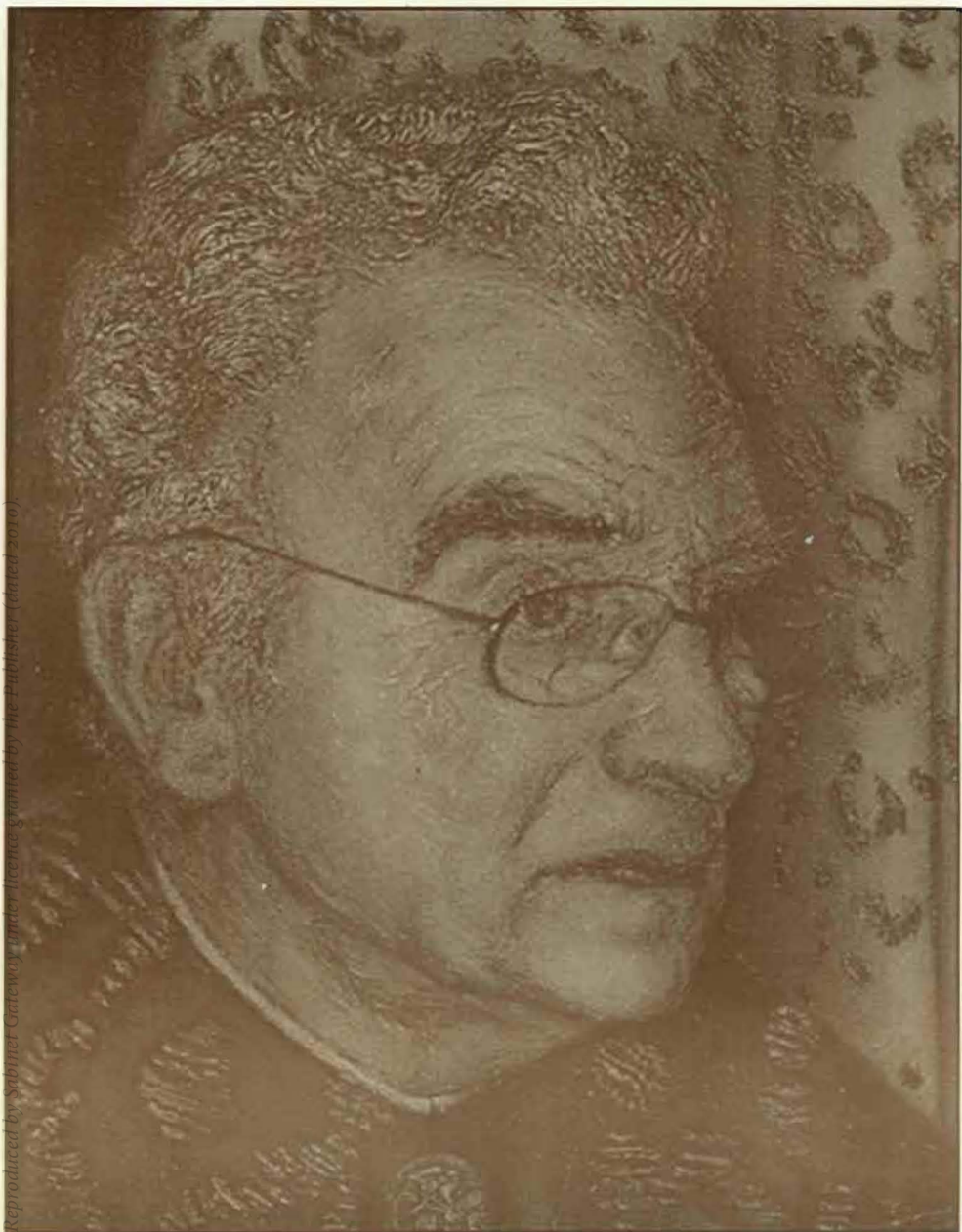


# ALTERNATION

Journal of the Centre for the Study of Southern African  
Literature and Languages Special Edition No. 2, 2005  
ISSN 1023-1757



*Alternation* is an international journal which publishes interdisciplinary contributions in the fields of the Arts and Humanities in Southern Africa.

\* Prior to publication, each publication in *Alternation* is refereed by at least two independent peer referees.

\* *Alternation* is indexed in The Index to South African Periodicals (ISAP) and reviewed in The African Book Publishing Record (ABPR).

\* *Alternation* is published every semester.

\* *Alternation* was accredited in 1996.

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ISSN 1023-1757

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# *Alternation*

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**Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of the  
Arts and Humanities in  
Southern Africa**

**The Study of Religion in Southern Africa:  
Essays in Honour of G.C. Oosthuizen**

**Editors  
Johannes A. Smit & Pratap P. Kumar**

**2005  
CSSALL  
Durban**

## **Acknowledgement of Reviewers**

We wish to acknowledge the participation of the following reviewers in the production of this special issue on G.C. Oosthuizen:

the anonymous referees of Brill Publishers, Leiden, who refereed sixteen of the articles in this issue for publication. Before submission to Brill for publication, they were also refereed and accepted for publication by the editors and Denzil Chetty.

For the remaining five articles, which were later added for the southern African edition of this collection, we wish to thank the following:

**Denzil Chetty**

**Suleman Dangor**

**Beverley Vencatsamy**

**Itumeleng Meko**

**Mohsin Ebrahim**

**Noleen Turner**



# Introduction

**Johannes A. Smit and  
P. Pratap Kumar**

This volume is brought together in honour of the significant research and other scholarly contributions Gerhardus Cornelius (Pippin) Oosthuizen has made to the study of Religion in southern Africa over a period of nearly fifty years. For this reason, the first essay provides a brief overview of Pippin's career, subsequent developments in the study of Religion in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, and a selection from his many mainly book-length publications. We also provide a brief overview of tertiary developments in the study of religion since 1997.

In the second essay, Michel Clasquin provides a Mahayana Buddhist reading of Richard Bach's *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*—a story (1970). It first traces the significance of this book – e.g. that the book reached the top of the New York Times best-seller list at the time, where it remained for 38 weeks, and that the British branch of Amazon.com, rated it the 6th bestseller in the category 'Religion and Spirituality' in 2000. It then reflects on its significance in education, music, language, and film, and proceeds to provide an overview of the book's multi-level character and what we may call its history of interpretation. Arguing that today's critical consciousness of the multiple layering and constructedness of meaning, as well as the variety of possible interpretations of texts, Clasquin then proceeds with his 'reading'.

In her 'The Suffering Mothers: The Hindu Goddesses as Empowering Role Models for Women', Alleyn Diesel provides an examination of the characteristics and mythology of the Dravidian Amman Goddesses of south India and indicates that their interests are women centred. She believes that this extremely ancient and unique form of religion, usually overlooked or dismissed by most scholars as too concerned with

calamity and darkness, has the potential to offer women a feminist theodicy that can explain and alleviate the suffering they experience because of patriarchal demands. She further holds that the Tamil Amman Goddesses offer a unique form of Goddess veneration of value to women, presenting them with liberating and empowering role models. Showing that the myths associated with these Goddesses (e.g. Draupadi and Mariamman) contain stories of women, both divine and human, violated, exploited and betrayed by men, but whose courage and purity brought them vindication against males whose violent behaviour threatened disruption of the social order, she maintains that recovery of knowledge of some of these myths has the potential to provide contemporary Hindu and Western women (and men) with a post-patriarchal spirituality which could assist with social transformation.

In his 'Mwali: A God of War or a God of Peace?', Leslie S. Nthoi reflects on the Mwali cult. He argues that the study of the Mwali cult in the last twenty years must take account of its past history for various reasons because it is only in the light of the evidence of earlier periods that we can appreciate the recent transformations and readjustments in terms of both beliefs and practices of the cult on the one hand, and the structure and organization of the cult on the other. Showing that much scholarly literature on the Mwali cult has stressed the cult's concern with fertility and afflictions, with the peace and well-being of the land and all its people from many diverse ethnic groups (e.g. the Shona, Karanga, Kalanga, Venda, Khurutshe, Nyai and the Ndebele), he points to its significance with regard to its prohibitions against the pollution of the earth by war and bloodshed, and that these have long been known to express paramount values attributed to Mwali, the All-Powerful, Creator and High God. On the other hand, a large part of the same literature is also devoted to the debate on the cult's involvement in politics of violence. It deals with the debate on the cult's role both in the 1896/7 rebellions in Southern Rhodesia, and in the recent liberation war and in the post-Independence campaign in Zimbabwe. The scholarly and wider political debate about the involvement of the cult in politics of violence is very much a part of the making of the cult in the current period, he argues.

