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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
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Editor's Note

I am once again pleased to introduce and welcome readers to the second issue of the *AASR E-Journal for the academic study of the religions of Africa and the African Diaspora*, a peer-reviewed, open-access journal of the African Association for the Study of Religions (AASR). While the maiden issue centred on the specific theme 'Health, Healing, and the Study of the Religions of Africa,' articles in this issue have been structured rather differently, focusing on varied themes with their rich complementarity. One of the top priorities of the *AASR E-Journal* is to serve primarily as an interdisciplinary journal in which members and non-AASR members, *particularly early career scholars and graduate researchers*, are encouraged, supported and mentored to publish the outcomes of their original research on the religions of Africa and the African Diaspora. It is against this backdrop that I am exceedingly delighted to introduce these essays from four young, promising, erudite researchers/students who make robust contribution to knowledge in the field through sharing aspects of their current research projects.

Charles Prempeh contributes to popular discourse on the appropriation of marijuana in Accra's urban slums, focusing on the sacralisation of marijuana by Muslim youth in Maamobi community. He situates the criminalization of marijuana consumption in Ghana as a relatively recent phenomenon, largely influenced by the colonialists' conceptualization of marijuana as a substance that is only smoked for recreational purposes. While researchers have mostly depended on the etic view in understanding the utility of marijuana, a perspective which partly confuses the discourse, the author employs a qualitative research design and ethnographic technique to unpack the meaning, appropriation and sacralisation of marijuana, and to better grasp the lived social realities of users in Maamobi. The use of marijuana in Maamobi is shown to constitute a unique sub-culture within the larger community, just as the structural organization of marijuana culture helps members to cope with the harsh economic conditions in Accra. The essay vividly demonstrates how users, in this case Maamobi Muslim youths, consume marijuana for its recreational and therapeutic value, and more importantly, for its ability to ward off evil spirits, including witchcraft, and to help them focus on the worship of Allah.

Theories are widely understood as a set of assumptions or propositions that attempt to provide rational explanations of causal relationships among observed phenomenon. As mental models of perceived realities, theories are nevertheless fluid and protean. They are open to constant revisiting, debunking and revalidation. Thomas Seat revisits old theorizing about Christianity's encounter with Indigenous beliefs in the Niger Delta. In light of extensive exploration of Church Mission Society archival materials, the author critiques Robin Horton's Intellectualist Theory, highlighting its emphasis on macrocosmic social structures and tiers of Brass' and Bonny's cosmologies, as rather limiting. He examines cosmological confrontations between Christian and indigenous beliefs, under Bishop Samuel Crowther in Bonny and Rev. Thomas Johnson in Brass, arguing that when individuals abandoned the microcosmic-tiered beliefs that these

encounters called into question, their microcosmic tier condensed with each belief that was disowned. While contested microcosmic-tiered beliefs were surely not rejected by everyone, for those that discarded them, a cosmological lacuna was created that could be filled in numerous ways based on an individual's personal inclinations, with conversion to Christianity being one option. Seat concludes that centuries of long-distance trading did not cause the macrocosmic tiers of Brass' and Bonny's religions to "overshadow" their microcosmic tiers, as Horton supposes. The inverse of Horton's theory appears manifest: rather than macrocosmic-tiered expansion, microcosmic-tiered condensation precipitated conversion. Thus, he posits a process of microcosmic-tiered condensation as a contributing factor in the conversion to Christianity in Brass and Bonny in the Niger Delta.

Some literary scholars have been mainly preoccupied with the representation of domestic violence in written texts, while others focus on medical and social aspects to the neglect of its electronic media representation, such as home video films, an important repertoire of sociology of the African society. Mobolaji Ajibade expounds the prevalence, causes and effects of domestic violence by exploring the representation of domestic violence in *Ìdààmú Ilémoşú*, a popular Nigerian Christian home video film produced by the Christoline Evangelical Drama Outreach Ministry. Pentecostal Christianity is portrayed in this film as a counter power and panacea to societal problems, demonstrating how the spiritual dimension of domestic violence, the role of culture in religion and the knowledge of history are germane in addressing the scourge. The author underscores the potential import of home video films in mitigating domestic violence, especially against women, since changing people's perception is a major step towards behavioural change.

Lastly, Briana Wong provides a critical review essay of four recent books: Paul Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa* (2016); Jacob Olupona and Rowland Abiodun, *Ifá Divination, Knowledge, Power, and Performance* (2016); John Peel, *Christianity, Islam, and Orişà-Religion: Three Traditions in Comparison and Interaction* (2015) and Laurenti Magesa, *What is Not Sacred? African Spirituality* (2013). In spite of the disparate and, sometimes contradictory approaches that characterize them, Wong vividly demonstrates how the books provide an invaluable glimpse into the complex fluidity and richness of African spirituality, through the practice of African forms of Christianity, Islam and indigenous religion. While rejecting the common misconception of African indigenous spirituality as static and unchanging, the authors highlight various types of religious change. Peel's (2015) historical anthropology, published posthumously, champions and models the comparative method in reflecting on Yoruba history, revealing the diversity that has characterized the religious lives of Yoruba peoples in space-time. Olupona and Abiodun (2016) is dedicated to the preservation of Yoruba religion in its many iterations throughout the world and encourages the partnership between ancient traditions and twenty-first century technology. Gifford (2016) prescribes, though controversially, African Christianity's abandonment of its "enchanted dimension," to pursue what he perceives as development; while Magesa (2013) argues contrarily, pressing for an increased incorporation of African traditional worldviews, including an acute spiritual awareness, into African Christianity.

It is hoped that all these robust discourses, controversies and findings will provide impetus for fruitful conversation but also suggest trajectories for further rewarding research. I therefore invite you to enjoy these fresh, sterling contributions.

Afe Adogame

Editor-In-Chief

August 2016

Peeping into the Sacralisation of Marijuana in Urban Slums: A Study of Muslim Youth in Maamobi, Ghana

Charles Prempeh¹

Abstract

The smoking of marijuana is considered a criminal act in many parts of the world. In Ghana, marijuana is a criminalized substance. However, the disclosure by the Narcotic Drugs Control Board (NACOB) that Ghana places first and third in the consumption of marijuana in Africa and the world respectively has sustained the debate about the criminalization of the substance. The arrest and prosecution of a popular hip-hop musician, Emmanuel Botchwey, for publicly smoking marijuana has further deepened the debate. This essay seeks to contribute to the debate on the use of marijuana in urban slums, focusing on the sacralisation of marijuana by Muslim youth in Maamobi. The paper argues that, while the consumption of marijuana pre-dates colonialism, the criminalization of the substance in Ghana is a recent phenomenon, largely influenced by the colonialists' conceptualization of marijuana as a substance that is only smoked for recreational purposes.

KEY WORDS: Marijuana, Sacralisation, Criminalisation, Ghana, Muslim Youth, Colonialism

Introduction

This essay contributes to popular discourse on the use of marijuana, focusing on the re-evaluation of marijuana as a consumable substance in the Maamobi slums of Accra. Marijuana is one particular herb, whose multiple usages go deep into human history, being used in religious rites of different religions. Tracing its origin from Asia, cannabis was a very important ritual element in most Eastern religions. Herer (1998) has documented that religions, including Shintoism, Hinduism, and Buddhism used marijuana for multiple purposes. Arab traders and Muslim Sufis served as the pathway for the introduction of cannabis to the Nile Delta and the East African coast by the

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fourteenth century (Herer, 1998). From these points of entry, cannabis spread to Central and Southern Africa. Cannabis appears to have grown wild in Ethiopia and Southern Africa for centuries. It was incorporated into rituals, aiding monastic contemplating in Ethiopia, and healing therapy in Zimbabwe (Courtwright, 2001, cited in Akyeampong, 2005:432). In Cameroon, the religious value of marijuana is tied with regulatory societies.² Known commonly as dagga, cannabis is a sacrament and medicine to the Pygmies, Zulu, and Hottentots (Herer, 1998).

Discourses on marijuana continue to excite controversy. Proponents of its use, such as Grinspoon, et al (1993) and Zimmer et al (1997) contend that it is a natural, relatively harmless drug with many beneficial properties, its image tarnished by lies and myth. On the other hand, anti-marijuana campaigners including Nahas et al (1992) and Walters (1993) contend that the potential harm of cannabis has been understated, and that it is a toxic drug that causes widespread harm. The lack of clarity over the harmfulness or otherwise of marijuana has resulted in a near universal criminalization of the substance. In Ghana, the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) Law 236 and the Narcotic Drug Law, enacted in 1990 render marijuana a criminal substance. Since the cultivation of marijuana is considered a crime, it also means legally, the term 'marijuana' refers to all parts of marijuana, the seeds of the plant, the resin extracted from the plant, and every compound, manufacture, salt, derivative, mixture, or preparation of the plant, its seeds or its resin (Miller, 1997: 412).

Statement of Problem

The near universal criminalization of marijuana, notwithstanding, it is one of the few substances that is widely consumed, and in consequence, in the discourse on illicit drug use, the substance has become a subject of scholarly, popular, and legal debate (Barrett, 1988: 128). Woody et al (1995) asserts that globally, an estimated 200-300 million people are regular users of marijuana. This disclosure is corroborated by the UNDP report (2002) that indicates that globally an estimated number of 147 million people are regular users of marijuana. The World Drug Report of 2009 also brings to the fore that cannabis plant remains the most widely cultivated crop in the world, and its products are the most widely used, although estimates about use are less precise than those about cultivation. In UNODC (2010) Report, the Executive Director, Antonio Maria Costa, noted that cannabis remains the world's most widely produced and used illicit substance grown in almost all countries, and smoked by 130 to 190 million people at least once a year.³ According to the World Drug Report (2014), in 2012, between 125 million and 227 million people were estimated to have used cannabis, corresponding to between 2.7 and 4.9 per cent of the population aged 15-64 years. West and Central Africa, North America, Oceania and, to a lesser extent, Western and Central Europe remain the regions with prevalence rates considerably higher than the global average. Over the past five years in North America, the largest cannabis herb market, prevalence rates have followed an upward trend in the United States but declined in Canada between 2008 and 2011, increasing again between 2011 and 2012. Although recent epidemiological data from Asia are not available, experts from nearly half of the countries in Asia consider cannabis use

² Interview with Professor Nicodemus Awasom of Swaziland University on September 26-27, 2010.

³ Source UNODC (2010). Promoting Health, Security and Justice. Source: www.unodc.org/documents/frontpage/unodc. Accessed December 19, 2010.

to be increasing in the region.⁴

Possibly because of the new researches that have shed new light on marijuana, the substance, after centuries of criminalization, is beginning to gain acceptance in some so-called developed countries. In countries like Netherlands, Bangladesh, North Korea and Uruguay, marijuana laws have been relaxed. But in many African societies, including Ghana, marijuana continues to be a criminalized substance. In Ghana, marijuana is widely used by people of all social backgrounds, and it is illegally used even in penal or reformation institutions. Statistics from the four psychiatric hospitals – Accra, Pantang, Ankaful, and Valley View – show a significant rise in the consumption of cannabis. With a total of 1,945 patients admitted in 2009, cannabis was the most abused drug beside alcohol, cocaine, and heroine. Out of this figure 1,072 representing 55.11% admitted using cannabis and 583, representing 30.23% admitted abusing alcohol. Only 61 patients, representing 3.14% admitted using cocaine.⁵

In October 2014, Mr. Daniel Akwasi Amankwah, an official of NACOB, revealed that Ghana places first in Africa and third in the world as a consumer of marijuana.⁶ Based on this disclosure, marijuana became public discourse in the country for several weeks. Initially, the debate over the substance had been brought forward by the Executive Secretary of NACOB, Akraasi Sarpong, who suggested in March 2014 that Ghana should open up a new debate on the criminalization of marijuana. The debate on the substance came to a head following the arrest of Emmanuel Botchwey, a popular Ghanaian hip-hop artiste, for illegal use of marijuana. Maamobi, is a Muslim-dominated migrant community that bears the full imprint of a slum. The features of a slum includes a community that is densely populated, with inadequate services such as poor sanitation, poor supply of electricity, irregular water supply, high poverty rate, and high rate of illiteracy (Hutchinson 1997; Turkstra et al 2004). What is the history of marijuana use in Maamobi in particular and Ghana in general? What are the religious values of marijuana in Maamobi?

Research Methodology

As suggested by Siziba (2009), intimate studies, such as those on culture, ideology, young people, identity and other aspects of human behaviour evoke a pertinent need for methodologies that afford the researcher close proximity to the research problem. Following Siziba's suggestion, the study is qualitative in design and helps to grasp better the lived realities of marijuana users in Maamobi. The data was collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with key leaders of the two sites. This research design ensured that respondents were not only objects of the study, but also active participants, who were given ample opportunity to tell their own stories, outlook, experiences and philosophy about the use of marijuana. It also helped the researcher to collect data on the socio-demography of marijuana users; explore the values marijuana users assign to the substance. The qualitative study design also enabled the researcher to apply the ethnographical technique of exploring the social realities of marijuana users

⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2014*. (United Nations Publication, Sales No. E.14.XI.7).

⁵ Regina Aidoo-Rockson, 'What you should know about cannabis', published in *The Ghanaian Times* on Monday, December 6, 2010, pg. 9 No. 1,561,223 ISSN: 0855-1502.

⁶ GNA, Ghana is first highest marijuana consumption in Africa. Source: www.graphic.comgh/.../33112 Accessed: 21 January, 2015.

through participant observation and participation in some social activities, such as football gala and ceremonial organization of entertainment, by marijuana users.

The purposive sampling was used to select the two oldest existing sites, Barracks and Four Junction in Accra, for the study. The researcher's choice of these sites, apart from their long period of existence in the past three decades, was informed by the fact that users from all the other smaller or satellites sites, as well as non-residents of the community, prefer these sites. Additionally, these sites are socially and politically well-structured to capture the marijuana culture in the community. The targeted population for the study included all Muslim youth who use marijuana in Maamobi community, but for time and financial constraints, 50 respondents were selected for the study. The snowball sampling technique was used to obtain the defined population for the study. This technique was desirable because even though Maamobi is a communal community, the stigma and fear for people who use marijuana creates a latent hostility between marijuana users and most residents. This situation, as well as the legal implications and the likelihood of imprisonment for possessing, selling, or using marijuana, makes it difficult for smokers to readily avail themselves. The sites are also generally closed to non-users. Nevertheless, since the researcher has some Muslim acquaintances who are users and residents of these sites, they helped to generate the sample size. The purposive and convenience sampling techniques were used to obtain the views of informants.

This study relied on primary and secondary sources for generating data. The study explored existing literature including published books, articles from journals, newspapers, the Hadith, and the Qur'an. The primary source of data collection required regular visits to the sites, where marijuana is consumed and sold. Key informants including association leaders of the sites were interviewed. Different data collection techniques were utilized, including structured and unstructured in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation and case studies of carefully selected marijuana users. The structured interviews enabled the researcher to elicit responses on specific questions from respondents. On the other hand, the unstructured method proved to be a very suitable instrument for engaging marijuana users in a conversational style of interview. Interview guide, which contained the major themes of the study, was used to engage interviewees and the interviewer in a discussion.

A focused group discussion guide was also used to collect information from marijuana users. Individuals selected for the focus group discussion were leaders and deputy leaders of the two main field sites. The selection criteria ensured that the views reflect what the two sites consider to be central to the marijuana culture. Two focus group discussion sessions, each comprising four participants, two representatives from each site, were conducted at Four Junction on Saturday, September 4, 2010 and at Barracks on Saturday, October 9, 2010 respectively.

Participant observation proved useful with frequent visits to the sites for interviews, informal conversations and observation of behaviour of marijuana users, and participation in social activities of marijuana users including football tournaments, parties and marriage ceremonies. My participation in a football match strengthened the relationship with marijuana users, and deepened the confidence of respondents. The participant observation enabled me to get firsthand information on activities of marijuana users.

