 – 29th August, 2008, Ljubljana, 26/08/2008 – 29/08/2008.

[29] David Chidester, Chirevo Kwenda, Robert Petty, Judy Tobler and Darrel Warren, *African Traditional Religion in South Africa – an Annotated Bibliography,* London, 1997: Greenwood Press (Bibliographies and Indexes in Religious Studies, Number 42).

calling and as general rituals for the lay public. Water is held to be a medium of spiritual power, in rites of purification, blessing, healing, prayer for fertility and initiation. The seaside, rivers and waterfalls are sites for rituals with specific meaning and powers. They are associated with specific spiritual and divine beings.[30]

The Rites by the Waterfall in Bantu Culture: Initiation and Spiritual Reinforcement

It is believed that a world of spirits exists under the waters, who manifest themselves to chosen ones and who can be contacted here. Initiates may experience to be abducted under the waters in visions. The spirits may take the form of mermaids and of snakes, seen in visions or recognised in unusual appearances in nature.

The South African psychiatrist and psychoanalyst B. J. F. Laubscher, who practised in a rural area of South Africa in the realm of the AmaXhosa wrote about this issue:

> "The Abantubomlambo is a race of people who live in a world of their own underneath the deep pools of the flowing river.. . . They have a "call" for earth people and he who receives this call will be unable to resist it. Only he or she will her the call and no one else, for it is heard inside the head, although some may think it comes through the ears. Often someone who hears the call is restless for days and wanders about aimlessly and then suddenly runs to the river or deep pool and plunges into it. .... The Xhosa Isanuses describe many facets of this strange experience of ukutwasa, the chief characteristic however, remains an awareness of things and events far beyond the world of our senses. ... At times he is away from home for days, but since they know he is twasa [literally:"sick"- a trancelike state in initiation] they are not worried."[31]

This role of the Abantubomlambo for initiation at river pools, especially by waterfalls has a central position in the spiritual and historical biography of the Zulu emperor Shaka (Chaka) kaSenzangakhona (1787 – 1828) by Thomas Mofolo (1876 – 1948), a BaSotho author. The author clearly assumes that his readers are familiar with the cosmology and rites. Shaka's destiny unfolds under the supervision and guidance of diviners, who "realise" the spiritual aspect of his personality and powers, but he himself is no diviner.

The first extract from Mofolo's book describes the prescriptions which Shaka's mother Nandi receives from a diviner for her son: Mofolo tells that "*a woman doctor at Bungane's who was very famous for her knowledge of charms*" is called to give the infant boy, destined to be king, some potent charms and medicine. She predicts Shaka's extraordinary future destination and powers.

> "She gave Nandi a medicine horn and said, 'Always when the moon is about to die you must bathe this child at the river very early in the morning, before the sun has risen, …, you must take some of this medicine with your fingers and

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[30] Penelope Bernard, "Sacred Water Sites and Indigenous Healers in Southern Africa: The Need to Protect.

Knowledge, Nature and Resource Rights", [presentation at:] *Indigenous Knowledge Conference*, 2001, URL: http://iportal.usask.ca/purl/IKC-2001-Bernard.pdf

[31] Bernard J.F. Laubscher. *The Pagan Soul.* London: Neville Spearman Ltd., 1975, 23ff.

27.

> anoint his head with it. You must anoint only the centre of the head where the child's heart throbs; be sure to anoint also this tuft of hair which is never to be shaved off. Bathe him in a large river not a small one. When this child is already grown … whenever he gets into the water, you must go away from him and wait in a place that is out of view, and you are never to go to him unless he calls you. He on the other hand, must not shout when he calls you, he rather should whistle. If he should see something that frightens him while he is in the water, on no account must he run away, regardless of whatever may appear. You for your part, must never, even on a single day, ask him what he has seen. Rather let him volunteer of his own accord to tell you.'"[32]

This passage reveals some ritual details: The bath in the river has to be made at an appointed time before sunrise in solitude. It prepares for the future vision in a pool beneath a waterfall. Both realms are connected spiritually. The flowing water of a strong river is spiritually important. The ritual bath, to be performed silently, is accompanied by the anointment of the top of the head with magic medicine. All of these elements are also practised in Umbanda initiatory sequences.

This regular ritual performance prepares Chaka for his initiatory vision and spiritual "empowerment" as a young man of which Mofolo tells:

> "It was once again Chaka's day for rising early and going to the water, and indeed he went at the earliest light of dawn. His mother, being conscious of the evil spirit among the people, went with him… Chaka washed himself. It happened that, as he was about to finish, the tuft of hair on his head shivered and shook, and the skin under it felt warm and it rippled very quickly, and just as suddenly as it began, everything was quiet again, dead still ... High up from the place where he stood was a tremendous waterfall, and at the bottom of that waterfall, right by him, was an enormous pool … in this pool the waters was pitch dark, intensely black. On the opposite bank, directly from where he was but inside the water, was a yawning cave … a little way from where it began, the water was covered by a very dense growth of reeds … Chaka once again splashed himself vigorously with the water, and at once the water of this side of the river billowed and hen levelled off. Then it swelled higher and higher till he was sure it was going to cover him, and he walked towards the bank. … The water subsided and the wind died down. In the centre of that wide dark green pool the water began to ripple gently, and it was evident that there was something enormous moving under it … Stricken by fright, Chaka shut his eyes so that, if that snake intended to kill him it should kill him with his eyes closed, avoiding looking in its face. Slowly he raised his hand and grabbed the tuft of hair, which he had been told to hold tight if very frightened; at the same time he whistled gently to call his mother. . . . When eventually Chaka opened his eyes, he realised that it had not touched him, he saw the snake, its eyes still gazing straight into his … A small column of thick mist arose from the deep pool … and then out of the reeds over there something boomed with a heavy stentorious voice: 'Mphu-mphu hail, mighty monster in the water, / It is seen only by the favoured ones / It is seen by those who will rule over nations.'"[33]

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[32] Thomas Mofolo. *Chaka.* (translated from the SeSotho original, Morija, Lesotho, 1925, by Daniel P. Kunene). Oxford: Heinemann Educational Books, 1981, 8f.

[33] Idem, 21 – 24.

The messenger snake – commissioned by the ancestors or by the "river people" as nature spirits - makes Chaka die a symbolic death and enwraps him to convey its powers to him. The whistling has connotations of spirit mediumship, since collective ancestral spirits are said to communicate in this way.[34] After this vision, the diviner who had been his mentor at a distance passes her responsibilities for Chaka into a successor. who appears in the next spiritual sequence of Chaka's preparations.

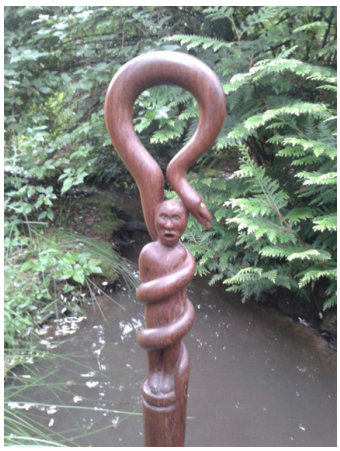

Image 1*: symbolic staff, wood carving o the VhaVenda people, Limpopo Province, SA, 2014*, *private photo U. R. Kleinhempel.*

Initiatory pilgrimages are made to rock pools or waterfalls, at sites where the "ancestors", the "Badimo" who have divine mediators, can be contacted repeatedly by diviners to reinforce their spiritual powers and their calling."[35] The same applies in Umbanda.

In Umbanda rituals by the waterfall occur in two distinct contexts: in the process of initiation, in a setting called "Camarinha": here the initiates are brought to a waterfall on the first day of a week of seclusion and of special rites, for purification.[36] Mediums and the spiritual leaders come together in regular intervals, for periods of secluded spiritual exercises, to reinforce their contact with the divine entities and spirits. In these sessions, ritual visits to rivers and waterfalls are important. They alternate with ritual liturgies, "giras" and with periods of silence.

[34] Penelope Bernard. "Sacred Water Sites and Indigenous Healers in Southern Africa: The Need to Protect
Knowledge, Nature and Resource Rights"

[35] Philip Nel. "African spirituality and space". In: Post, Paul, Philip Nel and Wouter van Beek (eds.). Sacred Spaces and Contested Identities – Space and Ritual Dynamics in Europe and Africa. Trento, N.J.: African World Press, 2014, p. 288.

[36] "*Tudo sobre a nação nagô* [Blog], entry: "Almas e Angola", 27th September, 2009. URL: http://catiacmam-tuosobreanaonag.blogspot.de/2009/09/almas-e-angola.html

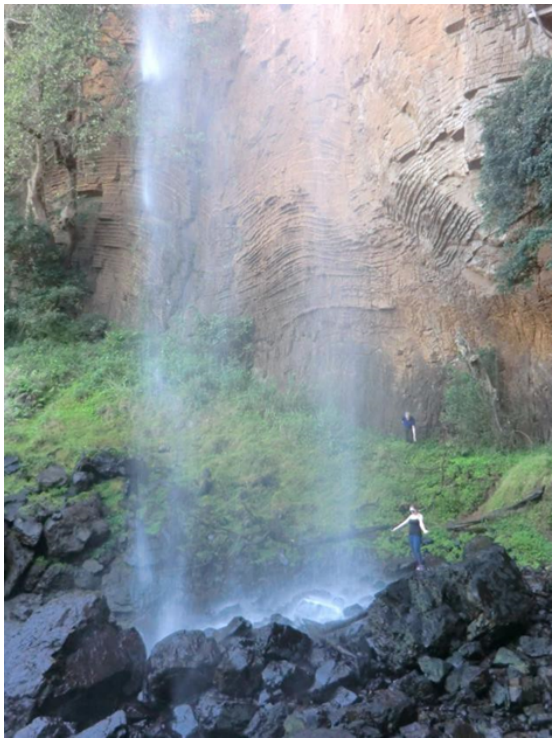

Image 2: *"Bridal Veil Falls" in Mpumalanga, SA, a religious site of ATR. private photo, U. R. Kleinhempel, 2014*

Pilgrimages to sacred sites, such as waterfalls, has also been preserved in churches of the African Initiated type (ATR). The continuity between ATR and Christian churches of the AIC type has been well described by A. I. Berglund.[37] He also mentions the importance of the "heavenly Princess", Nomkhubulwana, who is associated with the mist and with fertility.[38] Of her, it is said:

> "'She loves human beings. So she opens up the heaven…. That is when the rainbow is seen. … The princess surely loves us. Now the rain will stop and give us sunshine. Then after a time she will bring rain again'. … At least one end of the rainbow always stands on the earth, the base buried in a deep pool of water in which lives a snake with as many colours as the rainbow…. Diviners and heaven-herds are said to take careful note in which pool in a river the arch of the rainbow ends, so that they know where the snake is to be found."[39]

Symbolic attributes link the Heavenly Princess to the realms of rain, of the rock pools and to the "Abantu Bomlambo", the "river people", and to the large snake as their representative.[40] The link of the Heavenly Princess to fertility accounts for a special cause of pilgrimage. Prayer for fertility is one of the prime themes of womens' prilgrimage to waterfalls.[41] The traditional rites associated with Nomkhubulwana are being revived and

[37] Axel-Ivar Berglund. *Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism*. (Studia Missionalia Upsaliensia, 22), London: C. Hurst, 1976.

[38] Idem, 69.

[39] Idem, 70.

[40] Penelope Bernard. "Sacred Water Sites and Indigenous Healers in Southern Africa: The Need to Protect Knowledge, Nature and Resource Rights".

[41] Philip Nel. "African spirituality and space"„ p. 282.

re-enacted in South Africa, in the context of African Initiated Churches, in a form of syncretism,[42]

In Umbanda the visits to waterfalls are also connected to the Orixa Oxum. Here apparently the Bantu Heavenly Princess has been aligned with the Yoruba deity of motherhood and of love, Oxum. Her rituals at waterfalls are popular in Brazil, with songs dedicated to her. These rituals are open to the general public.

Comparison with Umbanda Rites by the Waterfall

The special significance of the ritual by the waterfalls is described in a handbook of Umbanda by Vera Braga de Souza Gomes as follows:

> "Macaia. Name given to a ceremony enacted in direct contact with Nature, generally in forests where there is a waterfall. Its objective is to fortify the mediumistic faculties, to remove negative fluids [i.e. a Kardecist concept] from all participants and to transfer more "aché" [also: "axé": a Yoruba concept denoting vital spiritual energy – a key word of Afro-American religions] or, be it, more spiritual power to the spirits attached to the "terreiro" [i.e. the ritual community]. It has a high esoteric value because the intimateness with the virgin energies, in the site of origin, allows a full use of their energies. Mediumism is developed through most extended exercises and is fortified by the "lavagem de cabeça" [i.e. the " washing of the head"] in the waterfall. The occasion is taken for certain obligations of devotion, to consolidate (ritual) works done before, by the washing of the "guias" [i.e. the ritual beaded necklaces which bear specific spiritual powers of those spiritual entities with whom the wearer has come into contact in the course of initiation] and to perform any act of magic of major portent, which demands the utilisation of forces taken directly at the original source. …The natural energetic components of the water of a waterfall are taken to reinvigorate the crown chakra [- note the Hindu concept -], by which consequently the mediumistic faculties are perfected. They are also indicated to remove any negative vibrations of the aura. [- note the esoteric concepts.] The washing of the head with the purpose of fortifying and purifying the "median" [- note the Hindu anthropology -], which is also called "firmeza", a name given to a special "imantação" [i.e. a ritual "magnetisation" with the specific spiritual energies of a deity or spirit] for security of/by the cult houses. The Macaia is also considered to be confirming for the Spiritual Entities to provide them an environment free of human contamination, full of pure emanations to which they are accustomed, which is favourable to their acquiring a greater vigour. The ceremony has variable duration. Generally it begins in the first hours of the day, lasting until the evening. When they enter the forest the Umbanda adherents usually sing a hymn in which they ask permission to enter and to perform the solemn rite. Thus they avoid that the Beings of Nature feel that their realms are invaded and interfered with, disturbing them. Since the forests contain positive and negative forces, the good outcome of a Macaia depends on the precautions with which it is enacted. To assure that only spirits of light are attracted the leader fulfils beforehand a series of ritual obligations. The mediums in turn must

[42] Carol Anne Muller. *Rites of Fertility and the Sacrifice of Desire – Nazarite Womens' performance in South Africa*. Chicago: Chicago Univ. Pr., 1999, 164.

> prepare with special baths for the physical and spiritual hygiene, and contribute to the upliftment of the environment."[43]

This text shows numerous correspondences with the description by Thomas Mofolo. In particular, the special significance of the top of the head, the "crown chakra" for the effect and experience of the rite by the waterfall may be pointed out, with the idea of a connection between what happens and is felt inside the body with what happens spiritually at the ritual site. Then too, the time of beginning, before dawn and the notion of special spiritual entities residing by the waterfall are noteworthy. However, the aspect of perceiving the rock-pools at waterfalls as "gates to the otherworld" appears to be largely lost, when the "spirits" are redefined as "energies". Here the transition from the African traditional cosmology to that of Esotericism – which is incomplete though – makes itself felt. In consequence, the visionary aspect and the ritual approach to an otherworldly realm are diminished from awareness. They are preserved in much of ritual though.

A video of a ritual of Umbanda by a waterfall (water rapids) for the spiritual reinforcement, shows significant details, which are also practised in Bantu culture. Its title: "*Homenagem da oxum e obrigação de cabeça*[44]*"* combines the elements of spiritual reinforcement with veneration of Oxum. At 22:48 mins. submersion in the water to bless the medium and the ritual beads, the „guias" he is wearing, is shown, at 22:57 anointment of the head with "spiritual medicine", with specially prepared and blessed herbs soaked in water at 25:07 blessing with white chalk ("Pemba") on the head, the hands and the neck. In Umbanda Pemba is used in ritual to mark participants,[45] whereas it is used to daube the face or body white during transitory periods of initiation in Bantu cultures. In Bantu culture, "whiteness defines the special transitional status of the sufferer-novice in the course toward health."[46]

Image 3: blessing with Pemba

[43] De Souza Gomes, Vera Braga. *Umbanda sem Estigmas – Fundamentos Esotéricos do Ritual da Umbanda*. Rio de Janeiro: Mudra, 1984, 214f.

[44] *Homenagem da oxum e obrigação de cabeça* [video]. By: William Mallmann, 17. 12. 2013. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zlPbRqm_B0

[45] Francisco Rivas Neto (Babá Rivas T'Ogyion). [video], *Ifá et pemba são fundamentais na Umbanda esotérica*. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jHh00uern7w (uploaded on 17. 6. 2013).

[46] John Janzen. *Ngoma - Discourses of Healing in Central and Southern Africa*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1992, 101. URL: https://muse.jhu.edu/book/25901

Conclusions

The dynamic development of Umbanda requires "informed analysis" to discern the elements of African Traditional religion through the permutations which they have undergone in response to changing environments, as discussed above. However, a fascinating aspect is to observe, how the core "system" of African Traditional Religion in Umbanda, and the Bantu element in it in particular, are responding to changing epistemological and cultural environments, by which Umbanda and ATR move beyond the boundaries of their original cultural realms, reasserting themselves in the process.

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Convoluted Pentecost? An Analysis of Akan Indigenous Worldviews in Ghanaian Pentecostal-Charismatic Praxes

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Abstract

In this paper, I argue that the reason for the success and the failure of Pentecostalism on the African continent, particularly in Ghana, is because of its interaction with the Akan indigenous cosmology. A critical examination of this on-going phenomenon begs the question as to whether this interaction between Akan indigenous and Pentecostal world-views could be convoluted, considering the myriads of practices that take place in churches identified with this strand of Christianity? There is also a critical examination of the sociological posture of Pentecostal-Charismatic churches arising from its praxes and the needed socio-theological response to correct them.

KEY WORDS: Akan, Pentecostal, Indigenous Religions, Sociotheological, Culture, Sociological Posture, Continuity, Charismatic

Introduction

Perhaps as its antecedent in the biblical narrative, Pentecost was marked with some kind of confusion when there was 'a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind', 'cloven tongues of fire' on those gathered at the upper room, each filled with the Holy Spirit as each was given utterance', and people from different countries around the world gathered, could hear the sermon of the Apostle Peter in their own language and asked, 'what is the meaning of this? It seems that the same question is fundamentally still being asked by observers and some insiders alike of Pentecostal-Charismatic churches due to some problematic praxes within the churches.

In spite of trying to make sense of some of the problematic praxes, in the last half century Pentecostal-Charismatic churches have become dominant on the landscape of Christianity in Africa and Ghana in particular. These Churches often described as Pentecostal-Charismatic now 'defy any rigid categorization since a whole range of churches, which emphasise the continuous reality of the power and manifestations of the Holy Spirit in church life qualify to be described as Pentecostal-Charismatic'.[1]

[1] Kwabena J. Amanor, "Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches in Ghana and the African Culture: Confrontation or Compromise"? *Journal of Pentecostal Theology 18,* (2009): 123–140.

'African Pentecostalism' has been described as a term used very broadly to include 'Pentecostal mission churches' which was started by white Pentecostal missionaries in the early twentieth century. 'Independent Pentecostal churches' initiated by native Africans, and 'indigenous Pentecostal-type churches' have historically, theologically been linked liturgically with the Pentecostal movement, all of which highlight the demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit in the church.[2]

Pentecostalism in Ghana has similar characteristics. It involves Western mission initiated or Western sponsored churches such as the Assemblies of God Churches, the Apostolic Church and the Church of Pentecost; Prophet-healing or indigenous churches initiated by Africans, collectively known as, African Initiated Churches (AICs), such as, the Apostles Revelations Society, and the Musama Disco Christo Church, and the latter day independent charismatic churches, the leading ones including the International God's Way Church, Victory Bible Church, International Central Gospel Church, Believers of Anointed Palace Chapel, Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre Church, Royalhouse Chapel International, Action Chapel International, Perez Chapel International, the Lighthouse Chapel, International and the Calvary Charismatic Church. The Pentecostal-charismatic renewal has claimed the largest following in Africa, moving into every denomination of the Church. It has become one of the most significant expressions of Christianity in Africa.[3]

This phenomenal growth of Pentecostal-Charismatic churches has led to creation of more 'sacred spaces' for these congregations where purpose built leisure centres, schools, offices, and industrial buildings are being converted partly or entirely into sacred places of worship.[4] Perhaps this is because of the shift in the point of greatest importance and activity of the Christian faith in Africa[5]. The astounding growth of African Christianity since the turn of the twentieth century has served to confirm Barrett's observation that 'by AD 2000 the centre of gravity of the Christian faith would have shifted markedly southwards, not only resulting in Christianity becoming the dominant religion of Africa, but also its context would transform into a primarily non-Western faith.[6]

Further, the reason Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity has earned the credential of being a non-Western faith is paradoxically rooted in its immediate religious past. The Indigenous religions of Africa, have acted both as midwife and mother of Pentecostalism. In other words, the Indigenous religions created viable contexts for its emergence and subsequent growth. However, the indigenous religious context also poses significant challenges to Pentecostalism where certain indigenous practices have found its way into the latter. I examine the ethos of the African Indigenous Religions, focusing on Akan Indigenous Cosmologies and Communities as a context, and specifically analyse examples of the indigenous religious world views in Pentecostal praxis such as:

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[2] A.H. Anderson, "BAZALWANE: African Pentecostals in South Africa", in A.H. Anderson, *African Pentecostalism and the Ancestors: Confrontation or Compromise*?, A Paper read at the Annual Conference of the Southern African Missiological Society, January (1993): 2.

[3] Gerrie te Haar, "Standing Up for Jesus: A Survey of New Developments in Christianity in Ghana", Exchange 23.3 (1994): 221-40; Asamoah-Gyadu, J. K. 'The Church in the African State: The Pentecostal/Charismatic Experience in Ghana', Journal of African Christian Thought 1.2 (1998): 51-57 (51); Gifford Paul, *African Christianity: Its Public Role.* (London: Hurst, 1998), pp. 31.

[4] J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics : Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana.* (Leiden : Brill, 2005), pp. 27.

[5] David B. Barrett, "Ad 2000 : 350 Million Christians in Africa," *International Review of Mission* 59, 233 (1970).

[6] Asamoah-Gyadu, "African Charismatics", pp.9.

divination, warding off of malevolent spirits, spiritual power demonstration and libation recitations in one breath; the dangers of the contemporary sociological posture of the churches; and the practical socio-theological response to avoid permanent damage to Pentecostalism.

Akan Indigenous Cosmologies and Communities in Context

The Akans form the largest ethnic group in Ghana. They include the Akyem, Asante, Akwamu, Akuapem, Brong, Assin, Denkyira, Wassa who speak the Twi language. The core of the religious ideas of the Akan can be applicable to the various ethnic groups of Ghana and generally to the traditional African perception of reality as a whole.[7] The Akan hold the view that their world is inhabited by powerful supernatural forces that affect their daily lives in the realm of the living either for evil or for good. The interaction between the spirit realm and the realm of humans gives room to mediums such as priests and priestesses (Akomfo) of the shrines, medicine men (Adinsifo), to play a mediatory role between the world of humans and of the spirits. The Akan hold a dualistic world-view that is 'interpenetrating and inseparable, yet with distinguishable parts.[8] Meaning, the Akan believe in the existence of two worlds, which are in constant interaction with one another, and occurrences in each affect the other and yet are distinct from each other. The two realms are engaged through revelations and responses as humans search for salvation in a precarious world'.[9]

Besides the expressions of their relationships with these distinct but interpenetrating worlds, the Akan believe in one Supreme Being who is *Onyankopɔn.*[10] This is contrary to the observations of the early missionaries, that the Akan's are polytheistic.[11]However, there are gods who serve as mediums between the supreme being and them. These entities have varying levels of involvement and reverence in the life of the people from domestic to community-wide roles.