N.S. Turner, in her 'Strategies for Expressing Social Conflict within Communal African Societies in Southern Africa', contrasts the ways in

which conflict is perceived in oral, communal and literate, individualist societies. She provides a brief description of each in terms of the nature of communication in conflict, and then continues to focus on the communal nature and dynamics of oral societies. She does this by unfolding this dynamics in terms of the nature of the oral mode of expression in communal society, its process of socialisation and control, and the nature of the form of dispute. Central to her argument is that communal oral societies use oral strategies in conflict expression that are different from typical strategies in literate societies. She concludes by stating that the various forms and strategies used in oral societies have particular functions, not least the forming of new communities which may transcend existing conflicts.

In her article, Pearl Sithole argues that traditional leadership as a form of government is finds itself in a precarious situation. This is however not caused by either the state or the traditional leaders, but derives from the fact that there is a vast difference in terms of which both the state and traditional leadership function. Whereas historical developments acknowledge the relevance and importance of both, recent globalising tendencies favour the constitution of a democratic state more than that of traditional leadership. Against this background, she argues that because of the intrinsic relationship between current diplomatic and economic system, on the one hand, and state-based democracy, on the other hand, the present form of elected government at various levels will prevail as a main political system in KwaZulu-Natal. Be this as it may, however. Since history has indicated the significance of traditional leadership, as well as its endurance, this institution, she argues, is likely to pose a serious challenge to the conscience of democratic government for many years to come

Musa Ww. Dube Shomanah's 'Circle Readings of the Bible/Scriptoratures' first reflects on the significance of the circle in African philosophical thinking. Significant is that African communities put much emphasis on issues of interconnection, interdependence, the continuity of life and relationships – even in its great diversity. The symbol of the circle captures this reality, even where death becomes relevant: it is unable to break the circle of life. This view she then contrasts with dualistic and hierarchical perspectives that often sanction exclusion and oppression. This also impacts on gender construction, but also across different ethnic, race, age, class, religious and national cultural identities and groups. The body of

her essay subsequently focuses on five main elements, namely what she sees as Biblical/ Scriptoratural and Black Biblical interpretations, Cultural/ Biblical Studies, Circle Cultural approaches to the Bible/Scriptoratures, Emerging African Women in Biblical-Scriptoratures Studies, and what 'Moving in Circles' means in this context and explication. The contribution concludes with reflections on Circle Biblical/ Scriptoratures interpretative practices.

Gospel music is an important medium used for the communication of the gospel message in Urhoboland. However, as J. Enuwosa states, very little is known about the origins, early development and nature of this medium – i.e. how the gospel music was influenced by local factors. In order to address this problem she conducted forty interviews for her article, among elders and pastors of Protestant Churches especially the Anglican Church, in the towns of Abraka, Eku, Kokori, Ughelli, Egborode, Ewureni and Sapele. The interviewees were either contemporaries of the early Urhobo gospel music activist, or pioneers of the gospel music who are still alive. The history of this gospel music can be broadly divided into two parts, namely the era of Adam Igbudu and the post-Adamic period.

Nkwoka focuses his study on the significance Pentecostalism has acquired in Africa and especially how it has manifested in Nigeria. He first provides a brief historical setting for the phenomenon and then treats it under three headings, namely, the Bible and Pentecostal theology, the significance of the perspicuity of Scripture for Pentecostal theology and the challenge the Pentecostal movement and theology pose to mainline churches. Significant is that he analyses the ways in which the understanding of the "perspicuity" of Scripture is an enabling and empowering strategy in the Pentecostal churches, that the proof-text approach to the Bible serves the preaching of the prosperity gospel as well as the performance of healings and miracles and that the churches are more existentially relevant to the lives of people than the mainline churches and their emphasis on good theological training. Linked to the belief in God's self-revelation in Scripture, the perspicuity of Scripture is an important truth for the challenge to capacitate African Christianity he argues.

Maarman Sam Tsehla starts off his essay by interpreting two quotes – one from Keener and one from Ukpong. He argues that similar to the view that prophetic practice and intellectual acumen are not opposites in Keener's

view, the same is true for African prophetic faith and intellectual pursuits and practices. This view is worked out from different angles over and against modern schizophrenic views that drives a dividing wedge into this notion of integratedness. His view is that intellectual pursuit and prophetic vocation coexist symbiotically in a true, brave and noble life. Such an assumption in African context, he sees to hold too, that there is a need to focus on one's cultural context as the primary subject and objective of one's life pursuits. His contribution then shows this integrated view to inform the intentions of African scholars—which is also central to the views and practices of the African hermeneut. Contextually, and following Ukpong, this derives from the unitive and not dualistic view which Africans have of reality, their common belief in the divine origin of the universe and the interconnectedness between God, humanity and the cosmos, the significance of the African's sense of community, and that of the focus on the concrete rather than the abstract or theoretical. These assumptions are then further developed with a broader perspective on what it means to be a scholar 'in an Africa way' – also including views on how this view engages 'global' scholarship and the commitments this view entails. The essay concludes with a few perspectives of the significance of prophetic activity in one's own 'hometown'.

Recognising the challenge that African theologians develop a hermeneutical model which could be applicable to different African cultures, Denzil Chetty sees the kinship, clan or family system as such a social construct which could be usefully developed for biblical hermeneutics in Africa. Drawing on the work of social anthropologists, he provides a definition of kinship minimally recognising that kinship has to do with the allocation of rights and their transmission from one generation to the next. These rights may include rights of group membership – e.g. clan and tribe membership – succession to office, inheritance of property, locality of residence, and type of occupation. In terms of this view, he then develops the hermeneutical model based on the integration of an African and Biblical kinship structure with which the relevant ancient texts can be read in a paradigm of common understanding and shared perceptions, amongst local African inhabitants. He calls it a 'Mudzimu Hermeneutics' as 'Mudzimu' is an African spirit in the VaHera clan of the Shona people with parochial self-interest in the survival of one's own immediate kin. As such, 'Mudzimu',

literally translated, means 'family', and as hermeneutic can be characterized as departing from 'African Kinship'.

The new government policy of openness and constructive engagement in the Peoples' Republic of China has enabled religious groups to consolidate their position after the destruction of the Cultural Revolution. In his 'The Steel Hand of Domination in a Velvet Glove of Hegemony ...' J.A. Loubser explores the extent and limits of this new-found freedom. For this, the concept of hegemony is applied to the present religious discourse. In the light of the relative scarcity of updated documentation, the author draws on first-hand impressions during a recent study tour to religious institutions in China. A preliminary conclusion of the paper is that the hegemonic ideology of the Party has effectively mobilised various factors—among others, innate patriotism, effective bureaucratic control, the memory of past trauma, and the desire to be socially acceptable. This hegemony has been internalised by religious groups to such an extent that a relevant social critique is impossible.

Suleman Dangor starts off his contribution by referring to some general perceptions of *jihad* as well as more particular understandings deriving from Islamic texts, commentary and reflection. This is followed by a section where he explores and analyse the causes of conflict in the Muslim World. He then focuses on the various dimensions of *jihad*, demonstrates that peace is the norm in Islam and assesses the current prospect for global *jihad*. He concludes by pointing out that there are certain sentiments within Islamic tradition and faith which will not tolerate certain unacceptable actions against Muslims.

Hassan Ndzovu starts his contribution by unpacking the interconnectedness between religion and politics and shows that such interdependence has long history. His view is that all aspects of life are to various degrees influenced or determined by both religion and politics. He holds that this view is especially true of both Islam and Christianity as it manifested in history. Currently, in the Islamic world, about fifteen countries have Islam as the official state religion. He then proceed to provide further perspectives on the interrelatedness of religion and politics in global context, develop an Islamic view on it, and then turns to the challenges of radical and politicized Islam in Kenya. He acknowledges that in the world system, this is currently a difficult issue, but that is why it should be studied.

