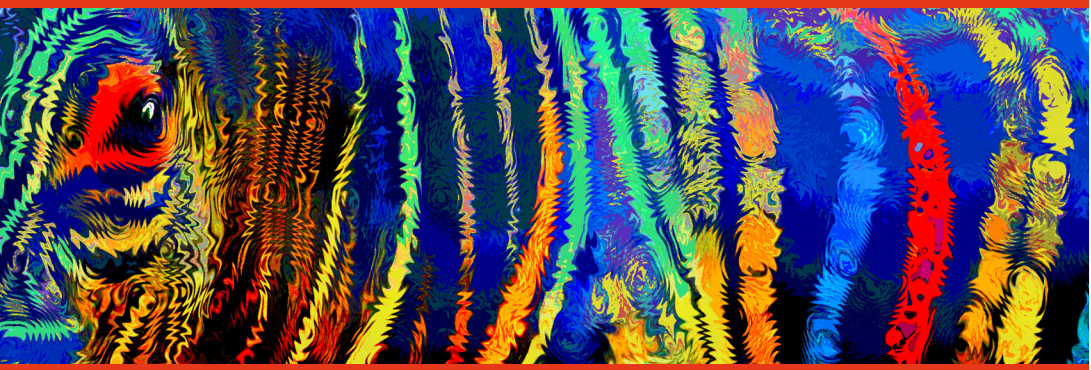
43 **BiAS - Bible in Africa Studies**
Exploring Religion in Africa 16

Louis W. Ndekha, Rhodian Munyenyembe and Judith Bachmann (Eds.)

AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS REVISITED

Dynamics in Indigenous Religions in 21st Century Africa

Essays in Honour of
Monsignor Professor Joseph Chaphadzika Chakanza



University of Bamberg Press

43 Bible in Africa Studies

Études sur la Bible en Afrique
Bibel-in-Afrika-Studien

Exploring Religion in Africa 16

Bible in Africa Studies
Études sur la Bible en Afrique
Bibel-in-Afrika-Studien

Volume 43

Exploring Religion in Africa 16

edited by
Joachim Kügler,
Kudzai Biri, Ezra Chitando, Rosinah Gabaitse,
Kathrin Gies, Masiiwa R. Gunda, Johanna Stiebert,
Lovemore Togarasei, Uta Poplutz

University
of Bamberg
Press
2024

African Traditional Religions Revisited

Dynamics in Indigenous Religions in 21st Century Africa

Essays in Honour of
Monsignor Professor Joseph Chaphadzika Chakanza

edited by
Louis W. Ndekha, Rhodian Munyenyembe
and Judith Bachmann

in cooperation with Joachim Kügler

University
of Bamberg
Press
2024

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über http://dnb.dnb.de/ abrufbar.

Dieses Werk ist als freie Onlineversion über das Forschungsinformationssystem (FIS; https://fis.uni-bamberg.de) der Universität Bamberg erreichbar. Das Werk – ausgenommen Cover und Zitate – steht unter der CC-Lizenz CC BY.

Lizenzvertrag: Creative Commons Namensnennung 4.0
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0

Herstellung und Druck: docupoint, Magdeburg
Umschlaggestaltung: University of Bamberg Press
Umschlaggraphik: Joachim Kügler (based on free material by www.vecteezy.com/free-photos/country)
Deco-Graphiken: Joachim Kügler
Text-Formatierung: Irene Loch, Joachim Kügler

© University of Bamberg Press, Bamberg 2024
https://www.uni-bamberg.de/ubp/

ORCID
Louis Ndekha https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8456-4094
Rhodian Munyenyembe https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5163-0908
Judith Bachmann https://orcid.org/0009-0002-2035-4095
Joachim Kügler https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8504-7742

ISSN: 2190-4944 (Print) eISSN: 2750-0179 (Online)
ISBN: 978-3-98989-030-5 (Print) eISBN: 978-3-98989-031-2 (Online)

URN: urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-irb-980874
DOI: https://doi.org/10.20378/irb-98087

Dedication

to

Monsignor Professor

JOSEPH CHAPHADZIKA CHAKANZA

(1943-2019)

Founding Member of
the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at
the University of Malawi, Chancellor College

You dedicated your life to the study of religion and culture in Malawi and impacted many young men and women, who passed through your hands at the University of Malawi, Chancellor College. You left an enduring legacy of excellence in the study of religions and culture in Africa.

Table of Contents

SECTION 4 | ATR and Ethics

SECTION 5 | ATR and Health

Acknowledgement

The editors of this volume are grateful to all the authors from various geographical locations in Africa for their contributions to this academic compilation. Their expertise in the study of ATR and willingness to participate in this volume are greatly appreciated. The editors also offer special gratitude to Prof. Dr. Joachim Kügler and the editorial team of BiAS/ERA for accepting the project, providing their exceptional editorial expertise and applying the final touches to the book's content. Mrs Irene Loch's painstaking job of formatting the work and giving it its final shape is also highly acknowledged. Thanks are also due to the peer reviewers whose voluntary feedback was helpful in the editorial process. We also thank all our colleagues in various institutions and universities where we work for their support during the project. Finally, we thank Prof. Brighton Uledi-Kamanga for accepting to proofread the manuscript and offering valuable technical insights on the volume. Last but not least, special thanks go to the University of Bamberg Press team for their technical input which finally made this volume possible.

The Editors

Chakanza and Malawian Religions and Culture: An Intellectual Quest (Preface)

Louis ***Ndekha***

The study of African religion and culture in Malawi and perhaps in Southern Africa is never complete without reference to Monsignor Professor Joseph Chakanza. Joseph Chaphadzika Chakanza was born in 1943 in the Lower Shire District of Nsanje, Traditional Authority Malemia, and Mchacha Village. Growing up in the village, he attended the local Catholic Church, which was then predominantly led by white Italian priests. Through the missionary work of the white Italian priests, young Joseph felt his call early in his primary school days, leading to his enrolment in priestly training. He was ordained into the priesthood in 1969. After a brief priestly service, Joseph Chakanza was offered a scholarship to study for a Master's degree at the University of Aberdeen. Upon his return from Scotland in 1977, he was appointed Lecturer in Religious Studies at Chancellor College, initially in the Department of Sociology, since there was, then, no Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Malawi. Later, in the 1980s, Chakanza was accepted into a PhD program in Social Anthropology (also known as Cultural Anthropology) at the University of Oxford, from which he graduated in 1985. The need for a fully-fledged theology and religious studies degree in Malawi, the first of its kind, saw Prof. Chakanza being at the forefront of establishing the Theology and Religious Studies Department. To make the academic study of religion and culture in Malawi accessible to a larger audience, Chakanza pioneered local academic and popular publishing. Concerning academic publishing, Chakanza was also the founding editor of *Religion in Malawi*. This journal was for a long time instrumental in curating research on the study of religion and culture in Malawi. In addition, he was one of the pioneers of the *Kachere Series*, the publication arm of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies in the University of Malawi. To ensure wide accessibility of his religion and culture research,

Chakanza extensively published articles in local magazines and newspapers. His posthumous publication in 2023 chronicles a long series of articles that he published between 1995 and 2008 in *The Lamp*, a popular Catholic magazine, for which he was a member of the Editorial Board.

Although he was an accomplished academic, Chakanza remained not just a priest but a people's priest. At the University, he served as the patron of the Chancellor College Catholic Students Union. He was also available to serve within the Diocese of Zomba, where the University of Malawi is located. Yet beyond that, he remained a priest of the Chikwawa Diocese and Chilemba Parish in Bangula, in particular. His interest in religion and culture enabled him to be a down-to-earth priest. He interacted with the Catholic masses in a unique way such that every time he came back to his home parish in Chilemba, Bangula he would leave congregants talking about him. It was through his congregants at St Joseph Mukasa Magoti Catholic Church at Sorgin that I came to know him way before he became my professor. Catholic church members at Sorgin would always tell stories about him. I remember my late mum, a Catholic herself then, would always come home from church with memorable stories of our *Bambo Chakanza* (Rev Father Chakanza). She tell us how Bambo Chakanza would start local *nkhete-kete*[1] songs and dance together with the congregants during mass. She would tell how he connected with the people using folk tales and cultural metaphors, leaving them wondering what type of priest he was. Everyone thought of him as being extremely funny and intelligent at the same time.

Chakanza taught in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Malawi for 31 years until his retirement in 2007. He then moved to the Catholic University of Malawi, where he was a member of the Department of Biblical and Religious Studies, as it was known then, in the Faculty of Education. Later, Chakanza went back to his diocese in Chikwawa. In recognition of his contribution to the Catholic Church, he was consecrated as a Monsignor in 2018. Joseph Chakanza died in 2019 and was buried in the Catholic Diocese of Chikwawa. There ended the illustrious biological life of a celebrated Catholic priest. Yet, Chakanza's academic legacy lives on and is bound to continue for decades to come.

1 Nkhete-kete is a Sena folk dance.

African Religions, Culture and the Tales of Resilience

A unique aspect of Chakanza's academic life was his recognition that African Traditional Religions (ATRs) constitute a fundamental religious background for diverse African peoples. He demonstrates this recognition through his publications on religion and culture in Malawi. However, globalisation and modern technology have significantly changed African life experiences and conceptions of reality. Alongside technological and social changes, the growing influence of world religions such as Christianity and Islam in Africa raises the question of the continuing relevance of traditional African religions today. Nevertheless, one enduring feature of African Traditional Religions that has enabled them to survive centuries of theological onslaughts from Christianity and Islam is their adaptability (Schoffeleers, 2000). This adaptability involves either taking on features of the world religions or adopting contemporary social-cultural categories from their environment. For example, the emergence of 'Simon' and 'Maria' masquerades within the Gule Wamkulu repertoire nearly five decades ago represented an ATR attempt at contextualization and adaptation in the response to growing Christian influence among the Chewa of Malawi. The question then becomes, how have African Traditional Religions adapted to the world's social, economic and technological changes? What are the modern manifestations of African Traditional Religions? These questions, which belong to the broader context of the study of religions in the contemporary world, remain under-explored. In the African contexts specifically, the relationship between ATR and African culture, and how changes in the latter may affect the former, also need to be considered.

Analysing the relationship between ATRs and African culture is necessary because social change, and by implication, cultural change, is always constant. The quest to realise the nexus between ATRs and culture and to understand and explain this nexus was a passionate preoccupation of Prof. Joseph Chakanza. While his work was diverse, the enduring relationship between traditional religions, culture and society in Malawi was at the heart of his research. For examples, in his 2003 article, *Bribery and Corruption: Any Cultural Roots*? Chakanza demonstrates the cultural roots of corruption in Malawi. He argues that the practice of offering gifts as part of ancestral veneration culminated in the cultural practice of gift-giving to respectable personages such as chiefs or their representatives.

Thus, in the traditional Malawi religious context, you cannot go to the ancestors empty-handed; water, beer, or flour offerings were constant accompaniments to shrine visits. This understanding translated into the same practice with regard to village chiefs and their representatives. In the context of cultural change, whereby the idea of important personages has been transformed, giving gifts to anyone in authority becomes easy, especially where gaining of benefit or goodwill is expected. Thus, a thin line exists between cultural gift-giving in African culture and corrupt practices. By tracing the corruption problem to its cultural roots, Chakanza demonstrates, albeit subtly, the continuing influence of ATR in Malawi and Africa. The work also illustrates how ATR can provide an alternative approach to dealing with corruption in Africa. This is also explained in one chapter in this volume: "Exploring Ways of Utilising ATR in the fight against Corruption in Nigeria."

It is also important to note that, while ATRs remain the bedrock on which African cultural values and practices are anchored, this religious tradition is not static. Social change in all its forms continues to significantly influence the practices and rituals within the indigenous religious tradition. In the edited work, *Initiation Rites for Boys in Lomwe Society in Malawi and Other Essays* (2005), Chakanza demonstrates how research in traditional religion in Malawi has shifted from broad ecological religions to communal rituals. One emphasis in the volume was the scrutiny of traditional rituals in connection with the study of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the transmission of the virus. While most of the contributions in the volume were attempts to understand communal rituals in their various contexts, the broader narrative running through all of the submissions was how traditional communities in African contexts were adapting their cultural practices in response to social change. Given the enduring connection between rites of passage and religion in Africa, the volume demonstrates the continuing dynamics in ATRs. This emphasis not only confirmed but also extended Schoffeleer's (2000) thesis on the adaptability of ATRs in the context of social change, including in response to the influence of other religions. The question of ritual change in African indigenous practices is a major issue in the study of ATR. Among the significant concerns in scholarship is how these new changes have implications for the sustainability of ATR (Oguntola-Laguda, 2022). Yet, as some contributions in this volume show, ritual change is an inevitable process for ATRs in contemporary society, where its adherents are constantly exposed to social and technological change. In fact, the ability to change its rituals needs to be

understood as ATR's inherent strength. It proves the religious traditions' resilience and abiding influence for the unforeseeable future.

While responding to social change is a hallmark of ATR, that trait is not its sole characteristic. ATR has also been characterised by resistance to change, especially in the face of the continuing influence of major religious traditions like Christianity and Islam. For example, in his 2006 book *African Ancestors Religion: Chipembedzo cha Makolo Achikuda,* Chakanza analyses an indigenous religious movement which epitomised religious-cum-political resistance within ATR. The name of this religious movement as reflected in the subtitle of the book is translated literally as 'the religion of black ancestors'. In the work, Chakanza chronicles how the movement was founded in 1959, the same year when Dr Hasting Kamuzu Banda, the first president of Malawi, arrived in Malawi to lead the country to independence. At the heart of the movement, according to Chakanza, was the rejection of the foreign Christian God and religious texts of the whites, aiming to rediscover indigenous traditional religion, and galvanise Africans to struggle for a pan-Africanist, Afro-centric religious liberation that redeems their cultural traditions and self-determination. The nexus between the resurgence of the new religious movement and the significant political changes connected with the coming of Dr Banda in 1959 demonstrates the political nature of ATR and how the religious tradition can take on political features in specific circumstances. The political nature of ATR is well documented in the role of the Chimurenga uprising in Zimbabwe. The *Mwari* cult and the authority of spirit mediums in the first anti-colonial resistance movement played a critical role in the struggle against British rule in colonial Zimbabwe (1896-1897) (cf. Kaoma, 2016). The same was also true of the Mau Mau movement in Kenya, where traditional religious and cultural themes were useful in mobilising and motivating many combatants (Weigert, 1996). All this demonstrates the historical dynamics of ATR and its role in society. How the political dimensions of ATRs are worked out within the present democratic dispensation in Africa remains to be explored. Also fascinating will be an exploration of the role of spirit mediums in contemporary politics in Africa. It is apparent from the above discussion that African Traditional Religions and culture constituted an essential dimension of Chakanza's life work. This volume is both a celebration and a continuation of Prof. Chakanza's lifetime work. It aims to locate traditional African religions in the broader framework of social change in Africa and its implications for the practice

of traditional religions. The following chapters, coming from diverse geographic and cultural perspectives, analyse the dynamics within African indigenous religions.

REFERENCES

Chakanza, J.C. (2003), Bribery and Corruption: Any Cultural Roots. *The Lamp*, 7.

Chakanza, J.C. (2006). *African Ancestors Religion: Chipembedzo Cha Makolo Achikuda*. Zomba: Kachere Series.

Chakanza, J.C. (ed) (2005). *Initiation Rites for Boys in Lomwe Society in Malawi and Other Essays*. Zomba: Kachere Series.

Kaoma, K.J. (2016). African Religion and Colonial Rebellion: The Contestation of Power in Colonial Zimbabwe's Chimurenga of 1896-1897. *Journal for the Study of Religion* 29(1), 57-84.

Oguntola-Laguda, D. (2022). African Traditional Religion and Sustainability: The New Indigenous Religious Movements. In: I.S. Aderibigbe, T. Falola (eds). *The Palgrave Handbook of African Traditional Religion*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Schoffeleers, M. (ed). 2000), *Guardians of the Land*. Blantyre: CLAIM.

Weigert, S.L. (1996). Kenya: The Mau Mau Insurgency, 1952–60. In: *Traditional Religion and Guerrilla Warfare in Modern Africa*, 22-23. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Continuity, Change and Methodology in African Traditional Religions

Louis ***Ndekha,*** *Rhodian* ***Munyenyembe*** *&* *Judith* ***Bachmann***

Abstract

Over the years, the study of religion has undergone a significant transformation. For a long time, religion, mainly African Traditional Religions, were studied as independent phenomena, unconnected to other social reality. However, today, there is increasing recognition of the intricate relationship between religious practices and other social phenomena and the corresponding need to undertake the study of ATRs within the larger context of other societal factors. This chapter introduces the dynamics of the study of ATRs, the possible methodologies that can be employed to analyse this great religion, and how the motif of continuity and change is captured across the length of the volume.Introduction

One of the recurring issues in the contemporary study of religion is the question of continuity and change. It is taken *apriori* in religious studies that intrinsic to religious traditions are elements that remain constant, which by implication represent the core elements of the religions, and those aspects of the religions which are subject to change. It is also axiomatic that ATRs are intrinsically tied to what it means to be African. While the essence of what it means to be African remains constant, the African experience, which constitutes Africa's interaction with itself and other external forces, has been subject to many forces and consequent changes. ATRs, as integral aspects of the African experience, have also been subject to forces that either tested their resilience or, in some cases, threatened to tear them apart. The influence of these contradicting forces result in significant changes in the understanding and practice of some of their unique elements. This chapter discusses dimensions of continuity and discontiunity in ATRs and the methodological approaches used in the study of ATRs. The central argument in the chapter, which is picked up later in the rest of the chapters, is that, like any other religion, ATRs have remained resilient even in the context of social change. Yet, this resilience partly comes from the religion's ability to adapt and change. The chapter, then analyses the operational term of ATRs used in the present volume,

discusses different methodological approaches that can be used to understand these processes of continuity and change in the ATRs.

Continuity and Change in ATRs

One of the characteristic features of traditional African societies was the unity of things that are now described as sacred and secular. Because of this unity there was no clear-cut distinction between things considered secular and those considered religious. Indeed, as John Mbiti observed, wherever the [traditional] African is, there is his religion (Mbiti, 1991). This means that religion was part and parcel of traditional African cultures, and that it was not perceived as a separate dimension of life. Some scholars have observed that in some traditional African societies, the word religion itself, as understood in the English language, did not even exist (p'Bitek, 1970). Given this background, it became inevitable for African religions to be influenced directly by whatever changes were happening to African cultures. This means that African traditional religions have changed and continue to change consequent to changes that are taking place in African cultures in general. In the same way, elements that do not easily change in African cultures continue to be expressed in traditional African religions, thereby perpetuating their continuity.

Cultures change either through what is known as a cultural revolution or a cultural drift. A cultural revolution is a sudden change, mainly due to external forces. On the other hand, a cultural drift is a change that happens to a culture slowly, whether influenced by outside or inside forces (Kraft, 1999). It is evident to any observer that ATRs have changed over the years due to the influence of other world religions, such as Christianity and Islam. Transformations have also increased due to global exchanges as well as scientific and technological advances. African cultures have constantly been changing because all cultures are dynamic, except that sometimes changes may happen frequently and at other times infrequently (Kraft, 1999). African cultures started to experience rapid change the day African traditional life came into contact with other cultures and values. One of the things that led to rapid cultural change in Africa was the introduction of European education models provided by Christian missionaries and colonial governments.

Traditional Africa did not have formal schools for children. Daily interactions transferred knowledge from the elders and experts in various fields to young ones in informal ways. Apart from informal interactions, the

other way of imparting knowledge was through yearly initiation ceremonies to mark the stages of development from one level to another in one's life cycle. While these initiation ceremonies still occur in some areas, they have been altered significantly. For example, young boys and girls now go to primary school, secondary school, colleges and universities, where necessary, before securing employment. This means that the formal school has become part of African culture so much that initiation ceremonies may no longer be considered mandatory because they have been overtaken by the school system and culture. In many areas where there are initiation institutions, it is up to the parents to choose whether their children should participate in initiation rites or not. In some cases, the children are required to attend school for the sake of their future livelihood and then subsequently go to cultural initiation ceremonies to be fully accepted in their communities.

In Malawi, for example, initiation ceremonies usually occur in the country's Central and Southern Regions. In the Central Region, the Nyau cult is part and parcel of the initiation process for girls. However, the Nyau also has its initiation ceremonies for boys. The boys undergo various rites depending on their age ranges. While the Nyau cult has remained an essential component of Chewa Traditional Religion, it has undergone many changes and adaptations (van Breugel, 2001). As an institution alongside other religions, it no longer commands respect from people of different backgrounds in a community. Many Christians and Muslims despise members of the Nyau cult, and sometimes, they clash with them due to misunderstandings and negative labelling of the cult. As an age-old component of Chewa Traditional Religion, the Nyau continues to show resilience and adaptations as it tries to bring modern aspects into its repertoire, consequent to its exposure to the material culture of modernity. This is evident in the Nyau structures that mimic such things as cars, aeroplanes and trains, which may not come from the Chewa traditional past but have been incorporated into the Nyau collection due to the persuasions of modernity. Despite the negative feelings associated with this institution in modern times, some areas of the country still utilize it for community mobilization and entertainment. Political parties have also found the Nyau dancers quite useful in attracting the masses during campaign rallies.

African traditional religions were originally very much concerned with ecological matters, among other things. In the days when ATRs were very strong, all matters to do with ecology were in the hands of religious lead-

ers. This was very true of territorial cults. Matthew Schoffeleers has observed that the loss of forests and the degradation of the environment in Africa happened in the years after territorial cults had lost their authority (Schoffeleers, 1978). For example, due to the waning influence of territorial cults, the ritualistic burning and preservation of bushes, the monitored grazing of animals in various grasslands and the control of human migratory movements are no longer dealt with from a religious point of view. In many parts of Malawi today, big trees are mostly preserved in graveyards due to these places' association with traditional religion. Apart from this, there are no more instances that indicate the influence of territorial cults from the heydays of ATRs. However, in terms of continuity, there are times when the few remaining adherents of ATRs sometimes organize religious ceremonies to placate the spirits of their ancestors, especially during crises such as drought in the context of sole reliance on rainfed agriculture. It is in such situations that we see neo-primal religions such as *Chipembedzo cha Makolo Achikuda* (African Ancestors Religion) taking the lead in organizing sacrifices and libations to prove the efficacy of ATRs in a nostalgic fashion (Chakanza, 2002).

In some parts of Malawi, there are traditional ways of dealing with what are perceived to be spiritual maladies. In northern Malawi, for example, a specific dance called *vimbuza* was performed therapeutically as it is believed to exorcise people troubled by evil spirits. While this phenomenon was widespread among the Tumbuka people in the past, these days, it has become rare. Some chiefs do not even want *vimbuza* to be performed in their villages as they consider it evil either because of their Christian convictions, or due to their scientific outlook on life. In some cases their negative attitude towards the traditional dance may stem from both factors. It is no wonder that today, *vimbuza* is mainly performed by dancers who want to entertain people. Recognizing its unique performance and heritage, UNESCO declared *vimbuza* an intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2008). This recognition promotes the survival of *vimbuza* on the entertainment plane, while its usage as a therapeutic dance has gone down, changing its functions due to the influence of world religions, modernity and medical science.

Many traditional African ways of health and healing are still being practiced though. Some of them have found new expression in some African Independent Churches (AICs), especially those AICs that more readily incorporate several traditional ways of health management and healing in their spirituality. In this regard, the traditional healer (*singa'nga*, not to be

mistaken with a witch doctor!) is still prevalent in rural and urban Africa despite the campaign by some Christian groups to shun such a healer. In some African countries, the traditional healer joins associations, which unite healers and help them to lobby with the government and other stakeholders in promoting the profession. Many traditional healers have modernized their ways of processing and marketing traditional medicine. In some African countries, people involved in dispensing traditional medicine have resorted to plying their trade in the streets or some designated herbal clinics. This is very different from how things happened in the past when people usually visited traditional healers clandestinely.

In spite of facing tough opposition from Christian faith healers and medical science, traditional healers are still able to satisfy a significant number of their clientele in combating barrenness and impotence, enhancing bedroom prowess for both men and women and providing love potions, business charms and protection from various perceived harms that can befall a person. In this regard, ATRs are still responding to African health, wealth, and vitality needs, albeit in ways that resonate with the changing times. It is interesting to note that practitioners of traditional medicine have quickly adapted to the new culture of advertising. They are able to advertise their medicines and concoctions in newspapers[1], on the radio, on social media and various other avenues that equally advertise a myriad of businesses. In Malawian urban areas, for example, the blaring of public address systems on top of minibuses and vans advertising medicines associated with indigenous knowledge is becoming a common experience.

African traditional religions have persisted despite all the odds. Some scholars even argue that the proliferation of prophetic churches in Africa that emphasize such things as exorcisms, personal prophecies, declarations of prosperity and well-being are a response to African needs in such areas that can be traced back to traditional spirituality as expressed in African traditional religions. The African concept of God and even the identity of God have continued not only among adherents of African traditional religions but even – though sometimes subtly and in a transformed way – among adherents of religions such as Christianity and Islam (Ogbonna, 2020). For example, the name for God in many translations of the Bible into African languages is the same name used in African traditional religions. In this case, the African understanding of God continues to be

[1] Newspaper adverts of traditional healers can actually be found in West African newspapers from the late 19th century on.

relevant even though the traditional institutions that nurture such knowledge have given way to other religious practices, except in their sporadic reappearances during life's crises. In the same vein, the cult or veneration of the ancestors is still there among African peoples, though they no longer celebrate the ancestors or interact with them in the way they used to do in the past. We, therefore, argue that the most essential elements of African traditional religions, namely God and the ancestors, are still intact in African spirituality, but altered in various ways because of the changes that have taken place and continue to take place in Africa.

As it is true that African traditional religion is part and parcel of African culture, ATRs are evolving with the ever-changing African culture. African people continue to make choices that they perceive to be relevant to them, whether these choices be influenced by modern or traditional socio-cultural elements. Given this observation, whether modern Africans are members of world religions like Christianity and Islam or members of non-religious or even anti-religious groups swayed by secularism and modernity, their cultural identity is influenced by ATRs in one way or the other. ATRs, therefore, are a force to reckon with because they are not something that has been left in our distant past but something that is still with us today, albeit in different ways due to the impact of our different socio-cultural contexts. Therefore, this should inform Africans not to abandon everything that is not from their traditional past to maintain a supposed purity of identity as Africans; that kind of cultural romanticism will not help the Africans of today. On the contrary, the African religio-cultural landscape is constantly changing, and Africans must, just like the rest of the world, embrace what is good from their traditional past while discarding elements that they deem no longer appropriate. In the same vein, they must critically assess in order to embrace the good from other cultures and traditions while rejecting those elements that may be detrimental to their wholesome development as a people. To that end, revisiting ATRs and re-evaluating them, given contemporary realities, must remain a necessary academic endeavour by African scholars of religion, hence the importance of the present volume.

Revisiting the Nomenclature of ATRs

One of the issues that we need to grapple with in our understanding of ATRs in contemporary times is whether the name ATR(s) still makes sense. When the missionaries and other European settlers came to Africa,

they described the African religions as traditional religions because to them, these religions were relics of the (African) past and were, therefore, traditional. However, since their encounter with Europeans and Americans, Africans created and re-created their religious practices in response to the Western incursion, whether they accepted Christianity or not. For example, the African Ancestors Religion (AAR) mentioned earlier was only founded in 1959. It is not from a traditional past. However, it can be described as a neo-primal religion. All neo-primal religions in Africa are not traditional religions in the sense that they come from the past, but they are revivalist religions that try to revive and glorify traditional religions. Consequently, there is a need to have a name that can embrace both traditional religions and the revivalist movements, which are known as neo-primal religions. In this regard, an all-embracing term for religions that have their origins in Africa, irrespective of when they came on the scene, would be African Traditional Religions (ATRs). In our quest to revisit ATRs, we are convinced the name ATR is most appropriate for the phenomenon.

Methodological Approaches to the Study of ATRs

The chapters in the present volume take diverse approaches to the study of ATR. The different approaches employed reflect the constantly changing context of the study of ATRs and the implications on how to approach the religions. It is, however, noteworthy that one of the weaknesses in the contemporary learning and teaching of ATRs is that many students, and sometimes even lecturers, do not know the different approaches to studying ATRs. As lecturers, we delve into what we know to be facts about ATRs without appreciating the approaches that unearthed those facts. ATRs are not a subject in themselves. On the contrary, they are merely phenomena which can be studied from various angles. These approaches then, produce the subject of ATRs. It is crucial to know how to approach one's study of ATRs and to appreciate the approach that a researcher or author used in their study of ATRs when we are reading their works. Below are some of the approaches to the study of ATRs.

The Evolutionist Approach

Influenced by Darwinian evolution in Biology, some scholars of religion attempted to understand all religions from an evolutionist point of view. These scholars hypothesized that African Traditional Religions (ATRs)

were among the most primitive of all religions. These Western imperialist scholars were of the view that their religion or religions from technologically advanced Europe were at the summit of religious development while African religions were on the lower rungs of the evolutionary ladder. This approach to the study of African Traditional Religions did not live long. At the peak of European colonialism, new approaches to studying ATRs appeared.

The Anthropological Approach

African Traditional Religions have been and continue to be studied from various angles. It must be noted that the first group of people interested in studying ATRs were Christian missionaries. Applying anthropological methods, these missionaries studied ATRs and African cultures, in general, to understand better the people they were serving. This means that the study of ATRs from an anthropological point of view was a means of Christian evangelization (Kraft, 1997). On the other hand, this approach also helped the European colonizers to administer the indigenous people, which they could not do without understanding them anthropologically (Chidester, 1996). The anthropological method has, therefore, been criticized as being oppressive in that it aimed to disarm the autochthones. The subjects of anthropology were at the mercy of the colonizers, who had access to every mystery of their lives. The anthropological approach is still very relevant in the studies of ATRs despite its historical affinity to colonialism.

The Theological Approach

African traditional religions have also been studied from a theological perspective by both Western missionaries and African Christian scholars. Some African Christian scholars, especially those with evangelical convictions, considered ATRs as *preparatio evangelica*, meaning a preparation of the gospel. This was understood in the same way the Jewish scriptures that Christians call the Old Testament were perceived by Christians as a preparation for the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, among the Jews of the first century. This approach to the study of ATRs does not do justice to the phenomenon, as it only evaluates ATRs vis-a-vis the Christian faith (Mbiti, 1991). On the one hand, this approach looks at ATRs positively because it champions continuity between ATRs and the Christian faith in Africa. On the other hand, some Christian scholars study ATRs from a theological position that does not see anything good with ATRs but view it as a

pagan spirituality that needs to be replaced with Christianity as soon as possible. This approach is derogatory and militant against ATRs, and it has been criticised for not being objective and neutral in studying this phenomenon (Gehman, 2016).

The Philosophical Approach

The philosophical approach examines the validity of the beliefs and practices of ATRs so that it can be established whether they are logically sound or not. Just like any other belief system, ATRs are exposed to a philosophical evaluation so that the reasons behind their claims and principles can be subjected to the scrutiny of reason. For example, in a recent paper, Molefe and Maraganezha (2023) provide a philosophical explication of an African religious moral philosophy. They argue that ATR embodies its own conception of ethical theory, which has implications for African ethical practices in bioethics or environmental ethics. Other studies have examined the African universe within the context of the place of man in this universe, the purpose of human existence, and man's ontology (Ihua et al., 2022). The above attempts to explain the African philosophy are presented in the context of the hegemonic western scholarship's denial of the possibility of philosophy in traditional Africa. Scholars like Mbiti (1991) wrestled with this challenge and consequently presented ATRs as plausible philosophical paradigms. It can be argued that the big questions in the philosophical approach centre around the nature of the categories used in evaluating ATR concepts and practices. Are they too western to accept the African conception of religion as philosophical? Is there a universal set of criteria that every intellectual tradition, including ATRs, can be subjected to in order for it to qualify as philosophical? Thus, the philosophical approach to ATRs provides an opportunity to place ATRs within the category of philosophical paradigms.

The Comparative Approach

The comparative approach studies ATRs alongside other religions to draw similarities and differences. This approach aims to understand the common themes and patterns as well as to discern the unique features and diversity of various religious traditions and phenomena. The advantage of this approach is that it puts ATRs on the same level as other religious traditions. The approach highlights broad perspectives on ATRs in the light of other religious traditions. For example, in a recent paper, Oladipupo and Oni (2024) present a comparative study of rationality in

ATRs. The paper highlights traditional belief systems that shape Africa's intellectual and moral landscape. Similarly, Maimela (1985) and Adeyemo (1997) studied salvation in ATRs. By doing this analysis in a comparative context with other religions or philosophical systems, the approach puts ATRs shoulder to shoulder with other religious traditions. However, the approach is not without its challenges. For example, the approach assumes that the researcher knows what religion is and what constitutes religion in all cultures. The blurred lines between culture and religion in the African context suggest that uncritical comparison of aspects of ATR with similar elements in other religions may result in skewed outcomes.

The Sociological Approach

The sociologists of religion focus on many things that show the interaction between religion and society and how religion impacts society. In this approach, the structures of religion and the function of religion in society are studied. As Venter (2002) posits, this approach regards religions as a collective name for a range of "many different things - philosophical systems, cosmologies, systems of morals". As opposed to the Marxist view of religion as a peripheral phenomenon, this approach assumes the all-pervading nature of religion and ATRs as part of a more extensive social system (Roberts and Yamane, 2015). This perspective clarifies the importance of studying them from a sociological perspective. The strength of studying ATRs from a sociological approach is that it helps to keep track of changes in the practices of the religion as reflections of the internal dynamics within the religion. Since ATRs are mostly practised rather than verbally articulated, studying them from the context of society provides valuable insight into religions.

The Historical Approach

Terence Ranger and John Kimambo are scholars accredited with popularizing the historical study of ATRs (Ranger and Kimambo, 1972). Before this approach was popularized by the two scholars, ATRs were studied flatly as if they were not affected by historical developments. The two scholars championed the historical development of ATRs as they were affected by different factors within the context in which they thrived. They, however, used the singular form of African religion instead of religions. This homogenisation of African religions has not received wide acceptance in later scholarship. The homogenisation undermines the heter-

ogeneous nature of African religions. According to Shaw (1990), this heterogeneity is a product of the paradigmatic status accorded in religious studies to the Judeo-Christian tradition and the associated view of 'religion as text'. For other scholars, an additional repertoire to this approach may also involve the study of ATRs in the context of other religions. For example, in a 1996 paper, Platvoet understook a historical study of African Religions, which included all religions in Africa, whether immigrant or indigenous, but subsumed under the term 'the religions of Africa'. Here ATRs are studied as a historical phenomenon in Africa, like any other religious tradition on the continent. Whether this dimension can be categorised as a concrete historical approach to ATR remains unclear. However, all in all, utilizing the historical study would make us appreciate how ATRs have been and continue to be affected by developments taking place in their various contexts.

The Phenomenological Approach

The phenomenological approach to the study of ATRs aims to understand the essence of religion by looking deeper into the experiences of the practitioners and the meanings they attach to their religious rituals and practices (Cox, 2010). The phenomenological approach is touted as the most objective way to study religion. However, the phenomenological approach has been found wanting due to its inability to evaluate ATRs in a way that can find the phenomenon useful or harmful in contemporary times (Chitando, 2005). The value of the phenomenological method is that it is the first step to understanding any phenomenon objectively before evaluating it according to one's lens. Perhaps closely related to the phenomenological approach but rooted in the African context is the Afrocentric paradigm to the study of ATRs. This paradigm, pioneered by Pan Africanists such as Zulu and Asante, emphasises the primacy of the African experience as a starting point for the study of African Religions. For Zulu (1999) and Asante (2014) an objective study of ATRs needs to be rooted in the historical experiences of Africa. According to them, this is the only way the study of Africa, its people and religions can be freed from European domination and the racist claws of European scholarship (Zulu 1999). The advantage of this approach to studying African religions is that it provides an alternative perspective to the bulk of studies done from Eurocentric perspectives. Yet, as in every paradigm, one has to wrestle with the question of objectivity vis-a-vis scholarly blindspots that characterise insider perspec-

tives to any scientific enquiry. Thus, while the paradigm provides a salutary balance to historical Eurocentricism in the study of Africa, it has to grapple with its own subjectivities and its drive towards blunt description at the expense of analysis.

The Chapters in this Volume

The volume is divided into five sections; (**1**) ATR's Dynamic History, (**2**) ATR and Christianity, (**3**) ATR and Social Transformation, (**4**) ATR and Ethics and (**5**) ATR and Health.

In the first section "**ATR's Dynamic History**," the chapter "African Traditional Religion in Comparison: Re-Negotiating Identity through Pan-Africanist and Esoteric Networks" wades into the thought-provoking waters of the contested nature of the ATR as a "religion". Researchers have argued that as a supposedly "European" term, religion does not fit well with traditional practices that include knowledge, medicine and everyday prescriptions. In this chapter, Bachmann argues that although ascribing the term "religion" to ATR may carry a missionary and colonial heritage, it has become useful to Africans and has been adapted by them. According to Bachmann, a critique of a term needs to include an analysis of the said usefulness and adaptation. Taking the example of the West African intellectual John Augustus Abayomi Cole, the author argues against a focus on a supposed European "origin" of religion. Instead, the "promise of universality" which is the basis of religion as a concept is only realised through the application and adaptation of religion in the works of non-European people like Abayomi Cole. The chapter specifically examines the entangled history of Abayomi Cole's concept of Ifá that did not stay without consequences in the later research on Ifá. Abayomi Cole made use of Pan-Africanist and esoteric networks to establish an understanding of indigenised Christianity as "true religion". The chapter makes the case that these networks tied the West African usage to a global discussion of "religion". Thus, even in the 21st century, Africans are part of a global discourse on religion when they use the name ATR.

The following section focuses on "**ATR and Christianity**". The first chapter in this section was written by Joseph Chakanza, who analyses puberty rites in Southern Malawi and the church's response to the practices. Chakanza observes that, although the Catholic Church's position on these

practices is one of opposition and prohibition, the church members continue to undergo these traditional rites. The tenacity to defy church rules and policies demonstrates the essential place rites hold among the Roman Catholic Christians in Southern Malawi. Chakanza advises that the church should not seek to destroy traditional religions and rites through its theology and evangelisation. Instead, the church must fulfil these practices and expose them to the unity of the saving act of God.

The next chapter under this section, "Ngoni funeral burial practices amongst Christians in Northern Malawi" discusses the funeral and burial rites among the Ngoni of Northern Malawi, who are mostly Roman Catholic. The chapter is based on focus group discussions and interviews with key informants. Although many Ngonis have now converted to Christianity, they still practice traditional funeral and burial rites in order to give the spirit of the deceased peace with the ancestors. For example, the chapter demonstrates how Catholic burial rituals are done in parallel with Ngoni traditional burial rites, such as calling on the ancestors to announce the death of one of their children, cutting hair to remove the spirit of the dead, and mingling with the dead through a beer party. These rites are not necessarily perceived to be in conflict with their Roman Catholic faith. Instead, many Ngonis see these rites as what is owed to the elders and view them as cultural rather than religious practices. All this demonstrates the abiding influence of indigenous cultural/religious practices in Africa even in the 21st century.

The third chapter in this section, "Continuing Relevance of ATR: Case Studies of African Initiated Churches in Kenya", analyses ATR's continued manifestation through African instituted churches in the contemporary East African community. The chapter takes a historical approach to analysing the AICs as the vanguards of African culture and religion. It traces the emergence of AICs and religious practices from the past to the present. It demonstrates how the AIC movement's genesis has its very roots in the promotion of African culture and religious heritage. The chapter also demonstrates how old and new AICs have lived up to their billing. In espousing and promoting African cultural values and heritage, they have promoted the use of shrines, ancestor veneration, faith-healing, culturally relevant administrative structure and the inclusion of women in leadership and worship. Yet, as the chapter argues, the AICs also betray internal contradictions. Some are detractors of ATR, denouncing it as not being a true religion. Also striking in the chapter's analysis of AICs is their ethnic basis, which renders them incapable of promoting a trans-tribal

national spirit. Nevertheless, by continuing to reflect traditional cultural values, the AICs manifest ATR's continued relevance in the 21st century.

The third section emphasises "**ATR's Social Transformations**". The first chapter in this section, "The Modification of Traditional and Religious Rituals and Its Impact on the Adherents in Modern Malawi", discusses the initiation rites for boys and girls as well as the funeral rites of the people in Traditional Authority Mwilang'ombe in Karonga district. Based on a review of the research literature and empirical research findings, the chapter argues that these rites have undergone modifications in modern times. To the community, these modifications have negative as well as positive consequences. Positively, the modifications are meant to limit the spread of diseases. Negatively, the modifications are perceived as causes of identity loss and social pressure.

The second chapter in this section, "Assessment of the Gule Wamkulu as a Rite of Passage Among the Chewas of the Central Region in Malawi", discusses the Nyau, a secret society among the Chewa communities in Malawi. Their initiation ceremonies for boys and girls are considered as rites of passage to adulthood and full membership in the Chewa communities. Yet, in modern times, the chapter opines, the Nyau do not seem to be well-equipped anymore to provide children with basic education. The chapter assesses that it is due to the monetary gain of the Chewa chiefs and Nyau leadership that the Nyau initiation ceremonies continue to be practised. Thus, for Mbewe, the continued relevance of the Chewa initiation rites is more superficial than real. Yet, even then, as Mbewe demonstrates throughout the chapter, the survival of the Chewa initiation rites regime over the decades, from the pre-colonial period, through the coming of Christian missionaries to the political manipulation of the Gule Wamkulu by politicians in the Malawi Congress Party era, demonstrates a national resilience that has characterised African traditional religions in Africa.

The fourth section relates to "**ATR and Ethics**". The first chapter in this section, "Fortune in the Bones: An Intersectionality of ATR and Albinism Discourse in Malawi", argues that African religions carry some negative aspects which may instigate the harvesting of persons with albinism (PWA)'s body parts or even their killing. Crucial for these negative aspects is the so-called witchdoctor who even may be in alliance with criminal gangs that trade in body parts for financial gain. As the problem is religious, the chapter puts forward the thesis that the solution also needs to be religious. The author emphasises that the Ubuntu spirituality is at

the core of African religions and can be used to bring out positive aspects in order to protect PWAs. Ubuntu is based on the idea that no one can exist alone and that everyone is in each other's care. Here, Mawerenga demonstrates not only the continuing relevance of ATR in the 21st Century but also its perplexing conundrum. It has a social-religious influence that can be used for good or bad. However, by placing a solution to the Albino killing challenge at the door of ATR, the chapter underscores the all-encompassing nature of ATR and its continuing relevance in the 21st Century.

The second chapter in this section "Exploring Ways of Utilizing ATR in the Fight against Corruption in Nigeria" proposes ATR as an alternative option for dealing with Nigeria's corruption challenge. The chapter observes that centuries of Christian and Islamic presence in this populous nation have not helped to develop the country. The nation's legal framework has roots in the West and is therefore, as the chapter argues, foreign to the Nigerian conception of justice. This includes the foreign religions' causal approach to the conception of the deity. It is due to these interferences that the nation has witnessed increasing corruption and instability. Meanwhile, African indigenous justice systems, now privately sought after by some sectors of society, have yet to be adequately tried in the fight against corruption. The chapter argues that the fight against corruption in Nigeria could be complemented by infusing in the legal system the adoration of the Ògún or Ayélála as an anti-corruption ethical divinity. These alternative anti-corruption measures include the use of curses and ritual covenants such as the Ìmùlẹ̀ Covenant. Conspicuously significant for the present volume is the chapter's detailed analysis of the past and present manifestation of ATR in Nigeria, even in the context of the continuous growth of Christianity and Islam. The proposal for officially recognising the efficacy of traditional values and attributes of ATR attests to the religion's continued relevance in the 21st century.

The last section focuses on "**ATR and Health**". The first chapter in this section "From the Bush to Social Media: Dynamics in the Practice of Traditional Medicine in Malawi" analyses the changes in the practice of traditional medicine in Malawi, using the research method of Netnography. It takes stock of the two-fold influence of social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp on religious institutions: religious traditions are taking advantage of development in social media and using them to advance their agenda. At the same time, social media is also changing the practices of

religious traditions. In light of the above analysis, the chapter demonstrates how traditional doctors in Malawi have taken to social media to interface with their modern media-savvy clientele. The chapter observes that, while the new platforms have increased the traditional doctors' customer base, the new platforms have also provoked significant changes in the structure and practice of traditional medicine. The most significant change is the new emphasis on herbalism at the expense of divination and spiritualisation, which are traditionally regarded as prerequisite aspects in traditional practice in Malawi. A unique aspect of the chapter is its ability to demonstrate how traditional medicine, which is an aspect of ATR, has taken advantage of social and technological changes to stay relevant in the 21st century.

The last chapter of this section and the one to close of this edited volume is another Chakanza paper, originally delivered at the 1997 Association of Theological Institution in Southern and Central Africa (ATISCA) conference. In the chapter on "Health and Healing: New Development in Spirit Mediumship in Malawi", Chakanza analyses the influence of Christianity on traditional healing practices through spirit mediums in Malawi. According to Chakanza, traditionally, spirit mediums use possession to diagnose and heal diseases. Chakanza, however, demonstrates how a new set of spirit mediums, who are members of Christian denominations, adopt Christian symbols and characters such as the Bible and biblical figures. By fusing both traditional and Christian elements in their healing practices, the new spirit mediums provide a bridge between traditional religions and the Christian tradition. These practices and institutions, although not fully sanctioned by the institutional church, provide an avenue for members of the Christian faiths to access the privilege of ATR, albeit coated with Christian colours. All this demonstrates ATR's contextual malleability and quest for relevance, even in the face of dominant religious traditions.

REFERENCES

Adeyemo, T. (1997). *Salvation in African Tradition*. Nairobi: Evang. Publ. House.

Asante, M.K. (2014). Afrocentricity: Toward a New Understanding of African Thought in the World. In M.K. Asante, Y. Miike & J. Yin (eds.), *The Global Intercultural Communication Reader* (2nd ed.), 101-110. New York: Routledge.

Chidester, D. (1996). *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa*. Charlottesville, London: University Press of Virginia.

Chitando, E. (2005). Phenomenology of Religion and the Study of African Traditional Religions. *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion 17*(4), 299-316.

Cox, J. (2010). *An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion*. London: Continuum.

Gehman, J.R. (2016). *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*. Chicago: Oasis International.

Ihuah, A.S., & Nor, Z.M. (2022). African Traditional Religion and African Philosophy. In I.S. Aderibigbe & T. Falola (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of African Traditional Religion*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-89500-6_22

Kraft, C.H. (1997). *Anthropology for Christian Witness,* Maryknoll: Orbis.

Maimela, S.S. (1985). Salvation in African Tradition Religions. *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 13(2), 63-77.

Mbiti, J.S. (1991). *African Religions & Philosophy* (2nd revised & enlarged ed.). London: Heinemann.

Molefe M., & Maraganedzha, M. (2023). African Traditional Religion and Moral Philosophy. *Religious Studies* 59(2), 355-370. Https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412522000543.

Oguntola-Laguda, D. (2022). African Traditional Religion and Sustainability: The New Indigenous Religious Movements. In I.S. Aderibigbe & T. Falola (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of African Traditional Religion*, 441-455. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-89500-6_34.

Platvoet, J.G. (2017). The Study of Religions in Africa: Past, Present and Prospects. In J. Platvoet, J. Cox & J. Olupona (Eds.) *The Study of Religions in Africa: Past, Present and Prospects,* 46-102. Cambridge: Roots & Branches.

Ranger, T.O., & Kimambo, I. (1972). *The historical study of African religion: with special reference to East and Central Africa*. London: Heinemann Educational.

Roberts, K.A., & Yamane, D. (2015). *Religion in Sociological Perspective*. n/p: Sage.

Shange, N.T. (2013). Shembe Religion's Integration of African Traditional Religion and Christianity: A Sociological Case Study (Doctoral diss., Rhodes Univ.).

Shaw, R. (1990). The Invention of 'African Traditional Religion.' *Religion* 20(4), 339-353. https://doi.org/10.1016/0048-721X(90)90116-N.

Venter, D. (2002). What is Sociology that Religionists Should be Mindful of it? The Relevance of the Sociology of Religion for Studying Change in South Africa. *Journal for the Study of Religion,* 167-189.

Zulu, I.M. (1999). *Exploring the African Centred Paradigm: Discourse and Innovation in African World Community Studies*. Los Angeles, California: Amen-Ra Theological Seminary Press.

SECTION 1

ATR's Dynamic History

African Traditional Religion in Comparison: Re-Negotiating Identity through Pan-Africanist and Esoteric Networks

Judith ***Bachmann***

Abstract

The consensus on the term African Traditional Religion (ATR) seems to be that "religion" is too limiting a concept for traditional practices because they include medicine, knowledge, and prescriptions for everyday life. Yet, as most scholars argue, ATR is the most fitting term one could think of for lack of a better term. Ugandan scholar Okot p'Bitek criticised the likes of Parrinder, Mbiti and Idowu, who made a career of using the term prolifically and by its introduction, Christianised and Hellenised African traditional practices. ATR became a position from which one could gain entrance into the hallways of "world religions." However, the debate about the perception that "religion" may actually not be a fully fitting term at all is yet to be taken seriously in the study of ATR with regard to its historical roots and the anti-colonial/imperialist interests connected with these roots. The chapter argues that we can understand the current debates about the term "religion" in (West) African contexts better, if we investigate the ways early Christian intellectuals re-negotiated their African religious identity within Pan-Africanist and esoteric networks. The chapter looks specifically at the nineteenth-century intellectual John Augustus Abayomi Cole, who compared traditional practices to Tarot, the Jewish Kabbalah as well as to scientific research. He became a professing Theosophist and quoted other prominent esoteric figures like the Rosicrucian and Theosophist Franz Hartmann and the Rosicrucian and Occultist Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers. Abayomi Cole used their arguments to promote the idea that if recovered from their missionary misconceptions, African traditions were religion and science in an anti-materialist sense. This idea served as the basis to the demand for a truly indigenous church that would be free from missionary oversight, a demand which was highly popular in West Africa at the turn of the century. The chapter thus concludes that in order to understand today's struggle to define African traditional practices, scholars have to take into account the history of comparison in which Africans were engaged early on.

Introduction

African traditional religion (ATR) is often seen as a term that does not quite fit but has continued to stick. It is criticised for the suggestion that there is only one religion across Sub-Saharan Africa,[1] for the concomitant homogenisation of the diverse practices subsumed under its umbrella and for its colonial and missionary heritage (Olabimtan, 2003; p'Bitek, 1980; p'Bitek & Wiredu, 2011). Scholars have also pointed out that "religion" in Africa is not segregated from the rest of social life like in the West (Olabimtan, 2003; Olupona, 2014). Yet, scholars continue to use it for lack of a better term which could serve the same function: namely the acknowledgement that practices across Africa continue to be identified as "religious" and that via a complicated history of conquest, domination and decolonization, these traditional "religious" practices are still seen as somehow related or connected to each other. In a way, this dilemma of ATR is not so different from the dilemma of the term "religion". Religion is used as a self-identifier and/or a negative foil worldwide, but within the study of religion, usage of the term has received criticism (Bergunder, 2016b, pp. 34-35). This criticism stresses that "religion" was a European term first, then in a second step it was applied by European traders, missionaries, settlers, and colonial administrators to other contexts. "Religion" was a term of domination (Chidester, 2014). Local terms should be preferred, some scholars stress (Chitando, 1997, pp. 92-93; p'Bitek & Wiredu, 2011, xxiii), and no doubt, local terminology needs to be studied. Yet, if local terms are only studied as exclusively connected to a supposedly local worldview and not in their relation to "religion," the danger occurs that people who use these local terms are treated as isolated islands. Thus, Africans are perceived as ignorant of global discourses, which is yet again similar to colonial perspectives.

Many people worldwide hold on to the term and its translations, or use them to demarcate their practices, the latter of which could not be understood properly, too, if the usage of "religion" was not studied as well. To abandon the term would imply to ignore these globally entangled usages that might or might not concur with European usages. The criticism that the idea that "religion" was invented in Europe and only taken to other contexts afterwards, reifies the idea of a straightforward and homogene-

[1] Jacob K. Olupona (2014) has therefore chosen the plural instead of the singular.

ous European origin. It also implies that there is no usage that can transform and even subvert the "original" usage to the extent that a new understanding emerges. This chapter will unpack both these problems that can be boiled down to history and agency. At the core, it will argue that ATR has its heritage in missionary and colonial knowledge production but that this heritage was adapted and transformed significantly by African intellectuals, using Pan-Africanist and especially esoteric discourses. The chapter introduces the context of West African intellectuals in the late nineteenth century who had gained access to Pan-Africanist and esoteric networks. The ideas common in these networks were strategically used by West African intellectuals to play into missionary anxieties about atheism in order to demand an independent church. Ultimately, the ways in which West African intellectuals used "religion" with a specific focus on African practices show that European and North American discourses on religion were not homogeneous and that these different competing positions made it possible for West Africans to adapt parts of them for their own strategic interests. ATR thus has to be placed in a global religious history to understand how African actors arrived at "religion" and what their understandings and interests were by adopting this term. Does this mean that "everything in Africa is religious"? A binary conception of either exclusive presence or absence of religion will only serve researchers, if either is connected to a preconceived value (e. g. religion= good because it preserves morality; no religion= good because it is progressive and scientific). Rather, the chapter aims to demonstrate the intricacies of debates on "religion" and how West Africans exerted their agency to demarcate their position within it.