The idea that the gods are involved in the community of the, is emulated by the Akan who sees himself or herself first as an integral part of a community before considering his or her individuality.[12] This sense of community is essential to the existence of Ghanaian traditional societies, because it defines its shared humanity on the basis of communality. It is to that effect that Mbiti in his *African Religions and Philosophy,* states that:

> Traditional religions are not primarily for the individual but for his community of which he is part. To be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do

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[7] Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi, "The Nature of Continuity and Discontinuity of Ghanaian Pentecostal Concept of Salvation in African Cosmology", *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 5, 1 (2002):88.

[8] Cyril C. Okorɵcha, *The Meaning of Religious Conversion in Africa : The Case of the Igbo of Nigeria.* (Aldershot : Avebury, 1987): 52.

[9] J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "'The Evil You Have Done Can Ruin the Whole Clan': African Cosmology, Community, and Christianity in Achebe's Things Fall Apart", *Studies in World Christianity* 16, 1 (2010): 52.

[10] Johannes Christaller, *Theology and Identity : The Impact of Culture Upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa.* (Oxford : Regnum Books,1992): 291-292.

[11] Edward Geoffrey Parrinder, *West African Religion : Illustrated from the Beliefs and Practices of the Yoruba, Ewe, Akan and Kindred Peoples.* (London : Epworth Press, 1949., 1949): 12.

[12] Harry Sawyerr and John Parratt, *The Practice of Presence* (Grand Rapids : W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1996): 117.

> so involve participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of the community, and in traditional society there are no irreligious people. A person cannot detach himself from the religion of his group, for to do so is to be severed from his roots, his foundation, his context of security, his kinships and the entire group of those who make him aware of his own existence. To be without one of these corporate elements of life is to be out of the whole picture.[13]

To complete the cycle of harmony in any community there is the need to be at peace with the gods and with fellow members of one's community. The ancestors are happy, the vital force is strong, and there is harmony in the land and in creation.[14] And any individual said to disturb this harmony could be seen as an enemy of the community, as epitomised by Okwonko, a character in Achebe's '*Things Fall Apart*'.[15] Instances where cosmic disharmony and imbalance occur, the elders and leaders of families and clans resort to appeasing the ancestors and god's by performing certain specific rituals to avert the imminent consequences.

Indigenous Religions Contexts and Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches

There have been scholars such as Miller who in the past have described African societies as animistic and claimed that the recognition of spirits in their cosmology means that they serve many spirits and therefore the emphasis of the Holy Spirit in Pentecostalism, 'has a liberating impact on people who experience themselves as being controlled by multiple spirits'.[16] Others trivialise the whole phenomenon of the growth and rapid spread of Pentecostal-Charismatic churches as an 'Americanisation', which shows the lack of understanding of African indigenous societies.[17] These assertions in themselves undermine the understanding of Gifford, Miller and other Western observers and writers about the context within which these Pentecostal-Charismatics find their expression - the indigenous African society. This lack of understanding by Western scholars such as Gifford is the source of the agitation for a Christianity that fit into the African religious worldview.[18]

Contrary to these Western scholars, Pentecostalism may have partially fulfilled the conditions for growth for any religion in our world today: its ability 'to include and transform at least certain elements of preexisting religions, which still retain a strong grip on the cultural subconscious demands', and its predisposition to 'equip people to live in rapidly changing societies'.[19]

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[13] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy.* (London : Heinemann, 1969), pp. 2.

[14] Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion : The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll : Orbis Books, 1997), pp. 81.

[15] Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart / Chinua Achebe*, African Writers Series: 1 (London : Heinemann, 1958).

[16]Donald Miller, "The New Face of Global Christianity: The Emergence of the Progressive Pentecostalism" An interview published by the Pew Research Centre, April 2006. See http://www.pewforum.org/2006/04/12/the-new-face-of-global-christianity-the-emergence-of-progressive-pentecostalism. Accessed on 25.10.2015.

[17] Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role.* (Hurst; Indiana Univ Pr, 1998).

[18] Ogbu U. Kalu "Yabbing the Pentecostals: Paul Gifford's Image of Ghana's New Christianity", *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology 15*, 1 (2005), pp. 3-15.

[19] Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century.* (London: Cassell, 1996), pp. 219.

To this end, it is therefore not surprising that the beliefs and praxis of Pentecostal-Charismatics in Ghana has been influenced by the indigenous religions, as the world-view developed by people within the concurrent and intertwining contexts of the indigenous religions and Christianity persist with them and cannot be repressed. Fields note, 'though it is not difficult by warfare, foreign administration, modern industry and other means, to smash up an ancient religious organisation, the ideas which sustained it are not easily destroyed. They are only disbanded, vagrant and unattached. But given sufficient sense of need, they will mobilise again'[20]. Therefore, it makes sense to say, Pentecostalism is an inculturated Christianity.[21] As its history of recent times suggests that there has been a blurring of the differences that were so prominent regarding liturgy and practice of mainline historic churches from that of the neo-Pentecostal churches.[22] The indigenous religious worldviews to an extent have shaped the beliefs and practices of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity, and this trend has not been confined to Pentecostal-Charismatic churches. It is a 'supra-denominational phenomenon, because of the appeal to primal expectations'.[23] Further, Gyekye encapsulates this fact of this discussion by stating that,

> Traditional African religions do not appear to be concerned about the kind of life that will be led by the immortal soul. They present no elaborate doctrines about what are referred to in other religions as 'the last things' (in Western Theology, 'eschatology') … In silence to the contrast on matters relating to the destiny of the soul in afterlife, the emphasis on the pursuit and attainment of human well-being in this world is unrelenting.[24]

Considering the fact that Indigenous religions have shaped Pentecostal-Charismatic beliefs, it is not surprising that the focus of these Pentecostal-Charismatic churches is on the existential realities of their members and not so much of the afterlife, although they believe in an afterlife. This assertion is contrary to the claim that 'despite social change, African traditions manage to hold its own against new influences', creating the erroneous impression that these Christianity and African Indigenous religions are antagonistic to each other, and are not affected by their co-existence, not to talk about its reshaping of one another.[25] In many instances the two religions are held side by side in the communities.[26]

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[20] M. J. Field, "Some New Shrines of the Gold Coast and Their Significance", *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 13, 2 (1940):138-149.

[21] Allan Anderson, "Evangelism and the Growth of Pentecostalism in Africa", http://www.artsweb.bham.ac.uk/aanderson/publications/evangelism_and_the_growth_of_pen.htm. Accessed on 25.06.2018.

[22] Cephas Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal of the Mainline Churches in Ghana*. (Boekencentrum: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum Zoetermeer, 2002), pp. 330.

[23]Emmanuel. K. Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity*. (Accra: CPCS. 2001), pp. 44-45.

[24] Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* (Accra: Sakofa Publishing Company, 1998), pp. 14.

[25]John S. Pobee and Emmanuel H. Mends, "Social Change and African Traditional Religion," *SA: Sociological Analysis* 38, no. 1 (1977): 1-17.

[26] Pobee and Mends, "Social Change and African Traditional Religion", p.5.

Comparative Analysis of Indigenous Religious Worldviews in Pentecostal-Charismatic Praxes

The mutual influences of Akan Indigenous religions on Pentecostalism and vice versa seems more conciliatory than it is an interposition. It is worth noting that names given to certain indigenous religious practices are different from what they are called in Pentecostal-Charismatic churches although the practices a strikingly similar and to the same end. The comparative analysis is done of some specific praxes of the Akan Indigenous religions and Pentecostal-Charismatics.

Divination and Prophetic Consultation

The idea of spiritual causation is an integral part of the life of the Akan and therefore drives them towards divination. To the Akan, not only does divination take place to understand past events, it also serves as an enquiry into causes that cannot be explained, things unknown hidden from sight or removed in space, appropriate conduct in critical situations, including the healing of illness, determining the times and modes of religious worship, making choices of persons of particular tasks and of future events[27]. Divination is practiced in many different forms even among the Akans. Amongst the Akan the priests of the shrines also serves as diviners who have days set aside for personal consultations with clients.

The kinds of problems, for which people go to see indigenous priests are diverse and the people come from diverse backgrounds. The advertisement of services on their website portray them to play multiple functional roles for their clients and adherents. Such roles include: a doctor, nurse, counsellor, finance manager, seer, and a mediator among others[28]. Many of the practices discussed above of the indigenous religions is very similar to what correspondingly play out among the neo-Pentecostals. Among Pentecostal-Charismatics, the practice of seeking the cause of evil occurrences, power to deal with it or to avert any future reoccurrence and the search for one's destiny through divination has been designated 'prophetism'.[29] Again Indigenous religions and the Pentecostal-Charismatics, both have strong leadership and control over their 'organisations' and their followers revere them as such. These individuals according to Baeta:

> Are endowed with a striking personality and the ability to impose his own will on others believing himself, and believed by others to be a special agent of some supernatural being or force, will emerge from time to time and secure a following. Powers traditionally credited to such persons, of healing, revealing hidden things, predicting the future, cursing and blessing effectually, etc., will be attributed to him whether he claims them or not. Some will make a more successful showing than others. Such things as the above-mentioned endowment, inward illumination, a sense of divine vocation, spontaneous enthusiasm . . . are facts of life and have their effects in African society.[30]

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[27]Barbara Tedlock, "Divination as a Way of Knowing: Embodiment, Visualisation, Narrative, and Interpretation", *Folklore* 112, 2 (2001):189.

[28] See list of functions and areas of expertise at http://www.kwakubonsam.com/service.php

[29] Cephas N. Omenyo, "Man of God Prophesy Unto Me: The Prophetic Phenomenon in African Christianity," *Studies in World Christianity* 17, 1 (2011): 30.

[30] C. G. Baëta, *Prophetism in Ghana : A Study of Some "Spiritual" Churches.* (London : S.C.M. Press, 1962), pp. 6.

They have positioned themselves as religious specialist who are in 'touch with the source and channels of power in the universe'[31] and can therefore provide direction popularly known as *'akwankyerɛ'* to individuals to avert calamities. In a sense they believe God can do all things, because he rules the universe and everything in it. The description given by Baeta of these prophets seems to fit the description likely to be given to the indigenous religions priests. It must be stated that Baeta in his research was referring to the leaders of the African initiated Churches who are referred to as the '*Sunsum Sore'* whose leaders were mostly referred to as prophets. Although there a lot of similarities that can be drawn between the Pentecostal-Charismatic prophets and that of the *Sunsum Sore*, not many Pentecostal-Charismatic leaders may want to be associated with the former. The reason being that these leaders claim the practices of sumsum Sore are very much similar to the Indigenous religions.

However, these Pentecostal-Charismatic prophets can be said to have taken on the characteristics and form of the priests within a different agency in order to maintain relevance to their adherents and followers. For that matter, the exercise of authority as a special agent of some supernatural being or force with certain spiritual endowments moved seamlessly from the indigenous religious priests to the Pentecostal-Charismatics with ingenuity. Notwithstanding, the perception of a convoluted Pentecostal-Charismatic praxes of observers.

Warding off Malevolent Spirits and Deliverance

In as much as the warding off of malevolent spirits has been a dominant feature in indigenous religious practices, it looks as though there has been a shift of this practice to the Pentecostal-Charismatics. That is not to suggest that the practice no longer features in Akan Indigenous religions but has been legitimised through a different agency, which is the Pentecostal-Charismatics. The indigenous religious belief of spiritual causality explains every situation of mishap and misfortune as having a spiritual source. Therefore, present difficulties and suffering of an individual can be equated to an ancestral or generational curse. This kind of religious expression as mentioned earlier has found its way into the worldview of Pentecostal-Charismatics. Asamoah-Gyadu states that in response to the indigenous belief in generational or ancestral curses as expressed by the elder of the shrine, 'African Pentecostals, through the ministry of "healing and deliverance", provide the ritual context within which such presumably "irreversible curses" on people's lives are broken by the power of the Spirit, in order that victims may be freed to enjoy the abundance of life that is available in Christ',[32] There is however resurgence through a conscious repackaging effort to claim originality of the practice.

A 2010 survey by the Association of Religion Data Archive state the 19.3% of the population in Ghana are adherents of Indigenous religions as against 61.2% being Christians. The statistics show a decline in the patronage of the Indigenous religions. The problem of the statistics quoted above is that, where does it place the Afrikania Mission which registers as a church and yet have beliefs and practices that are a synthesis of the Indigenous religions and Christianity.

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[31] Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa : The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion.* (Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press, 1995), pp. 106.

[32] J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Mission to "Set the Captives Free": Healing, Deliverance, and Generational Curses in Ghanaian Pentecostalism", *International Review of Mission* 93 (2004): 391.

Within Pentecostal-Charismatic churches, an easy adaptability of Pentecostal theology to different cultural situations partly accounts for its success in African countries such as Ghana with its traditional 'super-naturalistic worldviews'. Historic mission Christianity has generally been dismissive of African traditional world-views on the reality of demons and witchcraft as figments of people's imagination. Pentecostalism, on the other hand, evokes powerful responses in Africa because it affirms the "enchanted" worldview of indigenous peoples by taking these views seriously, and presenting an interventionist theology through which the fears and insecurities of African Christians are dealt with.[33] There is however an impression created by Onyinah, as though the momentum for deliverance from witchcraft influences has shifted entirely from the Indigenous religious practitioners to the Pentecostal- Charismatics and that view is problematic.[34]

Therefore, the adoption of deliverance ministry within the Pentecostal churches have not necessarily replaced the anti-witchcraft shrines, although it is acknowledged that there has been some significant shift. This may be due to aesthetic reasons such as the environment within which the exorcism or deliverance take place, and not the efficacy.

Spiritual Power Display through Miracles

Leslie Newbegin, outlines three main persuasions in the history of the Christian church based on their theological distinctive. He states that Roman Catholicism emphasises on structure, ritual and the sacraments, 'orthodox' Protestantism focuses on the centrality of scripture, and Pentecostalism has a pivotal belief that 'the Christian life is a matter of the experienced power and presence of the Holy Spirit today'.[35] Nevertheless, the African Pentecostal experience has been very peculiar because of its emphasis on power, which is informed by its 'cultural context that holds ardently to belief in a universe alive with benevolent and malevolent powers'.[36] As a result, 'Christians in Africa have found the categories of power, dominion and alleviation of suffering by the power of the Spirit relevant in the general struggle with fears and insecurities within a universe in which supernatural evil is considered hyperactive'.[37]Some Pentecostal-Charismatic churches and their leaders believe that Christians need to be experiencing the 'power of God' as a sign of differentiation from the rest of the world's religions and often use biblical motifs such as Elijah and the widow at Zarephath; Moses and the crossing of the Red Sea; Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus; Paul and Silas release from prison.[38]

As scholars such as Asamoah-Gyadu, Corten and Marshall-Fratani have stated, the practices, which make the neo-Pentecostal churches unique are defined within this prevailing context. Kalu goes further to emphasise by inference how strong the influence of the indigenous religions has been in the shaping of African Pentecostalism and yet

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[33] Gifford, "*African Christianity: Its Public Role", pp. 329*.

[34] Opoku Onyinah, "Deliverance as a Way of Confronting Witchcraft in Modern Africa: Ghana as a Case History", *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 5, 1 (2002): 109-110.

[35]Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church.* (London : SCM Press, 1964), pp. 95.

[36] J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Signs, Wonders, and Ministry: The Gospel in the Power of the Spirit", *Evangelical Review of Theology* 33, 1 (2009): 33.

[37] André Corten and Ruth Marshall-Fratani, *Between Babel and Pentecost : Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America.* (London : Hurst, 2001), pp. 5.

[38] Information obtained from http://www.royalhousechapel.org/Events.aspx. Accessed on 20 June 2011.

these ardent followers have succeeded to 'creatively weave the Christ figure into the African universe as the person who could rescue, the *Agyenkwa*, as the Akans would say'.[39] Kalu is mindful of the influence of Indigenous religions in reshaping Africa Christianity, but he is not however dismissive of the fact that these indigenous religions continue to thrive and their respective practitioners undoubtedly are still in the business of displaying power and working miracles.

Pentecostalism provides alternate ritual contexts within which the consequences of evil and spirit possession may be dealt with. Thus in Ghana, the Pentecostal-Charismatic phenomenon of healing and deliverance has been consciously integrated into the evangelising efforts of many Christian traditions, pressurising even historic mission denominations to hold national evangelistic crusades that emphasise the power of the gospel in acts of deliverance[40]. This assertion and that of the Indigenous adherents, indicates that Pentecostal-Charismatic churches have not replaced the indigenous religious beliefs and practice or even edged them out of the business of providing supernatural solutions to people's problems but rather held side by side. And where this similarity is drawn is where on the surface Pentecostalism may seem convoluted. One thing without question though is that, the Pentecostal message of God's life-giving power, which delivers from evil and allows one to feel safe in a hostile world, is relevant to the existential world of Africa[41].

Libation and its language use in prayer

A poignant feature of indigenous religions as expressed by its practitioners is libation. It is the pouring of alcoholic drink or water or even both at times, or the offering of food to the spirit-beings, all this done with prayer and incantation. 'Libation is poured by the individual or social group to his or their own ancestors. To pour libation to another's ancestors is considered most inhospitable, indeed hostile and amounting to a declaration of war on the ancestors of another group. This is because libation is another reminder that the family consists of the living, the dead and unborn'.[42] Libation as in Christian prayer is an acknowledgement of the dependence of the living on supernatural forces that exist in the Akan universe. Libation characterises almost every facet and aspect of life of the Akan. For instance, 'before and after travel, libation is poured to the ancestors to seek their blessings or in thanksgiving for the blessings on the journey. On such occasions there is no need for a ritual specialist to make the sacrifice'[43]. As illustrated with my grandmother's anecdote individuals could pour libation privately for different purposes and needs. On the other hand, Pobee adds that 'at the tribal level the cult of the ancestors is mediated by a ritual specialist such as the chief, linguist or priest'.[44]

Libation is poured in the presence of others who utter their concurrence with the sentiments of the prayer in such phrases as *Ampaara*, it is the truth or *Yonn*, yes, indeed[45];

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[39] O. U. Kalu, *African Pentecostalism : An Introduction.* (New York : Oxford University Press, 2008., 2008), pp. ix.

[40] Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Signs, Wonders, and Ministry: The Gospel in the Power of the Spirit", pp. 36.

[41] Yusufu Turaki, *Christianity and African Gods: A Method in Theology*, Wetenskaplike Bydraes Van Die Pu Vir Cho. Reeks F2, Brosjure Van Die Instituut Vir Reformatoriese Studies (Potchefstroom, South Africa: PU vir CHO, 1999), pp. 281.

[42] Pobee, "Aspects of African Traditional Religion", pp.10.

[43] Ibid. pp.10

[44] Ibid. pp.10

[45]Pobee, "Aspects of African Traditional Religion," pp.11.

Siompa, truely or *nyie,* well spoken. In other words, such ejaculations are the Amen of the congregation to the address to the spirit-beings which is also an occurrence in Christian prayers especially among the neo-Pentecostals.[46]

In the libation prayer, one would realise that reference is made to 'the snake' presumably 'the snake-devil' as presented in the Biblical narrative of the Adam and Eve being deceived by the devil in the garden. The inclusion of 'the snake' in the libation prayer narrative can be explained as a contemporary addition, which reflects the influence of Christianity on Indigenous religious practices.

Beyond certain individuals resorting to libation pouring, the language used by some members and congregation of Pentecostal-Charismatic churches, can be said to have been borrowed from those practitioners who pour libation at community and state functions. The accompanying petition and supplications said during libation are often very rich in language vocabulary and carries nuances that depict the rich cultural heritage of the community.

Taking a view of the above praxes, there is no doubt that they give a convoluted outlook of Pentecostal-Charismatic beliefs and praxes in Ghana, where one would have thought that they were distinct from the Indigenous religions. This therefore may present a challenge for some who on the surface may just describe the praxes of Pentecostal-Charismatics as nothing new whilst others may also consider it as ingenuity from the perspective of contextualisation.

The Dangerous Sociological Posture of the Pentecostal-Charismatic Praxes

The convoluted outlook of Pentecostal-Charismatic praxes is not only as a result of the mixture of what could be considered from the Akan indigenous religions within its praxes. It is also however, the sociological posture the church has assumed within society.

The position of the influences of the Akan indigenous religions is known except that sometimes it is generalised without specific examples as indicated in the previous section. Approaching the sociological posture of the Pentecostal-Charismatic from a positivist perspective, the indigenous religions instil a sense of community in its members as the Akan sees themselves as part of a community before they consider their individuality. Unfortunately, some of these Pentecostal-Charismatic praxes such as deliverance, spiritual power display, prophetic consultation, and the adoption of libation prayer patterns within the churches has negatively affected families and in some instances torn them apart. Unlike the movement in Latin America in the immediate past;

> The Pentecostal experience was credited with significant motivational change in members of both parent and satellite groups. The middle-class organizers began to conceive their task as conversion to Christ" instead of as "concern for the poor." The squatters began to abandon an individualistic materialism which emulates the middle class for an increasing communitarianism and pride of status.[47]

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[46] Ibid.pp.11

[47] Thomas J. Csordas, Religion and the World System: The Pentecostal Ethic and the Spirit of Monopoly Capital. *Dialectical Anthropology, Vol. 17*, No. 1 (1992): 3-24.

These Pentecostal-Charismatics have assumed a penchant for creating a class system through the display of material possessions, thus destroying the sense of community which the African indigenous communities have so guarded, a situation which Meyer has described as "an enmeshment with capitalism".[48] This "enmeshment with capitalism" has created a subtle competition where some leaders of these Pentecostal-Charismatic churches publicise their new cars, homes, holiday travels to Europe, Asia and North America as a measure of God's blessings and a result of their faithfulness to God. There have been instances where one "Man of God" after the other have imported Roll Royces to cement their superiority and in the process creating a class system through the struggles for superiority of who is most favoured and blessed by God.[49]

Further to the fallout of this class system creation, these leaders of the churches havegiven themselves names to portray their effectiveness in dealing with the devil or friendliness with their members and the public at large, such as Kumchacha, whose real name is Nicholas Osei; Charismatic Don Shatta Wale, real name Rev Obofuor.[50] Others have also move deeper into adopting names and designations which poses theological questions to the interpretation of the symbolisms used in specific biblical narratives, such as 'Angel' Daniel Obinim who claims has graduated from being a prophet to an Angel.[51] The danger in these claims and lifestyle of these leaders poses a sociological problem in that, these material possessions are thought to be from God without making any allusions whatsoever to the monetary giving of their members. They derive their economic status that propels and establish them in a higher class in society from the socio-religious capital against the theology of "this earth is our home" as they preach.

Nevertheless, some of the churches and their leaders embark on other social intervention programmes such as the International Central Gospel Church's Central Aid which has the largest scholarship Scheme for students in the country; Royalhouse Chapel's Compassionate Ministry, which attends to prisoners and the homeless; Perez Chapel International, International Central Gospel Church and Action Chapel International for instance, have established Universities to assist in building of human capital for national development.

There have also been questions asked of "social interventions" such as giving out cars to already successful individuals normally streamed live via social media platforms in their Sunday services with huge audiences, which only goes to promote the pastors and their ministries.