A.L. Pitchers directs his study to the Ethiopian Orthodox *Tewahedo* (one nature) Church. It focuses on this church's 'theology', was inspired by a visit to Ethiopia, and draws on some available scholarly material and web resources. Mostly, however, he works with data collected in on-site interviews. His aim was to ascertain to what degree could possibly play a significant role in assisting the country to develop to a stage where it would match its former glory, or how it could contribute towards the notion of the 'African Renaissance'. This meant that he had to examine the doctrines of the Church and ascertain how these could constructively impact on society. After providing a brief background on the origins of the church, he consecutively deals with the place of the trinity, the position of Mary, the monophysite doctrine of Christ, the concept of salvation, the doctrine of the last things, the E.O.C.'s relationship with other churches, the church's theological training, the reaction of the Ethiopian people to famine and hardship, and possible 'lessons' for South Africa deriving from the E.O.C.'s contribution (or not) to transformation. Ultimately, he sketches a bleak picture, especially when reality is compared to church mission statements.

In his study, Hendrik R. Tjibeba provides a historical-chronological perspective on the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC) schism from the Rhenish Mission Society (RMS) in Namibia during the year of the schism, 1946. He first provides some background information, e.g. the events related to Mangona Maake Mokone's break from the Methodist Church in South Africa in 1892, the rising tide of the founding of African 'independent' churches in southern Africa, the RMS and the Nama people in the South of Namibia during the first half of the twentieth century, and the RMS during the period, 1914-1945. This is then followed by a detailed study of significant documents and letters written during 1946. He shows that there are a few Nama leaders who played a formative role in the founding of this important church in the country, and that this event was an important conscientising precursor of the political struggles against the apartheid government, and the 1960 uprisings.

Manila Soni-Amin engages the processes through which the teaching of religion in South Africa went before it came to the current situation where it is known as 'Religion Education'. She provides a few historical perspectives on education in South Africa, highlighting some of the elements in politics and philosophy that informed the country's

education systems. The first two sections deal with education during colonial times, and apartheid with its philosophy of Christian National Education. The main section of the contribution treats significant events and signposts on the way of developing Religion Education in post-apartheid South Africa. Central to her analysis is the significance the decision to foster pluralism and the multi-religious study of religion has for the country.

P. Pratap Kumar looks at the history of the indenture and passenger Indians in South Africa and discusses the strategies that the Indians have used in making readjustments in the new country after their arrival from India. In the initial few decades the Indian not only denied his own identity, the system also denied economic and cultural and social opportunities. They were displaced from time to time making attempts to establish deeper roots into the South African soil more difficult as time went on. Almost until the mid twentieth century their citizenship was delayed. In spite of all the hurdles, the Indian community exhibited extraordinary resilience and managed to make profound changes in their own life styles and reinvented their own traditions and made substantial adjustments in the new land and emerged as a unique South African Indian community with their own identity among other South Asians in Diaspora. In the process they were not only assimilated into a new culture, but more importantly worked towards the firm establishment of diversity and difference.

Itumeleng Meko starts his contribution by unpacking some of the challenges modern Africa faced and continues to face in the aftermath of the colonial period. He sees the main problem in that there is a general perception of 'the so-called independent or liberated Africa' whereas, in reality, this does not apply. The conditions of the African people are worse than what it was during the colonial period in many senses. Against the background of these and related perspectives, Meko then consecutively addresses various issues related to the ideological and political dimensions of African Intellectuals' liberation, the possibility that African Leadership can chart the political direction for democracy, Molefi Kete Asante's – and others' – views on African intellectual emancipation and thought, the role of the African leadership in mapping Africa's economic direction, and the question of foreign debt in Africa. He concludes by addressing to closely related points, namely whether the West can help Africa to resolve her problems, and how Africans can help themselves. Here he finally reflects on



possibilities for (and obstacles) to African initiatives. The 'structures' – including forms(s) of democracy post-independent Africa inherited from colonial powers – do not deliver to the people, nor do they foster political accountability. This is the main area, he argues in conclusion, where Africa needs a second liberation.

J.A. Loubser's review article 'Before Gandhi: Leo Tolstoy's Non-violent Kingdom of God' deals with Tolstoy's most significant religious publication. It sheds light on the ideological background for Mohandas Gandhi's Satyagraha movement. The unsolved problem of violence makes Tolstoy's challenge to non-violence relevant for today.

School of Religion and Theology  
University of KwaZulu-Natal

# **G.C. Oosthuizen and the Study of Religion in KwaZulu-Natal**

**Johannes A. Smit and  
P. Pratap Kumar**

This collection of essays is brought together in the honour of Gerhardus Cornelius (Pippin) Oosthuizen on his eighty third birthday. Pippin has been one of the most significant religion researchers and prolific Humanities publishers South Africa has ever produced. Among his friends and colleagues count some of the most important scholars of religion in South Africa and elsewhere. With his critical acumen and insightful understanding of the ebb and flow of the South African socio-political landscape of the last fifty-odd years, he has been a distinguished leader in research and has been honoured with Honorary doctorates from South Africa's leading universities. This collection constitutes a small token of our appreciation for his more than fifty years in academia and his academic leadership.

Born in 1922, Pippin Oosthuizen completed his graduate studies at the Universities of Stellenbosch, Cape Town and Union Seminary in New York. For his studies at Union, he received the Rockefeller scholarship for Advanced Religious Studies. He then graduated with a Doctor of Philosophy (University of South Africa) and a Doctor of Theology (Free University of Amsterdam). The well-known Kant scholar, H de Vleeschauwer was his promoter of the first and J.H. Bavinck, of the second. He was also a recipient of the prestigious Alexander von Humboldt scholarship.

Between 1944 and 1946, Pippin served as Air Force army chaplain in Italy for the Allied forces. On his return to South Africa, he served as minister in the Dutch Reformed Church in Zimbabwe and Queenstown in the Eastern Province in South Africa respectively. This spell lasted from 1950 to 1959.

In 1959 he entered academia, with a position as Head of the Department of Divinity at the very influential and historically black University College of Fort Hare. Throughout the apartheid era, Fort Hare played a very significant counter-hegemonic role and he made an important contribution in so far as he flouted apartheid ruling opinion through his scholarship, research and wisdom. He broke new ground in his research and, in 1964, became Professor and Dean of the newly established Faculty of Theology. A remarkable number of black academics and church leaders studied under him.

Preferring work at previously disadvantaged institutions, he declined three offers to move to a previously white institution and accepted a position at the then University of Durban-Westville in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. He started as Head of the Department of Theology (1969 – 1971). Realizing, however, that cosmopolitan Durban, with its many world cultures and multiplicity of religions, was in need of research of this phenomenon, he resigned as Head of this Department. This decision also came about due to his very vocal anti-apartheid ideas, his resignation from the Church and his initiative in founding the Department of Science of Religion at the same institution in 1972. He held the position as Head of Department until his retirement in 1984.

On retirement, Oosthuizen founded and became the director of the Research Unit for New Religious Movements and the Independent Churches (Nermic). This unit was based at Kwadlangezwa at the University of Zululand. Here, he and his collaborators – amongst whom count some of the most internationally recognised scholars working in this area – developed an impressive body of knowledge through fieldwork, seminars and publications. He conducted his work with funding assistance of the Human Sciences Research Council. He continued with this project until 1997 when he closed it down due to health reasons. Even so, he continues to attend and read papers at conferences up to date.