The chapter is divided into two main sections, the first of which will discuss the theoretical problem of "religion" as a term and whether it can be used anywhere else but in Europe, and how this debate reflects best in the case study of Ifá, the Yoruba divination practice, seen as the interpreter of Yoruba traditional religion (Ogunleye, 2019). The second section will focus on the example of West African intellectuals in the late nineteenth century who adopted the term but under the impression of Pan-Africanist and esoteric networks. These networks were used to exploit missionary anxieties to negotiate for an independent church, but they also transformed the understanding of certain practices like Ifá. Ultimately, the chapter contends that African Traditional Religion needs to be studied within a global religious history, not apart or outside of it, to understand

the motivations and interests employed by actors today and in the past, like the West African intellectuals, in their usage of the word "religion".

Religion in Comparison

Religion: The Foreign Category?

The first significant critique of the category of "religion" came from the Ugandan philosopher and writer Okot p'Bitek. He contended that religion in Africa had not been studied according to peoples' own beliefs but overwhelmingly in light of European scholarship and Christian theology (p'Bitek, 1980). Following a turn from no religion to animism to religion within early anthropological and missionary writing, African intellectuals like John Mbiti and E. Bolaji Idowu had "robed [African deities] with awkward Hellenic garments" (p'Bitek, 1980, p. 47). Thus, they had contributed to the study of religion in Africa as a foreign category rather than within the context of indigenous thought, p'Bitek argued. The debate about whether "religion" is a local idea or only came to Africa through Christian or Muslim missionaries has bloomed since p'Bitek's critique (Chitando, 1997; Olabimtan, 2003; p'Bitek & Wiredu, 2011). It also resonates with a general controversy in the study of religion. It has become a commonplace to state that religion only fully applies to the "Western" context where it supposedly originated, giving it a "Judeo-Christian" heritage (Bergunder, 2016b, p. 42; Chitando, 1997, pp. 79-80). Against this background, every other context then seems deficient with regard to "religion". The rhetoric of the "Western or Christian prototype" proliferated.

However, religion is a globally relevant category. This fact is neither an inherently good nor bad thing but needs to be properly observed and contextualised. In some African countries, traditional healers have called for the acknowledgement of their practices as a "religion" (Jordaan, 2018). Are these healers victims of a Western prototype? To think that, would reduce their agency significantly. Researchers have pointed out that there are no real equivalents of "religion" or its assumed central concepts in other languages (Chitando, 1997, p. 80; p'Bitek & Wiredu, 2011, xxiii). This is specifically relevant for my context of interest here: the Yoruba of Nigeria, where "religion" was translated with "ẹsin" (worship) or "asa ibìlẹ" (customs of the country) (Peel, 2003, p. 90, 2016, p. 217). But Yoruba people, as well as other Africans, have grown up for some time with other languages which were acquired due to trade and migration, missionary-

taught and/or colonially enforced. English, French and Portuguese have become African languages by the simple fact that they are readily used by Africans – and not just as puppets of their earlier colonial masters but with their own styles, idioms, pronunciation and spelling (Jeyifo, 2017; O'Mahoney, 2019). How then can English be a "Western" language? Yet, the "local" languages should not be disregarded, and I will come back to the problem of translation associated with these languages.

Let us first look closely at the "prototype" rhetoric. The prototype is a critique of the supposed natural universality of religion. Instead of being naturally applicable to all human life, the prototype implies that "religion" was originally formed in a specific context, and ever since, this context serves as the defining factor of the term. In consequence, this means that every usage of the term carries with it this original context, and that the term can never be used in any other way. If "religion" was European, it would imply that it could not be used to meaningfully explain any phenomena in Africa. Yet, that does not seem to be the case: even p'Bitek wrote that "[t]he study of African religions is one important way of understanding African ways of thought" (p'Bitek, 1980, p. 119). Dipesh Chakrabarty described the same dilemma with regards to the "working class" in Marxist Indian thought. India lacked the same economic conditions as nineteenth-century Europe and thus, it was hard, indeed impossible, to identify a working class in India that was not deficient in some ways (Chakrabarty, 2000, pp. 31-32). Yet, the same problem applied to every term in the social sciences in India: Europe as an epistemic regime was "a much more profound theoretical condition" (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 29). But Chakrabarty also pointed out that "*we* [emphasis in the original] find these theories, in spite of their inherent ignorance of 'us,' eminently useful in understanding our society" (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 29). This "usefulness" needs to be considered in more detail because it explicates a paradox at the core of the prototype. The prototype is a comparative category. As we have seen from p'Bitek's critique: "religion" is supposedly applied according to "Western Christian" standards. Yet, its identity as prototype becomes relevant only during or after its application in a "foreign" context. We could also frame the paradox like this: "religion" is "Western," yet this very fact never played a role when it was only applied to "Western" contexts. But by its application elsewhere, the assumption that religion is universal also becomes plausible (Sakai, 2013). It is a universality that has to be performed rather than one that is already given, and the criticism

reveals its origin as a particularity. But that does not diminish the effects of the promise of universality.

The revelation of particularity, if done in a dichotomous way, however, runs into the danger of another supposed universal: the assumption of static culture boundaries. A proper critique of European and North American dominance in knowledge production cannot lead into relativistic notions, declaring African countries the opposite of whatever is regarded as "European" or "Western." This will ultimately end in orientalist ideas of Africans, frozen in time, very similar to the colonial knowledge produced about African people. Instead, to overcome essentializing dichotomies of "religion" – "no religion," "African" – "Western," I suggest following the ways in which "religion" has been appropriated and made useful by African actors. Doing that, I do not imply that religion is naturally universal; however, I also do not take it for granted as statically "foreign." I take it as the global comparative category that it is but taking leave from the act of comparison rather than from its first mention. It is this very act that potentially positions it as a particular ("Western" notion in a "foreign" context) and, at the same time, promises a universality (applicable to more than the context of its first mention). I think the global career of the name "religion" lies in this very promise of universality. I will explain how this way of analysis (focusing on the usage or application of "religion" rather than its supposed origin/first mention) could apply and what it entails, taking the example of Ifá, the divination practice among the Yoruba, and paying specific attention to agency and translation.

Ifá: No Religion at all?

Ifá is a divination practice among the Yoruba people of Nigeria, related to practices in neighbouring countries like Togo and Benin as well as across the Atlantic in the Americas. Practitioners manipulate either a chain of eight halfs of stylized or real *opele* seeds or sixteen separate palm nuts (*ikin*) with a tray of sand (*opon*) to diagnose ills and suggest solutions (Ajala, 2013). Practitioners also need to be well-acquainted with the Ifá corpus which consists of 256 verses. Different verses are applied depending on the formations which the practitioner discerns in the way the *opele* or *ikin* fall and translate to prints in the sand. Yet, most of the scholarship on Ifá focuses on the knowledge exposed by the practitioners through the usage of the totality of these verses, the so-called Ifá corpus (Abimbola, 1977; Adegbindin, 2014; Ajala, 2013; Bascom, 1999 [1969]; Meyer & Bede-Fagbamila, 1997). This knowledge, many claim, is not limited to religion.

Aderemi Sulaiman Ajala called it "an encyclopedia of Yoruba medicine" and "all-encompassing practice" (Ajala, 2013, p. 136). The Yoruba author Wole Soyinka (2008) argued that Ifá demonstrated best the inherent Yoruba capacity for tolerance and modern secularism. Unlike Islam and Christianity, which he claimed were exclusivist "foreign" enterprises, keen to evangelise any "unbeliever", Ifá exposed the indigenous knowledge of the limited human intellect. "Ifá's tenets are governed by a frank acknowledgement of the fact that the definition of Truth is a goal that is constantly sought by humanity, that existence itself is a passage to Ultimate Truth, and that claimants to possession of knowledge are, in fact, the greatest obstacles to the attainment of Truth" (Soyinka, 2008, p. 41). Earlier than that, the spokesperson of the traditional *òrìṣà* religion explained that Ifá was not based on spirit possession as other African religious practices: "Ifá is the only Òrìṣà who does not 'possess' his devotees overtly; instead he can inspire them" (Abimbola, 2003 [1997], p. 26). Newer scholarly literature stresses the philosophical nature of Ifá (Adegbindin, 2014). So generally, Ifá is regarded as more truthful and knowledgeable than Christianity and Islam; it is perceived as rational and learned, as an inspiration rather than a possession. It is also taken as the explanatory lens of Yoruba religious practices and culture in general, oftentimes treated as their mouthpiece, their logic or rationale (Ogunleye, 2019).

What is significantly missing from scholarship on Ifá is a historical perspective. If history is considered, the Ifá corpus is thought to provide the source of that history. Thus, it seems Ifá has no trajectory beyond its own source material, and has not undergone significant transformations, as if what is known of Ifá today, was always known about it. With this chapter, I want to provide a different perspective on what is known today as the outcome of global entanglements, and comparative practices. I will demonstrate in the next section that the conviction that Ifá is a rational, scientific practice, and not only offers religious but complete knowledge, is a position that has a history. I trace it back to the context of West African intellectuals around 1900. In this context, Ifá was compared to esoteric ideas on Kabbalah, and science. It was embedded in the struggle to define religion along non-materialist lines. This leads us back to the usefulness of the category of religion. Religion, as I will show, became a useful signifier to West African intellectuals within Pan-Africanist and esoteric networks due to the advancements in science and the missionary education which excluded them from this up-to-date scholarship of the mid- to late

nineteenth century. "Religion" was useful to counter but also exploit missionary knowledge production and concomitant expectations.

Religion was appropriated in the sense that West African intellectuals used it according to their interests. This leads us to the question of agency. The capacity to act has oftentimes been connected to freedom of choice. However, within feminist and postcolonial scholarship, there was an unease with agency and freedom in this sense. Could only those subjects who acted according to their own choices, uninhibited by any form of domination, be considered agents? In other words, were women who acted within patriarchy or colonial subjects who acted within colonial rule, not agents in their own right? Their answer was a changed perspective of agency as a possibility within power relations, which also had the capacity to transform and subvert these very relations which made it possible to act in the first place (Bhabha, 1984; Butler, 1995). This implied a new perspective on power relations as well. Power was not something permanent or static but instead it relied on performance and repetition (Butler, 1993, p. 9). In the same sense, "religion" as a name came from a European context but the promise of universality, which made it powerful as part of the colonial lexicon, could only be fulfilled if it could be applied meaningfully elsewhere. Yet, every application, especially when it came through the actions of colonial subjects, carried the possibility of slightly changing what "religion" implied according to their own interests. Yes, agency in this sense may be almost invisible and might be seen as just another repetition of European knowledge, if we do not look closely at the diverging interests and possible subversion strategies.

A similar danger of invisibility applies to translation as a realm of agency. Translation is often seen as the simple act of equating word A with word B because, according to context A, word A carries connotations that match the connotations of context B for word B as closely as possible. As Lydia Liu has shown for the Chinese translation strategies in the nineteenth century, exchanges from one language into another do not work according to simple and objective matching. Rather, translation is a contested realm where a once-made match relies on later affirmations for the initial equation of words to work, or in other words: for the equation to fulfil its promise (Liu, 1995, p. 26). Translation thus comes into view as a processual but non-linear practice, reacting upon, subverting, and transforming earlier translatory matches within new contexts (Hermann, 2016, p. 104). Translation also becomes akin to comparison, relying on the power of repetition. So, if we talk about Ifá as "religious," "more than religious" or even

"non-religious," we could frame it as a matter of contested translation which plays out over time and within different social, political and historical contexts, rather than just a matter of colonial versus indigenous knowledge. The possibility of contestation and transformation implies that there are possibilities to act and subvert within relations of priorly established power. In the next section, we will apply this possibility to the context of West African intellectuals around 1900, using Pan-Africanist and esoteric networks to re-negotiate "religion".

Context: West African Intellectuals in the Late Nineteenth Century

Before discussing the sources in greater detail, a bit more needs to be said about the context of West African intellectuals in the late nineteenth century. How did they become part of Pan-Africanist and esoteric-occultist networks? Most of these intellectuals along the West African coast were Christian by the late nineteenth century. They had gone through the missionary education system. John Augustus Abayomi Cole, who is credited with having delivered the lectures we want to focus on, was sponsored to attend the Church Missionary School in Lagos (Okonkwo, 1985, p. 60). In the late 1870s, he relocated to Freetown, Sierra Leone and became a teacher in missionary schools. He was also seemingly affiliated with Fourah Bay College and graduated in 1881, though he was never officially registered as a student (Bos, 2022, p. 71). Yet, he seems to have known what was taught there. This gives a good impression of how influential missionary education was: a smaller percentage attended higher institutions directly, but the knowledge seemed to travel.

Even though these intellectuals were missionary-educated, increasingly, they found themselves at odds with the missionary leadership. In the mid-1880s, Abayomi Cole became a missionary for the US-American *United Brethren of Christ* and worked in the interior of Sierra Leone. He was invited to travel to the United States, probably by his missionary society. Yet, at his arrival, he was ordained into the *Wesleyan Methodist Church*. Back again in Sierra Leone in the late 1880s, he started open-air camp meetings, which caused a scandal and finally led him to resign from the Wesleyan Methodist Church (Okonkwo, 1985, p. 65). This resignation also has to be contextualised with other West African intellectuals becoming very critical of the missionary societies. In the early 1890s, a number of African mis-

sionaries were suspended from the higher ranks of the Church Missionary Society in Nigeria (Lynch, 1965, p. 383). They demanded a "native church," which entailed an indigenous leadership. This cause for the "native church" was probably the reason why Abayomi Cole's lectures were given so much attention in the first place. The *Lagos Standard*, where they were printed, was founded by the Sierra Leonean George Alfred Williams around 1890 and was in print until 1920 (Mogase & Ludwig, 2016, p. 237). Williams was a strong advocate of the "native church" cause, co-founding the *United Native African Church* and having his newspaper report a lot on independent churches that were founded from the 1890s on.

The criticism that was employed by these intellectuals took cues from Pan-Africanist networks that were established in the late nineteenth century. One of the central figures was Edward Wilmot Blyden who was a mentor to many West African intellectuals at the time but specifically to Abayomi Cole. Born in the West Indies, Blyden relocated to Liberia in the 1850s, where he held educational and later government positions. In the 1870s and 1880s, he was very present in Sierra Leone and Nigeria and tried to encourage educated West Africans to emigrate to Liberia as well (Lynch, 1965, p. 376). Increasingly, Blyden argued that there was an African identity binding the fate of many different peoples together. In 1884, he urged that Sierra Leone and Liberia were "two peoples [... but] one in origin and one in destiny" (Lynch, 1965, p. 376). Blyden was also a role model when it came to gaining entrance into global (especially British) intellectual society. In the late 1870s, he became a member of the *Athenaeum Club of London* (Odamtten, 2019, p. 28), a club with high society members the likes of Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Charles Dickens and Edward Bulwer-Lytton. He also exchanged letters with W. E. B. DuBois, the African-American intellectual, founded journals, and published in many British, American as well as West African outlets where he often argued from a decidedly "African standpoint" (Odamtten, 2019, p. 32). These activities earned him the title of a "foundational figure for Pan-Africanism" (Jaji, 2018, p. 130).

Through Blyden and his Pan-Africanist networks, West African intellectuals like Abayomi Cole made contact with two prominent and intertwined topics: science and esotericism. In the late 1880s, Abayomi Cole made the acquaintance of other African-American missionaries working in Liberia. The African-American missionary Alexander Crummell, who was also interested in intellectual exchange, co-founded the Athenaeum Club of Monrovia, Liberia, with Blyden. Crummell introduced Abayomi

Cole to the botanist Job Bicknell Ellis. Abayomi Cole also spent six weeks in England studying medicinal plants and roots from Africa with British scientists (Okonkwo, 1985, p. 64). These were probably some of Blyden's intellectual connections as well. Abayomi Cole's specific interest in science was most likely driven by its absence in the missionary curriculum, a fact that West African intellectuals bemoaned from the late 1870s on (Paracka, 2003, p. 42). This search for science was a definite break with the missionary heritage. However, as we will see, its implementation by West African intellectuals had much to do with missionary anxieties over atheism.

The second topic West African intellectuals became interested in was esotericism. In parts, this was prepared by Blyden as well. Blyden wanted to reconcile Islam, Christianity, and traditional practices in order to find the practices most adequate to the "African Personality"; and for this aim, he seemed to favour Emanuel Swedenborg's works, especially in the interpretation of the *Swedenborg Society* and the *Swedenborgian New Church of Jerusalem* (Blyden, 1892a, 1892b). The Swedenborgian New Church missionaries were very active in Liberia and were perceived as allies of the Pan-Africanist cause by Blyden and others as they were abolitionists. The Swedenborgian New Church as well as the Swedenborg Society, propagated Swedenborg as an early egalitarian thinker, open to the idea of a divine presence in all cultures and religions. Blyden took up this train of thought (Blyden, 1892a, 1892b). This means Abayomi Cole would have likely had access to the networks of the Swedenborg Society as well. Swedenborgians like James John Garth Wilkinson, a medical practitioner, also shared Abayomi Cole's interest in herbal medicine (Bos, 2022, p. 73; Denham, 2013, p. 108; Okonkwo, 1985, p. 64).

Abayomi Cole himself also discovered the work of the English Indologist Friedrich Max Müller, probably the famous *Sacred Books of the East* (1879-1910) (Bos, 2022, p. 74). Both – Max Müller and Swedenborg – were a staple within theosophical works, whom a lot of British scientists at the time were also interested in (Frenschkowski, 2021). It is thus a logical suspicion that Abayomi Cole would have been alerted to Max Müller's work and theosophical texts through the intellectual British circles he had gained entrance to. In 1897, Abayomi Cole founded the *Astrological Society Sierra Leone*, also known as the Quabalistic Order West Africa, which was affiliated with the *Astrological Society London* under the leadership of the Theosophist Alan Leo (Bos, 2022, p. 75). The following year, he travelled

to England again to deliver a lecture titled "Astrological Geomancy in Africa" in front of the Astrological Society London. In this lecture, Abayomi Cole also called himself a Theosophist and quoted at length from the German Theosophist, Rosicrucian and medical doctor Franz Hartmann's work *Principles of Astrological Geomancy* (1889) (Bos, 2022, p. 78). Abayomi Cole probably got to know Hartmann through Charles Carleton Massey, who translated Hartmann's works into English. Massey was also the founder of the British chapter of the *Theosophical Society* and co-founder of the *Society for Psychical Research* (SPR). It seems no accident that Abayomi Cole founded the *West African Psychical Institute, Yoruba Branch*, in 1901, an act, of which his inaugural lecture was printed in the Lagos Standard as well ("The West African Psychical Institute Yoruba Branch," 1901). The SPR in England was to investigate, "prove or disprove" spiritualist practices and claims, and Abayomi Cole's institute (also called lodge) clearly subscribed to this aim as well, wanting to explore and make good use of supernatural abilities. As I will show, another important influence might have been the Freemason, Rosicrucian and Occultist Samuel Liddell Macgregor Mathers who also had ties to the Theosophical Society in the late 1880s. He was well-known for his translations of Kabbalistic works into English.

Even though Abayomi Cole was probably a bit more eccentric than many of his peers, from the attendance reported of his lectures, we can deduce that his convictions were not singular by a stretch. His lectures of 1900 in Lagos, Nigeria were well-attended by "Bishops, Members of Council, Clergymen of different denominations, Merchants, Traders, Government Officials, Professionals, Educationists, Writing Clerks, Workmen and several Ladies" ("Professor Abayomi Cole's Last Lecture," 1900). Mentioned by name were many who were known to be actively involved in matters of the "native church" or campaigning for self-governance against the British. His initial three lectures were deemed so relevant that the newspaper even reported on the question-and-answer session after the third lecture. The Lagos Standard also dedicated an extra article for the detailed presentation of the replies given by Abayomi Cole to the questions posed by the interested audience ("Question and Reply on Professor Abayomi Cole's Last Lecture," 1901). In April 1901, the newspaper also quoted from his inaugural speech for the West African Psychical Institute, Yoruba Branch at length ("The West African Psychical Institute Yoruba Branch," 1901). In the next section, I will explain how Abayomi Cole adapted "religion"

from these Pan-Africanist and esoteric networks, how he re-conceptualized Ifá and how his arguments can be contextualized as strategic, even in the context of European missionary dominance.

"Religion" between Esoteric and Pan-Africanist Networks

Religion and Science: Playing into Missionary Anxieties

The first important aspect of religion for Abayomi Cole and his peers was its compatibility and congruency with science. This understanding of religion and science was specifically promoted in esoteric circles. For West African intellectuals, it served to feed into the anxieties of the European missionaries against atheism, but its plausibility also came from missionary anti-esoteric writings drawing connections between esotericism and African practices. However, Abayomi Cole and his peers also pushed back against missionary "misunderstanding" of African practices, especially with regard to science.

In his first lecture in late 1900, Abayomi Cole criticises missionaries for misjudging and condemning "All African institutions" ("Professor Abayomi Cole's First Lecture," 1900). Contrarily, these institutions should be understood as the "Ancient Sciences of our fathers, [which,] however corrupted and buried in superstition[, are] a source of new life and inspiration to the race possessing it." Exploring the scientific status of practices like "Sigidi, Fange, Kofong and kindred Black Arts", Abayomi Cole states that they function in accordance with "natural laws". He explains that these laws all work under "the Odic Force or Organic Electricity", also called animal magnetism. This force "pervades all space, all animated beings, and can be controlled or directed by the will." With this approach to science and natural laws, he rejects mere empiricism and materialism, saying that "we have to transcend the stereotyped empirical knowledge prescribed by the modern schools and colleges." In the inaugural lecture of the Psychical Institute of early 1901, he goes on to state that science and religion are not opposites. "True science" and "true religion" are divinely intended to be one and the same. Once materialism is rejected, they will be "once more re-united, greeting each other as handmaids and servants of the Indivisible Creator" ("The West African Psychical Institute Yoruba Branch," 1900).

The reference to animal magnetism is quite revealing in the late nineteenth century. Animal magnetism was a theory developed by Franz Mesmer that peaked in popularity around the 1840s and 1850s. Yet, by the end of the nineteenth century, its reception was almost exclusively limited to esoteric or, more specific theosophical circles. The Theosophical Society's founder, Helena Blavatsky, saw in animal magnetism the underlying mechanism to explain all kinds of miracles (Blavatsky, 1877, p. 130). The physician Frantz Hartmann explained in his *Occult Science in Medicine* that if physicians were open to more than the physical, they could learn about "the activity of life itself, in a higher form" and employ "living power" (Hartmann, 1893, p. 77). Among the sources of living power, Hartmann counted animal magnetism, which, once taken seriously, would serve to bridge the widening gap between science and religion. The ongoing reference to animal magnetism functioned as a critique of the materialist debates that started in the mid-nineteenth century. Both Blavatsky and Hartmann claimed that religion and science needed to be saved from mere materialism as, to them, it heralded the decay of knowledge. Blavatsky accredited materialism with humanity's descent into "mere animal existence" (Blavatsky, 1877, x). Both also understood their anti-materialist endeavour as a search for truth. Hartmann wrote:

> "Neither can the materialist who denies the existence of Spirit in the universe have any real knowledge, for he ignores that which alone is real and deals only with the relations existing between phenomena which the unknown spirit produces. Real knowledge such as this [...] constitutes that *Theosophia or Self-recognition of Truth*." (Hartmann, 1893, p. 100)

In a similar vein, Abayomi Cole calls for a radical search for truth by "pious, learned and independent Negroes" ("Professor Abayomi Cole's Second Lecture," 1900).

Even though this particular understanding of science and religion as one, and the preference for animal magnetism, was clearly esoteric by the end of the nineteenth century, it cannot be underestimated how many intellectuals, even at that time, were still in the esoteric orbit and at least, knew the arguments of Theosophists. So, it should come as no surprise that they were employed by West African intellectuals, who, following Blyden, sought entrance to British intellectual circles. It was also not only West Africans who were involved in the debates on religion and science by the end of the nineteenth century. As scholarship has shown (Bergunder, 2016a, 2020; Strube, 2016, 2022; Strube & Krämer, 2020), these were truly global debates.

Why were these theosophical arguments attractive to West African intellectuals? One listener, a member of the clergy, might give us a hint. After the last lecture in 1900, he was credited with praising the three-part lecture series by Abayomi Cole for having been "highly scientific and philosophical yet [...] remarkably permeated with a Christian tone" ("Professor Abayomi Cole's Last Lecture," 1900). It was praiseworthy, he stated, specifically because scientists were in danger of "running to Atheism". The reference to atheism is quite revealing in this context. It was a common "boogeyman" in England (Franklin, 2018, p. 7). More voices warned against its dangers than confessions in its favour were made. Particularly scared were the Evangelicals who saw scientific materialism as the road to atheism (Noll, 1999, p. 108). Evangelicals made up a significant portion of missionaries in West Africa. However, this opposition to science had also only developed over the course of the nineteenth century. Around the mid-nineteenth century, it was still possible to conceive of a positive view of science, some seeing "Religion [as] the nourishing Mother of Science" (Farrelly, 2008, p. 668). Religion and science were perceived as complementary and had to be – theologically, the idea of a god detached from the world and its natural laws was unimaginable to evangelicals. God was conceived as "the author of both" religion and science (Farrelly, 2008, p. 669). Known in West African newspapers was also the Anglican cleric Frederic Farrar's work who had argued in the 1860s that the new scientific discoveries were in fact part of god's revelations (Farrar, 1868, p. 618; Johnson, 1905). Thus, 'older' Evangelical perceptions of the complementarity of science and religion under divine rule were still very popular in West Africa around 1900.

This was also due to the ongoing relevance of teaching materials produced at the beginning of the nineteenth century. One of these texts was Thomas Hartwell Horne's *Compendious Introduction to the Study of the Bible,* which seemed to still be in use in Fourah Bay College in the 1870s (Paracka, 2003, p. 42). In this book, Horne argued against critics of divine inspiration of the bible. Divine inspiration was "both reasonable and necessary" (Horne, 1827, p. 30), as issues told in the bible included things the writers could not have known. This specific argument is reminiscent of Scottish common-sense realism, which was introduced to the evangelical movement through figures like John Witherspoon and Thomas Chalmers. Chalmers was inspired by John Beattie, who argued that reason ultimately relied on common sense and intuition to arrive at truths that were self-

evident (Rice, 1971, p. 29). In this sense, nature could not oppose common-sense insights. This philosophical reasoning came to be the standard in the Evangelical movement in the early nineteenth century and, through its writing, was preserved in West Africa beyond that time.

This is not to say that every West African intellectual by the end of the nineteenth century also subscribed to the fear of atheism due to science. Some seemed to await the scientific revolution eagerly. A contemporary wrote that "Christian Agnosticism [would become] the order of the day" in Africa due to scientific progress (A Christian Agnostic, 1899). It shows that Abayomi Cole and his peers could in fact take different positions on the matter of science and religion. Some tended more towards materialist science, others swayed in the direction of esoteric and, in fact, earlier Evangelical convictions of necessary compatibility. However, they definitely shared a critique of missionary leadership. Feeding into the scare of atheism, Rev. James Johnson of the Church Missionary Society made a speech in 1899 reminding his audience that European Christianity was in decline and if the same should not happen to West African Christianity, "this Church [is in need of] expanding itself, [...] governing itself" (Johnson, 1899). Another writer called "Theophile" praised "the manly courage exhibited at present by the intelligent natives of this Colony to combat the false and hypocritical position in which the African finds himself placed by the white man, politically, socially and religiously" (Theophile, 1900).

Yet, while the critique of missionary leadership and misrepresentation was widespread, missionary writing was also hegemonic in the sense that it was ever present and constituted knowledge of African practices. The comparison of esotericism and African practices was introduced in missionary texts. Missionaries compared African practices with esotericism, most likely as a criticism of esoteric convictions that were widespread in Europe at the time. By comparison, missionaries implied that esotericism was less civilised than the Christian religion, akin to "paganism". An example was Reverend P. Baudin's account (Baudin, 1885), first published in French and quickly translated into English and German. This work would have been well known in West African intellectual circles, even only by its reception, for example, through the English colonial officer A.B. Ellis (1966), whose work is cited explicitly in Abayomi Cole's lectures ("Professor Abayomi Cole's Last Lecture," 1900). Baudin made comparisons between African practices and esotericism, for example, in his descriptions of "fetish-priests": "They believe in spirits, and are strengthened in this belief by the practices of magnetism and spiritualism" (Baudin, 1885,

p. 80). This might have served as a negative foil for Abayomi Cole, since Baudin outright rejected fetishism as a confusing mixture of spiritualism and materialism, as a "complete perversion of religion" (Baudin, 1885, p. 103). This might have influenced the way in which Abayomi Cole argued against both spiritualism and materialism, however, by employing theosophical arguments of religion and science's congruency. Theosophists like Hartmann sought "scientific" explanations for spiritualist practices, thereby criticising as well as demarcating the proper practices from "black magic" (connected to animal sacrifices) (Hartmann, 1904 [1890], pp. 97-98). Arguments similar to those made by Abayomi Cole, favouring a "scientific" understanding of traditional practices against missionary accounts such as "fetishism" and "black magic", were also popular among intellectuals in Asia (Strube, 2022). Theosophical adaptations were thus shared globally.

Kabbalah and Ifá: Negotiating a Comparison

There is another aspect where Pan-Africanist and esoteric networks had the effect of comparative practice on West African intellectuals. To grasp this aspect, we need to zoom in on Ifá which today is regarded as the Yoruba divinatory system akin to the status of all-compassing philosophy, religion and healing. As discussed in the beginning, Ifá is seen as a practice that cannot be properly confined to the realm of religion, especially when compared to Christianity and Islam. It is demarcated from the possession practices common in the veneration of other traditional *òrìṣà* shrines and positioned as a "learned tradition". Taking the example of one of the lecture transcripts, precisely the one titled "Ifá viewed theologically, mythologically and scientifically," I will analyse how Abayomi Cole drew on occultist writing to centre Ifá around a negative theology, to rationalise it vis-à-vis an irrational European Christianity, and to declare it fit to serve for continuation in indigenous (missionary-independent) Christianity, different from its European (irrational) counterpart. This happened in the face of missionary and early anthropological writing, which dealt with Ifá in a demeaning manner. Thus, Abayomi Cole and his peers prepared the way for later students of Ifá to broaden its claims as learned tradition and even philosophy.

In the lecture given in late 1900, Abayomi Cole first declared Ifá "the Divine manifestation of Omnisciency and Omnipotency" ("Professor Abayomi Cole's Second Lecture," 1900), even though Ifá is not the highest Yoruba deity. This argument is followed by a series of comparisons of the

"16 figures or Odu of Ifa Divination". To him, they are similar to "the Geomantic figures of Eastern Nations" as well as "Tarrot [sic] and the Zephan Yetzirah [sic]." Then he goes into a longer discussion of Kabbalah and Ifá. Before we dive into the details of this discussion, let us hold on a minute and think about how this comparison came to be.

Even though the practices mentioned by Abayomi Cole can, from today's perspective, probably all be summed up under the term "divination," Ifá today is also claimed to be culturally distinct and tied closely to the "Yoruba worldview." How did it lend itself to this comparison? As hinted at above, we have to consider the strategies of comparison employed in missionary and early anthropological writing to understand how this comparison became plausible and how it was amended to form a counterstrategy. Baudin, again, paints it in the strongest colours, accrediting even human sacrifices to the possible recommendations given by Ifá (Baudin, 1885, p. 87). He, as well as Ellis, stress that the practice of Ifá is "lucrative" (Ellis, 1966, p. 57). Baudin also writes that it is "very similar to playing-cards used by fortune-tellers" and that the practitioners accredit "at will good or bad fortune according [sic] as they deem it expedient to better dupe the fool who comes to consult them" (Baudin, 1885, p. 35). Ellis agrees that its "chief function is to foretell the future" (Ellis, 1966, p. 87). On a less demeaning note, they both also agree that it is 16 palm nuts or figures that are employed by the Ifá practitioner (Baudin, 1885, p. 35; Ellis, 1966, p. 155). As explained above, Baudin also sees a continuity between spiritualism and "fetishism", which probably led to a theosophical re-framing by Abayomi Cole. The missionary and early anthropological usage of the category of "divination" helped to broaden the implicit comparison and drive it into a slightly different direction. The 16 palm nuts were also carried over by Abayomi Cole – even though this piece of information has been criticised as not authentic within today's practice (Bos, 2022, p. 78). We will come back to this critique.

The implicit comparison as "divination" was really made explicit with the mention of Geomancy, Tarot and the Sefer Yetzirah (*Book of Creation* in Kabbalah tradition). Dated to the late nineteenth century, this combination hints at the reception of esoteric-occultist works. Kabbalah was mentioned in Blavatsky's work. She thought that its Jewish configuration was a corruption of Eastern ancient practice (Huss, 2021, p. 107). Even though the academic study of Jewish Kabbalah dismissed many esoteric adaptations of Kabbalah as "pseudo-Kabbalah" (Huss, 2021, p. 109), alongside

Jewish scholars, Occultists also started to study the source material of Kabbalah more closely towards the end of the nineteenth century. One of the founding figures of Occultism, Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers (1854-1918), had just published an edited volume of English translations of Christian Kabbalist Knorr von Rosenroth as well as other Kabbalist source material in 1887, which he had titled *Kabbalah Unveiled*. Reading MacGregor Mathers next to Abayomi Cole's lecture makes it very plausible that Abayomi Cole might have had knowledge of this book. We can show this in a paragraph which follows his explanation of the "Oduso", one of the palm nuts of the oracle, which is not actively used in the divination process as it "is regarded too sacred to be employed." On the left is the next section in Abayomi Cole's lecture, and on the right are paragraphs from Macgregor Mathers' introduction of *Kabbalah Unveiled*:

"It represents the first point of the Sephiroth. It is Keither, the Crown; the 'Formless Form', the 'Ancient of Days', the 'Concealed of the Concealed'. ... Learn a lesson O you Divines who have limited the unlimited, circumscribed the Absolute, and reduced God to the level of your materialistic anthropomorphism. ... The Guide of knowledge is above knowledge and therefore cannot be investigated by knowledge."	"If we think about it more deeply, we shall see that such must be the primal forms of the unknowable and nameless One, whom we, in the more manifest form speak of as God. He is the Absolute. But how define the Absolute? Even as we define it, it slips from our grasp, for it ceases when defined to be the Absolute. ... 'What God is in Himself it is not given to man to know. God is the absolute of faith; existence is the absolute of reason, existence exists by itself, and because it exists.'" (MacGregor Mathers, 1887, pp. 16-17) "Kether, the Crown, the First Sephira, ... of the hidden Sephirot... 'The Concealed of the Concealed,' 'The Ancient of the Ancient Ones'..." (MacGregor Mathers, 1887, pp. 20-22)

The first two paragraphs cited from *Kabbalah Unveiled* establish that one of the core ideas in Kabbalist thought is the negative existence of the divine or the "unknowable and nameless One". This idea is necessary, as Macgregor Mathers explains by citing Eliphas Levi, to avoid "idolatry" which Kabbalists "have a horror" of (MacGregor Mathers, 1887, p. 17). Even though Abayomi Cole seemingly does not go into the details of negative existence thought, he definitely employs the idea to establish Ifá as a non-materialistic and rational practice as well as decontextualizing, absolutizing, and thereby universalizing God in the same instance. He states: "Jehovah has no form. He has no name. He belongs to no nation. He cannot be reduced to creed, nor exponded [sic] into dogmas, for he is above and beyond all." ("Professor Abayomi Cole's Second Lecture," 1900) The strategy in this becomes even clearer when he lashes out against a personified "Anglo-Saxon idea of God". He takes this image from a poems collection by the US-American writer Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. He states that all these personifications are unnecessary in his own West African context. This leads him to say that religion always rests on "psychological" peculiarities and these peculiarities may be taken to higher stages of advancement but cannot be totally done away with. Thus, he comes back to Ifá, which he announces, in its current state, is "a corruption of the Ancient Religion and Astrology." According to him, Ifá has been corrupted by people who pretend to know it but in fact do not, thereby accounting for the way in which Baudin and Ellis had painted the Ifá practice. But – says Abayomi Cole – with the help of the missionary, Ifá can be purified to its original form, so that West Africans "find original pegs to hang the True Religion on." By true religion, as shown above, he means religion that is not differentiated from science and thus free from materialist notions. This is demonstrated again when he equates a purified Ifá with "the science of Astronomy" as well, combining it with "prognostications of coming events in relation to the Colony of Lagos." He concludes the lecture by assuring his audience that it is not an anti-Christian stance but an anti-European: "It is the spurious imitation that we decry, not the original." Christianity, at its core, is not foreign to West Africans if it is not mistaken for what he deems the European 'imitation' of Christianity. He ends the lecture with an appeal to his peers to rise up in search of truth and in obligation to their own conscience alone: "We have escaped physical thraldom and thus blow must be struck against spiritual Slavery."

Recently, Abayomi Cole has been rediscovered. However, what has been pointed out is that his own conceptualization of Ifá has nothing to do with

what is considered its authentic practice today. Among others, Bos noted that "there is no astrological component to modern *ifá*" (Bos, 2022, p. 78). But we have seen that this came in through the missionary and anthropological reports, which dismissed it as "fortune-telling". Bos also admitted that this might be due to the missing codification of Ifá that would only set in later and favour the knowledge of verses (Bascom, 1941, 1999 [1969]) rather than ideas of symbolic figures and occultist knowledge. He knew the practice from the hybrid setting of Freetown, Sierra Leone. But it would be hasty to dismiss Abayomi Cole's accounts as having no impact on later conceptions of Ifá. He had been rediscovered in the 1960s, just as the very codification of Ifá verses set in anew. Fela Sowande quoted him in his booklet Ifá (Sowande, 1964). Notably, this booklet contains the transcription of Ifá verses and, at the same time, positions Ifá in a way that sounds very similar to Abayomi Cole. He called Ifá "a System [...] not exclusively Religion, not exclusively Philosophy, not exclusively History, or Divination, or Natural Science, or Medical Therapeutics, but embrac[ing] all these and more" (Sowande, 1964, p. 6). Even though Abayomi Cole seemed forgotten, the effects of his comparison of Ifá and Kabbalah clearly lived on, giving credence to the idea that Ifá did not have to be one thing alone but could really bring together religion and science as all-encompassing knowledge (see Ajala, 2013, p. 136). His argument of the sacred palm nut and the negative existence of God might not have been employed directly again but the claims about the learned and inspirational nature of Ifá, its tolerant truth-seeking vis-à-vis narrow exclusivist beliefs can be traced back to the re-negotiation of a demeaning comparison with mere materialistically oriented "fortune-telling" and "card-playing".

In a way, the argument that Abayomi Cole's conceptualization of Ifá is odd and has supposedly nothing to do with authentic Ifá is somewhat similar to the debate about Kabbalah. Boaz Huss has shown that Kabbalists, especially following Gershom Scholem, have disowned the way in which Occultists like MacGregor Mathers have drawn on the Kabbalah. The "real" Kabbalah, according to them, has nothing to do with Occultist Kabbalah (Huss, 2021, p. 109). However, Occultists have left a significant impact on Kabbalah, Huss argued. Jewish Kabbalists knew occultist works on Kabbalah and commented on them, not only in negative ways. In addition, the idea that Kabbalah was a perennial, universal doctrine appealed to Jewish Kabbalists as well (Huss, 2021, p. 115). They also happily adopted the terms that the occultists used, identifying Kabbalah as "theosophy" and "mysticism." Thus, they continued along the lines of the

comparison established by the occultists. This is very similar to Ifá and African traditional religion, I argue. Even though esoteric sources are not acknowledged, and sometimes even heavily disowned as a foreign influence (Abimbola, 2003 [1997]), in the scholarship on Ifá, researchers continue to use terms that gained traction in the late nineteenth century in esoteric-occultist circles: terms like "divination", "science", "religion", "knowledge" etc. Many of them are still in use today to defend how traditional African practices are religious, and not just religious, but relevant to all matters of African life.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued that even though ATR and specifically the term "religion" may carry a missionary and colonial heritage, it has become useful to Africans. A critique of the term needs to include an analysis of the said usefulness. The very condition that a "foreign" term and its translations can become useful to Africans implies that its scope is not inherently limited to a certain geographical, cultural, epistemological, or ontological space. Its first mention was European, but it was not inherently limited in its applicability to Europe. This has to do with the promise of universality that was only made plausible by the application of "religion" elsewhere by comparison. As shown in the chapter, West African intellectuals made good use of that promise. Abayomi Cole, for example, argued that Christianity had to be differentiated from its "European imitation," implying that Europeans did not have ownership of what he considered the "true religion." So, the comparison first introduced by missionaries to slight Africans and declare them somewhat capable of civilization but not quite, was turned on its head. To Abayomi Cole, Ifá was also the proof that West Africans were among the few who had a good access to the "true religion" because Ifá employed a negative theology through its sacred unused palm nut analogous to Kabbalist thought. This re-negotiation of identity was made possible by the connections which missionary writing had already hinted at, that indigenous religion was esoteric. West Africans fulfilled these connections and thereby positioned themselves in a way that exploited missionary anxieties but also made them look better according to missionary standards. They tapped into Pan-Africanist and esoteric networks to demand a church led by their own peers, with some intellectuals founding their own churches. Their efforts might not have been effective in the sense that the missionary enterprise stopped right away, but

the chapter has demonstrated that in terms of the domestication and adaptation of "religion," their efforts cannot be overlooked. Their examples clearly show that even positions declaring themselves locally founded and idiosyncratically based on "indigenous philosophy" like Ifá, are connected in a global religious history.

REFERENCES

A Christian Agnostic (1899, October 4). The Warfare of Science and Theology or: Agnosticism and Christianity Examined in a Nutshell. *Lagos Standard*.

Abimbola, W. (1977). *Ifa Divination Poetry*. New York: NOK Publishers.

Abimbola, W. (2003 [1997]). *Ifá Will Mend our Broken World: Thoughts on Yoruba Religion and Culture in Africa and the Diaspora*. Interviews with an Introduction by Ivor Miller (2nd ed., reprinted). Roxbury, Massachusetts: Aim Books.

Adegbindin, O. (2014). *Ifá in Yorùbá Thought System*. Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press.

Ajala, A.S. (2013). Ifa Divination: A Diagnostic and Therapeutic Device in the Yoruba Healing System. In van Beek, Walter E.A. & P.M. Peek (Eds.), *Reviewing Reality: Dynamics of African divination*, 115-138. Zürich, Berlin: LIT.

Bascom, W. (1941). The Sanctions of Ifa Divination. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland 71*(1/2), 43-54.

Bascom, W. (1999 [1969]). *Ifa Divination: Communication between Gods and Men in West Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Baudin, R.P. (1885). *Fetichism and Fetich Worshippers*. Translated by Miss M. McMahon. New York, Cincinnati, St. Louis: Benzigee Brothers.

Bergunder, M. (2016a). 'Religion' and 'Science' within a Global Religious History. *Aries 16*, 86-141.

Bergunder, M. (2016b). Comparison in the Maelstrom of Historicity: A Postcolonial Perspective on Comparative Religion. In P. Schmidt-Leukel & A. Nehring (Eds.), *Interreligious Comparisons in Religious Studies and Theology*, 34-52. London, New York: Bloomsbury.

Bergunder, M. (2020). Umkämpfte Historisierung: Die Zwillingsgeburt von "Religion" und "Esoterik" in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts und das Programm einer globalen Religionsgeschichte. In K. Hock (Ed.), *Wissen um Religion: Erkenntnis - Interesse: Epistemologie und Episteme in Religionswissenschaft und Interkultureller Theologie*, 47-132. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt.

Bhabha, H. (1984). Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse. *Discipleship* 28, 125-133.

Blavatsky, H.P. (1877). *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*. New York, London: J.W. Bouton; Bernard Quaritch.

Blyden, E.W. (1892a, August 6). Swedenborg and the African. *Sierra Leone Weekly News*.

Blyden, E.W. (1892b, August 13). Swedenborg and the African. *Sierra Leone Weekly News*.

Bos, C. (2022). John Augustus Abayomi Cole and the Search for an African Science, 1885–1898. *Isis 113*(1), 63-84. https://doi.org/10.1086/718388.

Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York, London: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1995). For a Careful Reading. In S. Benhabib, J. Butler, D. Cornell, & N. Fraser (Eds.), *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange. Introduction by Linda Nicholson,* 127-143. New York, NY: Routledge.

Chakrabarty, D. (2000). *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Chidester, D. (2014). *Empire of Religion: Imperialism and Comparative Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Chitando, E. (1997). A Curse of the Western Heritage? Imagining Religion in an African Context. *Journal for the Study of Religion 10*(2), 75-98.

Denham, A.M. (2013). *Herbal Medicine in Nineteenth Century England: The Career of John Skelton* (Master's thesis). University of York, York.

Ellis, A.B. (1966). *Yoruba Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa: Their Religion, Manners, Customs, Laws, Language etc*. Photomechanic reprint of the edition of 1894: Oosterhout N.B.

Farrar, F.W. (1868). The Attitude of the Clergy towards Science. *The Contemporary Review 9*, 600-620.

Farrelly, M.J. (2008). "God Is the Author of Both": Science, Religion, and the Intellectualization of American Methodism. *Church History 77*(3), 659-687.

Franklin, J.J. (2018). *Spirit Matters: Occult Beliefs, Alternative Religions and the Crisis of Faith in Victorian Britain*. Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press.

Frenschkowski, M. (2021). The Science of Religion, Folklore Studies, and the Occult Field in Great Britain (1870–1914): Some Observations on Competition and Cain-Abel Conflicts. In Y. Mühlematter & H. Zander (Eds.), *Occult Roots of Religious Studies,* 44-81. De Gruyter.

Hartmann, F. (1893). *The Occult Science in Medicine*. London, New York, Adyar: Theosophical Publishing Society.

Hartmann, F. (1904 [1890]). *Magic, White and Black: The Science of Finite and Infinite Life* (8th ed.): John W. Lovell; Theosophical Society.

Hermann, A. (2016). Distinctions of Religion: The Search for Equivalents of 'Religion' and the Challenge of Theorizing a 'Global Discourse of Religion'. In F. Wijsen & K. v. Stuckrad (Eds.), *Supplements to Method & Theory in the Study of Religion: v.4. Making Religion: Theory and Practice in the Discursive Study of Religion,* 97-124. Leiden, Boston: Brill.

Horne, T.H. (1827). *A Compendious Introduction to the Study of the Bible* (2nd ed.). London: T. Caddell.

Huss, B. (2021). Academic Study of Kabbalah and Occultist Kabbalah. In Y. Mühlematter & H. Zander (Eds.), *Occult Roots of Religious Studies*, 104-131. De Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110664270-005.

Jaji, T. (2018). Pan-Africanism. In E.R. Edwards, R.A. Ferguson, & J.O.G. Ogbar (Eds.), *Keywords for African American Studies,* 129-133. New York: New York University Press.

Jeyifo, B. (2017). English is an African language – Ka Dupe! [for and against Ngũgĩ]. *Journal of African Cultural Studies 30*(2), 133-147. https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2016.1264295.

Johnson, E.T. (1905, February 15). An Open Letter to Mr Atundaolu. *Lagos Standard*.

Johnson, J. (1899, June 21). On the Christian Church in West Africa. *Lagos Standard*.

Jordaan, N. (2018). 'Treat us like a religion' - traditional healers demand greater rights. Retrieved from https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2018-09-21-treat-us-like-a-religion-traditional-healers-demand-greater-rights/.

Liu, L.H. (1995). *Translingual practice: Literature, national culture, and translated modernity - China, 1900–1937*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Lynch, H.R. (1965). Edward W. Blyden: Pioneer West African Nationalist. *Journal of African History 6*(3), 373-388.

MacGregor Mathers, S.L. (1887). *The Kabbalah Unveiled*. Translated into English from the Latin Version of Knorr von Rosenthal, and Collated with the Original Chaldee and Hebrew Text. London: George Redway.

Meyer, M., & Bede-Fagbamila, B.O. (1997). Ifa and me: A divination of ethnography. *Text and Performance Quarterly 17*(1), 33-57.

Mogase, E.P., & Ludwig, F. (2016). Introduction to Selected West African Journals around 1900. In K. Koschorke, A. Hermann, E.P. Mogase, & C. Burlacioiu (Eds.), *Dokumente zur Außereuropäischen Christentumsgeschichte: v.4. Discourses of Indigenous-Christian Elites in Colonial Societies in Asia and Africa around 1900: A Documentary Sourcebook from Selected Journals,* 235-240. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Noll, M.A. (1999). Science, Theology and Society: From Cotton Mather to William Jennings Bryan. In D.N. Livingstone, D.G. Hart, & M.A. Noll (Eds.), *Evangelicals and Science in Historical Perspective,* 99-119.

Odamtten, H.N.K. (2019). *Edward W. Blyden's intellectual transformations: Afropublicanism, Pan-Africanism, Islam, and the indigenous West African church. Ruth Simms Hamilton African Diaspora series*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press.

Ogunleye, A.R. (2019). IFA: An Epistle to the Indigenous Yoruba Worshippers in Nigeria. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies 3*(1), 68-77.

Okonkwo, R. (1985). *Heroes of West African Nationalism*. Enugu: Delta Publications Nigeria.

Olabimtan, K. (2003). 'Is Africa incurably religious?': II: A Response to Jan Platvoet & Henk van Rinsum. *Exchange 32*(4), 322-339.

Olupona, J.K. (2014). *African Religions: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

O'Mahoney, J. (2019). Why the future of French is African. Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-47790128.

Paracka, D.J. (2003). *The Athens of West Africa: A History of International Education at Fourah Bay College, Freetown, Sierra Leone*. New York, London: Routledge.

P'Bitek, O. (1980). *African Religions in Western Scholarship*. Kampala: Uganda Literature Bureau.

P'Bitek, O., & Wiredu, K. (2011). *Decolonizing African Religions: A Short History of African Religions in Western Scholarship*. Introduction by Kwasi Wiredu. New York: Diasporic Africa Press.

Peel, J.D.Y. (2003). *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Peel, J.D.Y. (2016). *Christianity, Islam, and Oriṣa religion: Three traditions in comparison and interaction*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.

Professor Abayomi Cole's First Lecture: Nature's Finer Forces and Their Functions in Sigidi and Fange (1900, December 5). *Lagos Standard*.

Professor Abayomi Cole's Last Lecture (1900, December 26). *Lagos Standard*.

Professor Abayomi Cole's Second Lecture (1900, December 12). *Lagos Standard*.

Question and Reply on Professor Abayomi Cole's Last Lecture (1901, January 2). *Lagos Standard*.

Rice, D.F. (1971). Natural Theology and the Scottish Philosophy in the Thought of Thomas Chalmers. *Scottish Journal of Theology 24*(1), 23-46.

Sakai, N. (2013). The Microphysics of Comparison: Towards the Dislocation of the West. Retrieved from https://transversal.at/transversal/0613/sakai/en.

Sowande, F. (1964). *Ifa*. Oja: Forward Press.

Soyinka, W. (2008). The Tolerant Gods. In J.K. Olupona & T. Rey (Eds.), *Orisa Devotion as World Religion: The Globalization of Yoruba Religious Culture,* 31-50. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Strube, J. (2016). Transgressing Boundaries: Social Reform, Theology, and the Demarcations between Science and Religion. *Aries 16*, 1-11.

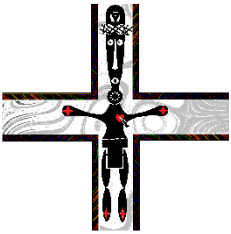
Strube, J. (2022). *Global Tantra: Religion, science, and nationalism in colonial modernity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Strube, J., & Krämer, H.M. (Eds.) (2020). *Theosophy Across Boundaries: Transcultural and interdisciplinary*. New York: SUNY Press.

The West African Psychical Institute Yoruba Branch (1901, April 17). *Lagos Standard*.

Theophile (1900, June 12). Whose is the Problem? *Lagos Standard*.

SECTION 2



ATR and Christianity

The Unfinished Agenda:
Puberty Rites and the Response of the Roman Catholic Church in Southern Malawi, 1901-1994[1]

Joseph C. ***Chakanza***

Abstract

The chapter analyses the practice of puberty rites in Southern Malawi and the response of the Catholic Church to the practice. The chapter notes that although the church response to puberty initiation rites is negative and also at most prohibitive, the practice continues among its congregants. The chapter concludes by arguing that the theology and the evangelisation strategy of the Church ought not to be one bent on destroying traditional African religion but fulfilling it and bringing all times and all religions to experience the unity of the saving act of God.

Introduction

This presentation attempts to examine the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church in Southern Malawi towards puberty rites of transition for boys and girls during the past ninety years. I shall raise the following three questions for special consideration: Firstly, how has the Church responded to the on-going practice of puberty rites? Secondly, for what reasons has the Church failed so far to come to terms with it but instead has persistently condemned it? Thirdly, why is it that despite the Church's draconian measures to stop the practice, some Catholic parents secretly still let their children undergo these traditional puberty initiation rites?

The effective presence of the Catholic Church in Southern Malawi dates back to 1901 when the Montfort Fathers, a missionary congregation founded in France in the 18th century, were assigned by Rome to evangelise the region under Monsignor Prezeau, the first Apostolic Vicar. By

[1] This chapter, which came out of a conference proceeding paper, was first published in the journal *Religions in Malawi* (1995). no.5, 3-7. The introductory abstract was added as part of this volume.

1908, the Shire Vicariate had been established under Bishop Louis Anneau. When this longest-serving Bishop retired in 1950, the vicariate was eventually divided into two: Blantyre (1950) and Zomba (1952). With the establishment of the hierarchy in 1965, the ecclesiastical region was further divided into Chikwawa (1965) and Mangochi (1969) Dioceses.