The posture of these churches is exacerbated by the fact that, there are no known government-backed established regulatory body to provide check and balance for churches in Ghana. Therefore, although one could have thought that the traces of

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[48] Birgit Meyer, Pentecostalism and Neo-Liberal Capitalism: Faith, Prosperity and Vision in African Pentecostal- Charismatic Churches, *Journal for the Study of Religion 20, 2 (2009)*:5 – 28.

[49] Unknown, Rev. Obofour Also Shows Off His New Rolls-Royce Ghost And Other Collection Of Cars To Challenge Obinim. https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/entertainment/Angel-Obinim-acquires-a-Rolls-Royce-662560; and also http://www.peacefmonline.com/pages/showbiz/news/201806/355668.php. Accessed 02.07.2018.

[50] See https://yen.com.gh/107352-i-members-church-sunday-kumchacha-cries.html; also https://starrfmonline.com/2018/04/18/video-pastor-performs-taking-over-in-church. Accessed on 03.07.2018.

[51] See https://www.pulse.com.gh/entertainment/angel-obinim-bishop-turns-40-here-are-12-controversial-things-about-him-id7226468.html. Accessed 04.07.2018.

indigenous religious practices in Pentecostal-Charismatic praxes give it a convoluted outlook, it is this posture that confounds people and makes them to ask "what is the meaning of this"? This calls for a socio-theological response to this posture.

Practical Socio-Theological Response to De-convolute Pentecostal-Charismatic Praxes

The thinking of some of the founding figures of social studies—most notably Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and Karl Marx as some points interrogated religion and social theories.[52] Most of the sociological work on religion in the first half of the twentieth century, however, tended to be reductionist and unappreciative of the impact of religious ideas and imagery.[53] The result was that overtime sociologist excluded theology from their analysis until;

> Roland Robertson could proclaim that a new departure in the field of sociology was developing that he dubbed "sociotheology." What he had in mind was the kind of work done by Peter Berger in "The Social Construction of Reality and The Sacred Canopy," and also by Robert Bellah in Tokugawa Religion and Beyond Belief, in taking seriously the religious dimension of social reality.[54]

Ultimately, it is important for there to be "sociotheological turn" in analysing praxes of Pentecostal-Charismatics giving them a particular sociological posture in their communities. This would involve incorporating into the social analysis of these groups to attempt to understand the reality of their specific worldview.[55] Considering the indiscipline and in somewhat the social mayhem some of these Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches in Ghana and their leaders have caused, there is the need for some kind of a sociological approach that does not merely acknowledges faith, but assist in changing the way social reality is perceived from a religious frame of reference and possibly the way religious reality is perceived from a social frame of reference. This may call for some politically-backed measures as part of the refereeing process to create cosmic harmony to preserve social structures.[56]

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[52] Durkheim attempted to immerse himself in the thinking of tribal societies to understand the socioreligious significance of totemic symbols (Emile Durkheim. [1912] 1915. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Translated by Joseph Ward Swain. New York: The Free Press.). *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*. Translated by Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells. New York: The Free Press; [1915] 1951. *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*. New York: The Free Press; [1916]. 1958. *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*. New York: The Free Press.). Karl Marx took seriously the relationship of ideological frameworks of thought to social structure, especially in his analysis of the role of religion in the German peasant's revolt (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. 1939. *The German Ideology*. Ed. R. Pascal. New York: International Publishers.).

[53] Mark Juergensmeyer, "The Sociotheological Turn", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81, 4, (2013): 939–948.

[54] Robert Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion*. New York, NY: Free Press. 1957.; Robert Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post- Traditional World*. New York, NY: Harper and Row. 1970. Peter Berger and Thmas Langman, *The Social Construction of Reality*. New York, NY: Anchor Books. 1967.; Peter Berger, *Religions in Global Society*. London, UK: Routledge. 2006.

[55] Mona Kanwal Sheikh, "Sociotheology: The Significance of Religious Worldviews", E-International Relations, the world's leading open access website for students and scholars of international politics. See https://www.e-ir.info/2015/12/14/sociotheology-the-significance-of-religious-worldviews/#_edn5. Accessed 02.07.2018.

These measures may include; the setting up of the United Kingdom style Charity Commission which regulates the conduct of churches and trustees of the churches according to the charity laws of the country. The Charity Commission has systems that collect data for monitoring and evaluation of the charities through annual returns and financial reporting.[57]

The establishment of a similar entity as in the United Kingdom would assist the public to hold Pastors and leaders accountable to the trustees of the Pentecostal Charismatic churches. Also the Charities Commission by recommendation to government could pass legislation to develop some requisite qualifications criteria for leaders and pastors to be as in Rwanda to be set by the Charities commission as an agency of government.[58]

Finally, there could be effective churches umbrella bodies which all church must belong. This regulatory body must be of theological repute to call to order deviant leaders and churches who violate social norms to undermine sound communal life to create a cosmic disharmony. The process could involve strengthening any existing on-going ecumenical discussion to straighten out issues of misconduct within these Pentecostal-Charismatic Leadership as they could be familiar with the polity of the churches.[59]

Summary and Conclusion

The niche of the Pentecostal-Charismatics has been their ability to place their belief and praxes within the Akan traditional context to make meaning to their converts. This fact lends credence to the observation that there exists some continuity of indigenous religious praxis in Pentecostal-Charismatic churches in Ghana.

To this end it is clear that African indigenous religions are not an interposition but rather a conciliatory as they provide the Pentecostal-Charismatics the platform for their praxis within the sphere of African indigenous beliefs and praxis.

However, this conciliation makes Pentecostalism to look convoluted, because one would not expect to identify certain beliefs and practices of the Akan indigenous religions within the praxes of Pentecostal-Charismatics especially when they claim the holy scriptures as the main source of instruction. In addition, the sociological posture of Pentecostal-Charismatics in an attempt to differentiate from the Akan indigenous religions and to authenticate their ministries, has veered into acts that rather denigrate Christian ministry and to undermine their receptibility by the sections of society. These acts, have led to the construction and deepening of unhelpful social class system that is responsible for the feeling of despondency and neglect among the poor, which is alien to Akan indigenous religious societies. This in the process creates a cosmic disharmony as

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[57] See Charities Commission in England and Wales at https://www.gov.uk/guidance/prepare-a-charity-annual-return.

[58] See https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-43225067 and http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2018/04/26/rwandan-government-closes-6000-decrepit-churches-requires-degrees-for-pastors. Accessed 01.07.2018.

[59] Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi, "African Pentecostalism in the Context of Global Pentecostal Ecumenical Fraternity: Challenges and Opportunities". PNEUMA: *The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 24, 2, (2002).

the Akan sees one's well-being directly linked to their relationship with others in the community and the ancestors and gods who are deemed closer to the supreme being.

These raised above, calls for a sociotheological response as a programme of action indicated above to complement existing efforts to mitigate the fallout from the Praxes and sociological posture of Pentecostal-Charismatic churches in Ghana. It is a response to answer the question of "what is the meaning of this?", from both insiders and outsiders as it was case in the biblical narrative of what happened on the day of Pentecost.

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Philanthropy as Image Politics in Ghana's New Churches

Michael Perry Kweku Okyerefo

Abstract

Ghana's new Pentecostal-charismatic churches are budding in charitable deeds and parade such humanitarian intervention publicly, some via TV channels. Based on in-depth interviews with spokespersons of Christian Action Faith Ministries International (Action Chapel) and International Central Gospel Church (ICGC), as well as the observation of the churches' philanthropic actions in the Ghanaian public sphere, the study argues that such actions of the Pentecostal-charismatic churches constitute mimetic isomorphism in relation to the historic churches. The philanthropy of the new churches augments their public image while "Prosperity Theology" drives the churches' growth in material wealth.

KEY WORDS: Ghana, New Churches, Prosperity Theology, Philanthropic Actions, Mimetic Isomorphism

Background

"Faith Gospel", Lindhardt[1] opines, is referred to variously as "the Gospel of Prosperity" and "the Word Faith Gospel", observing, however, that there are various "versions of this gospel", whose "conviction that every saved or born-again Christian has the right to receive divine blessings of wealth and health as well as the duty to pay tithes and make donations of money to God through a ministry". "Faith Gospel, the Gospel of Prosperity, or the Health-Wealth Gospel", Gifford[2] avers, essentially asserts that "God has met all the needs of human beings in the suffering and death of Christ, and every Christian should now share in Christ's victory over sin, sickness and poverty. A believer has a right to the blessings of health and wealth won by Christ, and he or she can obtain these blessings merely by a positive confession of faith". According to Gifford[3], the theological underpinning lies in the fact that such faith "propounds the view that the human condition of the born-again believer has been profoundly altered by the work of

[1] Martin Lindhardt, "More Than Just Money: The Faith Gospel and Occult Economies in Contemporary Tanzania," in *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, Volume 13, Number 1, 2009, 41.

[2] Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 48.

[3] Ibid.

Jesus". Drawing on the works of well-known scholars in the field (Maxwell[4]; Martin[5]; Gifford[6]; Hasu[7], Lindhardt[8] makes the following contentions. First, "the roots of the Faith or Prosperity Gospel can be traced back to post-Second World War spiritual revivals in the United States and more specifically to the foundation of Kenneth Hagin's Rhema Bible Training Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1974". Second, "its impact" can be appreciated better "by focusing on local cultural contexts into which it is appropriated and adapted". Third, scholars of the phenomenon in Africa have shown that "the promise of manifold returns for money offerings serves as an effective means to fundraising". From the foregoing, critical scholarship on the phenomenon in Africa gives credence to Gifford's[9] view that "Faith Gospel, the Gospel of Prosperity, or the Health-Wealth Gospel" emanates from Pentecostal Christianity and is a "much more theological" form of what he refers to as "'Christianity entails success'". If Ghana's new churches of the Pentecostal-charismatic tradition are steeped in Faith Gospel theology, then it stands to reason that they would be concerned with their own economic success. How, then, would they promote philanthropy for its own sake?

Okyerefo[10] has argued that "Pentecostal-charismatic organizations have taken on new, unexpected roles in African public culture" such as the provision of social services in the areas of education and health, thereby augmenting their public image, not least because the public questions their contribution to society. Thus, in 2006 Lighthouse Chapel International, for example, established an orphanage at Aburi in the Eastern Region of Ghana and, in the same year, a hospital in Accra. In 2007, Royalhouse Chapel "launched the Royalhouse Vanguard Christian Life Assurance, an insurance policy for the future welfare of members of the church"[11]. While some of these projects may not lack the profit motive entirely, the shift into the provision of social services is evidently a new path these churches are charting, as has been the tradition in the historic mission churches, and verges on the spirit of philanthropy. In fact, it is a development that favourably lends credence to Lindsay and Wuthnow's[12] idea of "strategic philanthropy". The authors examined the influence federal tax policy has had on religious philanthropy in the United States, focusing on "the role of private foundations" "in religious giving". They observed that not only has the growing importance of private foundations underscored the emergence of "supporting organizations and oversight organizations", both of which "have become increasingly prominent for religious philanthropy", in fact, private foundations "are important because of their institutional independence, financial resources, and unique ability to redirect energies within an institutional field". The authors point out that religion has been an important source of philanthropy in the West, with great antecedents in the Torah, the Koran, and specific emphasis on the Roman Catholic Church's "patronage for the arts during the late Middle Ages and Renaissance",

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[4] David Maxwell, "Delivered from the Spirit of Poverty? Pentecostalism, Prosperity and Modernity in Zimbabwe," in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Volume 28, Number 3, 1998, 350 – 73.

[5] David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Is Their Parish*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

[6] Paul Gifford, "The Comples Provenance of Some Elements of African Pentecostal Theology," in André Corten and Ruth Marshall-Frantani (eds), *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 62-79; Paul Gifford, 2004.

[7] Päivi Hasu, "World bank and Heavenly Bank in Poverty and Prosperity: The Case of Tanzanian Faith Gospel," in *Review of African Political Economy*, Volume 110, 2006, 679 – 92.

[8] Lindhardt, 42.

[9] Gifford, 2004, 48.

[10] Michael Perry Kweku Okyerefo, "The Gospel of Public Image in Ghana," in Harri Englund (ed), *Christianity and Public Culture in Africa*, (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2011), 205.

[11] Ibid., 211.

[12] Michael David Lindsay and Robert Wuthnow, "Financing Faith: Religion and Strategic Philanthropy," in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* Volume 49, Number 1, 2010, 87.

just as the Protestant reformers "established relief chests for the poor"[13]. Their work provides a good analytical foundation to the present study on the novel spirit of philanthropy in Ghana's new churches which, the study argues, depicts isomorphic modelling of the new churches on the historic mission churches to enable the former to gain public acceptability and curb critique over the visible opulence to which Prosperity Gospel has propelled them.

Mimetic Isomorphism as Driver for New Churches' Philanthropy

The neoinstitutional theory, according to Lindsay and Wuthnow[14], affirms that "organizations within the same institutional environment tend to be similar". In furthering this theoretical underpinning, the authors explored the extent to which private foundations have introduced isomorphism within the American religious sector. Drawing on Dimaggio and Powell's[15] classic paper on institutional isomorphism, which accounts for similarities in organizations, Lindsay and Wuthnow[16] argued that the philanthropy of private organizations "shape and condition the activities and behaviors of religious actors through what they fund and what they regard as legitimate activities", thereby exacting similarities in the institutional landscape of philanthropy. Following Amos Hawley[17], Dimaggio and Powell[18] observed that "*isomorphism*" is the "concept that best captures the process of homogenization". They hold that there are two existing types of isomorphism, competitive and institutional, observing that coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism constitute "three mechanisms through which institutional isomorphic change occurs"[19]. Coercive isomorphism occurs through state regulation of organizations' activities and definition, mimetic isomorphism results from organizations modelling themselves on others "they perceive to be successful"[20], and normative isomorphism is "associated with professionalization"[21].

This typology is illustrative of the present study, with the philanthropy of Ghana's new churches verging on mimetic isomorphism as they model themselves on the historic mission churches. While Lindsay and Wuthnow[22] were interested in private organizations, this study focuses on the religious groups themselves, arguing that their practice of "strategic philanthropy"[23] is a modelling on the other religious groups for legitimacy in the Ghanaian public sphere. This is important, however, not only as a driver for gaining acceptability, but also to stem criticism in the face of the opulence to which their Prosperity Theology has propelled them.

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[13] Ibid., 88.

[14] Ibid., 90.

[15] Paul Joseph Dimaggio and Walter Woody Powell, "The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields," in *American Sociological Review*, Volume 48, Number 2, 1983, 147 – 160.

[16] Lindsay and Wuthnow, 2010, 90.

[17] Amos Hawley, "Human Ecology," in David Lawrence Sills (ed), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, New York: Macmillan, 1968, 328-37.

[18] Dimaggio and Powell, 1983, 149.

[19] Ibid., 150.

[20] Lindsay and Wuthnow, 2010, 90.

[21] Dimaggio and Powell, 1983, 150.

[22] Lindsay and Wuthnow, 2010.

[23] Ibid., 87.

While 71.2% of Ghana's 24.6 million inhabitants are Christians, the Christian groups consist in 13.1% Catholics, 18.4% Protestants, 11.4% other Christians, and the Pentecostal-charismatic churches together forming 28.3% of the population[24]. Both their growth in population and notorious activities point to the growing influence of the Pentecostal-charismatic churches in the nation's public sphere, making them worthy of serious academic attention. There is no doubt that the socio-economic influence of the historic mission churches is still formidable. For example, of the 290 registered Health Institutions under the auspices of the Christian Health Association of Ghana (CHAG) shown in Table 1 below, 72.46% belong to the historic mission churches (Anglican, Catholic, Evangelical Presbyterian, Global Evangelical, Methodist, and Presbyterian). The leading single denominations in the provision of the said health institutions are Catholic (42.07%) and Presbyterian (17.24%). It is this reality, this study argues, that the Pentecostal-charismatic churches seek to replicate in their philanthropy.

Table 1: CHAG Member Institutions by Religious Group

No	Religious Group	No of Health Institutions	%
1	A.M.E ZION	1	0.34%
2	Anglican	8	2.76%
3	Assemblies of God	3	1.03%
4	Baptist	3	1.03%
5	Baptist Mid Mission	1	0.34%
6	Catholic	122	42.07%
7	Church of Christ	2	0.69%
8	Church of God	3	1.03%
9	Church of Pentecost	9	3.10%
10	Evangelical Presbyterian	7	2.41%
11	Faith Evangelical Mission	1	0.34%
12	FAME	7	2.41%
13	Global Evangelical	1	0.34%
14	Lighthouse Mission	1	0.34%
15	Luke Society Mission	2	0.69%
16	Manna Mission	1	0.34%
17	Methodist	22	7.59%

[24] Ghana Statistical Service, *2010 Population & Housing Census: Summary Report of Final Results*, (Accra: Sakoa Press Limited, 2012), 40.

18	Presbyterian	50	17.24%
19	Run Mission	1	0.34%
20	Saviour Church	3	1.03%
21	Seventh Day Adventist	29	10.00%
22	Siloam Gospel	1	0.34%
23	The Salvation Army	9	3.10%
24	WEC Mission	2	0.69%
25	Word Alive	1	0.34%
	TOTAL	290	

Source: Adapted from CHAG Annual Report 2015, 62-74.

Method

The study forms part of a continued research into Ghana's Pentecostal-charismatic churches and their transnational engagement since 2008[25]. With reference to this specific paper, in-depth interviews were held in Accra with spokespersons of selected churches between September and October 2016. The churches were selected purposively according to their age and influence in the Ghanaian public sphere. Purposive sampling was an effective means of identifying specific religious groups whose spokespersons were interviewed[26]. They include Archbishop Duncan William's Christian Action Faith Ministries International (Action Chapel), founded in 1979; Pastor Mensa Otabil's International Central Gospel Church (ICGC), founded in 1984[27]; Bishop Dag Heward-Mills' Lighthouse Chapel International, which has roots in his "Legon Calvary Road" founded in 1985 at the University of Ghana while he was a student; Apostle General Korankye Ankrah's Rayalhouse Chapel International that goes back to his "evangelistic ministry, Showers of Blessings" founded at the University of Ghana, which he entered in 1984[28], even though the founding date of Royalhouse itself is pinned to 1992[29]. The paper, however, singles out Action Chapel and ICGC for the sole reason that they are the two oldest new churches in order to analyze their level of institutionalization in the light of their philanthropic actions vis-à-vis the historic mission churches.

[25] Michael Perry Kweku Okyerefo, "'*Ausländer*!': Pentecostalism as social capital network for Ghanaians in Vienna," in *Ghana Studies*, Volume 11, 2008, 77-103.

[26] Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2008.

[27] Paul Gifford, "Ghana's Charismatic Churches," in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Volume 24, Number 3, 1994, 241-265; Paul Gifford, 2004; Akosua Keseboa Darkwah, "Aid or Hindrance? Faith Gospel Theology and Ghana's Incorporation into the Global Economy," in *Ghana Studies*, Volume 4, 2001, 7-29; Marleen De Witte, "Altar Media's *Living Word*: Televised Charismatic Christianity in Ghana," in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Volume 33, Number 2, 2003, 172-202.

[28] Michael Perry Kweku Okyerefo, 2011, 207.

[29] *Daily Graphic*, September 26, 2016, 03.

The in-depth interviews[30] carried out with spokespersons of each church (who wished to remain anonymous) to establish its official position on its philanthropic activities, as well as the observation of the said activities were analyzed thematically as 'charitable actions the churches are engaged in', 'how their charitable activities are presented in the Ghanaian public sphere', and 'what such actions mean for the churches'. Some of the critical questions explored in the interviews include "does your church engage in charitable works? Which ones? What are the reasons if, according to your faith-gospel belief, people can pray their way out of poverty?" "Are you engaged in philanthropic projects? Which?" "Do you advertise them in the media? Why?"

The images of the churches depicted in the media provided a foremost means of knowing and understanding how they engage in their charitable actions, leading to the observation of the churches' philanthropic actions in the Ghanaian public sphere. Since the media have their limitations in presenting objectivity, spokespersons of the churches were themselves interviewed in an ongoing fieldwork to present the voice of the churches on their philanthropy. Content analysis is a major research tool employed to gain a thoughtful insight into the churches' philanthropy.

Results

Since their inception both Action Chapel and ICGC have had an almost similar trajectory regarding reaching into the wider world. Action Chapel will be 40 years in 2019. This celebration will be anticipated with the founder's 60th birthday in 2018. The church prides itself in having established 71 branches in Ghana, 21 in West Africa, therefore 92 branches in Africa. 10 branches are said to be in Europe and 13 branches in North America, making 23 in the global North[31]. ICGC, on the other hand, has since 1984 grown to a membership of 97,086 worldwide by 2013, 93, 856 of them being in Ghana. It has 586 branches, 560 of which are in Ghana, 2 in other parts of Africa, and 24 in the rest of the world[32].

The study engages both churches comparatively to examine their charitable actions, explore how they are presented in the Ghanaian public sphere, and tease out the meanings they attach to their philanthropic activities.

Charitable Activities of the Churches

'Compassion in Action', the church's NGO, consists in Action Chapel's Social Services Wing. The establishment has a number of sectors. First, the Compassion Rehabilitation Centre, located at Dawhenya in the Greater Accra Region, caters for drugs and alcohol addicts. The church claims that one out of every five (5) persons at the facility is treated free of charge. During fieldwork in August 2016 twenty-five (25) clients were at the facility. Second, every month the Social Services Wing of the church donates food, clothing and 2000 Ghana cedis to the Basco Orphanage at Nsawam, which was established in 1996 but not owned by the Church. Some of the orphans there are said to

[30] I wish to acknowledge the research assistant on the project, Emmanuel Codjoe, an MPhil student of the Department of Sociology, University of Ghana, who helped in carrying out the interviews.

[31] Spokesperson, interviewed on August 26, 2016.

[32] Spokesperson, interviewed on September 6, 2016.

be students of Dominion University College owned by Action Chapel. Third, the Students' Scholarship Foundation was established in 2009, disbursing over 200 scholarships to-date to gifted students in need of financial aid at basic, secondary and tertiary levels. Fourth, the church claims to have sunk boreholes in a number of communities since 2014, and helped to refurbish High Grade Academy, a school on the Spintex Road in Accra. The headquarters of Action Chapel are on the Spintex Road. Its university college and one clinic are hosted at the same premises. The church has no basic or secondary schools but claims to have donated 100 school uniforms to the Street Children Empowerment Foundation (SCEF) at Jamestown in Accra in 2016.

ICGC initiated the 'Central Educational Trust' in 1988, a scholarship programme for Ghanaian students in Secondary, Vocational, and Technical Schools. This charitable project was rebranded in 1996 into 'Central Aid', moving beyond providing just educational need to Social and Community Development Projects, Relief Services (takes care of distressed people during times of disaster), Career Guidance and Counselling (to help beneficiaries of scholarship, youth groups, and others who come for help), and Advocacy (mobilizing experts to speak on national issues in areas like youth development, education, and social welfare). The flagship project of Central Aid, however, remains the allocation of scholarships, moving from 51 people who were on the scheme in 1989 to over 3,000 people in 2016 who have benefited from the project. Beneficiaries are said to have entered the field of medicine, the media, and other responsible positions. The funds for Central Aid are solicited internally in the church.