Though the Hausa language is commonly spoken in the community, questionnaires were written in English and translated into Hausa during the interviews with respondents. In few cases, Pidgin English and Twi languages were also used. The researcher familiarized himself with common jargons used by marijuana users, thus helping to have unimpeded conversation with marijuana users. My 30 years residence in the community enabled me to establish cordial relationship with marijuana users and facilitated relatively easy entrance to the sites.

In addition, a field notebook was used to document important observations and served as a source of reference. The initial intention to use tape recorders was dropped as virtually all the marijuana users objected to tape-recording the interviews, obviously for security reasons. However, they had no objection to writing, verbatim, their views and experiences. They exercised a great deal of patience as I consistently asked them to repeat what they had said in order for their views to be accurately represented. This was time consuming, but it helped the researcher to capture, as much as possible, the exact words and expressions of interviewees. The data collected was grouped thematically and interpreted descriptively to mostly reflect the views and opinions of marijuana users.

Theories on Marijuana Use

Scholars have used reference group or peer pressure theory, commitment theory and the stress theory to explain marijuana use. Sociologically, 'reference group' refers to groups which individuals use as a standard for evaluating themselves and their own behaviour (Rawat, 2007:114). Many researchers have suggested that marijuana use occur, at least, as a result of the influence of peers, whether in the guise of conformity to peer group pressure and escape from unpleasant circumstances (Ginsberg et al, 1978, Conger, 1979, cited in Santrock, 2005, Mussen et al 1984:538-539, Johnson, 1973, Miller, 1997:426). The theory postulates that a person's exposure to marijuana using sub-culture may lead to increased identification with marijuana users as reference group.

This theory resonates with the interactionist theory's approach to understanding the marijuana culture. The interactionist theory, as noted by Zastrow et al (2004:420), asserts that drug use is learned from interaction with others in a cultural environment. This theory states that social behaviour is formed as one communicates with other people in the society. Thus, both the reference group and the interactionist theories convey the understanding that prevailing conditions, such as coming into contact with a sub-culture that provides social networks and moral support for marijuana use could influence a person to use marijuana. These theories served as a framework for exploring how the presence of marijuana sites, which provide the support and social network, induce some Muslim youth to take to using marijuana.

The commitment theory asserts that when people are committed to doing conventional activities, they tend to have less time and energy to engage in any form of social deviant behaviour, which in our context is marijuana use (Johnson, 1973; Hirschi, 1971, cited in Ginsberg, et al. 1978:24). This theory is relevant to this study because, the use of marijuana is legally and socially treated as a deviant behaviour in the general Ghanaian society. The stress theory on the other hand maintains that some people use marijuana in order to escape from personal or psychological problems (Ginsberg et al, 1978:24). The theory is also related to the pressure-seeking or behavioural theory that

stipulates that people use drugs because they find them pleasurable and continue to use them because doing so prevents withdrawal distress (Zastrow et al, 2004:420).

The Marijuana Culture in Ghana

In Ghana, apart from the name ganja, marijuana has lots of names including *tampe*, *sundu*, *obonsam tawa*, *apopo*, *taba*, and *wee bitters*. Its use goes as far back as the pre-colonial era and it was abused as psychotropic substance, depressant or stimulant due to its chemical properties. Akyeampong (2005) has provided the historicity of marijuana consumption in pre-colonial Ghana. Besides, there is paucity of literature on the use of the substance in pre-colonial Ghana. Thus, much of the information gleaned for marijuana consumption in pre-colonial Ghana is also based on oral accounts. Asiama supports the idea that the knowledge of marijuana and other hallucinatory substances were known to most West African societies long before the advent of colonialism.⁷ He posits that virtually all the priests and priestesses of the popular shrines in Ghana, namely, Akonodi, Yeve, Tigari use some hallucinatory substances during initiation rites and incantations.⁸

Historically, traditional warriors used potent hallucinatory substances during wartime. This was expressed as *Ye ko noa asa*, to wit, ‘we are going to cook war.’ This was to adequately prepare the warriors, making them fearless and psychologically strong to face war and trauma. This was usually done in the forest, hence making the knowledge of it relatively unknown to the non-participants.⁹

Nevertheless, during the colonial era, marijuana was classified as a plant whose cultivation, use and possession were rendered a crime that was punishable by law. The criminalization of marijuana was economically motivated as it fed into the colonial political economy. This was because marijuana competed with tobacco introduced by the colonialists. To promote the sale of tobacco, the colonialists had to criminalise marijuana. Even so, the widespread in the use of marijuana among the youth in post-colonial Ghana is traced to the ex-service men, who returned to the country after World War II.¹⁰

Apart from the ex-servicemen, it is possible that the Krio from Sierra Leone who worked as stevedores along the Coast of West Africa popularized marijuana use in Ghana during the colonial era. In the 1930s, some Sierra Leoneans, therefore, began to explore a market for cannabis within British West Africa (Akyeampong, 2005: 433). As Akyeampong asserts, “with the decline in world market price for cocoa from 1958, cocoa farmers may have been encouraged to diversify into cannabis cultivation” (2005:435). Since then, marijuana has received wider use and it is the leading abused drug in Secondary Schools and University campuses (Kudadjie et al, 2004: 159). Presently in Ghana, some of the principal growing areas for cannabis include, the Volta, Brong Ahafo, Western, and Ashanti regions.

⁷ Interview with Rev. Dr. Asiama, a lecturer at the School of Performing Arts, and as he refers to himself ‘practitioner of herbal medicine’, Accra, 4 October 2010.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Mallam Yussif Iddris Konate, 10 October 2010.

Marijuana in Maamobi community

The use of marijuana has been an established culture in Maamobi community since the 1950s. During this period, America House,¹¹ a unit in the community, gained popularity as a vibrant site for the sale and use of marijuana. Marijuana was also sold at Avenor. The early dealers such as Mahma Issaka, Awolah, Medicine, and Mamare, traveled within and outside Ghana to purchase marijuana.¹²

Similar to the history of marijuana in Ghana in general, there has been no consensus on how marijuana became introduced to Maamobi. In spite of the controversy over the source of introduction, some residents linked the use of marijuana by some youth to armed robbery, criminal activities and other social vices in the community.¹³ A section of the community, known as *Kawo kudi*¹⁴ reflects the activities of some disgruntled ex-service men, who robbed people at the point of guns, knives and other deadly weapons. With this backdrop, the community became a major target for ridding of criminal activities in the country during the 1979 political uprising.¹⁵

When America House lost its popularity in 1979, Barracks¹⁶ and later Four Junction¹⁷ emerged as major alternative sites for the marijuana business. These two sites till date remain important centers for the sale and consumption of marijuana.

The Sociogenic Nature of Marijuana Use in Maamobi

In Maamobi community, the site represents the marijuana culture. Since the use of marijuana is a group activity, or as expressed by Goode (1970) to be ‘sociogenic’ or ‘cultogenic’, the site serves as the meeting point for marijuana users. For site members, the sociogenic nature of smoking marijuana is derived from one of the names of the substance, ‘wee’. ‘Wee’ to site members means ‘all of us’, an interpretation that binds site members together as a people who share some characteristics that define them as unique. Marijuana users hardly take non-participants, including those who use other narcotic drugs, such as cocaine and heroin, as friends. This has created a form of fictive family in the site where members are provided with social networks and support. There is, therefore, a strong sense of solidarity among members. This sense of ‘I am because we are and since I am therefore we are’ as formulated by Mbiti (1989) is symbolically expressed in the passing round of joints. The sharing of joints is also a way of asserting that, ‘one man does not share meditation.’ The sociogenic nature of smoking is also a latent way of ‘training’ a neophyte on the dynamics of smoking, including learning the expected behaviour in the site when the neophyte is ‘on high’. After a neophyte has learnt how to use marijuana, he joins the fraternity as a full member. Site members see

¹¹ The name America House reflects the activities of African Americans who contributed to development in the community in 1960s.

¹² Prempeh, Fieldnote, 2010.

¹³ Interviewed with Anthony Prempeh, 12/08/08.

¹⁴ A Hausa expression which means, ‘Bring money’.

¹⁵ The 1979 uprising was led by Jerry John Rawlings, the leader of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), and its main objective of undertaking a house cleaning exercise was popularly supported by many of the youths.

¹⁶ The name ‘Barracks’ represents the fact that it is only males who are allowed to sit there and use marijuana.

¹⁷ Four Junction is also another popular site for the marijuana business.

each other as ‘brothers’, and it is the duty of skilled members to pass on any known skills to other members. Membership of the site is open to males only.

The marijuana site has unwritten rules and regulations to govern the conduct of members. As part of the code of conduct, members are not allowed to use any illicit drugs in the site; members are not allowed to make unnecessary noise, or fight in the site; members are forbidden to steal in and outside the site, or admit criminals or thieves to life in the marijuana site. Though most site members smoke cigarette in addition to marijuana in the site, the sale of cigarette is not allowed in there; members are not proscribed from drinking alcohol, but members cannot live in the site under the influence of alcohol; no marital unfaithfulness, and finally ‘elders’ are supposed to be respected.¹⁸ *Hukumchi*¹⁹ is the punishment for those who break the rules in the site. It requires the guilty person to be tied to the ground and flogged by any member of the site. The climax of ‘Hukumchi’ is excommunication.

Since leadership is necessary for the sustenance of life in the site, there is a form of gerontocratic leadership. Leadership is reposed in older members of the site. They are expected to live exemplary life; and enjoin group solidarity among members. It is also their duty to initiate and organize social activities such as football matches, and clean-up exercise. They also assist members in the organization of marriage, funerals, and naming ceremonies. The reason for the strict commitment to the rules in the site was explained by an elder from Four Junction as follows:

To prevent the site from becoming a den of robbers, and not tarnish the image of the site and those of us who smoke here. The founder of our site, Lover [in the case of Four Junction] was a disciplinarian, who never tolerated nonsense, cheating, fighting, quarreling, and noise making. In his time, he made site life in such a way that one only enters here to smoke, not talk, quarrel, or even do business. This was because, the site was located right at the back of his house, and so, if he allowed noise and quarreling, he may be blamed by those in the house. He also resisted the temptation of selling *taba* to young boys. Those of us, who took over from him, must ensure that his idea of life in the site, free from troubles and criminals, is achieved. We do not shield criminals, hard drug pushers, or even allow the selling of nicotine [tobacco], because robbery is a cheat on someone, and selling hard drugs and nicotine is life threatening.²⁰

Another elder from Barracks complemented the above by saying:

Here is not a jungle of animals. And even in the jungle, animals have their own rules. Here in the site, we want to live a life to tell those who are against us that there is nothing bad about smoking, and that, we are law-abiding citizens. We don’t shield criminals, or fighters in the site. We have been misunderstood for a long time, and so, we owe it as a duty to make sure that life in the site speaks for itself. We can’t therefore allow a few individuals to make people think that the site harbors thieves and criminals.²¹

¹⁸ Prempeh Field Note, 2010.

¹⁹ *Hukumchi* is a Hausa word for punishment.

²⁰ Focus group discussion at Four Junction on 04/08/10.

²¹ Focus group discussion at Four Junction on 04/08/10.

Thus the use of marijuana in Maamobi constitutes a unique sub-culture within the larger community. The site is usually noted for introducing new words that are incorporated into mainstream Hausa dialect spoken in the community. These terms include words such as *dawa* (money), ‘speed off’ (I’m distressed), *kana Magana iskoki* (You speak nonsense) and *jon* (fool), to mention but a few. Life in the site, hence, serves as a sort of reference group to a number of up-coming youth in the community. The structural organization of marijuana culture in the site also helps members to cope with the harsh economic conditions in Accra.

The Supply and Sale of Marijuana in Maamobi

The study discovered that supply of marijuana is cloaked in a closely knitted connection among some police officers at the borders, cargo vehicle drivers, and marijuana farmers in Hoehoe, Sandama and Bolgatanga. Dealers have established strong ties with this network. They are respected and revered in the sites; they are believed to have some spiritual powers to outwit the police and escape all forms of arrest. They are also believed to have the ability to hypnotize their detractors. They control the distribution of marijuana in the sites. They liaise between the cultivators and the marijuana users in the sites, and they ensure the regular supply of the substance. A dealer does not necessarily have to be an elder. The farmers are responsible for the cultivation of the substance; the cargo drivers, who hide the substance under loads of charcoal, maize, or yam, transport the substance to Accra, while some senior police officers at the borders ensure the safety transport of the substance to Accra. There is, thus, a kind of division of labour that takes place in transporting the substance to dealers in Accra.

In the marijuana sites, apart from common names, marijuana is known by different terms such as ‘Ethiopian cancer’, *Apopo*,²² ‘Killing me softly’, ‘Sinsiminia’²³ ‘Congolapito’.²⁴ To buy marijuana the following terms are used: ‘Flow me taba’ ‘I me ludu’, ‘I me row’, ‘Blow me one’ ‘Let the wee flow’, ‘Let me have a puff’, ‘Flow me some Charley,’ and ‘Throw me one stone’.

To escape and preempt arrest, marijuana dealers sell to only members and friends of members of the site. Even though most members of the marijuana site are multiple drug users, marijuana and cigarette, with a few of them quaffing alcohol, the sale of all other drugs, apart from marijuana and cigarette, is strictly prohibited in the sites. Members are not allowed to use narcotic drugs. A member found using narcotic drugs is subjected to ‘Hukumchi’ and later excommunicated from the marijuana culture. Leaders of the marijuana sites have ways of identifying narcotic drug users. These include idiotic living; wearing of dirty clothes, and avoiding communal living. Members can also drink alcohol, but, here too, the culture of drinking is not allowed in the sites.

²² Apopo is a Chamba word for herbs.

²³ This is a corruption of the word, ‘Sinsemilla’, which means without seed. It is a variety of marijuana that is cultivated to eliminate seeds from the final product. For further detail, see, Miller, J. G. (1997). *Drugs and the Law: Detection, Recognition & Investigation* (2nd Edition). Florida: Gould Publications, Inc.

²⁴ Conglapito confirms Imam Yussif Iddris Konate’s assertion that marijuana on earlier on gotten from Krio stevedores from Congo.

Marijuana and Aggressive Behaviour: The Perspective of Marijuana Users in Maamobi

An aspect of the discussion on marijuana is the assumption that the use of marijuana is a threat to social order, since marijuana users may easily resort to aggressive behaviour on the least provocation. Findings reveal that 78% of respondents vehemently denied the above assertion, while 22% thought that the use of marijuana is a threat to social order and induces aggressive behaviour in the user. In a focus group discussion with marijuana users on this issue, Musbau was of the view that:

The use of marijuana has nothing to do with the peace of society. I admit that some marijuana users are sometimes hired to cause commotion in our community. But I can assure you that if you get closer to the person, who supposedly is causing commotion under the influence of marijuana, you will notice that the person has taken alcohol or other hard drug instead of marijuana. Marijuana, naturally, causes one to be calm. How do you find us in the ghettos? Do you see us fighting or beating each other?²⁵

Majid complemented Musbau's assertion:

Marijuana is a peacemaker. If you want to fight with somebody, or have the intention of doing any evil, all you need to do is to take marijuana. My brother, once you do that you will notice that you will tend to feel shy of the person whom you have nurtured evil against or intend to fight. In any case, if you smoke marijuana with evil intention, it will expose you. You will be arrested and imprisoned.²⁶

Uztaz thought otherwise. He was of the view that:

The question of aggressive behaviour and smoking is not a straightforward one for one to easily deny or confirm it. First, whatever you do is backed by intention. If it is your intention to smoke and become quiet, you will be quiet. But if you smoke with the intention of causing confusion, you would cause confusion. So, I'm against the idea of my other friends trying to find a narrow view of people's intention. If people smoke and they are peaceful, why do we have to make laws in the ghettos to govern our lives? If the smoking of marijuana will naturally stimulate in us to be peaceful, then it is irrelevant for some of us to be appointed as elders. Please, Mr. Researcher, the truth of the matter is that people's intentions determine their behaviour and not necessarily the smoking of marijuana.²⁷

In relations to addiction, most marijuana users are of the view that the substance is not addictive. In fact, one of them said that, "I learnt how to use it, so I can unlearn it." one of them also said, "Taba (marijuana) is not adhini (religion), and so one can stop." A few of them, however, think that the substance is addictive. For example, one of them, who is a mason, said that, "If I don't use marijuana, I am not able to work." The narrative in the sites about the addictiveness of the substance is not clear, as members have different views about it.