Puberty Rites and the Catholic Church

The ethnic composition of the ecclesiastical region comprises the indigenous Nyanja and Mang'anja as well as the Lomwe, Yao and Sena immigrants from Mozambique. Apart from the Sena who are patrilineal, all the other ethnic groups are matrilineal, with communal institutions for puberty initiation for boys and girls which are broadly similar in content and practice. Puberty rites confer the status of adults to the initiated boys and girls together with the rights, duties and obligations that go with the new status in the given society. At a deeper level, the adult status forges a new vital link for the initiates with the ancestral lineage for whom life is perceived as continuing.

Initiation rites at puberty collectively known as *chinamwali* are of different types and are called by different names in various societies. For boys they are called *Chidotolo* (Lomwe), *Lupanda,* and *Jando* (Yao).[2] Their main feature includes circumcision. The girls' puberty rites are two-fold: the prepuberty rite called *Chiputu* (Nyanja, Yao) for the ones between the age of seven and eleven, and *Ndakula* (Nyanja) for others who have experienced their first menstrual flow.

These communal initiation rites take place in a camp located in the bush, where water is available. Initiation huts called *thedzo* or *simba* are built. The camp is 'medicated' to give it some kind of mystical protection against the influence of evil spirits, witches and dangerous animals such as lions and leopards. This act is called *kusirika simba* (lit. to protect the camp or hamlet). Traditionally, the bush is the home of the spirits. It is believed that spirits have a transforming power. That is why people go to the bush for rites of transition and transformation.

Puberty initiation rites take place during the dry season, between May and October. Boys who have attained or are about to attain physiological puberty are brought to the initiation camp for the *Chidototo/Lupanda/Jando*. They

[2] Jando is the Islamicized version of the traditional Lupanda.

are circumcised on the day of arrival. This act is purificatory insofar as it removes the dirt that accumulated under their foreskins before circumcision. With the actual flow of semen, the boys attain physiological maturity. The transition from childhood to adulthood is completed when they take a ritual bath after the wounds are inflicted. In the meantime the sponsors (*anamkungwi*) teach the boys some riddles and instruct them on good conduct and matters pertaining to sex, including proper sexual behaviour. The coming out ceremony – which takes place after two or three weeks – is celebrated with pomp and dignity.

The girls who go into the initiation camp for the Chiputu pre-puberty initiation rites are taught by their sponsors how to elongate their labia minora. It is maintained that: "The 'inner lips' have an important function during sex play, it is believed that they stimulate the man in bed. A man is unhappy if his wife does not have the 'inner lips' elongated" (Linden & Linden, 1974).

The practice of elongating the labia minora is very much encouraged among young girls before they reach puberty. Failure to do so means that a girl risks to be divorced once she gets married. During the two weeks that the girls are in the camp, their sponsors instruct them on the physiological changes that will take place in their life, and how to deal with these changes. Issues discussed include menstruation, proper behaviour and decency in dress. The coming out ceremony marks the end of the rite.

The second rite for girls called Ndakula is a social and physiological initiation rite for those who have just experienced their first menstrual flow. The ceremony – which lasts two to three days – is usually held in private. Each candidate is initiated individually. The rite marks the transition from girlhood to motherhood, with all the rights, duties, obligations and privileges that go with this status. The instructions given on this occasion are on good manners, decency, cleanliness, proper sexual behaviour and human fertility.

In order to understand how the Catholic Church has responded to the practice of initiation at puberty, a brief overview of the interaction between the missionaries and the local people will be helpful. The late arrival of the Catholic missionaries in southern Malawi coincided with the migration of the Lomwe and Yao from Mozambique at the close of the 19th century. This brought the Lomwe especially into contact with the Catholic Missionaries since the autochthonous Mang'anja and Nyanja had already come under the influence of the Protestant Missionaries. It was actually

the Protestant Missionaries who had directed the Catholic to the immigrants who, providentially, were to become the largest ethnic group in the church in southern Malawi.

Compared with the already established Protestant Missionaries, the Catholic Missionaries who came mostly from the rural areas in France, were more flexible and easier to approach than their counterparts. However, although they permitted or tolerated the consumption of local beer, they showed no compromise when it came to puberty rites. Coming from a nineteenth-century background of a theological tradition which unwittingly posed a negative attitude towards African traditional institutions, the pioneer missionaries had no other alternative but to institute a Christian puberty rite. This strategy was adopted to prevent converts from taking part in the traditional puberty rites. In the early 1940s, Bishop Louis Auneau made the first attempt to set up a rival Christian institution for the puberty initiation rite:

> The idea behind the move was to bring about inculturation. The children had to gather together at a church centre or out-station and had to be told what chinamwali was all about so that they should not be curious about it and desire to join pagan initiation camps. And also to tell the children the facts of life in a Christian way and Christian atmosphere. There were no physical operations during such gatherings. The agents were selected people: women for girls and men for boys. All of them had to be under the supervision of the Catechist or a priest if he was available. The seclusion period was generally one week. Facts of life and a bit of taboos on how to behave towards elders were the main topics. The experiment was abandoned on the directives of Bishop Auneau who got to know that during such gatherings there were abuses in the sense that the instructors were teaching the children objectionable things (Letter, Bishop M.A Chimole to Fr. Vincent Chilolo, April, 1987).

There is no doubt that the experiment was indeed a break-through, granting that it was initiated by a pioneer missionary bishop, a product of the nineteenth century-French piety. Neither the Bishop nor his missionaries had made any real effort to study in depth and without prejudice the traditional initiation rites in order to determine their positive and negative aspects.

After the dismal failure of this experiment came a decentralized form of counselling by a group of elderly Christian women called *alangizi*. Their duty was to give advice and counsel to Christian youth who had come of age. This group, though distrusted by some Christians because of its superficial counseling or other known abuses, has nevertheless prevailed.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) ushered in a new wind of change in the Catholic Church. The life approach in doing theology, the new thinking in soteriology, the statements on inculturation of the Gospel message prompted a fresh look at the issue of puberty initiation rites.

On the local scene, the attainment of political independence on 6th July 1964 led to concerted efforts to explore traditional cultural values. A cultural revival policy launched by the Ministry of Education and Culture was pursued vigorously with the view of promoting cultural activities that were not detrimental to national development. Since the attainment of independence into the hands of Malawian Bishops, one can indeed say that this has backed up seriously the challenges of inculturation of the Gospel as advocated by the Second Vatican Council, given also the favourable and conducive at atmosphere reigning in the country.

The issue of puberty initiation rites was taken up once again in several dioceses but with little success. The institution of *Chinamwali cha Chikhristu* (Christian Initiation Rite) was reminiscent of the one Bishop Auneau had initiated in the 1940s. Bishop Chimole wrote: "When I took over, I tried in the early 70s to experiment again with children preparing for Confirmation in an effort to coordinate physical maturity with Christian maturity. But this experiment had to be abandoned again because of abuses" (Letter, Bishop M.A Chimole to Fr. Vincent Chilolo, April 1987).

One may wonder why this experiment carried out by 'a son of the soil' did not succeed. Given the prevalent atmosphere of cultural assertion at both church and national levels that did exist during Bishop Chimole's time, there should have been a better chance for arriving at a satisfactory conclusion on the issue. The mistakes and weaknesses that had led to the failure of the pioneering experiment could have been avoided. Nevertheless, I would like to suggest three weaknesses that may help to account for the failure of the experiment.

In the first place, the introduction of the *Chinamwali cha Chikhristu*, though undoubtedly motivated by a great zeal to bring the Gospel into the traditional puberty rites, was undermined by the 'anti-pagan' approach. This approach pre-supposes that African traditional cultural realities are incompatible with the Gospel, reminiscent of the Biblical saying: 'nothing good can come from Nazareth.' It is distinguished from the 'seeds-of-the-Gospel' approach which views traditional realities as having positive elements which are a preparation for the Gospel. While Bishop Chimole definitely understood the importance and the values, both positive and negative, of puberty rites, the 'anti-pagan' approach could not assure him with

certainty about the purity and orthodoxy of the *Chinamwali cha Chikhristu* practice. The pre-occupation with guarding the institution from being 'paganized' rather than ensuring that it blended well the traditional and the Christian values into an acceptable rite was, in my opinion, the obvious cause for failure. No wonder that the experiment was not given enough of an incubation period.

Secondly, the experiment would appear to have been started without adequate preparation. The priests, religious laity and particularly the instructors, should have been engaged in a research and dialogue on the issue, considering that it had been labelled as a'heathen practice' since the early days of the planting of the Church. In this connection, Bolaji Idowu's remark is relevant: "All over Africa people have been led to the stage of despising their own native tradition and cultures and of regarding foreign ideas and cultures as the only way to human dignity" (Cited in Dickson and Ellingworth, 1969, p. 15). It is not surprising, therefore, that when the Christian puberty initiation rite was introduced, people had divided opinions which I shall turn to later.

Another experiment, initiated by a team of progressive Dutch Montfort missionaries at Njale Parish in Chikwawa Diocese, took a different approach. The neophytes were brought to the bush for three weeks during which they received instructions on physiology and good moral life given by selected Christian elders. At the end of the period there was a 'coming out' ceremony from the Simba and the Christian community received the 'new people' with jubilation.

All in all, the experiment tried to follow closely the traditional rite which even included an adaptation of the circumcision rite for boys.[3] It appeared to have received a good response from the local community and soon became the 'talk' of the Diocese. However, the ceremony was only repeated once and discontinued after the incumbent missionaries had left and were replaced by a conservative team of another missionary congregation. Many Catholics accept that puberty rites have, in the final analysis, positive values that are in line with the authentic Christian doctrine, as well as negative elements which stand contrary to the Gospel. Positively they are regarded as an educational institution for inculcating ancestral traditions, preparation for marriage and instilling good discipline in the initiates. Healthy social relationships are cultivated and fostered as the initiates

[3] In Mangochi Diocese, the boys are sent to a Catholic hospital to be circumcised.

learn to live together in a community that has undergone the same experience. Through the rites, the initiates are taught how to endure the hardships of life and are introduced to the realities of adulthood and of the wider world. Apart from enabling the neophytes to find a new place in the society and to be accepted in it, the puberty rites confer cultural or ethnic identity on them.

However, objections are raised against the content of the education on sexual matters. This content is regarded as too advanced for boys and girls of seven to twelve years of age who go in for Chidotolo and Chiputu initiation ceremonies. It is therefore prone to encourage promiscuous behaviour. Furthermore, the going into the bush for initiation, the medicines used, the ordeals that have to be endured, the use of obscene language, the singing of obscene songs, are all regarded as degrading and inhuman. Finally, the practice of manipulating the labia minora in the case of girls is considered detrimental to their moral behaviour. While the instructions given during the Ndakula initiation ceremony are regarded as appropriate and more relevant to the age of the initiates, the main cause of objection against it is the singing and drumming that goes on. This practice is regarded as pagan.

In the final analysis, there is a general feeling among Catholic Christians that a total condemnation of the puberty initiation rites is not only unfair but also creates a vacuum in their cultural life. There is always a sense of uneasiness among them until this vacuum is filled. Some are of the opinion that where modern education and the living standards have advanced, like in the urban areas, the need for these institutions of socialization will die out. Others feel that the urge to send their children for initiation is still there, only that they fear sanctions by the Church. Therefore, unless the Church comes up with something solid and concrete, the problem will persist.[4]

After the experiment to substitute the traditional puberty initiation rites with the *Chinamwali cha Chikhristu* (Christian initiation) had failed, the Church unilaterally and categorically proclaimed a ban on traditional initiation, with sanctions attached to it. Catholic parents or guardians who

[4] At the 3rd conference for Catholic Primary School Teachers of Zomba Diocese held on 4th April, 1986, the teachers pointed out that the problem of puberty initiations has to be researched into because many Catholics are not satisfied with the "Christian" initiation because it is superficial.

sent their children to the traditional puberty initiation rites were automatically debarred from receiving the sacraments until they fulfilled the required demands for reconciliation. At a clergy meeting of Zomba Diocese held in 1967, it was decided that: "Those who have on purpose sent their children to the initiation ceremony, should be given a penalty of some sort, say, three days' instructions after which they could be received to the sacraments" (Council of Priests, Zomba Diocese, minutes cf 21/11/1967).

Again, eight years later, at another meeting it was agreed that:

> Parents who have sent their children to Chinamwali are to be given a series of special instructions leading up to confession. Payment of a sum of money to the Parish is suggested as a penance or act of reparation after confession oreven before confession at the end of the instruction (Minutes of the meeting held on 9/4/1975).

However, despite the Church's efforts to stop Catholics from going for such practices, there are still many cases every year of parents who send their children to these traditional rites.

In an effort to reinforce further the ban on the traditional puberty initiation rites, the Diocese opted for a more severe attitude towards the 'culprits' by referring their cases for reconciliation to the Bishop or his Vicar. In the minutes of the Zomba Diocesan Council of Priests held on 17th November 1982, it was stated:

> The procedure for those who have been to Chinamwali remains unchanged. Parents and child must see the Bishop (Minutes of the meeting held on 17/11/1982).

The hard line taken by Zomba Diocese is typical of the prevailing attitude in Southern Malawi.[5] It has sparked off a long-drawn debate on the appropriate pastoral approach to be taken.

One informant who supports the ban had this to say:

> The local Church is doing the right thing by condemning these initiation rites because even though there are both good and bad elements during initiation, it is a well-known fact that people are more attracted to bad things than good ones. The bad things always overshadow the good ones. For this reason, it is right that the Church does not allow her members to participate in the initiation rites (Fr. Beck and Fr. J. Paul, Zomba Diocese response to questionnaire, August 1986).

[5] The Comboni Missionaries who had just held one session of *Chinamwali cha Chikhristu* at Lirangwe Parish in Blantyre Archdiocese were told by the Archbishop the Most Rev James Chiona, to discontinue the practice.

Another informant who does not support the ban said: "I don't think that the local Church has taken a right approach towards those who are involved. It is too scrupulous when it comes to this question of initiation rites. It is frightened even to hear the word 'initiation'" (Interview, Fr V. Chilolo with Rev Fr. F.X. Loughran, former Vicar General of Zomba Diocese 25/8/1986).

People disagree when it comes to the question as to whether or not the Church is doing well by condemning these rites and beyond that by 'punishing' those who participate in them. Many people who have been educated in Catholic schools look upon these initiation rites as devilish and, therefore, incompatible with the Gospel. They say that the Church is doing well because it is the only way to preserve the faith. On the other hand, however, those who are in favour of the rites, are of the opinion that the Church is being unfair by condemning them and punishing the 'culprits'. And while most of these people respect the Church's stand and decision as the final word, what is clear is that there is a sense of dissatisfaction among some of them. The dissatisfaction is confirmed by the problems and tensions which arise as a reaction to the Church's stand.

First of all, there is tension between what the Church says and what the cultural tradition has instituted with regard to puberty initiation rites. Therefore, Christians who are members of both the Church and society, find themselves torn between the two. And since they consider both Christianity and puberty initiation rites as equally important, they stick to both because they do not want to lose either. As a result, they lead a dualistic life, by wavering between the two worlds. Here the statement of the Catholic Higher Institute of Eastern Africa (CHIEA) Community is relevant. These people "constantly live in different, and sometimes opposite world-views: one based on genuine African life and culture and the other, on Western Christianity. This dualism causes great tensions, anguishes and personality conflicts" (AMECEA, 1986, p. 34).[6]

Some writers have also made similar observations. For instance, Bolaji Idowu has the following to say about this issue:

> By miscarriage of purpose the church has succeeded in preaching to, and in teaching Africans about a strange God whom they have somehow come to identify as the God of the white man. But what has happened to the God

[6] AMECEA stands for Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa. In 1992 CHIEA obtained accreditation/charter from the Government of Kenya and became the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA).

> as known to their forbearers-the God who is the foundation of their traditional belief? He still remains with them. And so we have left them with two Gods in their hands and thus made of them people of ambivalent spiritual lives. This impedes the progress of evangelism; it also results in a very dangerous kind of polytheism (Dickson and Ellingworth, 1969, p. 13).

The dualism and tensions which exist among the people means that up to now Christianity has not been made to feel completely at home in the region.

Secondly, there is the problem of drop-outs. Just as some people take a middle way between "Christianity" and "African Culture", so also, there are others who, when confronted with this problem of the apparent conflict between the two, prefer to drop out rather than betray their cultural heritage. In other words, once these people find themselves at the "crossroads" of Christianity and their culture, the lesser evil for them in this case is being faithful to their African culture and giving up the "Christianity". When I asked a lady who had dropped out at Sitima Parish, why she had preferred to drop out instead of having her case rectified, she said: "The problem is that I have two more children who are not yet initiated. Even if I go back to the sacraments, when the time comes for them to go for initiation, I will find myself in the same situation. So, I find it better to remain aloof" (Interview with Rozina Gustor on 28/8/90).

In my analysis above, it is evident that one thing upon which most of the clergy and most of the laity agree is the fact that the puberty initiation rites have both good and bad elements. I have also shown that it is precisely because of the concurrence of these positive and negative elements that puberty initiations are a pastoral problem in the region, because different people have different reactions towards them.

My research reveals that quite a good number among the clergy are of the opinion that these puberty initiation rites should be got rid of and that the right way to effect this is by condemnations and by being as strict as possible with the people concerned. However, such an approach cannot subvert the people's beliefs and customs and even their philosophy of life.

One thing easily forgotten is that we should:

> Realize that excessive zeal to protect the Christian faith cannot but be a handicap to its propagation. It constitutes a handicap because we begin by thinking that the effect of God's action depends on our advocacy. The truth of the matter is: neither theology nor evangelism we want to teach and say to people. They are properly defined in terms of what God has done, what God is doing and what God is saying to each people in their own native

> context. Theology and evangelism are not directions as to what we think that people should be or what we want them to be: they are declarations of God and His sovereign love and will to all people (Dickson & Ellingworth, 1969, pp. 10-11).

Bühlmann also makes the following observations:

> "As Jesus did not then come to destroy the law, the religion of the Old Testament, but to fulfil it and uplift it (Mt 5:17), so the Church ought not today destroy traditional African religion but fulfil it and bring all times and all religions to experience the unity of the saving act of God" (Bühlmann, 2001, p. 39).

In other words, the work of the pastors, the Vicars of Christ who have been entrusted with powers to bind and loosen (Mt. 16:19, 18:18), is not to fight for and rejoice at the death of these initiation rites. Their work is to seek ways and means in the light of the Gospel, how they can be fulfilled and uplifted with Christianity and Christ's saving work. This is the cultural mission of the Church according to *Gaudium et Spes*, namely that the Church has to speak to people in the way they are and give answers to their questions. In short, it is the mission of the Church to make people more human and more free to be better people. They become more human and more free in confrontation with Jesus Christ (Lk 4:16-22). And when a person is more human he is able to relate humanity with his fellow men, and he is more divine and therefore, nearer to God. It is in this context that we can say: "The teaching of Jesus Christ and his redemption are, in fact, the complement, the renewal and the bringing to perfection, of all that is good in human tradition" (Hickey, 1982, p. 182).

To summarize our point here, we agree with Fourez that the right question which can help us judge whether the rite is a good one or not, is not to ask: "'when should rites be considered pagan?' but rather "which are the rites that liberate people as individuals or groups and which ones oppress them?" (Fourez, 1983, p. 37).

REFERENCES

AMECEA. (1986). AMECEA Priorities and Challenges. *African Ecclesiastical Review 28*(1/2).

Bühlmann, W. (2001). *The Church of the Future: A Model for the Year 2001*. England: St Paul Publications.

Dickson, K.A. & Ellingworth, P. (eds.) (1969). *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*. London: Lutterworth Press.

Fourez, G. (1983). *Sacraments and Passages*. N. P.: Ave Maria Press.

Hickey, G. (1982). Modern Missionary Documents and Africa. Dominican Publications.

Ngoni Funeral Burial Practices amongst Christians in Northern Malawi

Sangwani ***Tembo*** *&* *Edwin* ***Phiri***

Abstract

This chapter explores the significance, understanding, and meaning of the Ngoni traditional funeral burial practices among Christians of the Roman Catholic Church under the Traditional Authority Mtwalo of Mzimba in the Northern Region of Malawi. The qualitative research methodology was used, which included in-depth and group interviews, as well as observations. This study has revealed that despite being Catholic Christians, when it comes to the burial of the deceased relative, the Ngoni of Mzimba observe, respect and follow their traditional religious rituals. Among the reasons they give is the need to live in harmony between the living and the dead. The Ngoni believe that ancestors dwell both in the graveyard and among the living in the village. To appease ancestors, their descendants are expected to inform them when one of their children has passed away, mourn the kin's spirit together and offer sacrificial beer to the deceased. The burial rites are believed to help the spirit of the departed kin to be properly welcomed to the ancestral world while at the same time preventing misfortunes among the living. This chapter significantly contributes to our comprehension of African Traditional Religion within the context of Christianity. It elucidates the enduring presence of traditional practices, emphasizing the profound significance of ancestor worship. Furthermore, it highlights the crucial role played by rituals in preserving a delicate equilibrium between the living and the deceased within the Ngoni community of Northern Malawi.

African Traditional Religion and Christianity

Africans are religious people. Many millions of Africans are followers of more than one religion, even if they may register in the census as adherents of only one religion (Mbiti, 1975, p. 30). During British colonialism in Malawi, although ATR was widely practised, most Christians practised it in secret (Adamo, 2011, p. 1). The reason for the secret practice was that

the missionaries, in the 19th century, were aggressively opposed to traditional African practices which they considered to be barbaric and based on superstition (Denis, 2006, p. 310; Mills, 1995, p. 160, Chakanza, 1989, p. 44). Until now in the 21st century, ATR and its practices are still condemned by some sections of the Christian community. However, despite the condemnation, ATR continues to be practised. After the advent of democracy in Malawi, ATR has occupied an important position in public life (Chakanza, 1989, p. 40; Kishindo, 2002, p. 213; Chibwana, 2023, p. 1; Lost History Foundation, 2023, p. 2). Similarly, in South Africa and Nigeria, ATR has been increasingly acknowledged as an essential aspect of traditional indigenous knowledge systems. Several steps have been taken by health workers and in Parliament to give recognition to African indigenous healers in Africa. For example, in South Africa, Christian churches openly advocate dialogue with ATR (Adamo, 2011, p. 3; Denis, 2006, p. 310).

In the 21st century, mainstream mission churches such as Presbyterians, Methodists, and Dutch reformed, and Catholics are characterized by their acceptance, or at least tolerance, of ancestral practices. However, they generally avoid openly discussing these rites and instead maintain a neutral stance regarding ancestral practices related to death, bereavement, and burial rites. This reticence often stems from their historical and theological positions, which prioritize Christian doctrines over traditional beliefs. Conversely, African Independent Churches openly embrace and engage in ancestral rituals by integrating traditional African beliefs with Christian teachings (Ntombana, 2015, p. 104), which are some of the contested spaces within the Christian community (Makhutso, 2019, p. 1). In many African countries, churches differ in their understanding and interpretation of which practices should be accepted and which ones should be rejected. During funeral ceremonies, a parallel system exists in the sense that the clergy conduct some practices, while others are conducted by family members themselves, without the involvement of the church or church ministers. Such rituals are practised with an understanding that they are related to the family and clan ancestors. These burial rituals are often practised privately; the church is neither invited nor involved in that process. After family members have performed those rituals, the church's service and presence are still required in the funeral service and proceedings until burial. The church is expected and requested to perform Christian rituals that involve burial services led by a clergyperson or laypeople who are trained to conduct such services (Makhutso, 2019, p. 6). However, the funeral burial practices do not end upon burial, but continue through rituals

which are related to the family members. The study was conducted among the Ngoni people in the area of Traditional Authority Mtwalo under its Group Village Headman Fwiramthondo in Mzimba North. The study, therefore, explores the significance of Christian funeral burial rituals and practices, ancestor worship, rituals for ancestor appeasement, harmony between the living and the dead, and coexistence of Christianity and Ngoni Traditional religion.

African spirituality concerning the dead

Death is one of the most universal and mysterious human experiences. According to African theologians like Mbiti, death stands between the world of human beings and the world of spirits. The logical departure of someone requires rituals that are intended to unite the two worlds (Mbiti, 1991, p. 3). There is a close association between the living and the dead because the living connect with the dead for as long as they are remembered (Osore, 2021, p. 23). Funerals in the African context are often considered to be a spiritual journey, not only for the dead but also for the living. The natural relationship between ancestors and earthly descendants is usually likened to that of parents and offspring (Khosa-Nkatin et al., 2021, p. 3). Children consider their parents and grandparents as direct ancestors. It is also believed that ancestors automatically acquire some kind of supernatural power or sacred status (Magesa, 1997, p. 52). Munthali (2006, p. 372) reveals that the spirit of the ancestor is merely a personal power reigning over some 'holy or sacred' domain to Africans. Ancestors are not gods but intermediaries between the living and the dead. Therefore, maintaining good relations with the ancestors is vital. The ancestors have to be regularly appeased through a variety of ritual offerings and the appropriate observance of burial rites. Within this relationship, they are not worshipped but venerated by individuals and the community (White, 2015, p. 2; Hageman and Gluckman, 2016, p. 40).

In various parts of Africa, dead bodies are considered to be in a liminal stage. This understanding brings with it the need to observe and conduct proper burial rites as required by the community (Tshoba, 2014, p. 55). The ancestors thus become a source of blessing or curse to the family according to how they were buried. According to Munthali (2006, p. 370), Africans believe that when someone dies, the body is buried, but the spirit departs from the body. If the transition is not carefully managed, there is a chance that the deceased's *mzimu* (spirit) can be captured by evil spirits.

According to David (2008, p. 50), the quest for life and its security is the central motivation for observing proper burial rites.

Death from a Christian perspective

Many Christians view death as a consequence of sin. Sin is primarily seen as disobedience to God, who is the ultimate source of goodness. Because of sin, death becomes universal (Matthew, 2012). Every human individual dies, either through accident, natural calamities, sickness, old age, or perhaps suicide. The Bible has described the human condition as "living in darkness and the shadow of death" (Luke 1:79). From one Christian perspective, the universality of death is based on the belief that all humans are sinners, and "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). Humankind became separated from the living God and became subject to death and suffering. Yet, in a sense, death is not as much a punishment for sin but as an inevitable consequence of choosing to be separated from God, who is the source of life. Hence, the Christian view of life and death is that death was not previously part of the human situation. Instead, human beings were created for life together with God, while sin and death are seen as aberrations (Tan, 2020, p. 2). Death marks the final stage of a person's journey in this life. When death happens to the body, a person dies. In death, something happens to the person as a whole, which has significant consequences for the soul as well. The ability to live has been curtailed definitively, and the life journey has come to an end. From one Christian viewpoint, death also means that one's decision for or against God as reached during one's lifetime becomes final and unalterable (Dale, 2016, p. 120).

Many Christians describe death as the separation of body and soul. When one regards death as the separation of soul and body, this does not mean the soul has now entered a new state where it is freed from the encumbrances of the corporeal body. Instead, the Christian view of the person is a unity of body and soul (Tan, 2020, p. 6). This assertion, however, is not meant to suggest that there is no afterlife in which further developments could occur after death. Instead, it is meant chiefly to affirm that death does not mark the full stop of life but rather it signifies a new beginning (Albert, 2007, p. 232).

The way we see it in African Traditions, Catholic Christians also practise some things in preparation for what they call a good death. The practices based on Jesus' healing of the crippled, blind, and variegated people inspired Christians to serve in patient care. In contemporary times, almost

every church has hospitals, both to serve in their region and within the framework of mission activities. For example, the Catholic Church has established Extreme Unction and Viaticum. These practices began in the first centuries as emergency support services carried out to prepare a person on the deathbed for his/her last respect. The blessing prayer is called the "sacramental blessing of patients'' since the Second Vatican Council. The Extreme Unction is performed by the Priest who puts oil on the patient and blesses him/her by putting his hands on him/her. It is believed that this brings healing and a comfortable death to the patient (Flinn, 2007, p. 25, Kucuk, 2014, p. 440).

Catholic Christian burial rituals are not that different from those of ATR. Catholic Christians also perform various applications related to the deceased body. They prepare the dying person with some rituals after death, which include washing, cleaning, closing the eyes and clothing the deceased body. (Hartland, 1971, p. 471). Christians have diverse ways of burying the deceased for example, in trees, the sea, or land, and putting the body in a cave (Kucuk, 2014, p. 310).

A Brief History of Ngoni-Tumbuka Ethnic Interaction and Christianity

The study was conducted among Catholic Christians who belong to the Ngoni ethnic group. The Ngoni are a group of people found in the Mzimba District, in the northern part of Malawi. The Ngoni, migrated from South Africa with Zwangendaba as their first leader (Mtenje and Soko, 1998, p. 2, Madise, 2015, p. 5). The Ngoni actively sought to suppress the cultural practices of their subject peoples. One example of this suppression was the disappearance of the old Tumbuka religious cult centered around the spirit *Chikang'ombe*. The loss of formal religion among the Tumbuka captives in Mzimba made them receptive to the new religion brought by the missionaries (Vail, 1972, p. 156). In the 1880s and 1890s, the Ngoni leadership invited missionaries to live amongst them for economic and political reasons. However, they discouraged their children from acquiring Western education due to the impact of Christian teachings on their ethics. Instead, they allowed the children of their Tumbuka slaves and serfs to attend the mission schools. As a result, the Tumbuka were the first to be converted to Christianity (Vail, 1989). As the Tumbuka embraced Christianity and Western education, their language gained respectability.

Because they had been the first to grasp the new educational opportunities, their language could no longer be seen as the language of slaves and serfs only. Rather, it was the language of a rapidly expanding group of educated people (Pachai, 1972, p. 520). Moreover, because Tumbuka was the language of most of the Ngoni ruling elites' wives and concubines, it became the language that even Ngoni young people learned as they grew up (Kishindo, 2002, p. 215). Currently, there are a lot of Tumbuka people in Mzimba who identify themselves as Ngoni due to the assimilation process. As a result, the Tumbuka culture dominates among the Ngoni. This is partly evident from the fact that the Ngoni language is almost lost. However, it is also indisputable that the Ngoni culture and language have in turn greatly enriched the Tumbuka language in vocabulary and other traditions, including funeral burial rights, and vice versa (Mtenje and Soko, 1998, p. 4).

About the Study

The data upon which this study is based was collected using in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with old as well as young men and women who are members of the Roman Catholic Church and also observe traditional Ngoni religion on funeral burial rites. A total of 40 respondents were interviewed. Three FGDs were conducted; one group was a mixture of men and women. For the other two groups, one consisted of men only and one was comprised of women only. One norm of the Ngoni culture is that a father-in-law or elder brother-in-law cannot speak to the daughter-in-law or young brother's wife (Kottack, 2015, p. 204). The mixed FGD only included men and women who were allowed to talk to each other. The decision to have FGDs that separated men and women was meant to include the voices of women who could not speak in the presence of elders according to kin superiority. Key interviews with Group Village Headmen and Village Headmen were also conducted. This qualitative study was conducted among the Ngoni people of the Traditional Authority Mtwalo under Group Village Head Fwiramthondo in the Mzimba North between January and May 2023. The study's overall objective was to explore the significance of the Ngoni traditional of funeral burial practices amongst Roman Catholic Christians. The significance of these practices was to be explored in relation to the parallel funeral burial rites practised by Christians.

The Significance of Christian Funeral Burial Rituals and Practices

Most of the informants of the study indicated that Christian funeral rituals are significant to them. This is because the church plays a central role throughout the funeral service. One of the informants said that church members come in large numbers and comfort the bereaved family through prayers, singing hymns by the church choir, food contributions and cooking, from the day of the funeral until the burial. Christian funeral rituals involve a church gathering where family and friends praise God for Christ's triumph over sin and death. The mourning period includes prayer services, a vigil, and words of comfort and encouragement to the bereaved family. A lay preacher or priest leads the rituals following Christian traditions. The informants also indicated that the lay preacher or a priest is in charge of the burial service. One of the informants said that:

> *[Nyifwa yambulawa tchalitchi yikuzirwa yayi. Ŵatchalitchi ŵakutivikirila m'mapemphero kweniso Yesu ndiyo ndi nthowa ya ufumu wakuchanya]*
>
> "A funeral without the church is not respected. The church soothes and comforts us through prayers, and Jesus Christ is the way to heaven."

The above quote demonstrates that the involvement of the church, the reading of the Bible, the preaching of the word of God, hymn singing, and other rituals conducted by lay preachers or clergy during funerals are indispensable. This perception of the church mirrors Erdman & Kok-Mun's (2010, p. 131) observation that during challenging times, individuals gravitate towards an established individual or institution perceived as better equipped to navigate the complexities of the world. Therefore, the Church serves as a body that nourishes the spiritual well-being of the deceased or bereaved family with its rituals plays a significant role (Mokhutso, 2019, p. 73). One of the informants said that:

> *[Pala nyifwa nja Katolika, Ise ngati ŵatchalitchi, tikwiza kuzapangiska mapemphero na umo ndondomeko ya nyifwa yachikhrisitu yikwendera. Pala pakuchitika midawuko yakuti yikususkana na chi khrisitu yayi ise tilije nayo suzgo]*
>
> "When the deceased belongs to the Catholic Church, priests or church elders offer prayers. If family members perform traditional funeral burial rituals that are not against Christian beliefs, then we don't have a problem."

The informants said that the funeral program set by the church does not conflict with the traditional funeral rituals because some rituals are conducted by elders only, sometimes even before the arrival of church leaders or in a space where church leaders are not invited. Yet other traditional funeral rituals are conducted after the burial, meaning that these rituals are conducted in the presence of family members only.

Opening of the Graveyard

The informants said that when death occurs in a Ngoni village, three or four elders headed by the Village headman go to the graveyard and say:

> *[Tawodila ŵapapi, pepani tamusuzgani tasangika namasuzgo tataya mwana winu. Tikupempha kuti mutizomerezge tinjire mu muzi kuti timuperekezge munyithu]*
>
> "We are knocking on your door, our parents, sorry our ancestors, for bothering you. We have lost one of your children, and we ask for your permission to allow us to enter the graveyard so that we bury one of your own."

According to Munthali (2006, p. 371), the Ngoni also believe that ancestors have a role to play in the lives of their descendants, and that they have to be informed when misfortunes happen, so that they should not be surprised that a lot of people are going to the graveyard. After they plead to the ancestors, they enter the graveyard, and the village headman shows the elders where they will bury the deceased. When going to the graveyard, the elders carry a stick which, they say, is used to carry the spirit of the dead person; and one of the elders strikes where the deceased is going to be buried meaning that the spirit of the deceased has been transferred to his next home (*Kusamuska mzimu*). One of the informants said that failure to do this results in the spirit of the deceased person appearing in the dreams of the relatives and saying, "*iwe unilondezgenge kumalalo*" (You are also going to die and follow me at the graveyard). The informants revealed that even though they are Christians, they still observe these burial rituals because of the fear of ancestors and the spirit of the deceased who continues to play an important role among the living. Thus, when a Catholic Christian dies, the church and elders are notified, and subsequently, a funeral program is arranged. However, this program integrates both the church's protocols and the observance of Ngoni funeral burial traditional religious rituals (*Mudawuko*). In this case,each religious tradition is honored both individually and concurrently.

Mourning of the Deceased Person

When there is a funeral, all people in attendance are expected to mourn and sleep at the mourning house (*pachivumbi*). This might be done at the house of the deceased, the deceased's parents, or at the residence of elders with direct family connection to the deceased person. As is the case with the Tumbuka, the Ngoni of Mzimba believe that the spirit of a kin or an ancestor plays an important role in the lives of the descendants. Therefore, the spirit of the deceased will be directed to the house of his direct descendants (Munthali, 2006, p. 71). In the past, as informants indicated, people slept at a deceased person's place for almost a month and were fed by the relatives of the deceased person. Nowadays, after realizing that this long period is too costly to manage, people do *Chivumbi* for three to four days. A wife of a deceased person is expected not to take a bath for four days while still *pachivumbi* so that she should be pure as her husband's spirit is still settling at the graveyard. This practice is similar to one observed by Awolalu and Dopamu (1979, p. 267) among the Yoruba of Nigeria whereby the relatives of the deceased may not wash or change their clothes as a sign of mourning.

Informants of this study said that on the first morning, after the burial, the village head and elders go to the graveyard to see if nothing has disturbed the resting of the deceased person. For instance, someone might have dug up the place where the deceased has been buried. It is not everyone who goes to the graveyard to look at how their relative has stayed overnight. Some people remain in the mourning house, so that they should welcome those returning from the graveyard and ask them how the deceased has stayed (*Mwayendako wuli?)*. Immediately after the overnight status report of the graveyard has been given, all women start crying deeply.

People in the village are expected to mourn together with those who have lost their loved one, until the body of the deceased person starts decomposing or bursting. This mourning of the dead can last for a month. The informants said that every morning, the woman who has lost her loved one is expected to go and cry under the tree and mention the name of the husband. In the case of the husband who has lost his wife, he is expected to go to the river (*dambo*) every morning and cry. Both are expected to do that so that they should not have time to think about other partners, but they should always remember to go to their respective places and mourn their loved ones. This practice differs from what Daramola and Jeje (1995,

p. 153) found among the Yoruba. According to them, the wife of the deceased person was expected to go to the graveyard three times a day for seven days to weep and to pay respect to the deceased husband. No expectations were reported for the husband who lost a wife.

According to Kottack, in the patrilineal society of the Ngoni, marriage and payment of bride price (*malowolo*) mean that a woman's reproductive rights, obligations and responsibilities are transferred to the groom's kin. Therefore, when she dies, she is buried in the graveyard of her husband's kin (Kottack, 2015, p. 204). My informants told me that, after burying the woman, her relatives can decide to mourn her in their home village, and they communicate publicly that "Ta*ŵa*kuchanakazi chivumbi tinyamulenge" meaning to say that the relatives of the deceased wife will symbolically carry her spirit and mourn in her village. This is usually the case when the village of the deceased wife is far from where she got married. The relatives of the husband will give maize, flour, and meat to the relatives of the deceased wife as a sign that they have symbolically carried the spirit. When they arrive in her maternal village, the mourning will be done in the house of her parents, and people will equally cry as if she has been buried in that village. All the relatives who missed the burial will go to that particular house to continue mourning the deceased

Shaving of Hair of the Bereaved Relatives

The Ngoni, like many African societies, recognize that death is the rite of passage that all human beings must go through to complete their life journey on earth (Appel, 2011, p. 138). While still at the graveyard, burying the deceased, the village head or one of the elders announces the schedule for sweeping the house (*kugothola*), which is typically set for a day or two after the burial. During *Kugothola*, family members convene, usually in the morning, to emphasize the importance of unity, providing comfort to the grieving family, assisting with household tasks, and encouraging villagers to continue supporting the bereaved by staying at their home until the day of hair shaving (*Chimeto*). The chief, in consultation with village elders, determines the date of *Chimeto*, which usually occurs about a month after the burial. *Chimeto* signifies the conclusion of the mourning period and the start of a new phase for the bereaved relatives. The initial task during *Chimeto* involves cleaning the area around the mourning house and ensuring all ashes are cleared. Subsequently, family members shave their heads, and the shaved hair is ceremonially burnt (Ritcher, 2005, p. 1010).

According to our informants, in the past, the bereaved relatives needed to shave their whole heads. This applied to both men and women. However, these days, a woman who has lost her husband can just shave part of her head. If a man has lost his wife, the razor blade is just shown to the people symbolizing that the shaving has happened. Like the Zulu and the Xhosa of South Africa, the Ngoni indicated that they practice *kumeta* meaning shaving of hair, as a way of honouring the spirits of the dead and relinquishing ties with them. The informants said that in circumstances where family members fail to practice this ritual, they are bound to witness unusual events such as nightmares, ailments, and other misfortunes. One of the respondents said that:

> "Although it takes time for one to completely wipe out memories of their gone kin, it is not advisable to mourn past the day of kumeta or kugonthora because of the need to liberate the soul of the deceased kin to go in peace since they now exist in another world away from the living."

Offering Libation to Ancestral Spirits

The Ngoni believe that ancestors dwell both in the graveyard and among the living in the village. One key informant said that when they want to be among the living, the house of the elder of particular descendants tends to be a dwelling place for ancestors of that particular descent. It is believed that an elder person is old enough to be staying with the spirits of the dead. The same house is also used to keep the body of the person who has died in the village (*nyumba ya Chivumbi*). One of the informants said that:

> "The offering of sacrificial beer to ancestors (*moŵa wamizimu*) symbolizes the transition of the spirits from the graveyard to the spirit's house and the deceased's spirit meets other kin spirits in the ancestral house. The Ngoni believe that it is only the body that dies not the spirit so they want the spirits of the dead to be staying within the village."

On the day of *Kumeta,* the village head together with village members set a day to brew beer (*moŵa wamizimu*) to appease the spirit exactly one month after the deceased kin was buried. The beer is brewed at the house where the dead kin was mourned, and women who are known to be the best at brewing beer are identified within the village. When preparing the beer, the women use maize which is showing some signs of germinating (*chimera*). After it has been brewed, the beer, which is called *masese,* is stored in big clay pots.

When going to the other village (*malalo or mawono*), meaning the graveyard, one person is chosen to carry a one-meter stick (*Mntowa*) that will be used to hit the tomb of the deceased person, and everyone going to the graveyard on this day is expected to have a piece of cloth (*Chinwazi*) tied around his or her waist. *Chinwazi* is a wrapper that is used to cover the body of the deceased before burial. The tying of *Chinwazi* symbolizes the connection between the living and the dead. The stick is struck at the tomb to awaken the spirit of the dead. One of the respondents said that all the people are asked to surround the tomb. Everyone is expected to taste the beer, then pour the remains of the beer on the tomb and say:

> *[pepani tati timuwuskeni timutoleni mukawothereko moto ku nyumba]*
> "We are sorry to bother you, we would like to wake you up and get warmth through fire at the village."

This means asking the spirit of the deceased kin to go with the people to the village so that it might not feel cold at the graveyard as all the relatives will be drinking sacrificial beer at the village as part of the ritual indicating that the deceased has now joined the ancestral world. The pouring of beer on the tomb symbolizes that the people have now accepted that the person is in the world of ancestors (*Mizimu*) where he now belongs and can go back to the village as *muzimu* and the relatives need to offer sacrifice to appease his spirit. During this time, the deceased spirit is taken to the village for the sacrificial beer ritual. When coming back home from the graveyard, no one is expected to turn back for they believe that doing so will make the spirit of the dead person go back to the graveyard. In case one of the people looks back, the process starts again because, according to my informants, it means the spirit went back to the graveyard. Women are then asked to prepare another supply of beer so that no one dreams of the dead person's spirit, worrying that it is feeling cold and it needs to be where the rest of the other ancestors do reside within the village. The remains from the beer of the spirits are also poured on the clothes of the deceased person, because the people believe that doing so will chase the spirits from the clothes, and there will be no contact between the kin's spirit and the clothes. After that the clothes are ready to be shared among his or her relatives. The findings echo a claim by Matandiko (1996, p. 29) that the Ngoni of Zambia prepare beer when they have offended the ancestral spirits, so the beer is used to ask for forgiveness from the ancestral spirits.

The Existence of Parallel Systems of Funeral Burial Rituals and Practices

All the informants indicated that they are Christians belonging to the Roman Catholic Church, and that they believe in salvation through Jesus Christ. The informants said that as Christians they have to observe the Christian funeral rituals which guarantee the salvation of the deceased and brings hope and comfort to the bereaved family. However, they also have obligation and responsibility to observe Ngoni traditional funeral rituals. The informants did not refer to the traditional rituals as a religion like Christianity. The informants explained that these funeral burial rituals were practiced and taught to them by their forefathers through oral traditions. One of the informants said:

> *[Palakwachitika nyifwa, ŵatchalitchi ŵakutilongozga kweniso tikulondezga mudawuko uwo ŵapapi ŵakatilekela chifukwa pala taleka kulondezga mdawuko ndikuti mizimu yaŵapapi ŵithu yikwiyenge nase.]*
>
> "When we have a funeral, the church leads the program of the funeral, however, we also follow our tradition because if we don't, our ancestors will not be happy with us."

Other informants felt that these funeral burial rituals were their culture. Culture for them is who they are, therefore, these traditional funeral burial rituals define their distinctiveness as Ngoni. Some informants in the study noted that they practice these rituals out of respect for elders in their families, who often are the ones giving direction on the performance of the rituals during the funeral. It was also indicated that the Ngoni funeral burial rituals are important for the deceased to be received and accepted in the world of ancestors. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the bereaved family members to observe these rituals which help to avoid misfortunes in the form of illness, or disturbing appearance of the deceased in dreams of the bereaved relatives.

CONCLUSION

The Ngoni of Mzimba recognize the existence and vital role of ancestors in the lives of their descendants despite their overwhelming conversion to Christianity. They believe in the observation of Christian funeral burial rituals while at the same time maintaining their relationship with their

ancestors. Their ancestors' existence is manifested in different burial rituals with the aim to help the spirit of the deceased kin to have a proper burial and peace in the ancestral world. What is apparent from this paper is the descendants' desire to appease the ancestors through continued observation of the customs, which in turn assures the living to live in harmony and avoid misfortunes. To guarantee peace and protection from the ancestors, the descendants are expected to inform them when one of their children has passed away, mourning the spirit of the kin together and offering sacrificial beer to the spirit. The burial rites are believed to help the kin's spirit to be properly welcomed to the ancestral world. The Ngoni, though most of them are members of the Roman Catholic Church, do not perceive a conflict between their Catholic burial rites and the traditional ones. They do not see these burial rites as religious but rather as part of their traditions and culture.

REFERENCES

Adamo, D.T. (2006). *Africa and Africans in the New Testament*. Lamhart, MD: University of America Press.

Adamo, D.T. (2011). Christianity and the African traditional religion(s): The postcolonial round of engagement. *Verbum et Ecclesia 32*(1), 1-10.

Ademiluka, S.O. (2009). The Social Functions of Funeral Mourning: Illustrations from the Old Testament and Africa. *Old Testament Essays 22*(1), 9-20.

Albert, J.D. (2007). Approaching the End: A Theological Exploration of Death and Dying. In O. O'Donovan, (Eds.), Oxford Studies in Theological Ethics Series Oxford Studies in Theological Ethics Series. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Appel, D.L. (2011). *Narratives on Death and Bereavement from Three South African Cultures* (Masters' thesis, University of South Africa).

Awolalu, J.O. & Dopamu, P.A. (1979). *West African Traditional Religion*. Ibadan: Onibonoje Press.

Chibwana, E. (2023). People Should Rise up and know their Identity - Lost History Foundation Mesmerises Zomba City. Retrieved from https://www.zodiakmalawi.com/nw/national-news/66-news-in-southern-region/6505-people-should-rise-up-and-know-their-indentity-lost-history-foundation-mesmerises-zomba-city.

Dale, A.C. (2016). *Night Comes: Death, Imagination, and the Last Things*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.

Daramola, O., & Jeje, A. (1995). *Awon Asa ati Orisa Ile Yoruba*. Ibadan: Onibonoje Press.

Mattingly, D.J. (2007). The African way of death: Burial Rituals beyond the Roman Empire. In D. Stone & L. Sterling (Eds.), *Mortuary Landscapes of North Africa*, 138-163. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Adamo, D.T. (2011). Christianity and the African Traditional Religion(s): The Postcolonial Round of Engagement. *Verbum et Ecclesia 32*(1), 1-10.

Denis, P. (2006). The Rise of Traditional African Religion in Post–Apartheid South Africa. *Missionalia 34*(2/3), 310-323.

Hageman, J., & Hill, E. (2016). Leveraging the Dead: The Ethnography of Ancestors. *Anthropology Faculty Publications* 57. https://neiudc.neiu.edu/anth-pub/57.

Jiajing Wang, L., & Jiang, H.S. (2021). Early Evidence for Beer Drinking in a 9000-year-old platform mound in southern China. *Journal PLoS ONE 16*(8), 1-20.

Khosa-Nkatin, H.P. & White, P. (2021). Restriction of Burial Rites during the COVID-19 pandemic: An African Liturgical and Missional Challenge. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies 77*(4), 9259-9422.

Kishindo, P. (2002). Flogging a Dead Cow? The Revival of Malawi Chingoni. *Nordic Journal of African Studies 11*(2), 206-223.

Loe J.T. (2020). *A Christian Theology of Life and Death.*: Trinity Theological College. https://ethosinstitute.sg/christiantheologyoflifeanddeath/, accessed 20.09.2023.

Long, T.G. (2021). The Christian Funeral as Counter Witness. *Interpretation 75*(3), 216-226.

Madise, S. (2015). The Ngoni of Malawi (A History Revisited). Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2587050 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2587050.

Matandiko, C.M. (1996). *A Christian Response to Zambian Death Rituals*. Dissertation projects DMin. 689. https://dx.doi.org/10.32597/dmin/689.

Matthew, L. (2012). *Jesus and the Demise of Death: Resurrection, Afterlife, and the Fate of the Christian*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press.

Mbiti, J.S. (1970). *Concepts of God in Africa*. London: SPC.

Mills, W. (1995). Missionaries Xhosa Clergy and the Suppression of African Traditional Custom. In H. Bredencamp & R. Ross (Eds.), *Mission and Christianity in South African History*, 153–175. Witwatersrand: University of Witwatersrand Press.

Mkhize, N. (2004). *Self,* trans-D Wills, *Religious and Postmodernism Series*: *Community and Psychology*. Cape Town: UCT Press.

Mtenje, A.I., & Soko, B. (1998). Oral Tradition among the Northern Malawi Ngoni. *Journal of Humanities 12*, 1-18.

Munthali, A. (2006). Health Problems That Require No "Medication": The Case of Ancestor-Related Illnesses among the Tumbuka of Northern Malawi. *Nordic Journal of African Studies 15*(3), 367-379.

Osore, O.E.C. (2021). The Dead Never Die: An African Traditional Religious Perspective. *Editon Consortium Journal of Philosophy, Religion and Theological Studies 1*(1), 18-26.

Pachai, B. (1972). Malawian Perspective: The Early History of Malawi. *Journal of African History 8*(3), 511-528.

Richter, A. (2005). The Forgotten Children of Africa: Voicing HIV and AIDS Orphans' Stories of Bereavement: A Narrative Approach. *Theological Studies 61*(3), 999-1015.

Sherman, A.R. (1986). *Theology, Death, and Dying Signposts in Theology*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Tshoba, Z.M. (2014). *The Psychological Significance of Shaving Hair as a Ritual During Mourning Within the Ndebele Culture* (Master's thesis, University of South Africa).

Vail, L. (1989). *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*. London: University of California Press.

Continuing Relevance of African Traditional Religion: Case Studies of African Instituted Churches in Kenya

Peter Mutuku ***Mumo***

Abtract

Despite the condemnation of African Traditional Religion by western missionaries and writers, the religion has demonstrated its resilience by thriving up to the 21st Century. The first generation of African scholars of African Traditional Religion did thorough research on it in various parts of sub-Saharan Africa, documented its contents and disputed the prejudices and biases presented by Western writers. Through the use of case studies of African Instituted Churches (AICs) in Kenya, the chapter analyses from written literature how aspects of African Traditional Religion are continued in contemporary society. It argues that the distortions of African Religion by Western writers and their condescending attitude acted as the fodder for the emergence of AICs on the continent. It is further argued that after the translation of the Bible into African languages, Africans realised that Africans' beliefs and practices were in sync with the Jewish way of life. The founders of AICs felt that the best option for the survival of African Traditional Religion and the African way of life was to break away from the missionary-led churches in Africa and found churches where Africans would feel at home in expressing their religious and cultural practices. The chapter highlights major aspects of African Traditional Religion which have been continued by AICs, such as the concept of God, mystical powers and spiritualism, worship, initiation rites, marriage, empowerment of women in religion, communalism, wholeness of life and music, among others. The chapter also highlights the shortcomings of African independent churches such as their regionalism versus universalism, limited exposure to advanced theological training and unnecessary rivalry and competition for power leading to schisms. It is concluded that AICs continue aspects of African Religion in contemporary society.

Introduction

Africans reacted to the massive deculturation by colonialism and western evangelisation by founding African Instituted Churches (AICs). They wanted to have churches where they could feel at home. Welbourn and Ogot (1966) stressed the psychological aspects of founding AICs, where Africans wanted churches where their spiritual and cultural needs were met. The churches founded by western missionaries were excluding members who were deemed sinful due to their embracing of some African cultural practices, such as polygamy, among others.

Even Africans who embraced Christianity in mission founded churches realised that, during crises, these churches did not give them adequate solutions to their cultural and social challenges. Christianity, as expressed by the mission founded churches, could not adequately address their concerns. They started to secretly consult African culture in order to get solutions. The founding of AICs provided a Christian platform from which Africans could address their cultural and religious issues adequately. The African converts founded AICs because they wanted to remain true Africans and Christians at the same time.

The chapter makes use of experiences of AICs in Kenya, Eastern Africa, to illustrate how aspects of ATR are continued in the twenty-first century. The chapter also analyses the significance of ATR in the formation of AICs. It further uses case studies of some AICS to illustrate how aspects of ATR are continued in contemporary African society. Finally, the chapter examines the challenges that have engulfed the AICs, making some of them ineffective in promoting aspects of ATR.

African Traditional Religion and the Founding of African Instituted Churches

The Berlin conference of 1884/85 brought about the division of the African continent among the European powers. The European countries wanted to acquire as much land as possible for the exploitation of its resources. European colonies were subsequently established, and colonial governments replaced the traditional African kings, chiefs and councils of elders. The traditional rulers thus lost their authority over their people. According to Mkangi (Bahemuka & Brockington, 2004, p. 223) the colonialists embarked on a mission to bring Africans to the level of Europeans.

The lands formerly owned by clans were declared crownlands and were apportioned to European settlers (in cases of settler colonialism). The Former African owners were reduced to squatters who were supposed to provide the required cheap or forced labour on the settler farms. The Africans were therefore deprived of their livelihoods.