The church is said to have awarded a total of two hundred (200) scholarships to Second-cycle school students each year since 2011. The modus operandi of Central Aid is to ensure that if, for example, 50 students graduate from Senior High School in a particular year, 50 students would be accepted onto the scheme to make up the 200. This means that Central Aid caters for 200 students at every point in time. Once a beneficiary gets accepted onto the scheme, the individual enjoys it until his/her final examinations are over. The project calls for some level of commitment from those receiving the bursary and their families, thereby earnestly desiring community participation, stakeholders' involvement, and commitment at all levels of its operations. Central Aid hopes to cater for students at the tertiary level of education in future.

Apart from Central Aid, ICGC's 'Institutional and Community Support' sends financial assistance to the Ghana Heart Foundation monthly, supports the Princess Marie Louis Children Hospital, Mammocare-Ghana (a facility for breast cancer screening), while members of the church donate blood to the National Blood Bank twice a year. In 2006, the church also built a two-storey boys' hostel at a cost of over $200,000 at the Osu Children's Home, a state-owned and state-ran orphanage. It furnished the hostel with beds, mattresses and bed sheets, a canteen/dining hall, providing plates and chairs. An E-library was also established for the school. Furthermore, a caretaker's hostel was constructed and a water tank provided.

'ICGC Clean Water Project' is aimed at providing some deprived communities in the country with good drinking water. Twenty (20) boreholes fitted with hand-pumps are said to have been constructed at a cost of $200,000 in nineteen (19) selected communities in the Ga West municipal area of the Greater-Accra Region. The selection of the cites was based on the fact that some of the communities are Buruli ulcer endemic areas while others have high iron levels in their groundwater sources. It is estimated that a total population of over 12,000 people will be served with good drinking water in these

communities. The boreholes are under the supervision of the Water and Sanitation (WATSAN) Committees. Beneficiaries pay 0.20 pesewas each time they access water, being money used to repair pumps whenever the need arises.

In 2008, the church established a $100,000 recreational facility, 'Game Centre for both Church and Community', comprising basketball, volleyball, and tennis courts for the mutual use and benefit of its members and interested members of the public. A gym was later added. In the words of the spokesperson of the church, "this Game Centre is to help the will, emotions, and minds of the individuals, thus, keep the spirit, soul and body sound. It helps to minister to all facets of persons"[33]. Some of the other projects of the church include 17 Early Childhood to Junior High Schools and a University.

Publicizing the Churches' Charity

Action Chapel's philanthropy is publicized via the Dominion Television, which is owned by the church, as well as on the church's website[34]. It is also a means by which the church promotes its own television. The publicity given to their philanthropic acts is important to Action Chapel so "that those outside the body of Christ and in other churches can see what Action Chapel is doing". It wants non-members of the church "to sponsor and support such endeavours", as displayed on a flier designed by the church captioned 'Dominion Covenant Partners-DCP'.

ICGC, on the other hand, claims to make a conscious effort not to advertise these philanthropic activities in the media, although its website[35] contains some of these projects. "Basically, advertising such works of piety is not the focus of such activities. Dr. Otabil likes keeping the good he does and not blow his own horns. It is a responsibility to community and nation. Thus, the church gives back to humanity from the many she received. More so, the church is not taxed. Therefore, the only way you can consciously help is by ploughing back into the system. This becomes almost like a corporate social responsibility (CSR)"[36].

Meaning the Churches Attach to Charity

Action Chapel asserts that its philanthropic projects are done in the spirit of the founder of the church who is acclaimed to have said that the "true essence of Christianity is best defined by how we serve humanity. Eternity will reward and record these good works for our profit"[37]. The background of Archbishop Duncan Williams is said to be a great inspiration for Action Chapel's philanthropy, which aims at supporting and emancipating people in similar situations in which its founder found himself in his youth. As a young man he engaged in substance abuse and fell out of school due to financial difficulty.

To this end, the church believes that investing in the Rehab Centre will help reduce substance abuse and crime. Thus, the orphanage invests in the nation through its youth, which is also the reason advanced for awarding scholarships to students. All these

[33] Spokesperson, interviewed on September 6, 2016.
[34] http://actionchapel.net; http://dominiontv.net
[35] See projects under: http://www.centralgospel.com/?root=news&cid=3
[36] Spokesperson, interviewed on September 6, 2016.
[37] Spokesperson, interviewed on August 26, 2016.

activities are ostensibly geared toward gaining membership and encouraging non-members of the church to contribute to their DCP project. The church understands success "not as a destination, it is actually a journey. It is about how many lives you have touched both spiritually and physically. The words of Matthew 25 are thus relevant here. If you have not impacted onto others, you are not successful"[38]. In the same vein, "it is God who gives you wealth in order for you to give. If you have money and you do not give you are not wealthy". Action Chapels' understanding of status is with regard to God giving "grace to people to get higher". "The one who is high is supposed to serve like Christ did. Humility is key in status. One's intention is important even in status". In terms of its hierarchy Action Chapel has the Archbishop, a College of Bishops, pastors and other people in ministry. "Wherever you are is by grace and not by your power"[39]. The spokesperson's appeal to grace rather than power in this hierarchy where a founder of a church assigns the title 'Archbishop' to himself and appoints 'bishops', 'pastors' and 'people in ministry' depicts a penchant for building a positive public image. The fact is, titles in both institutions, like many comparable ones, are self-imposed, at least, ab initio.

Just as Action Chapel, the social responsibility of ICGC is predicated on the life experience of it founder, "Pastor Otabil, who in his youth lost both parents in one year and was catered for by friends and the extended family. Thus, he feels obligated to do same. More so, Christ asked us to cater for one another (cf. Matthew 25). The philosophy of the founder also holds that practical Christianity is essential"[40].

The church understands success in terms of "an established person in the House of God not just on earth but also in heaven. This happens when one develops through Christian principles and not through illegal means". "Wealth can best be explained as resources and not just riches. One who has wealth feels complete and total; here we must note that happiness should not be equated to being rich. You may not have all riches but one may be happy. Wealth is given by God through hard work". "Status must make people humble. It is for this reason that Dr. Otabil is simply called Pastor Otabil. He does not accept any other title and does not encourage his pastors to carry titles. Hierarchy in ICGC consists in three main divisions in the pastorate: the lay pastors, the licensed ministers, and the ordained, i.e. the Reverend"[41].

Analysis

Weber[42] has shown in his discussion on charismatic authority and routinization that religious groups evolve and institutionalize, hence the structures of philanthropy we are beginning to observe in Ghana's new churches. This study observes that the philanthropic structures and institutions the new churches are developing are similar to those of the historic mission churches, notably their health and educational institutions. To that extent the scholarship scheme of ICGC's Central Aid or Action Chapel's Rehab Centre also extend the said educational and health philanthropy. As growing religious groups Action Chapel and ICGC advertently or inadvertently find in the older religious

[38] Spokesperson, interviewed on August 26, 2016.
[39] Spokesperson, interviewed on August 26, 2016.
[40] Spokesperson, interviewed on September 6, 2016.
[41] Spokesperson, interviewed on September 6, 2016.
[42] Max Weber, "On Charisma and Institution-Building," in Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt (ed), *Selected Papers*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press), 1968, 46-65.

groups paradigmatic institutions in the field and are thereby modelling themselves on the precursors in the environment. The ensuing process encapsulates the neoinstitutional theory's characterization that "organizations within the same institutional environment tend to be similar"[43].

The religious group with the largest educational and health institutions in Ghana is the Catholic Church, followed by the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. Their leading role in these fields, coupled with the moral authority these groups exert on the Ghanaian public in interrogating the public conscience, particularly in matters of ethics, has undoubtedly contributed to the respectability both historic mission churches enjoy in the Ghanaian public sphere. It is logical for new religious groups to seek to relish similar leverage by engaging in mimetic isomorphism through modelling themselves on churches "they perceive to be successful"[44]. After all, what Action Chapel and ICGC are participating in is not new in the institutional landscape of the philanthropy of churches in Ghana. They are exerting great effort to extend their charitable actions in creative ways but the stark similarities this philanthropy has with that of the long established churches is palpable. Church schools and health institutions belong to an extensive history of evangelization by the historic mission churches in Africa[45], mostly a part of the churches' understanding of charity as a theological virtue to be lived in practical terms through the provision of free or subsidized education and health services, for example, to the people they serve, and not just their members.

By engaging in similar charitable projects in the Ghanaian public sphere, churches in Ghana verge on homogenizing philanthropy and are thereby engrossed in "*isomorphism*", the "concept that best captures the process of homogenization"[46]. With the historic churches being the trailblazer in the provision of social amenities, the new churches follow in their footsteps with mimetic isomorphic strides. This development is made clearer in the picture depicted in Table 1 above. Church of Christ, Church of God, Faith Evangelical Mission, Lighthouse Mission, Luke Society Mission, Manna Mission, Run Mission, Saviour Church, Siloam Gospel, WEC Mission, and Word Alive are all new players in the field, having on average one (1) health institution. All the above-listed eleven (11) churches together possess 18 of the 290 health institutions, all making 6.2% of all Christian health institutions in Ghana.

While mimetic isomorphism of religious institutions could replicate the provision of healthcare, for example, and increase concentration in a particular area of societal need, it at the same time increases service and stems an otherwise dire need in the area of augmenting social services, for instance, especially in poor countries. For example, in Ghana, as in a lot of African countries, many functions traditionally perceived to be the prerogative of the state have been taken up by foreign donors, religious and non-governmental organizations[47]. The consequences of the belt-tightening liberalization policies in Ghana since the mid-1980s and the drastic reduction in public spending on health and education have been well-documented[48]. The Structural Adjustment Policies

[43] Lindsay and Wuthnow, 2010, 90.

[44] Ibid., 90.

[45] Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa, 1450-1950*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 1994.

[46] Dimaggio and Powell, 1983, 149.

[47] Nicolas van de Walle, *African Economies and the Politics of Permanent Crisis, 1979-1999*, (New York: Cambridge University Press), 2001, 276.

[48] Reginald Oveå, "When men do women's work: structural adjustment, unemployment and changing gender relations in the informal economy of Accra, Ghana," in *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Volume 45, Number 4, 2007, 539-563.

(SAPs) came to be replaced with Poverty Strategy Reduction Papers whose drafting created the expectation of involving more collaboration between African governments, civil society, and international aid and lending institutions. A closer inspection, however, reveals that the process has continued to impose donor-driven constraints on democratic governance in countries such as Ghana[49], plunging such countries into even more poverty and exclusion from the wealth of nations. Interestingly, the founding of Action Chapel and ICGC coincided with the height of the the SAPs in Ghana. And ultimately, the next stage of the spiral of indebtedness, indicative of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative that poor nations were hurled into has brought no relief, a situation which the new churches notoriously feel called to rectify through philanthropy. And it is unlikely that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or Global Goals, as they are called, will stem the need for the churches' intervention, given Ghana's socio-economic trajectory.

Following Lindhardt's[50] observation the "impact" of "the Faith or Prosperity Gospel" can be appreciated better "by focusing on local cultural contexts into which it is appropriated and adapted". The socio-economic conditions prevailing in countries like Ghana that warrant the various near-successful and failed internationally-led policy interventions outlined above are so dire that citizens of these societies crave for anything that would promise them hope. Prosperity Gospel has succeeded in igniting such hope, real or unreal. Okyerefo[51] has pointed out that in view of the "general distrust in the weak state in Africa", "church organizations" have been projected into "the limelight, thereby making Pentecostal churches" "wield power by exercising their authority in the public sphere" through "public discourse on individual success and wealth creation". Thus, keen observers in the field, such as scholars on Africa have shown that "the promise of manifold returns for money offerings serves as an effective means to fundraising"[52]. Consequently, the more these new churches trumpet their philanthropy, the more opulent their wealth, thanks to the Gospel of Prosperity they preach, even if some of it is "plowed into development projects such as schools and hospitals"[53].

Conclusion

Both Action Chapel and ICGC are forging an of agenda by employing creative ways of engaging with the Ghanaian public sphere. The said creativity involves the provision of social services, such as health and educational institutions, just as the historic churches do.

The study has delved into Action Chapel's Compassion Rehabilitation Centre that caters for drugs and alcohol addicts, its establishment of a Social Services Wing that provides food and clothing aid to orphans, a Students' Scholarship Foundation, sinking of boreholes in some deprived communities, and its one clinic, all geared toward institutionalization. In the same vein, ICGC's Central Aid, its Institution and Community

[49] Lindsay Whitfield, "Trustees on Development from Conditionality to Governance: Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers in Ghana," in *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Volume 43, Number 4, 2005, 641-664.

[50] Lindhardt, 2009, 42.

[51] Michael Perry Kweku Okyerefo, "The role of Pentecostal Churches as an influential arm of Civil Society in Ghana," in *Ghana Social Science Journal*, Volume 11, Number 2, 2014b, 74.

[52] Lindhardt, 2009, 42.

[53] Okyerefo, 2011, 214.

Support, the "ICGC Clean Water Project", and its recreational facility are all seen by the church as philanthropic and contribute to the wellbeing of the wider society rather than just church members. Interestingly, the churches do not project their universities in the same light, probably because the churches themselves ostensibly perceive these as business projects. By the same token, Action Chapel and ICGC do not seem to be paying keen interest in the establishment of primary, junior and senior high schools as much as they are paying attention to their universities.

The institutionalization process in the two churches, however, bears a very close semblance to that of the historic churches. By modelling themselves on the historic mission churches, the paper argues, Action Chapel and ICGC engage in mimetic isomorphism. Not only does this result in their leveraging greater acceptability in the Ghanaian public sphere, in fact, the institutionalization agenda drives the churches' growth in material wealth through members' tithes and contributions, fuelled by the churches' Faith Gospel theology. Both members and non-members are targeted to pay for the philanthropic projects of both churches. Perhaps the churches are realizing that engaging with the Ghanaian public sphere through philanthropy will stem the critique Faith Gospel theology is generally accosted with that prosperity gospel enriches the churches and their founders at the expense of the individual member and his or her community.

In providing social services, then, the churches do not have to re-invent the wheel where there are old players already in the field, players the new churches sometimes compete with. Modelling themselves on the historic churches in the provision of educational and health institutions, then, would be because the Pentecostal churches perceive the historic churches to be "successful", what Lindsay and Wuthnow[54] describe as mimetic isomorphism. The process entails competition with the institutions on which they seek to model themselves at the same time as with the many other new players (Pentecostal churches) in the field in the bid to be more successful than the others. The process is also a logical corollary of the evolving and institutionalizing of religious groups[55]. In that vein the new churches' development of philanthropic structures is "associated with professionalization"[56] thereby verging on normative isomorphism as well.

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[54] Lindsay and Wuthnow, 2010.
[55] Weber, 1947.
[56] Dimaggio and Powell, 1983, 150.

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Causes of Religious Conflict in Ethiopia

Bekalu Atnafu Taye

Abstract

This study tried to see the causes of religious conflict in Ethiopia. Participants of the study were drawn from conflict-prone areas of the country, chiefly Muslim dominated areas. Christians of various denominations (mainly Protestants and Eastern-Oriental Orthodox or Coptic Church followers) and Muslims took part in the study. The results of the study showed that the desire to form an Islamic State, religious ethnocentrism, a new Islamic movement, the expansion of Christianity, reversing history and methods of preaching were found as major causes of the conflict. The conflicts are said to have brought destructions which caused the massacre of Christians by Islamic fundamentalists as a result of which, according to the study, forty five people were wounded, properties worth of more than five million dollars were destroyed, about five thousand people were forced to flee their homes, and a considerable number of Christians were forced to convert to Islam.

KEY WORDS: Ethiopia, conflict, religion, fundamentalist, ethnic, Islam

Introduction

Christianity and Islam have peacefully co-existed in Ethiopia for centuries. According to tradition, a group of Arab followers of Islam in danger of persecution by local authorities in Arabia took refuge early in the seventh century in the Aksumite Kingdom of the Ethiopian Christian highlands.[1] These people were well-treated and permitted to practice their religion as they wished. Consequently, the prophet Muhammad concluded that Ethiopia should not be targeted for *jihad.*[2] Since ancient time, Christian-Islamic relations have remained generally cordial.

Notwithstanding such peaceful co-existence, there were some occasional clashes between Muslims and Christians; the invasion of '*Gragn*', the '*Khedive of Egypt'* and the '*Mahdists*' were just few examples. In the first half of the sixteenth century, Ethiopia suffered a devastating Muslim invasion led by Ahmad Ibn Ghazi who declared a jihad (holy war) against the Ethiopians. In this regard, Young noted that in 1527 *Ahmad* the *Gragn* led a Moslem army from the southeast, and with the support of co-religionists in

[1] Pankhurst Richard, 1974: "Education, Language and History: A Historical Background to Post-War Ethiopia," *The Ethiopian Journal of Education*, 7(1): 75-79.

[2] Ephraim Isaac, 1971 "Social Structure of the Ethiopian Church," *Ethiopian Observer*, 5(14), 240-287.

Arabia and Turkey, quickly spread north overcoming the more poorly armed soldiers of Abyssinia, destroying churches, and causing massive dislocation; but later Ahmad was eventually defeated with the timely assistance of the Portuguese in 1541.[3] In a similar manner, at the end of the nineteen-century, the Mahdist movement arose against Ethiopia as a combination of religious revivalism and Sudanese nationalist opposition to Egyptian rule.[4] Mahdist forces occupied *Matamma* following the Egyptian evacuation, and initiated a period of border raids and another arena of Ethio-Mahdist confrontation was in the south, in the present-day *Wallaga* region.[5]

Apart from these main historical clashes, the two major religions have co-existed peacefully in Ethiopia. This being the case, some political movements have tried to manipulate religious differences as a source of conflict by encouraging the 'alienated groups' to raise religious demand. As the Italian invaders tried to favor the Muslim community to stand against their Christian brothers, the Oromo rebels also exploited Islam as a nationalist ideology for their nationalist projects. Despite the fact that the Oromo rebels attempted to use Islam as an instrument for their nationalist agenda, the Oromo nationalism in the mid-1960s was dominated by the Mecha Tulema, a self-help association with political and cultural attributes led by the dominant figure Tadesse Biru.[6] Similarly, the Eritrean Liberation Front leadership stressed pan-Arabism and Islam as a means to build ties with lowland sheikhs and ethnic leaders, an approach that led to accusations that it was sectarian and feudal.[7]

Despite the fact that such political groups tried to use religion differences for their political program by creating more sub-units that makes the case complex, the two religions in Ethiopians have lived peacefully for a long period of time, considering humanity, the long-held traditions, history and culture which have shaped the collective identities of Ethiopians.

This happened because the relationship between Christians and Muslims seems to have been relatively cooperative for a longtime but nowadays this relationship appears to be competitive. In Muslim-dominated areas of Ethiopia, the interactions are more likely to be characterized by lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear, following the conflict, particularly in areas where Christians are a minority, and/or, perhaps, vice versa. Among the various religious conflicts happening in Ethiopia, *Zelalem* tried to assess the religious clashes which happened only in the *Didessa* and *Gomma* districts of Western*Oromia*.[8] In a similar manner, Afe work focused on the religious tolerance in Addis Ababa.[9] Both studies did not address the causes of religious conflicts in a wider perspective and this study tries to fill in this research gap and it reviews causes of religious conflicts in the country. Taking the above points into account, the purpose of this study is to explore causes of religious clashes in Ethiopia.

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[3] John Young, Peasant *revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People's Liberation Front, 1975-1991* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 209.

[4] Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia: 1855-1991* (Addis Ababa University Press, 2002), p. 57.

[5] Ibid. p. 57.

[6] Adejumobi, Saheed, *The history of Ethiopia* (London Greenwood Press, 2007), p. 112.

[7] Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia*, p. 129.

[8] ZelalemTemesgen, "The 2006 Religious Conflict in Didessa and Gomma Woradas of Western Oromia," *Institute of Ethiopian Studies: M.A. Thesis,* Addis Ababa University. 2010.

[9] Afework Hailu, "Religious Tolerance in Addis Ababa 1991-2008," *Institute of Ethiopian Studies: M.A. Thesis,* Addis Ababa University, 2009.

The Research Process

The primary purpose of this study is to identify the causes of religious conflict happening in Ethiopia in the past few years. The study was conducted in three Ethiopian localities, namely *Jimma*, *Kemmise* and *Bale-Robe* because of the many religious conflicts in these areas. Thus, the study tried to find out what reasons were perceived to potentially cause religious conflicts. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, qualitative research methods were employed. I have chosen a qualitative phenomenological research to study the lived experience of the participants. In explaining phenomenological research, Creswell noted that phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a common phenomenon.[10]

A well-designed qualitative study requires a relatively small number of respondents to yield rich data needed to understand subtle meanings in the phenomenon under study. Furthermore, Dornyei noted that in qualitative research, the main goal of sampling is to find individuals who can provide rich and varied insights into the phenomenon under investigation so as to maximize what we can learn and this goal is best achieved by means of purposive sampling.[11] Thus, in selecting samples for the focus group discussion (FGD) and the interview, purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used. I also tried my level best to get data from the local government officials but, presumably, due to lack of transparency and willingness on the part of the local government officials, I could not interview or make them participate in the focus group discussions. It has been very challenging to get data with regard to religious conflict in Ethiopia. It seems that the government might opt to handle disputes quietly and internally but it could not be so because interest-based and value-based conflicts tend to require a holistic and extensive dialogue and this should not be done without the involvement of the public. Thus, the acts of the government, hiding the case from media coverage, may not be justifiable. This showed that data about religious conflict in Ethiopia are less accessible, for people refrain from giving data about the conflict for fear of state reprisal. As a result of this, many people assume that it is illegal to offer information about the conflict. Thus, it is believed that giving information about the conflict is equated with breaking the law of the government.

The number of subjects taking part in the FGD and in the interview sessions was eighteen (having six members in each group) and fifteen respectively. The subjects were Muslims, Orthodox Christians and Protestants. An attempt was made to identify individuals who were in the churches while the conflicts happened. To gather meaningful information about the intimidations experienced through these conflicts, church leaders, pastors, priests, mosques imams and adherents of each religion took part in the study.

The instruments were refined through pilot testing. During the focus group discussions and interviews, I made a brief explanation about the objectives of the research. I was able to create a non-threatening environment by engaging in warm-hearted conversations with the subjects in order to extract the necessary information from the discussants. Before and during the discussion, discussants were reminded not to worry about the responses they gave. The qualitative data were transcribed and the verbatim accounts were thematically analyzed. In order to uncover the hidden deeper meaning of

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[10] Creswell John, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, (London, SAGE Publications, 2007), p. 58.

[11] Dornyei Zoltan, *2007 "Research Methods in Applied Linguistics: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methodologies,* p. 113.

the data, a certain analytical process was employed; these were transcribing the data, coding, categorizing, producing tentative data and interpreting the data.

Scholars in qualitative research have used the voices of the participants in their studies. In doing so, Creswell stated that short eye-catching quotations are easy to read, take up little space and stand out from the narrator's text and are indented to signify different perspective.[12] Influenced by Creswell's argument, I used short eye-catching quotations throughout the analysis. The number of quotations in the forthcoming six sections varies from two to five which shows the relative degree of importance given to the points discussed. Regarding ethical issues, both the interviewees and the discussants were informed about the anonymity of the participants. I told them that I would not expose their names in both the analysis and the data; I informed them that I would rather use pseudo names.

Results and Discussion

For the present study, the participants from *Jimma*, *Bale* and *Kemmise* stated a number of multi-layered motives and the chief reasons have been classified into various sections. The perceived causes for the existing religious conflict in Ethiopia are the formation of Islamic State (IS), religious ethnocentrism, the new Islamic movement, reversing history, the expansion of Christianity, and ways of preaching.