Pippin Oosthuizen is known for his research in the areas of Ecclesiology, Missiology, Science of Religion and Theological Ethics. Undoubtedly, however, his most significant work has been on the new Religious movements and the African Independent Churches. On the one hand, he published much on the different religions present in southern Africa – also conscientising the populace of this diversity and its significance for the country. On the other hand, he has been one of the foremost scholars in the

country who researched the phenomenon of the African Independent Churches. This is one of the most significant counter-hegemonic and alternative phenomena in the history of South Africa, dating back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Not only has it served as haven for destitute Africans during the days of extreme exploitation by colonial and apartheid policies and practices, it also served as religious base – even as it is diverse in its manifestation – for the developing multi-cultural and -religious African-focused consciousness in South Africa. In many ways, it constitutes the greenhouse in which the new people-focused ethic for the country is being developed – by the people and for the people.

Oosthuizen is one of the foremost scholars who contributed to the development and study of this phenomenon.

In recognition of his scholarly contributions in Religion, he was conferred life membership by the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) in 2000. He was also the president of the eighteenth quinquennial congress of the IAHR which took place in August 2000, in Durban, South Africa.

In the remainder of this presentation we reflect on developments in the area of Education since 1994, and Religion since 1997.

## **Education in South Africa since 1994**

It is common knowledge that the new democratic government in South Africa (1994-) have been passing legislation to eradicate and transcend the constraints of apartheid laws. One of the government's most significant achievements so far was to formulate and pass legislation related to education in 1997 with further directives and the founding of national bodies and systems to implement it. Significant for Higher Education, was the decision to merge Historically Black universities with Historically White universities or historically disadvantaged with historically advantaged institutions. This move aimed at the eradication of the colonial and apartheid legacies of the underdevelopment of indigenous peoples and the bringing about of equality in tertiary education. This also impacted on the study of Religion and Theology in South Africa. The most significant is that, whereas apartheid education espoused a system of Christian National Education, the new government, in line with its democratic ethos, had to implement a system where all the religions and religious institutions in South Africa are treated equally. For

South Africans this means a change of mindset, because they have to think and interact in equity terms not only with regard to Diaspora religions – Hinduism for example – but especially with regard to the African indigenous religions (and cultures) and the indigenous churches.

In Africa, researchers have to increasingly take note of the rising tide of the various forms of Pentecostalist, Charismatic and indigenous religious movements and organisations. These organisations function at grassroots levels and fulfil a vital function for the people. On the one hand, and for more than one hundred years, they have served as spiritual havens for many of the indigenous populace who have suffered under the colonial and apartheid regimes. On the other hand, they also meet many material needs of the people. For example, through their various celebrations and feasts, they provide access to food and shelter to many. Through their 'stokvels' – a voluntary collaborative saving and purchasing organisation – they develop systemically challenging buying power through which households are elevated and their wealth increased. The same is true of the southern African region, and it is especially with regard to the study of this phenomenon that Pippin Oosthuizen has made such an impressive contribution in the 1980s and early 1990s.

These developments also brought about some local changes to the configuration of the study of Religion and Theology.

### **The Study of Religion at the University of Durban-Westville (1997-2003)**

In 1997, the University of Durban-Westville where Pippin served for fifteen years as professor, decided to dissolve its Faculty of Theology and the three Departments of Science of Religion, Hinduism, and Islamic Studies. This decision was based on two main rationales. The first was that the Faculty and the different departments were not viable financially. The second was that, given South Africa's new dispensation, the existing state of affairs did not allow for the equal and comparative study of the southern African religions, but especially in the grater Durban region, which is characterised by its plurality of religions and cultures. As an interim measure, and until new developments could take place, all staff came together in a Centre for Religious Studies in 1999. The Centre continued and phased out the older systems of the Faculty and departments. This important decision also impacted

on the offering of Biblical Studies. This subject was to be phased out and discontinued due to the fact that a very large number of students were graduating with Biblical Studies as major, and then experienced a dearth of job opportunities. This decision was also mainly due to the fact that the country as a whole – but also at local level – had to decide to focus its tertiary education investment at the training and preparation of students for viable job prospects.

Given the challenges and legacies related to colonial and apartheid underdevelopment and miseducation, the members of the Centre for Religious Studies conceived three programmes of study. The undergraduate programme was planned to service students from other departments and Faculties interested in the study of Religion, as well as students wishing to major in this field. As such, the Centre developed modules aimed at meeting the needs of prospective students from Law, Anthropology, History and Heritage Tourism amongst others. It also developed a wide variety of modules that could adequately educate, prepare, and enskill students for a variety of activities and opportunities in religious organisations. Due to the very relevant but also integrated scope of the programme, it was labelled the Programme of “Religion and Culture”.

During 1998 and 1999 the Centre also developed two post-graduate programmes, namely the Programmes of “Religion and Social Transformation” and “Religion Education”. Both these programmes contain general modules on research methodology and theory in the study of Religion, but also provide a multi-religious focus in which students may engage their own particular religion or the religion in which they wish to specialise. The aim of the first is to cater for the academic needs of religious leaders and practitioners such as pastors, imams and priests, while that of the second is educators and teachers. Given the legacy of the government-sanctioned priority of Christianity in South and southern Africa, this is a welcome incentive, because it opens perspectives on the multi-religious and –cultural constitution of the local, regional and sub-continent’s civil society. The programme in Religion Education also further contributes towards this reality by allowing for a more informed focusing on the teaching, learning and tutoring of religious people in a multi- and inter-religious way.

These developments led the Centre to found the School of Religion and Culture. It started these programmes in 2000 and has since then had more

than one hundred Honours and about fifty Masters and doctoral graduates. It is significant in this regard to also mention that many churches, especially those of Pentecostal and Charismatic persuasion, have sent their students to study in the School of Religion and Culture.

### **The Study of Religion at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (2004-)**

Following these developments, the Department of Education in South Africa launched its tertiary education merger strategies. It was decided that the Universities of Durban-Westville and Natal in Durban would merge. This again led to talks between the School of Religion and Culture and the School of Theology at the University of Natal. The decision was made to constitute a new school – the School of Religion and Theology – in the newly established University of KwaZulu-Natal. In this new dispensation, the former two Schools retained their existing programmes with the Pietermaritzburg site mainly offering programmes in Theology and the Durban site offering the three programmes mentioned above – the undergraduate programme in Religion and Culture, and the two postgraduate programmes, Religion and Social Transformation, and Religion Education.

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It gives us great pleasure to present this volume in honour of Prof G.C. (Pippin) Oosthuizen. Some of the contributions come from colleagues at Durban and Pietermaritzburg, while others were contributed by friends from elsewhere. The wide range of contributions testifies to the incredible contribution Pippin made to the founding and development of the study of Religion in southern Africa, but also more widely afield. It is our hope that this volume will further stimulate our already exciting research agenda in Africa, building on the work done by scholars such as Pippin and others.

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# **‘Once the Buddha was a seagull ...’: Reading *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* as a Mahayana Buddhist Text**

**Michel Clasquin**

In 1970, Richard Bach, a distant relative of composer Johann Sebastian Bach, published *Jonathan Livingston Seagull—a story*. It first became a firm favourite on American college campuses. From this base, the book rapidly gained in popularity. By the end of 1972, over a million copies were in print, the *Reader’s Digest* had published a condensed version (Lyles 1972)<sup>1</sup> and the book reached the top of the New York Times best-seller list, where it remained for 38 weeks<sup>2</sup>. Today, thirty-three years and millions more copies later, it is still in print. In fact, in the year 2000, the British branch of Amazon, the online bookseller, ranked it the 6th best seller in the category ‘Religion and Spirituality’<sup>3</sup>.

The impact made by this slender book has been remarkable, though not the occasion for much academic attention. Schoolchildren and students who had not even born when the book was first published have put their assessments of it on the Internet. A published author credits the book with

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1 The book was even the subject of a parody called *Ludwig von Wolfgang Vulture*.