A new master-servant social structure was created in which Africans became the servants of the white masters. A further development that took place was the arrival of Western Christian missionaries in Africa. Whereas their main objective was to convert Africans into their respective denominations, their approach brought them on a head-on collision with some of the African converts. Mkangi (in Bahemuka & Brockington 2004, p. 220) writes: "Coming from an alien culture but armed with a gun and with an ideology based on social Darwinism of evolution of the species, Europeans arrogated themselves the high status on the evolution scale." Hence, they declared every African to be inferior.

To the missionaries, Africans were heathens and pagans who had not been exposed to the light of civilization and the gospel of Christ. Mkangi (in Bahemuka & Brockington 2004, p. 237) argues: "The missionaries considered themselves as having divine mission not only to civilize Africans but also to save lost souls from the primitive way of life and pagan religion." Their customs, therefore, were collectively condemned as unchristian and called for their immediate eradication. The missionaries decided to impose European culture and Christianity on the Africans. However, to be a member of an African community, one had to fulfil and participate in those customs such as initiation, marriage and burial. The attacks on their age-old customs brought missionaries and African converts into a conflict. Karanja (1999, p. 182) observes: "Rigid church leaders who attempted to implement missionary policies without regard to local Christians also widened the rift between missionaries and African Christians." The African converts wanted to remain true Africans and Christians at the same time. The missionaries, on the other hand, wanted Africans to be Europeanised Christians.

Another problem African converts faced was that, whereas the missionaries taught about God's love for all and the equality of all before God, in practice, this was not the case. African converts were treated as "boys", and those who got leadership positions were equally treated as juniors by their European colleagues. Kibicho (2006, p. 189) argues that the attitude adopted by missionaries went against the Christian biblical teaching that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither rich nor poor,

neither free nor slave, neither male nor female, neither young nor old, neither white nor black"

Due to their grievances against the Western Christian missionaries, some Africans opted to pull out of the mission churches and found their own independent churches where they would be free from missionary control. Anderson (1977, p. 145) writes: "Independent churches sprang in some cases because African Christians believed African leadership was necessary for a genuinely African Christianity." Their main goals were to liberate their people from social, political and spiritual domination.

As argued above, AICs emerged due to a clash between the missionaries and African Christians. The levels of dissatisfaction with Western Christianity are depicted by the large numbers of AICs which spontaneously emerged in all major regions of Africa, Southern, Western and Eastern. Despite their large numbers, there is a common trend in all of them: the desire for freedom, identity and self-realization. It is, therefore, not surprising that several of these churches have the term "Independent" in their official names. Shorter and Njiru (2001, p. 15) argue that AICs are theologically similar to mainline churches but sociologically distinct and separate in organization. It is therefore concluded that AICs are churches that were founded by Africans without external support or control.

Different names have been given to AICs by African scholars depending on their perspectives. The following names are commonly used: African Indigenous churches, African Independent Churches, African Initiated churches, African Instituted Churches. The phenomenon of AICs is an ongoing process. New churches are emerging each day in Africa. Scholars have created two categories of AICs: those created during the colonial period in Africa are called classical AICs, while the new ones are called neo-Pentecostals due to their Pentecostal features.

Africans founded AICs due to various grievances against the missionaries and colonialists. On top of the list of grievances was the domination of the missionaries on the church. They did not give the Africans the space to express their spirituality in accordance with their cultures. On top of the domination was over-regulation of the church, where the missionaries developed over-strict rules for the African converts. When African church ministers went through training, upon employment, they found that they were treated as inferiors to the white missionary ministers.

Africans were forbidden from continuing with their African customs. For example, those Africans who were polygamists were being forced to divorce several of their wives and retain one wife. This caused African men to be at loggerheads with the missionaries. Most African customs such as dances, rituals, consumption of traditional brews, and African aesthetics were declared unchristian.

When the Old Testament was translated in African languages, African converts found that it seemed to endorse their customs. For example, the leading figures of Judaism were polygamous. The African converts realized that the condemnation of their cultural customs could not be based on Biblical teachings especially the Old Testament. It was for this reason that some African Christian converts broke away from the mission churches. They founded churches where they would be true Africans and Christians at the same time without any contradictions. Africans founded AICs to liberate themselves from both the oppressive colonial and missionary paternalistic systems. They purposed to reclaim the African identity and dignity while at the same time embracing the gospel.

An equally important vision of the founders of AICs was to embrace the whole of the African continent. This is demonstrated by the names they gave the churches they founded such as African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa (AIPCA), Church of Christ in Africa, African Brotherhood Church, and National Independent Church of Africa, among others. To capture this Baur (2000, p. 34) writes: "At the beginning of the African Independent Church Movement there stood the dream of one great African church embracing the whole Negro race and being born from the encounter of the gospel with African men and women, without the domination of European leadership and culture". In reality though, this was rarely actualised. In name, there was a desire to embrace all Africans but in practice most AICs were ethnic or regional-based.

Due to the exposure that the Africans had gained by associating with the colonialists and Western missionaries, they wanted to create a big church which would be for all Africans in the African continent. Their vision envisaged liberating Africans from social, religious, cultural and economic domination by outsiders who had no respect for the African way of life and its treasured institutions. This implied the expulsion of the colonialists from Africa, the establishment of African governments, the resurrection of African culture, the creation of material wealth, the overcoming of racial discrimination, and a reversal of colour roles.

The founding of AICs was not restricted to any part of the African continent. It was happening in all regions of sub-Saharan Africa. Africans in these regions were experiencing the same encounters with foreign domination. It can be rightly argued that the founding of AICs occurred spontaneously. The Africans were fed up with mission Christianity, which went against Christian values and doctrines. Africans were fed up with the missionaries' hypocrisy where they preached a gospel which claimed that there was neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, yet they practised ethnocentrism and condoned colonialism.

African scholars have classified AICs into various categories. The first category consists of AICs named *Ethiopian*, which stemmed from the interpretation of Psalm 68:31, "Envoys will come from Egypt; Cush will submit herself to God." These are mainly in Southern Africa; they advocate that African churches should be under African leadership. Another type is the Zionist or spirit type, which emphasises faith healing, prophesy, revelation and glossolalia. Another type comprises prophetic movements which are led by charismatic leaders. There are also the messianic movements whose founders claim to be the fulfilment of the second advent of Jesus Christ. Finally, we have the millennial movements which claim imminent millennium – a coming to the end of the present world order followed by the golden age.

Since the founding of AICs started at the peak of colonialism and missionary enterprise in Africa, most leaders of the AICs were severely persecuted by both the colonial governments and missionaries. The leaders of AICs were seen as challenging the status quo; hence, most of them were imprisoned. For example, in Kenya, the founder of *Dini ya Musambwa* was jailed until Kenya attained independence in 1963. Others were rounded up and harassed and later released. The missionaries fought the AICs by declaring them as heresy and a threat to Christianity. Their leaders were excommunicated from the former mission churches.

After the attainment of independence by African countries in the 1960's, the AICs were accorded recognition by the secular authorities and, to some degree, gained tolerance and acceptance from the mainline mission churches. From this time, the AICs started spreading unhindered throughout sub-Saharan Africa. According to Olowola (1993, p. 21), AICs are the fastest-growing churches in Africa. Kaelotswe (2014, p. 227) argues: "By the end of the 20th century, AICs had spread all over Africa, becoming the largest Christian church on the continent." He attributes

this phenomenal growth to the inclusion of aspects of African culture in most AICs.

African Instituted Churches and Continuation of Aspects of African Traditional Religion in Contemporary Society

Despite the introduction of Christianity in various parts of Africa, the influence of ATR has persisted. While writing on the resilience of ATR, Gehman (1989, p. 19) states, "... over 100 years since the introduction of the Christian faith, ATR persists and shapes the attitudes of a large number of people". AICs, which are the main carriers of aspects of ATR in contemporary society, have been founded in different ethnic groups. African Christian converts in various African ethnic groups founded AICs which addressed the cultural concerns of their particular communities.

The *Nomiya Luo Church* among the Luo was started by Yohana Owalo for the Nyanza people in 1912, and was registered in 1914 (Opwapo 1981, p. 61). It was the first AIC to be started in Kenya. Nomiya means "God has given me a revelation." It was started in Siaya County and spread to other parts of the Nyanza region. It has attracted many followers because it accommodates Luo cultural practices such as polygamy and the inheritance of widows, among others. Although the Luo do not practise circumcision of boys, due to the influence of the Old Testament, the practice is encouraged among Luo boys. In order for men to become members of the church, they have to be circumcised and then be baptised. The church teaches that as God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, likewise, He gave the Luos their customs. The Luo Nomiya Church was founded so that the Luo people could worship God in their own way and simultaneously uphold Luo traditional customs. Opwapo (1981, p. 83) writes: "Christianity dressed in Western garb was not really coming to grips with the emotional, moral and religious needs of the Luo."

In contemporary society, the Luo Nomiya Church allows its members to continue traditional burial ceremonies. According to Luo religious traditions, the dead are supposed to be buried in their ancestral lands, and traditional burial rites are supposed to be observed. When Luos die outside their homes, the corpses are transported and buried in their ancestral lands. In 1990, the burial of Luos in ancestral lands became a subject of litigation when a prominent criminal law advocate, S. M. Otieno died (Mumo 2021, p. 74). Wambui Otieno, the widow of the deceased, wanted

the body to be buried in Upper Matasia near Nairobi, while the clan wanted him to be buried in Siaya County. Both the High Court and Court of Appeal ruled that S. M. Otieno should be buried in his ancestral land in Siaya. These two court rulings legalised the custom of the Luo being buried in their ancestral lands.

In worship, the Luo Nomiya Church uses traditional Luo musical instruments such as drums and horns. They also dance using Luo rhythms. In keeping up with African care for the disadvantaged, the church allows its followers to practise levirate marriages where widows are inherited by a brother of the deceased. Although these kinds of marriages have become controversial in contemporary society, their objective in traditional Luo society was to protect the widow and her children from exploitation and the vagaries of life.

Another Kenyan church, *Dini ya Musambwa*, was founded by Elijah Masinde among the Bukusu of Western Kenya in the 1940s (Mukanda, 2008, p. 2). Although it was founded in Western Kenya, the church managed to spread to the Rift Valley, Uganda and Tanzania (Kuluba n.d., p. 3). It was founded as a resistance movement against political and western missionary domination. It was against the missionary type of Christianity, which had rejected many African practices. It advocated for Africans to return to the veneration of their ancestors. In fact, the name Musambwa is a Bantu name that means revering ancestors. Its founder Elijah Masinde was an activist who fought both the colonial and post-independence governments. For his resistance, he was detained by both governments. Dini ya Musambwa, strictly speaking, was not an AIC; Elijah Masinde rejected Christianity but embraced the Old Testament. The theology of Dini ya Musambwa is exclusively centred on the Old Testament. Kuloba argues that the theology emerged out of the fusion of ideologies of the Bible, especially the Old Testament and African traditional beliefs. Elijah Masinde urged Africans to abandon Western culture, which was being propagated by Western missionaries and the colonialists, and embrace African culture. Dini ya Musambwa promotes African values such as family, communal living, African unity and worship of *wele,* the African God. It urges Africans to embrace African names and abandon Western names.

In contemporary society, Dini ya Musambwa together with other AICs in western Kenya have managed to enable their members to continue African cultural practices such as traditional circumcision of boys, marriage rituals, traditional burial ceremonies, and use of traditional dances, among others. Through the practice of aspects of African culture, Dini ya

Musambwa has continued aspects of ATR in contemporary society. Magesa (1997, p. 6) argues: "Indeed, African perspectives persist despite the odds against them, and they serve a positive purpose."

Another AIC that embodies the continuation of aspects of African Traditional Religion in Contemporary Society is the African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa (AIPCA). The church was founded among the Kikuyu people of Kenya in the late 1920s. The main reason for its founding was to preserve Kikuyu cultural practices and political independence, which were threatened by the aggressive evangelisation of the missionaries operating in central Kenya. The missionaries were on a spirited mission to eradicate cultural practices which they deemed incompatible with the teachings of Christianity. The various missionary societies operating in central Kenya were preaching against polygamy, traditional dances, snuff taking, beer drinking and female circumcision. AIPCA was principally founded to resist the cultural attacks by the missionaries. Writing on why AIPCA was founded, Ndungu (1979, p. 42) says: "The life of the Kikuyu was thus threatened from all sides, and they had to find ways and means of responding to the external forces." The church was concerned about protecting and preserving African identity embodied in African culture and values.

Due to the impetus created by AICs in central Kenya among the Kikuyu, there is a resurgence of Kikuyu culture in the area (Omondi, 2023). The Kenyan constitution in 2010 legalised the formation of cultural groups. In 2014, the Kikuyu Council of Elders Association Trust was registered and was followed in 2018 by the Kikuyu Council of Elders. These groups contend that missionaries and colonialists unfairly treated Kikuyu culture. They call for the restoration of Kikuyu cultural beliefs and practices in contemporary society. These groups attribute moral decadence in contemporary society to the abandonment of Kikuyu cultural practices. These councils initiate young men into elderhood. During the initiation ceremonies, young Kikuyu men are required to sacrifice a goat under a *mgumo* tree. The ceremony is conducted facing Mount Kenya (Omondi, 2023). The councils have also revived traditional marriage ceremonies and the traditional Kikuyu naming system. To participate in traditional marriage ceremonies, the brides and grooms dress up in Kikuyu traditional attire. Through these cultural practices, the Kikuyu have maintained aspects of African Religion in contemporary society. Several radio FM and TV stations that broadcast in Kikuyu language have been used to promote aspects of the Kikuyu traditional culture.

It can also be observed that since the AICs were based on ethnic interpretations of Christianity, they addressed the cultural aspects of the communities concerned. Their understanding of the gospel mirrored the worldview of the specific communities. Mbiti (1969, p. 4) observes: "Each religion is bound and limited to the people among whom it has evolved." In addition, whereas the missionaries were communicating the gospel in English and Kiswahili, AICs communicated it in a wide range of African languages. Since the Bible had been translated into various African languages, AICs preached and interpreted the Bible in the contexts of African languages and world views. Most African societies already believed in a monotheistic concept of God; the AICs used the names and attributes of God as understood by African communities (Idowu 1973, p. 140). This presented a continuation of African belief in God. AICs gave Africans an opportunity to authentically understand God. Commenting on the significance of AICs adaptation of African cultural elements, Kealotswe (2014, p. 228) argues that they have made Christianity real and meaningful to African adherents. Whereas missionaries struggled to make Africans understand the Christian God, AICs did not have similar difficulties in presenting the same. The use of the Old Testament by AICs made it easy to express African cultural aspects. The Jewish religious practices were perceived as similar to those of most African communities. Therefore, the AICs founded in various African ethnic groups were able to continue aspects of ATR such as their concepts of God, spirits, rites of passage, wholeness of life, morality and spiritualism.

Due to their belief in spirits, AICs are able to deal with spiritual challenges among the Africans, which the missionaries were unable to deal with. For example, most spirit churches (type of AICs) use the holy spirit to assist members who are tormented by evil forces. Ministers of AICs are able to exorcise evil spirits. While writing on features of traditional healing using the case study of the *Akurinu Church* in Kenya, Ndungu (2009, p. 96) argues that the Akurinu Church has practised faith healing since its inception. The members of the Akurinu Church do not use modern medicine. Ndungu argues that Akurinu faith healing is derived from four sources, namely revelation received by the founders on Mount Kenya, the Bible, the fact that Akurinu pastors consider themselves as *nabi* (prophets) such as Elisha and Elijah, the belief in the holy spirit and the influence of traditional healers. The healing process among the Akurinu is very elaborate and is conducted as part of the church service. Those with physical or psychological problems are asked to go in front of the assembly and are surrounded

by other believers. The pastor leads in a prayer session, and the sick and the entire congregation join in the prayer. Ndungu (2009, p. 99) comments: "There is communal participation, which ensures that the sick are comforted by being made to feel that their suffering is shared by the rest."

In Central Kenya, the Akurinu Church has been instrumental in continuing aspects of African Traditional Religion. Its services are enriched by African music and dances. Despite their services taking too long, the music using African instruments and rhythms makes them lively. The Akurinu live a communal life like Africans in traditional African society (Njeri, 1984, p. 87). They have a very strong sense of community even in their church services. They allow polygamists to be members of their church. They also believe in the reality of ancestral spirits (Njeri 1984, p. 85). During the missionary period, they were opposed against missionaries destroying the Kikuyu culture. They believe in prophecy and the holy spirit.

In the field of mystical powers, which the missionaries had condemned as evil, the AICs have been active players. For example, the AICs are able to deal with the challenges of witchcraft. AIC ministers, across Africa, through the use of the holy spirit, have been able to convincingly neutralise witchcraft and deal with its effects. Those who claim to be bewitched have received faith healing from the AICs. The Pentecostal AICs, especially, have been instrumental in dealing with issues of mystical powers.

It can also be observed that most AICs were founded to accommodate those Africans who had been thrown out of mission churches because of issues related to African cultural practices. For example, in Ukambani in Eastern Kenya, the *African Brotherhood Church* (ABC) was started to accommodate polygamists, among other members who practised cultural aspects that were condemned by the missionaries. Hayward (1963, p. 53) argues: "For the majority of the peoples of Africa polygamy is a normal and sanctioned institution." The Africa Inland Mission, operating in this region, was not tolerant of African cultural customs. Ray (1976, p. 194) contends that AICs represent a radical indigenization of Christianity in Africa and that their rapid expansion presented a serious challenge to the established churches. In fact, the ABC ended up attracting nearly equal numbers of adherents with the *Africa Inland Church*.

Most of the AICs have an administrative structure which resembles the traditional social structures. Wepener & Swart (2021, pp.1-4) argue that AICs make use of African social structures to illustrate theological concepts and institutions. The leader of the church is viewed as the father of the spiritual family while the leader's wife is the spiritual mother. Due to

this constitution, there is an intimate interaction between the members and their leaders. Life in the AICs is characterised by communal brotherly love, which is a significant feature of ATR.

Women play a more important role in AICs than is the case in most mainline churches. In traditional African settings, women were given significant roles in religious matters. There was a considerable number of women in African societies who were prophetesses, diviners, medicine-women as well as herbalists. For example, among the Kikuyu, elderly women were accorded religious duties and responsibilities during worship sessions. In some AICs, women continue in this vein. For example, some AICs were founded by women. A case in point is Mary Akatsa who founded the *Jerusalem Church of Christ* (JCC) in Kawangware in Kenya (Nandi, 1993). She is referred to as a prophetess. Services in her church are conducted in Kiswahili language. Hymns use African tunes and melodies. Faith healing and revelation are key practices which attract Kenyans to the church (Nandi, 1993, p. 172). Although Mary Akatsa was born in Western Kenya, she migrated to Nairobi where she founded her faith healing ministry. Writing on this church, Nandi (1993, p. 172) says that the church is like a hospital and it attracts people from all races, the rich and the poor. Nandi (1993, p. 180) further writes: "Many Asians who seek healing at JCC believe that the foundress has a special gift from God to heal patients and that she has healed them and their relatives of incurable ailments". Nandi also says:

> "Other than healing Akatsa also eradicates witchcraft. Many testimonies were given by former patients and their relatives to prove that Mary Akatsa is a faith healer and that she owes these special healing powers to God. Before performing healing patients are required to repent their sins to pave the way for their healing. Most female patients suffer from barrenness, sterility and stomach complications while a few men suffer from impotency" (Nandi, 1993, p. 156).

The above section has illustrated how aspects of African Traditional Religion are continued in various African Instituted Churches in contemporary Kenyan society. Due to the inclusion of these aspects the churches have ended up attracting thousands of Kenyans. AICs have kept aspects of African Traditional Religion and culture a reality in contemporary society.

Challenges Facing African Instituted Churches in Contemporary Society

Although AICs are among the leading institutions in the promotion of aspects of ATR in contemporary society, they also have their challenges. For example, some of them condemn the ATR as an untrue religion. Their attitude towards ATR is similar to that of some mission churches. They see the aspects of ATR which they affirm as aspects of African culture rather than of religion. They do not approve of some aspects of ATR, such as using shrines as places of worship, consulting medicine men, and offering sacrifices, among others. Nevertheless, despite their insinuations, Mbiti (1969, p. 5) argues that African Religion is the African way of life. So to Mbiti, there is no difference between culture and religion, which some AICs stress.

However, the AICs that do affirm ATR, also have internal problems that negatively affect their positive promotion of ATR for the larger society. Falaye (2014, p. 91) observes that "AICs are not without problems even though they are attractive..." One of their most significant challenges is poverty. The majority of the members of AICs are extremely poor. Due to the poverty of their members, the AICs are poorly funded. Some of their members' refuse to send their children to school, denying them opportunities for social transformation. A vicious cycle of poverty has been perpetuated from parents to children.

The AICs also have faced prejudices perpetuated by missionaries and the mainline churches. Their founders have been viewed as a spiritual cancer eating steadily into the church of the land. These prejudices are a result of ignorance. Those who condemn the AICs have not critically examined their beliefs and practices. They just condemn them without first trying to understand them. Few of the AICs have been systematically researched on by qualified researchers. The negative perception of them is also augmented by the fact that the AICs have not documented their beliefs, practices, and history. Due to lack of information, many outsiders have unfairly attacked the AICs. Some of these attacks are also due to jealousy of the phenomenal growth and expansion of the AICs. Several mission churches have lost substantial numbers of their followers to the AICs.

The AICs have also been accused of syncretism. Mugambi (2002, p. 68) argues that syncretism is a negative word which Western theologians use to suppress the inclusion of aspects of African culture into Christian practices in Africa. Promoting African religious beliefs and customs has been

seen as a promotion of syncretic religiosity. This accusation is unfounded since all religions, including Islam and Christianity, are a collection of beliefs adopted from various belief systems. Syncretism is an issue to the mission churches only when they refer to AICs. The emergence of AICs in Africa was as a result of mission churches' failure to accommodate African cultural aspects such as the spirit world, witchcraft, polygamy, and rites of passage. If the mission churches seriously addressed these issues, the AICs would not have attracted the numbers they have done.

Another challenge facing AICs is lack of training of their clergy. Due to a lack of funding, most AICs cannot sponsor their clergy to go to advanced theological colleges. There are also instances where some pastors have been sponsored by some donors and acquired theological training run by the mainline churches. Still, after graduation due to jealousy, they have been rejected by their churches. In fact, some trained ministers have ended up migrating to the mainline churches.

Another serious challenge is that some AICs are ethnic-based and have not attempted to evangelise among other ethnic groups due to their ethnocentrism. There are very few AICs which have become national churches. Some writers, such as J. N. K. Mugambi (2002), have accused AICs of not promoting national cultures like how national protestant churches in Western Europe promoted Western European culture. Many AICs are localised and hence have not acquired a national outlook. Other AICs have been rocked by succession controversies. These battles have ended up preoccupying the top leadership of these churches.

CONCLUSION

Africans founded African Instituted Churches in order to perpetuate aspects of African culture, among other reasons. AICs in the twenty-first century are vehicles through which aspects of ATR are continued in contemporary African societies. Through the use of several case studies from Kenya in Eastern Africa, this chapter has demonstrated how AICs have incorporated aspects of ATR in their practices, liturgy and worship. It has also demonstrated that they continue practices such as burial rites, traditional circumcision of boys, use of African naming systems, communalism, marriage rituals, wholeness of life, empowerment of women in church ministry, use of African music rhythms and African spiritualism.

The chapter has further demonstrated that many of the AICs are theologically similar to the mission churches; hence they have retained some aspects of the mission churches from which they broke away. Although they continue some aspects of ATR, some of them only accept these aspects as "African culture", not religion. Some of the AICs still condemn some aspects of African religion, such as respecting traditional shrines and consulting traditional medicine men. They also outright reject the African Tradition Religion and see it as an untrue religion. Though some AICs have managed to spread to certain regions and developed infrastructure similar to that of mission churches, the majority of them are still ethnic-based and lack basic educational and pastoral training facilities. The majority of them are also poor and have not been able to sponsor their ministers for advanced theological training to empower them to systematically articulate their teaching and document their histories.

REFERENCES

Anderson, W.B. (1977). *The Church in East Africa 1840-1974*. Dodoma: Central Tanganyika Press.

Barrett, D.B. (1968). *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements*. Nairobi, Oxford: University Press.

Baur, J. (1994). *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African History 62-1992*. Nairobi: Pauline Publications.

Darwin, C. (1984). *The Origin of Species*. London: Random House Value Publ.

Falaye, T.A. (2015) A Review of African Initiated Churches and Heir Contribution to the Development of Education in Nigeria. *International Journal of African and Asian Studies 15*, 88-92.

Gehman, R.J. (1989). *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*. Kijabe: Kesho Publications Kenya.

Hayward, J. (1963). *The Book Collector*. London, Shenval Press.

Idowu, E.B. (1973). *African Religion a Definition*. London: SCM Press.

Karanja, J. (1999). *Founding an African Faith Kikuyu Anglican Church 1900-1945*. Nairobi: Uzima Press.

Kealotswe, A. (2014). The Nature and Character of African Independent Churches in 21st century: Their Theological and Social Agenda. *Studia Historiae Ecclasticae* 40(2), 227-242.

Kenyatta, J. (1938). *Facing Mount Kenya the Traditional Life of the Gikuyu*. London: Secker & Warburg.

Kibicho, S.G. (2006). *God and Revelation in African Context*. Nairobi: Acton Publishers.

Magesa, L. (1997). *African Religion the Moral Traditions of Abundant life*. New York: Orbis, Books.

Mbiti, J.S. (1969). *African Religions and Philosophy*. Nairobi: Heinemann.

Monyenye, S. (2004). Rites of Passage: Controversy over the Role of Initiation Ceremonies for Cultural Identity Among Some Kenyan Societies: The Case of the Abagusii Community of South Western Kenya. In J. Bahemuka & J.L. Brockington (Eds.), *East Africa in Transition: Images, Institutions and Identities,* 245-266. Nairobi: University of Nairobi Press.

Mugambi, J.N.K. (2002). *Christianity and African Culture*. Nairobi: Acton Press.

Mugambi, J.N.K. & Getui, M. (Eds.) (2004). *Religions of Eastern Africa under Globalization*. Nairobi: Acton Press.

Mukanda, S.W., Ogola, Y., & Wepukhulu, R (2019). A History of Dini Ya Musambwa in Bungoma County, Kenya: 1940-2017. *African Journal of Education and Social Sciences 2*, 1-9.

Mumo, P.M. (2021). Resilience of Ancestral Lands in Kenya: A Religious Discourse. *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies* 1, 65-80.

Nandi, O.M. (1993). *The Jerusalem Church of Christ: A Prophet Healing Independent Church in Kenya* (Masters' thesis, University of Nairobi).

Ndungu, N.W. (2004). Religion and Cultural Identity: The Case of African Instituted Churches. In J. Bahemuka & J.L. Brockington (Eds.), *East Africa in Transition: Images, Institutions and Identities*. Nairobi: University of Nairobi Press.

Ndungu, N.W. (2008). Cultural Challenges and the Church in Africa. *African Ecclesial Review 50*(1-2), 71-94.

Ndungu, N.W. (1979). *African Independent Church of Africa and Eschatology* (Masters' thesis, University of Nairobi).

Ndungu, N.W. (1994). *The Akurinu Churches with Special Reference to their Theology* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nairobi).

Njeri, P. (1984). *The Akurinu Churches: A study of the History and some of the Basic beliefs of the Holy Ghost Church of East Africa 1926-1980* (Masters' thesis, University of Nairobi).

Opwapo, M.A. (1981). *Nomiya Luo Church: The dynamics of an African Independent Church among the Luo of Siaya District* (Masters' thesis, University of Nairobi).

Ocheni S. & Nwankwo B. (2012). Analysis of Colonialism and its Impact in Africa. *Oscanada Cross-cultural Communication 8*(3), 46-54.

Olowolo, C. (2022). An Introduction to African Independent Churches. Uploaded from https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ajet/03-2_021.pdf.

Omondi, F. (2023). The Illusion of the Kĩama kĩa Ma. Retrieved from https://www.theelephant.info/culture/2023/02/21/the-illusion-of-the-kiama-kia-ma/.

P'Bitek, O. (1971). *Religion of the Central Luo*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau.

P'Bitek, O. (1970). *African Religions in Western Scholarship*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau.

Ray, B.C. (1976). *African Religions: Symbols, Ritual and Community*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall Press.

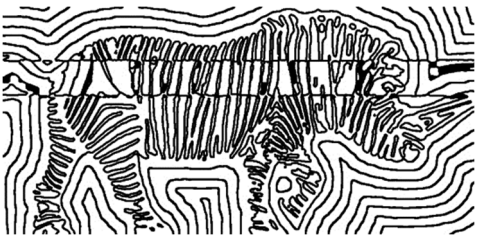
Shorter, A. & Njiru, J.N. (2001). *New Religious Movements in Africa*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications.

Taylor, V.J. (2001) *Christian Presence Amid African Religion*. Nairobi: Acton Publishers.

Wabyanga, R.K. (2014). Religion of the Ancestor(s) (Dini Ya Musambwa) in East Africa: Historical and Theological Analysis. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 149, 111-125.

Welbourn, F.B., & Ogot, B.A. (1966). *A Place to Feel at Home" a Study of Two Independent Churches in Western Kenya*. London: Oxford University Press.

SECTION 3



ATR's Social Transformations

The Modification of Traditional and Religious Rituals and Its Impact on the Adherents in Modern Malawi

Joyce ***Mlenga***

Abstract

There has been an increasing trend of modification of traditional and religious rituals, which has led to a remarkable impact on the adherents of the rituals in Malawi. Therefore, the modification has raised questions about the authenticity, purpose and meaning of these modified rituals. This chapter seeks to examine these modifications occurring in traditional and religious rituals associated with puberty initiation and funeral rites in modern Malawi. Additionally, the chapter analyses the impact of the modification on adherents in Modern Malawi. The study utilised a hybrid of methods to collect data on funeral rituals in Traditional Authority Mwilang'ombe in Karonga District. Data was gathered through observation and interviews with key informants. Field notes and audio recordings, with participants' consent, were utilised. Data was analysed thematically. However, data on puberty initiation rites was based on a review of grey literature, anecdotal evidence, and informal conversations. The study found that due to modernization, religious influences and health concerns, there have been considerable modification of puberty initiation and funeral rites, affecting the adherents positively and negatively. Positively, modification of rituals protects those involved from contracting contagious diseases and pandemics, while at the same time, it has created a void in many people's lives, leaving them with unresolved issues, especially concerning identification and their relationship with their ancestors. Understanding this modification and its consequences is crucial for comprehending the challenges and opportunities facing Malawian society as it navigates the delicate balance between preserving cultural heritage and adapting to contemporary realities.

Introduction

Malawi's traditional and religious rituals are ingrained in the daily lives of its people, connecting them to ancestral heritage, agricultural cycles, and

community cohesion. These rituals, ranging from rites of passage to communal celebrations, have served as channels for passing down cultural values and maintaining a collective sense of identity (van Gennep, 1960). The traditional and religious rituals are deeply rooted in the customs of various ethnic groups of Malawi. However, the dynamics of traditional and religious rituals are evolving in response to changing societal structures, modernisation, the influence of Christianity and Islam, and epidemics, such as HIV and AIDS and, most recently, COVID-19 (Prazak, 2007). While some rituals are being modified, others have been abandoned completely.

There are many rituals that communities in both rural and urban areas perform, which are connected to traditional religious beliefs in Malawi. These include rituals associated with pregnancy and birth, initiation rites of boys and girls, funeral and mourning rites, enthronement of chiefs, healing rituals and many others (Kyalo, 2013). While changes are being witnessed in several rituals, this chapter focuses on those changes associated with two rites of passage ceremonies: initiation of boys and girls (puberty initiation rites) and funeral rites. The choice has been based on the observation that these two rites are ritually laden, but at the same time, there is an increasing trend of changes with accompanying effects. Mbiti (1991) notes that some rituals associated with rites of passage, such as those connected with birth and the naming of children, can continue to be followed with slight modifications. However, those associated with the initiation of boys and girls seem difficult to maintain due to Western education, and recently, owing to the influence of Christianity and Islam.

This qualitative study employed observation and in-depth interviews as data-collecting strategies on funeral rituals in Karonga, in Northern Malawi. Forty people (21 males and 19 females) and four key informants, who function as traditional leaders within their community, were interviewed. The community members were conveniently sampled, while key informants were selected through purposive sampling. Thematic analysis was conducted on the data. Data on puberty initiation rites, which are concentrated in the Southern and Eastern regions of Malawi, was collected through existing grey literature and anecdotal evidence. Analysis was conducted thematically. Ethical procedures were maintained throughout the study.

This study contributes to the conversation on change and traditional and religious rituals, and how the changes impact different communities. Comprehending the challenges and opportunities facing Malawian society in navigating the delicate balance between preserving cultural heritage

and adapting to contemporary realities requires understanding the modifications and their consequences.

Ritual: A Conceptual Analysis and Significance

The most common definitions present ritual as a religious action or ceremony, even though not all rituals are religious (Mbiti, 1970; Kyalo, 2013). For instance, Mbiti (1970) defines ritual as "a set form of carrying out a religious action or ceremony" (p. 131). He considers ritual as a means of communicating something of religious significance through word, symbol or action (Mbiti, 1991). Assmann (2006) believes that "rites are symbolic actions whose meaning exceeds the primary purpose of the action" (p. 71). It is important to note that rituals are not practised in a vacuum, but there are underlying beliefs. According to Ugwu and Nwankwo (2020), a ritual is a set of gestures and actions that make up rites. Some rituals contain a series of actions that are always performed in the same way each time they are done, and, in most cases, those who do them like to do them, just like their ancestors did them. Rituals are mostly connected to religious activities, but they can also be related to other traditions or cultures of a specific community, or they can be connected to ceremonies or different protocols. It is important to note that rituals are often associated with specific mythological concepts. Participants believe that the authority for the ritual comes from external sources such as the state, society, God, ancestors, or tradition (Lavenda & Schultz, 2003).

Closely related to ritual are rites. Rites are ceremonies performed by a particular group of people, often for religious purposes, such as initiation and funeral rites, commonly known as rites of passage. Bell (1997) defines rites of passage as "ceremonies that accompany and dramatise such major events as birth, coming-of-age initiations for boys and girls, marriage and death" (Bell, 1997, p. 94). It is a ceremony or event that leads to a new phase of life. Rites are established, well-structured and ceremonial acts, while rituals are the actions that are performed in a rite. Rites of passage are important events or ceremonies that symbolise a person's moment of transition from one social status to another (Ludwig, 2001; Frogelin & Schiffer, 2015). Some authors refer to rites of passage as "life-crisis" or "life-cycle" rites that culturally mark a person's transition from one phase of life to another (van Gennep, 1960; Bell, 1997; Skinner et al., 2013). Some rituals are religious, while others are just traditional, especially those to do with initiation rites, even though it is very difficult

to separate tradition from religion since culture and religion are intertwined in Africa.

Notably, rituals associated with rites of passage play a vital role in Malawian societies. The rituals occupy an important place in the lives of those who perform the rituals, or of the individuals on whose behalf the rituals are performed. First, rituals associated with rites of passage tend to knit people together, increasing solidarity (Jindra & Noret, 2022; van Gennep, 1960). The rituals and ceremonies play a crucial role in shaping the identities of members of various communities. Every society, whether traditional or otherwise, engages in rituals, which give it identity and cohesiveness. Rituals are an expression of the collective consciousness of a society. According to Durkheim, as cited by D'Orsi and Dei (2018), the negative, positive, or peculiar rituals all have one major function; they provide social order. They aim to uphold the community to renew the sense of belonging to the group and maintain their beliefs and faith.

Hiebert et al. (1999) state that rituals have multiple important functions, one of which is to provide people with a sense of identity and belonging. During rituals, a group feels its unity most intensely, and members acknowledge their mutual sense of belonging. Rituals also connect people to the supernatural, enabling them to experience and relate directly to the spirits, ancestors, and supernatural forces. There are different rituals, each with its own meaning and rationale. Those who perform the rituals are usually confident that something will happen or will not happen after performing each ritual, depending on the need at the time the ritual is performed.

While there are different kinds of rituals, rituals of passage serve a specific function. The specific function of rituals of passage is to create fixed and meaningful transformations in the life cycle. People are physically and sociologically transformed into "new" beings with new roles in the life cycle. Ray (1976) expresses it thus:

> Newborn infants are made into human persons, children are made into adults, men and women are made into husband and wife, and deceased people are made into revered ancestors... This remaking of man... involves the symbolic destruction of the old and the creation of the new (p. 91).

Human rituals are universal symbolic actions that are repetitive, standardised, and highly valued. They help individuals channel emotions, share beliefs, and transmit values (Santos & Gould, 2018).

Initiation and puberty rituals have many symbolic meanings in addition to the physical drama and impact. According to Mbiti (1970, p. 158), the youth are ritually introduced to the art of communal living. Another great significance of the rites is to introduce the candidates to adult life: they are now allowed to share in the full privileges and duties of the community. They enter a state of responsibility: they inherit new rights, and new obligations are expected of them by society. They are prepared in matters of sexual life, marriage, procreation and family responsibilities. Initiation rites have an educational purpose; the occasion marks the beginning of acquiring knowledge, which is otherwise not accessible to those who have not been initiated (Mbiti, 1970; Schroeder et al., 2022).

In Malawi, boys' and girls' initiation rituals are far more commonly practised in the Southern Region than in the other regions, and are also more common in rural areas than in urban areas. The *Fisi* tradition is almost exclusively prevalent in the South, where it is particularly common in the districts of Mulanje and Phalombe (Makwemba et al., 2019), even though it is discouraged nowadays due to the HIV and AIDS epidemic. It must be noted that girls and boys are mostly encouraged to go for initiation as a matter of fulfilling traditional requirements. Initiation rites are important not only for the initiates but also for the parents and guardians of the initiates (Ussi, 2004). For instance, the circumcision of a boy improves the social status of his parents because they gain respect. The puberty initiation rites of passage serve to introduce and transition young people to a new sense of identity and a more respected social standing in their communities (Schroeder et al., 2022; Thomas, 2005). Boys feel more assertive than before, and girls feel empowered by the lessons they get from initiation ceremonies. Ekine et al. (2013, p. 15) note that girls' "value depends on how feminine they are and whether they can please men sexually or not".

Funeral rites are more elaborate than other rites and are assigned the greatest importance in many societies in Malawi. The rites play a significant role in ushering the spirit of the deceased into the realm of spirits by purifying it after burial. Such rituals ensure that the departed enter the ancestral realm in peace, an aspect that is crucial for the flourishing of the living. When the deceased has a peaceful transition, it also enables the living to thrive.

Traditional and Religious Rituals and Change in Malawi

Modification in this chapter is used to refer to minor and major changes that have taken place in a particular ritual due to factors such as modernization, religious influences and recently, epidemics, such as HIV and AIDS, as pointed out already. Rituals change over time and space. However, they sometimes change rapidly in response to events that challenge people's beliefs, myths and health. In Malawi, the past few decades have witnessed accelerated social and cultural transformations caused by economic conditions, political and ideological changes, epidemics and new technologies. These events have resulted in people adapting old rituals to suit the new conditions.

Some rituals have been modified, changed or transformed to accommodate contemporary realities. It is also obvious that other rituals remain the same because there has not been anything that necessitates the change. The power to change rituals lies with various people. However, at the village level, the village chiefs and elders hold the most power. Additionally, the government and non-governmental organisations can also influence changes in rituals based on the prevailing circumstances (Makwemba et al., 2019). For instance, during the Covid-19 pandemic, some rituals were suspended or modified, to prevent the disease from spreading further.

Research and personal observations have noted that some rituals have been modified because the original ones seemed to have lost their place in modern society. Both internal and external factors have influenced ritual modifications. Due to Christianity, western education, and modernity, some members of society consider some rituals irrelevant. Other factors that have influenced the modifications include neo-colonialism, globalisation and urbanisation. The next section discusses the changes that have taken place in rituals associated with puberty initiation rites and funeral rites.

Rituals Associated with Puberty Initiation Rites

Initiation rites associated with puberty serve a very important function. They allow boys to participate in the transition from boyhood to manhood and girls from girlhood to womanhood. In Malawi, several significant changes have been witnessed in the way that puberty initiation rites are conducted among the Chewa of Central Malawi. One of the changes in the initiation rites among the Chewa has occurred in response to the HIV

and AIDS pandemic. In the past, traditionally, the ceremonies for courtship and marriage followed immediately after initiation. However currently, this is not always the case (Ott, 2000). The onset of sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV and AIDS has caused the Ministry of Health to intervene in initiation rites in order to reduce the spread of the disease. To modify this practice, the church has taken over the initiation of boys and girls who belong to the Christian faith. Several authors have written on the "Christianization" of initiation rites of boys and girls, which tries to provide an alternative or a modification to what has been occurring before (Chakanza, 1995; Fiedler, 2005; Phiri, 1995). The usual lament is that with the Christianization of the rites, some cultural elements have been lost. Those who belong to other religions, such as Islam, are being encouraged to conduct the puberty initiations in a way that will ensure safety for the initiates, such as encouraging circumcision that is done in hospital facilities. Despite Church and government injunctions, some communities still follow traditional puberty initiations. It is true that even Christians take their children to traditional initiation, in addition to Christianized initiation, as they see the former as necessary (Ussi, 2004).

Today, parents are encouraged to take their children to health facilities for circumcision. However, contemporary research shows that this ritual is considered incomplete, and even empty, because the ritual is described as authentic based on who does it, where it is done, and how it is done (Schroeder et al., 2022; Prazak, 2007). For most Malawian traditional initiation rituals, the process is filled with ceremonies and incantations. For instance, in a *Jando* initiation ceremony conducted among the Yao tribe, a special person known as *Ngaliba* is responsible for the surgical operations and uses traditional medicine to heal the wounds (Ussi, 2004).

The Changing Funeral Rites in Malawi

The dead body is at the centre of a number of funeral ritual practices in Malawi. Death, including proper ways of mourning, preparation of the body and beliefs about the afterlife, involves complex and even long rituals and ceremonies (Mombo & Mojola, 2022). The people in Karonga are very sensitive to what is done when death occurs in the family. They ensure that everything is done right so that an individual or the family does not face the consequences of negligence.

There are three kinds of rituals regarding death: pre-burial, burial, and post-burial. There are rituals concerning the preparation of the corpse for

disposal. Ritual leaders found in every village perform these rituals. Apart from preparation, there are rituals that are associated with the actual burial and after burial. It must be noted that funeral rites vary depending on the status of the person on whom the rites are being performed (Mlenga, 2016). Major funerals such as those of chiefs and other important persons require a lot of preparation and rituals. The death of children or ordinary people may not require a lot of preparation and rituals. Funeral and mourning rites mark symbolically the transition from the material world into the spiritual world, which Mbiti refers to as the community of the "living dead" that is the spirits of the ancestors. Deceased persons are usually made to rest among their dead relatives within their land. This explains why when one dies in an urban area, the dead body is taken home (to the village) to be buried among ancestors which is also the place where rituals are freely performed.

In Malawi, many changes have been observed over time, from the preparation of the body to the burial itself. For instance, there is a tendency for many urbanised people to be buried where they reside, and this is a major concern for the relatives who live in the village. Burying a person in the city prevents elders from directing the burial according to the "essential" rites, by village standards. This is because the context of rituals is the village, and the city does not provide a conducive environment for such rituals. The respondents in Karonga consider the sending of the dead to the ancestors in the city as incomplete and, therefore, inauthentic, because proper burial rites have not taken place. This remains true even when the relatives or elders of the village are invited to attend the burial ceremony in the city. In fact, people in some cultures in Malawi, such as the Tumbuka, refer to urban centres as "*kuthondo*" (bush). Towns and cities are not "home", the genuine home is the village. For communities where burial rites are important, it becomes an issue of great concern if a deceased relative is buried in towns or the city. Normally, rituals are performed for the safety of both the deceased and the bereaved. If the living do not carry out the rituals, they may face misfortunes if the deceased is displeased.

Additionally, traditional funeral rituals such as shaving hair, washing hands in medicated water after burial, especially when people come from the graveyard, sweeping the premises after burial (including who sweeps), the period for mourning the dead, gathering and spending nights at the funeral home, have undergone some considerable changes. For a long time, in the Ngonde culture of Northern Malawi, close relatives used to wash their hands with traditionally medicated water on the grave of the

deceased, immediately after burial. This was done to ward off the spirit of the dead, which may 'stick' to their hands. This was a modification because, in the past, the family members bathed their whole bodies to remove the 'smell' of death and spirits from the bodies. The washing of hands is a case of practical innovation, where symbolic rituals have replaced the original ones. Today, washing hands is not mandatory, and with the advent of COVID-19, some choose to use sanitizers on their hands. Rather than shaving the head, a pair of scissors can be laid on the head, or very little hair can be cut as a symbolic gesture (Mlenga, 2016). Further, in the past, the sweeping of the premises would take place after three days, but these days, it takes a day after burial and it is just symbolic. A small area is swept, while in the past, the whole surrounding premises would be swept.

Among the Chewa of Central Malawi, when it came to the preparation of the body, the deceased's head was shaved and anointed with oil. This is no longer done today (Breugel, 2001). Breugel further reports that in the past, the outside cloth for wrapping a dead body, especially for the chief, had to be red, and white for an ordinary person, but today, any colour may be used. Concerning the period of mourning, strangers may go home after the burial, but relatives are expected to stay for five or six days and continue to observe the taboos concerning sexual relations. In the past, the strangers used to stay for as long as the relatives stayed, but nowadays, they consider themselves free once the burial itself is over. It is worth noting that the shortening of the mourning period is not just common among the Chewa, but among many ethnic communities. Yet, the period of mourning among the Chewa lasts until the "first shaving of the hair" (*kumeta maliro koyamba*). According to van Breugel (2001, p. 114), there are two separate periods of mourning. The first one lasts for five to seven days for an adult, three days for a child and four weeks for a chief. It ends with the ceremony of the first shaving. The second period of mourning lasts until the second shaving (*kumeta kachiwiri),* which always takes place during the dry season from six to twelve months after the death. Breugel notes that men nowadays do not have their heads shaved as they used to (2001, p. 115). Similarly, due to modern concerns, many females today do not accept shaving, even though the one who passes away is their husband or child. Usually, female villagers are more willing to be shaved than women living in urban areas.

Death cleansing rituals are also common, such as *kulowa kufa*. These are mainly practised in Nsanje District (Muhuta, 1997). These rituals are performed to help the living cope with the loss of a loved one and to honour the dead. *Kulowa kufa* is a death cleansing ritual that involves a man having ceremonial unprotected sex with a widow of his deceased relative. Normally, the brother to the deceased is asked to have sex with the widow, in order to cleanse the village of the dark cloud that engulfs it following the death. The widow cleansing ritual is done with the view of exorcising the ghost of her late husband. It is believed that if a woman does not perform this ritual, the deceased husband would haunt the wife as well as the whole village (Mahuta, 1997). This ritual is still being practised, only that it has been modified to prevent the spread of epidemics. Today, it is not allowed for the widow to have sex with the deceased's brother, but the elders request a couple, either from among the family members or outside, to conduct the *kulowa kufa* ritual. This couple is involved in ceremonial sexual relations to ward off the dark cloud that has befallen the village. This, therefore, raises the question as to how this modification fulfils the need for cleansing without the involvement of the one who needs cleansing.

One more change relates to what happens to the widow. In the past, when a married man died, the mourning period for the widow could last for some months, and the woman was allowed to wear one dress only, the dress she wore when her husband died. The widow was also expected to sleep on the floor until some rituals were performed. In those days it was common for widows to wear black clothes until after a year. However, recently, very few widows wear black clothes after burial and mourning period rituals have been relaxed in many clans.

Another new development has been the attendance of funerals online. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, people could not travel to attend funerals. So they chose to be part of the funeral services virtually. This meant that some of the rituals could not be performed by all those who were supposed to participate in the services. For instance, among the Tumbuka found in Karonga, when a loved one passes on, close relatives are expected to throw some soil used to bury the deceased into the grave. Alternatively, the gravedigger passes around soil on a shovel so that close relatives of the deceased can touch it, and then after everything is done, the soil is thrown into the grave, and then the filling of the grave with soil begins. This is done to ward off the spirit of the dead so that it does not come to the relatives in a bad way. If this is not done, consequences might follow.

The Impact of Changing Rituals on the Adherents in Malawi

Malawi has undergone significant changes in the performance of traditional rituals, as cited above, and the changes have affected the adherents in one way or another. These changes have caused social and emotional impacts. This section focuses on the impact of the changing rituals on funeral rites based on data collected from Karonga in Northern Malawi, and also discusses the impact of changes in puberty initiation rites based on grey literature and anecdotal evidence.

Various people have reacted differently to the modifications. The modifications have been well received by those who are moving with change. However, many have reluctantly welcomed the modifications, raising questions about whether the modified rituals are authentic and still have the same meaning and purpose. Below are some of the views that respondents expressed in relation to funeral rites and puberty initiation rites:

Loss of identity and culture

The respondents highlighted that modifying funeral and initiation rituals creates a sense of loss of identity in them, as they are unable to identify with the wider community, despite undergoing the rituals. Those who experienced the "original" rituals consider themselves as bona fide members of the society, while those who experience the modified ones are viewed as "outsiders." This is common in puberty initiation rituals. For example, people who participated in traditional puberty initiation rituals that occurred in specific, secluded locations over an extended period of time (like a month) could be seen as legitimate members of that community. However, those who attend Christianized initiation ceremonies might not be viewed as genuine members of the community and could face disdain from others. This is also true about circumcision. Individuals who are circumcised during initiation ceremonies feel the pride of belonging to a particular culture, unlike those who undergo medical circumcision. Additionally, for individuals who miss the rite in their lifetime due to personal reasons or convictions, their cultural life is also often viewed as incomplete. This makes them miss that cultural identity that is considered to be acquired through the rite. Furthermore, they are not socially recognised as adults until they undergo the rite. As noted above, adolescents receive a lot of pressure from their peers and their parents to attend

the 'genuine' rituals, even after the modified (Christianized) ones have been performed on them.

Authenticity of Rituals

There is a feeling among the ritual adherents that the modified rituals are diluted and, therefore, inauthentic. This leads to a sense of inadequacy on the part of individuals upon whom the rituals are performed. For instance, when it comes to initiation rites, such as circumcision, the rituals and the practices associated with them are now done in health facilities by medical workers, without the accompanying traditional rituals. Some adherents in these rituals said they did not feel a sense of belonging. What must be noted is that the circumcision, done in its appropriate place, by the right person (*Ngaliba*), and with the appropriate accompanying rituals, makes the rituals carry a lot of weight. Those who undergo circumcision in the hospital are not recognized as having undergone the ritual or as having moved to the next stage genuinely. Among the Yao, the original rites of *Jando* are more valued than the ones performed at the hospital by medical staff (Ussi, 2004; Makwemba et al., 2019). Consequently, there is always a feeling of inadequacy on the part of the individuals circumcised at the hospital. They feel like they do not really belong to the community of adults. Feeling is an important aspect of ritual, as Quack & Sax (2010, p. 5) state, "Rituals are associated with an internal psychological realm of feeling and sentiment…." The feeling of inadequacy affects the confidence and pride that one can have in his culture.

One woman respondent narrated that by not participating in the traditional initiation ceremonies, she felt that she missed something "big", and she did not consider herself "woman enough", especially when she was among her fellow women be it in town or in the village (Personal conversation, September 2021). Some women respondents confessed that they felt more comfortable sitting around learned people who do not care about these traditional rituals than being around those who emphasize them. One woman stated that it was "psychologically disturbing" to think that she was not woman enough, and unfortunately, she could not turn back the clock. All this demonstrates that the initiation rites perform a psychological role in the initiates. Even the thought of being considered "a child" just because one had not been initiated was "traumatic". In other words, those who do not participate in the initiation rites due to the modification experience low self-esteem, and this leads to shame in the face of their peers who undergo genuine initiation rites. In terms of marriage, girls

who undergo traditional initiation rites are more desirable than those who undergo Christianized puberty initiation. The traditional rites are still seen as the most suitable and the most valued than the Christianinized ones (Schroeder et al., 2022).

Rituals are infused with symbolic meaning, and if they are not performed as intended, their purpose may not be fulfilled. In relation to funeral rituals, a study conducted in Karonga found that when rituals are modified during a funeral, people felt that the spirits being warded off may not depart as intended because they may not recognize the new rituals. Therefore, such modified rituals are considered ineffective and equivalent to not performing any ritual at all. One respondent had this to say:

> Mmmmm..... Well, it is a concern for many of us that the traditional funeral customs and ceremonies are evolving too quickly. We are unsure if the spirits of the deceased even recognize or appreciate the rituals we perform for them. As a result, we fear that they may not be at peace and could be angered by the changes that we have made. May God help us! (Interview, M6, 22nd September, 2021).

In Karonga, many funeral rituals are performed to ward off the spirits. The bereaved expressed fear that if the "genuine" rituals were not performed, they would face consequences. Some of these consequences include the possibility that the spirits will not settle; they will be restless. When anything goes wrong in society, in the family/clan, people will always point at a ritual that was not properly performed. A good example is the shaving of hair, which is believed to keep the spirits from torturing the living. If a pair of scissors is just laid on the hair symbolically, what it means is that the spirits will still remain on the hair, and this has implications. There is a belief that spirits reside in people's hair. By shaving hair, the spirits' residing place is disturbed; hence, they have nowhere to stay in order to be close to their living relatives. This ritual is understood as one way of making relatives forget about the dead relative. Available literature notes that some funeral rituals, such as *kulowa kufa*, commonly practised by the Lomwe, were banned by the government of Malawi to prevent the spread of HIV and AIDs. The communities replaced the ritual with a symbolic ritual, which is done openly, but a recent study reveals that the traditional ritual is still performed secretly (Schroeder et al., 2022). There is still a lot of pressure on the people to conform to what the tradition dictates.