Formation of Islamic State

Participants in the study listed causes of the conflict. In this connection, Mr. Kebede (Coptic Orthodox Christian) stated:

> 'Attackers, who got support from the Arab world, were in Somalia and in the Arab world and they brought youngsters under their control. Their objective is to eradicate Christianity from the region.'

Similarly, Mr. Tesfa (Protestant) added:

> They [the fundamentalists] just want to form Islamic State; these fundamentalists have been supported by the Arab States. They recorded all the incidents on video, the act of burning the Christian church, and sent it to the Muslim nations. For the seacts, they would get support from the Arab nations.

Mr. Jemal (Muslim) noted:

> 'They [the fundamentalists] need to make the whole region Muslim-dominated. They claimed that the region is a Muslim area; that is why they forced Christians to convert to Islam.'

Mr. Molla (Muslim), on his part, contributed:

[12] Creswell, 2007: *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, p. 182.

> 'In the religion of Islam, there is a doctrine which forces all people to convert to Islam; such form of religious theology could also be a cause of the conflict. Fundamentalists insist that Islam is the unique and final option for human beings because it is a "peaceful" religion.'

Mr. Adissu (Coptic Orthodox Christian) listed the following:

> 'Fundamentalists brought destructions which caused the massacre of Christians by Islamic fundamentalists as a result of which, forty five people were wounded, properties worth of more than five million dollars were destroyed, about five thousand people were forced to flee their homes, and a considerable number of Christians were forced to convert to Islam.'

As Lemma's response indicated, the local people wanted to keep the area as 'Muslim dominated'; they just wanted to establish Islamic State. This finding was corroborated by Zelalem's result. Zelalem reported that the new Muslim sect demanded that the totally Islamic state led by '*Sharia Law*'/Islamic law be established.[13] In a similar manner, Zeidan stated that fundamentalists aim at completely Islamizing the social and political systems of their societies and establishing a worldwide Islamic state based on Islamic law.[14] Tibi also stated that all Muslim fundamentalists set the implementation of the Shari'a/Islamic law as the primary condition for the realization of an Islamic system of government.[15] In its regular meeting in Abuja, Nigeria, in 1989, the 'Islam in Africa Organization' announced that every country in Africa has to implement Islamic Law; to this end, every support has been rendered.[16] Fundamentalists want nothing less than to control the world and submit it to Islam; that is, the primary aim of fundamentalists is the formation of an Islamic state with a new political order. As these data show, fundamentalists aim to convert all people to Islam but converting all Christians into Islam is against the dynamics of modern religiously pluralist states. This situation turned the case into interest-based and identity-based conflicts which did not have a great potential for compromise.

According to the words of *Kebede* and *Tesfa*, the Arab world supported the fundamentalists in the act of Islamizing the population. Consistent with this, Braswell stated that Saudi Arabia funds the building of mosques and the establishment of Islamic organizations across the world.[17] The Saudis have a desire to form Islamic States across the world; to this end, this country exerts much effort towards the Islamization of citizens all over the world, and Muslim fundamentalists are said to have been financed by the Islamic Relief Aid. Supporting this finding, Afe work's respondents also stated that there are 'NGOs' and 'foreign agents' that work legally in Addis Ababa.[18] As a matter of fact, the actions of these institutions would bring religious instability, according to the aforementioned respondents. Since long time ago, the Arab World has never felt comfortable with Ethiopia. For this, *Mesfin* mentioned a range of historical reasons of which the following are most important.[19]

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[13] Zelalem, 2006: *The 2006 Religious Conflict in Didessa and Gomma Woradas of Western Oromia,* p. 91.
[14] Zeidan, 2003: *Swords of Allah*, p. 11.
[15] Tibi, 1998: *The Challenges of Fundamentalism*, p. 142.
[16] Beyagebegnal, 2012: *Islamic Radicalism and the Process of Islamizing today's Ethiopia,* p. 17.
[17] Braswell, 1996: *Islam: Its Prophet, People, Politics and Power,* p. 270.
[18] Afework, 2009: *Religious Tolerance in Addis Ababa 1991-2008*, p. 85.
[19] Mesfin, 1971: Ethiopia and the Indian Ocean, p. 4.

The first reason is that, unlike the North African countries, the Ethiopian highland has remained immune to repeated attempts of the Arabs to convert it to Islam; this symbolizes the failure of the Arabs and of Islam in general. This factor must lie within the framework of historical clashes; for example, *Ahmed Gragn's* invasion (1531-1543) and the movements of the *Mehadists* could be mentioned as instances of the attempt to convert the country into Islamic State. Second, Ethiopia breaks the solid continuity of Islam-from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean. Third, most people agree that Islam holds hidden hostility to all those they say are 'infidels', those who have not accepted Islam nor submitted to it. Due to this, the Arab world, having had an intense desire to make the country of Ethiopia an Islamic state, has been since long an enemy of Ethiopia. Just as an example, the separatist movement in Eritrea which was initially the Muslim-dominated Eritrea Liberation Front was supported by nations in the Arab world, such as Syria and Iraq which regarded Eritrea as an integral part of the Arab homeland.[20] Eritrean secessionism was born, nurtured and brought to full maturity in Egypt.[21] The material and moral support of the Arabs for the Eritrean Liberation Front could also be taken as a calculated long-range policy to weaken Ethiopia. This showed that Ethiopia is in danger from all sides except from Kenya in the south. Muslim [Arab] fundamentalists try their utmost therefore to subvert Christian Ethiopia ands pend a large amount of the money that they remit Ethiopia for terrorist attacks. In view of the above, most people consider the actions of Muslim fundamentalists as being secretly aimed at realizing their ardent desire of the formation of Islamic Statein Ethiopia.

With regard to *Molla's* response, Muslim fundamentalists insist that Islam is unique and final. I think, there is a need to see things through a different set of social lenses because a religious preference involves subjectivity. In drawing an analogy between a religion and a wife, Shenk clearly showed the level of subjectivity in comparing wives and religions.[22] When a husband says to his wife that she is the most beautiful woman and is the only one for him, this statement is true for him but it is not universally true. The wife of the husband might not be as pretty as other women but he perceives her as the most beautiful because is variation in perception and it in human nature to be attracted to what is familiar to us. In the face of modern religious plurality and relativism, it seems irrational to absolutize a particular religious understanding. Religious plurality is part of our current social existence and is a global phenomenon that cannot be ignored at all.

Religious Ethnocentrism

According to the data, the rising tide of religious conflict is fueled by ethnicity. Still, participants of the study have listed down this factor as a key cause.

Mr. Yilkal (Protestant) said the following:

> 'Ethnic and religious conflict feed each other. In the Ethiopian context, the way ethnic conflict has been handled causes religious conflict; this is because, people become conscious about their identity.'

Mr. Molla (Muslim) on his part mentioned the following points with regard to this:

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[20] Ibid: p. 18.

[21] Mesfin, 1999: *The Horn of Africa: Conflict and Poverty,* p. 84.

[22] Shenk, 1997: *Who Do You Say that I am,* p. 39.

> 'The political system paves a way for the formation of ethnocentric thought; and now villages become ethnocentric; this gives rise to the emergence of ethnocentric religion.'

Mr. Nurhussen (Muslim) in the interview session forwarded the following regarding the conflict happening in Bale-Robe,

> 'The cause of the conflict was identity consciousness which is the result of ethnic-politics.'

Similarly, with regard to the conflict in Bale-Robe, Mr. Dawit, a protestant religious leader, during the interview, noted the following:

> 'I think some hidden agendas were the reasons for the religious conflicts. In any case, the existing ethnic conflict heightens the salience religious identity and this leads to religious dispute.'

As the data above show, the religious conflict got an ethnic basis and ethnic federalism provides fertile ground for ethnic and religious fundamentalists to flourish. Since EPRDF ('Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front') came to powerin1991, religious and ethnic conflicts have been endemic and the numbers of such conflicts have been increasing. It was noted that ethnic federalism will inevitably reinforce rather than minimize conflict between groups.[23] Moreover, the International Crisis Group underlined that there is a growing discontent with EPRDF's ethnically defined state and with its rigid grip on power stirring fears of continued interethnic conflict.[24] Asnake, on his part, noted that inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts have accompanied the federalization process in Ethiopia; and mismanagement of ethno-linguistic diversities in the country has been one of the perennial causes of conflicts in the country.[25] Considering ethnocentrism as an arrogant philosophy of narrow-minded African dictators, and fully accepting federalism as a basis for political power and shared governance, *Alemayehu* demonstrated that the current political elites of the Ethiopian government have been hanging us separately one by one on the hooks of 'ethnic federalism'.[26] Bahru, on his part, noted that ethnic federalism has saddled us [Ethiopia] with a host of problems and he further commented that the federal arrangement needs to reflect historical reality, conform to economic rationality and facilitate an efficient administration.[27] To achieve these goals, the American-style territorial federation is to be preferred.

Although a number of comments were forwarded about the effects of ethnic federalism, the government has never wanted to take an yof them seriously. In this regard, the International Crisis Group stated that the regime is unwilling to share power or to accept criticism as normal.[28] This is because ethnic federalism has been designed intentionally to divide the society. Many authors describe ethnic federalism as a malicious tactic of TPLF (Tigray People's Liberation Front) to plant divisions among ethnic groups so as to create

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[23] Bekalu, 2017: "Ethnic Federalism and Conflict in Ethiopia," p. 43.

[24] International Crisis Group, 2009: Ethiopia: Ethnic Federalism and Its Discontents, p.153.

[25] Asnake, 2002, Federalism, Some Trends of Ethnic Conflicts and their Management in Ethiopia, p. 17.

[26] Alemayehu, 2013: Ethiopia: Liberating a "Prison Nation, p. 2.

[27] Bahru, 2008: *Society, State and History: Selected Essays*, p. 54.

[28] International Crisis Group, 2009: Ethiopia: Ethnic Federalism and Its Discontents, p. 154.

legitimacy for its minority rule over the other ethnic majorities. Most supporters of the opposition allege that the TPLF clearly manipulates ethnic identities and conflicts in order to stay in power.[29] For the current government, ethnic federalism has served as a political strategy to divide the society into compartmentalized classifications because a divided society does not rally to the common goal of challenging the government. Rather, in the Ethiopian case, the people have been under a climate of fear and suspicion of each other.

Some scholars seemed to rise against ethnic federalism by arguing that it undermines the integrity and the unity of the Ethiopian population by magnifying the ethnic differences and that it there by negatively affects the solidarity of the people. Ethnic federalism never clips the strings of separateness but rather feeds division and remains a powerful force in dismantling social unity and national identity. That is, a shared identity and a sense of community have lessened significantly since 1991 because of ethnic federalism. Ethnic federalism has exacerbated differences among groups, promoted ethnic self-awareness and tensions among all groups.

Thus, the Ethiopian ethnic federalism appears to be one of the main causes of intensified religious conflict. In this connection, *Zelalem* noted that the enormous value given to local ethno-linguistic identity today has tempted political parties to tie 'their own' peoples distinctiveness not only strictly to cultural terms but also to religious orientations.[30] The emergence of ethnic politics in Ethiopia has divided the various ethnic groups and promoted religious intolerance with devastating consequences.

The Coming of the New Islamic Movement

Islam has a number of sects; one of which is *Wahhabis /Khawerji* Movement. In connection to this, Mr. Mulatu (Muslim) stated the following:

> 'There were divisions among Muslims. Older Muslims are criticized by the youth since their way of life was similar to Christians' life.'

Mr. Yilkal (protestant) addressed the points below:

> 'The Wahhabis' movement aiming to purify Islam from the tradition has been a cause for the rise of fundamentalists.'

Mr. Kebede (Coptic Orthodox Christian) added the points below:

> The traditional Muslim community in Ethiopia has been 'Sunni'. The newly movement group named 'Wahhabis' was formed recently. This group is known for its fundamentalism. It is a group of educated religious youth. From this group, a very radical group was also formed and this is named as 'Warj'. This group does not greet Christians; they stand against education except Quran; they are against government tax.

The dichotomy between progressive youth and traditionalist Muslims with respect to certain specific issues of Islam was one of the reasons of the conflict. As the statements

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[29] Oakland Institute, 2014: Engineering Ethnic Conflict, p. 16.
[30] Zelalem, 2010: The 2006 *Religious Conflict in Didessa and Gomma Woradas of Western Oromia,* p. 106.

quoted show, the teaching of the fundamentalist group named '*Warj'/' Khawerji'* seriously instructs fellowMuslim not to greet Christians, not to pay tax to the government, not to drink milk, not to eat honey, and not to live peacefully and harmoniously with Christians. Regarding the origin of this sect and their further characteristics, *Zelalem* stated that *Khawareji* first entered *Harar* and then crossed into *Bale*, *Arsi* and lastly *Jimma*.[31] This sect brought new culture of dressing, wearing *hijab*, covering the full face of women Muslims and shortening the trousers of Muslim men along with leaving the beard and the moustache uncut.

Zelalem further stated that the young generation is controlled by the teaching of a new foreign extreme sect of Islam, '*Khawerji'*. Medhane, on his part, noted that lax religious policy and devolution of powers to the regions in Ethiopia after 1991 have created a fertile ground for the spread of the *Wahabbi* and other revivalist movements.[32] Moreover, the youth have started a campaign aiming to purify Islamic belief. When fundamentalists cause religious unrest; they need to produce various reasons and one of which is the production of spiritual renewal. Renewers of Islam such as the *Wahabbis* do not respect religious diversity and they become suspicious of any change when that change originates outside the Muslim community.

Reversing History

Furthermore, the participants of the study recorded that reversing history is also a cause for religious clash.

Mr. Yilkal (a protestant) said the following:

> 'Ethiopia is said to have been a 'Christian Island' and this claim is not welcomed by the Muslim population. They thought that they were despised by the Christian rulers and they need to reverse this.'

Mr. Molla (Muslim) added the following points:

> These fundamentalists stated that Emperor Yohannes IV forced Muslims [in 1878]to be converted to Christians since the numbers of Muslims in those days were few. Now, we have to reverse this history since our number is mounting from time to time.

As says *Yilkal*, the claim 'Ethiopia is a Christian island' was an appropriate way of describing Ethiopia as religiously homogeneous in those ancient days but not now. At present, Ethiopia is a divided nation in which a number of religions and ethnic groups try to co-exist together despite the challenges exerted by the ethnic federalism imposed some twenty-five years ago. In such a context, utterances or claims that ignore the heterogeneity of the country in terms of ethnic and religious groups might aggravate conflict. Afe work stated that some people think that Ethiopia is the 'Island of Christianity', but that claim is bluntly contradicted by the existing cultural heterogeneity of Ethiopia.[33]

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[31] Ibid. p. 91.

[32] Medhane, 2004: *Turning Conflicts to Cooperation in the Horn of Africa*, p. 17.

[33] Afework, 2009: *Religious Tolerance in Addis Ababa 1991-2008*, p. 84.

Despite the long co-existence between Christians and Muslims in Ethiopia, there were some occasional quarrels and hostilities between Christians and Muslims in which there were victims on both sides, as happened in many parts of the world. For example, the ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria also have some historical antecedents in many governmental actions during the colonial rule and after independence which encouraged, to a large extent, the sowing of the seeds of ethno-religious conflicts that are found to be rampant in the Nigerian nation today.[34] In the Ethiopian context, Afe work stated that some religious people have been unable to 'forgive' the past and they chose to dwell on past misdeeds.[35] If religious people hold antithetical position in all spheres of life, the ultimate effect of their move is sowing the seed of hostility, resentment and hatred in the generation to come. This is also against Islam, for the Quran suggests that it is better not to do revenge but people should rather act in a spirit of charity. Quran, Chapter 5: 45 states that: "We decreed for them therein that: the soul for the soul, the eye for the eye, the nose for the nose, the ear for the ear, the tooth for the tooth and an equivalent injury for any injury. However, anyone who pardons and forfeits as a charitable act will have his sins remitted."[36] But fundamentalists who have been prone to conflict try to find a cause that triggers religious conflict.

Expansion of Christianity

Expansion of Christianity was mentioned as one of the factors that caused religious unrest. In this regard, Mr. Yilkal, a protestant religious teacher**,** noted the following during the interview session:

> 'In most Muslim dominated areas, Protestants preach gospel widely and they convert Muslims into Christianity and this upsets the Muslim fundamentalists.'

Mr. Kedir (Muslim) stated the causes of the conflict as follows:

> 'The expansion of Christianity in the region is one of the causes for the conflict. Particularly, the expansion of the Protestant church does not give comfort to the Muslim fundamentalists.'

Mr. Tesfa (protestant) added:

> 'Now, the number of Christians is increasing and the local Muslim fundamentalists clearly state that Christians should leave the regions or they should be converted to Islam.'

Mr. Mulatu(Coptic Orthodox Christian) noted:

> Since one Pastor has converted a number of Muslims to Christianity, he was forced to change his place because the surrounding Muslims strongly wanted to kill him.

Mr. Getachew, (Protestant) during the interview, had to say the following:

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[34] Salawu, 2010: "Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria," p. 348.
[35] Afework, 2009: *Religious Tolerance in Addis Ababa 1991-2008*, p. 96.
[36] Quran, Chapter 5: 45.

> The expansion of Christians in the area did not relieve Muslim fundamentalists since they have had the desire to keep the area as Muslim dominated as before.

As these data show, the rise of Christianity in the regions has been viewed as a threat; extremists therefore opposed it. Basically, the *Orthodox Tewahido Church* is not much involved in raising the number of Christians as it rather focuses on maintaining the believers that already belong to this church. Contrary to this, the Protestant Church is a vibrant Christian church aiming to spread the gospel through eloquent preachers. But the efforts of the Protestant church to spread the gospel were unacceptable to Muslim fundamentalists. Islam in its advance has been successful in societies and among people n which there is freedom of religion and religious liberty but in many Muslim-dominated areas, Christianity faces prohibitions when it enters a region and/or faces restrictions of its activities.[37] This implied that Christian minority groups were denied effective religious practice. Christians were restricted from propagating their faith or seeking converts. This happened also because it should be remembered that Islamic law orders capital punishment for apostasy from Islam to other religions. This law posed there fore a great danger to Christians who share the gospel with Muslims.[38]

As human beings have inquisitive minds, they are able to investigate the world as it exists and choose what is relevant to him/her. Contrary to this, Islamic identity possesses a strong sense of self-sufficiency and is not readily open to finding or seeking the relevance of anything else apart from its own convictions.[39]

Ways of Preaching

Participants of the study also mentioned ways of preaching as other potential causes of religious conflict. Mr. Dawit, a protestant religious leader, during the interview made the following points:

> 'Muslims have disgraced the Christians' faith by citing words from the Bible. To this end, they have been distributing cassette and CD of Dr. Zakir Naik, teasing the Christians' faith.'

Mr. Ali (Muslim) added the following:

> 'There were cassettes that aggravate the Muslim-Christian conflict.'

Mr. Hussien (a Muslim) on his part said:

> 'Cassettes coming from outside Ethiopia have the potential to instigate religious conflict and supervisions should be made.'

As it can be seen from the excerpts above, there were some preachers who instigated conflict through their preaching. Afework also stated that some of the sub-groups in religious institutions as well as individual preachers, singers, publishers and writers acted irresponsibly towards glorifying their own line of faith at the expense of others.[40] For example, Dr. *Zakir's* and his fellows' inflammatory comments upon the Christian faith

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[37] Braswell, 1996: *Islam: Its Prophet, People, Politics and Power,* p. 244.
[38] Ibid, p. 244.
[39] Woodberry, 1989: M*uslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road*, p. 29.
[40] Afework, 2009: *Religious Tolerance in Addis Ababa 1991-2008*, p. 84.

have been a linchpin to the fundamentalist movement. Many innocent Muslims might take their words for granted and act violently and they have been involved in a radical violent campaign. As a result, their preaching agitates the Muslims to form militant Muslim groups. Provocative cassettes being played on public streets could be considered a form of aggravation. Even local stories and rumors, focusing on inter-religious implications, might trigger religious conflict, particularly when reported irresponsibly.

Conclusion

A range of issues were mentioned as causes for the eruption of violence among Muslims and Christians. Some of the causes mentioned by the informants of this study were the desire to establish an Islamic state; the influence of ethnic federalism on strained relationships between religious groups; the influence of the new Islamic movement on tensions already existing between Muslims and Christian; Christian missionary campaigns towards expanding their numbers in Muslim dominated areas; "reversing history" (by Muslims claiming that their increased numbers justify the reversion of their past minority position to that of the majority in a region), and inflammatory preaching by some Muslim leaders. Muslim fundamentalists want to see Islamic theocracy in the country and to that end they try to convert people to their religion by force.

It was noted that ethnic federalism has also aggravated differences among groups; it promoted ethnic self-awareness and created tensions and consequently conflicts among all groups. The data also clearly showed that the religious conflict observed in Ethiopia has been partly caused by the influence of the Arab world. It is a historical watershed that the Arab world has lit fire for the destruction of Ethiopia.

It was found out that some fundamentalists Muslims have tried to attack the Christian faith in cassettes and it is significant to note that at the height of religious troubles, it is such type of media provocation which exacerbates conflict. It was observed that denominationally-based publications and electronic media are less subject to monitoring by the government.

Recommendations

Based on the results discussed herein in this study, the following recommendations are forwarded. The finding of the study showed that fundamentalists aim to form Islamic States through coercive measures such as by converting people involuntarily for fear they will be killed. Forcing people to renounce their religion is an unbalanced kind of thinking, for, no matter what type of religion people follow, we should not try to convert people by force. If fundamentalists use force for the expansion of their religion instead of convincing via peaceful discussion, 'Islam', which is used as a shelter by fundamentalists, may be labeled as a flag bearer of violence.

It was found out that ethnic federalism has been a cause of religious conflict. Federalism might be the order of the day but ethnic federalism should not be applicable to a country like Ethiopia where all ethnic groups have been dispersed sparsely throughout the country. The federal system of government on the basis of ethnicity could cause deep ethnic division and bring multiple problems and also generates a culture of mistrust that causes ethnic conflict.

It was noted that the coming of the new Islamic movement was one cause of the conflict. It should be clear from the outset that everything coming from outside, particularly, from the Arab world is cause for suspicion. Rather than being driven by new movements, the new generation of the Ethiopian youth needs to uphold the wisdom of their forefathers or ancestors and maintain tolerance in the face of ethnic and religious diversity. In this regard, Ephraim (1971:263) stated that a healthy society is not an extremist one; it is one that can combine the best of the past and the best of the present.[41]

The finding of the study further revealed that fundamentalists have the desire to reverse the previous history. Religious people need to forget the cumulative events of the past and the scares left by the previous regimes; they are supposed to learn forgiveness. From time immemorial, we have had an inheritance of unfair rivalry and we were fierce in the fights for power. There must be a shift away from the devastating struggle for power, for rivalry is not characteristic of a religion. Competitive identity, competitive religion, and ethnicity and culture should not be part of a pluralistic globalizing society. Particularly, competitive religion, a claim denoting that my religion is better than yours, is very much unwelcome. Instead, we have to accept and appreciate our differences.

The study revealed that expansion of Christianity in Muslim-dominated areas has been a cause of religious conflict. It is always proper to interrogate our own share in causing the conflicts and it is also better to meet people of other faiths and see their non-Islamic view point.