2 The only other books to reach this spot in 1972 were Herman Wouk’s *The Winds of War* and *The Word* by Irving Wallace. See [http://www.wcfls.lib.wi.us/mukcom/adult/adult\\_reading\\_lists/reading\\_lists/new\\_york\\_times\\_no\\_1\\_best\\_sellers.htm](http://www.wcfls.lib.wi.us/mukcom/adult/adult_reading_lists/reading_lists/new_york_times_no_1_best_sellers.htm)

3 See <http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/tg/feature/-/125054/ref%3Dbr%5Fbx%5F1%5F5/202-6751837-4086248>.

inspiring him to take up writing<sup>4</sup>. Samizdat copies of the entire text can also be found on the Net, ready for downloading. It has inspired the production of a motion picture (about which the consensus is that the best part of it was Neil Diamond's soundtrack)<sup>5</sup> a ballet<sup>6</sup> and a thousand posters of flying gulls on a million adolescent bedroom walls. The Australian registry of vessels contains two yachts named after Jonathan<sup>7</sup>. An educational NGO in Hungary proudly calls itself the Jonathan Livingston Seagull Foundation<sup>8</sup>. In the Clarksdale, Mississippi school district, the book is required reading in the programme for gifted children<sup>9</sup>. Clearly, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* has joined Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, Gibran's *Prophet*, and, for a previous generation, Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* as one of those must-read books that one encounters in late adolescence and that remains with one forever.

Most interesting is the way Jonathan Livingston Seagull has crept into our language, the way it has become part of a cross-cultural shared discourse. Actress Barbara Hershey briefly changed her name to Barbara Seagull from 1972 to 1974, apparently after running over a gull in a car accident, but the timing of the name-change suggests that *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* may have had something to do with it as well. The term 'Jonathan Livingston Seagull' itself has become synonymous with a certain concept of unfettered freedom. For example, an Indian film actress is interviewed and talks about her life:

The only good thing that happened was that I was free from the contract and was free to do whatever I wanted. I was a lost girl, trying to find my wings all over again. I was almost like a close relative of Jonathan Livingston Seagull, It was the first time I knew

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4 See <http://www.storyman.com/st00009.htm>.

5 See <http://pw1.netcom.com/~zmoq/pages/jls.htm>.

6 See [http://www.berkshiredancetheatre.org/web\\_pages/main\\_pages/past\\_performances.htm](http://www.berkshiredancetheatre.org/web_pages/main_pages/past_performances.htm). It is not clear whether this ballet was ever performed by any other dance company than the Berkshire Dance Theatre, or whether the music was that of the film soundtrack.

7 See <http://www.amsa.gov.au/SRO/REG/reg23.htm>.

8 See <http://www.seagull.hu/english/index.html>.

9 See <http://www.cdps.k12.ms.us/LEAD/About%20JLS.html>.

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what freedom was and how far I could fly with this great gift of freedom which I had lost all hope about at one time<sup>10</sup>.

Similarly, when Al Shugart, one of the founders of the IT industry is interviewed, one of the questions is:

Q: If you could have a talent that you don't have, what would it be?

Shugart : Flying.

Q: Like a bird, or a pilot?

Shugart: Like Jonathan Livingston Seagull<sup>11</sup>.

Neither interviewee feels any need to explain the reference. There is no need to state that this is a character from a book. The shared nature of the discourse can be assumed. For generations before us, we are told, the Greek classics served such a purpose—a universally recognised universe of references that is now lost to most of us. The Bible survives in that role, though just barely in some circles. But new sets of cultural references have arisen, and Jonathan Livingston Seagull is clearly one of them. This does not imply that the new symbols are radically different from the old in what they signify. On the contrary, as Miller has demonstrated, a continuity of symbolic structures is universal to people everywhere. Symbols of freedom occur cross-temporally and, with some reservations, cross-culturally. But the specific forms those symbols will take, the images used to portray the concept, can and do vary (Miller 1981). For us, freedom is symbolised by a seagull in full flight.

In South Africa, too, both the book and the imagery that flows from it are widely available and seem to have become part of the cultural landscape. An Afrikaans translation of the book seems to have died an early death, but the English original can still be found both online and at booksellers, at least in the major cities.

Like any piece of literature with any scope, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* can be interpreted in many ways. Several early commentators,

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10 See <http://www.screenindia.com/jun16/cover.htm>.

11 See [http://www.thetech.org/exhibits\\_events/online/revolution/shugart/ib.html](http://www.thetech.org/exhibits_events/online/revolution/shugart/ib.html).

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focusing mainly on the first part of the book, see it as part of that American self-help and positive thinking culture epitomised by Norman Vincent Peale<sup>12</sup>, as an example of 'the erosion of the sandcastle of Calvinism by the sweeping tides of Arminianism' (Kuykendall 1973:182) or, less kindly, compare it to the children's tale 'The little engine that could'. But while *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* may take the form of a traditional animal fable, and can be enjoyed by young children at that level, it's greatest attraction has not been to children. Indeed, just as the fables of Aesop and the Buddhist Jataka tales were not originally designed to be children's entertainment, so does *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* exist on different planes of interpretation, of which the children's book is probably the least important. As Misra put it, it is 'a multi-level story—a story of flight in various levels of consciousness' (Misra 1981:9).

Precisely this multi-level character of the book was abhorrent to many reviewers at the time: in 1972, when 'postmodernism' was an obscure theory of architecture rather than a culture-wide buzzword, Beverly Byrne (1972:60) noted how,

No matter what metaphysical minority the reader may find seductive, there is something for him in *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*. ... the dialogue is a mishmash of Boy Scout/Kahlil Gibran. The narrative is poor man's Herman Hesse; the plot is Horatio Alger doing Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. The meanings, metaphysical and other, are a linty overlay of folk tale, old movies, Christian tradition, Protestantism, Christian Science, Greek and Chinese philosophies, and the spirits of *Sports Illustrated* and *Outward Bound* ... This seagull is an athletic Siddharta tripping on Similac, spouting the Koran as translated by Bob Dylan ... One hopes this is not the parable for our time, popular as it is—the swift image, all-meaning metaphor that opens up into almost nothing.

One doubts that Byrne would approve, but her analysis has turned out to be almost prophetic. Twenty-first century society, or as much of it as we at its

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12 Lyle (1972:1187) and Kuykendall (1973) make this comparison explicitly.

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beginning can see emerging, is multicultural, tolerant of cognitive dissonances, constantly seeking new ways of re-appropriating the old. American president George W Bush, at war with a Muslim enemy, goes out of his way to defer to non-beligerent Muslims, even inviting imams into the White House. His father, at war with a Muslim enemy ten years earlier, never seemed to give it a thought. Even our conservatism now carries a multiplicity of meanings.

Today, this multiple layering of meaning, not to mention the ransacking of sources to construct a new playful non-ultimate meaning, is precisely what lends a book appeal. Indeed, there is no longer a single way to look at life, or at a book, and *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* was, in retrospect, a marker on the road from the 20th to the 21st centuries, from the certainties of modernism to something we call postmodernism—unless a different name comes along, of course. Fixity is stagnation.

Nancy Carter, writing two years after Byrne, takes the idea of *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* as a peculiarly American phenomenon even further. She regards it as an expression of Nixon-era self-delusion that is

... popular with those who have a concept of elitism embedded in their subconscious minds, who do not want to recognise the harsh realities of a political Watergate world, and who think religion is like cotton candy—something to be bought for a price and enjoyed (Carter 1974:95).

Her reasoning is hard to follow: she makes unexplained and unsupported assertions such as that 'Jonathan Livingston Seagull' stands for 'Jonathan (Jesus) Livingston (I am the way and the life) Seagull (Son of God)' and draws broad, perhaps excessively broad, parallels between the book and recent American history. In any case, we have seen above that the book's popularity has long transcended the particular circumstances of Nixon's America. If that had been the only reason for it's popularity then, we might expect to see a resurgence of interest in the book in George W Bush's America, which has seen a rise in conventional religiosity just like that which Carter describes in her analysis of America in the early 70s, but how does one explain the book's enduring popularity for the three decades in between, or in different cultures altogether, such as India and Hungary? If



we are to explain the book with reference to social conditions, those conditions will have to transcend the country of the book's origin.

Indeed, one could hardly imagine a starker contrast to these than the interpretation of *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* we find in the June 1999 edition of the Buddhist magazine *Vajra Bodhi Sea*. Here, the analysis starts in the middle of the story and focuses on an aspect of the book that has not attracted the attention of western commentators to any degree:

Jonathan Livingston Seagull is a story by Richard Bach about an enlightened master [Chiang Gull] transmitting wisdom to his successor. Through dialogues between seagulls, he unravels the intricate enigma of the relationship between speed and wisdom<sup>13</sup>.