People Live in Fear: Desire for Human Flourishing

During field research, respondents reported that they live in fear because of some modifications occurring in funeral rituals. Death marks a physical separation of the deceased individual from other human beings. This is a radical change, and the funeral rites and ceremonies are intended to draw attention to that permanent separation. Great care is taken to perform the funeral rites and to avoid causing any offence to the departed (Mbiti, 1991). In Malawi, like in most African cultures, it is believed that death completes an elaborate life cycle, a rite of passage that allows the person's spirit to travel to his or her next life or world (Rahiem & Rahim, 2021). Scholars such as Dovlo (1993) and Ephirim-Donkor (2021) state that joining the ancestors at death, especially to become one of them, is the goal of many African people, and Malawi is no exception. It is important to note that in Malawi, a ritual is usually performed so that people can have a safer life, a life free from torture from the ancestral spirits. A study conducted among the communities in Karonga shows that proper burial rites must be conducted for people to be safe and healthy. One respondent narrated as follows:

> Okay…My cousin died of COVID-19. Anyway…. Health workers buried her without rituals. We die once….and the rituals must be performed properly. We do not want to be in trouble with the spirits and we do not want to risk our lives. We also want our loved one to have a safe journey…. That's it! (Interview, F6, 22nd September, 2021).

It is believed that failure to perform death and funeral rituals may put both the deceased and the living in danger. Negligence of rituals can lead to death, and the modification of rituals is believed to have some consequences, too. Rituals are meant to protect the living from any negative consequences (Mbiti, 1969). As Jindra & Noret (2011, p. 2) state, "funerals are for the dead, yet intended for the living". If care is not taken, the dead may not go to rest with their ancestors. This, therefore, shows that the rituals that are performed in initiation and funeral rites are not just physical or spiritual, but they do have psychological effects as well, both on the ones the rituals are being performed, and on the relatives involved, both the living and the "living dead". The rituals assure the dead that they will have a good life where they are going. If certain rituals are not carried out, or they are not carried out in totality, then certain stages of the rituals will not be fulfilled. The dead may not arrive safely at their destination, and

this creates chaos. The spirits will not be pleased if the rituals are not perfectly fulfilled. This might be a stumbling block to human flourishing.

Furthermore, people live in fear in communities where the modified symbolic rituals are performed rather than the "genuine" ones. For instance, the symbolic *kulowa kufa* that used to be performed on a widow in the Lomwe culture is now performed without the involvement of the widow herself. Since the ritual was done to cleanse the widow of the spirit or ghost of the deceased, what happens to the ghost? The woman and the community live in fear because the deceased may come back to take the widow or any member of his clan.

As regards initiation rites, people live in fear because they believe that the modified rituals do not really prepare them for adult life. This emanates from the notion that people who undergo modified rituals consider themselves not to be properly equipped. Since initiation rites provide different kinds of education, including sex education, the young ones feel that they will not be able to perform sexually when they get married. For instance, due to the HIV and AIDS epidemic, the ritual of *fisi* was banned, and this implies that there is no way the sexual skills of new girl initiates could be assessed on their performance. Girls who do not undergo such a ritual feel inadequate and afraid that there might be consequences for missing out on both sexual education and the *fisi* ritual. More importantly, the man's (*fisi*) semen is believed to purify or cleanse the initiate (Maleche and Day, 2011). Therefore, many girls who do not undergo the *fisi* ritual live in fear of the consequences of not being cleansed.

Discussion

As noted above, various ethnic groups in Malawi have made several modifications to their puberty initiation and funeral rites. It is evident that these changes have an impact on both the performers of the rituals and those for whom the rituals are intended. A modified ritual can never evoke the same feelings or emotions as the original version. Therefore, there is inevitably a loss of connection, real or perceived, with the modified ritual in the process of performing it. Rituals are not just repetitive actions or "this is how we do things here," but have a deeper meaning than the eye can see, and their neglect has consequences. The meanings of rituals appear more pronounced by their absence than their presence. This observation implies the strength of belief. The modification of rituals has called into question the efficacy and significance of some of these practices (Mombo & Mojola, 2022, p. 289).

Based on the responses of the people interviewed and a review of existing literature, it is clear that rituals are considered complete if all aspects that are associated with them are maintained. If people secretly perform a disallowed ritual, it shows that it plays a key role in their lives that the modification cannot accommodate. Chakanza (1995) states that despite the Roman Catholic Church's strict measures to stop the traditional puberty rites of transition for boys and girls, Catholic parents continued to let their children undergo these traditional puberty initiation rites. This shows the value that the parents attached to the ritual. They could not imagine their children growing up without undergoing puberty rituals. Confirming this, Phiri (1995) writes that when the Nkhoma Synod banned initiation rites, the Christianization of initiation ceremonies followed. This happened because there was a lot of pressure from African Christian women and men to have the rites. This transformation of the rites was done because they could not have a vacuum. It is also interesting to note that some parents continued to send their children to traditional initiation ceremonies (*chinamwali*) in secret even when the church had put in place ways to ensure that the Christianized initiation ceremony (*Chilangizo*) worked. For example, there is a penalty of eighteen months suspension from the sacraments for parents who send their children to the traditional initiation ceremonies. Secondly, when a couple wants to get married in the church, the church asks for a *chilangizo* certificate from the girl before agreeing to announce marriage bans. With this requirement, it is mandatory for girls in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Nkhoma Synod to attend *chilangizo* (Phiri, 1995, p. 19). The fact that parents secretly continued to send their children to the traditional initiation ceremony shows that the ritual is necessary, otherwise, if a ritual is not necessary, it can easily be modified, or it disappears (Lincoln, 1977).

The concerns expressed by the ritual adherents about loss of identity, living in fear, experiencing pressure, and others are issues that need to be addressed. There is a need to come up with a solution that intersects traditions, Christian practices and conventional ways of dealing with the issues of ritual modification. Change is inevitable, but it is important to understand the motives of the people advocating the maintenance of the rituals. If meaningful changes are introduced to the existing ritual, community members are likely to respond positively to voices from inside the culture, and can easily embrace the changes if they consider them to bring satisfaction. Needless to say, communities, due to various factors, have always adapted to changes in other rituals apart from initiation and

funeral rites. This suggests that it is still possible for people to find meaning, purpose, and authenticity in the modified rituals when they are properly done.

A deep reflection on rituals shows that they are not performed as a routine. They meet specific requirements, and usually, these requirements are tied to people's beliefs. Beliefs do bring fear. There is, therefore, a need to bring solutions that deal with the source of fear so that the communities can have confidence in the modified rituals. Rituals continue to engage the passion and commitment of people who are very strong in traditional religious beliefs because they stimulate their creativity and their emotions. If the rituals are partially performed, there seems to remain a sense of uneasiness, which implies that there is a partial vacuum in the people on whom the partial rituals are performed (Chakanza, 1995, p. 5). This, therefore, calls for a debate on whether the modified rituals still serve the function for which they were established. Somé (1998, p. 146) observes that "because ritual is so deeply connected to our human nature, anytime it is missing, there will be a lack of transformation and healing". If a culture does not draw from rituals, its members will do something else to fill the gap because they have to heal. Consequently, if the rituals are modified, a full or partial vacuum is created.

The truth is that beliefs are still alive, and yet the rituals have changed. The rituals have their own meaning and serve particular functions. Undoubtedly, the omission of such rituals will result in several consequences for the ancestors. The rituals are significant for the community and its welfare. Therefore, it is necessary that the deceased persons are properly treated; otherwise, if this is not done, in the traditional conception of reality, chaos will be the order of the day. Traditional societies may have developed some coping mechanisms. These mechanisms remain an area for further inquiry. There is also a feeling that cultural identity is at risk if the required rites are not observed.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed the modification of traditional and religious rituals and its impact on their adherents. In Malawi, puberty initiation rites and death rites are highly ritualized. As the world keeps changing, people are adapting to the changes, in order to keep up with new developments. However, some modifications of traditional rituals are negatively affecting the adherents to the point of preventing them from flourishing

because they live in fear. Modifications can allow Malawian traditional and religious rituals to adapt to changing social, political and environmental contexts. By incorporating new elements or adjusting practices, traditional and religious rituals continue to thrive and maintain relevance in contemporary African society. Rituals are a result of the beliefs that people have but the modification of rituals also has an impact on the beliefs. It is important to continue the conversation and investigation around the issues raised with regard to the loss of identity, authenticity, and meaning of modified rituals. With more and more rituals being modified due to various factors, it is essential for community leaders to address the people's concerns and find solutions to the concerns.

REFERENCES

Amanze, J.N. (2005). African Traditional Religion in Malawi. Zomba: Kachere series.

Assmann, J. (2006). Form as A Mnemonic Device: Cultural Texts and Cultural Memory, in: Richard A. Horsley, Jonathan A. Draper, John Miles Foley (Hg.), Performing the Gospel. Orality, Memory, and Mark. Essays dedicated to Werner Kelber. Minneapolis: Fortress, 67-82.

Bell, C. (1997). Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions. Revised edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chakanza, J.C. (1995). The Unfinished Agenda: Puberty Rites and the Response of the Roman Catholic Church in Southern Malawi, 1901-1994. *Religion in Malawi* (5), 3-7.

Dionne, K.Y. (2015). Social Networks, Ethnic Diversity, and Cooperative Behavior in Rural Malawi. *Journal of Theoretical Politics 27*(4), 522-543. https://doi.org/10.1177/0951629814556173.

D'Orsi, L., & Dei, F. (2018). What is a Rite? Émile Durkheim, a Hundred Years Later. *Open Information Science 2*(1), 115-126.

Dos Santos, N.B., & Gould, R.K. (2018). Can Relational Values be Developed and Changed? Investigating Relational Values in the Environmental Education Literature. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* (35), 124-131.

Dovlo, E. (1993). Ancestors and Soteriology in African and Japanese religions. *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue 3*(1), 48.

Ekine, A., Samati, M., & Walker, J. (2013). Improving Learning Opportunities and Outcomes for Girls in Africa. Brookings Institution. Center for Universal Education.

Ephirim-Donkor, A. (2021). African Spirituality: On Becoming Ancestors. Rowman & Littlefield.

Fiedler, R.N. (2005). Coming of Age: a Christianized Initiation for Women in Southern Malawi (Vol. 25). Zomba: Kachere series.

Frogelin, L., & Scriffer, M.B. (2015). Rites of Passage and Other Rituals in the Life Histories of Objects. *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 25(5), 815-827. https://doi:10.1017/S0959774315000153.

Hauchard, A. (2017). In Malawi, the Horrors of a Sexual Initiation Camp for Young Girls. Le Monde. August 2017. Retrieved January 25, 2019, from https://www.worldcrunch.com/culture-society/in-malawi-the-horrors-of-a-sexual-initiation- camp-for-young-girls.

Hiebert, P.G., & Shaw, R.D. (2000). Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices. Baker Books.

Jakalasi, L.W. (1988). Jando: A Yao Initiation Rite as Practiced in Traditional Authority Maganga, Salima District. Research Paper Chancellor College, TRS Department.

Jindra, M., & Noret, J. (2011). African funerals and sociocultural change. *Funerals in Africa. Explorations of a Social Phenomenon, New York-London, Berghahn*, 16-40.

Jindra, M., Noret, J. (Eds.) (2022). Funerals in Africa: Explorations of a Social Phenomenon. Berghahn Books.

Johnson, J. (2018). Feminine Futures: Female Initiation and Aspiration in Matrilineal Malawi. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute 24*(4), 786-803. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.12917.

Kamlongera, A. (2007). What Becomes of 'her'?: A Look at the Malawian Fisi Culture and its Effects on Young Girls. *Agenda 29*(1), 81-87. https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2007.9674879

Kangaude, G.D. (2017). Adolescent Sex and "Defilement" in Malawi Law and Society. *African Human Rights Law Journal 17*(2), 527-549. https://doi.org/10.17159/1996-2096/2017/v17n2a8.

Kang'ethe, S.M. (2013). The Panacea and Perfidy of Cultural Rites of Circumcision in African Countries: Examples from Kenya, Botswana and South Africa. *Eastern Africa Social Science Research Review 29*(1), 107-123. https://doi.org/10.1353/eas.2013.0003.

Kapungwe, A. (2003). Traditional Cultural Practices of Imparting Sex Education and the Fight against HIV/AIDS: The Case of Initiation Ceremonies for Girls in Zambia. *African Sociological Review 7*(1), 35-52. https://doi.org/10.4314/asr.v7i1. 23129.

Katani, A. (2000). Birth Rituals among the Chewa of T/A Kawamba in Kasungu District and the Attitude of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Nkhoma Synod (Bachelors' thesis, University of Malawi).

Kishindo, F.M. (1969). Changes in Initiation Ceremonies as a Result of Modern Attitudes. UNIMA Chancellor College: Sociology Department.

Kreinath, J., Hartung, C., Deschner, A. (2021). The Dynamics of Changing Rituals: The Transformation of Religious Rituals within Their Social and Cultural Context. New York, United States of America: Peter Lang Verlag. Retrieved Jun 6, 2023, from https://www.peterlang.com/document/1096670.

Kyalo, P. (2013). Initiation Rites and Rituals in African Cosmology. *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology 1*(1), 34-46.

Langer, R., Dorothea, L., Kerstin, R. & Jan, S. (2006). Transfer of Ritual. *Journal of Ritual Studies 20*(1), 1-10.

Lavenda, R.H.& Shultz, E. (2003). Core Concepts in Cultural Anthropology. Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Lincoln, B. (1977). Two Notes on Modern Rituals. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 45(2), 147-160.

Ludwig, T.M. (2001). Sacred faiths: Understanding the religions of the world. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Mackenzie, D.R. (1925). Spirit Ridden Konde. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott.

Magesa, L. (1997). African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa.

Makwemba, M., Chinsinga, B., Kamtukule, C., & Munthali, A. (2019). Survey Report: Traditional Practices in Malawi. https://www.unicef.org/malawi/media/1546/file/Traditional.

Maleche, A., & Day, E. (2011). Traditional Cultural Practices and HIV: Reconciling Culture and Human Rights. Working Paper for the Third Meeting of the Technical Advisory Group of the Global Commission on HIV and the Law, 7-9 July 2011.

Mbiti, J.S. (1970). African Religions and Philosophy. New York: Anchor Books.

Mbiti, J.S. (1991). Introduction to African Religion. 2nd edition. Johannesburg: Heinemann.

Mkandawire, P., Luginaah, I., Dixon, J., Armah, F., & Arku, G. (2013). Circumcision Status and Time to First Sex among Never-married Young Men in Malawi: Evidence from the Demographic and Health Survey. *AIDS and Behavior 17*(6), 2123–2135. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10461-013-0444-x.

Mlenga, J. (2016). Dual Religiosity in Northern Malawi: Ngonde Christians and African Traditional Religion. Mzuzu: Mzuni Press.

Mombo, E.M. & Mojola, A.O. (2022). Death Rituals in Western Kenya, in Kaunda, C.J. (Ed.). World Christianity and Covid-19: Looking Back and Looking Forward. Springer International Publishing, 285-301.

Mphande, D.K. (1996). The Use of Malawian Proverbs in Moral Instruction. *Religion in Malawi* (6), 9-14.

Mughogho, K.K. (1998). The Impact of Christianity on Socio-Cultural Changes: A Case Study of Death and Burial Rituals among the Tumbuka of Nkhamanga Area (Bachelors' dissertation: University of Malawi).

Muhuta, A.S.E. (1997). Death and Burial Rituals among the Lomwe: Anthropological Perspective with 'Amihavani' in Particular (Bachelors' dissertation: University of Malawi).

Munthali, A.C., & Zulu, E.M. (2007). The Timing and Role of Initiation Rites in Preparing Young People for Adolescence and Responsible Sexual and Reproductive Behaviour in Malawi. *African Journal of Reproductive Health 11*(3), 150-157.

Mweta, N., Juma, P., & Phiri, S.B. (2023). Conservation of Natural Forests Through Indigenous Religious Beliefs and Practices: A Case Study of M'bona Cult, Nsanje District, Malawi. In Socio-Ecological Systems and Decoloniality: Convergence of Indigenous and Western Knowledge. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 157-177.

Ott, M. (2000). African Theology in Images. Blantyre: CLAIM.

Parrat, J. (1984). Whatever is Happening to the Mizimu? Some Problems on The Study of ATR. A Staff Seminar Paper presented at Chancellor College, October, 1984.

Phiri, I.A. (1995). The Initiation of Chewa Women of Malawi: A Presbyterian Woman's Perspective. *Religion in Malawi* (5), 13-21.

Prazak, M. (2007). Introducing Alternative Rites of Passage. Africa Today, 19-40.

Quack, J., & Sax, W.S. (2010). Introduction: The Efficacy of Rituals. *Journal of Ritual Studies* 24(1), 5-12.

Rahiem, M. D., & Rahim, H. (2021). The Sultan and the Soup. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies, 8*(1), 43-65.

Rasmus, J., Ingvaldsen, H., & Prusac, M. (Eds) (2015). Death and Changing Ritual: Function and Meaning in Ancient Funerary Practices. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ray, B. (1976). African Religions: Symbol, Ritual, and Community. Englewood: Prentice Hall.

Schroeder, E., Tallarico, R., & Bakaroudis, M. (2022). The Impact of Adolescent Initiation Rites in East and Southern Africa: Implications for Policies and Practices. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth 27*(1), 181-192.

Skinner, J., Underwood, C., Schwandt, H., & Magombo, A. (2013). Transitions to Adulthood: Examining the Influence of Initiation Rites on the HIV risk of Adolescent Girls in Mangochi and Thyolo Districts of Malawi. *AIDS Care 25*(3), 296-301.

Somé, M.P. (1998). The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding Life Purpose Through Nature, Ritual, and Community. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam.

Shorter, A. (1998). African Culture: An Overview. Socio-cultural Anthropology. Nairobi: Pauline Publication Africa.

Talakinu, C.M. (2018). "I am Because of What I know I have": A Descriptive Analysis of Chinamwali in Preparing Women for Womanhood, Sexual Life and Reproduction. *Journal of Pan African Studies 12*(7), 107-122.

Thomas, D.E. (2005). African Traditional Religion in the Modern World. London: McFarland & Co. Publishers.

Ugwu, S. & Nwankwo, B. (2020). Modern Funeral Rites during COVID-19 Pandemic. *Nigerian Journal of Social Psychology (3)*1. Retrieved from https://www.nigerianjsp.com/index.php/NJSP/article/view/50.

Ussi, A.M. (2004). Culture and Agents of Social Change: The Jando Initiation Institution in the Light of HIV/AIDS, Hunger, and Technology among the Yao of T/A Mponda in Mangochi (Bachelors' dissertation, University of Malawi).

Van Breugel, J.W.M. (2001). Chewa Traditional Religion. Blantyre: CLAIM.

Van Gennep, A. (1960). The Rites of Passage. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Zuesse, E.M. (1979). Ritual Cosmos: The Sanctification of Life in African Religions. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press.

Assessment of the Gule Wamkulu as a Rite of Passage among the Chewas of the Central Region in Malawi

Mastone L.K. ***Mbewe***

> *"Chabwino ngati ali ndi mphotho zofupa nyauzo mutha kuuza ana kuti akamemeze gule pamidzi yozungulira* (Makumbi 1975, p. 48)."
>
> ("Alright if the people who want to organize Nyau Dance have the appropriate things to give the dancers, go ahead and tell the youth to announce date for the occasion in the neighbouring village").[1]

Abstract

This chapter examines the initiation of boys and girls in Chewa societies in the Central Region of Malawi. It results from an analysis of available literature and older scholarly data. The initiation ceremonies among the Chewa, usually done through Nyau masquerades, are conducted in an environment of rampant beliefs in witchcraft and sorcery, and in ritual fortification as a means of protecting the initiates from attack by evil people. By contrast, Christian missionary societies conducted similar ceremonies, but without recourse to fortification or witchcraft beliefs. The chapter raises the question of the relevance of these practices and underlying beliefs today. It argues that the Nyau exists as a means for the initiation ceremonies of boys and girls because it has become a source of income for chiefs, leaders of dambwe, leaders of liunde and leaders of girls' initiation ceremonies (*Namkungwi*). This is because the initiation ceremonies are less beneficial for the initiated than for these leaders since the time available for initiating boys and girls is insufficient for them to achieve the purposes of initiation. I therefore argue that until these stakeholders of the initiation of boys and girls find alternative means of making money, they are unlikely to hand over this instructional aspect to the official guarantors of education like the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.

[1] Translated by the author.

Introduction

This chapter assesses the role of the *Gule Wamkulu*[2] as a rite of passage among the present day Chewa of the Central Region in Malawi. Boys aged between eight and twelve among the Chewas of this Region are expected to go through this rite of passage. Yet, boys whose parents are serious churchgoers are not allowed to undergo this kind of initiation. Girls, on the other hand, go through the initiation rites at the beginning of their first menstrual period. If a boy or a girl does not go through this rite of passage, he or she is not fully accepted in his or her own community because he or she is considered to have missed an important stage in life. Boys and girls who are not initiated into the Gule Wamkulu are excluded from participation in important functions in their communities. In the pre-colonial period, all boys or girls among the Chewa were required to go through the initiation rites. The arrival of missionaries in the late 1800s significantly changed how initiation ceremonies were conducted. The churches stopped the Chewa who had converted to Christianity, including members of their catechumenate classes, from attending the traditional Chewa initiation ceremonies. They conducted their own initiation ceremonies. In these circumstances, the Nyau secret societies started directly recruiting boys between eight and twelve years of age instead of adults who had one or two children (Breugel 2001, p. 127). The missionaries' interference with the initiation ceremonies purposefully stopped Chewa Christian converts from attending the traditional initiation ceremonies. The colonial government agreed with the chiefs that they would not interfere with the local running of things in traditional societies. This was the British policy of indirect rule pioneered by Lord Lugard. The age of entry into the initiation ceremonies for girls did not change. It remained the onset of puberty.

Relevant Aspects of the Nyau From Earliest Times to Present Time

In addition to the factors that have affected Nyau outlined above, there are other factors that we need to consider. These factors include the loss of

[2] The Gule Wamkulu ('the great dance') is a dance practiced by initiated members of Nyau secret societies among the Chewas of the Central Region in Malawi. Typically, the dancers wear full-body masquerades.

importance of the Nyau masquerade, the introduction of Free Primary School Education, and the rise of secularism and globalization in the country. In the pre-colonial times, the Nyau secret societies were so important that their membership was constituted by the whole Chewa society. With the passage of time and the impact of various factors, the Nyau was reduced to a form of entertainment. To appreciate the current status of the Nyau among the Chewa, we have to begin with Russell's (1962, p. 14) assertion that: "The circumstances of men's lives do much to determine their philosophy ... conversely their philosophy does much to determine their circumstances". In terms of Russell's statement above, the Chewa started as a closed society that was motivated by fear of death, and the need to produce children. The Chewa considered it important to follow their forefathers' practices and modes of behaviour. Evil things in society were considered to come about as a result of disobedience to the spirits of the ancestors or the spirits of recently departed people. The emergence of missionary education and commerce brought significant changes in their beliefs about life. Consequently, not only have the peoples' beliefs about the Nyau changed, but the circumstances of their lives have also changed. For instance, at present, young boys and girls consider the Nyau performers to be human beings, not spirits or wild beasts, as was the case in the past. Similarly, all children have to go to school at present. In the past, a large proportion of the children were not going to school. In the paragraphs below, I describe circumstances that have led to the loss of importance of the Nyau as a rite of passage in Chewa societies. I begin with a description of the Nyau in the pre-colonial Chewa societies. The discussion of the Nyau in pre-colonial societies is followed by the effects of Christian missions that arrived in the country in the late 1800s. The Nyau societies' reaction to the missionaries' activities brought about changes in the organization of Nyau as a rite of passage. The post-independence government introduced other changes that affected the Nyau as a rite of passage. These changes are discussed below.

Nyau in Pre-colonial Times

In pre-colonial times, the Nyau membership was reserved for adults with one or more children (Breugel 2001, p. 125). Only adults who had given proof of bravery and endurance were allowed to join the Nyau secret societies (Breugel 2001, p. 127). In the precolonial times, the Nyau were considered as fearsome creatures that uninitiated passers-by had to keep away

from in order to avoid being beaten or injured by the Nyau. The introduction of the Christian Missions in the late 1800s brought about three changes in Chewa societies. These changes were: The depletion of numbers of the Nyau and *Chinamwali* initiates (male and female initiates); the reduction in age for entrance into the Nyau societies from adulthood to eight or twelve years; and, the degeneration of the purpose of the Nyau dance to mere amusement as reported by Hodgson in 1933 (Bruegel 2001, p. 127). In the following paragraphs, I discuss these changes.

The Depletion of Nyau and Chinamwali Initiates

The decrease in numbers of initiates was a serious issue because it led to reduction of the wealth in the form of cows, goats, mats and chickens that chiefs collected from parents of the initiates. The central issue in the relationship between chiefs and missionaries was money. In her book "*Growing up in a Chewa Girls' Initiation*," Longwe relates how each girl that had taken part in an initiation ceremony was finally redeemed at the chief's house by her parents through paying the appropriate charge for initiating a girl. The wealth that a chief collected from initiation ceremonies was called in Chichewa *chuma cha unamwali* (initiation fees). The missionaries offended the chiefs by introducing their own initiation ceremonies. They did not allow the Chewa who had been converted to Christianity or the members of their catechumenate classes to attend the Nyau ceremonies. They conducted their own initiation ceremonies for boys and girls in their schools. The net effect of introducing alternative ways of becoming an adult in a Chewa society meant the reduction of initiation fees (*chuma cha unamwali)* for the Chewa chiefs. This led to the conflict that Linden (1974) refers to in his book and that I have described above. These alternative ways of becoming an adult in Chewa societies operate up to this day. In one village near my home, there were two chiefs at one time. One of the chiefs was referred to as a white chief and the other as a black chief. The white chief was a Christian and was responsible for everything except the Nyau. The black chief was responsible for the Nyau functions only. This implies that there are now accepted alternative ways to the Nyau of becoming an adult and ultimately a leader, at least in some Chewa societies.

Change of Age of Entry into Nyau Societies

The missionaries engaged children in most of their activities. The Nyau societies realized the need to change the age of entry into the Nyau from adulthood to eight or twelve years in their competition for initiates with the missionaries. This change implied that their abstract concepts of spirits, *mdulo* complex, and ways of placating spirits to avoid disaster, had to go hand in hand with entertainment. The purpose of the Nyau, hence, degenerated into "mere amusement" as Hodgson (1933) observed. Since that time the Nyau societies have wavered between being a source of amusement and entertainment to children and women or solemn structures of societies of the Chewa. The change in entry age was not accompanied by adjustment in the content presented to the initiates of Nyau. Consequently, the concepts and ideas that could be considered too abstract for children are taught without making any adjustment.

Rules and Regulations

As Lwanda (2005, p. 188) states, in the precolonial times, the Nyau masquerades were such fearsome creatures that used to beat with sticks any uninitiated boys and girls. Later, this practice pleased neither colonial administrators nor the Ngoni invaders. The only way boys and girls could be saved from being beaten by Nyau was to join them. In these circumstances, the colonial government ruled that the Nyau masquerades should not beat anyone moving on the roads or pathways in the country. This ruling ensured that children who had not yet been initiated could meet the Nyau masquerades face to face without running away from them. In the pre-colonial times, a person carrying a red flag walked ahead of the Nyau masquerades, calling on all travellers on the route of the Nyau to run away and hide themselves. In the post-independence period, there was no need for even uninitiated persons to run away from the Nyau. The Nyau, hence, ceased to be fearsome creatures as was the case during the pre-colonial period.

Domestication of the Nyau

The rulers of Malawi in the early post-independence period made an effort to reduce the Nyau to an ordinary dance. They used the Nyau to entertain people during political meetings (Lwanda 2005, p. 188). The Nyau dancers

took turns to perform in these meetings like any other dancers. When going to political rallies and meetings of the Malawi Congress Party, the Nyau boarded lorries or buses. This had the effect of enabling children to realize that the Nyau masquerades were performed by human beings. It seems that during the post-independence period, the Nyau became only a dance that could be used to attract foreign travellers to the country.

The Length of the Nyau Initiation Ceremonies

In the precolonial times, the initiation ceremonies were reported to last for one month (Breugel 2001, p. 145). It is not possible today for a boy to stay one month at the *dambwe*. The school calendar cannot accommodate such lengthy ceremonies. Schools in Malawi open in September, and close in December for holidays. The Nyau ceremonies are often held between September and November. Consequently, the Nyau have had to adjust their calendars to avoid collision with the school calendar. In the post-independence period, a Presidential order ruled that except for the purpose of a funeral, the Nyau ceremonies should not be conducted during the rainy season. This means that the initiation ceremonies now usually last only three or five days. In her book, Longwe (2006, p. 137) showed that the events that girls had to attend during their initiation ceremonies were so many that she could not attend all of them and decided to miss some of them in order to attend others. It thus seems that much content is crammed into a small amount of time.

Free Primary School Education

The conflict between the Nyau and the state school education system was resolved in 1994 when the government introduced free primary school education. From 1994 onwards, all children are expected to go to school. The Nyau or Chinamwali functions have to be conducted during school holidays. This has led to further reduction in the length of the duration of the Nyau and chinamwali initiation ceremonies.

Legends of Nyau

According to Giannotta, & Stefanin (2014), the Gule Wamkulu masquerade, also known as Nyau among the Chewas, originated in Zaire, today

the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This is where a rock painting depicting the present-day *Kasiya Maliro* in Malawi, dating back to 992 AD has been found. Kasiya Maliro is a type of Nyau that resembles an antelope and is usually featured during funerals and other important functions (Ngoma & Chauma 2010, p. 49). Among the Chewa in Malawi, however, there are various legends about the origin of the Nyau. In his notes on the Chewa and Angoni, Hodgson (1933, p. 146) states that the most common explanation of the Nyau origin is that when God made the country and its people, he also gave them the Nyau. Hence, there are two types of legends about the origin of the Nyau. As already noted above, one legend suggests that the Nyau was imported from the DRC while another legend considers the Nyau to have been crafted in Malawi. Ngoma and Chauma (2010, p. 47), for instance, state that the Chewa brought the dance with them when they moved from the DRC to Malawi. According to these authors, the dance was called *Mburi*. Although these authors' position on the origin of Nyau concurs with that of Giannotta, & Stefanin (2014) presented above, they have not indicated the sources of their story. However, in the available literature, no other authors have referred to *Mburi* as the origin of the Nyau dance.

Breugel (2001, p. 134) has reported another important Nyau legend. According to this legend, it was Makewana, the rain priestess at Msinja, who made the Chewa dance the Nyau. When Makewana noticed that the people did not sufficiently respect Chiefs among the Chewa, she decided to introduce the Nyau, which had not existed until then. According to Breugel, Makewana chose several chiefs and gave them the right to have a dancing place for the Nyau (*bwalo*). It is reported that after Makewana started Nyau, she saw that much respect was being paid to the chiefs. As indicated later, one of the lessons girls learn during their initiation ceremonies is to respect the village chief and other elders. This legend emphasizes the important roles of chiefs in conducting the Nyau functions. According to Breugel (2001), Rangeley reported a legend of Nyau in which a certain Nyanda sought to obtain food from women by dancing during a period of famine. Nyanda was joined by other young men and continued to dance even after the famine was over. The dance pleased many people very much. When Nyanda died, the dance was performed at his funeral. It became a traditional way of mourning the deaths of important people in the Chewa communities. This legend reflects the idea of personal gain that seems to be inherent in the Nyau secret societies.

Breugel (2001, p. 134) also reports another legend presented by Salaun. According to this legend, a man and a woman decided to use animal structures and mask dancers to frighten girls at their initiation and to add solemnity to the initiation ceremony. This legend tells us about the use of the Nyau in the initiation of girls. Another legend reported by Phiri (1974) considers the Nyau to be a dance that started among women. The men admired the Nyau and took it away from the women. It became a dance exclusively for men who performed it during the funerals of important members of the Nyau Community. According to this legend, the Nyau dance was performed at the funeral of the chief, his wife, or nephew, Namkungwi and Wanjira.

Nyau Reactions to the Changing Environments

The available literature suggests that the Nyau was originally a dance of men, who were often naked when dancing while the women sang songs, and that membership was reserved "to those who had given proof of bravery and endurance (Breugel 2001, p. 175; Stannus 1910, p. 197). Animal structures and masks were used when performing the dance. For a chief to conduct the Nyau, he or she had to get a bundle of rights from a Senior Chief for the performance of the Nyau dance at such rituals as, funerals, and initiations of boys and girls. This bundle of rights was called *Mzinda*. Any village chief conducting initiation ceremonies without receiving *Mzinda* from his or her Senior Chief was severely punished. A chief who did not have *Mzinda* could not conduct initiation ceremonies or receive initiation fees that took the form of money, chickens, mats, cattle and goats (Phiri 1974, p. 237). It seems, therefore, that it was in the financial interest of any Chewa chief to get every boy or girl initiated to increase the initiation fees collected from the parents of the initiates. Longwe (2006, p. 150) tells us that at the end of the initiation ceremony for girls, the parents of the initiates "*are supposed to redeem their daughters by giving the chief the required amount per girl*". One aspect of the conflict between the Christian missions and the Chewa chiefs is that the missionary activities led to a reduction in the amount of the fees the chiefs collected from the initiates. This reduction came about because the missionaries did not allow children who went to school to join the Nyau-based initiation ceremonies. Instead, the missionaries conducted their own initiation ceremonies for

the children attending their schools. In addition, they did not pay any initiation fees to the Chewa chiefs. This lowered the number of participants in local initiations.

With the passage of time in the late 1940s, the Nyau Societies began to experience the effects of the activities of the missionaries. As indicated above, membership of the Nyau was confined to older people. The missionaries instead focused their activities on young boys and girls. The Nyau Societies hence saw the implication of the activities of missionaries as depletion of the base from which they recruited members of the Nyau. Consequently, they decided to start recruiting young children as well (Linden 1974). The membership of the Nyau hence changed from strictly adults to adults and children. However, Hodgson (1933) reported that the incorporation of children in the Nyau dance changed its purpose to mere amusement (Breugel 2001, p. 127). Rangeley (1949) used the word degeneration to describe the change that occurred in the purpose of the Nyau secret societies. This change has had significant effects on the role of the Nyau in the post-independence period.

The incorporation of children in the Nyau secret societies was followed by the domestication of the Nyau in the post-independence period. During the post-independence period, attempts were made to reduce the Nyau to an ordinary, entertaining cultural dance. Hence, the Nyau dancers were used to entertain people during political meetings. The dancers were perceived as ordinary people and not wild animals (*zirombo*) as they had been viewed before. In this period, the Nyau in their ceremonial masquerade could board vehicles with ordinary people to go to political rallies. Furthermore, they were strictly forbidden from beating people on roadsides and pathways. They were also used to mobilize people to attend the political rallies of the Malawi Congress Party. The Nyau, therefore, became an ordinary dance with the same status as *chimtali* or *mganda*[3]. As Lwanda (2005, p. 188) observed, the Nyau dancers in the post-independence period ceased to be fearsome creatures from which an uninitiated person used to run away during the pre-colonial period. The Nyau was also used to chase people from their houses so that they go to attend political meetings. It may be concluded in this connection that the Nyau succumbed to the forces of nationalism.

[3] Chimtali or mganda are not masquerade dances. They are other forms of ordinary dances.

Other international factors that have affected the Nyau include secularization, globalization and diseases. According to Crossman (2021), secularization is a cultural transition in which religious values are gradually replaced with nonreligious values. The youth today are becoming less influenced by ideas of spirits, ancestors, or *mdulo*. Secularization as the transformation of religion forms its ethics without any reference to spirits, ancestors or God. Secularization confines religion to the individual and not to public institutions or states. Globalization is looking at the whole world as one economic unit. What matters in the world economic unit is to produce goods that other people want to have and are prepared to pay for them. The Nyau are currently not one of such goods; hence, the youth may see participation in the Nyau secret societies as a waste of valuable time. In addition, in recent years, diseases such COVID-19, Ebola and cholera have tended to discourage the gathering of large numbers of people, and in some years, the Nyau or Chinamwali ceremonies had to be postponed. Any assessment of the Nyau as a rite of passage must consider the factors presented above.

Initiation Ceremonies of Boys and Girls

This subsection begins with a description of the initiation ceremonies of girls. This is followed by a recounting of the initiation ceremonies of boys and a discussion of relevant aspects of the Nyau secret societies from the earliest times to the present.

Initiation of Girls (Chinamwali)

As indicated previously, the initiation of girls begins with puberty. The initiation of girls takes place at funerals, the commemoration of funerals, as either ad hoc initiation *(chikudzu-kudzu)* ceremonies or proper initiation ceremonies. Unlike the case with the initiation of boys, the age of entry into the initiation of girls has remained unchanged since time immemorial. Longwe (2006, p. 148) states that initiation for girls lasts five days. The description of each of these days is derived from the process of beer brewing for the celebrations to the end of *chinamwali*. The first day is the beer-brewing day, the second is beer re-boiling day, the third is the day when the beer cools down, the last but one day is the day when the beer is sieved and the last day is the beer-drinking day. During these days and nights, the initiates are subjected to intensive verbal, practical and demonstrative teachings of various aspects of sexuality, adulthood and the

expectations of society about their behaviour as adults. Important lessons are embedded in songs to enable easy memorization.

Longwe (2006, p. 134) gives the following as a lesson that is embedded in song:

> *The girls respond: Chingondo (head crown)*
> *Mwana wanamwiali tandiuza mawanga ankhanga (Initiate tell me)*
> *Response: Chingondo*
> *Mwana wanamwali tandiuza: Kapanda maso*
> *Response: That without eyes (Male sexual organ)*

The lessons embedded in songs are those that can be presented in public.[4] The girls' instructors include the leaders of initiation ceremonies, older women, and girls who were already initiated. The Nyau also take part in the initiation of girls through threatening, harassing, and sometimes providing actual information to the girls. Girls' initiation includes visiting the places where the Nyau masquerades materials are kept in the village in order for them to learn about the Nyau. The overall aim of *Chinamwali* seems to produce an adult woman, who is knowledgeable about what is expected of her regarding sexuality, good behaviour and responsible national citizenship.

Initiation of Boys

According to Breugel (2001, p. 144), the initiation of boys takes place when Nyau members are at the *dambwe* (the place where initiation ceremony happens), preparing their animal structures (*zirombo*). In many places, the initiation of boys takes place between September and November. Like in the girls' initiation ceremonies, each boy is accompanied by a senior previously initiated member. Blindfolding the initiate as he approaches the *dambwe is* a common habit. On approaching, the initiate is welcomed by people singing at the *dambwe*. Sometimes, the initiate is beaten with sticks. Breugel tells us that punishment given to the boy who had misbehaved is sometimes very harsh and could maim boys for life. Among the lessons given to the boys, are the vocabularies of about 100 lessons, which are secret to the Nyau. They consist of symbolic languages for communication. The initiates are also made to eat or drink various things believed to be remedies for various mystical diseases. Through these practices, the initiates are closely supervised by *aphungu* (advisors).

[4] Readers who are interested to learn more about these lessons should consult Longwe's book Chapter 3 on pages 40 to 70 and Appendix A, pages 145 to 151.

One of the main tasks of instructors of male initiates is to communicate the various rules and regulations that the ancestors have put in place for the well-being of individuals and the community as a whole. Chakanza (2000) presents a collection of 2000 proverbs, some of which were used by the Nyau instructors as a way of promoting a spirit of hard work among the initiates. Proverb No. 649 *kuthyola ndiwo ndi kuwerama* (if you want something, sweat for it) stands out as a shining example of such a valuable proverb (Chakanza 2000, p. 147). Similarly, Mbewe (2017, p. 217) adds another proverb that agrees with that of Chakanza. The proverb states "*Munthu amamva nkhwali, nkhwali ikalira mmawa, iye azidzuka nayamba kugwira ntchito* (A human being is supposed to get up as early as possible and start working). Initiates also learn that they are supposed to get up and start working once they hear birds in the morning. Part of the lessons also include aspects of the Chewa belief about the Nyau. For example, they tell the initiates that the Nyau masquerades are apparitions of the spirits of ancestors. There are good as well as evil spirits. There are also the uncategorized spirits that are unpredictable. Communicating these beliefs to eight-year-old children can indeed be a difficult task.

Some churches consider the Nyau-initiated persons to be outcasts or pagans. Other churches refuse to organize burial ceremonies for boys who happen to die while practicing Nyau masquerade, even if they were baptized in the Church. In the Nyau communities, however, people who have not been initiated into the Nyau, are not allowed to take leadership positions in these communities. When a boy is initiated into the Nyau cult, the letter O or A is prefixed to his name when calling him (Longwe, 2006). This is done to acknowledge his change of status from a minor to a responsible adult. For instance, Dalitso becomes O Dalitso or A Dalitso. In this sense, the initiation ceremony serves as a rite of passage to full adulthood in a community where leadership positions are still exclusive to the Nyau initiates. All in all, it seems that when the age of entry into the Nyau secret societies was adjusted from adults to young people, the content taught to initiates was not changed. Makumbi (1975) summarizes the instructions given to boys during initiations into twelve rules. One of the rules prescribes a period of sexual abstinence for couples after childbirth. Another rule advises the initiates against stealing food from cooking pots. A further rule urges parents to take proper care of their children even if they are engaged in work.

One of the common ways of ensuring acceptable behaviour among boys and girls in the Nyau is to tell them that when they do wrong things, either

they or their relatives will suffer from a strange disease and may die in the process. This ritual disease is referred to as the *mdulo* complex by Breugel (2001, p. 171). Rangeley, however, reported that when medical officers examined persons suffering from *mdulo*, they invariably diagnosed diseases such as hookworm, malaria, dysentery, bilharzia and chronic malnutrition. He stated that some cases of tuberculosis were also considered to have been caused by *mdulo*. It seems that *mdulo* cannot be equated to any illness known in medical science. In the thinking of the Chewa, it is a mysterious disease that occurs when ancestral spirits have been annoyed by failure to conform to the ancestral ways of doing things. *Mdulo* for instance, occurs when a woman has a sexual relationship with a man during the menstrual periods. One of the functions of the initiation ceremonies is, therefore, to convince boys and girls about the importance of observing ancestral rules to avoid *mdulo*.

One of the practices of the traditional boys or girls' initiation ceremonies for the Chewas that cannot be reconciled with practices of Christian institutions is fortification (*kukhwima*). Chewa initiation ceremonies are conducted in an environment of strong beliefs in witchcraft and sorcery. Before the initiation ceremonies are held, a medicine man or a chief with more powerful magic is invited to fortify the grounds and house in which the girls or boys would be staying. The ceremony itself is also fortified to ensure that no disturbances take place in the course of the initiation ceremony. Initiation rites are considered, among the Chewa, to be vulnerable to attacks by enemies that can harm the initiates mysteriously (Longwe 2006, p. 45). The Chief of the village that intends to hold initiation ceremonies has the task of protecting his or her subjects from such mysterious attacks. The concoctions that are planted around female initiation areas are called deterrents by Longwe (2006, p. 45). These beliefs about possible attacks are so strong that anything that girls or boys come in contact with is carefully isolated and thrown into a pit latrine to avoid possible use by enemies or cruel people in bringing harm to the initiates. This aspect of initiation ceremonies among the Chewa contrasts sharply with the practices of religious institutions where no fortification ceremonies take place.

The importance of the initiation ceremonies in Chewa societies is indicated by the fact that on the final day of initiation, which is called the day of beer-drinking, the initiates and other people are entertained by the *mnjedza* dance, which is performed by chiefs, their wives, the initiation instructors and other senior elders. Longwe (2006, p. 148) reports that the

final day is marked by feasting and the slaughtering of goats or chickens. People from surrounding villages also attend the ceremony. The most important Nyau masquerade, *njovu* (the elephant masquerade), is featured on this day. Monies are showered on the Nyau. The hair of the initiates is shaved on this day. Finally, the initiates are escorted to their respective homes by the *Namkungwi* and other senior instructors.

Assessment of the Nyau as a Rite of Passage.

For the readers to understand why the Nyau persist to exist and the initiation ceremonies continue to be conducted even in modern times, it is necessary to consider the beliefs of the Chewa, especially their perspective on death and other cases of misfortune. The Chewa are said to be a people who are mainly concerned with death, illness, drought, and infertility (Ott 2001, p. 11; Breugel 2001, p. 267). The fear of death and the need to have children appear to be the main drivers of important activities in a traditional Chewa community. To understand the nature of this fear, Breugel (2001) carried out a survey of causes of death among the Chewa. He looked at 451 deaths and, in each case, asked for causes for the death as perceived by his respondents (Breugel 2001, p. 26). I applied Colaizzi's (1978) method of analysing data and collapsed his categories to four presented in the table below.

Table 1: Causes of death among the Chewa

Categories of causes of death	Number	Percentage (%)
God	48	11
Nature	38	8
Evil in man	356	79
Spirits	9	2
Total	451	100

Source: van Breugel (2001, p. 26)

Among the Chewa, every death has a cause. As indicated in the table, the most frequent cause of death is the evil that is in man. Breugel (2001, p. 26) also states that the majority of the deaths he surveyed were considered to be caused by the evil that is in man. The Nyau is a society of men who are involved in placating spirits so that they do not do any harm to

the society or to individuals. The aim of the initiation ceremonies is, among other things, to introduce children to the world of the ancestral spirits, the spirits of the recently departed, and the spirits that have been denied the ancestors' status (*ziwanda*). Even though these beliefs are still widespread, it is obvious that children of eight to twelve years may be too young to grasp things to do with spirits. Secularization among Malawian citizens also works to discredit the idea of spirits.

The Nyau masquerades nevertheless remain very important in present day Chewa societies because there are people who are benefiting from their existence. The chiefs get paid when the Nyau are in operation. It seems, therefore, that the Nyau masquerades exist today not because they provide reasonable rites of passage for children to adulthood, but because they are a source of income for the leaders of the *bwalo*, the leaders of the *dambwe*, and the leaders of girls' initiation ceremonies.

CONCLUSION

The task of the Nyau secret societies is to provide adulthood education to boys and girls in the Chewa communities. At present, the adult education to boys and girls is provided in an environment that is full of beliefs about witchcraft and sorcery. One wonders whether these beliefs are necessary considering that the missionaries had set up units of adult education without resorting to fortification and witches. It needs to be acknowledged that the purpose of initiation, has always been to prepare boys and girls for adult life in their communities. For boys, it was meant to equip them with knowledge and skills that would enable them to live as adults in their societies. However, societies are rapidly changing and as Parrinder (1954, p. 146) observed "*the clock cannot be put back*". Forces of nationalism, trade, education, and other religions, are bringing about rapid changes in African societies. The use of archaic methods of providing adult education to boys and girls in the present society is unlikely to be successful. There also appears not to be enough time to teach the boys and girls' aspects of adulthood sufficiently as the ceremonies had to be shortened signifcantly to accommodate the school calendar. All in all, it seems to me that this

aspect of education for boys and girls to become adults has yet to be entrusted to the Ministry of Education Science and Technology, even at this time when we, citizens of this country, are running all education institutions. The main issue at stake in this matter are finances accruing to the chiefs and the other stakeholders of the Nyau. Until the main stakeholders of the Nyau find other sources of income, it is unlikely that this aspect of education will be handed over to appropriate public institutions.

REFERENCES

Chakanza, J.C. (2008). *Wisdom of the People: 2000 Chinyanja Proverbs*. Blantyre: CLAIM.

Colaizzi, P. (1978). Psychological Research as a Phenomenologist Views It. In R.S. Valle & M. King (Eds.), *Existential phenomenological alternatives for psychology*, 48-78. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Crossman, A. (2021). *What is Secularization?* Retrieved from https://www.thoughtco.com/secularization-definition-3026575.

Giannotta, D. & Stefanin, E. (2014). *Gule Wamkulu – the Sacred Cult and Masks of the Chewa People, Malawi*. https://illuminatipropagand.com/gule-wamkulu-malawi-culture.

Gwengwe, J.W. (1965). *Sikusinja ndi Gwenembe*. Blantyre: Macmillan Malawi Limited.

Hodgson, A.G.O. (1933). Notes on the Achewa and Angoni. In J.W.M. Van Breugel, (2001). *Chewa Traditional Religion*, 146, Blantyre: CLAIM.

Linden, I., & Linden, J. (1974). *Catholics, Peasant and Chewa Resistance in Nyasaland 1889 – 1939*. London: Heinemann.

Longwe, M. (2006). *Growing Up. A Chewa Girls' Initiation*. Zomba: Kachere Series.

Lwanda, J.L. (2005). *Politics, Culture and Medicine in Malawi: Historical continuities and Raptures with a Special Reference to HIV / AIDS*. Zomba: Kachere Series.

Makumbi, A.J. (1975). *Maliro ndi Miyambo ya Achewa*. Blantyre: Longman (Malawi) (Pvt) Ltd.

Mbewe, M.L.K. (2017). Rites of Passage, Profane or Sacred? A Phenomenological Approach. The Case of Nyau Cult Society of Lilongwe South West. In *Africa Arising: Narrating Success of a Resurgent Continent*, 271-279. Nairobi: Centre for Democracy, Research and Development.

Ngoma, S. & Chauma, A. (2010). *Mbiri ndi Miyambo ya Achewa*. Blantyre: Dzuka Publishing Company.

Parrinder, E.G. (1974). *African Traditional Religion,* New Edition. London: Sheldon Press.

Phiri, J.E. (1958). *Kalenga ndi Mnzake*. Oxford/Lusaka: Oxford University Press in Association with Zambia Publication Bureau.

Phiri, K. (1974). Interview Transcripts of History of the Chewa in Areas of Chiefs Mazengera, Kalumbu, Chadza, Masumba, Kalolo in Lilongwe District.

Pickering, W.S.F. (1974). The Persistence of Rites of Passage: Towards an Explanation. *The British Journal of Sociology 25*(1), 63-78.

Rangeley, W.H.J. (1949). Nyau in Nkhotakota District. *Nyasaland Journal*, *2*(2), 35-49.

Russell, B. (1946). *History of Western Philosophy and its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present day*. London: Unwin Books.

Stannus, H.S. (1910). Notes on Some Tribes in British Central Africa. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute 40,* 285-335.

Van Breugel, J.W.M. (2001). *Chewa Traditional Religion*. Blantyre: CLAIM.

SECTION 4

ATR and Ethics

Fortune in the Bones: An Intersectionality of ATR[1] and Albinism Discourse in Malawi

Jones Hamburu ***Mawerenga***

Abstract

This study discusses the phenomena of the intersectionality of African traditional religion (ATR) and albinism in Malawi. It is based on data that was collected through qualitative research methods: literature review and interviews. During the past two decades, People with Albinism (PWAs) in Malawi have been victimised through what is considered superstition-driven and witchcraft-related violence in the form of abductions, body mutilations, killings and grave vandalism to exhume their bones for ritual purposes. The study observes that ATR serves as a bedrock for some of the beliefs, which motivate some criminal gangs to commit horrendous violence against PWAs in Malawi. The following reasons are proffered: First, ATR highlights the explicit nexus between the spirit-beings and their confluence with the material world, which is very important in situating the albinism discourse in the Malawian context. Second, the belief in the invisible 'spirit world' and its interconnectedness to the material world has subsequently influenced the development of certain corresponding religious beliefs and practices of rituals. For instance, rituals involving the killing of PWAs are based on the belief that the PWAs are persons whose body parts carry a rare sacred quality that can be used to make charms for acquiring fortunes in the material world. The chapter argues that since the roots of violence against PWAs in Malawi are anchored in some aspects of ATR, such as superstitious and witchcraft beliefs and practices, the remedy must also be essentially religious to holistically resolve the problem. This can be done by employing life-enhancing aspects of ATR beliefs and practices such as the African ethics and spirituality of Ubuntu/Umunthu. The study's main implication is that the current tide of violence against PWAs

[1] Prof. Joseph Chaphazika Chakanza was an ardent scholar of ATR who argued for the necessity of retrieving and using of the human flourishing qualities of ATR in the contemporary African society. This chapter is dedicated to his unwavering commitment to bring out the good out of ATR.

in Malawi is inconsistent with the African spirituality and ethics of Ubuntu/Umunthu. The life-flourishing qualities of Ubuntu uphold the sanctity of human life and complement human dignity, safety and security, and well-being.

Introduction

The chapter discusses the phenomena of African traditional religion (ATR) and albinism in Malawi as intersectional to each other. The phenomenon of albinism in Malawi is couched in myths, superstitious and witchcraft-related beliefs, spiritualisation, and socio-cultural constructions that inevitably promote violence against persons with albinism (PWAs). Baker et al. (2021) write that at the root of the religious and sociocultural construction of albinism in Malawi lie some aspects of the African traditional religious heritage, which some criminal gangs have embraced in committing atrocities against PWAs. Shoko (2016) argues that ATR being an existential reality, implies an all-encompassing influence on individuals and societies. According to Mbiti (1990), African spirituality and religiosity are ingrained and reflected in their worldview and overall behaviour:

> Africans are notoriously religious. Wherever the African is, there is religion. He carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party, or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician, he takes it to the house of parliament (p. 1).