The study further found out that ways of preaching could cause religious unrest. The weighty knowledge of a spiritual leader could be tested against the behavior s/he shows and the utterances s/he makes. True preachers try to win human beings through love and humble treatment. They should not denounce the religious practices of other faiths. Religious leaders or preachers coming from Somalia, *Jijjiga* or from the Arab world should be seen in the light of their words and deeds. The mission of theology teachers should be limited to teaching and guiding the personal holy spiritual experience of the believers. To this end, they are supposed to preach love, respect, mercy, tolerance, kindness, spirituality dealing with holiness, absolute goodness, all of which is completely agreeable to our mind. Preachers need to plant a good faith in the hearts of the people. In doing so, they are to be more careful when they articulate any message. If they preach grievance, conflict and hatred, we expect Ethiopian Muslims to doubt the sincerity of their words. This is because, religious doctrines are not only principles; rather they are lives we have to actually live.

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[41] Ibid, p. 84.

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Left Wing Fideism: A Critique of Non-Cognitivism

J. C. Thomas

Abstract

The non-cognitivist analysis of Religious Language often uses remarks from the later writings to Ludwig Wittgenstein to try and build a non-cognitivist apologetic for Christian belief. The "Concept of Prayer" by D.Z. Phillips represents this approach to the analysis of Religious Language. The crucial defect in Phillips account of the logic of religious language is that he assumes that it is single leveled. Once 'depth' grammar has revealed what logic of God is like, this univocal logic can be applied to every religious statement, and any religious statement which does not fit into this account, must be reduced to a statement which will, or be eliminated from religious discourse. Phillips uses Wittgestein's insight that words and statements only have meaning in the stream of life, to prop up a doctrine which leads back to the dogma, to mean is to name. This paper argues that any such approach finds it difficult not to distort the ordinary meaning of Religious Language and attempts to offer a detailed critique of this position.

KEY WORDS: Non-Cognitivism, Religious Language, Lugwig Wittgenstein, D.Z. Phillips

Phillips' Epistemology

The Logical Nature of the Non-Cognitivist Dispute

How is it possible to decide whether or not the cognitivist or the non-cognitivist provides the correct epistemological analysis of religious statement? The Creeds and the prayers which Christians seem to make factual claims at several different levels about the nature of God and the actions and status of Jesus Christ.

The dispute is not about what the languages of, for example, the major Christian Churches' claim about the factual or non-factual status of key religious assertions; it is rather what the correct analysis of religious assertions is to be, if they are to be genuinely religious. Phillips argues that the religious assertions are ' sui generis', and therefore totally unlike any other statement or assertion in any other language game. For Phillips, the task of the philosophical theologian must be to clarify the unique nature of theological utterances, by cleansing them from the superstitious husks which they have caught by being contaminated by non-religious language games.

Thus despite Phillips claims that he uncovers the 'depth' grammar of religious utterances, the cognitivists-non-cognivitist dispute is not,' Do religious statements or assertions as a matter of fact contain cognititive elements?' rather it is the question, ' Are statements or assertions which have some fact claiming elements, the most appropriate sorts of statements by means of which to make religious assertions, to formulate prayers, to write liturgies, to construct dogmatic systems?'

The cognitivist-non-cognitivist dispute is a question as to what sorts of statements or assertions are most appropriate to provide a system of projection for the nature of God as described in say Christian worship, prayer and doctrine. Just because the question which Phillips is attempting to handle is, 'which system projection must be used to describe the God who is the most worship worthy?", and not in the end, 'What language about God do ordinary believers usually use? , he pervasively confuses concepts and the things concepts refer to. The disease is one which is generated by the use of the ontological argument which attempts to reach reality from a concept alone. It is hardly surprising that Phillips major question (although one which he does not see clearly) is 'Which concept of God is the most worship worthy? (However odd a question this may be). Findlay in his ontological disproof of God's existence is like-wise obsessed with the problem of the nature of the most worship worthy God.[1]

The question as to the worship-worthiness of a God is, not merely a factual question. It can be restated as 'Which god ought I to worship'? The cognitivist will obviously answer: The god whose existence is a logical possibility. The non-cognitivist will answer: The god to which specified religious attitudes are the most appropriate. But how do I decide which god is the most worship worthy? The attempt to answer this question involves not only the factual question of what various concepts of God there are, but also the evaluative question of which god ought to be worshipped. However if this question is to be answered, it is clear that the answer will involve attempts to persuade others that a given concept of God is the best one, and attempts to comment one concept of God rather than another.

Persuasive Definition

Phillips claims that his methods are strictly empirical infact, he is looking to see how religious language is actually used and provide an analysis of this usage. A closer inspection shows that Phillips' thesis is not as metaphysically innocent as he would have us believe. The title of the book indicates a non-empirical approach. In the face of the great varieties of different types of prayers in different religious traditions, to suggest that there is" THE" concept of prayer, which is the only genuinely religious type of prayer is to prejudge the issue.

The Concept of Prayer is a work of metaphysics gone rampant in that Phillips uses an acceptable form of the statements 'every statement has its own logic', and 'don't ask for meaning as for use', in order to foist on his reader a highly metaphysical form of these injunctions: with the help of the latter he attempts to retain the emotive connotations and imagery associations of the word 'Prayer' whilst redefining its descriptive meaning. Phillips programme is in fact a massive exercise in persuasive definition.

[1] Flew and Machintyre. New Essays in Philosophical Theology.pp.47ff

A less rigid application of the thesis that meaning and use are equivalent is that a single univocal criterion of meaning cannot be used to appraise the meaning of every statement no matter what the context in which it is uttered, without gross distortion of the meaning of those statements which belong to a different logical family from the ones which form the model for univocal meaning criterion; For example, in Descartes' case such a model was the language of pure Mathematics. In so far as Phillips is using this weaker form of the thesis to criticise Flew, Hepburn, and Munz's univocal use of such words as 'exist', 'real', 'all powerful' etc. he is quite correct in his objections.

Phillips also uses the slogans 'every statement has its own logic', and 'don't ask for meaning ask for use' to make stronger claim: this is the claim that if a statement or set of statements have a use, if a language game is played, then the reality of the concepts employed in the language game is used. Thus he writes: "To say, 'This is the true God' is to believe in Him, and worship Him."[2] Or again Phillips endorses Malcom's statement: "In those complex systems of thought, those 'language games', God has the status of a necessary being. Who can doubt that? Here we must say with Wittgenstein, 'This language game is played'.[3]

Phillips method in *The Concept of Prayer* is thus very good metaphysics: he begins with an 'a priori' proof of God's existence. Once the ontological argument has shown what God's nature must be like, the types of prayer used in ordinary religious devotion can be redefined so that they will be appropriate to what Phillips considers to be the only worship worthy concept of God.

What Does Phillips' Stronger Thesis Prove?

The problem about the use of the stronger form of thesis 'don't ask for meaning ask for use' is that it tends to prove too much for Phillips' purposes. If the use of a language game justifies a belief in the reality of the concepts described by the language game, then this argument provides an ontological proof for the existence of every concept used in any language game. If the playing of the Hebraic- Christian language game justifies belief in a Christian God, then the same can be said for the Hindu God, the Buddhist God or in the case of Theraveda Buddhism, the non-existence of God.

The strong meaning equals usage thesis is thus metaphysical in that it demands that the existence of a concept can be conjured out of its definition in use. This contrasts with the weak form of the thesis which is an injunction to get away from a univocal theory of meaning, whether this is the verification theory, or an essentialist theory such as the strong meaning equals usage theory. To say in the weak sense that meaning equals use is to recommend a careful investigations of the 'situ im leben' of a statement, before deciding its meaning.

The 'a priori' character of the strong meaning equals usage thesis is illustrated by Peter Winch both in *The Idea of a Social Science* and in *Understanding in a Primitive Society*. Winch claims that the concept of 'reality', the concept of 'truth', the concept of 'logic' in a given society or universe of discourse is wholly determined by the language game in which these concepts are used. For example, to suppose that the modern scientific outlook has shown Azande witchcraft to be nothing but superstitution, is to ignore the

[2] The Concept of Prayer, p.149
[3] The Concept of Prayer ,p.18

employment of witchcraft language game by the Azande people. The problem which Winch builds round himself is that if there is no common logical form, no common concept of truth and reality which cross-crosses and interlocks with all the diverse possible language games how can different cultures such as those of Modern Western society and that of Azande tribes ever communicate at all? Each has its own language game, but each game subsists, granted that they have no common logical form, in splendid isolation.

This 'isolationist' language game theory is 'a priori' because once a language game is seen to be played, the criteria of each such games meaningfulness and reality are purely internal: hence comparative culture and comparative religion are logically impossible. As A.K. Louch puts it:

> Winch wishes to reject the comparison of Christian baptism with other instances of ritual purification. The grounds of his rejection of these interesting comparisons are clear enough: if he is to explain baptism 'a priori', the rite must be deducible a set of conventions, or espoused theory, i.e. Christian theology and ritual. If Church historians were to find the roots of Christian baptism in earlier rites of purification, his thesis would entail assertions of temporal, and perhaps casual sequence, which would require empirical research. To say that an action is a convention is to say among other things that it is not idiosyncratic, and this is a truth that can be discovered only by observation. It is surely not discoverable by lexicography or grammar along.[4]

A further problem for the strong meaning equals usage thesis is how a language game is to be delimited. If every statement has its own logic does this mean, there is no common logical form between any two statements, so that no two statements have any logical relation the one to the other. More seriously, if each language game has criteria of truth and reality internal within itself, what grounds are there for dividing language games up into science, religion, aesthetics and so on? Why not divide them further into physical science and chemical science, into Catholic and Protestant religion, and yet further into Anglican, Methodist and Pentecostalist, each with its own self-justifying language game? Where in fact is the process of division to stop?

The strong form of the meaning equals usage thesis also implies that belief and understanding are identical, because the reality and truth of the belief in question. It is hard to see what assertion amounts to. It suggests that to believe X is to understand X and that it is logically impossible to believe X and not to understand X. Further an unbeliever can come to understand what Christian believes without becoming a Christian; a Christian can never come to understand what Azandes believe about Witchcraft, without coming to believe what they believe. This move therefore gets rid of any problems of verification or falsification by a definition; for if belief and understanding are identical, then once I believe X, I understand that it is true and problems of how I can know a proposition to be true, which I first understand without knowing its truth, cannot be raised.

It is easy to see what it means to say that in the case of some statements belief and understanding are simultaneous; I can understand and believe at one and the same time

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[4] A.L. Louch. "The very idea of a social science" Inquiry vol. 6. 1963 pp. 280 and 283.

the statement that I am now typing with a black ribbon on white paper. But the fact that my belief and understanding are simultaneous in this instance does not make them identical. I could be deluded about my sitting here typing: I might be either dreaming, drunk, or under the influence of drugs.

This point raises another issue about the stronger thesis: How can it account for illustrations and delusions. If my understanding X and my believing X are not merely simultaneous, but are identical, can I ever be said to suffer an illusion? Certainly if this thesis is correct there can be no concept, however open textured of reality and unreality, of truth and falsehood; the concept of reality and unreality are internal to the language game which is being played. Phillips writes: "One cannot contrast something called 'hallucinating prayer' with something else called 'normal prayer'. One cannot contrast hallucinatory experiences of the Virgin Mary with normal experiences of the Virgin Mary."[5]

The internal criteria which determine the reality or unreality of the vision are the compatibility of the vision or prayer with the religious tradition in which the vision or prayer is claimed to have taken place. "One may claim to have had a religiously significant vision, but whether the vision has such religious significance is determined by the religion within which the vision is experienced, or at least, by the religion which influences the vision."[6]

This position commits Phillips to saying that if prayer or vision occurs within a given religious tradition, it is genuine. If the prayer or vision does not occur within a religious tradition, it is by definition not a prayer or not a vision, hence cannot be a hallucination. To say this is to deny the ordinary use of 'normal' and 'hallucinatory' in religious language. Surely some prayers are normal, others odd; some visions 'normal' others 'hallucinatory.' A vision of the virgin Mary could well be genuine, if it was seen by a good Christian in the course of his daily prayers. But surely every vision of the Virgin Mary seen by a good Christian in a sound Christian tradition is not necessarily genuine? It is not self-contradictory, as it must be if Phillips is correct in identifying belief and understanding, to say, 'I thought I had a vision of the Virgin Mary in chapel this morning, but it was really a 'hallucination'. The fact that there is a language game in which genuine visions of the Virgin Mary are described, presupposes criteria other than that of compatibility with existing traditions for distinguishing genuine and non-genuine visions. To say there is a concept of what it is to have such visions of what the Virgin Mary really is like. If not, then it is hard to see how the language games of visions of the blessed Virgin ever got off the ground. Of course all visions of the Blessed Virgin Mary may be illusory; the concept may have no reality. But if the reality of the concept is to be taken seriously, it is hard to see how the distinction between genuine and hallucinatory visions can be ignored.

Phillips makes a similar definitional victory in refusing to allow a distinction between 'Normal' and 'odd', or 'self-deceiving' acts of prayer. He writes: "In prayer what is said can only be said directly to God. This is an analytic statement, since what is said is God's language as it wore."[7] This statement is true only if it made so by definition. Suppose someone says, 'I pray every night, but I never pray to God, but to the Virgin Mary.' Phillips would presumably reply to such an instance, that may be what is said at an

[5] Op Cit. p.33
[6] Phillips Op.cit.p.36
[7] Op.Cit. p.52

empirical level is what we would normally call a prayer, but since it is not addressed to God, my definition of prayer will not allow such an instance to count as prayer.

Firstly there do seem to be situations in which it is possible to say a person has prayed, but has not prayed correctly. In South America it seems to be the case that some naïve Roman Catholics regard local saints as a substitute for God, and they pray to them for particular blessings and benefits. These South Americans are not merely asking their saints to pray and intercede to God for them, (which is the Orthodox doctrine of the intercession of the Saints), but are making petitions directly to the saints. Now an Orthodox Christian may call these prayers superstitions, but it is not logically self-contradictory as Phillips argument requires calling them prayers.

Secondly, the Orthodox doctrine of the intercession of the Saints, is an example of prayers which are not made to God. The Christian prays to a saint, that he may intercede with God on the believer's behalf. J.H. Newman in Tract XC suggests that in the intercession of the saints, God is continually reminded by the saints of the importance of the contingent particularly of the created order. I am happy about saying that God either can be or needs to be reminded about anything. The doctrine of the Intercession of the saints is designed to stress God's determination to show his concern for the particularities in the world, despite his omnipotence. It is not surprising that Phillips who has no interest in God's relation to contingent particulars should ignore this form of prayer. If Phillips is willing to take any notice of the 'depth' grammar of religious belief at all, he cannot deny that this language is played: is it not then a falsifying instance of his claim that prayer is only prayer when it is prayed to God?

A further consequence of this reduction of understanding to belief is that our knowledge of God is restricted to "knowing how". Religious knowledge for Phillips is not a "knowing that" the world is of such and such a nature, and that it is related to God in such and such a way; rather it is "knowing" how to play the religious language game, a "knowing how" to pray, and how to pray aright. He writes: "To say 'This is the true God' is to believe in Him, and worship Him"[8]

There are clear examples of people who know how to do something, without their being able to explain the 'knowing that' involved. A great novelist is none the less great if he is unable to explain in propositions the method or technique of writing a great novel. Alternatively many people can drive a car and know how to handle it on the road, without having the faintest idea of the effect their driving the car has on its mechanical parts.

Phillips strong meaning equals usage thesis however is claiming more than that many people can know how to pray to God without knowing the correct philosophical analysis of the relation of a man who is praying to the God to whom he prays. He is saying that if I know how to pray, neither I nor anyone else needs to get worried about what it is to know the rules, regulations and theories about God's relation to man in prayer. Phillips gets rid of the possibility of the misuse of prayers, and of the possibility of hallucinatory visions: If "knowing how" and "knowing that" are identical, no conceptual criticism of a "knowing how" is possible. But surely "knowing how" is in the end parasitical for its justification on knowing that: I know that to make my ear go faster or slow down, I can take my foot off the accelerator and put it on without thinking about what I am doing

[8] Op.cit.p.149

when I do this. But my knowing how to operate the accelerator presupposes that someone knows that depressing the accelerator increases the flow of petrol to the engine and increases the frequency of the explosion in the cylinders.

Similarly in the case of prayer; many Christians know how to pray to God: and about what sort of a God it is who is interested in our prayers, and who cares sufficiently about this creation to listen to the supplications of this creatures.

Phillips allows no account of what we can know about God to be given: understanding and belief are identical, so to know God is not to know something about him, but to believe in him. The question about what sort of God it is that Phillips exhorts us to believe in, is a question the possibility of which is ruled out by the identification of "knowing how" and "knowing that". Phillips seems to think that the more unintelligible and obscure he makes his concept of God, the more this concept approximates to the true God.

Prayer and Ordinary Language

The Concept of Prayer claims to be an examination of the ordinary use of prayers. Phillips implies that God is a logically necessary being. All religious activity must be restricted by the nature of the God towards whom this activity is directed. Barth similarly argues that the nature of the God towards whom this activity is directed. Barth similarly argues that the nature of dogmatics must be determined by the object it studies (i.e. God). But Barth's God is free to reveal himself, or to refuse to do so as he sees fit. The God conjured into existence by the ontological argument has not got this absolute freedom: he is logically necessary being, and in the nature of the case is unchanging and unchangeable. Phillips refuses to allow any type of prayer which it is not appropriate to offer to a logically necessary being to be genuine prayer He attempts to reduce all types of prayer which will not be appropriate to his concept of God, to types which are appropriate. Phillips accepts prayers of confession and thanksgiving as genuine prayers, but subtly changes the meanings these types of prayer possess in ordinary usage.

Prayers of confession are normally used in a situation where a person or congregation ask God to forgive them for their sins. The believer is then given God's forgiveness, either by a minister, or by his personal awareness that God has forgiven him. God alone has the power to forgive sins, and his central means of forgiveness was his atoning action through Jesus Christ on the cross. The common sense idea of confession is clearly brought out in the Prayer Book communion service.

> We earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings; the remembrance of them is grievous unto us; the burden of them is intolerable. Have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us, most merciful Father; for thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, forgive us all that is past; and grant we may ever hereafter serve thee in newness of life.[9]

For Phillips, the forgiveness appropriate to an act of confession does not seem to be an act on God's part; it is a means of getting to know oneself. Thus "in coming to know

[9] 1928 Prayer Book p.346

God one comes to know oneself."[10] Belief in God is a necessary condition of self-understanding, but God in no way participates actively in this process of self-forgiveness. It is hard to see how Phillips attaches any meaning to the opening sentence of the traditional Anglican canon of consecration:

> Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who of the tender mercy didst give only son Jesus Christ to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption; who made there (by his one oblation of himself once offered) a full perfect sufficient, sacrifice and satisfaction for the sins of the world.[11]

Prayers of thanksgiving are also treated in a reductionist manner by Phillips. A genuine prayer of thanksgiving is, he asserts, not thanking God for this or that, but thanking God for the whole of existence. This is not the ordinary usage of thanksgiving[12] where various features of existence are singled out as meriting thanksgiving, but in particular "the redemption of our Lord Jesus, Christ".

A further problem about this analysis of thanksgiving is this: 'is it a logically possible analysis of the concept?' It is clear what I mean by the word 'thank' when I thank John for the birthday present he gave me. Similarly, I know how I am using the word 'thank' when I say that I am thankful to my parents for being firm with me, and sometimes punishing me for my own good, when I was young. But what does it mean to say, as Phillips does that I ought to thank God, not for this or that, but for everything for the whole world of my life? Both Phillips and J.R. Jones suggest that this is the most appropriate attitude to life; "For to be able profoundly to give thanks for existence is the same as acceptance of the world, acceptance of life. And this is what being happy means-being in agreement with the world".[13] The word 'thank' has a clear use when used of particular things in the world; but when it is applied to the world as whole it is pushed beyond the bounds of its meaningful use. Just as the concept of cause becomes meaningless if taken from its application to the relationships between particular events and applied to the universe as whole: likewise a category mistake is committed if the word 'thank' is applied to the universe as a whole rather than particular things for which we may be thankful.

It is also hard to know what it means to say that a person ought to be thankful to God no matter what happens to him; If gratitude is inappropriate in a particular situation (e.g. if a close relation at the height of his career is dying of cancer), to insist that words of thanks be used to describe my response to the situation, is to insist that the word 'thanks' be used vacuously: if 'thanks' are appropriate to God no matter whether the world treats me justly or unjustly, why describe my attitude as one of thankfulness rather than unthankfulness? If no situation occurs in which it is inappropriate to give thanks, is it meaningful to say that a situation occurs in which it is appropriate to give thanks?

Prayers which cannot be offered to a God who is logically necessary being, Phillips dismisses as superstitious. "In the face of prayers which do not fit readily into my exposition, all I can do is to note them and leave it at that. I do not say that they are not

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[10] Op.cit.p.63
[11] 1928 Prayer Book, p.349
[12] 1928 Prayer Book, p. 151
[13] "In J.R. Jones "Love as the Perception of meaning."Phillips: Religion and understanding. P.52

prayers (who is philosopher to say that?) but simply that I do not understand what I is involved in them".[14]

The most obvious example of prayer which is inappropriate to a logically necessary being is petitionary, or intercessory prayer. Ordinary language suggests that a large part of our public and private prayer is intercessory; that is it asks God to make some change either in the state of affairs in the world, or in the spiritual state of ourselves or of others. For example, the collect for the fifth Sunday after Trinity runs: "Grant O Lord we beseech thee that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by the governance, that the Church may joyfully serve thee in all Godly quietness, through Jesus Christ our Lord". Similarly, the Collect for Sunday before Advent runs: " Stir up, we beseech thee, O lord, the wills of thy faithful people , that they say plenteously bring forth the fruit of good work, and say of thee be plenteously rewarded."[15] As far as private prayers are concerned, I can only speak from my own experience, but I do find myself frequently praying for specific solutions to specific problems: for peace in Vietnam, for an end to the cold war, for the safe journey of a friend, for a relation in sickness and so on.

Whatever the prima facie evidence of ordinary language may be Phillips thinks that any form of petitionary prayer is superstitious: to be genuinely religious is to thank God for everything there is, whether it is good or bad. He claims that what we are really doing when we use petitionary is showing God the strength of our desires. "When deep religious believers pray for something, they are not so much asking God to bring this about, but in a way telling him of the strength of their desires."[16] But if this is so, why has petitionary prayer not died out in sophisticated Christian belief as a primitive superstition? How does Phillips explain the strength of the persistence of the use of petitionary prayer? Further why does he decline to present detailed examples of reformulated petitionary prayers in which for every occurrence of 'Lord, will you do X' a form of the statement 'Lord, I feel very strongly about X' is substituted? But any such move would surely commit a category mistake of supposing that a request for an active response is nothing over and above an intense expression of desire?

God for Phillips is unchanging and omniscient. It is therefore impossible to tell God anything he does not already know. Further: if both is an unchanging logically necessary being, and he knows everything that is going to happen in the future, is not the possibility of the existence of contingent events in his creation ruled out? If God has planned from eternity everything that is going to happen in the universe and God's nature is unchanging what is the point in asking for an alteration in the detail of the history of the universe? For theological determinists, part of God's plan could be that people will use petitionary prayers at certain points in the plan, and yes or no answers built into the course of events will be part of the plan from the beginning. The difficulty about petitionary prayer in this type of metaphysic is that the petitioner's questions and answers are all engineered: part of the meaning of saying 'I ask X' or 'I grant X' is that I need not have asked if I had not wanted to, and that my prayer need not have been answered.