Perhaps this is an extreme example of how our cultural biases affect our reading of a text. But there are clear indications in the book that show how it can be read as primarily a Buddhist, and more particularly as a Mahayana, text with minor allusions from non-Buddhist sources, and the rest of this essay will explore this way of reading *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*. This does not imply that Richard Bach was a Buddhist (in fact, he seems to have been a Christian Scientist at the time), or that he consciously set out to write a *sutra*. There is a persistent urban legend that Richard Bach did not actually write the book, but that it was dictated to him by a disembodied voice. Of course there is a contradictory myth that the book was rejected by over thirty publishers and was continually edited during this time<sup>14</sup>, but this kind of playful contradiction, as we have seen above and shall see again, is the stuff on which *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, character and book alike, thrive. Taken together, these stories indicate that the *zeitgeist* was ready for this kind of book to appear, for the ideas in it to spread though western society. The seventies were a time of unprecedented growth for Buddhism outside Asia, and the book is a reflection of the greater social, religious and philosophical trends that made both western Buddhism and the publication

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13 See <http://www.drba.org/BTTS/VBS/VBS349/vbs349p40.html>.

14 Cf. Avramenko (1998). The truth of these stories could not be ascertained. Bach himself lives in seclusion at the time of writing and has even shut down his website.

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of *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* possible. Reading the book in this way gives it even more of that multiplicitous width that the reviewers of the early 1970s found so problematic.

When we approach *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* from a Buddhist perspective, the first thing that stands out is its division into three sections, each of which closely approximates a specific level of understanding and attainment in the Buddhist tradition. In fact, the first section tails off into a separate subsection that deserves consideration in its own right, and to a certain degree, so does the second. This gives us three major sections and two minor, intermediary parts. Together, these five sections can be seen as a Buddhist 'pilgrim's progress', a movement from the initial impulse to seek for something special called enlightenment to the final realisation that even enlightenment itself is nothing special. The tale of Jonathan is the tale of the Buddha. We could do worse than to label these sections according to the kind of Buddhism they represent.

## Hinayana

We start with our feet firmly planted in *samsara*, the everyday world of physical reality: 'A mile from shore a fishing boat churned the water ... a thousand seagulls came to dodge and fight for bits of food'<sup>15</sup>. Things are as they seem—rivers are rivers, and mountains are mountains. But already Jonathan is showing the first signs of his ascetic nature. Out by himself, he is practising flight. Like a Buddhist meditator concentrating on her breathing, like a monk placing total concentration on each footstep, he seeks perfection in precisely the most mundane of all activities his body is capable of. Which, for a gull, is flying. Conventional values are inverted as the instrumental action is assigned ultimate value, the most valued of *samsaric* actions are deprecated, and the quest for perfection slowly takes precedence over all else.

Unlike the Buddha, Jonathan does not need to sneak away from his flock in the middle of the night: he is expelled in a ceremony of public humiliation after he

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15 All quotations from Bach (1973). Considering how short *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* is, no page references will be given.

fired directly through the centre of Breakfast Flock, ticking off two hundred twelve miles per hour, eyes closed, in a great roaring shriek of wind and feathers.

Unlike the Buddha, Jonathan does not encounter old age, sickness and death: the epiphanies that inspire him concern discoveries of excellence rather than decrepitude. Nevertheless, there are similarities. Like the Buddha, Jonathan decides to teach his fellow gulls that there is a higher purpose to life. But they, as the Buddha too would consider, have sand in their eyes and food on their mind. His banishment turns him into the equivalent of the solitary hermit who, as the *Sutta Nipata* says, dwells as solitary as the rhinoceros. He flies away and ironically enough, finds that his superior flying skills guarantee him a better diet than the gulls of the flock could ever find. But that is secondary: there is always the urge to learn even more about flying.

By the end of Part One, Jonathan has ended up as the *Pratekyabuddha*, the silent Buddha who knows but does not teach. But this was hardly his doing: a younger Jonathan had been desperate to share his insights, but had been firmly rebuffed by his flock. His compassion having fallen on barren rock, he had no choice but to advance in wisdom first.

Even so, from the Mahayana Buddhist point of view, Part One is excessively concerned with technique, with progress, with ego. It is a text that breathes the spirit of *Hinayana*, of the 'small vehicle' where the practitioner is far too much concerned with perfecting the 'self' for the sake of the 'self'. I use the term 'Hinayana' here not in the usual sectarian way, as a vaguely derogatory reference to the extant Theravada school, but in the spirit of texts such as the *Lotus Sutra*, where it refers to an individual's level of aspiration, not to the particular institution to which he or she belongs. A Theravadin teacher filled with compassion could be regarded as bodhisattvic and thus Mahayana in spirit, while it is probably true to say that the majority of lay Buddhists who formally belong to a Mahayana sect have, at best, a Hinayana level of aspiration.

True, when Jonathan is called to appear before the elder gulls he is thinking that he wants no credit for his discovery, but even this is not enough for the Mahayanist, for it is still 'his' discovery, made by 'him'. Jonathan has progressed far, but he has yet to make the transition from mundane perfection to ultimacy. For that, he will have to fly into the centre of the Mahayana tornado, the centre that is a perfectly still vacuum.

## Bardo

In the Tibetan religious tradition, *bardo* means inbetween-ness, and usually refers to the hallucinatory experiences undergone by a nonenlightened person between one existence and the next, between this life and the following incarnation. In the bardo between lives, the *Bardo Thodol* or 'Tibetan book of the dead' describes the appearance of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, all of which are really just creations of the dying mind, but in a Buddhist universe in which *all* phenomena are equally illusory and temporary, that is to be expected. If the dying consciousness can embrace these apparitions, can realise the nondifference between himself and all the Buddhas that ever were, rebirth can be evaded and enlightenment, or at least a more favourable rebirth, attained.

For Jonathan too, there is such a moment of liminality. No Buddhas or bodhisattvas appear to greet him, just two gulls, 'as pure as starlight, and the glow from them was gentle and friendly in the high night air'. The fact that they alone, of all gulls ever seen on earth, can fly as well as he shows the Buddhist reader that these must be projections from his own consciousness. Once he accepts them as his equals he can let go of his attachment to his beloved sky, his own attainment, and all the trappings of his ego-based existence. At last he is able to let go.

And Jonathan Livingston Seagull rose with the two star-bright gulls to disappear into a perfect dark sky.

## Mahayana

As Jonathan flies away from this earth and on to another, his body changes.

... the same young Jonathan Seagull was there that had always lived behind his golden eyes, but ... it felt like a seagull body, but already it flew far better than the old one ... his feathers flowed brilliant white now, and his wings were smooth and perfect as sheets of polished silver.

In Buddhist terms, he has arrived in a Pure Land. This is not a heavenly realm of sensual pleasures; instead, it turns out to be a place where the search for perfection is commonplace, where all gulls are dedicated to flight

and conditions are arranged so as to speed up their efforts. We are not told the name of the Buddha who created this particular Pure Land; perhaps the scattered references to the 'Great Gull' and the 'Gull of Fortune' throughout the book can serve as such references.

Jonathan learns far more about flying here, where there are others to instruct him, than he ever did on his own. Finally, Chiang the elder gull teaches him to 'fly' without wings, to simply be 'there' already, instantly: 'any number is a limit, and perfection doesn't have any limits'.

Here we start to see clear reflections of Mahayana philosophy:

The trick was to know that his true nature lived, as perfect as an unwritten number, everywhere across space and time.

A statement that could as easily have come from Fa-Tsang or Dogen. In a nondual reality, time and space are illusions that do not bind the enlightened. Realities interpenetrate each other without hindrance and there is no ultimate distinction between 'here' and 'there'

And indeed, Jonathan struggles with this concept much as a Zen student struggles with a *koan*: in order to achieve that which he wants most, he has to abandon his most cherished preoccupations. Rivers are no longer rivers, mountains are no longer mountains. Long ago, he let go of *samsara*, of the struggle to survive physically, but now he has to jettison his very concept of himself. He is no longer a physical gull with physical limitations, in the deepest essence of his being he is nondually connected to everything, 'a perfect idea of freedom and flight, limited by nothing at all'. If space is an illusion, then the illusions of 'being here' and of 'being there' are interchangeable. To fly anywhere, instantly, is to realise that you are already there. Compared to the extravagant miracles performed by Buddhas in Indian Mahayana literature, instant transportation across the universe is a modest achievement. But in the gull's Pure Land, it represents the highest goal imaginable.