The chapter locates the source of PWAs victimisation in Malawi in some aspects of ATR such as superstitious and witchcraft beliefs and practices embraced by some criminal gangs to commit horrendous violence against and murder of PWAs. Mbiti (1990) states that superstitious and witchcraft beliefs and practices are widespread on the African continent. Turaki (2006) argues that superstition and witchcraft exemplify the manifestations of African traditional power and spirituality. Witchcraft denotes the use of magic or supernatural powers to inflict harm, misfortune, and death on people. Munyenyembe (2011) writes that superstition and witchcraft constitute religious phenomena in Africa because they are inherently spiritual and supernatural or supra-natural with the potency and efficacy to cause evil, injury, and death to human beings. Turaki (2006) adds that the superstitious and witchcraft-related beliefs and practices inspire the

making of African magic-medicine (*muthi*) by using human body parts in order to enhance its potency or efficacy. Mwiba (2018) states that the *muthi* containing human body parts of PWAs is considered stronger when the parts are harvested while the victim is alive. Consequently, this leads to the gruesome and horrendously violent killings of PWAs. In Malawi, the brutality against PWAs is despicable. They are specifically targeted, and their limbs are cut off when the victims, normally children and youths, are still alive (Netshiavha, 2013). Thus, the chapter locates the violence of criminal gangs against PWAs in Malawi in the framework of superstitious and witchcraft beliefs and practices. In this setting, human body parts are harvested from PWAs to make charms and *muthi* medicines to bring good luck, health, success, and fortunes to the clients of the medicine men (Baker et al., 2021).

The chapter endeavours to uncover the multi-faceted influence of some aspects of ATR on the albinism discourse in Malawi by addressing the issues in the following four sections: (**1**) general discussion of albinism in sub-Saharan Africa; (**2**) the socio-cultural context of albinism in sub-Saharan Africa; (**3**) the nexus between African Traditional Religion (ATR) and albinism; (**4**) the retrieval of positive ATR beliefs and practices such as the African spirituality and ethics of Ubuntu/Umunthu to enhance the quality of lives of PWAs in Malawi.

General Discussion of Albinism in Sub-Saharan Africa

Hong et al. (2006) remark that the word "albinism" etymologically comes from the Latin word "albus" meaning white. Oetting et al. (1996) say that albinism refers to a group of inherited genetic disorders in which a person has partial or complete loss of pigmentation (melanin), which is responsible for the colouring of the skin, eyes, and hair.

Lynch et al. (2014) infer that people with albinism have different levels of melanin, which causes variations in skin colour, hair colour, and eye movements. Tambala-Kaliati et al. (2021) argue that albinism begins at birth and lasts the rest of a person's life. Lund (2005) states that PWAs are inclined to suffer from at least two lifelong physical and health problems, i.e. vision impairment and ultraviolet skin damage, which can lead to skin cancer. Braathen and Ingstad (2006) conjecture that the genetic disorder of albinism can be passed down from either parent and is difficult to prevent, particularly if both parents are unaware of their family history (Lynch, Lund, and Massah, 2014). Baker et al. (2010) convey that if both

parents have albinism or bear the gene, their children are more likely to be born with it. Tambala-Kaliati (2021) extrapolates that health issues associated with albinism in sub-Saharan Africa are aggravated by poverty, lack of sunscreen lotions, lack of hats with large brims, lack of clothing which covers almost the entire body, lack of sunglasses, and lack of access to adequate health care (Hong et al., 2006).

Mártinez-García et al. (2013) explain that there are several types of albinism characterised by different gene defects. They include Oculocutaneous albinism (OCA), Ocular albinism (OA), Hermansky-Pudlak syndrome, Chediak-Higashi syndrome, and Griscelli syndrome. Lund and Roberts (2018) observe that although OCA is a worldwide phenomenon, it has a high frequency in populations in sub-Saharan Africa, at least 1 in 1755 in the Southwest African country of Namibia and 1 in 2673 in Tanzania in East Africa. Lund and Gaigher (2002) estimate that the prevalence of albinism in sub-Saharan Africa is in the range of 1 in 2000–5000. Bradbury-Jones (2018) notes that PWAs in sub-Saharan Africa are feared and viewed with suspicion, while simultaneously they are considered to have mystical powers due to their perceived difference in skin colour. As a result, there is a misconception that their body parts can bring good luck, success and wealth. Also, they are believed to be a curse, bringing bad luck. Cruz-Inigo et al. (2011) aver that the condition of albinism is loaded with symbolical representations and meaning associated with its efficacy. Unfortunately, the mythical understanding of albinism contributes to the prevalence of various superstitious-driven attacks against people with albinism.

The Socio-Cultural Context of Albinism in Africa

Ikuomola (2015) argues for the significance of the socio-cultural context of albinism in Africa in order to adequately address the causes of violence against PWAs. Reimer-Kirkham et al. (2019) intimate that the socio-cultural context of albinism in Africa is highly embedded in myths, superstitions and witchcraft beliefs and practices (Lund and Gaigher, 2002, p. 367). In this chapter, a myth is defined as an unusual traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the worldview of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon (Culpepper, 2000). Dapi et al. (2018) observe the prevalence of myths concerning albinism in Africa. This chapter considers superstition to refer to three things. First, irrational beliefs are at odds with scientific knowledge (Vyse,

2013). Secondly, superstition is comprised of various beliefs and practices that are attributed to spirit-beings, fate, magic, and are alleged to have mystical or supernatural influence (Petrus and Bogopa, 2007). Thirdly, superstition constitutes beliefs and practices associated with luck, charms, amulets, and various paranormal phenomena (Geschiere, 2008). The chapter gives a threefold definition of witchcraft.

> First, witchcraft is the art or science whereby people endowed with mystical powers manipulate the supernatural and natural forces in order to cause harm to human beings or their property. Secondly, witchcraft which encompasses sorcery and black magic involves an anti-social or inhumane use of mystical or supernatural powers to harm people and their possessions, harm animals, plants, and the entire environment. Thirdly, witchcraft denotes evil such as the occurrence of mysterious illnesses, bad luck, misfortunes, accidents, or sudden death that witches inflict upon their perceived enemies (Van Wyk, 2004, p. 1201).

Taylor et al. (2019) argue that various myths and misconceptions regarding albinism reflect African traditional understanding of albinism and rationalize its subsequent stigmatisation and violence against PWAs. Cruz-Inigo et al. (2011) list at least fourteen myths and misconceptions concerning albinism which were collected in various African countries, i.e. Zimbabwe, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, and South Africa: (1) weaving the hair of PWAs into a net improves the chances of catching fish; (2) body parts of PWAs worn as amulets bring good luck, fortune, and health; (3) body parts of PWAs are necessary ingredients for witch doctor potions; (4) PWAs have magical superpowers and can cure diseases; (5) intercourse with a lady with albinism will cure HIV/AIDS; (6) spitting on a PWA prevents the condition in one's family; (7) mother of a child with albinism was laughed at by a person with albinism during pregnancy; (8) albinism is caused by a missing top layer of the skin; (9) PWAs and their mothers are possessed by evil spirits; (10) the devil stole the original child and replaced it with a PWA; (11) albinism is very contagious and spreads through touching; (12) PWAs are housed by ghosts of European colonists; (13) PWAs have low brain capacity and cannot function at the same level as others; (14) mother of a PWA was impregnated by a white man; and (15) albinism is a curse from the gods or from dead ancestors. As a result, being in contact with a PWA will bring bad luck, sickness or even death.

Although most Western scholars of albinism argue that the deconstruction of myths and superstitious beliefs concerning albinism in Africa

should be based on genetics or biology, this chapter contends for the effectiveness of the African religio-cultural based deconstruction. Mbiti (1990) argues that there is no distinction between the ATR and the African socio-cultural fabric because religion permeates the entire African socio-cultural fabric. Machoko (2013) points out that the socio-cultural construction of albinism in Africa and its perpetuation is based on some aspects of ATR beliefs, myths, stereotypes, and practices. Hence, ATR should be employed in addressing issues associated with the socio-cultural context of albinism in Africa (Reimer-Kirkham et al., 2019).

The Nexus Between African Traditional Religion and Albinism in Malawi

This section of the chapter answers the question: "What is the influence of African Traditional Religions (ATR) on the albinism discourse in Malawi?" Although most Africans are adherents of Christianity and Islam, beliefs and practices associated with ATR play a crucial role in their daily life (Awuah-Nyamekye, 2012). Therefore, it is imperative for this chapter to probe how ATR beliefs and practices influence the discourse of albinism in Malawi.

Olupona (2014) contends that ATR refers to the indigenous religions of the African people; hence, ATR is not a homogenous religion but a heterogenous one constituting a variety of homegrown religions arising out of the African soil. It deals with their belief systems, cosmology, ritual practices, ceremonies, festivals, thought patterns, symbols, arts, society, and so on (Turaki, 2020). Mabvurira (2016) argues that ATR permeates all aspects of African life and informs the African worldview and its interrelationship with the cosmos, culture, society, and daily life.

Bon Massa, the former president of the Association of Persons with Albinism in Malawi (APAM) bemoaned the rising cases of violence against PWAs in Malawi:

> It is unfortunate to observe a heightening trend of abductions and killings of PWAs in Malawi. These killings are being driven by superstitious and witchcraft beliefs and practices that regard us (PWAs) as mysterious beings who have some mystical powers which can be used to bring success, fortunes, and good health (Chimjeka, 2022).

The chapter contends that superstitious and witchcraft beliefs and practices concerning the phenomenon of albinism in Africa are the driving

forces of violence against PWAs. However, these superstitious and witchcraft beliefs and practices are anchored by some aspects of ATR, including the spirit phenomenon and the role of witch doctors in the killing of PWAs. Therefore, the chapter engages with these aspects of ATR in order to demonstrate how they influence the albinism discourse. Moreover, the chapter draws out the religious implications of the violence against PWAs in Malawi.

Spirit Phenomenon and Albinism

Imafidon (2017) affirms that ATR and the African traditional worldview consider PWAs in terms of alterity or otherness. The otherness, separateness, or difference of PWAs in Africa is not only a physical phenomenon but also an ontological otherness in some African communities. This is because, from this perspective, PWAs first and foremost belong to the world of the spirits, though they appear human. Their ontological otherness lies in the fact that, apart from being human beings they are also regarded as ghosts or spirits (Baker, 2010). Machoko (2013) suggests that the traditional Shona people of Zimbabwe regard PWAs as water spirits who manifest themselves as mermaids (*njuzu*). Cimpric (2000) explains three myths that demonstrate the connection between PWAs and water spirits. First, PWAs are considered as water spirits in Western DRC. Secondly, the birth of a person with albinism was believed to be the result of a woman having sexual intercourse with a water spirit in the Central African Republic (CAR). Thirdly, the hair of people with albinism was used by fishermen in order to attract fish in Lake Victoria, and that belief recalled the links between albinism and the water spirits in Central Africa.

The belief that PWAs are not fully part of the world of the living but are ghosts (*Mzukwa*) is also reinforced in Malawi by the *Nyau* or *Gule Wamkulu* cult. It is also believed that 'if you laugh at a '*Nyau*' (a member of a secret society of the Chewa people in Malawi who often wear masks and perform the dances '*Gule Wamkulu*'), you will have a baby with albinism' (Lynch, 2014, p. 218). Van Breugel (2001) argues that the association of albinism and *Nyau* or *Gule Wamkulu* has a specific religious significance because just as the *Nyau* symbolically represents the invisible spirit world; similarly, persons with albinism are also regarded as ghosts (*mzukwa*). Hence, PWAs are not considered to be proper human beings but ghosts (*mzukwa*) who are reincarnated spirits of the dead in a bodily form.

One study participant related how he was constantly being ridiculed that he was a ghost:

> My friends always ridicule me almost on a daily basis that I am not a human being but a ghost ... I suffer a lot of challenges at home, school, and in my community. I had to daily negotiate with rejection, stigma, and discrimination in virtually all spheres of my life because I was considered as a ghost and not a proper human being.

Baker et al. (2010) opine that the 'death myth', which is common in Malawi, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe, supports the notion that PWAs do not fully belong to the world of the living but belong to the 'spirit' world. The 'death myth' states that PWAs do not die a natural death but simply go into the bush and disappear. This belief is commonly heard in South Africa (Lund and Gaigher, 2002). Baker et al. (2010) narrate that participants in a study on albinism in Malawi expressed the belief that PWAs do not die a natural death; they just disappear and, more specifically, that 'they die or disappear before they reach the age of 40'.[2]

Bradbury-Jones et al. (2018) argue that ATR and the African traditional worldview ascribe a special spiritual status to PWAs, which makes them enigmatic and fearsome, capable of either blessing or cursing humanity. For this reason, superstitious beliefs about albinism have been linked to violent assault and murder of PWAs in sub-Saharan Africa (Bryceson et al., 2010). Taylor et al. (2019) submit that body parts of PWAs are used in witchcraft-related rituals that typically involve them being made into charms or amulets capable of bringing good luck, good health, success, opulence, wealth, protection, etc. Mulemi and Ndolo (2014) establish a symbiotic relationship between superstitious and witchcraft beliefs regarding albinism in sub-Saharan Africa and poverty or livelihood insecurity. Subsequently, economically and socially deprived people seek alternative ways of overcoming poverty by invoking supernatural powers associated with mystical or superstitious beliefs and witchcraft (Thuku, 2011). Thus, in this framework, PWAs are either targets for making magical charms in order to bring success and wealth to the financially insecure or scapegoats for perceived calamities or misfortunes in the traditional African community (Mulemi and Ndolo, 2014).

[2] The lack of melanin in the skin of people with albinism makes them vulnerable to skin cancer and without adequate health care, their life expectancy is limited, which may explain the assumption that people with albinism 'disappear' at this age.

Bakamana et al. (2021) posit that the pursuit of spiritual meaning in ATR rapidly translates into the pursuit of mystical and supernatural powers. Traditional Africans believe that their destiny and well-being are controlled and manipulated by supernatural, mystical, or unseen mysterious powers. Hence, they embark on a quest for power in order to predict, control, and manipulate the spirit-powers for their own benefit. Turaki (2006) mentions that mystical power generates or deposits power in things or objects. The potency, efficacy, and durability of this power vary in objects to the extent that some objects are inherently endowed with more powers than others. In this respect, the human body parts of PWAs, especially their bones, are coveted since they are believed to be endowed with more mystical powers than the human body parts of persons without albinism (Lipenga and Katemecha, 2021). Turaki (2006) argues that the mystical or mysterious powers embedded in things or objects can be extracted for use in rituals and sacrifices. For this reason, medicine men and women, diviners, witchdoctors, sorcerers, seers, rainmakers, priests, etc., extract the mystical powers embedded in natural objects, plants, and animals for medicine, magic, charms, amulets, fetishes, and talismans. Therefore, the ritual killing of PWAs in Africa and the exhumations of their remains from graves are partly motivated by this belief that their body parts and bones contain great mystical powers, which should be extracted for use in witchcraft or magical-related rituals in order to gain fortunes (Taylor et al., 2019).

Therefore, a correlation between the belief in spirit phenomena and its corresponding influence in the ritual murders of persons with albinism in Africa can be established (Caviglia, 2012). Vincent (2008) writes about *muthi* murders in South Africa, which refers to the killing not only of PWAs with the purpose of harvesting body parts for use as traditional medicine or *muthi*. The *muthi* is said to have mysterious powers, which enable its users to achieve at least one or more of the seven results. **First**, the killings of PWAs in Africa intensify during election times as demand increases for magical potions by politicians seeking to win in an election, to be re-elected, or to be appointed for higher positions in the government (Uromi, 2014). **Second**, it is believed that through the power of the magical potion, businessmen can become rich overnight, or if their business is failing, it can be boosted to astounding success (Kayombo, 2021). **Third**, the raping of women with albinism in Africa is believed to bring wealth, good health, cure infertility and diseases such as HIV/AIDS (Machoko, 2013). **Fourth**, the killing of PWAs in Africa is believed to bring good luck,

fortunes, wealth, success, good health, protection, etc. (Kisanga and Mbonile, 2017). **Fifth**, the killing of PWAs in Africa is believed to ward off evil spirits. In other words, it can bring deliverance from curses and calamities (Benyah, 2017). **Sixth**, the killing of PWAs in Africa enables fishermen to catch more fish because PWAs are associated with water or marine spirits (Cimpric, 2000, p. 31). **Seventh**, the killing of PWAs in Africa is believed to enable miners to source greater wealth by striking more gold or other minerals (Bryceson et al., 2010).

The Role of Witchdoctors in the Killings of PWAs

Lugira (2009) argues that a witchdoctor (*Sangoma*, *Inyanga*, *Sing'anga*, *Mzuza*, *Waganga*, etc.) is a type of healer who treats illnesses believed to be caused by witchcraft. The term witchdoctor is sometimes used to refer to healers, particularly in regions, which use traditional healing rather than contemporary scientific medicine. Roelofse (2014) argues that the witchdoctor is a key player in making and administering the *muthi*-magic (*mankhwala*, *shonga*, *muthi*, *juju* etc.). Mbiti (2015) explains that the witch doctor is often a powerful community leader, revered by many for his or her perceived supernatural powers and ability to carry out magic. Aquaron et al. (2009) concurs that witchdoctors usually have commercial interests in promoting the notion that PWAs carry certain supernatural powers. Also, their body parts and bones can be used in making charms, potions, spells, chants, invocations, and incantations in order to bring about a client's success. Masanja (2015) argues that the witchdoctor succeeds in peddling the narrative that the body parts of PWAs have magical powers because, in African epistemology and metaphysics, the witchdoctor is considered to have secret knowledge of how the spirit world works, particularly concerning witchcraft. Thus, people use their services to get help when dealing with metaphysical issues of witchcraft, superstition, magic, divination, etc. According to Lipenga and Katemecha (2021), witchdoctors in Malawi may incorporate different parts of the body of the PWA into their work in order to bring about the desired change for the client. For example, the hair of PWAs may be woven into fishing nets in order to catch plenty of fish. Vincent (2008) explains that witchdoctors in South Africa make some *muthi*-magic concoctions using fingers, arms, legs, skin, eyes, genitals, and blood of PWAs.

Bota (2020) clarifies that witchdoctors have been accused of fuelling the killing of PWAs in sub-Saharan Africa. They are said to give instructions

to perpetrators of the crimes on how to kill PWAs and harvest their body parts, thereby operating as the heads of criminal gangs with middlemen that help them carry out the killings in a discreetly organised form of criminal activity. Bucaro (2009) argues that the witchdoctor is also considered to be the fulcrum of the clandestine market for PWA body parts, which forms a very lucrative enterprise for the dealers (Dave-Odigie, 2010, p. 68). Bota (2020) argues that in 2015, the government of Tanzania introduced provisional licences to witchdoctors and banned those who practised without a licence. The ban followed the discovery that witchdoctors fuelled attacks on PWAs as they spread rumours that body parts of PWAs were an important concoction to their practice. Consequently, the police in Tanzania arrested at least 200 unlicensed witchdoctors as part of a nationwide crackdown in connection with the wave of attacks and murders on PWAs in the country.

Religious Implications of the Violence Against PWAs in Africa

Machoko (2013) opines that ATR presents two main implications of the violence perpetrated against PWAs in sub-Saharan Africa. **First**, the ritual murder and rape of PWAs are done in order to eradicate dangerous signs of societal and spiritual pollution because albinism is considered as a curse and a disdain in traditional African societies (Blankenberg, 2000). **Secondly**, PWAs are murdered or sexually assaulted in order to offer a more acceptable sacrifice to the ancestors for the socio-economic and political blessing of the whole society. Bakuluki and Mpyangu (2014) indicate that the shedding of blood in a sacrificial context implies that human or animal life is being given back to God, who is, in fact, the ultimate source of all life. Therefore, the ritual murder, mutilations, and rape of PWAs in Africa should be understood in the sacrificial context, whereby they are believed to have magical powers or supernatural characteristics, which makes them ideal people for ritual sacrifice (Cimpric, 2000).

Retrieval of ATR Beliefs and Practices in Enhancing the Lives of PWAs in Africa

In this section of the study, I expound on my main argument for the chapter that, since the violence against PWAs in Malawi is influenced by some

negative aspects of ATR such as superstitious and witchcraft beliefs and practices, the solution to the issue also lies with some positive aspects of ATR. Therefore, I focus on retrieving, appropriating, and applying the life-enhancing beliefs and practices of ATR, such as *Ubuntu/Umunthu*, as the means with which to combat the ongoing violence against PWAs in Africa. In other words, this chapter proffers the African spirituality and ethics of *Ubuntu/Umunthu* as positive aspects of ATR that can be used in combating violence against PWAs.

Ubuntu/ Umunthu

Bradbury-Jones (2018) argues that one of the solutions to the multi-faceted challenges faced by PWAs in Africa is the retrieval of the essence and practice of the African spirituality of *Ubuntu* or *Umunthu*. Nussbaum (2003) opines that *Ubuntu* provides a good starting point for understanding sub-Saharan African spirituality and morality because African spirituality is an all-embracing and holistic phenomenon that stems from the historical, socio-cultural, and religious heritage of the African peoples. Mkondo (2007) argues that *Ubuntu* is not an abstract principle nor a set of rules; rather, it is the religious foundation for African spirituality, philosophy, worldview, and way of life. John Mbiti captures the essence of the African spirituality of *Ubuntu* through his classic phrase: "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (Gathogo, 2022, p. 3). Nussbaum (2003) relates that *Ubuntu* is the basis of African communal cultural life. It expresses our interconnectedness, our common humanity and the responsibility to each other that is deeply interwoven in the fabric of our society.

Nussbaum (2003) affirms that *Ubuntu* is the capacity of African culture to express mutual companionship, reciprocity, respect, generosity, dignity, harmony and humanity in the interest of building and maintaining a community with justice and mutual caring. Membe-Matale (2015) declares that from this inherently humane and humanistic perspective, only by being members of this universal human community can we fully know, experience, and express ourselves as individuals (Haws, 2009). Consequently, *Ubuntu* has repercussions on the discourse of albinism in sub-Saharan Africa because it creates a life-enhancing environment for PWAs in Africa. Apart from its life-giving qualities, *Umunthu* also serves as a moral criterion for judging whether or not a particular form of human

behaviour affirms the humanity of all persons in the community. It follows, then, that the violence against PWAs in Africa is against the very notion of *Umunthu*.

Metz (2007) gives a twofold categorisation of the nature of harmony or community in African thought. First, community implies that one has a moral obligation to be concerned about the good of others by being sympathetic and helpful to them. *Ubuntu* exemplifies the virtue of beneficence in its endeavour to achieve the common good of all, mutual consideration and aid, sympathy and concern for the welfare of others (Metz, 2016). Second, community implies that one has a moral obligation to think of oneself as bound up with others by being a member of the community and actively participating in its shared values and practices. In this case, an individual has a duty to identify himself or herself with others. The African values of community or harmony entail the combination of identity, solidarity, and hospitality (Metz, 2011). Thus, the violence perpetrated against PWAs in Africa is contrary to the values of *Ubuntu* for two reasons. First, it is inconsistent with the African moral obligation for an empathetic and sympathetic orientation towards humanity. Second, it fosters the disintegration of African society by disrupting the cordial harmony that exists in African communities.

Metz and Gaie (2010) argue that community or harmony entails that every human being is expected to consider him/herself as an integral part of the whole and assume the responsibility of promoting the common good of all (the summum bonum). Mokgoro (1998) asserts that the purpose of our life is community-service and community-belongingness. Therefore, the abductions, body mutilations, and killings of PWAs in Africa are contrary to the values of *Ubuntu* for two reasons. First, this violence suggests the otherness, stigmatisation, and marginalisation of PWAs in African communities instead of fostering the spirit of belongingness. Secondly, it prohibits the participation of PWAs in the socio-economic development of their communities because of safety and security concerns, which they have to negotiate on a daily basis (Mswela, 2017).

Sindima (1991) proposes that the African spirituality of *Umunthu* refers to the quality and fullness of human life. In this case, *Umunthu* is concerned with the existential reality of living in space and time. The term *Umunthu* implies the fullness of life in socio-historical conditions and demonstrates an authentic way of living in the world. As such, *Umunthu* is against all that jeopardises human life or prevents its fullness (Musopole, 2021). Mabvurira (2020) insinuates that *Ubuntu's* emphasis

on humanity suggests that whatever is good for humanity is *Ubuntu*, and whatever harms humanity is against *Ubuntu*. Therefore, the abductions, killings, and body mutilations of PWAs in Africa are inconsistent with *Umunthu*.

Mabvurira (2020) argues that one of the sayings of *Ubuntu* is: "If and when one is faced with a choice between wealth and the preservation of the life of another human being, one should opt for the preservation of life" (p. 75). Therefore, the current tide of violence against PWAs in Africa is inconsistent with *Ubuntu* because it reflects a pursuit of wealth through the commodification and pricing of PWAs' body parts.

Majola (2019) identifies several qualities of a person with *Ubuntu*. They are: welcoming, hospitable, warm and generous, willing to share, open and available to others, willing to be vulnerable, and affirming of others. Therefore, the present-day dehumanisation of PWAs in Malawi totally destroys the spirit and essence of *Ubuntu* (Kaigoma, 2018).

At this juncture, it is imperative to question the effectiveness or the efficacy of *Ubuntu* in resolving the plight of PWAs in Malawi. The question can properly be phrased in the following way: "Why does violence against PWAs persist in Malawi in the midst of the *Ubuntu* spirituality and ethical theory?" In their provocative article: "The end of *Ubuntu*", Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013), give the harshest critique of *Ubuntu* by insinuating that it has reached its end as both a way of life and an ethical theory, hence it should be eliminated because it fails to solve problems in contemporary Africa such as the violence against PWAs. Kayange (2020) demonstrates the limitations of associating *Ubuntu* with a version of radical communitarianism that gives priority to the community over the individual. Kayange (2020) articulates that *Ubuntu's* appropriation of radical communitarianism both isolates and denies individuality or any individualistic elements in the African traditional way of life and thought (Eze, 2008). Consequently, this inevitably leads to the isolation and denial of the unique individuality of PWAs in African communities and provides a basis for their discrimination. Therefore, in view of the afore-mentioned critique of the theory and praxis of *Ubuntu*, when applying the concept, its retrieval, appropriation, and application there is need to understand its limitations and work towards improving it in order to ensure its efficacy in resolving contemporary problems in African society.

Rather than a matter of *Ubuntu's* inherent shortcomings, one also needs to consider the theory-praxis gap. Imafidon (2017) identifies a gap existing

between *Ubuntu* theory and praxis. This gap questions the Africans' commitment to the practice of *Ubuntu* in real-life situations. This gap is evident in the way PWAs are being brutally attacked in contemporary Africa (Mabovula, 2011). Ndareba (2021) argues that the retrieval of *Ubuntu* to resolve the current social issues in Africa demands the appropriation of both its theory and praxis in contemporary society. Metz (2007) opines that most African people talk about *Ubuntu* on a theoretical level, but they fail to practically live the values of *Ubuntu* in their daily lives. Letseka (2012) argues that *Ubuntu* expresses the fundamental reverence of human life and dignity, which are understood to be deeply rooted in the community. Hence, the praxis of *Ubuntu* in contemporary African society has the potential to eliminate the violence against PWAs.

CONCLUSION

The chapter has demonstrated the intersectionality of African traditional religion (ATR) and the albinism discourse in Malawi. Some negative aspects of ATR serve as sources of various myths, superstitious and witchcraft beliefs and practices, which contribute to the stigmatisation, discrimination, and violence against PWAs in Malawi. The violence is exemplified by abductions, attacks, killings, body mutilations, and grave exhumations of the bones of PWAs. The chapter observes that horrendous crimes against PWAs are perpetrated based on the belief that their body parts can be used to make charms, fetishes or magical concoctions that can bring good luck, health, material and financial prosperity to the beneficiaries of these concoctions. Although the superstitious and witchcraft related beliefs concerning albinism cannot be scientifically proven, they have their epistemological basis and praxis in some aspects of ATR. Thus, the main argument proffered in this chapter is that since the roots of the plight of PWAs in Malawi are based on some aspects of ATR such as superstitious and witchcraft beliefs and practices, the solution must also be essentially religious, in order to holistically resolve the problem. This can be done by employing life-enhancing aspects of ATR beliefs and practices such as the African ethics and spirituality of *Ubuntu/Umunthu*. Consequently, the chapter demonstrates how the African religio-cultural framework of *Ubuntu/Umunthu*, if practised, can be utilised in curbing the violence against

PWAs in Malawi. *Ubuntu* is the basis for African spirituality, communal life, ethics and worldview. Hence, *Ubuntu's* life-enhancing and flourishing qualities should be retrieved, appropriated, and employed to ensure the human dignity, well-being, and safety of PWAs in Malawi.

REFERENCES

Aquaron, R., Djatou, M., & Kamdem, L. (2009). Sociocultural Aspects of Albinism in Sub- Saharan Africa: Mutilations and Ritual murders Committed in East Africa (Burundi and Tanzania). *Medecine Tropicale: Revue du Corps de Sante Colonial* 69(5), 449-453.

Awuah-Nyamekye, S. (2012). Religion and Development: African Traditional Religion's Perspective. *Religious Studies and Theology 31*(1), 75.

Bakamana, D.B., Magesa, L., & Majawa, C.C.A. (2021). Use of Charms in Succession Politics of Traditional Luba Leaders of Kasai Central in the Democratic Republic of Congo. *International Journal of Social Science Research and Review 4*(3), 65-74.

Baker, C., Lund, P., Nyathi, R., & Taylor, J. (2010). The Myths Surrounding People with Albinism in South Africa and Zimbabwe. *Journal of African Cultural Studies 22*(2), 169-181.

Benyah, F. (2017). Equally able, Differently Looking: Discrimination and Physical Violence Against Persons with Albinism in Ghana. *Journal for the Study of Religion 30*(1), 161-188.

Blankenberg, N. (2000). That Rare and Random tribe: Albino Identity in South Africa. *Critical Arts 14*(2), 6-48.

Bota, J. (2020). *A 'Harvest' in Malawi: The Position of Albinism in Refugee Law* (Master's thesis, University of Cape Town).

Braathen, S.H., & Ingstad, B. (2006). Albinism in Malawi: Knowledge and Beliefs from an African Setting. *Disability & Society 21*(6), 599-611.

Bradbury-Jones, C., Ogik, P., Betts, J., Taylor, J., & Lund, P. (2018). Beliefs about People with Albinism in Uganda: A Qualitative Study Using the Common-Sense Model. *PLoS One 13*(10), e0205774.

Bryceson, D.F., Jønsson, J.B., & Sherrington, R. (2010). Miners' Magic: Artisanal Mining, the Albino Fetish and Murder in Tanzania. *The Journal of Modern African Studies 48*(3), 353-382.

Bucaro, S. (2009). A Black Market for Magical Bones: The Current Plight of East African Albinos. *Pub. Int. L. Rep. 15*, 131.

Bukuluki, P., & Mpyangu, C.M. (2014). The African Conception of Sacrifice and Its Relationship with Child Sacrifice. *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences 41*, 12-24.

Cimpric, A. (2010). *Children Accused of Witchcraft: An Anthropological Study of Contemporary Practices in Africa – Les Enfants Accusés de Sorcellerie: Etude Anthropologique des Pratiques Contemporaines Relatives aux Enfants en Afrique*. UNICEF WCARO, Dakar.

Cruz-Inigo, A.E., Ladizinski, B., & Sethi, A. (2011). Albinism in Africa: Stigma, Slaughter and Awareness Campaigns. *Dermatologic clinics 29*(1), 79-87.

Culpepper, J.C. (2000). Merriam-Webster Online: The Language Center. *Electronic Resources Review 4*(1/2), 9-11.

Dapi, L.N., Tambe, B.A., & Monebenimp, F. (2018). Myths Surrounding Albinism and Struggles of Persons with Albinism to Achieve Human Rights in Yaoundé, Cameroon. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work 3*(1), 11-16.

Dave-Odigie, C.P. (2010). Albino Killings in Tanzania: Implications for Security. *Peace Studies Journal 3*(1), 68-75.

Eze, M.O. (2008). What is African Communitarianism? Against Consensus as a Regulative Ideal. *South African Journal of Philosophy – Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif vir Wysbegeerte 27*(4), 386-399.

Geschiere, P. (2008). Witchcraft and the State: Cameroon and South Africa: Ambiguities of 'Reality' and 'Superstition'. *Past and Present 199* (suppl_3), 313-335.

Haws, C.G. (2009). Suffering, Hope and Forgiveness: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu. *Scottish Journal of Theology 62*(4), 477-489.

Hong, E.S., Zeeb, H., & Repacholi, M.H. (2006). Albinism in Africa as a Public Health Issue. *BMC Public Health 6*(1), 1-7.

Ikuomola, A.D. (2015). Socio-Cultural Conception of Albinism and Sexuality Challenges among Persons with Albinism (PWA) in South-West, Nigeria. *AFRREV IJAH: An International Journal of Arts and Humanities 4*(2), 189-208.

Imafidon, E. (2017). Dealing with the Other between the Ethical and the Moral: Albinism on the African continent. *Theoretical medicine and bioethics 38*, 163-177.

Kayange, M.G. (2020). Restoration of Ubuntu as an Autocentric Virtue-Phronesis Theory. *South African Journal of Philosophy – Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif vir Wysbegeerte 1*(39), 1-12.

Lipenga, K.J., & Katemecha, T. (2021). Striking Bold Strokes: Albinism and Stigma in Malawian Spoken Word Poetry. *Imbizo 12*(2).

Lugira, A.M. (2009). *African Traditional Religion*. New York: Infobase Publishing.

Lund, P.M., & Roberts, M. (2018). Prevalence and Population Genetics of Albinism: Surveys in Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Tanzania. In J. Kromberg &

P. Manga (Eds.), *Albinism in Africa: Historical, Geographic, Medical, Genetic and Psychosocial Aspects*, 81-98. Cape Town: Academic Press.

Lund, P.M., & Gaigher, R. (2002). A Health Intervention Programme for Children with Albinism at a Special School in South Africa. *Health Education Research 17*(3), 365-372.

Lund, P.M. (2005). Oculocutaneous Albinism in Southern Africa: Population Structure, Health and Genetic Care. *Annals of Human Biology 32*(2), 168-173.

Lynch, P., Lund, P., & Massah, B. (2014). Identifying Strategies to Enhance the Educational Inclusion of Visually Impaired Children with Albinism in Malawi. *International Journal of Educational Development 39*, 216-224.

Mabvurira, V. (2020). Hunhu/ubuntu Philosophy as a Guide for Ethical Decision Making in Social Work. *African Journal of Social Work 10*(1), 73-77.

Machoko, C.G. (2013). Albinism: A Life of Ambiguity–a Zimbabwean Experience. *African Identities 11*(3), 318-333.

Mártinez-García, M., & Montoliu, L. (2013). Albinism in Europe. *The Journal of Dermatology 40*(5), 319-324.

Masanja, M.M. (2015). Albinos' Plight: Will Legal Methods be Powerful Enough to Eradicate Albinos' Scourge. *International Journal of Education and Research 3*(5), 231-244.

Matolino, B., & Kwindingwi, W. (2013). The End of Ubuntu. *South African Journal of Philosophy 32*(2), 197-205.

Mbiti, J.S. (1990). *African Religions & Philosophy*. London: Heinemann.

Mbiti, J.S. (2015). *Introduction to African Religion*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.

Membe-Matale, S. (2015). Ubuntu Theology. *The Ecumenical Review 67*(2), 273-277.

Metz, T. (2016). Recent Philosophical Approaches to Social protection: From Capability to Ubuntu. *Global Social Policy 16*(2), 132-150.

Metz, T., & Gaie, J.B. (2010). The African Ethic of Ubuntu/Botho: Implications for Research on Morality. *Journal of Moral Education 39*(3), 273-290.

Mokgoro, Y. (1998). Ubuntu and the Law in South Africa. *Buffalo Human Rights Law Review 4*, 15-23. Available at: https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/bhrlr/vol4/iss1/3.

Mswela, M. (2017). Violent Attacks Against Persons with Albinism in South Africa: A Human Rights Perspective. *African Human Rights Law Journal 17*(1), 114-133.

Mulemi, B.A., & Ndolo, U.M. (2014). Albinism, Witchcraft, and Superstition in East Africa: Exploration of Bio-Cultural Exclusion and Livelihood Vulnerability Research Report. The Catholic University of Eastern Africa.

Munyenyembe, R.G. (2011). *Christianity and Socio-Cultural Issues: The Charismatic Movement and Contextualization of the Gospel in Malawi*. Zomba: Kachere Series.

Musopole, A. (2021). *Umunthu Theology: An Introduction*. Oxford: African Books Collective.

Mwiba, D.M. (2018, June). Medicine Killings, Abduction of People with Albinism, Wealth and Prosperity in North Malawi: A Historical Assessment. *Proceedings of the African Futures Conference 2*(1), 30-49.

Netshiavha, A.R. (2013). *Tsenguluso ya u tenda kha u via kha Tshivenda* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Limpopo).

Nkondo G.M. (2007). Ubuntu as Public Policy in South Africa: A Conceptual Framework. *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies 2*(1), 88-100.

Nussbaum, B. (2003). African Culture and Ubuntu. *Perspectives 17*(1), 1-12.

Olupona, J.K. (2014). *African Religions: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Petrus, T.S., & Bogopa, D.L. (2007). Natural and Supernatural: Intersections between the Spiritual and Natural worlds in African Witchcraft and Healing with Reference to Southern Africa. *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology 7*(1), 1-10.

Reimer-Kirkham, S., Astle, B., Ero, I., Panchuk, K., & Dixon, D. (2019). Albinism, Spiritual and Cultural Practices, and Implications for Health, Healthcare, and Human Rights: A Scoping Review. *Disability & Society 34*(5), 747-774.

Roelofse, C. (2014). Ritual and Muthi Murders: An Afro-ethno-criminological Assessment of the Phenomenon and Development of a New Typology. *Acta Criminologica: African Journal of Criminology & Victimology*, 71-83.

Shoko, T. (2016). Teaching African Traditional Religion at the University of Zimbabwe. In E. Chitando & A. Adogame (Eds.), *African Traditions in the Study of Religion in Africa*, 53-66. Abingdon: Routledge.

Sindima, H. (1991). Bondedness, Moyo and Umunthu as the Elements of Achewa Spirituality: Organizing logic and principle of life. *Ultimate Reality and Meaning 14*(1), 5-20.

Tambala-Kaliati, T., Adomako, E.B., & Frimpong-Manso, K. (2021). Living with Albinism in an African Community: Exploring the Challenges of Persons with Albinism in Lilongwe District, Malawi. *Heliyon 7*(5), e07034.

Taylor, J., Bradbury-Jones, C., & Lund, P. (2019). Witchcraft-Related Abuse and Murder of Children with Albinism in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Conceptual Review. *Child Abuse Review 28*(1), 13-26.

Thuku, M. (2011). Myths, Discrimination, and the Call for Special Rights for Persons with Albinism in sub-Saharan Africa. *Amnesty International Editorial Review on Special Programme on Africa*.

Turaki, Y. (2020). *Engaging Religions and Worldviews in Africa: A Christian Theological Method*. Carlisle: Langham Publishing.

Turaki, Y. (2006). *Foundations of African Traditional Religion and Worldview*. Nairobi: Word Alive Publishers.

Van Breugel, J.W.M. (2001). *Chewa Traditional Religion*. Blantyre: CLAIM.

Van Wyk, I.W.C. (2004). African Witchcraft in Theological Perspective. *HTS: Theological Studies 60*(3), 1201-1228.

Vincent, L. (2008). New Magic for New Times: Muti Murder in Democratic South Africa. *Tribes and Tribals Special 2*, 43-53.

Vyse, S.A. (2013). *Believing in Magic: The Psychology of Superstition-Updated Edition*. Oxford University Press.

Internet Sources

Chimjeka, R. (2022, December 4). 3 Relatives of Slain Girl with Albinism Arrested. *The Times Group*, https://times.mw/3-relatives-of-slain-girl-with-albinism-arrested/.

Exploring Ways of Utilizing ATR in the Fight against Corruption in Nigeria

Obafemi ***Jegede***

Abstract

The question of corruption and the problem of political and economic stability raise several discussions and arguments among Nigerian citizens. The popular opinion is that if the problem of corruption is addressed, it would spell an end to the Nigerian predicaments. Religions, particularly Islam and Christianity, have been known to play significant roles in the development of many nations of the world. For many centuries of their existence in Nigeria Islam and Christianity have not offered the same benefits to the country as those which they offer to the Middle East and Europe respectively. Nevertheless, these religions are spreading in Nigeria more than in many other parts of the world. The new awareness, however, is that Christianity and Islam have not optimally served the purpose of development in Nigeria. There is a legion of opposition to Christianity and Islam in Nigeria. Islam and Christianity are called *Ẹ̀sìn àjèjì* (foreign religions). It is adduced that the foreignness of these faiths has made it impossible for them to adequately serve the purpose of development in Nigeria. There is, therefore, a frantic search for the alternative, which has been found in African Traditional Religion (ATR), otherwise called *Ẹ̀sìn àbáláyé* in Yoruba parlance. So, there is a brewing revolution that is leading to the resurgence of ATR, which previous studies have not adequately articulated. The popular demand, which is brought to the fore in this paper, is the need to mainstream ATR into stemming the tide of corruption and Nigerian predicaments. The chapter is pitched on the theory of religious engineering as conceived by Spies and Schrode, which states that religion should be engineered for the transformation of the nation. Using the qualitative research method, the chapter raises the following research questions: What are the values and tenets of ATR for stemming the tide of corruption and the Nigerianpredicaments? How can the power and prowess of the *Òrìṣà̀* (deities) be mainstreamed in the fight against corruption? Thus, this chapter provides a fresh prism through which certain qualities and contents of ATR can be mainstreamed to help Nigerians out of their predicaments. It also recommends these qualities and contents in ATR as useful for stemming the tide of corruption and Nigerian predicaments.

Introduction

The question is: if there were no Christian and Islamic missionary enterprises in Africa, would there still be what is called ATR? This fundamental question is raised against the background of the fact that the idea of ATR was coined by Christian missionaries in Africa. According to Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar (2012, p. 457), religion cannot be distinctly singled out as it is difficult to determine what exactly constitutes a religion and, as a result, it is also difficult to locate boundaries. One can say that religion is everything and everything is religion.

Pobee (1976) problematized these three words namely: *Africa*, *traditional* and *religion*. In his view, these words are not appropriate given the vastness of Africa as a continent, the pluralism of its cultures/religions and the multi-headed hydra nature of existence. In describing the indigenous faith of Africa, Lucas used the word *Yòrùbá religion*; Parrinder (1954) used *West African traditional religion,* while Idowu (1973) used the term *African traditional religion* (ATR). Recently, the argument is centred on whether it is African traditional religion, religions, or African indigenous religion(s), or simply African religion(s).

The controversy around the right name of a phenomenon puts its existence in doubt. The obvious problematic fact is that it is geographicalised; that is, it is named after Africa as a geographical location. It is also culturalised; that is, it is traditional. Like most other religions, it is not named after a specific founder or central ideology or doctrine and so it is difficult to give it a supposedly accurate name. The religion itself was described by theologians, sociologists and archaeologists, many of whom were Christians, and, as a result, their background in Christian theology influenced their writings. Idowu (1973) noted the pejorative and dyslogistic scholarship with which studies in ATR were riddled. He noted this when he did an analysis of what he called derogatory terms against ATR such as animism, savagery, paganism, magic, fetishism, idolatry, juju, primitive, heathenism and ancestral worship. By implication, these terms cannot be acceptable definitions or names of indigenous religion(s) of Africa. Idowu (1976) and Awolalu (1979) attempted to use Christian lenses to see ATR, and this is the basis for their comparative study of religion. For example, Idowu (1962), in his book *Olódùmarè: God in Yòrùbá Belief,* attempts to situate and equate *Yòrùbá Olódùmarè* (Supreme Deity) with *Yahweh* (the Hebrew Deity). Recently, this position has been hugely contested.

Anthropologists and historians argue that the concept of religion itself has been defined implicitly with the scaffolding of Christian and Islamic terms. This is exemplified in the data that are treated as "religion". What happens is the location and transfusion of Christian, Judeo-Christian and Muslim templates as a way by which religion can be seen to have been in existence in Africa before the invasion of Christianity and Islam. By so doing, there is an outright mistranslation and misrepresentation of African worldviews and practices. Ideally, what is seen as ATR is based on the oral traditions of the Africans. These traditions are transitional, which means that the basic values and ways of life are passed from elders to younger generations. These traditions cannot appropriately be referred to as religion, but a cultural identity that is passed on through stories, proverbs, myths and tales.

Logically, what is termed ATR in this context is the notion that people have the capacity to master and manipulate forces or energies in space; it is the indigenous technology for the manipulation of energies in and outside of the so-called physical realities toward achieving personal or collective objectives. This is the phenomenal aspect of culture in sub-Saharan Africa. ATR can be interpreted to mean those cultural devices generally employed by indigenous people to cause or solve problems in Africa or Nigeria before the invasion of British colonialists. In this context, therefore, ATR is the belief in and activation of the *Òrìṣà* (divinities; gods/goddesses), magic, medicine, charms, occult and occultism, rituals and other practices, including the application of these to solve problems or to achieve personal or selfish desires including causing problems. The application of these elements is still deeply rooted in African societies, in spite of the overwhelming influence of modernity. In the view of a number of scholars, it has rather increased (Brain, 1982, p. 382 and Drucker-Brown, 1993). In complex situations, even in times of war, drought, during political campaigns, political meetings, protests and other national upheavals, people still resort to the power of *Òrìṣà*, magic, occult, ritual and others as obtainable in ATR (Kohnert, 1997, p. 1347 and Jegede, 2013, p. 44).

Previous studies have emphasised the capacity of ATR to cause problems rather than solve problems. The notion of ATR as a phenomenon that can be harnessed to solve problems has not been adequately brought to the fore, which is the gap this chapter has filled. The portrayal of ATR as an evil-causing phenomenon is partly the reason for its marginalization in Nigerian religious space. This is also the reason why Christianity and Islam have been properly mainstreamed into the national development agenda with little or no involvement of ATR in national affairs (Jegede,

2010). Like Christianity and Islam, ATR is a positive phenomenon and ought to be seen as such. Admittedly, like any other (religious) phenomenon, there are other aspects of ATR that are used for evil. However, these aspects can/should only be seen as expressions of the misuse of a religious tradition. This study, therefore, is designed to inspire discourses on the need to harness the positive aspects of ATR for curbing the problem of corruption in Nigeria.

Corruption and the Nigerian State

With almost 200 million inhabitants, Nigeria is Africa's most populous country. Endowed with countless mineral resources, Nigeria is one of the world's largest oil exporters, and has been the continent's leading economy for several years. Nevertheless, the country faces immense challenges. Today, about 87 million people in Nigeria live on less than 1.90 US dollars a day, making it one of the countries with the world's highest number of people living in extreme poverty (Yahoo Finance, 2023). To make matters worse, the country's economy is only slowly recovering from a severe crisis that began in 2014 and bottomed out in 2016. According to the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC), the unemployment rate has risen annually since the onset of the economic crisis, reaching a provisional high of 23.2 per cent in the third quarter of 2018 (UNDC, 2019). However, the number of unreported cases of unemployment is probably much higher. In addition, the country's birth rate is around 5.2 children per woman, leading to a rapid population growth that is set to continue in the future. Further, as the UNODC (2019) indicated, the country would need to achieve double-digit economic growth in order to develop and offer its people prospects for the future.

Other indicators that shed light on the difficult situation in Nigeria include the fact that around 60 percent of the population is not connected to the electricity grid; 13.5 million children do not attend school, and an estimated 58,000 women die in childbirth every year (WHO, 2015). The country's power supply and education system are as underdeveloped as its health care system, and its dilapidated roads are in desperate need of repair.

On top of this, the security situation throughout the country has deteriorated significantly over the past decade. The Islamic terror militia called

Boko Haram, and the splinter faction known as Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) have been destabilizing the northeast of the country for the last ten years. In central Nigeria, deadly clashes are escalating between ethnically mixed but predominantly Christian farmers and Muslim Fulani herders. Organized banditry in the northwest and the oil-rich south, along with daily kidnappings and robberies throughout the country, are all aggravating the security situation. The conflicts claim thousands of lives every year and have driven more than two million people from their homes (Adetola, 2021).

Corruption destroys a working system such that the system is not able to function and, therefore, it is unable to attain the desired optimal benefits for the people. Corruption is more visible in an organized system, when it is not promptly eradicated, it is capable of affecting the whole system adversely. The general opinion, as expressed by randomly selected respondents during interviews, is that corruption is any conscious or unconscious actions or inactions, processes or procedures perpetuated by an individual or group that unfairly and unduly appropriates rewards, resources, or advantages to some individuals or groups at the expense of others. Corruption is that which makes it difficult for those who operate a system to achieve collective benefits but makes it easy for them to achieve personal benefits. Participants believed that corruption has become a cankerworm eating up the fabric of Nigerian systems. The resultant effect is that whatever mechanism that is put in place will not allow the system to work effectively. More disturbing is the problem of total moral disconnection to the extent that it becomes difficult or sometimes impossible to determine or even differentiate between good and evil.

The current situation in Nigeria is largely due to the scale of corruption that has deprived the country of vital development for decades. Corruption pervades the whole of society; it is systematically practised by the ruling elite and comes in many guises, including embezzlement of state funds, clientelism, nepotism, fraud, bribery; and, as a result, large-scale money laundering at home and abroad. It permeates every level of society, from high-level politicians and civil servants to the security forces, business people and the country's poorest citizens. So, it is hardly surprising that Nigeria has remained in the lower quarter of Transparency International's "Corruption Perceptions Index" for many years. In 2018, the

country was ranked 144 out of 180 alongside countries such as Cameroon, Kenya and Mauritania (Transparency International, Corruption Perception Index, 2021).

It is over-laboring the obvious if one should ask what the problem is since it is experienced right under everybody's nose. In politics, the leaders do not pay heed to the basic unwritten law that their private interests should not come in conflict with those of the public. We have experienced a series of political upheavals, economic malaise, social instability, and even religious crises. There is an emerging Naijaphobia as people are generally afraid of Nigerians everywhere in the world, and, as a result, they are constantly the primary suspects of every perceived crime or misdemeanour. Nigerians are subjected to special scrutiny at the airports; and people are afraid of striking deals with Nigerians even in international trade and international relations. This is glaring proof of the extent of the Nigerian predicaments. It was Okolo (1994, p. 34) who underlined 'squandermania mentality' as the central problem of Nigeria. This, he defined as a situation whereby every Tom, Dick and Harry develops a passive consumerism rather than a productive attitude to issues. There are many stupendously rich people whose sources of wealth are untraceable. Leaders, just like their citizens, are mostly preoccupied with the here and now such that they fail to see beyond the immediate satisfaction and interest of the moment. As a result, there is no provision for the future and its generations. An immersion into the world of 'now' shows some resistance to the pain and discipline needed today for a better tomorrow. Another associated problem is the alienation and marginalization of oneself from the problem and the solution, otherwise referred to as the externalisation of causes of the problem and solution. In other words, Nigerians like to project their problems as something caused by Westerners or others rather than something caused by themselves.

Things have started to fall apart, and the centre may not hold. Nigeria is on the brink of collapse; it is a near war situation calling for a "state of emergency" This is more so because the corruption problem in Nigeria is so intense that no conventional solution can address it squarely; hence, the need to adopt unconventional solutions to the problem. The data as reflected in the indexes of international agencies measuring the fragility of the Nigerian State, is unfavourable. For several years, Nigeria has remained firmly rooted in the top 20 of the weakest and most fragile states in the world. When the assessment started in 2005, the country was ranked 54. In the 2021 report on the Fragile States Index (FSI, 2021), a

study carried out by the Fund for Peace (FFP) focusing on weak and failing states, Nigeria was ranked as the 12th most fragile state in the world. By implication, Nigeria has declined by two further steps. In the years 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023, Nigeria has steadily remained the 14th most fragile state (FSI, 2023). What these reports reveal is that the country's position is not getting better; it is rather getting worse. It means that all the efforts that have been put in place to remedy the situation have not yielded any meaningful results. The assessment, which started 16 years ago, is an early warning system for analyzing domestic threats that have the potential to escalate to a major national crisis with grave international outcomes. In 2016, a report by Fund for Peace identified Nigeria as one of the states the international community must keep in view, having scored a relatively high figure, which places it in the "alert" category trailed only by countries with long-standing political and security woes like the Central African Republic, Sudan and Afghanistan. An individual FSI score is usually any number from zero to 10 that depicts the intensity of the pressure exerted by each of the 12 social, economic, and political indicators on conditions within each of the countries on the index. The lower a country's total score, the more stable it is.

Corruption in Nigeria manifests itself in many ways: It expresses itself in misappropriation of resources, kickbacks, forgery, bribery, embezzlement, tribalism, nepotism, money laundering, and outright looting of the treasury, and so on. Corrupt actions can be done secretly and sometimes openly (Obuah, 2010). Some parameters used to index the fragility of a state are: insecurity and violence, a legacy of conflict, weak governance and the lack of capacity to deliver an efficient and just distribution of public goods and services (Mcloughlin, 2012). There is a consensus in the literature on the existence of a relationship between corruption and fragility, but causalities are difficult to establish (Hussmann, Tisné, Mathisen, 2009). Corruption is the brain-box of the Nigerian predicament; when it is dealt with, it is easy to eradicate all other vices.

The fragility of the Nigerian state is reflected in the series of killings, maimings, kidnappings and all other vices that indicate the volatility of the country. Like an emerging pandemic, the *Japa* syndrome is presently a common vernacular currency in Nigeria. *Japa* is a locution of a *Yòrùbá* word, which means to run away from one's own country in search of greener pasture. Sadly, some people are leaving the country and aimlessly wandering around in strange lands. The fundamental reason for emigration is frustration; the people can no longer bear the distressing issues we

have always fussed about, namely issues of corruption, poverty, insecurity, neglect and an oppressive government, which calls the bluff of the weak citizens and treats them with disdain.