²⁵ Focused group discussion at Barracks on 09/10/10.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

The Power of Marijuana: Protection Against Witchcraft

As Ghanaian Muslims, the respondents' belief in witchcraft is largely influenced by their indigenous worldview and Islam. In addition to the prescribed method of dealing with the challenge of witchcraft in Islam, such as offering a special prayer (*dua*) in the middle of the night, marijuana users assume that the smoke of marijuana is another panacea to dealing with the paranoia of witchcraft. The belief in the existence of witchcraft is common in the indigenous religions and Abrahamic religions.

In Islam, both the Qur'an²⁸ and the Sunna attest to the existence of witchcraft, so much emphasis is placed on the existence of witchcraft that whoever denies the existence of such a malevolent and capricious spirit is considered an infidel. From the Sunna, we learn that the Prophet of Islam, Mohammed, was bewitched. This is narrated by Aisha, who relays that: 'The messenger of Allah was bewitched by a man from Banu Zurayq who was called Labeed ibn Al-A'sam, until the messenger of Allah imagined that he had done something when he had not done it' (Fath Al-Baari, 10/222, cited in Khaleel ibn Ibraaheem Ameen, 2005:182). Aside from the Qur'an and the Sunna, leading Islamic scholars attest to the existence of witchcraft. For example, that witchcraft is an existential reality is expressed by Al-Qurtubi as follows:

The Qur'aan, in more than one Verse, and the Sunnah, in more than one Hadeeth, indicate that witchcraft exists and that it has effect on the one who is bewitched. Whoever denies that is a kaafir who rejects what Allaah and His Messenger say, and denies something that is well known. Moreover, if he denies witchcraft in secret, he is a heretic and if he denies it openly he is an apostate (Sharh Al-Qurtubi 'Ala Saheeh Muslim, 6/6, cited in Khaleel ibn Ibraaheem Ameen, 2005:183).

A majority of Muslims, including marijuana users in Maamobi believe that witchcraft is a reality. In Islam, witches are ontologically noted for causing havocs and harm on society.

The belief in witchcraft is deeply ingrained in the psyche of marijuana users in Maamobi that it provides the framework to make meaning of their lives. Marijuana users project witchcraft as a nocturnal malevolent spirit that is capable of jeopardizing one's life. Marijuana users resort to all forms of spiritual means to protect themselves from witchcraft activities. Some wear specially prepared charms, rings, and amulets prepared by Mallams, Muslim ritual experts, for protection against malevolent spirits, particularly witchcraft. Some have their bodies injected with anti-witchcraft substances. Most respondents claim to protect themselves from witches through the use of marijuana. They argue that since witches are believed to attack the soul of a person, and marijuana establishes contact with the soul, the substance is able to protect the user from the malevolent activities of the witch.²⁹ The smoke of marijuana is believed to carry the spiritual potency to neutralize the powers of witchcraft. The belief in witchcraft provides an outlet for marijuana users to explain the existential challenges of life. In view of the strong belief in the malevolent activities of witchcraft, a ritual accompanies the consumption of marijuana in Maamobi. Some respondents recite the Fathia, the first

²⁸ Qur'an 2:102; 10:81-82; 113:1-5.

²⁹ Prempeh Field Note, 2010.

chapter of the Qur'an, to invoke the spiritual potency of marijuana. MacDanji³⁰ articulated this as follows:

I always recite the Fathia before I smoke taba. I do this because taba has its own power and to activate that power, one must first plead with Allah, the creator of all things, including taba, to enjoy the spiritual benefits of taba. It is the activation of the inherent spirit in marijuana that drives away the spirit of witchcraft. Witches do not like the smoke of taba, because the smoke of taba is charged with the spirit of Allah. As researchers, you might have heard that every plant has a spirit inhabiting it. That explains why herbalists perform special rituals before they make use of any herb. Over here, we also believe that taba, as a herb, has its own powers, and its powers are best invoked to counter evil spirits.

MacDanji's observation is similar to the use of herbs by indigenous healers in Ghana who perform rituals before they go into the forest to cut any root, leaves, or bark of a tree for medicinal purposes. Rituals are also performed to invoke the therapeutic powers inherent in the herb. It is commonly held belief among most indigenous healers that every herbal plant possesses some spirits, and the permission of these spirits must be sought before such herbs are used for any purposes. This seeming pantheistic belief is very dominant in the sites. Marijuana users believe that benevolent spirits inhabit marijuana, and that gives the substance the ability to ward off witchcraft. Other spirits believed to inhabit marijuana are the jinns, a belief widely held among Muslims in Ghana. Muslim clerics make reference to the Qur'an to justify the existence of these spirits. (Qur'an 51:56; Qur'an 46:29-30; and Qur'an 34:13). Basically, two types of jinns are recognised in Islam: believer jinns (*al-muslimun*) and infidel jinns (*al-qasitun*). Marijuana users follow this categorization of jinns, but hold onto another belief about jinns, which is not universally shared by Muslims. Marijuana smokers believe that there are good jinns inhabiting marijuana, and these jinns are capable of warding off evil spirit, particularly witchcraft. However, the question of whether or not jinns reside in marijuana is contestable even among marijuana users. But the general understanding among marijuana users is that there is some kind of symbiotic relationship between marijuana and the jinns, a relationship that can be exploited to drive away evil forces, particularly witchcraft.

Some Muslim ritual experts in Maamobi share the belief that the smoke of marijuana could invoke the jinns. In an interview with a Mallam, who also uses marijuana, he avers that:

There are spirits in virtually everything. These spirits are called the jinns. The jinns can be ordered to work to the advantage of human beings. There are those who use the jinns for negative things, while there are those who use these jinns for constructive purposes. Those of us who use marijuana are able to implore the jinns to protect us from witches. And this we believe works for us. Because, we are very certain that these jinns are more powerful than witches.

Hamarnah (1972) has argued that some Muslim Sufis used marijuana to enable them withstand the rigorous demands of ascetic living. Marijuana, a sedative substance, is able to calm the nerves and as a result make it possible for the consumer to 'stay cool' and

³⁰ For security reasons, we do not use the real names of our respondents. So, while the statement attributed to the names are right, the names are fictive creation. All the names are pseudonyms.

attain a high level of concentration. Some marijuana users in Maamobi indicate that marijuana keeps them in deep thinking as they meditate on the word of Allah; makes one calm and also keeps one in intense relaxing mood. They refute the assumption that marijuana makes one aggressive and violent, arguing that anyone who behaves aggressively after consuming marijuana is a multiple drug user. In his rather apologetic position, Masud contends that:

Taba alone cannot let anyone go wild. Taba alone cannot cause one to be violent. Anyone who smokes taba and misbehaves should be checked properly. Such a person uses other substances. Such a person is likely to quaff alcohol in addition to taba. Or in some instances, such a person uses heroine and cocaine in addition to taba. I have been smoking taba for so many years and I have lots of experience to share with you concerning this precious herb. But let me just tell you that marijuana rather helps one to concentrate on Allah and meditate upon His word. Whenever I smoke taba in the company of my friends, I am able to think deeply about Allah and also think about my life.

Conclusion

Researchers have mostly depended on etic view to form opinion on the utility of marijuana, thus partly confusing the discourse on the substance. This is against the backdrop that marijuana represents food, medicine, and industrial substance in many societies. Marijuana is still widely consumed by people from all walks of life in spite of the popular criminalization of the substance. Further research has resulted in the increasing acceptance in some countries. Hamilton (2013) has written that some states in the United States, namely Colorado and Washington, have passed laws legalizing the recreational use of marijuana while in Britain cannabis has been reclassified from class A drug to class C drug. In Ghana, the substance continues to be illegal, even though Ghana is reported to be the leading consumer of marijuana in Africa and rank third in the world. This paper has attempted to explore the meaning, utility and sacralisation of marijuana in Maamobi community, Accra. Findings show that users consume marijuana for its recreational and therapeutic values, but, more importantly, for its ability to ward off evil spirits, including witchcraft. The substance is also believed by Maamobi Muslims to help them focus on the worship of Allah. A good understanding of the beliefs of marijuana users could guide policy makers in devising an effective way of dealing with the social challenge.

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Christian Confrontations with Indigenous Beliefs in the Niger Delta

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Abstract

After centuries of deep embeddedness within macrocosmic social structures, including trade with Europeans and other communities along the Niger, the macrocosmic tiers of Brass' and Bonny's cosmologies were not as prominent as Robin Horton's Intellectualist Theory would predict. Rather, this article suggests that a process of microcosmic-tiered condensation precipitated conversion in Brass and Bonny. Church Mission Society archival materials that recount cosmological confrontations between Christian and indigenous beliefs under Bishop Samuel Crowther in Bonny and Rev. Thomas Johnson in Brass are examined, arguing that for individuals that abandoned contested beliefs, the microcosmic tier of their cosmology became smaller with each belief that was disowned. A cosmological lacuna was thereby created that could be filled in a number of ways, including conversion to Christianity. This article suggests that this process of microcosmic-tiered condensation became a contributing factor in conversion in Brass and Bonny.

KEY WORDS: Niger Delta, Conversion, Church Mission Society, Bishop Samuel Crowther, Intellectualist Theory, Robin Horton

Introduction

In his renowned 1971 review essay "African Conversion," Robin Horton presents a conversion theory that remains popular even today.² Horton observes that "typical traditional cosmology... provides an impressive instrument for explanation, prediction, and control,"³ famously delineating two cosmological tiers within this exceedingly broad "traditional" framework: the macrocosmic, in which a Supreme Being creates the cosmos, and the microcosmic, which consists of "lesser," everyday divinities and spirits that directly and regularly interact with communities. Since the Supreme Being rarely

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² See Robin Horton, "African Conversion," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* Vol. 41, No. 2 (1971): 101-107. For a very recent example in which Horton's theory is not only taken seriously, but also presumed to be more or less accurate, see J.D.Y. Peel, *Christianity, Islam, and Oriṣa: Three Traditions in Comparison and Interaction* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2016).

³ Horton, "African Conversion," 101.

possesses “a direct concern with human morality,” “few events are directly attributed to him [*siŋ*]... Techniques for approaching him are poorly developed.”⁴ Yet since “most events, fortunate or unfortunate, are attributed to [the ‘lesser’ spirits’ and divinities’] agency,” most African societies have developed “a wealth of techniques for approaching and manipulating them.”⁵

Horton contends that when small African societies live in social microcosms largely closed off to the wider world,⁶ “lesser” divinities more or less particular to their local communities remain dominant. Yet increasing participation in macrocosmic social structures (e.g., long-distance trade) erodes microcosmic social boundaries,⁷ foisting indigenous societies into an international, macrocosmic world—thus causing indigenous communities to begin bringing a macrocosmic Supreme Being to the forefront of their cosmologies, typically one believed to hold sway over the wider world in which such societies suddenly find themselves.⁸ Significantly, Horton maintains that this shift of emphasis from the microcosmic to the macrocosmic tier within an indigenous cosmology is a natural consequence of participating in macrocosmic social structures—and a Supreme Being’s increase in significance would transpire even without exposure to Islam or Christianity, “reduc[ing] Islam and Christianity to the role of catalysts—i.e., stimulators and accelerators of changes which were ‘in the air’ anyway...”⁹

The first section that follows pushes back against Horton’s theory, demonstrating that it does not accurately predict Brass’ or Bonny’s cosmological trajectories since after centuries of deep embeddedness within macrocosmic social structures, the microcosmic-tiered dimensions of their respective cosmologies still vastly overshadowed the macrocosmic-tiered Supreme Being. In the second section, I argue that it was not integration into macrocosmic social structures in general, as Horton supposes, that increased the macrocosmic tier’s significance in Brass and Bonny, but rather exposure to Christianity in particular that did so.¹⁰ More specifically, I examine cosmological confrontations between Christian and indigenous beliefs, arguing that when individuals abandoned the microcosmic-tiered beliefs that these encounters called into question, their microcosmic tier condensed with each belief that was disowned. While contested microcosmic-tiered beliefs were surely not rejected by everyone, for those that discarded them, a cosmological lacuna was created that could be filled in numerous ways based on an individual’s personal inclinations, with conversion to Christianity being one option.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Horton often refers to Africa as a whole, buttressing his theory with examples from North, West, East, Central, and South Africa. My broad use of ‘Africa’ in this article reflects Horton’s.

⁷ Horton deals with macrocosms in both socio-spatial and cosmological terms. For clarity’s sake, I sometimes employ the term “macrocosmic social structures” to denote Horton’s socio-spatial use of “macrocosm.”

⁸ For a fuller account, see Ibid., 102-103. See also Horton, “On the Rationality of Conversion. Part I,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* Vol. 45, No. 3 (1975): 219-220.

⁹ Horton, “African Conversion,” 104.

¹⁰ Christian encounters still involved social macrocosms, at least insofar as missionary efforts were funded and overseen by missionary societies in the metropole (and in cosmological terms, Christianity was also macrocosmic in scope). I contend that encounters with this *specific* macrocosm—and not social macrocosms in general, like long-distance trade—precipitated conversion.

Macrocosmic Encounters in Bonny and Brass

By the time Horton penned his theory, the Niger Delta had already been exposed to the wider world's macrocosmic structures for at least 300 years—and perhaps for more than 500. G.I. Jones reports that the *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis*, a Portuguese navigational text composed around 1505, recounts events that can be dated as early as 1450; it mentions the “Rio Real,” the Portuguese name for a river in West Africa that “was an important trading river in the Portuguese Empire.”¹¹ The Rio Real almost certainly referred to the Niger, especially since the text’s “description of the coastline on the Eastern [Niger] Delta... was substantially the same as today...”¹² The *Esmeraldo* also reports an unnamed large village that Jones believes was likely Bonny, in which the pernicious slave trade would have been “already well established.”¹³

While Bonny, and perhaps even Brass, *likely* began trading with Europeans in the mid- to late fifteenth century, Bonny and Brass *certainly* traded with Europeans by the late seventeenth century. Jones also examines relevant portions of the 1686 French version of Olfert Dapper’s *Description de l’Afrique*, which was originally published in Dutch in 1668. According to Dapper, the Dutch trade on the Rio Real included “the district of Bani,” or Bonny.¹⁴ Nembe is also mentioned as a trading port, which, by 1871, was considered to be Brass’ “capital.”¹⁵ John Barbot paraphrased Dapper’s *Description*, adding his own material about “Great Bandy,” or Bonny, in 1699, noting that Bonny’s residents traded slaves with both Europeans and “their own countrymen” along the Niger’s “upper markets.”¹⁶ Significantly, Bonny’s residents even acted as brokers between Europeans and other African communities in commercial transactions.¹⁷ Thus by 1699, Bonny and Brass had established inveterate trading economies replete with domestic and international markets. In the 1830s, British explorers even observed that Brass denizens did not grow their own food apart from plantains, importing yams and other food products from elsewhere, funded by “the very considerable profits which accrue to them from their trading transactions...”¹⁸

Barbot also reported that before docking, several of Bonny’s residents sailed out to meet him—speaking English, Portuguese, and Dutch.¹⁹ Two oral traditions report that Bonny’s King Asimini’s son Ebi learned Portuguese in Portugal, intending to serve as a translator in Bonny between the Portuguese and the Ibani.²⁰ Further, Crowther reports

¹¹ G.I. Jones, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers: A Study of Political Development in Eastern Nigeria* (London: Published for the International African Institute by Oxford University Press, 1963), 34.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 36.