A remarkable feature of Phillips supposedly empirical analysis is his lack of discussion of the New Testaments notions of prayer. The one quotation he does offer

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[14] Op.cit. p.8

[15] The Book of Common Prayer. Collects for Trinity 5, and the Sunday before Advent

[16] Op.Cit. p.121

suggests a reference to Christ's words in the garden of Gethsemene: "Thy will not Mine be done".[17] He goes on to suggest that Petitionary prayer is in the end such a submission to the will of God.[18] But here is paying attention to the surface grammar and not to the depth grammar of Mark. The whole of verse 36 reads (R.S.V. text): "And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee, remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt". Christ addresses God not as a being who is outside participation in human language, or who is a being we cannot understand: Christ as very man addresses God as Father, one of the most personal terms. This verse seems to presuppose that had Jesus asked for the removal of the cup, for the removal of the necessity for his passion, God could have removed it. What happened, 'how' things are, was important for God's redemption of mankind. 'How' Jesus behaved was a crucial factor in his redemptive action. This verse seems to contradict Phillips whole thesis, since the verse presupposes: a) God could have answered Christ's petition for the removal of the cup, If Christ had insisted that he did. b) The history of the 'how' of the world depended on Christ's refusal to take the easy way out, and not ask for God to deliver him from the passion. There is a strong tendency of radical theologies in both the Catholic and Protestant camps, to leave redemption to God and let the world go to the devil. This is shown clearly in Phillips view that God can never be said to act in the world. God shows himself in the fact that the world exists, not in 'how' it exists. Phillips leaves salvation to the self-negation of the individual, and ignores the importance to God of the social circumstance and obligations in which men find themselves.

Religious Dependence

The naturalistic fallacy in religion is the definition of the will of God in terms of natural events or phenomena. To say the world depends on God Phillips argues, is not to say that there is any casual or logical relation between the world and God: the relation of the believer to God is 'religious' in that man loves God and accepts the world by continuing to remain faithful to God no matter what happens in the world. "To see the word as God's creation is to see meaning in life. This meaningfulness remains untouched by evil in the world because it is not arrived at by inference from it."[19]

Phillips argues that to say there is a casual relationship between God and the world, or to say that there are logical relations between statements about God and statements about the world is to make belief in God into an experimental hypothesis, or in the case Wisdom's technique of connecting and disconnecting into a non-experimental hypothesis.[20] He insists that all fact-claiming statements are some form of experimental hypothesis. Therefore to say that there is any sort of logical or casual relationship between God and the world is to make God into a hypothetical entity.

But is Phillips univocal view of fact claiming statements correct? Are all fact-claiming statements some type of hypothesis? I think not. When I say 'there is a desk in my room', I am not stating an experimental hypothesis, in the way in which I would be doing if offered an analysis of the rectilinear propagation of light. I do not infer from sense data, or from any other sorts of entity that there is a desk in my room. If I do when and how do I perform the inference, why am I never aware of making such an inference?

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[17] Mark. 14:36

[18] Phillips Op.cit. p.122

[19] Op. cit . pp. 97-98

[20] Cf. p.2 Phillips "Wisdom's God's" Philosophical Quaterly January 1969 pp. 15

If this possibility is ruled out, is my belief that there is a desk in my room a non-experimental hypothesis? No. It is not a hypothesis in any sense of this word. If my belief about my desk is a hypothesis, then I seem to be committed to saying that all beliefs about the material world are some sort of hypothesis. But the term 'Hypothesis' implies:

> a) that several similar phenomena are being related in order that their common cause may be explained.
>
> b) That the relation of the phenomena to the common cause is inferential. The desk in my room is a particular entity. Further I do not know it as the result of an inference ... I see it. Therefore I cannot see that there is any ground for saying that my belief about desk is a hypothesis of any sort.

Does the belief that the 'how' of the world count against its creation by a good omnipotent God make the belief in this God an experimental hypothesis? Phillips criticizes Flew, Mitchel and Crombie for supposing that evil in the world counts against the existence of a good omnipotent God. This is not surprising since Phillips God is a logically necessary being who cannot be said to be related in any way to the contingent particulars of the world. Phillips presses his argument by using a fork technique: Belief in God is either non- cognitive, or it is an experimental hypothesis. There is room for no third alternative. Apart from assertion of his position, Phillips gives no reasons why there should not be factual beliefs about God which are not hypotheses. God, like our perception of a material object is not inferred from the nature of the world. Rather the nature of God and the nature of the world illuminate the factual content of each other.

The major defect in Phillips treatment of the possibility of cognitive belief, in his refusal to allow the possibility of informal factual beliefs a well as the formal factual hypothesis. Newman's distinction [21] between 'National' and 'real' assent is surely pertinent here. Phillips makes all cognitive beliefs 'natural' in the sense that he insists they must be some type of hypothesis, and, if he is consistent he must say that all beliefs about the material world are in the form of general propositions, and are formally inferential in character. Newman rightly insists that most beliefs held in ordinary life are not so formalised; they are certainly factual, cognitive beliefs, but are beliefs about particular objects and are the results of 'direct' perception, rather than of any formal techniques.

What Sort of Theodicy Does Phillips Use

What sort of alternative theodicy does Phillips non- cognitive belief have to offer? He seems to rest on the assumption that any theodicy is morally revolting than the acceptance of existence of evil in the world. He quotes Ivan Karamazov: "I hasten to return my ticket of admission. And indeed If I am an honest man I'm bound to hand it back as soon as possible. And this I am doing. It's not God that I do not accept, Alyosha. I merely most respectfully return him the ticket."[22]

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[21] The Grammar of Assent Ch. 4 pp.49

[22] Dostoevsky: The Brothers Karamazov. Penguin Vol. 1 Pt. II Bk. Ch.4 p.287

For Phillips theodicy must be logical impossible sort of enterprise, because he allows no logical or casual relations to exist between God and the world. The fact that problems of theodicy arise for the cognivist he regards as reason against accepting the cognitivist position.

What is the cost of isolating the world from God in this way? It means that to love God is to accept the world for what it is, and to accept suffering as the school in which we learn to accept the world for what it is, and to accept the world for what it is, hence to accept God. "Love of God is sacrificial; it involves a denial of the self "[23] Again: "Man has the spirit of God in him to the extent that he negates himself"[24]

It is hard to understand what it means to say that we must thank God for everything, and accept what is, no matter what it is. Suppose that there as much more physical evil in the world than there is. Suppose that each person was so built that he was born suffering from a painful and incurable cancer, which lasted the whole of a person's life. Around the age of seventy each person died in severe pain. The only thing men could do would be to eat and keep themselves alive. What would it mean to accept God and to thank God for the fact that the world is, in this sort of situation?

Phillips seems to ignore the possibility of metaphysical rebellion once a non-cognitive epistemology is adopted. But if Ivan's rebellion against the occurrence of evil in a world supposedly created by a good God is justified, why is this rebellion not justified in the face of the same phenomena (the facts of evil) in a non-cognitivist interpretation of the universe? Why is not rebellion as appropriate a response to the God we must thank for everything, as to the God who is in some way logically casually related to the world?

Phillips dismissal of the problem of theodicy is no less morally revolting than the alternative which he criticises. Thus he adopts an attitude towards the existence of evil which might be called 'cosmic Toryism'. He thinks that once evil is viewed aright, not only can we thank God for it, as part of the fact that the world is, but we can learn from what we suffer: the suffering can give us spiritual depth. "But suffering can also be used to teach one that one is nothing just because it does not tempt one to put oneself at the centre of one's concern."[25]

This statement raises two questions: Firstly, is it true that suffering is often spiritually beneficial? The word 'Suffering' covers a whole cluster of different types of entity from physical pain to an emotional and also an intellectual kind of suffering. A person is as often completely crushed and immobilized by suffering as he is spiritually benefited by it. Phillips would reply that a person who is crushed by suffering is just not religiously mature: he has not learnt to accept the world and to love God. But here he is just not taking the phenomena of evil and impulse felt to rebel against it seriously. After reaching certain intensity, both physical and mental suffering would seem to prevent any sort of thankfulness. Could a person being tortured day by day in Auschwitz thank God for what the world is? Surely many of the people who had to live and suffer in concentration camps were so affected by it that existence lost all meaning: the meaning of the 'that' of existence. Even at a more ordinary level, suffering over something like the death of a wife or husband, can crush a person for years. To say, 'Your wife is dead, let's thank

[23] Op. cit. p.100
[24] Op. cit. p. 101
[25] Op. cit. p.102

God for it' seems perverse. If God understands human beings in their creaturely state at all, he surely understands the appropriateness of sorrow at the loss of a loved wife or husband. Consider Jesus weeping before the raising of Lazarus, or at the thought of the future destruction of Jerusalem.

Secondly, is it true for a Christian that man is nothing? The doctrine of creation does or is sometimes thought to imply that God created man ex nihilo, but this does not mean that man when he is created is also nothing. Man once he is created by God is something, and has value and rights which make his act of rebellion a possibility. If man is nothing then the world and the creatures seem to have no value in their own right. The world, is a stage set for the drama of redemption in which the redemption is all that matters, and the people and creation as such are merely a means to the redemptive end. Phillips seems to disagree with the psalmist on the saying: "What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him. Thou created him a little lower than the angels to crown him with glory and worship."[26]

The analysis of evil which Phillips provides removes man's actions from the sphere of responsibility: to say that man depends on God in the sense that man must completely negate himself, and obey God blindly, is in the last resort to say that man has no obligation to try to alleviate suffering and to freely choose to obey the moral beliefs which he imposes on himself. Moral and spiritual responsibility presuppose a freedom which is an impossibility if the self is negated, and God is obeyed, whatever God's will may be. But may not man within the autonomous sphere of his own systems of moral and social values be under a moral obligation to try to improve the social conditions and therefore the 'how' of the world. Does not Christ's command to love your neighbor as yourself entail an obligation to alleviate human suffering as much as possible?

The Concept of Prayer seems to suggest that the more suffering there is, the more healthy the state of religion will be, because then people will be forced by circumstances to learn to negate themselves, and to love God in and through suffering. A welfare state, which is designed to reduce the amount of physical suffering through national health scheme, a sickness benefit scheme, an unemployment scheme, a pension scheme, a mental health scheme, and so on, is prima facie unacceptable to this type of cosmic Toryism. Phillips position is rather like that taken by Bultmann in his essay, 'The significance of the idea of freedom in Western civilisation' He claims that the political and social development of the present "is everywhere like an impending doom on Western civilization, cultural life being more and more subjected to organization, while the state becomes more and more estranged from its original and real task of being constitutional state, becoming a Kulturstaat, and a welfare state ... Where mutual relationship is regulated through organization, trust ceases to be the bond between man and man. Where the sight of suffering is taken away by the removal of the sufferers, the poor and the ill from their families, and from the public, the feeling of security of living is speciously brought before one, and the consideration of life's actual insecurity and exposure to threats is glossed over … Like gratitude, resignation, suffering, the power of enduring disappears too. Modern man with supposed legal claim to the good things of life, feels need and suffering to be an injustice and rebels instead of submitting. The blissful power of suffering to bring man to himself … this power which Stoicism and Christianity both knew … is no longer experienced."[27]

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[26] Ps. 8 Prayer Book text

[27] Essays Philosophical and Theological. p. 315 ff.

Suffering and any unstable social order which fosters it must be preserved in order to promote a successful and prosperous ecclesiastical structure!!! The only reply to this is that if the price of having Christianity in society is unnecessary suffering and injustice, this opium of the people must be put to sleep at once.

It follows from Phillips account of evil that the individual must submit himself humbly before God, and in loving God accept whatever happens in the world. The danger in the concept of humility which Phillips presupposes is that it is very ambiguous concept. The danger in saying "Be humble before God, and accept any suffering that comes in love and trust" is that this form of humility may be disguised aggression. An example of this from recent Anglican Ecclesiastical History is the Bishop's of Leicester's (Dr. R.R. William's) comments on the Guildford affair. The circumstances of this incident are still not clear: Bolton had been Provost of Guildford before and during the building of the new Cathedral. He seems to have had certain defects in the sense that he was a fairly weak-willed person, and somewhat prone to spread gossip about brightness of his own prospects. There are some reasons to believe that he was initially offered the job as Dean of the New Cathedral. There seem to be reasons to believe that he was unpopular with the local property owners and upper middle classes, because he condemned all forms of blood sports. Eventually the then Primate, Lord Fisher, offered the Post to someone else. Protests occurred and the scandal got into the national press. The Bishop of Leicester then wrote a letter to a Sunday Newspaper stating that it was a great pity that the closing years of Archbishop Fisher's primacy should be clouded by a petty squabble over Church Appointments. God works in mysterious way, and doubtless in the case of ecclesiastical appointments, God's will is done no matter what injustices are involved. We should therefore accept God's will in humility.

Here the notion of humility is being used to cover a pernicious form of conservative aggression. It is almost a declaration of the infallibility of the method of Anglican ecclesiastical appointments. Human beings, including clergymen, are in the first instance responsible for any uncertainties and injustices which occur in Church appointments. God, however hard he tries, cannot turn injustice into justice. He may already have fitted into the purpose as unjust and never ceases to be this. Those who see the injustice for what it is, commit a sin against the Holy Ghost if they refuse to condemn it for what it is. Humility before the purported will of God is no substitute for that humility which is willing to see and condemn injustice, no matter what the cost to the person who has to do the condemning. "[28]

Is There a Satisfactory Theodicy?

I have tried to show in the above argument that Phillips' acceptance of evil and his denial of the need for a theodicy is a naïve and unacceptable attempt to get round the problem of evil. But is the acceptance of what has traditionally been called the problem of evil, and an attempt to solve it in any sense a more satisfactory move?

I do not think the problem of evil can be solved in the sense that a reason can be given for any and every occurrence of an evil. A perfect theodicy explains the reason for every evil in the world. If the phrase 'the best of all possible worlds' means anything,

[28] 'Justice' : Reprinted in the 'Borderlands of Theology' p. 148

presumably it seems that world in which possibility of evil exists, but in which there is need for a theodicy.

Phillips is correct in seeing that which has traditionally been called 'the problem of evil' presents one of the greatest obstacles to belief in Christian God. Philosophical discussions of this problem have been re-opened by A.G.N. Flew[29] and J.L. Mackie[30] Flew and Mackie both present a jazzed up version of Hume's statement of the problem of evil (Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion). Parts I and XI). The charge against theism is that the statements 'God exists and is all god and all powerful', and 'evil exists in something he creates' are logically incompatible.

"There is no view of human life or of the condition of mankind from which, without the greatest violence, we can infer the moral attributes, or learn that infinite benevolence, conjoined with infinite power and infinite wisdom, which we must discover by the eyes of faith alone."[31] The objection to theism is more fundamental than the objection that none of the arguments put forward to support it are invalid, or the premises false. If it can be shown that the terms of the concept involved in the conclusion are logically self contradictory, then no argument can ever support this conclusion. "God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them are true the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theological positions; the theologian, it seems, at once must adhere and cannot consistently adhere to all three"[32] Mackie's claim is that 'God is omnipotent' God is all good' and 'evil exists in the world' are, if taken together, logically inconsistent, and this logical inconsistency can only be eliminated, either by denying one of the three prepositions, or by shifting the ordinary meaning of the words contained in them. I will try to show that if the terms omnipotence, goodness, and evil are analysed, the Christian concept of God can be shown to be logically self – consistent, although whether such a concept refers to an existent entity will remain an open question.

God is Omnipotent

Mackie outlines what he considers to be the paradox of omnipotence. This arises from asking the question, "Can an omnipotent being make things which it cannot subsequently control?" and "Can an omnipotent being make rules which then bind himself, the rules once made, reduce the omnipotent being to impotence in relation to the rules. If an omnipotent being cannot make rules which then bind himself, the omnipotent being is not really omnipotent. Mackie suggests that the paradox is clarified by distinguishing first order omnipotence (omnipotence I) which is the unlimited power to act, and second order omnipotence (omnipotence II) which is the unlimited power to determine what powers to act certain things shall have. Mackie thinks that if Omnipotence I, then nothing can act independently of God; but if omnipotence II, then God no longer posses omnipotence I.

There is thus an ambiguity in the notion of omnipotence; do we mean when we say God is omnipotent that he can do anything whatever……..that his power is totally

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[29] In 'Divine omnipotence and human freedom' Reprinted in New Essays in Philosophical Theology. Pp. 144 ff

[30] In 'Evil and Omnipotence' reprinted in Pike: God and Evil. pp 46ff

[31] Dialogues. Pt. X N. Kemp – Smith ed. P.202

[32] Op. cit. p. 47

unlimited. If so then God can create male bitches, female husbands and round squares. But can even God do what is logically impossible? Are we to say: a) that to be limited by what is logically impossible is not to be limited at all? Mackie seems to think that God's inability to do what is logically impossible limits God's omnipotence. "This account of logic" i.e. (that God creates the laws of logic) is clearly inconsistent with the view that God is bound by logical necessities unless it is possible for an omnipotent being to bind himself"[33] Mackie seems to be working on a very crude model; he seems to assume that God exists for a time omnipotently, and absolutely independently of the laws of logic, and then decides to limit this omnipotence by creating logical laws. But the concept of God, or anything existing is impossible unless the laws of logic, then he could equally meaningfully be said to have not existed for this period, or to have spent the time drawing square circles. But to say God is limited because any meaningful description of him presupposes logical limits is not necessarily to say that he is unlimited at all. If God were absolutely unlimited, he would be able to do and to be anything and everything; perfectly good and perfectly evil all the time; existent and non- existent all the time etc. But a being of such an unlimited nature, is not this rather than that hence is not anything.

I wish to argue that by saying God is omnipotent, I am saying not that God's nature and power are absolutely unlimited, but that God's nature is such that the properties he does possess, are unlimited. Donald Hudson puts forward a similar view to this in "An attempt to defend Theism" "The all- power attributed to God is invariably all power in goodness. This is a qualified sort of power, and one's conception of it will be determined by what one takes to be the highest good. Suppose one takes that to be love. Then the all power which one claims for God, will be the capacity to go on loving through all rejection and opposition. The claim will be that nothing diminishes or destroys this love. The contention will not be that God is two distinct things viz. loving and powerful, but that his love is his power."[34]

I think that Hudson's point can be put more effectively, if it is stated more formally. Power is a predicate of a logically different type from predicates such as 'love', 'hatred', 'size', ' quickness' and so on. To say something or someone is powerful is to say that they or it is powerful in respect of something. Thus the American army is powerful in respect of the number of ground to air guided missiles which it has in readiness. Harold Wilson is powerful in respect of his office as Prime Minister. Cassius Clay is powerful in respect of his size and physique. God is powerful in respect of being loving, all merciful, completely just and so on. "Powerfulness" is thus a second order predicate in that it states a quality of first time order predicate. Mackie supposes that omnipotence is predicated of God and then God being all powerful decides which qualities from a list of predicates he likes. But theism has never claimed God possesses this property. Mackie's paradox of omnipotence is based on a category mistake of supposing that power is attributable to a person or thing in the same sense as the predicates in respect of which the person or thing is said to be powerful.

God Is All Good

Mansel in The Limits of religious thought claimed that the fact evil occur" are reconcilable we know not how, with the infinite goodness of God, but which certainly are not to be explained on the supposition that its sole and sufficient type is to be found

[33] Pike Op. Cit. p. 50
[34] Philosophy: January, 1964

in the finite goodness of man."[35] Mansel is saying the term 'good' has a different meaning when applied to God, that the meaning it has in ordinary use. In a similar way Phillips by stating that God does not participate in human language and that his will cannot be questioned by a genuine believer, but only obeyed, is saying that God in the end is not really good:. J.S. Mill said that "To say that God's goodness may be different in kind from man's goodness, what is it but saying, with a alight change of phraseology, that God may possibly not be good?.....I will call not being good, who is not what I mean when I apply the epithet to my fellow creatures; if such a being can sentence me to hell for not so calling him to hell I will go."[36] Thus to say God is good, is presumably to say that God is good in an analogous sense to the sense in which man is at the best imperfectly good.

Evil Exists in the World God Created

The problem of evil can easily be solved by denying that evil exists. This can be done by claiming that evil is only an appearance, which is not 'real' if the universe is viewed as a whole, but seems real when part of the universe is viewed independently of the whole. Phillips takes up a position very close to this by saying evil is the ground for metaphysical rebellion if the creator of the world is inferred from his creation, but that if we adopt a genuinely religious attitude we can meekly accept the evil that there is, and offer God thanks as much for the good things we receive, as for the evils we suffer. Is not this in the end to say that evil is not real for the religious believer? I do not see how such a position can be held by anyone who takes their experience seriously. If someone dying slowly of cancer is not an example of evil, can the words "evil" and "good" have any meaning at all?

But if God is omnipotent and all good, and evil is real, why is there evil? I will restrict my discussion of this problem to what has been called the free-will defence, because it is at this point that the empiricist attack of both Mackie and Flew has been directed.

The free will defence claims to explain the existence of moral evil in a world created by an omnipotent all good God, by asserting that God gave all man free will to choose between good and evil. Some men sometimes and most men occasionally choose evil rather than good, but a world containing free moral agents and some evil, is a better world than a world containing more automata, beings who always do what is right because God has so made them that they could not but perform actions which happen to be right. Mackie restates the case: "To explain why a wholly good God gave free will although it would lead to some important evils, it must be argued that it is better on the whole that men act freely, and some time err, than that they should be innocent automata acting rightly in a wholly determined way."[37] This defence is sound if: (a) What G.E Moore called the theory of Organic Wholes is an acceptable theory. (b) In order to be genuinely free moral agents, some men may abuse their freedom and act immorally.

The theory of organic wholes does seem a plausible theory: there do seem to be instances of the value of a whole being greater than the value of its constituent parts. The value of the parts may be neutral, or in fact negative, but the value of the whole positive. Moore claims: "To be conscious of beautiful object is a thing of great intrinsic value; whereas the same object, if no one be conscious of it, has certainly comparatively little

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[35] Quoted in Pike, Op. cit. p. 41
[36] Pike Op. cit. pp. 42 and 43
[37] Pike. Op. cit. p. 55-56

value, and is commonly held to have none at all."[38] In the case of an organic whole, it cannot be argued that a part is of greater value than the whole: the positive value of the parts alone may be less than the positive value of the whole containing the parts of negative value. The existence of the part of negative value may be a logically necessary condition of the whole possessing the value it does possess. To quote Wisdom's example: "It is not claimed merely that love is sometimes caused pain, but that sometimes a case of love contains pain and moral evil as an object and is thus logically dependent upon that pain. It is claimed further that sometimes such a case of love contains pain and moral evil as an object and is thus logically dependent upon that pain. It is claimed further that sometimes such a case of love is good enough as whole to compensate for the evil it contains."[39] It thus seems to be a logical possibility that moral autonomy plus some evil, is better as a whole than moral theonomy plus no evil.