Qualities and Contents of African Traditional Religion (ATR): Toward Religious Engineering

More than 90% of Nigerians are either Christians or Muslims. Therefore, the religions are institutionalized, and their tenets are seen to be able to guide not just the individual followers but also the nation. Christianity and Islam pervade the lives of most citizens, leaving their marks on the society and the topography of Nigeria to the extent that these religions are deeply ingrained in the socio-cultural, economic and political life of Nigeria. This makes religion a very powerful force for profoundly influencing the Nigerian people and society. Therefore, when a nation fails, the pervading religions in that nation should be implicated. This is basically the reason why, in this study, we seek certain aspects of the values and tenets of ATR that can be mainstreamed in the fight against corruption in Nigeria. What are the values and tenets in ATR that can be harnessed to stem down the tide of corruption and Nigerian predicaments? These qualities include the mysterious power of the ethical *Òrìṣà*, the justice of the uncompromising *Òrìṣà*, and the philosophy of *ọmọlúàbí* (the epitome of goodness). The first two tenets constitute the bedrock for the last. In other words, Nigerians would internalise and exhibit *ìwà rere* (good or incorruptible character) in the face of the mysterious power of the *Òrìṣà* cum their divine justice system. Foreign religions have failed in this regard. The futility of foreign religions is attested by the prevalence of *ìwa ọ̀daj́ú* (evil or corrupt character) in Nigeria. The futility of Christianity and Islam is evident in the fact that for many years of the use of the Bible and Quran for oath taking, especially by public officeholders and in the Court of Law, the problem of corruption and how to eradicate it remain unanswered.

In this study, therefore, I would like to invoke the idea of religious engineering as conceived by Spies & Schrode (2020). In their view, religion should be engineered for the transformation of the nation; this is the purpose of religion. The theory is borne out of the idea that if religions are properly harnessed, they could serve the purpose of development. However, Schrode and Spies's concern, as succinctly expressed, is mainly premised on Islam and Christianity. By religious engineering, in this study, I mean the conscious application of tenets and practices in ATR to

the development of Nigeria, particularly in the search for a solution to the problem of corruption. Paula Schrode and Eva Spies's religious engineering is in consonance with Van der Merwe (2008, p. 1299), who states that the traditional religion of a people is strategic for problem solving; thus stressing the phenomenology of traditional religion with particular emphasis on practices. According to Atanda (1980), the stability of the *Yòrùbá* in the nineteenth century hinged on the development of religion, which formed an important aspect of the life of the people. In the Yoruba religion there were norms which regulated the people's social life and gave the people a high standard of morality; in fact, the whole existence of man and the sustenance of the Yoruba universe are hinged on the people's religion. For this purpose, a morally sound life is fundamental to the religion and vice-versa.

In looking at the transformative contents of Islam and Christianity, the questions regarding the extent to which these two religions have served the purpose of transformative development have not been exhaustively examined. However, it was expected that the two religions would engender a social-ethical transformation of the people in the country. However, the popular opinion is that Christianity and Islam have not adequately served this transformative purpose in Africa and, particularly in Nigeria. Despite the wide spread teaching of Christianity and Islam in Africa, the problems of corruption have continued to aggravate. The underlining statement of the problem is that there is an emerging pushback, leading to a growing hatred for Christianity and Islam in what Otiko (2023) refers to as the contestation of space. In this context, people are declaring the Bible and the Quran as ordinary books that are not capable of serving transformative purposes. The reason, as advanced by these people, is that the massive teaching and spread of Christianity and Islam have not had an adequately positive effect on national development. To demonstrate the profanity of these books, people now openly burn the Bible and the Quran. Some of the adherents of ATR who are used to practising their religion surreptitiously now practise it openly.

The general idea is that, given the fragility of the Nigerian state as a result of corruption despite the massive spread of Christianity and Islam, many Nigerians now deem it fit to reconsider ATR as a succour as well as a solution to their problems. Many people now choose adherence to ATR not just as a religion but also for the purpose of personal transformation, the role that Christianity and Islam are considerably unable to perform adequately. In the views of many of the new converts into ATR, following

Christianity and Islam simply provides identity and class formations with no salvific function. As earlier defined, ATR means those methods handed over by ancestors by which complicated and seemingly intractable problems are solved. This understanding emanated from the theoretical standpoint of *ọ́ ní bí a ṣe ń ṣé* (that is, there is always a way by which complex problems are solved). This is necessary when the problem is complicated and unfathomable; when all popular, available and conventional solutions are not able to tract the issue, people are lured to go beyond the ordinary. This prompts the need to seek the support of *Òrìṣà*: energies and forces in space who in their own way are believed to control the affairs of the world.

Mainstreaming the *Òrìṣà* (Deities) in the Fight against Corruption

How can the power and prowess of the *Òrìṣà* (deities) be mainstreamed in the fight against corruption? The African universe, I opine, is not just eco-systemic or eco-centric. This is because the general knowledge, as argued by literature on science, is not holistic or all-inclusive. The scientific literature on ecosystems argues that an eco-system is about plants and animals that live in a particular area together with the complex relationship between them and their environment (Kathleen, David and Gene, 2012). In my many years of ethnographic exploration among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria, I have realized that the idea of the visible and the invisible is a complicated ontological issue among the indigenous people of Africa. This is because reality is seen as a whole with an interconnectedness of forces, and so it is alien to differentiate or dichotomize the so-called physical and the metaphysical. The African universe, therefore, is an inclusive universe locating realities not just in animals and plants or other physical realities but also in the so-called invisible entities. The African universe cannot be seeing as an eco-system, in fact, it is neither systemic nor systematic. It is a conflicting, complex and unfathomable universe full of innumerable energies or forces imposing and compelling relationships as the basis for equilibrium. These supposedly invisible realities are called *Òrìṣà*, *Irúnmọlẹ̀* and *Ìmọlẹ̀* which are translated in English as deities, divinities and gods/goddesses. This is the reason why the Yoruba called our universe *Ayé*, derived from *Àìyé,* which means the incomprehensible phenomenon (Jegede, 2012, p. 112). The Nigerian predica-

ment, therefore, cannot be detached from the problem of anthropocentrism, the notion that man is at the centre of the universe; hence, man is the most valuable of all creation. *Ayé* (world) from the African point of view is akin to Rudolf Otto's understanding of religious experience called the numinous dread or awe-fullness or *mysterium trememdum*, that is to say, that man's encounter with and experience of the world is a mysterious yet fascinating reality; it is attractive as well as repelling (Phillip, 1885; Todd, 2000, p. 123).

So, in this complex phenomenon called *Ayé*, the overemphasis on anthropocentrism (a theory that puts only humans at the centre of the universe) will be incapable of fostering cosmic balance even when the reality of human corruptibility is incontrovertible. If humans are corruptible, it is foolhardy to hand over the total running of the universe only to the humans. *Odù Ogbè-Yọ́nú* lends credence to the corruptibility of man. In *Odù Ogbè-Yọ́nú, Ifá* says:

Ọ̀rúnmìlà ní èèyàn wọ́n	*Ọ̀rúnmìlà* said (good) humans are scarce
Ifá mo ní èèyàn sòro	*Ifá*, I said humans are complicated
Ọ̀rúnmìlà ní ko s'èèyàn mọ	*Ọ̀rúnmìlà* said there are no good humans
Ó ní t'ala a sun mọ?	He (*Ọ̀rúnmìlà*) said who shall we draw closer to?
Ó ní t'alaà bá ṣe?	He (*Ọ̀rúnmìlà*) said who shall we relate with?
Ó ní t'alaà bá mulẹ̀ tí ò leè da ni?	He (*Ọ̀rúnmìlà*) said who shall we make a covenant with that will not betray one's trust?
Òòṣàlla ni òun ni	*Òòṣàlla* (arch divinity; god of creation) said he is one that can be trusted because it is he who will not betray trust
Ògún ní òun ni	*Ògún* (god of iron and technology) said he is one who can be trusted
Ṣàngó ni òun ni	*Ṣàngó* (god of fire, lightning and thunder) said he is one who can be trusted
Ẹ̀ṣù ni òun ni.	*Ẹ̀ṣù* (god of law, order and justice or the divine enforcer) said he is one who can be trusted
Mo bá Òòṣàlla mulẹ̀, ó dà mí	I made a covenant with *Òòṣàlla*, he betrayed me
Ó bẹ̀rẹ̀ sí je ìgbín ati iyán elòmíràn	He started to eat somebody else's snails and pounded yam.

Mo bá Ògún mulẹ̀, ó dà mí	I made a covenant with *Ògún*, he betrayed me
Ó bẹ̀rẹ̀ sí gbé ajá elòmíràn níbi gbogbo	He started to take somebody else's dogs everywhere
Mo bá Ṣàngo mulẹ̀, ó dà mí	I made a covenant with *Ṣàngo*, he betrayed me
Ó bẹ̀rẹ̀ sí gbé àgùntàn àwọn ènìyàn	He started to carry away people's ram
Mo bá Ẹ̀ṣù̀ mulẹ̀, kó dà mí	I made a covenant with *Ẹ̀ṣù̀*, he did not betray me.
Èèyàn wọ́n	Good people are scarce
Mo bá Ẹ̀ṣù̀ mulẹ̀	I, therefore, made a covenant with *Ẹ̀ṣu*

Why should it be only humans who dominate both the moral and physical universe as if other beings are inconsequential? Other beings are, therefore, itching for inclusion, seeking cooperation with humans so that they can be properly mainstreamed into the running of the affairs of the universe. Given the intensity and the bewildering nature of corruption in Nigeria and the fragility of the Nigerian state, it is apt to state that corruption in that country is transcendental, and thus requires a transcendental solution. There is largely a need for a conscious and systemic mobilization of other realities within the space in cooperation with human beings to stem the tide of corruption in Nigeria.

African Traditional Religion (ATR), Oath-taking and the Fight against Corruption

Phenomenologically speaking, oath-taking is premised on invaluable components of the judicial system of the indigenous societies. The idea of oath-taking emerges from the understanding of human limitation. In its essence, the very idea of human limitation dehumanises humanness. Oath-taking among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria is *Ìbú-ara*, that is, to abuse humanness. This means that humans are expected to be incorruptible. However, there is also the recognition of the possibility of corruptibility. Because humans are corruptible, humans are therefore vulnerable. Incorruptibility is the basis for which an individual is considered capable of holding a position of trust and in trust; the need for oath-taking is, therefore, predicated on the limitedness of the humans. This is expressed in *Ifá* verses thus:

Imú ji, ó kàn ńwòran ọ̀ọ́kán.	The nose wakes actively but can only see the front
Àtànpàkò ji ó kàn ńwòran ọ̀nà	The toes wake up and only watches the road
Ọ̀ọ́kán ni gbogbo wa ńwò, a ò raye	Man only looks a little far away but unable to see the world where he lives
Ọmọ ẹ̀nìyàn fọ́ ojú inu, ẹ̀dá kò gbọ́n tan	Man's inner eyes are blindfolded; he is not totally wise
Ẹni tí ó lójú méjì tí ò mọ ibi tí ńlọ	Man, though with two eyes, does not know where he is going

So, the vulnerability of humans to do evil is the reason for oath-taking. The problem here is the liturgy of the oath. For over 62 years since the independence of Nigeria, the oath-taking patterns in the Nigerian public service still follow Christian and Muslim oath liturgies. Nevertheless, the volume of corruption and corruptibility has continued to rise higher and higher. The liturgies of these two religious traditions are too watery, little, ordinary and therefore inconsequential. Each one of them is an oath-taking liturgy that is bereft of powers and energies in the universe that can make the oath-taking consequential. This explains why political leaders do not fear the oath they swear before coming into office. The oaths have no direct adverse effects on the oath-taker and are therefore inconsequential. Most of the public office holders do not see oath-taking as anything anymore because the institutions, whose judges swear them in, are not even strong because corruption has equally eaten deep into the very fabric of the judicial system.

As gleaned from the interview sessions with the respondents, in Nigeria, it is interesting to note that business owners, communities, and other groups including social and political associations, have resorted to private oath-taking patterns that are not in line with the constitution of Nigeria. Rather, they follow rigorous indigenous oath-taking patterns using *Ògún*, *Ṣàngó*, *Ayélála* and others. Many Christians and Muslims, including Christian ministers and members of the general public, are now agitating that traditional deities (*Ògún*, *Ṣàngó*, *Ayélála*, etc.) be used together with the Bible and the Quran to swear-in public office holders. The general opinion is that curses should be attached to the tools used during the swearing-in of public officeholders. They are saying that the government

should utilize indigenous religious tools to battle financial corruption, instead of relying only on the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), which sometimes ends up losing cases against corrupt leaders.

Ògún as an anti-corruption ethical divinity

In the precolonial Yoruba community, *Ògún* was concerned about the peace and stability of every community. *Ògún* is, therefore, called upon to help punish an offender or vindicate an innocent person. This explains why *Ògún*'s shrines were everywhere in the precolonial Yoruba. One would always find his shrine at the entrance, centre and outskirts of the community. In the indigenous Nigerian society, no deity commands as much attention and veneration as the *Ògún*. He is the most indispensable of the *Òrìṣà* (Idowu, 1996). This is because Ogun's eyes were believed to be everywhere so as to identify corrupt people and as well punish them. In everyday living, one comes into inevitable contact with him as one cannot for once do without *Ògún*. A chant in his honour evinces the essentiality of *Ògún*:

Á-pòòṣà má-pògún	One who praises all sorts of divinity and refuses to call *Ògún*
Ara ẹ l'ó tànjẹ	Only involves himself in self-deceit
Ó dá mi lójú gbangba	I am pretty much sure.

The influence of his reality is obvious in virtually every part of Yorubaland despite the overbearing influence of modernity. In Yoruba mythology, *Ògún* is a primordial *Òrìṣà* whose first appearance was as a hunter named *Tọbẹ Ọdẹ*. He is said to be the first of the *Òrìṣà* to descend to the physical realm from *àjùlé ọ̀run* (sky heaven) to *àjùlé ayé* (the earth) to find suitable habitation for future human life. In commemoration of this, one of his *Oríkì* (praise names), *is Ògún lá ká ayé, Ọ̀ṣìn Ìmọlẹ̀* (meaning, one who is honoured all through the earth, first of the *Òrìṣà* to come to the earth).

Olawuyi (1988) said Soyinka describes *Ògún* as "essential god of restorative justice". Also the most popular and widespread *Òrìṣà* in Yoruba, in Nigeria's postcolonial period, has been *Ògún* (Matory, 2005). Among the divinities in Yorubaland, *Ògún* is one of the highest. In Yoruba lore, *Ògún* and the other gods climbed down from sky-heaven to earth on a spider web. As Soyinka in Olawuyi (1988) explains:

> The shard of original Oneness which contained the creative flint appears to have passed into the being of *Ògún*...With creativity, however, as its complementary aspect, *Ògún* came to symbolise the creative-destructive principle as well as terrible guardian of the sacred oath.

In the cult of *Òrìṣà*, *Ògún* appears in seven different dimensions which are emblematic of his multidimensionality and multifarious responsibilities. Each of these facets is connected with the other. The facets are; *ÒgúnOgbòrò*, *ÒgúnOnírè*, *OgúnMọ́làmọ́là*, *OgúnÌkọ́là*, *ÒgúnOnígbàjámò*, *ÒgúnAlárá*, *Ogúngbénagbénà*.

No one who believes in *Òrìṣà* would dare lie after swearing to tell the truth on *Ògún*. When we speak of truth, in *Ògún*'s ethical theory, it does not mean some idealistic vision of the way things should be. *Ògún* searches for the truth about the way things really exist in the world. Harping on *Ògún*'s attribute as a god of justice, Babalola (1989, p. 155) asserts that *Ògún* is an Aeneas or a figure of Robin Hood, showing kindness towards the poor and the needy with the abundance of his riches. By his nature, and as an essential aspect of his attributes, he is a protector with inner and outward eagerness to respond to the appeal of the oppressed. *Ògún* is, therefore, a warrior against injustice. The saying of the Yoruba regarding *Ògún*'s ability to see what is in the innermost part of man is: *Bí mo bá ṣèkẹ́, bí mo bá dalẹ̀, Ògún rí'nú* (If I secretly did evil, if I betrayed trust, *Ògún* sees me inside out). *Ògún*, by virtue of his attributes is able to severely punish a corrupt individual without going through the complex judicial systems.

Ògún is the patron of smiths and is usually displayed with his attributes: gun, machete or sabre, and rum; hence, fabrication and creation in the blacksmith shop is possible only through the conflictingly interacting force of iron and fires which symbolizes the capacity of *Ògún* to bring sanity to the society which in turns result to the equilibrium of the cosmos. According to the Haitian tradition, it was *Ògún* who is said to have planted the idea, led and given power to the slaves for the Haitian Revolution of 1804. To date, he is called upon to help people obtain a government more responsive to their needs.

The key incident in the *Ògún* myth is *Ògún*'s traversing of what Soyinka calls "the transitional gulf" like a spiritual colossus, *Ògún* bestrode the beginning, I mean the ancient times (before history). According to Soyinka in Olawuyi (1988):

> When long isolation from the world of men had created an impassable barrier which they (the gods) tried, but failed, to demolish, *Ògún* was the only deity who sought the way, and harnessed the resources of science to hack a passage through primordial chaos for the gods' reunion with man.

Ògún, having plunged through the abyss, called on the others to follow, hence, the saying *Ògún lọ́ lànà dé 'fẹ̀* (*Ògún* made the way to Ife). When creation was completed, the gods realized that people needed to clear

more land in the forest where they lived. Unfortunately, the only tools available were made of soft metal, a material not suitable for cutting down trees. However, *Ògún* had been given the secret of iron by *Ọ̀rúnmìlà*, son of the supreme god *Ọlọ́run*, and he used an iron axe to clear the forest. *Ògún* later shared the secret of iron with the other gods and with humans. He also showed them how to shape the iron into weapons.

Ayélála as an anti-corruption ethical divinity

Ayélála is a female deity whose epiphany epitomized the vastness of African universe and the mystery of reality. In the legend of *Ayélála*, we see the innerness of humanity, the very source where actions are conceived before being executed, and this is itself a mystery, thus incomprehensible and unsearchable. That is to say, the depth of man's action is hidden in utmost mystery. This, of course, is the reason why there is the suffering of the innocent, and as a result many people are suffering the consequences of the offence they never committed. Most times evils are done surreptitiously. An apparent demonstration of human evilness is the fact that no one can foretell what man can do. Most of the times, it is circumstances or situations that determine the action anybody takes. Is it not possible for a man to eat his child as meat in the time of famine? The Yoruba say: *Tí ilé bá dá, àgbàlagbà á kó obẹ̀jẹ* (if there is nobody in the house, an elderly man can steal soup in the pot). Most of the times the divine attributes of a human are manifested through suffering. The suffering of the innocent has in most cases served as the leeway for the trans-connection with the divine reality in the heavenly realm.

There are many conflicting myths regarding how *Ayélála* came to be regarded as a divine personality. The common thread that runs through the myths is that she was either rightly or wrongly accused of stealing or adultery. One legend states that she was forcefully offered as a sacrifice to seal the covenant of peace treaty and avoidance of killings, stealing, witchcraft and sorcery between the two warring parties. Before she died, she shouted *Ayé mà lá la o*! *Ayélála*! (the world is a huge and incomprehensible phenomenon). By virtue of the fact that she had joined the ancestors, she was saddled with the responsibility for enforcing the terms of the covenant by punishing anyone who refused to abide by it. An account as narrated by Fafeyiwa (2003, p. 3) is that *Ayélála* was killed because she broke the *Orò* taboo which forbids women from coming out to see *Orò*. She was killed gruesomely. It was said that she was buried alive with her head outside as a punishment for either adultery or stealing. With her head in the open,

she shouted several times *Ayé mà lá la o*! *Ayélála*!, after which she died. The word *Ayélála* therefore serves as Africans' concept regarding the nature of the world, crime, criminality and punishment. It is epistemological as it can serve as a theoretical stand point with which the African concept of the cosmos, crime and criminality can be discussed. The probing of crime by law enforcers is not able to confront the criminal with facts, and evidence is in many cases partial, discredited and susceptible to fixing. To bring about an essentially pragmatic and empirical legal system, humans are therefore confronted with the indispensability of the god's oriented holistic jurisprudence. According to Awolalu (1975, p. 42), the prompt judgment of *Ayélála* brought about fear of engaging in any evil. There was a general understanding of the devastating judgment of *Ayélála*, and the resultant effect was justice and fairplay. This suggests to us the need to move away from de facto dichotomy to multiple conceptions of justice by using state and non-state instruments: legal, semi judicial and non-judicial techniques.

Malediction/Curses and the Fight against Corruption in Nigeria

Modernization and missionary religions such as Islam and Christianity forbid the use of curses or malediction. According to Leeson (2012, p. 193), a curse is an appeal to a supernatural power to physically, emotionally, spiritually, or otherwise bring harm to another person or a people. In African traditional religion (ATR), malediction is considered to be an avenue through which negative energies are invoked and activated to create fear and prevent the advancement of evil. It is the invocation of negative energies in space so that they fall upon the evil doers especially in a situation where government agencies and other apparatus of law are ineffective. In such cases, people can resort to self-help especially against predators. In the indigenous African society, particularly among the *Yòrùbá*, curses are very important and powerful. They are used to hurl evil consequences upon the person or people responsible for the evil that bedevils a people. Curses enable people to express themselves with powerful emotions thereby venting out their anger. They are used to safeguard the integrity of the people because curses are able to create fear of doing evil in the people. They allow for justice without the court of law and judgment without judges.

In many parts of the indigenous *Yòrùbá* society, especially before Western modernity, there were festivals, rituals and liturgies of curses. These were used to guide and checkmate people in positions of authority as well as the general public. By so doing, the people's anger would then be turned directly against those who engage in any form of corruption that brought calamity upon the people. There are examples of cannons of maledictions among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria. In the ritual and liturgy of curses, women lead. This is because among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria, women are regarded as carriers of greater spiritual energies than men. They spread ashes on their heads and other parts of their bodies, appear half-naked by opening their breasts, moving round the communities and hurling all forms of calamitous curses on evil doers. In doing these acts women can invoke energies in nature and ask them to fight evil and evil people. Women, children and even men are mobilized, filed in two or more long lines and they hurl curses in a litanic and liturgical manner following a form of versicles and responses. It could be musical, mythical, proverbial, or a strong verbal expression, even a combination of all these. For this to be effective, there must be cursors and those to be cursed. It must be grounded in target, existing beliefs and unfalsifiable.

When a malediction satisfies all the above conditions, it becomes an effective institutional substitute for conventional agencies of security and law enforcement, especially against corruption in Nigeria. The use of curses to stem the tide of corruption has not been explored adequately in contemporary Nigeria. This is because of the pervading modernity, the enthronement of Western rationality and the spread of Christianity and Islam which forbid the use of curses. The lethargy in the use of curses is also linked to the increasing role that legal authorities and other agencies of law play in the maintenance of law and order. But the fact remains that foreign religions and the secular judicial system have woefully failed to stem the tide of corruption in Nigeria.

Ritual of *Ìmùl̀ẹ̀* (Covenant)

Ìmùl̀ẹ̀ (Covenant) is an institutional method of regulating human behaviour and bringing sanity to the community in the Yoruba societies. It is a special form of oath-taking that bonds the people together in doing what is right and is able to bring sustainable development to the people. With *Ìmùl̀ẹ̀*, it is dangerous to do anything contrary to the covenant one has made. One of the hunters interviewed by the researcher claimed that

Ìmùlẹ̀ is what necessitates utmost carefulness and caution among them. He further claimed that *Ilẹ̀* (the earth) is able to swallow anyone who does something contrary to the covenant he has made.

Ìmùlẹ̀ (covenant) is the drinking of the earth. *Ìmùlẹ̀* implies that the drinking of the earth is fundamental to harmony in the space. *Ìmùlẹ̀* presupposes that if humans eat food, drink water, build houses, walk on the surface of the earth, then the humans constantly drink from the earth and are sustained by the earth. The earth is, therefore, the host and humans are her guests. The ritual of *ìmùlẹ̀* (covenant taking) is fundamental in many Yoruba indigenous communities. Among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria, the earth is regarded as a delicate phenomenon and, therefore, has to be treaded upon carefully. This is because the earth may bend, and this might portend grave danger to other human species. To do the ritual of *ìmùlẹ̀* is to covenant with the earth by seeking justice from the earth. The basis for this assertion is the fact that the earth is the ultimate authority. Since humans do everything on the surface of the earth, this means that they have a strong unbreakable bond with fellow humans and other realities on the surface of the earth. In fact, to live on the earth is to engage in a covenant with the earth. This is the essence of human existence, as humans are supposed to cooperate with the earth for the equilibrium of the cosmos. This is why the following Yoruba saying is apt:

A gbórí'lẹ̀, a je'ku o	We live on the earth to eat rat
A gbórí'lẹ̀, a jeja	We live on the earth to eat fish
A gbórí'lẹ̀, a ṣe'bàjé	Yet we live on the earth to do evil
Àṣẹ wá dọwọ́ ilẹ̀ ta jọ mu.	The ultimate authority belongs to the earth that we drink together.

The whole of the lives of the indigenous Africans, particularly the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria, is covenantal. All humans engage in *ìmùlẹ̀* in one way or the other. However, there are rituals of *ìmùlẹ̀* in which people who hold public positions in trust are made to drink the earth. By so doing, the people seek the judgement of the earth if the person engages in evil acts that may be detrimental not just to the survival of the people but also to the equilibrium of the cosmos.

The ritual is done in such a manner that one is made to go through several secret places, drink and eat all kinds of concoctions. There may be need to taste the blood of an animal as well as to make pronouncements by hurling curses. These are done to seek direct judgement of *ilẹ̀* (the earth) if the individual does anything that may be inimical to the survival of the

people. Very crucial to the *ìmùlẹ̀* (covenant ritual) is the digging of the earth and pouring of water on the hole and the covenantee is made to bend directly to drink water from the earth. It is in doing this that the consequences of corruption can be seen to be fatal.

In the search for solutions to the problem of corruption in Nigeria, indigenous voices have been silenced deliberately, and the fight against corruption is unduly too anthropocentric, neglecting the essentiality of other realities. If other realities in the universe are corruptible, humans are also corruptible beings, so humans cannot absolutely regard themselves as the only beings that are able to direct the affairs of the universe. Nigerians have continually relied only on the colonial justice system that is so inappropriate and complex. Instead of solving the problems of corruption, this system has rather aggravated it. The United Nations Declaration on the Right of Indigenous People (2007) affirms that indigenous people are equal to all other people and therefore deserve to be respected and not to be repressed. Integrating certain practices from African traditional religion in the fight against corruption reinforces the saying that *ó ní bá a ̩se má a ṇse* (there is always a way we handle complex situations). This is imperative given the fact that corruption is the key problem responsible for the Nigerian predicaments and the fragility of the Nigerian State. There is increasing desperation to stem the tide of corruption so that Nigeria might not be consumed. Given the failure of the oath-taking patterns in Christianity and Islam and the inadequacy of the western legal and judicial systems, African Traditional Religion (ATR) and its tenets should be explored in Nigeria to bring an end to corrupt practices. If not, we will not be able to overcome corruption anytime soon.

REFERENCES

Adetola, O.B., Àkànle, O., Adejare G.S., Olaniyan, O.I. (2021). Historical-Contemporary Currents in Corruption and Development in Nigeria. In O. Àkànle & D.O. Nkpe (Eds), *Corruption and Development in Nigeria*, 21-30. Abingdon, New York: Routledge.

Atanda, J.A. (1980). *Introduction to Yoruba History*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.

Bayers, J. (2017). *Perspective on Theology of Religions*. Durbanville: AOSIS.

Blau, A. (2009). Hobbes on Corruption. *History of Political Thoughts 30*(4), 596-616.

Blau, A. (2019). Cognitive Corruption and Deliberate Democracy. *Social Philosophy and Policy* 35(2), 198-220. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052519000037

Battiste, M. (2000). Introduction: Unfolding the Lessons of Colonialization. In Battiste, M. (Ed.), *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, xvi-xxx. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

Bongmba (2011). African Theology in *The Willey Blackwell Companion to African Religions*. Bongmba and Olupona (eds.). UK. Wiley Blackwell.

Ellis, S. and ter Haar, G. (1998). Religion and Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of Religion in Africa* 36(2), 175-201.

Fund for Peace. (2021). Fragile States Index Report. Washington: Fund for Peace.

Gooch, T.A. (2000). *The Numinous and Modernity: An Interpretation of Rudulf Otto's Philosophy of Religion*. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter.

Idowu, E.B. (1962). *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*. London: Longman Publisher.

Idowu, E.B. (1973). *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*. Ibadan: SCM Press.

Jegede, Obafemi (2010). *Incantation and Herbal Cures in Ifa Divination: Emerging Issue in Indigenous Knowledge*. African Association for the Study of Religion: Book Builder Ibadan, Nigeria.

Jegede, Obafemi (2011). *Shrines, Oath-taking and Jurisprudence in Yoruba and Igbo Religions*. N.P.: Lambert Academic Publishing.

Kathleen, C.W; David, L.S and Gene, E.L. (2012). *Fundamentals of Eco-systems*. (N.P. Elsevier Inc.).

Lawuyi, O.B. (1988). Diffusion: Across Boundaries and identity Construction. *African Studies Review* 2, 127-139.

Leeson, P.T. (2012). "God Damn": The Law and Economics of Monastic Malediction. *Journal of Law and Economics 30*(1), 193-210.

Obuah, E. (2010). Combating Corruption in 'Failed' State: The Economic and Financial Crime Commission. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* 12, 27-53.

Okolo, C.B. (1994). *Squandermania: Reflections on Nigerian Culture*. Nsuka: University Trust Publisher.

Otiko, A.A. (2023). Ifa and the Contestation of Space in Nigeria: Paper Presented at the European Conference on African Studies (ECAS). May 31, 2023. University of Cologne.

Pobee, J. (1976). Aspects of African Traditional Religion. *Sociological Analysis 37*(3), 1-18.

Nyoni, T. (2018). *The War against Corruption in Nigeria: Devouring or Sharing the National Cake?* Online at https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/87615/ MPRA Paper No. 87615, posted 29 Jun 2018 19:01 UTC.

Mathisen, T. (2013). *Literature Review on Corruption in Fragile States.* U4 Corruption Resource Centre. Transparency International. https://www.u4.no/publications/literature-review-on-corruption-in-fragile-states.pdf, viewed, 2/7/2023.

Spies, E. & Schrode, P. (2021). Religious Engineering: Exploring Projects of Transformation from a Relational Perspective. *Religion 51*(1), *1-18.* DOI:10.1080/0048721X.2020.1792053.

Yai, O.B. (1982). Fundamental Issues of African Oral Literature. *Ife Studies in African Literature and the Arts* 1, 4-17.

Internet Sources

Transparency International (2021). Transparency International Index, https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021, viewed 7/2/2023.

United Nations. (2007). Declaration on the Right of Indigenous People. (2007). https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/un-declaration-rights-indigenous-peoples-1, viewed 13/5/2023.

United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC) (2019). *Corruption in Nigeria: Patterns and Trends,* https://unis.unvienna.org/unis/en/pressrels/2019/uniscp1093.html, viewed 20/7/2023.

Yahoo Finance (2023). Nigeria. http//:finance.yahoo.com/news/nigeria/poverty/report 2023, viewed 7/ 8/2023.


43
16

SECTION 5

ATR and Health

From the Bush to Social Media: Dynamics in the Practice of Traditional Medicine in Contemporary Malawi

Louis ***Ndekha*** *&* *Thokozani* ***Solomon***

Abstract

The chapter analyses the practice of traditional medicine in contemporary Malawi. The study finds that social media is transforming not only the social perception of traditional medicine but also its practice. First, in a largely religious/Christian country where traditional medicine is commonly frowned upon, social media has increased not only access to traditional medicine but also raised the profile of traditional medicine. It is now possible for individuals who could not easily access traditional medicine, on social or religious grounds, to do so without fear of religious or social ostracism. However, the online presence of traditional medicine has affected its practice. It has significantly undercut the threefold structure of traditional medicine: divination, spiritualisation and herbalism. It has led to the emphasis on herbalism at the expense of divination and spiritualisation. This trend demonstrates the impact of hypermediated religious spaces and their implications on social relationships and ritual practice. Through this analysis, the chapter contributes to the literature on the continuing relevance of indigenous religions in the 21st Century.

Introduction

Social media has become one of Africa's most influential social change agents in the last two decades. Social media has transformed how people communicate and relate to each other. As a result, social media now significantly influences most people's social outlook. In Malawi, for example, Facebook and WhatsApp have become the most valuable virtual platforms where individuals interact with others across the globe. The unique significance of social media is that it enables users to conflate time and space. Instant communication across the globe has enabled the emergence of

online communities and ways of human interactions that are unprecedented in human history. Some of the online communities established on WhatsApp and Facebook have not only been critical channels of rapid information dissemination but also been vanguards of resource mobilisation for the common good. For instance, WhatsApp and Facebook communities have been able to organise social interventions in times of need, such as providing various services during disasters, school fees for needy students, and relief for widows and orphans. The growing significance of social media is underscored by the fact that for many people in Malawi today, online presence is no longer a luxury but a necessity. One's presence or absence on social media is a measure of one's social agility and community relevance. This trend also demonstrates the impact of hypermediated religious spaces and their implications on social relationships and conventional practice.

The social media hype has not escaped the attention of the religious groupings. Today most Christian groups have become social media savvy. It is common for churches to have a Facebook account. In addition, WhatsApp is an accessible intranet platform for most churches' internal communication. However, the most ardent religious social media users are new prophetic churches. These churches represent a new phenomenon within Pentecostalism. A unique trait of these churches is the special emphasis on forensic prophecy wherein the "prophet" publicly demonstrates peculiar knowledge of his or her spiritual clients' personal details such as their phone numbers, car registration numbers, birth dates, and even specific life events (Matshobane, 2023). The display of prophetic features, which is often mediated through Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter has resulted in the creation of celebrity prophets whose personal charisma represents a special public charm (Kgatle, 2022). These churches have managed to create a social media presence that has not only popularised the prophetic movement in the country but also enabled the creation of a unique and influential image of the 'men of God'. In keeping with the social media trend, there is concomitantly a significant shift in the practice of traditional medicine in Malawi. Customarily, traditional medicine is usually associated with the bush, countryside or the cloistered corners of slums. Ordinarily, people identify and locate a traditional doctor through recommendations from someone. Occasionally, a small red flag on the roadside hoisted on a rugged pole indicated the presence of a traditional doctor. Although, over the years, traditional doctors have come closer to the people by, for

example, plying their trade in marketplaces, a new crop of traditional doctors has emerged onto the scene. These traditional doctors no longer offer their services exclusively in the bush. Like conventional commodity and service traders, many of them have embraced social media. They are immediately connected with their clients on social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp.

This trend can be understood as mere individualistic and materialistic endeavours and, therefore, unrelated to any dynamics within indigenous religions in Malawi. However, traditional medicine in Africa is usually regarded as an indispensable aspect of African Religion (Hishima, 2022). As Hishima argues, although knowledge of and use of traditional medicine can be communal and therefore accessible to many, the efficacy of traditional medicine is often linked to the correct observance of taboos and appropriate rituals (Hishima, 2022). Several factors connect traditional medicine to religion in Africa. **First** of all, the spiritual leader or the priest in African culture has always doubled as a medicine man (Ndubis and Kanu, 2021). This understanding has historically connected African spiritual leaders not only with medicine but also with magic. For example, in the Malawi Chewa folklore, Mlauli, Mbona''s uncle, was not only the Chief priest of the Chewa shrine in central Malawi but also the unrivalled magician and medicine man of the land (Mweta et al., 2022). **Secondly**, most Africans view illness or misfortune as having both natural and supernatural causes. This perception of disease or misfortune gives traditional medicine a metaphysical dimension and, by implication, a religious tinge. While this trend is changing in that some traditional medicine practitioners are just practitioners of herbal medicine, the general thinking remains in favour of the intricate relationship between traditional medicine and ATRs. **Thirdly**, probably connected to the above factors, the divination, which accompanies most traditional medicine practices, re-enforces the religious orientation of traditional medicine in Africa (cf. Omonzejele and Maduka, 2011). In the process of exploring the metaphysical dimension of disease and misfortune, divination transforms traditional medicine from the physical into the realm of the spirit. All this creates a strong link between traditional medicine and African religions.

Studies have demonstrated that one enduring feature of traditional religions is their ability to adapt to changing social conditions (Schoffeelers,

2000). In Malawi, for example, the emergence of '*Simon*' and '*Maria*' masquerades within the Gule Wamkulu repertoire nearly five decades ago represented an African Traditional Religion (ATR) attempt at contextualisation and adaptation in the context of growing Christian influence among the Chewa of Malawi. Agyeman and Awuah-Nyamekye (2018) have recently demonstrated that one unique ATR response to globalisation and social change is the emergence of New Religious Movements (NRMs) within its fold. Unlike the 'orthodox' African Traditional Religion with no founders and missionaries, these NRMs have founders, have a missionary dimension, and are transnational (Agyeman and Awuah-Nyamekye, 2018). All this reveals the adaptability of African Traditional Religion to changing times.

This chapter examines the dynamics in the practice of traditional medicine in Malawi and its implications on the continued relevance of traditional religions in Malawi. The chapter's central argument is that the present shift in traditional medicine from the bush to social media can be attributed to the new media's growing 'hypermediation of religious spaces' (Evolvi, 2022). Hypermediation theory focuses on how the proliferation of digital media discourses reconfigures physical and virtual spaces of practice and belief. Religious contextualisation of this change has resulted in hypermediated religious spaces as alternative and mainstream avenues of religious expression (Evolvi, 2018). This shift in spatial expression is extensive in more prominent world religions like Christianity and Islam. However, due to their observed propensity to adapt, traditional religions have also plugged into the shift. This study finds that in Malawi social media is transforming not only the social perception of traditional medicine but also its practice. It was observed that there was a strong correlation between the social media presence of traditional doctors and the growth of their clientele. However, concomitant with this trend is the growing undercutting of the structure of the practice of traditional medicine. This chapter argues that, given the strong link between traditional medicine and religions, this shift represents part of the traditional religions' enduring quest for relevance. The shift signifies what Luckmann (1977) calls religions' search for transcendence amid historical immanence. The chapter has three sections. The first section analyses the relationship between social media and religion. The second section presents the methodology and hypothesis of the study. The third section examines traditional doctors' social media presence in Malawi and its implications on the practice of traditional medicine

and, by further implication, the continuing relevance of traditional religions. Through this analysis, the chapter contributes to understanding the persisting influence of traditional religions in the 21st Century.

Social Media and Religion in Sub-Saharan Africa

Over the last decade, a growing body of research on the influence of social media on religion has emerged. Two main approaches have characterised these studies. The first approach is research on the religions' functional adoption of social media. Studies have demonstrated how religious actors have taken advantage of the prevalence and accessibility of mass media in Africa to continue to spread spiritual messages across the continent (Ayeni, 2021). For example, churches have used the mass media for advertising their programs (Ansor, 2018), for evangelisation (Amanze and Wogu, 2015) and even for social branding (Ayeni, 2021). As Leositapkana (2018) has demonstrated, the social media presence of the prophets has helped them create and bolster the identity and authority of the man of God. The prophet's simultaneous presence in multiple social media contexts has reshaped the identity of the man of God. It has created a continuous presence of the men of God before their clientele. This presence has resulted in the social branding of the men of God as manifestations of divine blessing and an indispensable grouping for the individual's access to prosperity. In their appropriation of social media, most religious actors use Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp (Anyasor, 2018; Amanze and Wogu, 2015; Chiluwa, 2012). Thus, social media enables African religious actors to broaden their influence and social outreach. Most of these studies have focused on the Christian religion and its interface with social media. Very few, if any, studies have examined the religious adoption of social media from the perspective of Traditional Religions.

The studies' second approach examines how the new media informs and influences religious engagement (Faimau et al., 2018). The approach focuses on how the new media has changed the perceptions and practices of religious beliefs and how they have altered the way religious meanings are expressed or, in some cases, evaluated. For example, Kimaru (2012) has shown how social media has provided new avenues for human connection and promoted a participation culture that has changed how some churches practise and deal with theological issues. The interactive possi-

bility within religions has been possible due to the kinetic nature of social media. Social media facilitates "one to many" and "many to many" communication, allowing users to generate personal views through discussion and negotiation with political, social and religious online discourses (Farkas et al., 2018a, 2018b). Real-time feeds and instant feedback on religious actors' messages significantly influence how they package their messages. Similarly, social media facilitates the emergence of online communities. For example, Manyongaise and Mhuru (2022) have demonstrated how Bible Challenge WhatsApp groups in Zimbabwe provide avenues through which Christians create online communities and open spaces in which theological issues are discussed and evaluated. These new social media religious communities not only challenge conventional religious practices but also represent a shift in the formation of religious communities. By creating novel sacred spaces, social media also enables religious entrepreneurs to take advantage of new markets and consumers, expand their customer base, and lower overhead costs (Ruchi & Jones, 2022). This trend is evident from the way Facebook and its impact have been linked to the emergence of prophetic churches in Southern Africa (Kgatle, 2018).

Social media has also transformed the way religious institutions function. In a study of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, Matobobo and Bankole (2021) demonstrate how social media like WhatsApp enables religious leaders to create online closed communities for leaders, such as communities of elders, departmental leaders, the church board executive and district church communities where conversations and decision-making take place. According to Matobobo and Bankole (2021), this transformation of internal communication is not without its problems. Among the perceived challenges are the circulation of improper content, the danger of diverting the groups' purpose, irreverent use of social media platforms and flooding the groups with media content unrelated to the groups (Matobobo & Bankole, 2021). On the other hand, studies have also demonstrated the role of social media in the increased negative characterisation of other religious traditions. As Hashmi (2021) argues, social media users are freer to negatively characterise religious traditions than they would be in a non-virtual environment (cf. Civila et al., 2020). The inclination probably emanates from the sense of reduced responsibility for social media users.

The two approaches to the study of religion and social media demonstrate that religious institutions have embraced social media and have also been significantly transformed by it. However, there is a dearth of research on the influence of social media on the practice of African traditional medicine from a religious and social change perspective. A few studies have tangentially addressed the role of social media in alternative medicine. For example, Ng et al. (2023) have recently examined the role of social media in sharing user/practitioner beliefs, attitudes, and experiences about complementary medicine. The study found that social media can be an accessible, effective, and viable option for delivering complementary and alternative medicine therapies and information (Ng, 2023). Equally, a recent study in Mexico showed that the irruption of social media significantly influenced the packaging and sale of traditional medicine (Semotiuk, 2015). The study also found that social media offered the potential for entrepreneurs to reach groups of consumers with similar interests. Semotiuk argued that conversational marketing, a striking feature of social media, brings Mexico's plaza culture to the online environment (Semotiuk, 2015). By bringing the 'public square' online, social media inevitably reshapes the perception of traditional medicine. In the context of the sparsity of research on social media and traditional medicine in Africa, the present study serves as one of the initial surveys of the field in Malawi and provides a basis for future studies.

Methodology and Hypothesis

The study used Netnography to collect and analyse the data on the practice of traditional medicine in Malawi. Netnography is a new qualitative method devised to investigate the consumer behaviour of cultures and communities on the Internet (Kozinets, 1998). It is an adaptation of ethnography primarily concerned with online communication as a data source for understanding a cultural phenomenon (Jong, 2019). Among other things, Netnography investigates the specific instance in which a community is produced through computer-mediated communications (Kozinets, 1998). Pioneers of the method initially argued that a "pure" Netnography is complete within itself and requires no off-line ethnographic research (Loanzon et al., 2013). Although significant shifts have taken place within the method, including the introduction of off-line data supplements, the original notion suggests that in a netnographic study, a "significant" amount of data collection "originates in and manifests

through the data shared freely on the internet" (Kozinets, 2015, p. 79). Although initially confined to consumer behaviour and marketing, Netnography has become popular in other fields of study, such as education research (Barnes & Penn-Edwars, 2015) and health research (Jong, 2019). There are advantages to using Netnography as shown in the research literature. Costello et al. (2017) argue that Netnography is particularly well suited to dealing with personally or politically sensitive topics or illegal acts discussed in online communities by individuals who prefer to conceal their offline identities and welcome the anonymity of online presence. Gupta (2009) also argues that as a method for collecting and analysing data, Netnography avoids the limitations of quantitative survey research's reliance upon a participant's memory. Virtual communities' interactions are imprinted on their forum and, therefore, not prone to external distortion. Thus, using Netnography enhances the trustworthiness of research findings.

It is axiomatic that offline traditional medicine creates supplier-client relations between African traditional doctors and their clients. The transition of this relationship onto the online platform creates what is akin to hypermediated traditional religious spaces (cf. Evolvi, 2022). This suggests that digital media discourses reconfigure the physical and virtual spaces of the practices and beliefs of conventional religious traditions. It not only alters the perceptions and practices of religious beliefs but also changes the way religious meanings are expressed or, in some cases, evaluated (cf. Faimau et al. 2018). This study hypothesises that social media is creating new dynamics in religious traditions in Malawi. The social media presence of traditional doctors is not only transforming the practice of traditional medicine but also represents a partial digitisation of traditional religions. From a sociological perspective, this contextual shift demonstrates the persistence of traditional religious symbolism in the context of social change.

The data for this study was collected from traditional doctors who use social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp. The traditional doctors were purposely sampled and interviewed online through WhatsApp. In some instances, where network problems existed, the mobile phone was used. The sampling frame was traditional doctors who appeared on the researchers' social media platforms, Facebook and WhatsApp. From this sampling frame, eight (8) traditional doctors were identified. Six (6) of them use WhatsApp, and two (2) use WhatsApp and Facebook. In terms

of their gender distribution, only one (1) traditional doctor was identified as a woman, implying that the majority of traditional doctors on social media are men. Geographically, out of the eight (8) sampled traditional doctors, four (4) live either within or near the borders of Malawi and Mozambique, with two (2) in the villages within Malawi.

Only one (1) traditional doctor claimed to live in the urban community. One (1) other traditional doctor indicated that he lived in Mozambique but occasionally visited Malawi to conduct clinics. If this is anything to go by, it may be concluded that about 57% of online traditional doctors live within the borders of Malawi and Mozambique, 28% in rural villages within the country and 14% in urban communities. This statistic corresponds to Malawi's estimated rural and urban population distribution of 84% and 16%, respectively (National Statistics Office, 2018). Most of the data was collected through interactions with the doctors within their online communities. The researchers joined the doctors' online groups but privately introduced their interest in interviewing them. The structure of the interview had two foci. First, it aimed to identify the rationale behind the doctors' adoption of social media to reach their clientele. Particularly important is how the doctors created and managed online communities, including their advantages and possible disadvantages. Secondly, the interviews aimed at identifying the societal problems that the traditional doctors addressed. Emphasis was placed on identifying the continuities and discontinuities between 'hypermediated practices' of the traditional doctor on social media vis-à-vis the traditional approaches to medicine in local contexts. To clarify some data gathered from the traditional doctors' online communities, the researchers conducted telephone interviews with the traditional doctors. Admittedly, the study took a one-sided perspective of traditional medicine and social media in Malawi. Only the traditional doctors were interviewed. This approach was necessitated by two factors. First, traditional doctors, as commodity traders, are the most visible unit of analysis in traditional medicine on social media. They are available and willing to be reached by their clientele. Inversely, due to privacy issues, it is not easy to identify and interact with the traditional doctors' clientele. In fact, the very success of virtual communities created around themes like traditional medicine hinges on the anonymity that social media offers to its users (Costello et al., 2017). It is therefore important that future studies attempt to provide a doctor-client perspective to traditional medicine and social media in Malawi.

Findings: Malawi Traditional Doctors and Social Media

Traditional healers are an essential social grouping in Malawi. These are men and women usually seen as esoterically endowed with the use of traditional medicine. The cryptic nature of their practice makes them able to deal with illnesses that are perceived to be of supernatural origin or those caused by witchcraft or other dark forces (Lowes et al., 2019). However, the social perception of traditional medicine in Malawi has always been mixed. Several factors have influenced this mixed perception. First, the growing influence of Christianity in the country led to the negative characterisation of traditional medicine. For a long time, the mission churches branded traditional medicine as satanic and therefore off limits to its membership. This perception was also exacerbated by the distrust between allopathic and traditional practitioners (cf. Romero-Daza, 2002). Until recently, modern doctors were the most ardent detractors of traditional medicine. The lack of specific measurements in traditional medicine and the differences in the logic of prescriptions have usually shaped the divide between traditional and modern medicine. Besides, increasing westernisation, arising from globalisation, especially among the younger generation, and the concomitant perception of everything African as negative, have augmented the negative perception of traditional medicine. In addition, the negative characterisation of traditional medicine as demonic by the church also contributes to the complicated place of traditional medicine in Africa. Thus, until now, due to either social or religious reasons, not many people would want to be seen associating with traditional doctors in public. Due to this mixed perception, for many, consulting a traditional doctor is a last resort.

However, the results of this study demonstrate that in Malawi, social media is transforming not only the social perception of traditional medicine but also its practice. First, all the traditional doctors indicated increased client numbers due to their online presence. The traditional doctors indicated that social media gives more privacy to customers, thereby breaking religious barriers that both traditional doctors and clients have historically struggled to deal with. For example, the average Christian in Malawi would not be comfortable to be seen physically visiting a traditional doctor. Not only would his or her commitment to the church be questioned, but in some hyper-conservative churches, such individuals would be disciplined. However, today, by using social media, a Christian, Muslim or

any member of any other religion can privately interact with the traditional doctor of his or her choice without the fear of being seen. Thus, social media breaks the religious-cum-social barriers that have historically prevented Christians or some Muslims from freely accessing traditional medicine. Concerning specific social media platforms, the majority of traditional doctors indicated that WhatsApp consultation gives their clients, especially women, more freedom to express themselves, unlike physical interactions. According to them, most of their clients are women. It has always been hard for women to express themselves freely, especially when seeking help on a problem concerning their private life. For example, a traditional doctor identified as *Pangaunye* (whose name means 'do and perish') pointed out that, "If the problem was to do with infertility or being unsatisfied in bed, they (women) were not expressing themselves freely fearing that a traditional doctor would want to sleep with them. Inversely, online consultation has set women free to express themselves regarding the confidentiality of their problem." This understanding agrees with Costello's (2017) observation that social media enables its users to conceal their offline identities. It became apparent in this study that the online anonymity offered by social media allows the clients to negotiate the challenge of social stigma associated with traditional medicine and the issues of privacy, self-expression, and safeguards in a doctor-patient relationship. Doctor *Pangaunye* said:

> "With social media, everyone, regardless of religion, is now free to contact us whenever there is a need. The disadvantage of physical consultation is that many Christians thought of secretly consulting us when they find themselves in critical death-threatening situations, when Western medicine has failed, in fear of being excommunicated."

The above sentiment implies that the privacy that comes with social media consultation and interaction has opened up doors for Christians whose denominations restrict them from consulting a traditional doctor. This, among other things, indicates that social media bridges the stereotypical gap that has historically characterised the relationship between traditional doctors and some African Christians. In the context of increasing stigmatisation, social media offers a new lease of life on traditional medicine. It provides avenues for the continued relevance of not just traditional medicine, but also its attendant philosophical presuppositions.

Another reason traditional doctors embrace social media is that these platforms break the temporal and spatial barriers associated with physical

consultations. The average traditional doctor is part of his or her community and usually has a local clientele. However, the more potent and, therefore, famous traditional doctors are generally associated with 'distant lands.' Their locations are 'bushy', hard to reach or not cheaply accessible from all corners of the country. According to the traditional doctors in this study, social media bridges the temporal and spatial barriers with their clientele. One of the traditional doctors, *Nyangatayani* (the name means 'throw away charms'), who lives in area near the Mocambican border with Malawi's Phalomber district, illustrates the functional significance of social media in traditional medicine in Malawi. Asked why he lives in such a hard to reach low populated community when the nature of his job demands he lives in populous communities, *Nyangatayani* argued:

> "I deliberately live near the border of Malawi and Mozambique in order for me to easily fetch traditional medicine in Mozambique forests since natural forests in Malawi have been seriously deforested."

However, although he is geographically disadvantaged, *Nyangatayani* remains in business thanks to WhatsApp and Facebook. He has clients across the country and beyond due to social media. Nevertheless, *Nyangatayani's* statement demonstrates the sad state of Malawi's environment and biodiversity and its implications on the future of traditional medicine. *Nyangatayani's* situation reveals that continued biodiversity loss drives traditional doctors further away from their clientele. Yet on the flip side, in the context of the increasing distance between the traditional doctors and their clientele, social media provides avenues for continued interaction.

The study also identified that an innovative and unofficial offline courier system supports the online interaction between traditional doctors and their clients. Traditional doctors do not use official courier business operators to deliver medications and charms to their clients. Instead, they use minibus and taxi drivers. According to the traditional doctors interviewed, minibus and taxi drivers are all over the country and are quick, cheaper and trustworthy compared to courier companies. The traditional doctor encloses the medicine or charms in an envelope, writes the name and address of the client on it and seals it. He then hands over the parcel to the taxi or minibus driver. The doctor also takes down the taxi or minibus driver's phone number and shares it with the client. The taxi or bus driver and the client communicate and complete the deal. Payment is usually made through mobile phone banking.