¹⁵ Church Missionary Society Archives: CA3/O20, “Journal extracts of Thomas Johnson for the three quarters ending December 31, 1871,” 22 April 1871. All CMS archival references are taken from Section IV of the CMS’s microfilm collection.

¹⁶ Jones, 39. Jones is quoting John Barbot, *A Description of the Coasts of North and South-Guinea; and of Ethiopia Interior, vulgarly Angola: Being a New and Accurate Account of the Western Maritime Countries of Africa* (1732), 381.

¹⁷ Barbot, 381.

¹⁸ Richard Lander and John Lander, *Journal of An Expedition to Explore the Course and Termination of the Niger: With a Narrative of a Voyage Down that River to Its Termination*, Vol. 2 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1837), 254.

¹⁹ Barbot, 380.

²⁰ See Ebiegberri Alagoa and Adadonye Fombo, *A Chronicle of Grand Bonny* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1972), 7.

that in addition to Ijo, both Bonny and Brass residents spoke Igbo,²¹ and, given the extent of their trade along the Niger, many more African languages were likely spoken.

Significantly, Barbot brokered deals not only with Bonny's King William, but also with Bonny's non-royal residents,²² and so, like Lander's record of Brass, Bonny's whole community was caught up in trade. Bonny remained a highly-trafficked slave trade port for the next hundred and forty years until signing an antislavery treaty with the British in 1839.²³ Presciently perceiving, years beforehand, that Britain might significantly obstruct or even halt its slave trade, Bonny diversified its market in order to maintain the European trade upon which its economy depended. Bonny delved so deeply into the palm-oil trade that by 1836 the British navy felt compelled to sign a trading treaty with Bonny to protect its commercial interests.²⁴

Accordingly, Bonny and Brass engaged in steady trade with Europeans and other communities along the Niger for hundreds of years, perhaps as early as 1450, but certainly by 1668. For centuries, then, Bonny and Brass came to depend upon macrocosmic long-distance trade, even developing multilingual denizens. Hence Brass and Bonny communities surely fulfill Horton's stipulation of "go[ing] to work outside [their] own community, as well as engaging in a 'modern' occupation,"²⁵ being initiated into macrocosmic social structures that necessitate "wider communication (for instance, a development of long-distance trade)..."²⁶ According to these provisos from Horton, one would expect both Brass and Bonny to have exceedingly prominent macrocosmic tiers, yet according to both Rev. Dandeson Coates Crowther and Horton himself, writing nearly a century apart, the Ijo of Brass and Bonny's conceptualization and veneration of the Supreme Being was not nearly as pronounced as it could be.

In February 1876, missionaries met for an interdenominational conference in Gabon, pooling together knowledge of West Africa to further their common cause of conversion.²⁷ In a four-page appendix to conference notes that appears to be written in D.C. Crowther's hand, elements of "African Superstition," more positively recognized as indigenous religions today,²⁸ are summarized. Crowther rightfully—and astutely, for that time—observed that "we find that as there are tribes, so many are the superstition[s] coined by each..."²⁹ In other words, there are at least as many indigenous religions as there are ethnolinguistic groups. Growing up along the Niger and sometimes accompanying his father, Bishop Samuel Crowther, on journeys in the Niger Delta before being installed as Bonny's pastor in 1871, D.C. Crowther observed firsthand both

²¹ CMS: CA3/O4, Crowther to Venn, 2 May 1865.

²² See Barbot, 460, 463. This is noteworthy since Horton argues that only those directly involved in macrocosmic social structures like trade would experience an increased focus on a Supreme Being. For instance, in areas in which only rulers engage in trade, only royal families would be likely to develop their macrocosmic cosmological tier. See Horton, "On the Rationality of Conversion. Part I," 226.

²³ Dike, 83.

²⁴ For a copy of the treaty, see Jones, 221-222.

²⁵ Horton, "African Conversion," 103.

²⁶ Horton, "On the Rationality of Conversion. Part I," 220.

²⁷ CMS: CA3/O13, "Subjects for discussion at the Conference to be held at Gaboon [*sic*] in January 1876," 27 September 1875. The conference was ultimately held in February 1876.

²⁸ While I quote missionaries referring to sub-Saharan religions in terms that are often derisive, whenever I am not quoting another source, I use the term 'indigenous religions' to denote the integrity of Bonny's and Brass' religions as complex and coherent belief systems. Similarly, I capitalize 'Supreme Being' unless quoting another author.

²⁹ CMS: CA3/O13, "Conference of the undernamed West African Protestant Missions, held at Gaboon [*sic*] February 1876," Appendix No. 6: "Abstract. African Superstition."

differences in microcosmic-tiered beliefs among the Niger Delta's various ethnolinguistic groups and striking similarities regarding their conceptualizations of a Supreme Being. Thus Crowther reports:

We all know that the notion of a Supreme Being is universal in this part of the country, and it is on this great truth that we find the whole fabric of African Superstition is based. The heathen have the idea that the Supreme Being is so high, great and terrible, that he cannot be approached... therefore inferior [supernatural beings] are given which can be approached, and which they classify under different objects of worship.³⁰

By Crowther's lights, the Supreme Being was deemed to be withdrawn, having created the world before rescinding into cosmic hinterlands; such a remote Supreme Being had little to do with day-to-day existence, and therefore had little relevance for everyday circumstances. This is why practitioners turned to "inferior... objects of worship." These "inferior"—or as Horton puts it, "lesser"—divinities could be persuaded to intervene in day-to-day life.

Crowther goes on to elaborate upon the prominence of these "lesser" divinities in several communities along the Niger, including Bonny and Brass. Bonny's local divinity is "said to be the protector of the people there, [and] can give them richer children and all good things; besides these there are clusters of gods supposed to possess the spirit of their forefathers..."³¹ Further, there is "worship of guanas [*si*]" at Bonny," and at Brass, the "boa constrictor [*is*] worshipped..."³² In addition, in both places "images of wood rudely carved in sundry forms, clumps of stone, bundles of stick, lumps of clay, and a variety of other absurd things are looked upon as objects of veneration, all tending either to protect from evil or to bring good and riches; to these the heathen bow and pray."³³

Crowther's belligerent dismissiveness of indigenous religions and their practitioners notwithstanding, his 1876 description coincides nicely with Horton's theory insofar as two cosmological tiers are evident in both Brass and Bonny. Yet given Bonny's and Brass' intricate enmeshment within social macrocosms through long-distance trade, Crowther's description of the macrocosmic tier's Supreme Being as withdrawn and not regularly approached calls into question the applicability of Horton's theory to Bonny and Brass. The timeline is especially important here, since Horton maintains that these changes could occur relatively quickly—indeed, within an individual's lifespan.³⁴ Since these cosmological shifts did not occur in Bonny or Brass over hundreds of years, it seems that exposure to macrocosmic social structures like trade did not necessarily lead

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Horton writes: "The particular position taken up by a given individual will depend largely on the degree to which, in his [*si*] own personal life, the boundaries of the microcosm have ceased to confine him," and so cosmological change is a "matter of individual cosmological adjustment..." Horton gives an example of an individual moving from (microcosmic) farming to (macrocosmic) long-distance trade, claiming that the individual's move is accompanied by a shift in cosmological emphasis, with the microcosmic tier becoming "overshadowed" by the macrocosmic tier. See Horton, "African Conversion," 103. This correspondence between subsistence farming and microcosmic-tiered emphasis and between long-distance trade and macrocosmic-tiered prominence is maintained in his follow-up article. See Horton, "On the Rationality of Conversion. Part I," 220, 225-227.

to cosmological changes, or perhaps these changes could take much more time than Horton supposes.³⁵

In his more robust follow-up article, Horton himself locates the Ijo, who lived in Brass and Bonny during Crowther's era,³⁶ in a "middle position" between indigenous cosmologies "which include almost nothing in the way of reference to a supreme being... [and] those which are almost dominated by the concept and cult of this being."³⁷ In this "middle position," "religious life still primarily focused on the lesser spirits, but with a more elaborate concept of the supreme being," brought about by "considerable trade beyond the boundaries of the[ir] territories."³⁸ While Crowther's general description of the Niger Delta's concept of a Supreme Being is slightly less elaborate than Horton's, Ebiegberi Alagoa recounts an oral history of Brass' Nembe that suggests a Supreme Being was venerated infrequently even before Christianity's arrival, with residents possessing a strong—yet rather inchoate—concept of a Supreme Being.³⁹

Despite small discrepancies regarding the Supreme Being's status, Crowther's, Horton's, and Alagoa's accounts all report that the microcosmic tier still eclipsed the macrocosmic tier in indigenous cosmologies. Yet Horton's theory contends that increased participation in macrocosmic structures means "[l]ess attention will be paid to the spirits, and more to the supreme being,"⁴⁰ even to the point that "the cult of the lesser spirits is likely to be overshadowed by that of the supreme being."⁴¹ Indeed, a basic premise of Horton's theory is that the greater the degree of participation in macrocosmic social structures like trade, the more prominent a Supreme Being would become.⁴² Yet given Brass' and Bonny's remarkable integration within—and even economic dependency upon—international trading structures across multiple centuries, it is difficult to imagine sub-Saharan communities from that era with greater participation in macrocosmic social structures. By Horton's lights, then, a Supreme Being should have "overshadowed" Bonny's and Brass' microcosmic tiers. Since the macrocosmic tiers of their respective cosmologies did not become prominent—even in ideal macrocosmic interaction through longstanding long-distance trade agreements—Brass and Bonny present historical scenarios that Horton's theory does not account for or explain.⁴³

³⁵ It is entirely possible that cosmological changes from macrocosmic exposure could sometimes take much longer than a single lifespan and that the "middle position" of Brass' and Bonny's macrocosmic tier was only possible from centuries of long-distance trade. This would render such changes nearly imperceptible and—since there are no extant descriptions of Bonny's and Brass' religions before European trade began, and hence no baseline for quantifying cosmological changes—virtually impossible to measure.

³⁶ CMS: CA3/O4, "Instructions to the Mission Agents of Bonny and Brass Missions," 5 May 1868.

³⁷ Horton, "On the Rationality of Conversion. Part I," 225.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 226.

³⁹ Although defunct for over a decade by 1964, Ebiegberi Alagoa reports that a three-day Creator festival occurred once every seven, fourteen, or twenty-one years as determined by a priest, whose only non-festival duties entailed maintaining the Creator's "temple." Despite a having a dedicated priest, Alagoa writes of Nembe: "The idea of the Creator is strong among the Nembe [Brass] people, but ideas of what he is like and how he operates are not always worked into integrated systems. There are apparent contradictions..." See Ebiegberi Alagoa, "*Idu: A Creator Festival at Okpoma (Brass) in the Niger Delta*," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* Vol. 34, No. 1 (1964): 2-3.

⁴⁰ Horton, "On the Rationality of Conversion. Part I," 220.

⁴¹ Horton, "African Conversion," 103.

⁴² See *Ibid.*, 102-103.

⁴³ Further, while Horton identifies the Nuer and Dinka as being among those furthest along the spectrum of macrocosmic-tiered expansion, Brass and Bonny share the very features of participation in social macrocosms that Horton claims caused a Supreme Being to "loo[m] very large." More specifically, like transhumance cattle herders among the Nuer and Dinka, Brass and Bonny residents also regularly "not

In Humphrey Fisher's second rejoinder to Horton, he helpfully registers his opinion that he and Horton "propose general principles, leaving it to regional and other experts to decide whether the principles fit the circumstances of this or that particular case."⁴⁴ In this vein, it seems that Horton's theory does not explain adequately the historical cases of Brass and Bonny. At most, these cases call either for revisions, however slight, to Horton's theory to account for Bonny's and Brass' cosmological states or for an explanation of how Brass' and Bonny's circumstances actually conform to Horton's theory. As they stand, these historical scenarios delimit, however slightly, the scope of this theory's applicability. However, it could be rather important to note that Brass and Bonny's embeddedness within macrocosmic social structures stemmed directly from their involvement with the slave trade. It is quite possible that dozens of other major slave ports along Africa's coasts—especially those that, like Bonny, acted as brokers between Europeans and other African communities—would have developed economies and other social structures dependent upon international trade. If, like Bonny and Brass, the macrocosmic tiers of other slave ports' cosmologies did not become patently prominent, as Horton's theory would predict for such macrocosmically-integrated communities, then such a bevy of counterexamples beyond Brass and Bonny could significantly circumscribe the scope of this theory's applicability across sub-Saharan Africa, further questioning its efficacy.⁴⁵

Challenging Microcosmic-Tiered Beliefs Precedes Conversion in Bonny and in Brass

In this section, I suggest an alternative explanation for events that precipitated conversion in Bonny and Brass based on archival research. Conversion to Christianity in both locales followed cosmological confrontations between Christians and practitioners of indigenous religions, encounters that caused Brass and Bonny denizens to reassess particular microcosmic-tiered beliefs. Of course, only a handful of microcosmic-tiered beliefs were challenged—and never the microcosmic tier itself—but for those who disowned these beliefs, their microcosmic tier condensed, becoming further compressed with each belief that was abandoned. While not everyone rejected each of these beliefs, those that did faced a cosmological void that could be filled in a number of ways, including conversion to Christianity.

only leav[e] the microcosm physically," in their case by travelling to other Niger-area communities for trade, but "also for[m] relationships which breach... boundaries socially," even speaking multiple African and European languages. The Ijo of Brass and Bonny thus share with the Nuer and Dinka the characteristics that Horton claims paves the way toward macrocosmic-tiered development, yet a Supreme Being is only prominent among the Nuer and Dinka—not the Ijo of Brass or Bonny. Accordingly, encounters with macrocosmic social structures—in and of themselves—do not necessarily lead to a Supreme Being's heightened importance. For his brief account of the Nuer and the Dinka, see Horton, "On the Rationality of Conversion. Part I," 227.

⁴⁴ Humphrey J. Fisher, "The Juggernaut's Apologia: Conversion to Islam in Black Africa," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* Vol. 55, No. 2 (1985): 154.

⁴⁵ Further study, of course, would be needed to substantiate such a claim, which could, perhaps, begin with Barbot, who describes his perceptions of a Supreme Being's remoteness in certain ports. See, for instance, Barbot, 124.

Cosmological Confrontations in Bonny

King William Dappa Pepple of Bonny wrote to Samuel Crowther in 1864, requesting that a school be opened in Bonny.⁴⁶ Crowther arrived to begin preparations the following March.⁴⁷ A temporary schoolroom was constructed and a teacher was installed by May;⁴⁸ after attendance rose to 54 children, a permanent school and teacher's quarters were built in 1866—which is where the story gets interesting, but difficult to recount in full ethnographic detail. Crowther's journals that would have recorded this specific encounter are not listed in the Church Missionary Society (CMS) archives or in any major databases, but two early twentieth century sources seem to have drawn from them; given their accurate reporting of other events—such as the killing of sacred iguanas in Bonny, which is recounted below from primary sources—their portrayals of the events surrounding a CMS building's construction are likely accurate.

A local priest made clear that the building site was a “juju bush,” and Bonny's “fear-stricken people” reiterated: it was a “*very bad juju bush*.”⁴⁹ The priests declared that its “spirits must not be disturbed” while the people averred: “The Christians will die if they go there.”⁵⁰ Crowther maintained that this was to be the building site; practitioners of indigenous religions were to leave Christians with the “juju to settle the remaining palaver.”⁵¹ The king's son George helped oversee construction, but he was so nervous about disturbing the bush that he had Christian scripture read and prayers recited before bones of adults and of infant twins were unearthed.⁵² When Christians did not die, as Bonny's residents and indigenous priests supposed, an indigenous microcosmic-tiered belief was shown to be wrong. While it seems that no conversions followed this incident, Crowther reports that shortly thereafter: “The adult population seem[s] to be more and more interested in our mission work; though they do not come forward to join us, yet, they feel and confess boldly that they have been in error.”⁵³ That is, they “confess boldly” that some of their microcosmic-tiered beliefs had been shown to be erroneous.