Jonathan masters even this, the highest form of 'flying'. And he is suitably regarded with awe by his fellow gulls; in a vignette that reminds us of the biography of the Buddha before his enlightenment, he looks set to be rated as the new Elder Gull after Chiang departs. But there is yet another renunciation to make. This final renunciation is to cross time, space and old

enmities, to return to his old flock as a teacher. It is not an easy decision to make. Even after Chiang's final instruction to him to 'keep working on love', Jonathan needs to discuss it with his previous teacher, Sullivan Seagull. In a curious role reversal, it is now Sullivan who plays the role of Mara (the personification of self-doubt and temptation) in the Buddhist enlightenment mythos, who tries to prevent Jonathan from taking the momentous step of returning to earth, to *samsara*. But in the end Jonathan renounces his position as teacher in the gulls' Pure Land and returns to his old flock.

This is not entirely a new development. Even after his very earliest enlightenment experiences, we had observed Jonathan's eagerness to share his findings with his fellow gulls. But this decision to return is of a different order of magnitude. His earlier decision to teach would not have implied the drastic step of renouncing all that he had so painfully achieved. Had it been accepted by the elder gulls, he could have looked forward to a comfortable life as the flock's resident guru. All false modesties aside, it would have been a step up in the world.

But to return to the world of recalcitrant gulls after having touched perfection in the Pure Land is a renunciation of epic proportions. This is the vow of the bodhisattva, the steely determination to keep on working until the last blade of grass has entered Nirvana, to become normal again after having scaled the heights of supernormality. The last vestiges of '*Hinayana*' thinking have been discarded. He may use them in his future work, as he does when he says to his first student 'Let's begin with level flight ...', but what once held ultimate meaning for him now is as much of mere instrumental value as he once regarded the search for sustenance to be. He may look and perhaps even act like a gull, but he has grasped the true nature of reality, and combined this insight with the limitless compassion of the saint. Here, he is the embodiment of Mahayana, the 'big vehicle' that will not depart until all passengers are aboard.

## Bardo II

As before, we find a moment of liminality, of inbetween-ness, between two main sections of *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*. In the first bardo episode, two gulls appeared as projections from Jonathan's consciousness to lead him to another level of reality. Here Jonathan himself appears as a pure idea of

freedom and flight, a thought without a thinker, far removed from the Cartesian/*Hinayana* seagull who had seen flight as an exercise in aerodynamics. This time it is Jonathan who appears to guide the young outcast Fletcher Lynd Seagull, not to another world, but back to the reality of this one, differently perceived. From a classical *Mahayana* position, the book's perspective now slowly shifts to something more like Zen.

And another subtle shift has occurred. Going back to teach is no longer a solitary decision, but becomes woven into the teaching itself. It is a stated precondition for receiving Jonathan's instructions. In this respect, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* mirrors the historical development of Buddhist thought. From an individual moment of insight and a personal decision to teach, slowly but inexorably compassion became not merely a virtue but a ritualised requirement; the bodhisattva's momentous vows would be routinely chanted in misunderstood foreign languages. Even the finest flash of wisdom eventually hardens into a dogma. As Jonathan and his students would soon discover ....

## Ekayana

The third and final section of *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* takes us to Jonathan's career as a teacher. No longer the over-enthusiastic would-be reformer who was once expelled from the flock, he is now a soft-spoken instructor who is capable of 'miraculous' feats, but does not rate them highly. Like the final figure in the Zen ox-herding pictures, he is 'entering the marketplace with helping hands'. He is a normal seagull again—once more, rivers are rivers, mountains are mountains—but one who has been through the process of awakening, one who sees that the normal view of normality is actually subnormal.

For Jonathan himself, this return to *samsara* is no longer a primarily learning experience. Now it is not learning but doing that matters. There no longer is a *Hinayana* or *Mahayana*, a 'little' and a 'big' vehicle. Those contradictions have been resolved into the *Ekayana*, the One Vehicle. It is a vehicle that goes nowhere, for there is nowhere special to go. Perfection can be attained on this very beach, if only one learns how to fly.

In the end, Jonathan does what every Buddhist teacher has to do sooner or later. He designates a successor and departs. The manner in which he leaves the flock is his signature—unlike the blinding light in which

Chiang departed, Jonathan just quietly fades away, vanishes 'into empty air'. As we can also observe in the hagiographies of Zen masters and Tibetan magicians, even in enlightenment, where technically speaking no differences exist, there is still the possibility of expressing individual styles of doing things.

His final words to Fletcher sum up his philosophy. Just as the Buddha entered the final nirvana with a summary of his teachings in the words 'Decay is inherent in all compounded things: work out your own salvation with diligence'<sup>16</sup>, so do Jonathan's final words sum up all that has gone before. He denies any special status: 'Don't let them ... make me a god ... I'm a seagull. I like to fly, maybe ...' Just as the Buddha was, in the end, a man, even if a remarkable one, Jonathan is, in the end, a gull, an equally remarkable gull. Any human being can become enlightened: any gull can learn how to fly. There is no special dispensation, no divine favour granted to some and denied to others. Some will take longer to learn than others, but time is as much of an illusion as space.

Finally, Jonathan instructs Fletcher not to

believe what your eyes are telling you. All they show is limitation. Look with your understanding, find out what you already know, and you'll see the way to fly.

Again, we hear echoes of Mahayana philosophy, of Dogen's insistence that all people are already enlightened and that meditation is a post-enlightenment exercise. 'You already know the answer' is a classical Zen non-answer to an insincerely asked question (and occasionally to a sincerely asked one!)—it throws the questioner back on his own resources, which, on investigation, reveal that there is no 'he', no ownership, no resources, only the true nature of reality, painfully obvious all along, except we all had our attention focused elsewhere.

## Conclusion

When one reads *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* through Buddhist eyes, it magically transforms into a *sutra* of sorts, a twentieth century equivalent of

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16 Maha-Parinibbanasutta.



the *Gandhavyuha* or the *Jataka* tales. This is not the only way to read it. When read from a liberal Christian point of view, the Buddhist elements recede and other elements come to the fore<sup>17</sup>. I have heard Scientologists claiming it as one of their own. This is one of those books that changes shape as it is picked up by a new reader. Perhaps that is why it has found a home on so many bookshelves.

One could not claim that it is a deep book in the sense that *Crime and Punishment* is deep. But it has width, scope, and above all, spirit. It may start off with a paean to progress, but by the end of the book, progress has subsided into no-gress, into the realisation that all is as it must be, and that all we need is immediately available, if only we dare to reach for it. It soon escapes from any conceptual framework in which we try to put it. Contrary to Byrne's hopes, it has indeed become the parable for our time. Or at least one of them.

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17 This is, for instance, how Avramenko sees the book: as mainly a Christian parable to which other elements, and he acknowledges that some of these are Buddhist, are added.

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# **The Suffering Mothers. The Hindu Goddesses as Empowering Role Models for Women**

**Alleyn Diesel**

## **Introduction**

From the earliest manifestations of Hinduism, devotees have been familiar with divinity envisaged as both female and male.

The village or folk tradition, dominant in rural India, particularly in the southern Dravidian areas of Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh, involves the worship of predominantly female deities. Richard Brubaker maintains that there is increasing evidence of a continuity between the Indus Valley Civilization (c.2500-1500 BCE) and the south Indian Dravidian cultures (1983:149). Thus this is one of the most ancient forms of Indian religion (Whitehead 1921:11,17), and quite probably one of the oldest existing manifestations of human worship.

Although Hinduism is unique among the world religions in its rich tradition of Goddess worship, there is an obvious discrepancy between the respect paid to these divine females and the reality of the daily lives of Hindu women.