An insightful dimension of this mode of transaction is the level of trust required between the traditional doctor and the client. Usually, the traditional doctor has to trust the client's honesty to pay, and the client has to trust the efficacy of the traditional medicine procured. The traditional doctors sampled in this study indicated that they build trust with clients and potential clients by offering to be paid after successfully addressing the client's problem. Remarkably, no traditional doctor reported any experience of payment problems from clients. Asked what would happen if a client defaulted, one traditional doctor answered, "Chimenecho ndi chibwana, tikhoza kumulodza" (that would be childish, we can bewitch them). All this suggests a new set of relationships and emotions emerging from social media interactions. As Evolvi (2022) argues, hypermediation intensifies emotional responses that elicit social change. It makes people create religious narratives to rapidly reach like-minded users or spread fear and anger against those perceived as different. In the Malawi context, the traditional doctors' use of the threat of witchcraft spells demonstrates the potential loss of control within the online communities and the need to bolster the control with metaphysical-cum-religious narratives of fear or efficacy. While, in the present study, the clients' trustworthiness is partly generated by the traditional doctors' magical threat, the whole scenario demonstrates that mixed emotions characterise the doctor-client relationship on social media. In onsite interactions between traditional doctors and their clients, the exchange of value (money or service) is usually straightforward and the efficacy of the doctors' prescriptions is validated by living testimonies and word of mouth, not just social media marketing. All this indicates that social media is creating not only new spaces for the practice of traditional medicine in Malawi but also new modes of social interactions between traditional doctors and their clientele.

The study also established significant continuities and discontinuities between the social media practice of traditional medicine and conventional practice. In terms of continuities, most social problems addressed by traditional doctors are also mentioned available through social media platforms. A sample of a WhatsApp advert illustrates this continuity:[1]

[1] English Translation of the WhatsApp Advert.

Thank you brothers and sisters who want herbal medicine from BABA MATEMBA (+265)

I am from Mocambique but I currrently in Malawi. I help people who have problems or sickness without using blood (without killing).
Those who are far dont be loose heart, there is help and you will be helped even if you are far from this country.

I help with problems like:

1. Haemorroids/ Anal Tags
2. BP or sugar
3. ASTHMA
4. Erectile Dysfunction
5. Bussines Attraction
6. Miracle money into your bank or mobile account
7. Money Oil
8. Luck to win LOTTO kapena BETT
9. Finding a job or getting paid twice per week
10. To be loved by the boss
11. Bringing back lost lover
12. Bringing back stolen property
13. Family problems
14. Magic fortification
15. Fortifying the body or house
16. Winning case in Court or at the village chief's court
17. Magic stealing of money
18. I have magic Minions
19. Fly Catcher nkola tchetche
20. Killing
21. Bewitchinig
22. Endless menstruation
23. Lightning and other things
24. Being let of by the police even when you are in the wrong

If you want to know more call or WhatsApp this number (+265) BABA MATEMBA

An expert in traditional medicine. For those far way, dont hesitate, help is available find me BABA MATEMBA on this number call or Whatsapp (+265)

Table 1: A Sample of Traditional Doctors' WhatsApp Advert:[2]

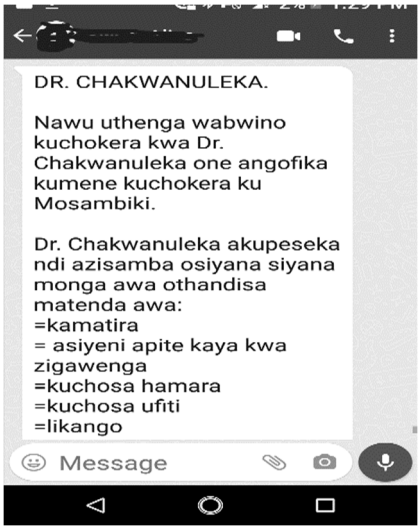
Zikomo abale ndi alongo amene mwakhala mukufuna mankhwala azitsamba kuchokera kwa BABA MATEMBA (+265) *Ndinachokera ku Mozambique, pano deli kuno ku Malawi .ndimathandiza anthu kumavuto komaso matenda osiyanasiyana mopanda kugwiritsa Chito magazine. KWA amene MULI kutali muzagwere mpwayi ayi chithandizo chilipo ndithu ndimathandiza or mulikutali kwadziko lino (sic)*	*Ndimathandiza mavuto monga* *1. LIKANGO* *2. BP kapena sugar* *3. ASTHMA* *4. MBAMVU za abambo banja* *5. MUITANO pa business* *6. NDALAMA za changu kulowa chikwama wallet komanso account* *7. SENDAWANA oil (money oil)* *8. Mwayi owina LOTTO kapena BETT* *9. KUPEZA NTCHITO kapena kulandira kawiri per week* *10. KUKONDEDWA ndi bwana wanu* *11. KUBWEZERETSA wachikondi wanu nga munasiyana* *12. KUBWEZERETSA katundu obeledwa*	*13. MAVUTO abanja* *14. KUKWIMA* *15. KUTSILIKA thupi nyumba* *16. KUWINA mulandu ku court ngakhale kwa amfumu* *17. CHITAKA WALLET* *18. NDIKUPEZEKA ndi abantwa ndi zina* *19. nkola tchetche* *20. kupha* *21. Kuloza* *22. Kudwala kumwezi mozalekesa* *23. Ching'aning'ani ndizina Zambiri* *Ndikupezeka ndi wa tsiyeni apite nangati mwakumana ndi a police (sic)*	*NGATI MUKUFUNA KUDZIWA ZAMBIRI IMBANI FONI KAPENA WHATSAPP PA NAMBALA IYI (+265) BABA MATEMBA* *Akatundu kuchitekete kwa mankhwala azitsamba kwa amene muli kutali muzagwere mpwayi ayi chithandizo chilipo ndithu ndipezeni BABA MATEMBA pa number yake imeneyo call or Whatsapp (+265)*

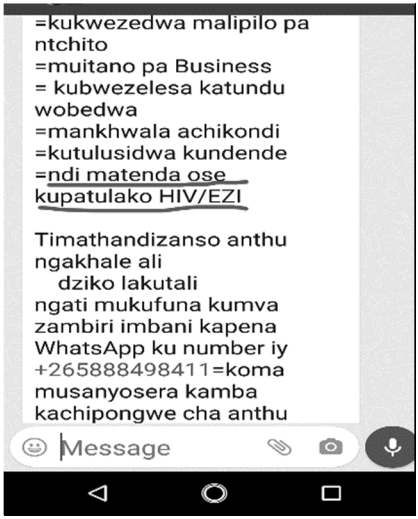
[2] This advert was copied exactly as it was in the original form with all the language and spelling errors.

Table 1 above indicates the generic social problems and needs usually associated with traditional medicine in Malawi. Physical issues such as *Likango*[3], love portions, killing (*Kupha*), bewitching (*Kulodza*) and business magic such as *Chitika* have always been integral to conventional traditional medicine. However, there are also noteworthy discontinuities that have emerged from traditional doctors' social media presence. Firstly, a new set of social problems seems to take centre stage in the traditional doctors' online adverts. Most of these new problems are rarely physical. They are soft social needs such as removing bad luck, marriage problems, infertility, manhood enlargement, workplace problems, and body protection against witchcraft. In some social media adverts, actual physical ailments are rounded up in the phrase "and all diseases except HIV/AIDS" at the bottom of the list.[4] In other instances, like in the WhatsApp excerpt below, minimal reference is made to physical ailments.

[3] Also called liable or mauka, likango were 'long' or 'flat' growths, sores or blisters on the vulva, vagina, penis and/or anus (of both women and men).

[4] The accepted HIV and AIDS narrative is that there is no cure for this ailment. Apparently, over the years, traditional doctors have been made to accept this narrative and propagate it. Any traditional doctor who claims to cure HIV/AIDS is heavily censored.





This trend suggests a significant shift in social tastes and needs to which traditional doctors have responded. To meet their clients' needs, traditional doctors have mastered the art of creating social media profiles to

outline the problems they specialise in. According to the sampled traditional doctors, this practice helps clients identify and quickly locate appropriate traditional doctors for their particular issues.

The study has also established that the traditional doctors' social media presence significantly undercuts the traditional structure and practice of traditional medicine. Studies in traditional medicine in Africa have identified three levels in its practice: divination, spiritualisation and herbalism. Divination involves the identification of the disease and its cause (Chaitanya et al., 2022; Ozion and Chinwe, 2019). Spiritualisation involves the attempt to situate the problem within a relational-cum-spiritual context. For example, in Malawi, this stage includes an explanation of how hostile social relations in the client's household or community have resulted in inciting malevolent spirits from angered parties. To establish the social-spiritual context of the problem afflicting the client, the traditional doctor interrogates the status of the client's social relationships and the possible lapses that would have given way to malignant spirits. Herbalism is the last stage in the process. It involves the provision of herbal remedies and their appropriate prescriptions (*zizimba*). However, the study has established that traditional doctors' social media presence significantly shrinks the three-stage process of traditional medicine. Most traditional doctors acknowledged that herbalisation has become the most dominant stage in the doctor-client relationship. Very minimal consultation or divination and spiritualisation take place through social media. By using social media to announce their areas of specialisation, the traditional doctors delegate the diagnostic phase to the clients. The clients are left to self-examine their symptoms and problems and match the same with the doctor's speciality. This new trend undercuts the conventional structure of traditional medicine. It is possible that social media may not be the only factor behind this change. The growing herbal medicine industry catering to the new demand for herbal medicine could be another possible factor. However, the sampled doctors demonstrate that their social media presence creates a new pragmatism that necessitates the shedding off of other stages of the traditional practice.

Another feature of the study worth noting is how traditional doctors create social media handles that enable them to access and build online communities with their potential clients. The sampled traditional doctors indicated three ways that they use to develop online visibility and attract online traffic to themselves. First, they may team up with friends and create a

new WhatsApp group with an attractive name. They post the link on existing groups so that people can join the new group. A traditional healer identifying himself as *Pangazako* (whose name means 'do your own things') indicated that various traditional healers mostly use political names or names of football teams because these social media handles attract a lot of traffic. Once people have joined, group adminstrators who are mostly friends of the traditional doctor, post political news or start a political debate. When the discussion is heated, a traditional healer will post a message advertising his business. Group members usually protest and tell the group adminstrators to remove the traditional doctor on the grounds that they are thieves. But since the group adminstrators are part of the game, they may remove the doctor and add his number again some hours or a day later. While some group members protest against traditional medicine adverts, other group members with needs requiring the doctor's assistance contact the traditional doctor privately. Through this process, the traditional doctors create an online following and a virtual community around their practices.

Secondly, the traditional doctors also indicated that, in some instances, they create their own social media handles and tag the same to more prominent social media groups on Facebook or WhatsApp. They usually tag the social media handles of popular social media influencers like musicians, football players and other important personages. Thirdly, the traditional doctors also indicated that they 'crash' into public or social media accounts of important personages. Again, like in the previous approaches, they take advantage of the significant online traffic on these social media handles. Again, the doctors post their adverts during intense online traffic around a particularly contentious issue or comments on an influential person's post. According to some of the traditional doctors, in these forums, no one protests since the admins or the owners of the social media accounts are never interested in the ongoing debate. While no one openly responds to their adverts, traditional doctors get private inquiries. The three approaches rely on the online curiosity of younger Malawi social media users. Again, by offering solutions to the most prevalent social challenges in their adverts, the traditional doctors are assured of a growing clientele.

Lastly, the study also established that the social media presence of traditional doctors is not without its challenges. According to most traditional doctors, one of their significant challenges is an overflow of people who

claim to be traditional healers, yet they are scammers aimed at duping people. Such being the case, public trust in online traditional doctors is decreasing. One traditional doctor lamented: "In most cases when I post a message on a WhatsApp group, I get removed by group admins because people are conscious of being duped." It is instructive that although traditional doctors are organised into a national association, not all doctors are registered with the group. It is also likely that even for those registered, their association does not have the capacity to monitor and validate traditional medicine on social media. It is also noteworthy that over and against the apparent social media challenges traditional doctors face, the general tone of the relationship between traditional medicine and social media is a positive one. Most of the sampled traditional doctors indicated that social media has expanded their customer reach. They now have a more vibrant clientele and no longer have to wait for the lone client who would occasionally beat the path to reach them through word of mouth. Today, the traditional doctor is actively interacting with his or her clientele.

Concluding Thoughts

The chapter has analysed how the social media presence of traditional doctors demonstrates a significant shift in the practice of traditional medicine in Malawi. It has been shown that social media provides new innovative platforms that transform the practice of traditional medicine in Malawi. Social media provides platforms through which traditional doctors meet clients in more private constellations. Given the assumed esoteric nature of traditional medicine and its religious dimension, new media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp have become new contact points between African Traditional Religion and its people. These findings agree with other studies on religion and social media in Africa, which demonstrate that religious actors have taken advantage of the prevalence and accessibility of mass media in Africa to continue to spread spiritual messages across the continent (Ayeni 2021; Ansor 2018; Leositapkana 2018). By embracing social media like other religious actors, traditional doctors - as a dimension of traditional religions - demonstrate the dynamism of indigenous religions and their continuous adaptation to changes in social structure and processes. This continuous adaptation does not represent mere individualistic and materialistic endeavours by

traditional doctors. It demonstrates, in part, traditional religions' enduring quest for relevance and what Luckmann (1977) calls a search for transcendence amid historical immanence. The growing clientele emanating from traditional doctors' embrace of social media has several implications. It signifies the resurgence of popular demand for and access to traditional medicine. This trend comes after years of negative characterisation and misperception of traditional medicine created by major world religions such as Christianity. In this case, social media provides a new lease of life for indigenous religions. It enables them to reclaim their lost territory and reassert themselves as authentic religions at par with other religions.

The study also found that like other religious actors, the use of social media also transforms the structure of the practice of traditional medicine. While divination, spiritualisation and herbalisation were integral components of traditional practice in the past, the same no longer holds. For pragmatic purposes, herbalism has become the new emphasis in the social media practice of traditional medicine. This new transformation demonstrates the contextual metamorphosis of traditional religions in Africa. This observation agrees with Schoffeleers (2000) viewpoint about indigenous religions. For example, the Malawi *Gule Wamkulu* masquerade's adoption of Christian names such as Maria and Simon signifies the traditional religions' continuous transformation for relevance. Similarly, by shedding off divination and spiritualisation, traditional medicine is practically shedding off its traditional shells that have historically determined its negative characterisation. It is now entering the realm of herbal medicine, a new trend in modern alternative medicine that is threatening to rival conventional medicine. While the other two aspects of traditional medicine will not be shed off completely, the emphasis on herbalism will enable the practice to navigate and find its place in the digital world. Yet even in the digital world, the esoteric nature of traditional medicine will always connect it to its religious roots.

REFERENCES

Agarwal, R., & Jones, W.J. (2022). Social Media's Role in the Changing Religious Landscape of Contemporary Bangkok. *Religions 13*(421), 1-17.

Amanze, P.O., & Wogu, C.N. (2015). Internet evangelism: An effective Method for Soul-winning in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Nigeria. *Asia-Africa Journal of Mission and Ministry (AAMM)* 11, 149-170.

Anyasor, O.M. (2018). Advertising motivations of church advertising in Nigeria. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development 5*(1), 192-199.

Ayeni, O.B. (2021). Branding and Marketing Nigerian Churches on Social Media. *Palgrave Studies of Marketing in Emerging Economies Marketing Brands in Africa*, 91-119. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Barnes, N., Penn-Edwards, S. & Sim, C. (2015). A Dialogic About Using Facebook Status Updates for Education Research: a PhD student's journey. *Education Research Evaluation 21*(2), 109-121.

Chaitanya, M.V.N.L., Baye, H.G. Saad, H. & Usamo, F.B. (2022). Traditional African Medicine. In H.A. El-Shemy (Ed.), *Natural Medicinal Plants*,. 47-66. No city: IntechOpen.

Chiluwa, I. (2012). Online Religion in Nigeria: The Internet Church and Cyber Miracles. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 47(6), 734-749.

Civila, S., Romero-Rodríguez, L.M., & Civila, A. (2020). The Demonization of Islam through Social Media: A Case Study of #Stopislam in Instagram. *Publications 8*(52), 1-19.

Costello, L., McDermott, M.L., & Wallace, R. (2017). Netnography: Range of Practices, Misperceptions, and Missed Opportunities. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 16(1),1-12.

Evolvi, G. (2022). Religion and the Internet: Digital Religion, (Hyper) mediated Spaces, and Materiality. *Zeitschrift für Religion, Gesellschaft und Politik* 6, 9-25.

Evolvi, G. (2018). *Blogging My Religion: Secular, Muslim, and Catholic Media Spaces in Europe*. London: Routledge.

Farkas, J., Schou, J., & Neumayer, C. (2018a). Cloaked Facebook Pages: Exploring Fake Islamist Propaganda in Social Media. *New Media & Society 20*(5), 1850-1867.

Farkas, J., Schou, J., & Neumayer, C. (2018b). Platformed Antagonism: Racist Discourses on Fake Muslim Facebook Pages. *Critical Discourse Studies 15*(5), 463-480.

Gupta, S. (2009). How Do Consumers Judge Celebrities' Irresponsible Behavior? An Attribution Theory Perspective. *Journal of Applied Business and Economics 10*(3), 1-14.

Gustafsson, J., Ngomba, T.J. & Nielsen, P.E. (2019). New Media and Processes of Social Change in Contemporary Africa. *Journal of African Media Studies 11*(2), 125-141.

Hishima, S.D. (2022). African Traditional Religion and Contemporary Functionalism: Medicine. In I.S. Aderibigbe & T. Falola (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of African Traditional Religion*, 391-401. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Jong, S.T. (2019). Netnography: Researching Online Populations. In P. Liamputtong (Ed.), *Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences*. 1321–1337. Singapore: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-5251-4_17.

Kgatle, M.S. (2022). "Go Deeper Papa, Prophesy, Do something": The Popularity and Commercialisation of Prophetic Deliverance in African Pentecostalism. *Verbum et Ecclesia 43*(1), 1-7.

Kozinets, R. (2015). *Netnography: Redefined*. London: Sage.

Kozinets, R.V. (1998). On Netnography: Initial Reflections on Consumer Research Investigations of Cyberculture. In J.W. Alba & J.W. Hutchinson (Eds.), *NA - Advances in Consumer Research* 25, 366-371. Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research.

Loanzon, E., Provenzola, J., Sirriwannangkul, B., & Al Mallak, M. (2013). Netnography: Evolution, Trends, and Implications as a Fuzzy Front-End Tool. Proceedings of Technology Management in the IT-Driven Services Conference. http://www.picmet.org/db/member/proceedings/2013/data/papers/13R0051.pdf

Lowes, S., & Montero, E. (2019). Traditional Medicine in Central Africa. *AEA Papers and Proceedings 109*, 516-520.

Luckmann, T. (1977). Theories of Religion and Social Change. *The Annual Review of the Social Sciences of Religion 1*, 1-28.

Hashmi, M.M., Rashid, R.A. and Ahmad, M.K. (2021). The Representation of Islam Within Social Media: A Systematic Review. *Information, Communication & Society 24*(13), 1962-1981.

Manyonganise, M., & Mhuru, L. (2022). Beyond the Sacred Text: Examining the Confusion, Conflicts and Complications at the Intersection of Religion and Law in Zimbabwe. *Religions 13*, 1-11.

Matobobo, C., & Bankole, F. (2021). Evaluating eWOM in Social Media: Religious Leaders vs Religious Organisations: Functionality Approach. Conference Proceedings of the UK Academy for Information Systems Conference Proceedings, Spring 3.29. 2021.

Matshobane, M. (2023). New Prophetic Churches and Syncretism: A Critical View. *Religions 14*, 1-12.

Mweta, N., Juma, P., & Phiri, S.B. (2022). Conservation of Natural Forests Through Indigenous Religious Beliefs and Practices: A Case Study of M'bona Cult, Nsanje District, Malawi. In D. Pullanikkatil & K. Hughes (Eds.), *Socio-Ecological Systems and Decoloniality*, 157-178. Cham: Springer.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-15097-5_8.

National Statistical Office, *(2018). Malawi Population and Housing Census Main Report",* May 2019.
Retrieved from https://malawi.unfpa.org/sites/deafault/files/resource-pdf/.

Ndubisi E. J. O., & Kanu, I. A. (2021). Innovative Trends in African Traditional Medicine. In I. A. Kanu, K. L. Nwadialor & E. J. O. Ndubisi (Eds.), *African Religion and Culture: Honouring the Past and Shaping the Future*, 45-63. No City: The Association for the Promotion of African Studies.

Ng, J. Y., Verhoeff, N., & Steen, J. (2023). What are the Ways in which Social Media is Used in the Context of Complementary and Alternative Medicine in the Health and Medical Scholarly Literature? A Scoping Review. *Complement Medicine Therapy*, *23*(32), 1-48.

Omonzejele, P. F., & Maduka, C. (2011). Metaphysical and Value Underpinnings of Traditional Medicine in West Africa. *Chinese Journal of Integrative Medicine*, *17*, 99–104. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11655-011-0649-y.

Omosor, F. (2019). Christianity and African Traditional Medicine: A Critical Study from Afro-Biblical Perspective. *UNIUYO Journal of Humanities*, *23*(2), 363-384.

Ozioma, E. O. J., & Chinwe, A. A. C. (2019). African Traditional Medicine in Herbal Medicine. In P. F. Builders (Ed.), *Herbal Medicine* (pp. 191–241). London: Intechopen. DOI: 10.5772/intechopen.80348.

Romero-Daza, N. (2002). Traditional Medicine in Africa. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *583*(1), 173–176.

Semotiuk, A. J., Semotiuk, N. L., & Ezcurra, E. (2015). The Eruption of Technology in Traditional Medicine: How Social Media Guides the Sale of Natural Plant Products in the Sonoran Desert Region. *Economic Botany*, *69*(4), 360–369.

Schoffeleers, J. M. (Ed.) (2000). *Guardians of the Land*. Blantyre: CLAIM.

Tolhurst, R., Theobald, S., Kayira, E., Ntonya, C., Kafulafula, G., Nielson, J., & Van den Broek, N. (2008). "I Don't Want All My Babies to Go to the Grave": Perceptions of Pre-Term Birth in Southern Malawi. *Midwifery* 24(1), 83-98.

Tshepo Phagane. (2021). *Traditional Healers Turn to Technology to Connect with Clients."* SABC News.
Retrieved from: https://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/traditional-healers-turn-to-technology-to-connect-with-clients/, 7.5. 2023.

Sarkodie Agyeman, Y. & Awuah-Nyamekye, S. (2018). African Traditional Religion in Contemporary Africa: The Case of Ghana. *Oguaa Journal of Religion and Human Values* 4, 1-21.

Health and Healing: New Developments in Spirit Mediumship in Malawi[1]

Joseph C. ***Chakanza***

Abstract

This chapter discusses the transformation of the practice of healing and mediumship in Malawi. It notes that while traditional healing practices have always been associated with spirit possession recent trends demonstrate striking innovations among traditional healers. Part of these innovations have been the use of prayer, the Bible and the singing of hymns as part of the healing process. Part of this transformation was necessitated by the misconception and mistrust of traditional healing within Malawi's Christianised society.

Introduction

There are misconceptions and distrust concerning traditional ways of healing in Malawi. The very idea of possession by a spirit, ancestral or otherwise, provokes skepticism. The swing from possession by ancestral spirits to possession by spirits of saints and Biblical personalities among the spirit mediums has made a great impact. Although it has not yet been positively endorsed by some sections of our community as an alternative system of medical practice contributing to health care, traditional healing is still sought after by many people. Traditional healers claim success in treating such diseases as cancer, diabetes, insanity, asthma, epilepsy, sex-

[1] This paper was first published in ATISCA BULLETIN no.5/6 (1996/1997) as J.C. Chakanza, "Health and Healing: New Developments in Spirit Mediumships in Malawi" in *Theology Cooked in an Africa Port*, edited by K. Fiedler, P. Gundani and H. Mijiga, Special Volume, pp. 101-105.

ually transmitted diseases, conditions of impotence in males and infertility in females. Official government policy has been to encourage traditional healers to improve and update their healing techniques.[2]

Spirit Mediumship

A recent innovation in traditional healing in Malawi has been detected among some of the spirit mediums (*asing'anga a mizimu*) who have incorporated some Christian elements in their healing ministry (Chakanza, 1997, p. 24f). It is this category of spirit mediums that I discuss in this article. The conventional spirit mediums are healers who deal with ancestral spirits and carry out their work of mediumship only when possessed by the spirits. Otherwise, they are normal people. Possession constitutes an important means of communication with the spirit world, a world of invisible beings, which can influence people either for good or for evil. Spirit possession, then is a cultural term, which gives expression to the belief that a person who displays certain behaviour has been taken possession of by an invisible being or power (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 231). In Malawi, spirit possession, which is understood literally as *kugwidwa* or *kulowedwa ndi azimu* is known by different names among various ethnic groups, such as *malombo* (Mang'anja, Sena), *mabsyoka, ichikwangwali, mazinda* (Sena), *mpwesa, mtume, nantogwe* (Lomwe), *majini, mutu waukulu* (Yao, Nyanja), *vimbuza, virombo, vyanusi* (Tumbuka-Ngoni).[3] Although spirit possession is regarded as *matenda* (illness), it may be useful to distinguish between possession cases requiring the permanent expulsion of an undesirable spirit through exorcism, and those, which aim at establishing some sort of lasting relationship through accommodation. This distinction will separate the phenomenon of spirit mediumship from that of spirit possession of an undesirable spirit requiring expulsion through exorcism, and those, which aim at establishing some sort of lasting relationship through accommodation. This will also separate the phenomenon of spirit mediumship from that of spirit possession in general. In the latter cases (spirit possession), the behaviour of the individual con-

[2] Traditional healers in Malawi have formed the "Herbalists' Association in Malawi" with its sister wing, the "Traditional Birth Attendants". The ministry of Health has appointed a doctor who liaises with them.

[3] On spirit possession among the Sena and Mang'anja, see Schoffeleers 1968, Soko 1987 and Nazombe 1988 and Soko 1988.

cerned does not necessarily convey any particular message to other people. It is primarily regarded as the bodily expression of spirit possession by the possessed person, whereas in the case of the former (spirit mediumship), the emphasis is on the communicative aspect.[4]

The Call to the Healing Ministry

There is no doubt that changes in our society have had an impact on traditional ways of healing which have adjusted to new circumstances and influences. To illustrate this point, I shall confine myself to the influence of the Christian religion on spirit mediums. The point I want to emphasise briefly is that there has emerged a number of spirit mediums who claim to heal not by being possessed by ancestral spirits, but by personalities mentioned in the Bible as well as by Christian saints, thereby giving their healing ministry a Christian flavour. Usually they are church-going members and their healing techniques entail the use of prayers, Bible readings, hymn-singing and other Christian practices together with some traditional elements. They are not to be confused with faith healers or ordinary herbalists, and neither are they to be considered prophets or founders of new churches. Like the traditional spirit mediums, they did not choose to become healers, but, at a crucial point in their lives, they found that they had no alternative but to accept the "call" to the healing ministry. Usually, a critical and protracted illness, which did not respond to any cure, was recognised as a sign of the 'call'. Once the sign was accepted, the illness ceased, but when this sign was neglected or refused, the illness worsened. In the traditional setting, the 'call' comes from an ancestral spirit while in this new manifestation, it originates from the spirits of saints and persons mentioned in the Bible such as Mary, Lazarus, John the Baptist, James, Thomas, Noah, Melchizedek etc.

Recent research carried out by Bernadette Banda (1996), a Bachelor of Arts student at Chancellor College, on two such spirit mediums at Namitete in Mchinji district, illustrates what I have been saying about this 'call' (Mulanje, 1996). The first one, a man whose name is Potifals, is a member of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP). He had been critically ill for years and all efforts to cure him through western and traditional

[4] For a brief discussion on spirit possession, see ter Haar, Moyo and Nondo's (1992), African Traditional Religions in Religious Education. A resource book with special reference to Zimbabwe, Utrecht University, pp.117-127.

medicines were to no avail. In early 1979, he became possessed and the possession spirit spoke through him saying: "I am the spirit of Lazarus and have come to stay permanently. I want Potifals to become a healer". First he ignored the 'call' and thereafter his illness became even worse. Later, he became unconscious and the spirit reiterated its demand. He felt he had no choice but to yield. He was then twenty-five years old. He came to be known as 'Lazarus' after the spirit.

The second case-study is that of a Roman Catholic lady, Alfonsina, who became seriously ill in 1987 and was brought to a certain spirit medium called Maria. During one of the sessions for exorcism, as people said prayers, she became possessed and a spirit spoke through her saying "I am the spirit of John and have come to stay permanently. I want Alfonsina to take up witch-identification and witch-chasing as her career."

Six weeks later, when Alfonsina had shown reluctance to accept the 'call', she became seriously ill once again. She was brought to Potifals, and while prayers for exorcism were being said, she became unconscious. She became possessed and the possessing spirit spoke through her saying: "I am the spirit of John and have come to stay permanently. I want Alfonsina to take up healing as her career." Alfonsina responded to the call and she is functioning as a spirit medium until today.

In Bvumbwe (Thyolo district), the foundress and proprietor of St Maria's Clinic (Chipatala cha Maria), which opened its doors to patients on 9 July 1984, has a similar story to tell. The Spirit of Maria entered her when she became unconscious after undergoing an operation. While she was in that state, the spirit revealed to her many types of medicines for curing a host of diseases. The spirit continues to reveal medicinal herbs to her through dreams. She and her husband are Catholics.[5]

A Healing Session

Unlike ordinary herbalists who rely on their knowledge of medicinal herbs, spirit mediums rely on dreams and possessions to decide on diagnosis and treatment of illnesses. They have a special room for diagnosis and treatment, which is known as *kachisi* (spirit house). When they carry out a healing session, they wear special uniforms: white robes and hats with red crosses marked on them. The kachisi has hardly any furniture,

[5] Lucy Mulanje, "Maria, the Healer at Bvumbwe in Thyolo District". B. Ed., University of Malawi, 1990.

and patients sit on mats. There are religious symbols such as crosses, pictures of saints, hymn books and copies of the Bible. Shoes and metal objects such as coins are usually not allowed into the kachisi. Their presence hinders the healing sessions.

The healing session proper starts with hymn-singing, both traditional and Christian, and is meant to invoke the healer's spirit to descend with its power and give guidance in the diagnosis of the illness and dosage of the prescribed medicine. Spontaneous prayers are made by both patients and attendants. The spirit medium asks one person to read selected texts from the Bible, usually those suited to the occasion. In the course of the Bible reading, the spirit medium becomes really possessed and the diagnosis of the patients starts. The patients do not have to tell the spirit medium what their ailments are but wait for him to establish the verdict. They may disagree with the verdict, but when it corresponds with their feelings, they gain confidence in the spirit medium's use of mirrors as a sort of video screen where past and present experiences of the patients and other suspicious circumstances can be seen. A stick is also used by some spirit mediums. It is believed that the power of the spirit is transmitted through the stick to help the spirit medium to diagnose properly and administer appropriate medicines. Some spirit mediums wear belts around their waist in the belief that this will lessen pain in the patients being diagnosed.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that these spirit mediums create a Christian atmosphere in the way they exercise their healing ministry. A prayer is said before the actual diagnosis starts; the gathered community is made to sing church hymns; Bible passages are read and heard by Christians and non-Christians alike. However, it is difficult to know what to say concerning the claims of the spirit mediums that they are possessed not by ancestral spirits, but by spirits of saints that are really at work among these people. The response from mainstream churches has simply been to reject or ignore them and, in many cases, to forbid their followers to approach these mediums while they themselves are ostracized from their churches. However, these spirit mediums are trying to blend Christian and traditional concepts of healing by using symbols from both. Above all, they are suggesting that traditional ways of healing can be changed and improved by contact with other forces, be they positive or negative towards them. There

is a misconception and distrust concerning traditional ways of healing, presumably because they lack a rationally formulated expression when compared with Western medical practice. The very idea of possession by a spirit, ancestral or otherwise, immediately provokes skepticism in many Western-oriented people.

Finally, I wish to observe that the spirit mediums do not claim to cure every disease, hence they refer some cases to hospitals. This swing from possession by ancestral spirits to possession by spirits of saints and Biblical personalities among the spirit mediums has made a great impact by replacing witchcraft and sorcery as well as evil spirits. It helps to build a sound community under Christian influence directly or indirectly by not antagonising people.

REFERENCES

Banda, B. (1996). "Two Healing Spirit Mediums in Nkhwazi Village: An Assessment of their Ministry." (Bachelors' thesis, University of Malawi)

Chakanza, J.C. (1997). "Health and Healing Mediumship." *The Lamp* 7, 20-207.

Haar, G.T., Moyo, A., Nondo, S.J. (1992), *African Traditional Religions in Religious Education. A Resource Book with Special Reference to Zimbabwe*. Utrecht: Utrecht University, 117-127.

Mulanje, L. (1990). Maria, the Healer at Bvumbwe in Thyolo District. (B. Ed., Dissertation, University of Malawi)

Nazombe, Anthony J. (1988). Nantongwe: a Lomwe Spirit Possession Ritual. *Religion in Malawi* 2, 15-18.

Schoffeleers, J.M. (1968). *Evil Spirits and Rites of Exorcism in the Lower Shire Valley*. Chiradzulu: Montfort Press.

Soko, J.B. (1987). An Introduction to the Vimbuza Phenomenon. *Religion in Malawi* 1,9-12.

Soko. J.B. (1988). The Vimbuza Possession Cult: The Onset of the Disease. *Religion in Malawi* 2, 11-15.

Wilkinson, M. (1991). *A Mental Health Handbook for Malawi*. Limbe: Limbe Assemblies of God Literature Centre Press.

EPILOGUE

Louis ***Ndekha***

This volume is divided into five sections: ATR's dynamic history, ATR and Christianity, ATR and Social Transformation, ATR and Ethics and ATR and Health. The breadth of the sections and the diversity of the discussions in the chapters demonstrate that African Traditional Religions are indeed the bedrock on which the totality of the African experience is anchored. Not only is ATR's history dynamic, but the cultural-religious nexus in African religions also confirms the religions' all-encompassing representation of the African experience. This cultural-religious nexus is well illustrated by the contribution of the Re-Negotiating Identity through Pan-Africanist and Esoteric Networks. Thus, the contention of whether African religions qualify as religions in both scholarship and Christian theological discussion is a modern misnomer. It represents a failure to appreciate the dynamics in African Religions and their religio-cultural function. Although the average indigenous African does not use the word religion in everyday rituals, the conception and conflation of the sacred and secular in African ontology demonstrates the all-encompassing nature of the African human experience.

The importance of confirming the cultural-religious nexus in African religions in this volume has been demonstrated by the intricate, abiding and sometimes contentious relationship between African religions and Christianity. From the submissions in this volume, it is evident that because ATR is an unshakable bedrock of what it means to be African, as Chakanza had argued, Christian theology and the church's evangelization strategy have to constantly contend with the abiding influence of African Traditional Religions. Although the submissions in this volume have focused on Christianity, the central thrust of the volume and the submission would be true for any other foreign religion expecting to set its foothold among African peoples.

It is also essential to note that, although African Traditional Religions represent tales of resistance to forces beyond themselves, such as foreign religions, malleability is their characteristic feature. Thus, in the context of the social transformation, African Traditions have continually evolved and

adapted to new social conditions. Thus, although rituals constitute African cultural-religious practice, their continued relevance in a turbulent and constantly changing world has demanded that they continuously transform. Thus, rites of passage, whether puberty, death or birth, have evolved continuously in response to social change. The relationship between African Traditional Religions and Health has also been reflective of the relationship between African Traditional Religions and social transformation. As the submissions have demonstrated, the continuous evolution of traditional doctors' healing practices and their presence on social media represent the continuing resilience of African traditional religions in the context of social change.

Also integral to African Traditional Religions is their influence on values and ethics. Unfortunately, like in the cases of many other religions, these values and ethics have negative and positive implications for social relations and economic development in Africa. As the volume has demonstrated, some African social taboos with roots in African Traditional Religions have been the cause of horrendous suffering in selected social sectors of individuals such as people with albinism, children and older people. Chakanza once argued that even corruption may have roots in African religious and cultural practices. Yet the solution to these social problems, according to the submissions in this volume, can be gleaned from African Traditional Religious heritage and values.

Thus, the revisit of African Traditional Religions in Africa in the 21st Century demonstrates a religious tradition that is there to stay. It is a religion that will continue to profoundly influence African people's adoption and practice of other faiths. It is a religion that will go along with its people as society continually transforms, and, in the process, it will continue to provide fundamental philosophical and ethical values for the masses.

NOTES on Editors and Contributing Authors

Judith BACHMANN is a postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Department of Religious Studies and Intercultural Theology, University of Heidelberg. She has a doctorate in the study of religion from the University of Heidelberg. Currently, her research is focused on the emergence of African practices as "tradition" and "religion" in global entanglements. ORCID ID: 0009-0002-2035-4095

Joseph CHAKANZA (†) was a Catholic Priest and Professor of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Malawi for 31 years until his retirement in 2007. He did his PhD in Cultural Anthropology at the University of Oxford. His research interests were in religion and culture and he published extensively in this area.

Obafemi JEGEDE is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan. He is keenly interested in African Traditional Religion, Traditional African Medicine, Indigenous Knowledge and Belief Systems. He holds a PhD in Traditional African Medicine and Belief Systems from the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, an MA in African Studies and a BA in Religious Studies from the University of Ibadan.

Joachim KÜGLER (cooperating editor) was a Professor of New Testament Studies at the University of Bamberg (2008-2024). Now retired, he continues to be a member of the editorial board of BiAS and ERA. ORCID ID: 0000-0002-8504-7742

Jones MAWERENGA is a Senior Lecturer in the Theology and Religious Studies (TRS) Department at the University of Malawi. Mawerenga holds a PhD in Theology and Religious Studies (TRS) from Mzuzu University (Mzuni). He is the author of: *The Homosexuality Debate in Malawi* (2018) and *Systematic Theology* (2019). He has also published numerous chapters and journal articles in international peer-reviewed journals and books. He is a member of the Network for African congregational theology (NetACT). ORCID ID: 0000-0003-4439-6142

Mastone Lenias Kachikwerete MBEWE is a Senior Lecturer in Education and currently working as Head of Education Department at DMI University Mangochi Campus. He holds a PhD in Education Curriculum and Teaching Studies and an MA both from University of Malawi, BA and Diploma in Education both from Marist College, Nairobi, Kenya. His interest is in gender and social cultural Issues.

Joyce MLENGA is a Lecturer in Theology and Religious Studies at Mzuzu University, and her research interests revolve around African Indigenous Religions, religion and culture, Christian education, and women's issues. She holds a PhD in Theology and Religious Studies from Mzuzu University, a Master of Divinity in Christian Education from Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology, and a BA from the African Bible College. ORCID ID: 0000-0003-0225-4621

Peter Mutuku MUMO is an Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Nairobi and has keen interest in African Traditional Religion, African cultures and Church History. He holds a PhD, an MA, and a BA in Religious Studies from the University of Nairobi. ORCID ID: 0000-0002-2815-4541

Rhodian MUNYENYEMBE is a Senior Lecturer in Theology and Religious Studies at Mzuzu University and has a keen interest in African cultures and traditions. He holds a PhD in Theology from the University of the Free State, a MEd from Concordia University and an MA and a BA from the University of Malawi. ORCID ID: 0000-0001-5163-0908

Louis NDEKHA lectures in Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Malawi. He is also an Alexander Von Humboldt Research Fellow at the University of Bamberg. He is interested in the interaction between the biblical text and contemporary culture, including African Religions. He holds a PhD from the University of Gloucestershire, an MTh from the University of Edinburgh and a BA from the University of Malawi. ORCID ID: 0000-0002-8456-4094

Edwin PHIRI is a senior student at The Catholic University of Malawi, majoring in Anthropology and minoring in Social Work. He is also a registered poet with the Poetry Association of Malawi (PAM) and the Copyright Society of Malawi (COSOMA). His research thesis focuses on the intersection of African Traditional Religion and Christianity. Furthermore, he is currently gaining valuable experience as a UNITE 4 GBV study Project Intern at the Malawi Liverpool Welcome Programme.

Thokozani Jackson SOLOMON is a postgraduate student at the University of Malawi pursuing a Master of Theology and Religious Studies degree programme. He is currently working as a tutor in Church History and African Traditional Religion at University of Malawi, Department of Theology and Religious Studies. Solomon Holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theology with a minor in Communication, specializing in Broadcasting and Development Support Communication. Currently he is a registered member of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Malawi and Theological Society of Malawi.

Sangwani TEMBO is a Senior Lecturer and Head of Anthropology Department at The Catholic University of Malawi. He is currently pursuing PhD studies in Humanities Anthropology at Rhodes University in South Africa. He holds a Master's degree in Environmental Studies and a Bachelor of Social Sciences in Anthropology both from The Catholic University of Malawi. His research interest is in Indigenous Knowledge systems, African spirituality and sacredness and sustainable biodiversity management.

BiAS at University of Bamberg Press

The book series **B**ible **i**n **A**frica **S**tudies (**BiAS**) was established in 2009 by Joachim Kügler, Lovemore Togarasei and Masiiwa Ragies Gunda.

All volumes of BiAS series are available online at:

- **http://www.uni-bamberg.de/ubp/verlagsprogramm/reihen/bible-in-africa-studies/** (information and overview of the series)
- **https://fis.uni-bamberg.de/cris/series/series00016/seriespublications.html** (download of the full texts)

We will always keep you updated if you follow us here:

- **http://uni-bamberg.academia.edu/BiasSeries** (information, additional texts, tables of matters, download links; pre-print versions)

Editorial board of BiAS volumes and the sub-series ERA from Volume 43 on:

Kudzai **Biri** *(African Traditional Religions)*
Ezra **Chitando** *(World Christianity)*
Rosinah **Gabaitse** *(New Testament)*
Kathrin **Gies** *(Old Testament /Hebrew Bible, responsible for the contact with UBP)*
Masiiwa R. **Gunda** *(Old Testament / Hebrew Bible)*
Joachim **Kügler** (*New Testament, responsible for the contact with UBP)*
Uta **Poplutz** *(New Testament, responsible for the contact with UBP)*
Johanna **Stiebert** *(Old Testament / Hebrew Bible)*
Lovemore **Togarasei** *(New Testament)*

Previously published volumes of the BiAS series

BiAS 1 **The Bible in Context**: Essay Collection / by Lovemore Togarasei, Bamberg: UBP, 2009
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-opus-2131

BiAS 2 **Reign with Him for Thousand Years (Rev 20:6)**:
A Socio-Hermeneutical Exposition of Biblical and Contemporary Millenarian Movements in Zimbabwe as Radical Responses to Deprivation / by David Bishau, Bamberg: UBP, 2010
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-opus-2457

BiAS 3 **The Bible and Homosexuality in Zimbabwe:**
A Socio-historical analysis of the political, cultural and Christian arguments in the homosexual public debate with special reference to the use of the Bible / by Masiiwa R. Gunda, Bamberg: UBP, 2010
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-opus-2522

BiAS 4 **From Text to Practice:** The role of the Bible in daily living of African people today / ed. by Joachim Kügler & Masiiwa R. Gunda, 2nd ed., rev. & expanded, Bamberg: UBP, 2013
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-opus4-20465

BiAS 5 **Pauvreté ou paupérisation en Afrique :** une étude exegético-ethique de la pauvreté chez les Beti-Fang du Cameroun / par Jacques F. Owono, Bamberg : UBP, 2011
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-opus-3259

BiAS 6 **Death and After-life Rituals in the eyes of the Shona:** Dialogue with Shona Customs with the Quest for Authentic Inculturation / by Canisius Mwandayi, Bamberg: UBP, 2011
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-opus-3336

BiAS 7 **The Bible and Politics in Africa** / ed. by Masiiwa R. Gunda & Joachim Kügler, Bamberg: UBP, 2012
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-opus4-4726

BiAS 8 **The Messianic Feeding of the Masses:** An Analysis of John 6 in the Context of Messianic Leadership in Post-Colonial Zimbabwe / by Francis Machingura, Bamberg: UBP, 2012
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-opus-4032

BiAS 9 **HIV/AIDS and the Bible in Tanzania:** A Contextual Re-reading of 2 Samuel 13:1-14:33 / by Mussa S. Muneja, Bamberg: UBP, 2012
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-opus4-9957

BiAS 10 Aluta continua biblical hermeneutics for liberation: Interpreting biblical texts on slavery for liberation of Zimbabwean underclasses / by Obvious Vengeyi, Bamberg: UBP, 2013
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-opus4-37641

BiAS 11 The Book of Ruth from a Lomwe perspective: ḥesed and ikharari / by Justino M. Alfredo, Bamberg: UBP, 2013
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-opus4-50966

BiAS 12 Prophets, profits and the Bible in Zimbabwe: Festschrift for Aynos M. Moyo / ed. by Ezra Chitando, Masiiwa R. Gunda & Joachim Kügler, Bamberg: UBP, 2013
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-opus4-55996

BiAS 13 Towards an African-Christian Environmental Ethic / by Nisbert T. Taringa, Bamberg: UBP, 2014
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-opus4-64812

BiAS 14 Beyond Making Money: The Prophetic Songs of Paul Dzampah from Ghana; Edition, Introduction, and Annotations / by Joachim Kügler, Bamberg: UBP, 2014
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-opus4-101753

BiAS 15 ERA 1 | Multiplying in the Spirit: African Initiated Churches in Zimbabwe / ed. by Ezra Chitando, Masiiwa R. Gunda & Joachim Kügler, Bamberg: UBP, 2014
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-opus4-105096

BiAS 16 Analysing the Frames of a Bible: The Case of the Setswana Translations of the Book of Ruth / by Sidney K. Berman, Bamberg: UBP, 2014
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-opus4-250198

BiAS 17 The Bible and Children in Africa / Lovemore Togarasei & Joachim Kügler (eds.), Bamberg: UBP, 2014
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-opus4-252876

BiAS 18 On the Public Role of the Bible in Zimbabwe: Unpacking Banana's "re-writing" call for a socially and contextually relevant Biblical Studies / by Masiiwa R. Gunda, Bamberg: UBP, 2015
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-opus4-255608

BiAS 19 Offering the Gospel ADAPANON: An interpretation and application of 1 Corinthians 9:18 / by Johannes M. Wessels / Ed. & provided with a foreword by Joachim Kügler, Bamberg: UBP, 2015
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-opus4-264687

BiAS 20 The Bible and Violence in Africa: Papers presented at the BiAS meeting 2014 in Windhoek (Namibia), with some additional contributions / Johannes Hunter & Joachim Kügler (eds.), Bamberg: UBP, 2016
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-opus4-461656

BiAS 21 At the Crossroads: A Call to Christians to Act in Faith for an Alternative Zimbabwe / by Masiiwa R. Gunda, Bamberg: UBP, 2018
https://doi.org/10.20378/irbo-53039

BiAS 22 The Bible and Gender Troubles in Africa: Papers presented at the BiAS meeting 2016 in Harare (Zimbabwe) with some additional contributions / Joachim Kügler, Rosinah Gabaitse, Johanna Stiebert (eds.), Bamberg: UBP, 2019
https://doi.org/10.20378/irbo-54678

BiAS 23 ERA 2 | Abundant Life and Basic Needs: African Religions as a Resource for Sustainable Development / by Bednicho Nyoni, Bamberg: UBP, 2019
https://doi.org/10.20378/irbo-54768

BiAS 24 ERA 3 | African Pentecostalism, the Bible, and Cultural Resilience: The Case of the ZAOGA / by Kudzai Biri, Bamberg: UBP, 2020
http://doi.org/10.20378/irb-47003

BiAS 25 ERA 4 | Religion and Development in Africa / Ezra Chitando, Masiiwa Ragies Gunda & Lovemore Togarasei (eds.) in cooperation with Joachim Kügler, Bamberg: UBP, 2020 *https://doi.org/10.20378/irb-47759*

BiAS 26 ERA 5 | Religion and Social Marginalization in Zimbabwe / Lovemore Togarasei, David Bishau & Ezra Chitando (eds.), Bamberg: UBP, 2020
https://doi.org/10.20378/irb-47836

BiAS 27 Witwen und Bibel in Tansania: Eine leserinnenorientierte Lektüre von 1 Tim 5,3-16 / by Stefanie Beck, Bamberg: UBP, 2020
https://doi.org/10.20378/irb-48219

BiAS 28 ERA 6 | "The wounded Beast?": Single Women, Tradition, and the Bible in Zimbabwe / by Kudzi Biri: UBP, 2021 *https://doi.org/10.20378/irb-48992*

BiAS 29 Mother Earth, Mother Africa, and Biblical Studies: Interpretations in the Context of Climate Change / Sidney K. Berman, Paul L. Leshota, Ericka S. Dunbar, Musa W. Dube, Malebogo Kgalemang (eds.), Bamberg: UBP, 2021
https://doi.org/10.20378/irb-49839

BiAS 30 ERA 7 | That all may Live! Essays in Honour of Nyambura J. Njoroge/ Ezra Chitando, Esther Mombo & Masiiwa Ragies Gunda (eds.), Bamberg: UBP, 2021 *https://doi.org/10.20378/irb-50019*

BiAS 31 ERA 8 | COVID-19: African Women and the Will to Survive/ Helen A. Labeodan, Rosemary Amenga-Etego, Johanna Stiebert & Mark S. Aidoo (eds.), Bamberg: UBP, 2021 *https://doi.org/10.20378/irb-51639*

BiAS 32 | Paul's Ethics of Reconciliation in Dialogue with Ndebele and Shona Ethnic Cohesion/ by Ishanesu S. Gusha, Bamberg: UBP, 2022 *https://doi.org/10.20378/irb-54882*

BiAS 33 ERA 9 | An Anglican "Quest for Belonging?"/ by Farai Mutamiri, Bamberg: UBP, 2022 *https://doi.org/10.20378/irb-55722*

BiAS 34 | Luke's Gospel on Material Possessions and Christian Practise in Nigeria/ by Kingsley I. Uwaegbute, Bamberg: UBP, 2022 *https://doi.org/10.20378/irb-55730*

BiAS 35 ERA 10 | Daring Patriarchy? A Biblical Engagement with Gender Discourses on Political Participation in Post-colonial Zimbabwe/ by Molly Manyonganise, Bamberg: UBP, 2023 *https://doi.org/10.20378/irb-57154*

BiAS 36 ERA 11 | Religion and Health in a COVID-19 Context. Experiences from Zimbabwe/ Molly Manyonganise (Ed.), Bamberg: UBP, 2023 *https://doi.org/10.20378/irb-58422*

BiAS 37 ERA 12 | The Bible, Quran, and COVID-19 Vaccines. Studies on Religion-based Vaccine Perceptions (Africa–Europe–Middle East)/ Joachim Kügler & Kathrin Gies (Eds.), Bamberg: UBP, 2023 *https://doi.org/10.20378/irb-59373*

BiAS 38 | Identity and Socio-Economic Relations in Luke's Gospel. The Sermon on the Plain (Lk 6:20-49) and Greco-Roman Panegyrics/ by Louis Ndekha, Bamberg: UBP, 2023 *https://doi.org/10.20378/irb-90377*

BiAS 39 ERA 13 | SANKOFA. Liberation Theologies of West African Women (Circle Jubilee Volume 1)/ Seyram B. Amenyedzi, Aosi Apollos Maton, Marceline L. Yele (Eds.), Bamberg: UBP, 2023. *https://doi.org/10.20378/irb-91400*

BiAS 40 ERA 14 | Queen of Sheba. East and Central African Women's Theologies of Liberation (Circle Jubilee Volume 2)/ Loreen Maseno, Esther Mombo, Najagu Muke, Veronica Kahindo (Eds.), Bamberg: UBP, 2024. *https://doi.org/10.20378/irb-92896*

BiAS 41 ERA 15 | NEHANDA. Women's Theologies of Liberation in Southern Africa (Circle Jubilee Volume 3)/ Nelly Mwale, Rosinah Mmannana Gabaitse, Fundiswa Kobo, Dorothy Tembo (Eds.), Bamberg: UBP, 2024. *https://doi.org/10.20378/irb-95198*

BiAS 42 | Going the Extra Mile. Reflections on Biblical Studies in Africa and the Contributions of Joachim Kügler/ Ezra Chitando, Masiiwa R. Gunda, Kathrin Gies, Lena Jannek, Jana Hock (Eds.), Bamberg: UBP, 2024. *https://doi.org/10.20378/irb-95726*

University of Bamberg Press

This volume shares in the increasing recognition of the intricate relationship between religious practices and other social phenomena. Therefore, the authors undertake the study of ATRs within the context of other societal factors. BiAS 43/ ERA 16 reflects on the dynamics of the study of ATRs, the possible methodologies that can be employed for an analysis, and how the motif of continuity and change is captured in different contexts. The chapters cover ATR's dynamic history up to now, changes in its relationship with Christianity, ATR's social transformations, ATR and ethics, and ATR and health issues. The book is dedicated to the memory of the great Malawian scholar Joseph Chaphadzika Chakanza (1943-2019).

Editors & Contributors

Louis NDEKHA (ed.) (Malawi) | Rhodian MUNYENYEMBE (ed.) (Malawi) | Judith BACHMANN (ed.) (Germany) | Joseph CHAKANZA (†) (Malawi) | Obafemi JEGEDE (Nigeria) | Jones MAWERENGA (Malawi) | Mastone Lenias Kachikwerete MBEWE (Malawi) | Joyce MLENGA (Malawi) | Peter Mutuko MUMO (Kenya) | Edwin PHIRI (Malawi) | Thokozani Jackson SOLOMON (Malawi) | Sangwani TEMBO (Malawi) | Joachim KÜGLER (ed. coop.) (Germany)

ISBN: 978-3-98989-031-2

9 783989 890312

www.uni-bamberg.de/ubp