As of September 1866, Bonny had no church—just a Christian King, George, whose father passed away,⁵⁴ and a solitary convert.⁵⁵ Yet D.C. Crowther reports that “from the time I got here [in 1871], we have never had below 250 persons” attending Bonny's church,⁵⁶ evincing incredible growth within that five-year span. My contention that Christian confrontations with indigenous beliefs impacted this high conversion rate is furthered by two other cosmological encounters—the killing of Bonny's sacred iguanas and a sacred grove's destruction.

⁴⁶ CMS, “New Mission in the Bight of Biafra,” *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, November 1865, 125.

⁴⁷ CMS: CA3/O4, Crowther to Venn, 5 April 1865.

⁴⁸ CMS: CA3/O4, Crowther to Venn, 2 May 1865.

⁴⁹ F. Deaville Walker, *The Romance of the Black River: The Story of the C.M.S. Nigeria Mission* (London: Church Mission Society, 1930), 133; original emphasis. See also Jesse Page, *The Black Bishop: Samuel Adjai Crowther* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908), 203. I should note that Walker reports that teachers' quarters were to be built while Page reports a “school-chapel,” yet both agree that the building was commissioned by the CMS.

⁵⁰ Walker, 133. See also Page, 203.

⁵¹ Page, 204. See also Walker, 133.

⁵² Page, 204; Walker, 134.

⁵³ CMS: CA3/O4, Crowther to Venn, 30 January 1867.

⁵⁴ CMS: CA3/O4, King George Pepple to Crowther, 3 November 1866.

⁵⁵ Samuel Crowther, *A Charge Delivered on the Banks of the River Niger in West Africa* (London: Seeley, Jackson, and Halliday, 1866), 13.

⁵⁶ CMS: CA3/O13, D.C. Crowther to Venn, 9 November 1871.

As of February 1867, Bishop Crowther had not yet reported any conversions or baptisms, yet he maintains: “I have observed evident tokens of a silent but mighty struggle for mastery between demon worship”—a pejorative term he sometimes applies to indigenous religions—“and Christianity.”⁵⁷ Since there were not yet struggles between Christians (again, at this point there is only one non-royal convert) and practitioners of indigenous religions, Crowther is likely referring to Bonny residents grappling with their belief systems—which would likely have been a prerequisite for the next major event, Bonny denizens killing sacred iguanas.

Based on Crowther’s reports, the CMS explains that “spirits” sometimes “take up their abode in animals... at Bonny the iguana was the sacred animal;”⁵⁸ indeed, these iguanas “are sacred to the gods, and... have been worshipped...”⁵⁹ Supposedly English merchants were killed for “rolling casks of oil over some iguanas in 1787,” but by the 1860s, there were likely heavy fines to be paid for injuring or killing one.⁶⁰ King George, after consulting Bonny chiefs, decreed: “the Geedee or Iguana, Bonny Juju, be declared to be no longer Bonny Juju...”⁶¹ Upon hearing this pronouncement, many Bonny denizens indiscriminately slaughtered the lizards, with 57 iguana carcasses strewn across one Bonny market alone.⁶² Further, it was decided that “lest any should hereafter say he had not partaken in the blood of the sacred reptile, it was decided that some of the blood be sprinkled into all the wells of water in Bonny Town,” indicating not only shared complicity, but also that iguanas were now considered edible.⁶³

It seems Crowther rightly detected “tokens of a silent but mighty struggle” with microcosmic-tiered beliefs, and Crowther believed these acts of divinicide to be “proof of their conviction of former error...”⁶⁴ This remarkable event is a clear-cut sign that microcosmic-tiered beliefs regarding divinities and spirits were undergoing serious restructuring in Bonny, and the timing of this decree—issued on Easter Sunday—coupled with King George’s next-day dispatch of a letter to Crowther informing him of Bonny’s divinicide suggests that Bonny’s collective encounter with Christianity occasioned the extirpation of this long-held belief. Indeed, Bonny’s microcosmic tier became visibly condensed, eliminating a central feature of Bonny’s indigenous religion.

Yet despite this momentous cosmological change, no conversions resulted immediately—perhaps, in large part, due to a heinous act of a Christian schoolteacher in Bonny, who was caught molesting an eleven-year-old schoolgirl. King George admonished Crowther: “The people of Bonny expected that the mission tends to the improvement, not the corruption of their people.”⁶⁵ Many parents withdrew their children from school; disturbed, Crowther strongly condemned the teacher’s actions, letting King George know that the teacher had broken the laws of Bonny, England, the Church, and God—and must be punished.⁶⁶ This abominable act likely gave Bonny residents justifiable pause about Christianity, halting cosmological restructuring.

⁵⁷ CMS: CA3/O4, Crowther to Venn, 27 February 1867.

⁵⁸ CMS, “The Juju House, Bonny,” *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, August 1867, 87.

⁵⁹ CMS: CA3/O4, Crowther to Venn, 1 May 1867.

⁶⁰ E.M.T. Epelle, *The Church in the Niger Delta* (Port Harcourt: CMS Niger Press, 1955), 10.

⁶¹ CMS: CA3/O4, Crowther to Venn, 1 May 1867. Crowther is reporting verbatim a short letter King George sent to him on April 22, 1867.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ CMS: CA3/O4, King George Pepple and Chiefs of Bonny to Crowther, 10 May 1867.

⁶⁶ CMS: CA3/O4, Crowther to Venn, 27 May 1867.

A new teacher seems to have rebuilt trust between the mission station and Bonny, but it was not until April 1868, when Crowther brought a pony to Bonny, that excitement around the mission was rekindled, drawing a crowd of 500 and transforming the mission into a “zoological garden.”⁶⁷ This excitement lasted for days, and Crowther capitalized on it by proposing a road be built between the Niger and Bonny missions—one that went through a sacred grove in Bonny. Crowther could then travel by horse, allowing him to visit more frequently. This was “a bold request that had been made to the king and chiefs,” especially since, ostensibly, “[n]o sacrilegious axe had ever profaned it, and the gods... had been left in undisturbed possession of it.”⁶⁸

Surprisingly, King George and the chiefs consented, and Crowther lost no time, beginning to clear the grove the following morning. A large snake came at them, yet it was killed. Then swarms of bees attacked, and “native agents” fled the painful stings—yet Crowther endeavored to fight through the pain, for he knew that “if they all fled from the wood the people of Bonny would be sure to say that the gods had driven them out.”⁶⁹ Crowther knew what he was doing: contesting the belief that Bonny’s divinities would let no harm come to this sacred grove. While eventually Crowther also had to retreat, he had fires lit in the grove that night. The smoke killed the bees, and by the next day’s end, the grove was cleared, “no doubt to the great discomfiture of... [Bonny’s] priests.”⁷⁰ Crowther and company faced no consequences, significantly challenging yet another indigenous belief.

It is only after this cosmological confrontation at the sacred grove that Bonny’s church attendance began to grow. Although attendance records are scant, Bonny missionary W.E. Carew occasionally recorded attendance in his journals, for instance, observing that in addition to 40 school children, 15 adults attended church on July 5, 1868.⁷¹ This number appears to have amassed weekly, and by September 20, 1868, 105 adults attended.⁷² This church growth followed a succession of indigenous beliefs being abandoned—namely, that local divinities would harm or kill those that violated the sacrality of a grove, iguanas, or a “juju bush.” At this juncture, it is important to reiterate that not all microcosmic-tiered beliefs were challenged, and I am in no way suggesting that all were abandoned—many microcosmic-tiered beliefs were likely alive and well in Bonny’s churches, but underreported by missionaries.⁷³ Further, some Bonny residents might not have held the bush, iguanas, or grove to be sacred in the first place, while others might have retained beliefs in their sacrality after these encounters.

Rather, I am suggesting that cosmological confrontations between indigenous and Christian beliefs created an occasion for Bonny’s residents to reconsider certain microcosmic-tiered beliefs.⁷⁴ For those that abandoned beliefs after these encounters, the

⁶⁷ CMS, “The Bonny Mission,” *The Church Missionary Intelligencer*, July 1868, 224.

⁶⁸ CMS, “Bonny, Brass, and Akassa,” *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, March 1869, 28.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁷¹ CMS: CA3/O10, “Journals of W.E. Carew,” 5 July 1868.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 20 September 1868.

⁷³ My sources are primarily missionary journals and letters, which not only contain clear biases, but also tend to accentuate, one-sidedly, perceived ‘triumphs’ while omitting or downplaying events that could be regarded as questionable or unfavorable.

⁷⁴ By maintaining that these cosmological confrontations provide an occasion for reassessing microcosmic-tiered beliefs, I am in no way suggesting that changes in indigenous cosmologies are *only* possible through Muslim or Christian encounters, nor am I implying that indigenous religions are static. Indeed, as Horton himself contends, indigenous religions could regularly adapt to meet new needs

microcosmic tier of their cosmologies condensed with every discarded belief, opening up new cosmological possibilities. Although many did not convert, conversion to Christianity was a likely option, especially since encounters with Christianity called into question the efficacy of these microcosmic-tiered beliefs in the first place. Similar events transpired in Brass, providing another case study to explore these claims further.

Cosmological Confrontations in Brass

After years of serving as Brass' catechist, Thomas Johnson was installed as Brass' pastor by Bishop Crowther in 1871, at which point weekly church attendance seemed to average in the low to mid-100s.⁷⁵ However, these numbers would soon increase—often in tandem with challenging indigenous beliefs at the microcosmic level. This subsection explores two encounters between Christianity and indigenous religions that contested microcosmic-tiered beliefs in Brass.

On May 9, 1871, a pregnant female convert to Christianity who was given the name Susanna at baptism visited Johnson. A few months beforehand, her three-year-old child died, and “her mother and relatives said she was the cause of its death, because she had been converted to the Christian religion.” For this offense, “she was severely flogged and put in irons, and they threaten[ed] to drown her if she will not renounce her faith... she candidly told them that she was ready to submit to any punishment, or any kind of death rather than recanting.”⁷⁶ Susanna did not deny her faith, and, surprisingly, she was acquitted: since other children recently died whose parents did not go to church, it was determined that her child's death was not necessarily a punishment from a local divinity, and so she was not held responsible.⁷⁷ Although she was not executed, according to local custom, her family stalwartly believed that she would not survive childbirth.

Yet on November 24, Susanna “gave birth to a son to the surprise of the heathens [*sic*], for they had said that she will die on the child bearing as she had denied their juju, and all the midwives refused assisting her because she is a Christian, her mother who had persecuted [her] sometime ago, was there, and was in despair that her daughter will die...”⁷⁸ Yet when Susanna did not die during or immediately after giving birth, her mother “exclaimed that she now [saw] that the God whom her daughter is serving is the true God, she willingly consented that the child her grand son should be baptized, and called him a name which signified that he is not her's [*sic*] but God's.”⁷⁹ Moreover, “The father who also was totally against his children being baptized is now a regular attend[ee] at Divine Service every Sunday, one of his wives had since been baptized and another is a candidate for the same holy sacrament [*sic*].”⁸⁰ When the indigenous belief that Susanna would die during childbirth from having “denied their juju” was determined to be fallacious, at least four astonished adults began regularly attending church, likely with their children. Yet again, a cosmological confrontation with Christianity caused individuals to reject a microcosmic-tiered belief, precipitating conversion to Christianity.

occasioned by new circumstances. See Horton, “On the Rationality of Conversion. Part I,” 222. Christianity could be seen as but one such circumstance, one that did not force change, but rather one that a number of Brass and Bonny residents found useful enough to incorporate into their own cosmologies.

⁷⁵ See, for instance, CMS: CA3/O24, “Journal extracts of Thomas Johnson for three quarters ending December 31, 1871,” 7 May 1871.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 9 May 1871.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 24 November 1871.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

A second Brass incident, much like Bonny's, involves sacred animals. Writing for the CMS, E.M.T. Epelle reports that boa constrictors were believed to be possessed by spirits in Brass, and "[s]o sacred were these snakes... and so deeply rooted was the[ir] worship" that the paramountcy of their protection was recognized in a treaty between Brass leadership and the British Consulate in 1856.⁸¹ As late as 1871, punishment for killing one—even inadvertently—entailed either paying a large fine or being executed. In fact, a man that accidentally killed a sacred boa but could not afford the fine was awaiting execution before Johnson brazenly intervened.⁸²

Significantly, Epelle also discloses that the "deification of the snake... caused the people much economic hardship as they were disallowed planting, and as they could not freely rear livestock."⁸³ This explains why Brass traders grew nothing beyond plantains, importing yams and other foodstuffs as the brothers Lander reported in 1831: even though their land was cultivable, they could not disturb their boas' natural habitat. It also explains why Johnson writes that "farming... was prohibited by juju,"⁸⁴ and why:

...the law of the gods, which forbad the inhabitants of Brass River to grow yams in their own soil, and to cut the stems of certain creepers, or climbers, or large trees, on pain or punishment of paying a heavy fine of some casks of palm-oil for the offence committed to the gods. This breach of the god's laws must be committed if any attempt is made to clear the jungles for plantations...⁸⁵

Brass' tremendous reverence of sacred boas, then, was profoundly embedded in Brass' social order.

This is why it is exceedingly remarkable that in his Annual Letter of 1874, Johnson reports that "farming... is now tak[en] up by every one in Nembe," Brass' capital—even "the chiefs are now farming. I asked Bokola [the head priest] on his visit whether it does good or evil to the country he said it does good and that he himself will soon begin to make [a] farm. Bokolo himself is now doing many things which he himself said that the juju forbids to be done..."⁸⁶ It is clear that Johnson attributes this cosmological shift in Nembe to Christianity's influence, including this incident in a list of Christian 'triumphs.' This development likely stems from an agreement Bishop Crowther struck with the kings of Ogbolomambiri and Bassambiri, Nembe's two political divisions, who consented to allow the Brass Mission to begin "the cultivation of the land for plantations..."⁸⁷

When Brass residents saw Christians not being harmed but prospering after openly contravening "juju prohibitions," deep-seated indigenous beliefs were called into question. When *many* (not likely *all*, as Johnson hyperbolically reports) Brass residents—including chiefs and the leading indigenous priest—began farming without reprisal, not only had another microcosmic-tiered belief been effaced, but Brass' social order had been upturned: Brass' principally trade-based economy became an admixture of trade and agriculture, radically altering Brass' social ontology. The number of Christians in

⁸¹ Epelle, 23.

⁸² CMS: CA3/O24, "Journal extracts of Thomas Johnson for three quarters ending December 31, 1871," 5 May 1871.

⁸³ Epelle, 23.

⁸⁴ CMS: CA3/O24, "Annual Letter, Brass Station," 4 November 1874.

⁸⁵ CMS, "Brass," *The Church Missionary Intelligencer and Record*, November 1877, 676.

⁸⁶ CMS: CA3/O24, "Annual Letter, Brass Station," 4 November 1874.

⁸⁷ Epelle, 22-23.

Brass increased by nearly 50% that year, moving from 204 in 1873 to 300 in 1874.⁸⁸ This alacritous increase likely resulted from the cosmological changes that followed confrontations with microcosmic-tiered beliefs regarding the efficacy of indigenous divinities' punishments for cultivation-based offenses. Much like Bonny, it seems quite likely that the abandonment of specific beliefs, which caused the microcosmic tier of Brass' indigenous cosmology to recede for some, paved the way for a macrocosmic-tiered turn through conversion—a process prompted not by encounters with macrocosmic social structures like long-distance trade, but with Christianity.

Conclusion

Centuries of long-distance trading did not cause the macrocosmic tiers of Brass' and Bonny's religions to "overshadow" their microcosmic tiers, as Horton supposes. Active cosmological restructuring due to heightened macrocosmic participation, then, could hardly be said to be "in the air" when widespread conversion to Christianity began in the late 1800s, suggesting that different phenomena precipitated conversion.