The Flew- Mackie attack on the free will defence consists in the assertion of the theses: the compatibility thesis and the utopia thesis. The compatibility thesis states that there is no contradiction in saying that a human action is both predictable and caused, and yet at the same time the action was performed freely by the agent. Flew "demonstrates" the existence of free acts by means of his 'paradigm case argument'. 'Words which have no ordinary usage such as 'act freely,' could have done otherwise', are taught ostensively by pointing to a given action which exemplifies a free act and hence unless at least one example of a free act occurs, the phrase could never have been taught ostensively, and therefore could not have got built into ordinary language. Flew believes that the term 'free-will' has a referent, but what exactly is this? He asserts that a free act is not an action which is uncaused, or unpredictable, but an action which is not externally compelled or constrained. "To say that Murdo was a free to ask whichever eligible girl of his acquaintance he wanted, and that he chose to ask, was accepted by, and has now married Mairi of his own free will, is not to say that his actions and choices were uncaused or in principle unpredictable but precisely and only that being of an age to know his own mind, he did what he did and rejected the possible alternative courses of action without being under any pressure to act in this way."[40]

The utopia thesis claims that it is logically possible that God might have created free moral agents who as a matter of fact always freely choose the morally right action. Thus Mackie "If God has made men such that in their free choices they sometimes prefer what is good and sometimes what is evil, why could he not have made men such that they always freely choose the good? If there is no logical impossibility of man's freely choosing the good on one, or on several occasions, there cannot be a logical impossibility in his freely choosing the good on every occasion."[41]

One attempt to reply to the Flew-Mackie attack which I find wholly unsatisfactory is that of John Hick in *Evil and the God of Love*. Hick grants most of the Flew – Mackie case: it is logically possible that God could create free moral agents who always freely choose to do what is morally right. He writes: "So long as we think of God's purpose for man as Mackie does, exclusively in terms of man's performance in relation to his fellows, as a moral agent within human agent a human society, there is no contradiction in the idea of God's so making human beings that they will always freely act rightly."[42] But there is the

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[38] Principia Ethica p.28
[39] "God and Evil" Mind 1935 p.14
[40] New Essays. Op. cit. pp. 149-150
[41] Pike Op. cit. p. 56
[42] Evil and the God of Love p. 310

further question about men's relationship to God. Is it logically possible for God so to make men that they will freely respond to him in love and trust? In the text of the first edition of *Evil and the God of Love*, Hick claims that it is logically impossible for God to cause man freely respond to himself in love and trust. He quotes with approval: "It is logically impossible for God to obtain your love – unforced- by- anything – outside – you and yet himself force it".[43] In conversation over this passage Hick once assured me that he did not really mean this was a logical impossibility he is talking about. In Flews' analysis of free-will is correct, I don't think that the Hick line will work. If in an ordinary human situation a free action is one that is caused and predictable, but not externally constrained, why is this not so in the case of my freedom before God? If a free action is an action which is caused, and yet constrained, surely God could cause his creatures freely to respond to him in love and trust, and the action of the creatures would be free, provided the causal mechanism was not some kind of external constraint. Hick ought to be consistent: he ought either to reject Flew's analysis of freedom, in the cases of both man's moral relation to his fellow men and his relation to God; or it he is going to accept Flew's analysis, he must admit that God could cause man freely to respond to himself in love and trust.

I think that the best way to handle the Flew Mackie attack is to deny their central claim outright. It is just not the case that it is logically possible that God could create free moral agents whom he caused always to act morally. Flew claims that just as young married couple's marriage was a free action, because although caused, it was not constrained, in a like manner, all men could freely act normally, and yet be caused by God so to act. Flew defined free will in terms of a certain type of causality: this leads to a necessity to distinguish different types of causes. There is a qualitative difference between (a) Cause I: an event or action which is caused, yet not constrained to happen; and (b) Cause II an event or action which is caused and constrained to happen. Compare two types of marriages. In the first two people fall in love. The man proposes to the woman. The woman thinks about it, hesitates and finally accepts. After a few months of engagement they marry. The causes of this marriage will be diverse: their love for each other; the social strata in which they live and were brought up; parental likes and dislikes. Whatever the causes however, we wish to say in a case such as this that either the man or the woman could have done otherwise at any point in the proceedings: the girl could have returned her fiancée's ring: the man could have refused to say 'I will' at the marriage service. In the second, a chap makes his girl friend pregnant, and their parents belonging to a responsible upper middle class stratum of society force the man and woman to marry, even to the point of frog-marching them to the registry office. In this case the two people were constrained to marry each other. With the internal and external family pressures they could not have done other than they did. To deny the distinction between these two cases, is to go in for a rigid determination.

The trouble is Flew wants to have his cake and eat it. God must be causally related to his creatures in the second sense, if the creatures are to be in such a situation that they cannot but to freely what are morally good actions. But if Flew wants to say that God causes his creatures always to do freely morally right action in sense one of my analysis, then this type of analysis is not strong enough to get Flew's argument working. Human beings actions are all caused in some sense, yes, and they are in some sense caused by God who is their creator. But they are caused in such a way that the human beings concerned could have chosen to act in other ways than they did, if they had wished to do

[43] Wisdom: God and Evil Mind 1935, p. 10

so. If Flew denies this in the case of God, surely he has to say in case one of the two married people, that they could have not done other than they did, but this is to slide into sense II of the notion cause. A rigid form of determinism, may be the correct analysis of our supposed free action; but this is not the analysis of our supposed free action; but this is not the analysis Flew intends to offer of the relation between Murdo and Mairi. Flew's case gains may plausibility it may have from his interchanging the two sense of 'cause' which I have outlined at any point which suits his convienience.

I am not suggesting that "whatever is freely done must be sometimes not done: the power freely to choose the good presupposes the power to choose the bad, and this requires that the bad should sometimes be chosen."[44] God could have created free moral agents who as a matter of fact always choose to do what is right. It is logically possible that man might not have fallen. Whether or not the free moral agents God has created do in fact always act morally correctly is up to the moral agents in question, and not up to God.

Ethics and Autonomy

Phillips condemns the naturalistic fallacy in religion, which is committed when God's will is defined in terms of how the world is. He is only too keen, however, to commit the naturalistic fallacy in ethics, by making the real and the true ethic consist in obedience to God's will. "God's commands cannot become of secondary importance without being abandoned"[45] Phillips makes ethical values internally related to the concept of God. The ontological proof of God requires that everything we know of God is derived from the definition of this concept, and is not arrived at from experience. He writes: "To understand then what is meant by the religious conception of duty, one must understand what it means to believe in God."[46]

The Problem of Ethical Autonomy

"If 'holiness' and 'what is dear to the gods' meant exactly the same, then, since holiness was loved because it was holy, what is dear to the gods would have been loved because it was dear, and holiness would have been holy because it was loved. But…..the contrary is the case and two the things are entirely distinct. One is loveable……When I asked what holiness was, you did not choose to show me its real nature. You could only tell me something that happens to it; and that was that it is loved by the gods: what it is in itself you have not told me yet"[47]

Plato saw clearly the difficulties in trying to discern the relation, if and there is one, between theological statements and ethical assertions. What do we mean when we predicate goodness of God? Are we obliged to obey God's will because he, the omnipotent sovereign wills that we behave in certain ways, or because what God wills is as matter of fact good? If what God wills is good because he wills it, then the statement 'what God wills is good' means no more than 'what God wills is what God wills'….a tautology devoid of ethical content. But if God wills what is good because it is good, then there must be some standard which is independent of God's will, in virtue of which what he wills is good. Thus God ceases to be an omnipotent sovereign.

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[44] J.L. Mackie: Theism and Utopia. Philosophy 1961

[45] 'Moral and religious conceptions duty: an analysis.' Religion and Understanding. P. 197

[46] Religion and Understanding. Op. cit. p. 195

[47] Plato: Euthyphro 11ff. in Plato and Xenopho a Socratic Discourses Everymans Library, p. 321

God Omnipotent, but Amoral

One way out of the dilemma is to adopt what might be called a 'naturalistic' position. That is goodness may be identified with one of God's properties, in a similar way to which a utilitarian might claim that goodness and pleasure are identical. It is thus possible to claim that what God wills is good because He wills it: goodness is therefore identified with what God wills. If this position is carefully stated, it can aide step what has been called the argument from trivialization. Granted that if goodness is identical with what God wills, then the question, 'Is what God wills good?' is reducible to the question, 'Does God will what he wills?' But does it follow, as for example G.E Moore would argue[48] that the question, 'Is what God wills good?' is therefore a pointless trivial; but there are many people, including myself, who have not realized that goodness is what God wills is true by definition, and the putting of such a question, or the assertion of an analogous statement, would be necessary to bring home such people the fact that goodness is what God wills. Further, the question, 'Is what God wills good?, is significant in the sense that it can be used as a test or criterion of the definition 'Goodness is what God wills'. A hard headed 'naturalist' theologian could claim, that what God wills is good is not strictly speaking an ethical statement, but a method of indicating what study is to go under the name of ethics…. In fact this becomes the study of what God wills, without any claim, that what God wills has any goodness beyond being what he wills. This amounts to the claim that there are no qualities over and above the will of God to which the word 'good' can be applied. Perhaps the term ethics might be replaced by the term 'theodices'?

Hobbes holds that God, like a civil sovereign, has the right to treat his creatures, or subjects in any way he pleases, provided he possesses the power to do so. He was convinced of God's irresistible power which gave him sovereignty over all men, and the unquestionable right to use them as a means to any end and chooses. He attempts to reduce moral obligation: God is pictured as a civil sovereign, but with unlimited, instead of limited power, with them to enforce his commands. Foe Hobbes to say what God wills is good, is to assert that God has the power to enforce any command he wills. If God decided that murder, rape and incest were good from 4 a.m. tomorrow, these actions would become good at the specified time, provided God wills that they should. But if in saying that God is good, we do not mean that Tom is good when we predicate goodness of him, do we mean anything at all? To say that whatever God wills is good, in the end amounts to saying God is not really good at all. Hobbes agrees: "for in the attributes which we give to God, we are not to consider the signification of the philosophical truth: the signification of pious intention, to do him the greatest honour we are able"[49] In one passage he writes "Our faith consisteth not in our opinion, but in our submission ... for the nature of God is incomprehensible: that is to say, we understand nothing of what he is, but only that he is."[50]

Hobbes gives scriptural support to his case, by a superficial exegesis of carefully selected passages from the Bible. In particular Romans 9:20 seems to suggest that God's goodness must be sacrificed on the altar of omnipotence." Who are you, a man, to answer back to God? Will what is moulded say to its moulder, 'Why have you made me thus?' Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty, another for menial use?"

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[48] In Principia Ethica

[49] Leviathan Molesworth ed. p. 354. Quoted Hobbes Richard Peters p. 246

[50] Op. cit. p.383 Quoted Richard Peters op. cit. p.250

Here Hobbes touches on without discussing, the problem of analogy. How, if at all, do the words which we employ in ordinary usage e.g. 'good', 'powerful', 'loving' etc. refer to and describe, properties possessed by God? Is it reasonable of Hobbes to suppose that the term 'power' can be analogously extended to describe God, and yet deny that the term 'goodness' can be so extended? Hobbes wants to wriggle out of the problem by denying that it is a genuine problem: He asserts that we cannot know what properties God possesses, but only that He exists. But if this is so, then we cannot know that God is all powerful. If, however it is meaningful to extend the usage of the word 'powerful' or 'sovereign' to describe God, why cannot the meaning of the word 'good' be extended in a similar way? If Hobbes appeals to the scriptures at this point, it seems that the four gospels support the view that it is necessary to attribute goodness to God. Thus "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him 'Why do you call me good? No one is good, but God alone"[51]

Anyone who defines God's goodness in terms of his will or power, cannot avoid concluding that the term 'goodness' can be eliminated from our description of God, because the same features of God can be equally adequately described in terms of will or power. Hence Richard Price argues: "If there were no moral distinction, eternally and unalterably right and wrong, there could be nothing meant by his eternal and unalterable rectitude or holiness … what can be more preposterous, than to make the deity nothing but will; and to exalt this on the ruins of all his attributes."[52]

D.E. Phillips: God and Ought:

"Many philosophers suggest that ... an acceptance of God's commands must depend [53]on my moral judgement. I want to deny this … What I am denying is that the relation between God and what I ought to do is necessarily parasitic on moral judgement. On the contrary, for believers 'good' means 'whatever God wills'

Phillips argues that in the case of childrens obligation to their parents an 'ought' statement is implied by an 'is' statement, because he claims that from the fact X is my father I can infer that I ought to obey him. '"That status of being a father entails certain rights, which children of the father have obligations to satisfy. It is possible to argue from 'He is my Father' to 'I ought not to leave him destitute"'[54] Phillips continues that if one understands what it is for someone to be a Father, one will understand why he ought to be obeyed. There is something about institution of the family which bestows moral obligations on those who accept it. '"This is because in rejecting God's will, one is not rejecting one claim among many within an institution such as a family; one is rejecting the foundation of an institution. To reject God's claim is not to reject one of many competing claims in a way of life; it is to reject a way of life as such … Camus says: 'When man submits God to moral judgement, he kills him in his own heart."'[55]

I find Phillips arguments very confused. Firstly, I think it is false to say from 'X is my father' I can infer, 'I ought to obey X'. There are certain commands a father could give me which I ought not to obey. If my father was a professional bank robber taught me

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[51] Mark 10:17 R.S.V. text
[52] A Review of the Principle question of Morals ed. D.D. Raphael pp.86-87
[53] Christian Ethics and Contemporary Philosophy ed. I.T. Ramsey, p.133ff
[54] Phillips Op. cit .p.136
[55] Op. cit. p. 139

the trade, and the ordered me to 'to a job' on my own, surely, I would be justified in refusing to train as a robber, if this was in my power, or if not, to refuse to do the 'job' on my own. Phillips however does not wish to claim that I ought to obey my father in every respect, but only in certain respects: unfortunately he doesn't tell us when we ought and when we ought not to obey our fathers. He offers the suggestion that 'It is possible to argue from 'He is my father', 'I ought not to leave him destitute' But if the notion of the fact of fatherhood implying moral obligation on the part of sons is qualified, the analogy between the early and heavenly father is weakened, for in God's case if I am under obligation to do what he wills, I am under obligation to do everything he wills.

Secondly, I wish to deny that it is possible to argue from 'he is my father' to 'I ought not to leave him destitute'. Suppose my father were a lazy oaf who had always been destitute because he was too lazy to an honest day's work. Heavy inflation occurs over a short period. My father can no longer manage to live off my mother's earnings as a char woman, and her wages are not likely to increase. If I plough more of my earnings into the family purse, my father will remain in his lazy stupor. If I leave destitute, for a period, he might decide to do honest days work which he is physically capable of performing. In these circumstances, ought I not to let him sink into destitution?

Thirdly Phillips fails to see clearly that the term father may have both descriptive and prescriptive connotations. "No doubt I shall be accused by some Philosophers of having moved argument from descriptive to evaluative statements," he admits.[56] Consider the word 'steal'. On the descriptive level, 'Thomas stole £5 from X' means 'Thomas removed from X's possession without X's permission a £5 note which X had a right to own'. But the word 'steal' also has emotive, or if a less subjectivist moral theory is preferred, prescriptivist overtones. The notion of 'ought not' seems to be built into the notion of stealing. This does not however imply that it is possible to infer from the fact that Thomas stole £5, that Thomas ought not to have stolen £5. The circumstances of the case might be such that Thomas ought to have stolen £5, e.g. if this action was performed in a period of economic depression, and high unemployment, and it was the only way of his preventing his wife and children suffering from acute malnutrition.

Fourthly the 'logic' of impressive is much more complicated and tricky than Phillips seems prepared to admit. Let us suppose that he means to say in saying that I can infer 'I ought to do Y' from the fact X is my Father, that 'X is my Father' materially implies 'I ought to do Y'. Therefore 'I ought not to Y' materially implies 'X is not my father'. Unless Phillips is prepared to specify in detail what logical relationship exists between certain factual statements and certain ethical statements, it is hard to see what he is talking about.

Splendid Isolation

Phillips seems to be remotely aware of the problems of the relationship between ordinary human ethics and the will of God. He writes: "I am anxious to avoid a position in which religious language seems be a special language, cut off from other forms of human discourse.

[56] Op. cit. p.135

Religion would not have the kind of importance it has were it not connected with the rest of life. Religious discourse has much in common with moral discourse….on the other hand I also want to avoid the view that religious concepts can be accounted for in moral terms."[57]

In Phillips' philosophy, this statement is not more than a pious intention which is never put into practice. His account of ethics, for example, is so religious, that it is cut off from the will of God. But Phillips' concept of God is itself completely isolated from ordinary discourse: it resides in its own self-justifying language game. Phillips method is similar to Winch's insight that to follow a rule is to act in such a way that one's action commits one to and is a sign of, commitment to some further act it portends, whose non-realisation would constitute the violation of a rule. "The notion of following a rule is logically inseparable from the notion of making a mistake. A mistake is a contravention of what is established as correct; as such, it must be recognisable as such a contravention. That is if I make a mistake in say my use of a word, other people must be able to point it out to me … Establishing a standard is not an activity which it makes sense to ascribe to any individual in complete isolation from other individuals. For it is contact with other individuals which alone makes possible the eternal check from an established standard."[58] Phillips and Winch thus place themselves in the Kantian tradition of fixing a great gulf between pure and practical reason which no formal logical relations can cross. The price of such a move is to create a total separation of religious statements from statements describing the world, or any aspect of it. The problem about such a deep separation is to know where in the God is placed on the conceptual map, if he has no place in and no relation to the categories of pure reason. Kant remarked in the Grundlegung, that although we can never comprehended freedom, we can comprehend its incomprehensibility. Insofar as Phillips is always telling us what parts of the conceptual map God does not occupy, and never the parts which he does occupy, his motto might well be that although we cannot understand God. We can understand his incomprehensibility.

Conclusion

Phillips is a theoretical theist. He claims that he believes in and prays to God. I wish to argue that because the religious language game he plays is totally cut off and isolated from all other language games, he is in practice an Atheist. It is very hard to pin Phillips down and show that this is what he finally commits himself to. This is because although he says time and time again what sort of knowledge, knowledge of God is not, it is wholly unclear what does constitute knowledge of God. God cannot be referred to by any sort of descriptive statement, he cannot be referred to by any sort of con-cognitivist discourse … he is 'sui generis', so presumably any statements which are in any way related to him are 'sui generis'. But if Phillips is not using such words as 'true', 'real', 'genuine', 'being', 'necessary' in some sense which is at least remotely analogous to their ordinary usage, how is he using them? What does it mean to say 'I am praying to the true God, but my use of 'true' in this context is totally different from any other sort of use it has'?

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[57] "Moral and religious conceptions of Duty: an analysis" Religion and Understanding. P.196

[58] The idea of a social science, p. 32

If language used in talking about God e.g. the language used in *The concept of Prayer* is totally unrelated to any other sort of language, it is hard to see how Phillips concludes by means of the ontological argument that God id a logically necessary being. The argument supposes that it is possible to infer the existence of God from the concept of God and nothing else. But the concept of God is defined in language which is parasitical for any meaning it has on ordinary usage. 'A being a greater than which cannot be conceived' contains such words as 'being' 'thought' and the relation 'to be greater than', which gain their meaning from the usage they normally have. If therefore all ordinary language is logically unrelated to God (God is not a participant in human language) how can the ontological argument over get started?

Phillips book is high flown idealist metaphysics: the cognitivist- non- cognitivist dispute which raises, rests on an answer to the question what metaphysical concept of God is the most adequate: Phillips answer reflects the Hegelian love for ontological argument. The concept he chooses forces him to engage on a large scale of programme of revisionary metaphysics, in which he persuasively redefines the concept of prayer in non-cognitivist terms.[59] It is easy to show that a descriptive metaphysic of the Christian concept of indicates, that Phillips is wrong, and that the Christian language is cognitive. But Phillips could admit that there is such contrary evidence, yet reply that all cognitive uses of religious language are superstitious, and are never implied by prayer to the 'true' God. Even if we grant that the cognitivist concept of God is not worship worthy, whatever is meant by this emotive phrase, neither is Phillips concept. This is because to be worship-worthy the concept must at least be intelligible: but I just do not understand what sort of God this is to whom nothing has any casual or logical relations, to whom nothing can be told and who cannot understand human language.

Apart from not being a theist, Phillips modifies the Christian idea of revelation because he thinks that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is something which is philosophical analysis can afford to dispense with. The criterion of faith is determined for Phillips by the traditions inherent within the autonomous Christian religious language game.

The New Testament preaches that God revealed himself in Jesus Christ. "And he asked them 'But who do you say that I am'. Peter answered him 'You are the Christ'. And he charged them to tell no one about him."[60] Not only is there no serious discussion of Christology in *The Concept of Prayer*, but the epistemology it enunciates is logically unable to handle a God who becomes flesh. "The fact that there should be anything, that there should be a world, survives these changes as a source of prayer and in so doing remains distinct from any contemplation of objects in the world (cf. Wittgenstein: How the world is completely indifferent for what is higher. God does not reveal himself in the world. Tractatus 6.4.32) Any aspect of the world which one contemplates could become an object of human understanding and utilization. One cannot say of God, without talking nonsense, that He is an object of human understanding, or that He can be used"[61]

The incarnation cannot be given a place on Phillips conceptual map, because the concept of God which Phillips uses is that of a logically necessary being. Presumably the statements describing the existence of a logically necessary being are themselves logically necessary. The statements which describe the Word became flesh, the God who humbles

[59] Stevenson: Ethics and Language, 1944
[60] Mark 8:29-30
[61] Op. cit. p. 76

himself to become man, if they are to describe a being that genuinely enters the historical scene, amidst its ambiguities and uncertainties, are in the nature of the case, contingent. Lessing once remarked, "If no historical truths can be demonstrated, then nothing can be demonstrated by means of historical truths. That is, accidental truths of history, ca never be the proof of necessary truths of reason"[62] Equally, necessary truths of reason cannot be the proof of accidental truths of history. By making all the relations between assertions made about of God internal Phillips has cut off the possibility of this God having any logical relations with the history of the world, with contingent particulars, of space and time. Phillips attempts what Barth condemned in whose who try to get from abstract concepts of God to the particular actuality of Christ.

I admit that in his chapter on 'God's voice and the concept of community' Phillips does stress the impossibility of understanding Christ's claim to be the Messiah, except against the backgrounds and traditions of the Jewish faith. But this is an example of Phillips habit of switching when he finds it convenient, form the stronger meaning equals use theses, which makes religious language isolated and autonomous, to the weaker meaning equals used thesis, which stresses only the importance in seeing each statement in the context in which it is made, and as not cut off from its history. It is true that Jesus' claim to be the Messiah cannot be understood apart from its context in Jewish eschatological expectations: but Christ's claim to both fulfill and transcend and modify these expectations presupposes a logical relation between statements about Christ's biography, and statements about the actions of God, which are ruled out by the concept of a God which is that of a logically necessary being.

Phillips denial of the possibility of intercessory prayer is another example of his inability to copy with particularity of God's action in the world. The fact of incarnation, the actuality of God's becoming Galilean living in Nazareth shows God's concern about the detail of what happens in the world. Christians believe that this concern of God is still present in His freedom to give us what we ask of him, when and how he sees fit to do so.

The crucial defect in Phillips account of the logic of religious is that he assumes that it is single leveled. Once 'depth' grammar has revealed what logic of God is like, this univocal logic can be applied to every religious statement, and any religious statement which does not fit into this account, must be reduces to a statement which will, or be eliminated from religious discourse. Phillips uses Wittgestein's insight that words and statements only have meaning in the stream of life, to prop up a doctrine which leads back to the dogma that to mean is to name. Just as logically proper names are entities which name one and only one thing, and have internal logical relations with any other logically proper names, so the religious language game, as it were names of God, in such a way that there is only one method of referring to God, and this one method of reference is logically unrelated to all other uses of language.

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[62] 'On the proof of the spirit of power'. Theological Writings ed. Henry Chadwick.

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