Accordingly, I examined a series of cosmological confrontations that preceded conversion in Bonny and Brass, contending that for those that abandoned contested beliefs, their microcosmic tier became smaller, creating a cosmological void that could be filled in multiple ways based on each individual's predilections. While many did not convert to Christianity, those that did likely had varied reasons for doing so, reasons that other conversion theories might very well account for. Yet my proposal is that the process of compressing the microcosmic tiers of those that disowned disputed beliefs became a contributing factor in conversion. Further research would be needed to determine whether cosmological confrontations led to microcosmic-tiered compression outside of Brass and Bonny, but at least for these two settings, it seems the inverse of Horton's theory is manifest: rather than macrocosmic-tiered expansion, microcosmic-tiered condensation precipitated conversion.

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A Christian Construction of Domestic Violence in Electronic Media: A Case Study of *Ìdààmú Ilémoşú* by Kolade Segun-Okeowo

Mobolaji Oyebisi Ajibade¹

Abstract

Domestic violence is often literally used as a metaphor for power relationships and expressed in different forms and contexts. Scholarships on domestic violence focus more on medical and social aspects to the neglect of its representation in electronic media. An analysis of home video films, which forms part of the electronic media, is worthwhile in expounding the prevalence, causes and effect of this social ill in the Nigerian society. This paper explores the representation of domestic violence in *Ìdààmú Ilémoşú*, a popular video film produced by Kolade Segun-Okeowo, a Nigerian Christian producer of Christian home video films. The analysis of data benefits from the sociology of religion.

KEY WORDS: Domestic violence, Christian Home Video films, Religion and Society

Introduction

Some literary scholars working on domestic violence are mainly preoccupied with the representation of violence in written texts (Slotkin 1973; Takaki 1993; Perraudin (1998); Roberts 1998; White 2006 and Garret 2009) to the neglect of home video films, an important repertoire of sociology of the African society. The power of fantasy and images in the (re)creation of persons and societies cannot be underestimated (Meyer 2003). Fantasy is now a social practice, which enters, in a host of ways, into the fabrication of social lives for many people in many societies (Appadurai 1996: 54). Representation of various fantasies and other aspects of life in diverse media, especially

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film and video, is pertinent to understanding the society. The role of media in propagating religious issues is paramount in Nigeria and the entire African continent at large. Domestic violence could be termed as an affliction and abuse suffered by an individual and or as a group in society. It could be termed a social problem which can lead to untimely death, sickness and stigmatization, if not attended to in time.

Most of the existing studies on domestic violence focus mainly on prevalence, patterns, causes and its perceptions in Nigeria. There is virtually no published work on the portrayal of Christian perceptions of domestic violence in the Nigerian cinematography. This paper contributes to the understanding of the scourge of domestic violence for two major reasons. One, electronic media, especially the home video films occupy a central space in changing peoples' behavioural attitudes and perceptions. Two, religion also occupy a major space in societal attitudes towards various issues in the society. Domestic violence is deep-rooted in many African societies, including Nigeria, where wife beating is considered a prerogative of men (Odimegwu, 2001; Ofie-Aboagye, 1994 and Okemgbo, 2002). Hence, this essay is important as it points to efforts to mitigating violence, especially against women in Nigeria since changing people's perception is a major step towards behavioural change.

Oyediran and Isiugo-Abanihe (2005: 39) observes that:

Violence against women is evident in many forms, including domestic, verbal and physical abuse, rape and sexual assault, early and forced marriages, incest and female genital cutting. In most societies, physical abuse is often considered an acceptable behaviour, and where it is frowned at, women are often blamed for inciting men to engage in it.

The observation above reveals the diverse forms of violence that could be found in any society and the fact that no society is free from this retrogressive act. Their assertion that physical abuse is regarded as an acceptable norm in many African societies is plausible. This is because many regard husbands beating their wives and maltreating young girls will in turn make them good housewives. They maintain that violence affects the lives of millions of women in Nigeria irrespective of their socio-economic status. It cuts across ethnic, cultural and religious barriers, impeding the rights of women to participate fully in the society. As grievous and as common domestic violence is both in the public and private spheres, it is often rendered invisible, unrecognized and at best trivialized (Ondicho, 2000).

In Nigeria, reports reveal "shockingly high" level of violence against women. Amnesty International (2007) reports that a third (and in some cases two-thirds) of women are believed to have been subjected to physical, sexual and psychological violence carried out primarily by husbands, partners and fathers while girls are often forced into early marriage and are at risk of punishment if they attempt to escape from their husbands. More pathetic is the revelation of gross under reporting and non-documentation of domestic violence due to cultural factors (Oyediran and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2005, *Afrol News*, 2007). Women in Nigeria have had various challenges, the co-existence of males and females has been observed to witness inequality and discrimination against females. Women are relegated, marginalized and discriminated in the society. The popular depiction of women in media cannot be overemphasized, the Christian home video films, as we shall discuss below, is one instance of this.

Christoline Evangelical Drama Outreach Ministry

Christoline Evangelical Drama Outreach Ministry was established by Evangelist Kolade Segun-Okeowo (KSO) and his wife Sumbo Segun-Okeowo on November 6, 1993. The initial headquarters was Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria before it was moved to Ogijo, Ogun State, Segun-Okeowo's home town. He studied history at Ogun State University, Nigeria and graduated in 1990. He earned a M.Sc. degree in International Relations at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. Segun-Okeowo was a former member of the Palm Wine Drinkers Club (Kegite), a popular student society mostly in Nigerian universities. He claimed to have become a devoted Christian on March 9, 1992 and was involved in Christian drama after he watched a local Christian drama staged by the Mount Zion Institute of Christian Drama. This was disclosed in an interview with him in 2011 at Ogijo town:

When I converted I was zealous to serve God. While I was in Ile-Ife as a missionary to a church in town I got to know about Mount Zion Film Production. On campus in Oduduwa Hall I watched a film called 'Lost Forever' and I was thirsty to know the people who did this film. So, I was impressed that film could be used as a source of evangelism. When I had the opportunity of attending their two weeks training course I jumped at it. In the course I got the opportunity of serving God and that is what I was doing up till today.²

In 1993, he founded his drama group called Watchtower Drama Ministry. His first film was produced in 1995 titled *Omoge Omi*, with its English version titled 'Daughter of River' that gave him needed popularity. From the time of his conversion he had attended various Pentecostal churches, starting with the Deeper Christian Life Bible Church, moved to the Assemblies of God from where he finally joined the New Covenant Church. He again left the New Covenant church and joined the Redeemed Christian Church of God where he remains a member. His wife, Sunmbo graduated from the Federal Polytechnic, Ede, Osun State where she studied Computer Science. The couple both directs the affairs of the drama outreach ministry. Between 1994 and 2011, Christoline had produced nineteen films, besides those written and co-produced with other Christian drama ministers. Among them are: *Omoge Omi* (1994), *Alade Okunkun* (1994), *Return of the Prodigal* (1995), *Time to Weep* (1997), *Basket of Vengeance* (1999), *The Thorn in My Flesh* (2001), *Too Hard to Bear* (2002), *Free but Costly* (2005), *The Fall of A Thousand* (2006), *Ta Lo n Se Mi?* (2007), *Who Is My Enemy?* (2007), *The Other Woman* (2008), *The Blood on Trial* (2008), *Loving the Foe* (2009), *Idaamu Ilemosu* (2009), *The Gods Are to Blame* (2009), *Isise Kan* (2010), *Hose on the Rock* (2010), and *And When Two Elephants Fight* (2011).

Ìdààmú Ilémoşú "The Scourge of a Divorcee": Brief Summary of Content

Ìdààmú Ilémoşú (the Scourge of a Divorcee), a Christian home video film written and produced by Kolade-Segun Okeowo centers on marital challenges and uproar. It is in connection with ancestral covenants made by their fore-fathers, by one of the kings with ancestral spirits, which the current generation is ignorant of. The play presents Ajoke as a victim of broken marriages, who after bearing four children for four different husbands still found herself in her mother's house. Ajoke's mother takes solace in divorce. In fact,

² Personal interview with Segun-Okeowo in 2011 at Ogijo town, Ogun state, Nigeria.

to her divorce is a thing of prestige, glory and a means of wealth accumulation from divorced husband.

Ìdààmú Ilémoşú constructs the troubles associated with the practice of spiral polygamy; a woman who had four children for four different husbands; and in each case forced out of marriage. Each of these husbands usually beat her mercilessly. In many instances, she sustains injury from these beatings. This movie enumerates the effects of a covenant made by king of a community and the evil effects of this covenant on generations of indigenes of this community, even on those who reside outside the town. Domestic violence persisted until the affected person 'received deliverance' (is exorcised) from the ancestral spirit before she could secure a successful married life. Thus, it was when Ajoke accepted Jesus as her Lord and Saviour that she became liberated from the evil effects of the covenant instituted by the king who established that community, as depicted in the play.

As the play unravels, Bayo a friend to Lawon, Ajoke's first husband systematically walks into her life bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ to her and revealing the secret of her inability to have a happy and long lasting marital life. The movie shows that the blessings of the spirit of the land of *Igbòòdú* results into curses for the inhabitants. The curse is that they will have unstable marriages in which they will be giving birth to children outside marriage. Ajoke is able to overcome these marital difficulties by accepting Jesus Christ, thus also portraying how she was delivered from all curses.

Marriage and Family Issues

To some Pentecostal Christians in Nigeria, social questions are essentially understood as spiritual issues as well. Many of the Christian home videos have strong religious allusions and call audiences to review the traditional and religious values surrounding the institution of marriage. *Ìdààmú Ilémoşú* is a typical example of a home video film that addresses overtly the Nigerian Pentecostal perception of a marriage institution. This pattern is congruent with what happens in real life in many towns in Southwestern Nigeria. The thriving stories of Pentecostal churches seem to confirm their perception and attitude towards the institution of marriage and family issues. The video film activates a number of issues regarding marriage such as divorce, child-bearing and inheritance.

The role of the traditional ruler in the village (*Igbòòdú*) ontology is significant in the community, since he bridges the gap between the real and supernatural worlds, striving to sustain peace and harmony between all members and also to seek the continuity of the community. In the represented community, the so called blessings of the spirit of the land of *Igbòòdú* on its inhabitants is that they shall continue to have many wives, many husbands and they shall keep bearing many children. Ultimately, this was to populate the community.

Central to Christoline productions is Christian spiritual warfare against the forces of evil. The films warn of dangers, but also offer solutions, an approach which is sometimes seen to be effective in popularizing biblical messages. In my interview with the film producer in 2011, he opines that this presentation is in consonance with God's warning to the Israelites that they should forsake the ways of the heathen in order to enter into their promised land. They were given strict and direct orders as to how they were to deal

with the idols in their new land. As he explained further, ‘God told Israel they were not only to destroy the idols, they were to break down their altars and cut down their groves, or destroy completely the high places that the idols occupied. They were also to destroy all their images.’ It is the contention of some Pentecostal Christians that the curses on a particular land can be combated and removed only through fervent charismatic prayers, worship and exorcism, usually led by a faithful pastor. The film emphasizes the doctrines of deliverance and sanctification while constantly reminding believers of the dangers of the occult and ancestral spirits. Some Nigerian Pentecostals argue that all current problems stem from what they call demonic practices; anyone who has participated in traditional rituals, is seen as someone who has been contaminated by demons and needs deliverance as depicted in the home video.

Viewed from another perspective, this film serves as a ‘sermon’ against divorce and separation. The idea reinforced in this film corroborates the way that some Nigerian Pentecostals hold the institution of marriage as hinging on the principle of togetherness. The movie portends that religious leaders should be familiar with the historical foundation of the local context they are pastoring in order to be empowered for a successful ministerial enterprise. In the play, Ajoke was able to know the source of her problem through a European scholar who conducted research on Igbó Òdú, her native town and discovered that a lady that got married must come back home (dálémoşú) in order to populate the town. The covenant in this town was depicted as having major effect on all marriages contracted for all indigenes, which means that all marriages must collapse and women will be moving from one husband to another. Ajoke, the heroine of the play was a victim of this ancestral curse until the day she came in contact with the Christian who had knowledge of the community’s history. Through this contact she got to know the genesis of her existential problem. At this juncture, the only solution for her was deliverance from the ancestral curse that has been working against her. In the play, Ajoke begins to enjoy blissful marital life after she has gone through much violence in the hand of various husbands as a result of ancestral curses. It has been demonstrated that the power of Pentecostals serve as power breaker, but through contestation (Ojo 1997; Asonzeh 2008; and Ajibade 2013). The play projects the Christian idea that whenever an individual gives his or life to Christ there must be newness of life and experience. This construction in the film is to sermonize that the Pentecostal power surpasses every other power. Hence, the film is an appeal to the masses to have a change of mind and life for a better life in the society and the life to come.

The worldview underpinning the practice of healing and deliverance in African Pentecostalism is based primarily on Jesus’ encounters with the powers of affliction and Pauline notions of the wrestle with principalities and powers (Ephesians 6); as well as within the indigenous African cosmology. The basic theological orientation of the healing and deliverance phenomenon is the belief that demons may either possess a person and take over his or her executive faculties or simply oppress people through various influences. Whether the human crisis has resulted from possession or oppression, African Pentecostal churches and movements including the classical Pentecostal churches provide the ritual contexts for prayer and exorcism to deliver the afflicted. Moreover, the African worldview of mystical causation looms large in the practice of healing and deliverance. Much of the worldviews underlying the practice of healing and deliverance, especially the belief in mystical causality, resonates with African philosophical thoughts.

Deliverance doctrines evolved from those seeking an explanation of the evil influence often demonstrative in believers' actions. Deliverance from demonic forces was a sincere effort to explain the influence of the spiritual powers in a Christian's life. Deliverance ministers teach that part of their "spiritual armor" was to get "delivered" from the demons that had "strongholds" in their lives. Some Nigerian Pentecostal Christians who practice deliverance service use the very words of Jesus to justify their practice, and they attribute almost any serious problem or sickness at least potentially to demons:

And these signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it shall not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.³

Advocates of deliverance feel that they are privy to the devil's best kept secrets. The factor of guilt and generational curses also play a major role here. Deliverance tradition has been one of perfectionism. It has been believed that once one has experienced "entire sanctification" or "the Baptism of the Holy Spirit," or both, one is responsible for, and capable of, maintaining a largely curse and sin-free life and attitude. To eradicate curses and sinful actions and attitudes, one need only remain faithful in devotional practices and "claim the victory" by appropriating God's power over spiritual forces and moral problems. This is visible in the movie where the housewife, Ajoke, who has been married to four different husbands, was told to accept Jesus as her Lord and savior and be delivered from generational curses in order to be freed from curses. It was shown in the movie that it was deliverance from curses that guaranteed Ajoke's marital bliss and stability. When things are not going well, the appeal to the work of demons and witches come in handy as explanations.

Pentecostals draw attention to the fact that the gospel is about restoration, so it is expected that the transformation of the personality would be manifest in personal health, well-being and care. In short, salvation is holistic and includes spiritual as well as physical abundance. The process of restoration is not individualistic as people are encouraged to disengage from generational curses; and through fasting, prayer and personal ministration release family members from any such bondage. Salvation here gives a holistic meaning that includes "a sense of well-being evidenced in freedom from sickness, poverty and misfortune as well as in deliverance from sin and evil (Anderson and Hollenweger, 1999:215).

It must be pointed out however that the Pentecostals and Charismatic groups who engage in deliverance ministry provide a ritual context in which the enslaving effects of generational curses can be dealt with and they substantiate their claims with the prophetic declaration in the book of Ezekiel, "The sins of the fathers shall no more be visited on their children." This is seen as a path to enjoying the fullness of life in Christ. The producers of the movie thus maintain that Ajoke's misfortune is linked to the generational curses that must be broken by accepting Jesus and deliverance. It would seem that one lesson the film attempts to convey, though controversially, to the audience is that majority of people who experience marital hardship and instability need to recur to deliverance as their problems might be rooted in generational curses. This will resonate mostly with the audience in the specific local context in which the film was produced.

³ Mark 16:17-18 (NAS).

Conclusion

The producers of entertainment media appear to present their perspective of domestic violence from a somewhat realistic view, which adds validity to media representations of domestic violence. The examination of the cinematographic representation of domestic violence establishes the fact that women suffer a great deal. Domestic violence, such as intimate partner violence has led to much havoc such as untimely death, sickness of various kinds, social stigma and lots more. The play unravels the fact that the place of culture and history in religion is very significant in order to achieve sustainable development in any given society. More importantly, a proper understanding of home video films is revealing and illuminating; it shows that home video film is a repertoire of societal issues, especially those that are regarded as hidden. The movie reveals an emphasis on the empowering effect of the gospel of Jesus Christ; but also a relationship between transformation and empowerment. African Pentecostal and Charismatic churches maintain that demonic influences and generational curses has led to the provision of ritual contexts in which people could renounce such stumbling blocks through healing and deliverance in order that they may be empowered to live victorious life. Through the film, Pentecostal Christianity emerges as a counter power to attempt solution to societal problems. It shows how the spiritual dimension of domestic violence should not be underrated in addressing the scourge of domestic violence. Likewise, the role of culture in religion and the knowledge of history are germane to achieving the desired results of ameliorating violence, in this instance domestic violence.

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Review Essay

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Olupona, Jacob K. and Rowland O. Abiodun, editors. *Ifá Divination, Knowledge, Power, and Performance*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016. ISBN: 9780253018823. 390 pages (paper). US \$40.

Peel, J. D. Y. *Christianity, Islam, and Oriṣa-Religion: Three Traditions in Comparison and Interaction*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2015. ISBN: 9780520285859. 312 pages (paper). US \$39.95.

Despite the disparate and, at times, contradictory approaches of the books I will review in this essay,² the four taken together elucidate the complex, fluid nature of African religious beliefs and practices. J. D. Y. Peel's historical anthropology *Christianity, Islam, and Oriṣa-Religion: Three Traditions in Comparison and Interaction*, published posthumously, champions and masterfully models the comparative method in reflecting on Yoruba history, thereby revealing the incredible diversity that has characterized the religious lives of the Yoruba people over time. The collected volume *Ifá Divination, Knowledge, Power, and Performance*, edited by Jacob K. Olupona and Rowland O. Abiodun, is dedicated to the preservation of Yoruba religion in its many iterations throughout the world and encourages the partnership between ancient traditions and twenty-first century technology to accomplish this purpose. Paul Gifford, in *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, prescribes African Christianity's abandonment of its "enchanted dimension,"³ namely, those beliefs and practices that are rooted in the belief in the pervasiveness of the spiritual realm. In *What is Not Sacred?: African Spirituality*, Laurenti Magesa argues precisely the opposite point, pressing for an increased and unapologetic incorporation of African traditional worldviews, including an acute spiritual awareness, into African Christianity. Though all four authors advocate various types of religious change, Peel, Magesa, and the contributors to *Ifá Divination, Knowledge, Power, and*

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² A version of this essay was originally submitted as an assignment for a course entitled "Vitality of Indigenous Religions of sub-Saharan Africa," taught at Princeton Theological Seminary by Professor Afe Adogame during the spring 2016 semester.

³ Paul Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 105.

Performance all recognize the fundamental equality that exists between the respective cultures of Africa and the West, while Gifford vehemently denies it.

Peel, who served as Professor of Anthropology and Sociology with reference to Africa at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), bases the theory-rich Christianity, Islam, and Oriṣa-Religion on approximately fifty years of personal research.⁴ His first chapter, "History, Culture, and the Comparative Method: A West African Puzzle," sets the tone for the rest of the book. It raises the importance of comparing the histories of societies, rather than merely their contemporary forms, in order to take full account of the ways in which the societies in question have changed over the course of time.⁵ The remainder of the book, featuring chapters with topics ranging from comparisons of the distinct versions of the cult of Ogun in various geographical locations throughout history, to those between the reception of Christianity during the early missionary period and after the arrival of Pentecostalism, exemplifies Peel's emphasis on the union of historical perspective and the comparative method. In highlighting the constant changing of Yoruba religious experience and the necessity of making historical comparisons, Peel also calls attention to the variegated nature of Yoruba religious traditions; he is sure to note that the Yoruba did not even begin to conceive of themselves as people sharing one identity until the twentieth century,⁶ and that in fact, the beliefs and practices of the Yoruba constitute multiple religions.⁷ One of the primary themes Peel explores concerns the myriad ways in which Christianity, Islam, and indigenous oriṣa cults have all impacted one another. He demonstrates how, compared with the interreligious violence that has been plaguing northern Nigeria in recent times, the southern part of the country has been marked by the "remarkable ... coexistence" of the three major traditions, including a fair amount of interfaith marriages.⁸ Born-again Christianity has affected Yoruba Islam, for example, as can be seen through the development of the Nasrul-Lahi-il Fathi society, in which Muslims gather for services on Sunday mornings and practice their religion in ways that mirror the style of born-again Christian worship.⁹

Olupona's and Abiodun's *Ifá Divination, Knowledge, Power, and Performance* overlaps in content with Peel's book in that its focus is solely on religion as practiced by the Yoruba, although it differs in scope. Whereas Peel examines multiple religions in a single geographical location, this collected volume is centered on one religion—Ifá—throughout the Yoruba diaspora. This volume comprises essays presented at an interdisciplinary conference held at Harvard in 2008, the objective of which was to create an opportunity for scholars and practitioners from around the diaspora to share their knowledge of Ifá divination and to promote further studies on the topic,¹⁰ with the expectation that Ifá epistemology offers something of value concerning the issues the world currently faces.¹¹ Wande Abimbola, the foremost scholar-practitioner of the Ifá

⁴ J. D. Y. Peel, *Christianity, Islam, and Oriṣa-Religion: Three Traditions in Comparison and Interaction* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2015), 4.

⁵ Ibid., 35.

⁶ Ibid., 36.

⁷ Ibid., 216.

⁸ Ibid., 124.

⁹ Ibid., 187.

¹⁰ Jacob K. Olupona and Rowland O. Abiodun, "Preface" in Jacob K. Olupona and Rowland O. Abiodun, eds., *Ifá Divination, Knowledge, Power, and Performance* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016), xv.

¹¹ Jacob K. Olupona and Rowland O. Abiodun with Niyi Afolabi, "Introduction," in Olupona and Abiodun, 12-13.

religion,¹² states another of the book's unifying themes, which is the emphasis on the Yoruba religion as an ascendant and "important world religion."¹³ Therein lies the most crucial point of departure between this work and Peel's. Though respecting Yoruba religion—or, more specifically, the multiple orisha cults that together make up Yoruba religion—Peel draws a definite distinction between indigenous religions, which he defines as "preliterate religions," and world religions, or "religions of the Book."¹⁴ Peel situates this dichotomy within Harvey Whitehouse's model of "divergent modes of religiosity,"¹⁵ identifying indigenous religions as primarily "imagistic" and world religions, as primarily "doctrinal."¹⁶

The scholars who contributed to *Ifá Divination, Knowledge, Power, and Performance* underscore Yoruba religion's status as a world religion as they discuss its expansion to Europe and the Americas and detail the nuances of the forms it has taken in different contexts. For instance, Stefania Capone lauds the "'good' syncretism" that has arisen between the "sister religions" of Brazilian Candomblé and Cuban Santtería, as she believes this admixture can help communities of African descent to reclaim their "lost tradition" and "reconstruc[t]" it.¹⁷ Lest anyone suggest that Ifá religion has changed only because of its geographical expansion and its encounter with the religions of the Americas, Akintunde Akinyemi's chapter on Ifá in art and culture makes clear that time itself has been sufficient to transform Ifá in Yorubaland through the introduction of modern technology into the religion. Akinyemi evaluates various depictions of Ifá divination in Yoruba videos and argues that depending on the accuracy of such portrayals, these films either help to preserve the tradition for younger generations or project a distorted image of reality.¹⁸ For example, he mentions how, typically, in Yoruba films, the actor representing the diviner controls the divination instrument—whatever it might happen to be in a given instance—in a way that "conforms to that of an authentic Ifá priest in Yoruba society."¹⁹ The accuracy of the portrayals of this aspect of divination can prove helpful for members of the younger generations who might have grown up in a time in which "the discontinuation of [Ifá] ceremonies" has "led to the loss of the tradition associated with them."²⁰ On the other hand, most Yoruba films involving divination feature diviners whose "elaborate dress ... is a major departure from the modest dress of [real] Yoruba Ifá priests,"²¹ thereby causing potential confusion through continual misrepresentation to anyone unaware of the present sartorial habits of Ifá diviners. In either case, modern film has the potential to affect the way today's practitioners of Yoruba conceive of their religion. Filmmakers also frequently capture changes that have already taken place in Ifá divination, such as the recently developed practice of divination clients' "whisper[ing their] problems to a sum of money, in the form of a bill or a coin," as a new way of performing the age-old tradition of communicating one's problems to the deity Ifá.²²

¹² Ibid., 2.

¹³ Wande Abimbola, "Continuity and Change," in Olupona and Abiodun, 41.

¹⁴ Peel, 75.

¹⁵ Ibid., 71.

¹⁶ Ibid., 75.

¹⁷ Stefania Capone, "*The Pai-de-santo and the Babalawo*," in Olupona and Abiodun, 240.

¹⁸ Akintunde Akinyemi, "Art, Culture, and Creativity," in Olupona and Abiodun, 356.

¹⁹ Ibid., 347.

²⁰ Ibid., 356.

²¹ Ibid., 344.

²² Ibid., 345.

Gifford's *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa* is the undeniable outlier among the four books I analyze in this review. Gifford makes no secret of the fact that the change he is proposing involves the decreasing, and possibly the elimination, of indigenous influences on African Christianity.²³ This book delves into two forms of African Christianity—Pentecostalism and Catholicism—and compares them along the lines of their “enchanted dimension.”²⁴ Gifford, a professor emeritus of Religions and Philosophies, also at SOAS, rejects African Pentecostalism as detrimental to the continent’s development and modernity, by virtue of its dealings in the spiritual realm. Although he admits that a fair amount of Catholics also “live in an enchanted world,”²⁵ Gifford does not write off Catholicism outright, because he views the Catholic Church as “the biggest single development agency on the continent.”²⁶ He distinguishes therefore between what he considers the “‘internally secularized’ Christianity of the Catholic professionals” and the “enchanted religious imagination” of many other African Christians, both inside and outside the Catholic Church. Gifford critiques Meinrad Hegba, a Cameroonian Jesuit who “used traditional Catholic prayers, and promoted devotion to Mary”²⁷ but also “identified demons by name, broke ancestral curses, reversed curses and healed AIDS.”²⁸ It is this second set of ministry activities Gifford labels “the problem,”²⁹ as they fall outside his understanding of modernity and development.

Gifford expresses frustration with certain African Catholic theologians, who demonstrate reluctance to live into what he considers an overly spiritual form of Christianity but then stop short of denouncing it.³⁰ In a lengthy engagement with the work of one such theologian, research professor Stan Chu Ilo of the Center for World Catholicism and Inter-Cultural Theology at DePaul University, Gifford’s assessment strikes me as lacking in nuance. While Gifford accurately states that Ilo rejects the abuses of power by certain African Pentecostal leaders³¹ and their claims to have healed AIDS,³² Ilo still, on the whole, expresses support for African Christians’ adopting “African worldviews,”³³ complete with their acknowledgement of “spiritual forces.”³⁴ The irony lies in the fact that Gifford critiques what he sees as Ilo’s willful excision of the “enchanted dimension” from his description of African Christianity, while Gifford himself fails to recognize Ilo’s endorsement of a fair amount of this so-called enchantment in Christianity, simply without the aspects Ilo finds abusive—some, but by no means all, of which overlap with Gifford’s own list of unsettling characteristics in African Pentecostalism. It seems therefore that Gifford unintentionally has placed himself among those at whose arguments Ilo takes umbrage, due to their “not taking Africa seriously or ... not listening to Africans.”³⁵ Gifford does not appear to hear,

²³ Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, 151.

²⁴ Ibid., 105.

²⁵ Ibid., 107.

²⁶ Ibid., 155.

²⁷ Ibid., 124.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 104-106.

³¹ Stan Chu Ilo, *The Church and Development in Africa: Aid and Development from the Perspective of Catholic Social Ethics* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2013), 233 in Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, 105.

³² Ibid., 170 in Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, 104.

³³ Ibid., 128 in Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, 104.

³⁴ Ibid., 119 in Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, 104.

³⁵ Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, 104.

through Ilo's overt statements, the latter's identification with a form of the same concept—enchanted Christianity—on which Gifford perceives him to be silent.

Some historical context might be helpful in further uncovering the problematic nature of Gifford's line of argumentation. For decades, Gifford has made a variety of broad-based claims about African Christianity, including Pentecostalism, that ignore crucial evidence to the contrary. Gifford claims, together with Steve Brouwer and Susan D. Rose, in *Exporting the American Gospel: Global Christian Fundamentalism*, a book the three wrote jointly twenty years ago, that various forms of Christian fundamentalism originating in the United States, including many genres of Pentecostalism, have been spreading not merely the gospel but also American culture throughout the world. Brouwer, Gifford, and Rose contend that “even as Christian fundamentalism is purveyed by an aggressive international sales force ... the social product that they distribute so successfully around the world is clearly stamped ‘Made in the U. S. A.’”³⁶ They identify the prosperity gospel in particular, already rather widespread, as a “quintessentially American faith.”³⁷ While they acknowledge that “the prosperity gospel [is] so readily received in Africa,”³⁸ at least in part, as a result of African indigenous religion's preeminent concern “with health, fertility, and abundance,”³⁹ they nevertheless insist that “[w]e should not conclude that the Christianity that is evolving is a genuinely African construct.”⁴⁰ The impetus for this argument appears to be compassionate, as the three authors critique the injustice of the perceived imposition of American culture into an African context. Nevertheless, their denial of indigenous agency in the spread of Christianity was met with mixed responses.

Gifford's sweeping arguments have inspired much critique over the years, including, notably, by David Maxwell, the late Ogbu Kalu, and more recently, Afe Adogame. In 2000, Maxwell, responding to Gifford's highly controversial *African Christianity: Its Public Role*, published in 1998, exposes what he understands to be the inadequacy of Gifford's research methodology. While admiring Gifford's use of sources which theretofore had remained in obscurity, such as “a host of tracts, and spiritual biographies produced by the movement's leaders,”⁴¹ Maxwell expresses concern regarding Gifford's tendency to analyze such sources “in a rather literal way as theological treatises and not ... as material objects whose meanings are made in different contexts and which help to shape emergent religious movements.”⁴² Furthermore, according to Maxwell, since Gifford's fieldwork took place primarily in urban settings, in “luxurious hotels and conference centres”⁴³ that “exclude ordinary rank and file church members who are also often too busy earning a living to attend such events,”⁴⁴ the picture Gifford gleaned of African Christianity naturally was that of the wealthier practitioners, upon whom the influence of American culture often was more pronounced. Maxwell opines, “If he had been able to move beyond the urban mega-churches to townships and rural locations, Gifford might

³⁶ Steve Brouwer, Paul Gifford, and Susan D. Rose, *Exporting the American Gospel: Global Christian Fundamentalism* (London: Routledge, 1996), 11.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 172.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁴¹ David Maxwell, “In Defence of African Creativity,” *Journal Of Religion In Africa* 30, no. 4 (November 2000): 468. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed June 17, 2016), 474.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 474.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 475.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 475.

have been reassured to discover that the faith gospel has a different meaning,” one rooted in a desire for “security,” rather than for a frivolously extravagant lifestyle.⁴⁵

Kalu, writing in 2005, agrees with Maxwell’s assessment of Gifford’s treatment of primary sources. Kalu, too, finds Gifford’s approach wanting, as “his evidence is from one segment of cultural production, namely media.”⁴⁶ Gifford’s heavy emphasis on such a narrow selection of sources poses a significant problem, according to Kalu, whose conviction is that a holistic study of the church’s role in the world ought to involve a thorough examination of “its being, saying and doing.”⁴⁷ Gifford, rather than giving equal attention to each of these three aspects of the church’s operations, homes in almost exclusively on the “saying” portion, which raises crucial questions for Kalu, with respect to whether evidence extracted merely from “television, print, and select messages from ... sermons ... is strong enough to carry the weighty conclusions that follow.”⁴⁸ The conclusions to which Kalu alludes—chief among them, “that the new Christianity has failed to perform and is not helping to bring Ghana into the world’s modern economic system”⁴⁹—prove weighty indeed, and the sources used to support them, most worthy of scrutiny.

Adogame, in an essay published only a few years before *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, directly overturns Gifford’s claim concerning the foreign nature of African Pentecostalism and, particularly, the prosperity gospel. In this case study of one African Pentecostal denomination, the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Adogame demonstrates that “the strand of argument that privileges ‘ecclesiastical externality’ and ‘extraversion’ in explaining the public role and demographic profile of African Christianities is lacking in depth and scope.”⁵⁰ Adogame showcases how in many instances, African Pentecostal movements are “self-financing” and “demonstrate a high degree of indigenous religious vitality and innovation.”⁵¹ Agreeing with Matthew A. Ojo, who asserts that “Prosperity and success as religious ideas ... are not ‘foreign elements in African Christianity as Paul Gifford (1990) has asserted,’”⁵² Adogame explains that “indigenous epistemologies of health and wealth—in other words, the quest for ‘the good things in life’ as local iterations of prosperity—blend seamlessly with external discourses on prosperity.”⁵³ This is to say that the prevalence of the prosperity gospel in African churches ought to be seen as a natural manifestation of indigenous life and thought, rather than as an American imposition. Adogame points out that the “general preoccupation” within African culture with the quest for the good things in life is ... ‘rebranded’ with the label of prosperity gospel within Pentecostal discourse.”⁵⁴ He does not deny that “external social processes” are active in African Pentecostalism but

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ogbu Kalu, “Yabbing the Pentecostals: Paul Gifford’s Image of Ghana’s New Christianity” in Wilhelmina J. Kalu, Nimi Wariboko, and Toyin Falola, eds., *African Pentecostalism: Volume I: Global Discourses, Migrations, Exchanges and Connections: The Collected Essays of Ogbu Uke Kalu* (Trenton, NJ and Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, Inc., 2010), 156. This essay first was published in *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology* 15 (2005) 3-25.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 156.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 157.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 156.

⁵⁰ Afe Adogame, “Reconfiguring the Global Religious Economy: The Role of African Pentecostalism,” in Donald E. Miller, Kimon H. Sargeant, and Richard Flory, eds., *Spirit and Power: The Growth and Global Impact of Pentecostalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 186.

⁵¹ Ibid., 188.

⁵² Matthew A. Ojo (1996) in Adogame, “Reconfiguring the Global Religious Economy,” 188.

⁵³ Adogame, “Reconfiguring the Global Religious Economy,” 194.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 197.

maintains that these processes work “in tandem” with “internal religious dynamics,” without which it would be impossible to understand the “distinctive identities” African Pentecostal churches, and other charismatic churches in Africa, are creating through this combination.⁵⁵

Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa marks a shift in Gifford’s argument, perhaps in response to such critiques as those mentioned previously. If this is the case, it likely is not the first time Gifford has done so; Adogame points out that Gifford’s stance shifted, temporarily,⁵⁶ when the latter conceded a year after Maxwell’s review that “the faith gospel builds on traditional preoccupations.”⁵⁷ Even so, Gifford insists, in the same chapter, that current African Pentecostalism “is increasingly articulated in terms of standardized American form.”⁵⁸ Furthermore, in subsequent years, as Adogame notes, “this shift was not as evident”⁵⁹ in Gifford’s writing.

In *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, on the other hand, Gifford makes no effort to claim that Pentecostalism in Africa is not authentically African, or that it is too Western. Instead, he suggests that the “stress on cultural equivalence”⁶⁰ and the desire to retain aspects of African indigenous culture and religion have been thwarting development and therefore preventing Africa’s full entry into modernity. “Is something that is ‘traditionally African’ calculated to bring Africa into the socio-economic and political systems obtaining in the modern world?” he asks rhetorically.⁶¹ He continues, “Would anyone urge modern Scandinavians to organize their societies from the myths of Wodin and Thor? Why should Africa be different?”⁶²

Gifford briefly inquires whether it might be possible for “the two worldviews, that of functional rationality and that of enchanted forces, [to] be combined,”⁶³ but he ultimately comes to the conclusion that no, they cannot.⁶⁴ The reasoning behind this conclusion is that “enchanted Christianity,” which “operates from a belief in pervasive spiritual forces” is located “on a totally different plane,” from the “disenchanted and internally secularized Christianity” of the Catholic Church, which he praises for paving the way for development.⁶⁵ Gifford celebrates the “cultural modification” that the Catholic Church has brought about in Africa through its development efforts.⁶⁶ In promoting new forms of education and health care, the Catholic Church, he believes, has introduced Africans to “characteristics of the modern world,” which are “necessary for any nation wishing to join it.”⁶⁷

⁵⁵ Ibid., 201.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 189.

⁵⁷ Paul Gifford, “The Complex Provenance of Some Elements of African Pentecostal Theology,” in A. Corten and R. Marshal-Fratani, eds., *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America*, edited by A. Corten and R. Marshal-Fratani, 62-79. Bloomington: Indiana University, 2001), 64 in Adogame, “Reconfiguring the Global Religious Economy,” 189.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Adogame, “Reconfiguring the Global Religious Economy,” 189.

⁶⁰ Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, 130.

⁶¹ Ibid., 141.

⁶² Ibid., 142.

⁶³ Ibid., 155.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 157.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 130.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Gifford's conclusion here raises concern for two reasons. First, Gifford's vision of the modern world seems to be heavily influenced by Western values, especially relating to a certain type health care and education. Second, even if, for the sake of argument, one were to accept this particular understanding of modernity, it is evident that African Pentecostals have made remarkable strides in this direction, and that they continue to do so. Gifford fails to recognize the numerous and significant African Pentecostal efforts to ameliorate health care and higher education, along with a host of other aspects of individual and community life on the continent.

Many Pentecostal organizations throughout Africa have founded hospitals,⁶⁸ maternity homes, and clinics of various sorts,⁶⁹ in addition to institutes of higher learning. One African Pentecostal denomination, the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA), known around the world as the Forward in Faith Church (FIF), started Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University and also Mbuya Dorcas Hospital, offering both spiritual and physical forms of treatment.⁷⁰ Phillip Musoni, a lecturer at the denomination's university, asserts that the ZAOGA FIF "has outdone the myth that scientific medicine is not God's way of treatment."⁷¹ The RCCG, which has started multiple medical centers of different types, has served to "supplement and challenge the inadequacies of local government health-care schemes" and, in the process, has created "employment opportunities for members and non-members alike."⁷² At the RCCG's famed Redemption Camp in Nigeria, one will find "the Redeemer's Clinic, a maternity center, an orphanage, a post office, security post, a gas station, bookstores, supermarkets, a public market, a bakery, and a canteen," in addition to "five banks," "the Redeemed Christian Bible College, Redeemer's Junior and High Schools, and its own university, the Redeemer's University."⁷³ These are but a few examples of African Pentecostal contributions toward societal uplift.

With respect to higher education in particular, Joel Carpenter, director of the Nagel Institute at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, has written about how private evangelical and Pentecostal universities have been springing up throughout the global South in an effort to intervene in situations in which governments cannot satisfy their populations' demands for higher education.⁷⁴ These new universities intend to mimic neither "the liberal arts college, with broad general education requirements," nor "the comprehensive university, with scores of different concentrations to offer." Rather, they function as what have been called "'boutique' colleges, which offer only a few programs targeted to respond to growing areas in market demand."⁷⁵ Carpenter explains, "The evangelical and Pentecostal movements that are creating these new universities are

⁶⁸ Afe Adogame, "The Redeemed Christian Church of God: African Pentecostalism," in Stephen M. Cherry and Helen Rose Ebaugh (eds), *Global Religious Movements Across Borders: Sacred Service* (Ashgate Inform Series on Minority Religions and Spiritual Movements. Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 57.

⁶⁹ Afe Adogame, "How God became a Nigerian: Religious Impulse and the Unfolding of a Nation," in *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 2., 2010, 491.

⁷⁰ Phillip Musoni, "African Pentecostalism and Sustainable Development: A Study on the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa, Forward In Faith Church." In *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, Volume 2, Issue 10, October 2013, 77-78.

⁷¹ Ibid., 78.

⁷² Adogame, "The Redeemed Christian Church of God: African Pentecostalism," 57.

⁷³ Ibid., 50.

⁷⁴ David Cohen, "The Worldwide Rise of Private Colleges," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 9 March 2001, A47 in Joel Carpenter, "Universities on the Mission Field? Part II: New Evangelical Universities: Cogs in a World System, or Players in a New Game?" in *International Journal of Frontier Missions*. Volume 20, Issue 3, Fall 2003, 96.

⁷⁵ Carpenter, 98.

themselves a global phenomenon,” and the universities “are at once the responses of local change agents to urgently felt local needs, and reactions to global economic and cultural trends.”⁷⁶ He describes these institutions as depending on the desires of “the born-again and Spirit-filled of their regions to provide a better life for the eager and aspiring students who enter their portals, to further the welfare of their homelands, and to respond, out of a Christian imagination, to the dynamic forces they see at play in the larger world.”⁷⁷ These new universities are providing opportunities for students who otherwise would have been excluded from the university system the chance to receive an education intended to prepare them to flourish in their respective contexts,⁷⁸ and in so doing, to improve the socioeconomic environments of their respective nations. Despite such efforts, Gifford condemns African Pentecostalism of posing a hindrance to modernity and development, on account of its spiritual emphases.

Magesa, a Roman Catholic priest and theologian from Tanzania, advances an argument quite contrary to that which Gifford proposes. Magesa agrees with Gifford that there is a “spirituality of indigenous black Africa as a whole” that extends to Africans of all religions,⁷⁹ but rather than dismissing this spirituality as backward, Magesa upholds it as deserving of special honor, referring to it as one of the “two parents” of African Christianity, with the other being the Bible.⁸⁰ He spends the first part of the book simply introducing African spirituality to those who might be unfamiliar with its ethos, and in the second part, he moves into a discussion of how this spirituality can—and ought—to be incorporated into African Christianity.

In the vein of Paul Knitter and Peter Phan, Magesa raises the possibility of “double or multiple religious belonging.”⁸¹ He shares a personal story in which he was forbidden, as a Catholic priest, to participate fully in the traditional funeral practices—which would have involved having his head shaved and bathing with his male family members in a lake on the last day of the period of mourning—when observing the occasion of his father’s death.⁸² He obeyed but confesses to the reader that, if he had not had an older brother eligible to fulfill the traditional responsibilities in his stead, “there would have been no choice except to participate in the ritual lest we displease the ancestors and endanger the life of the family and clan.”⁸³ In this way, Magesa, while identifying fully as a Christian and practicing as a minister, still acknowledges the worldview derived from the indigenous religion of his ethnic group and views himself as positioned within that framework as well as the Christian one.

While Gifford interprets a denial of the spiritual realm to be necessary for progress in Africa, Magesa is confident that less progress will be achieved without the acknowledgement of the invisible. Magesa is of the mind that that which is unseen is typically more powerful than that which is seen.⁸⁴ For him, knowing how to relate to the various forces in the spiritual realm is crucial to individual and communal well-being, but he suggests that “only in the traditions of the people” can information be found

⁷⁶ Ibid., 100.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 101.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 98.

⁷⁹ Laurenti Magesa, *What is Not Sacred?: African Spirituality* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 3. Cf. Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, 5.

⁸⁰ Magesa, 107.

⁸¹ Ibid., 123-125.

⁸² Ibid., 84-85.

⁸³ Ibid., 85.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 34.

concerning “what these powers are and what level and type of energy they are capable of exercising.”⁸⁵ Not all spirits are the same, according to Magesa, who considers African traditional wisdom essential for determining how to interact with “the spirit of Ubuntu,” of which the fruit is that which is listed in Galatians 5, and how to interact with those that “constitute witchcraft.”⁸⁶

In addition to assistance in the “discernment of spiritual powers,”⁸⁷ Magesa emphasizes the numerous ways African indigenous culture and religion can contribute to the practice of African Christianity. One of the most striking examples he provides relates to the ritual of peace between the Luo and Maasai people of Kenya. As part of the ritual, people from both warring parties gathered on either side of a fence of poisonwood trees, which was constructed to represent “existing hostility.”⁸⁸ After slaughtering a dog, whose blood flowed onto the land on both sides of the fence, Maasai and Luo mothers momentarily lent one another their infants, so that they could each nurse the babies of the other, which “signified the establishment of blood ties.”⁸⁹

Magesa is aware that taking the steps to inculturate Christianity in Africa is fraught with risk. He is not so much concerned with the risk of syncretism but rather with that of personal rejection as communities enter the “uncertain, even destabilizing” process of inculturation.⁹⁰ In response to the reality of this risk, Magesa quotes the Rwandan proverb, “A fetus that is afraid of criticism is never born.”⁹¹ A certain amount of risk is required for redemption, he claims, backing up this assertion with the idea that Jesus himself took a risk in the process of setting humanity and creation free from destruction.⁹²

These four books, when read in short succession, provide an invaluable glimpse into the richness of African traditional spirituality, whether through the practice of African forms of Christianity or Islam or through an African indigenous religion. Peel calls attention to the multiplicity and diversity of the cults that make up Yoruba religion, and to how these have been transformed throughout time. Olupona, Abiodun, and the authors who contributed to their volume demonstrate the transformation that movement in space can add to movement in time when it comes to Yoruba religion, and the ways in which these changes can be fruitful or destructive to the endeavor to protect the integrity of what they see as a growing world religion. Gifford, like Peel, addresses the non-uniformity of African religion but chooses for his object of analysis a larger geographical area—sub-Saharan Africa, rather than just Yorubaland—and a more specific population—only Christians, rather than Christians, Muslims, and practitioners of Yoruba religion. Magesa casts a vision for what it might look like, practically speaking, for Christianity to merge in a productive way with African indigenous spirituality. All four rejected the common misconception of African indigenous spirituality as something static and unchanging; indeed, it is constantly in motion.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 112.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 159.

⁸⁹ John Mbiti, <http://www.upf.org/component/content> in Magesa, 159.

⁹⁰ Magesa, 186.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

With the exception of *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, I would recommend each of these books to a different audience. I found *Christianity, Islam, and Oriṣa-Religion* heavily theoretical but still reasonably accessible; I would therefore recommend it to intermediate undergraduate students of anthropology, history, or religious studies, as well as to more advanced scholars in related fields. *Ifá Divination, Knowledge, Power, and Performance* is interdisciplinary and is composed of chapters at a variety of levels of difficulty. For the majority of the pieces therein, I would suggest the reader have at least a minimal amount of exposure to Yoruba religion. Among the more accessible pieces were Barry Hallen's Socratic "Ifá: Sixteen Odu, Sixteen Questions" and M. Ajisebo McElwaine Abimbola's "The Role of Women in the Ifá Priesthood: Inclusion versus Exclusion." Due to Magesa's explicitly Christian focus and theological orientation, I would recommend *What is Not Sacred?* primarily to seminary students and ministers. While I appreciate Gifford's earnest concern about what he perceives to be destructive elements in certain forms of African Christianity, the dismissive tone and air of cultural superiority I inferred from *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa* give me pause when I consider how enthusiastically I might recommend the book to others.

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