In KwaZulu-Natal, the veneration of these Dravidian folk Goddesses, can be traced back to its practice in south India, which the early Tamil settlers brought with them to South Africa from 1860 onwards.

## **Characteristics of the Amman Goddess Tradition**

Dravidian is the name given to the aboriginal inhabitants of India, found mainly in the southern and eastern parts of the country. Lack of literature

results in a scarcity of information about their early existence. The religion displays many points of continuity as well as discontinuity with the Brahmanical tradition of Goddess worship.

Unlike the pan-Indian Brahmanical Goddesses, the indigenous folk deities are particularly identified with a specific village. There may be more than one in a village, but some are completely unknown outside their own village.

Their names often indicate their character and function (e.g. Kokkalamma, Goddess of coughs). *Amma* or *Amman* simply means 'mother' or 'respected woman' (cf. Amba, Ambika, Ma, Mata). Although both Kali and Durga are considered part of the Brahmanical tradition, they almost certainly have non-Vedic roots (Payne 1979:68; Elmore 1913:5).

Despite their great numbers and variety of functions, these folk deities share a considerable number of characteristics, many highlighting a tradition which places women's experience at centre stage.

Firstly, unlike the Brahmanical Goddesses, these Goddesses are often represented not by anthropomorphic images, but by natural features such as trees, unhewn stones, or anthills, an indication of their close associations with the natural world, typical of the great Earth Mother (Kinsley 1986:198).

Secondly, they are concerned mostly with local interests, particularly the wellbeing of the inhabitants of the village, as protector of the village. The Goddess is Mother (*Amman*) of the village; she gave birth to it as its Creator, and the villagers are sustained by her body, the earth. She is worshipped to ensure fertility, of earth, animals and humans, prosperity in the form of rain, good crops, and protection from famine, disease, snakebite, demons and premature death.

Thirdly, these *Amman* deities are frequently violent, punishing, Mothers, associated with disasters, diseases and death. They are not primarily associated with quiet peacefulness, but with the darker, fierce, untamable sides of human life and the natural world. Their characteristics are independence, arousal, anger, ferocity, destruction and a general lack of predictability. As Earth Mother, they are reminders of the inherent ambiguities of life; that those same forces of nature that uphold the stability of life and the social order, also ultimately threaten its existence.

Fourthly, a significant characteristic of these Goddesses is that they

usually do not have male consorts. Their independence from male control is often described as 'virgin', although this does not usually mean sexually inexperienced or inactive, but undominated, 'her own person'. This combination of the images of mother and virgin, but not of wife, is for Hindus powerful rather than contradictory, the appellation 'mother' not being interpreted to mean that birthing and nurturing the young is their (or women's) only or most important function, but simply to act in a life-giving, creative fashion. The sexual independence of these Goddesses also reflects their potentially dangerous nature, as not being answerable to any external authority. By contrast, Brahmanical Goddesses with male partners, such as Lakshmi, Sarasvati and Parvati, are usually gentle and mild, lacking the uncontrolled wildness often manifested by the sexually autonomous Goddesses.

Fifthly, their mythology further reflects their ambivalent sexuality, often involving stories of a faithful and virtuous woman, unjustly and violently treated by men, sometimes through sexual assault (Kinsley 1986:200-201). The woman expresses her outrage in anger and revenge, and, after her violent and premature death, is transformed into a Goddess (Fuller 1992:49; Blackburn 1985:260). This is reminiscent of the mythology of the virgin Goddess Durga, who rejects the sexual advances of all male suitors and their attempts to dominate her, and is victorious in battle over a male buffalo demon, Mahisasura, who threatens the stability of the universe. These myths are often recounted or acted as dramas at the festivals of the folk Goddesses (e.g. Terukkuttu for Draupadi).

Linked to this sense of outrage is the tradition that frequently they demand blood sacrifices of male animals. Blood sacrifice has a lengthy association with the Brahmanical Goddesses Kali and Durga, both of whom are depicted as thirsty for the blood of their male adversaries. Many folk Goddesses are also regarded as carnivorous, thirsting particularly for the blood of buffaloes, reminiscent of the Buffalo Demon, symbol of chaos and destruction, slain by Durga.

Sixthly, it is evident from the above characteristics that this tradition emphasises the immanence of the divine in the world and in human affairs. There is no real separation between the sacred and the secular; all life is sacred, the entire natural world is infused with spirit (*anima*), and the divine is encountered at every turn. This is particularly clear in the phenomenon of

possession, very frequent in *Amman* religion, where a deity is believed temporarily to inhabit the body of a devotee. The Goddess chooses human bodies in which to manifest herself to show her power, and her ability to communicate and to heal. The divine can, therefore, frequently be experienced in human form, particularly in female bodies

Also, the elevating of humans to divine status, particularly those who were renowned for their power or purity, or who died strange, untimely deaths, were murdered, or women who died in childbirth, is an indication of the interweaving of the divine and the human (Fuller 1992:50).

There are few written sacred texts recording origins, belief or practice of *Amman* religion. Most stories and legends were orally transmitted, probably for centuries, before being committed to manuscripts of palm leaf (Whitehead 1921:122; 126; Elmore 1913: ix). (The one clear exception is the Draupadi myth, central to her festival, but this has its origins in the Brahmanical *Mahabharata*, a later text than the majority of myths of the ancient folk Goddesses. See below.)<sup>1</sup>

A further characteristic is that the religion shows practically no acknowledgement of the caste system which it appears to pre-date, but operates in a more egalitarian fashion (Kinsley 1986:199). There is no priestly caste; the *pujaris* who officiate can come from any class, and all who wish may participate in the worship, regardless of gender or caste background, outcastes included (Whitehead 1921:154), which makes it a religion with appeal to the poor and marginalized, especially women and Dalits.

Finally, female pollution and the accompanying need for ritual purification do not appear to be given the same emphasis as in the Brahmanical tradition. The Goddess herself is believed to give birth and to

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<sup>1</sup> Elmore (1913:ix; xii) explains: 'The Dravidians are not a literary people, and their religion has no literature .... Their history is contained in the somewhat confused legends recited by wandering singers who attend the festivals and assist in the worship. These legends are always recited from memory; and as usually the singers cannot read, written stories would be of no value to them .... The written sources of information ... are limited. The most important are the government gazetteers, district manuals, and bulletins of the Madras Government Museum'.

menstruate, so these female functions are regarded as more naturally acceptable than in the mainstream tradition (Bhattacharyya 1977:8-9,19).

### **The Feminist Meaning of the Amman Goddesses**

It is in the festivals of the *Amman* Goddesses that these diverse and complex characteristics come together to provide some overall meaning to the function of these seemingly paradoxical deities. In the past a festival would be called when some crisis, such as drought, flood, or disease, overwhelmed the village. The festival involved the people of the village, the children of the Goddess, springing into action to elicit her assistance in dealing with the calamity. The various rituals are designed to deal with and overcome the disorder and disaster, to revere and propitiate the Goddess, and so to restore a situation of order and wellbeing to the community.

The climax of the festival—its core ritual—is the blood sacrifice. This can be interpreted as an offering, a gift, made directly to the Goddess, to placate her so she will withdraw the effects of her anger; and as representing her defeating and slaughtering the invading and disruptive demons of disease and disorder (Kinsley 1986:205). Buffaloes were the original and most usual sacrifices offered to the Goddesses, and are directly associated with Mahisasura, the Buffalo Demon beheaded by Durga in the *Devi Mahatmyam*. Brubaker (1983:152) points out that the buffalo is a 'powerful and unpredictably dangerous beast with a well deserved reputation for brutishness ...'. Often it invades cultivated fields causing great destruction to crops, so it is appropriate that it becomes a symbol of power out of control, of chaos and disruption to the civilized order. Its beheading in the festival symbolises the Goddess's victory over the encroaching demonic forces.

It is significant that the sacrificial animals are always male, as this links with the mythological theme of the anger of the Goddess, aroused by some injustice done to her by males. The demons of chaos and destruction who invade the village, the territory of the Goddess, her body, are invariably depicted as male, so that the image of a rape is evoked.

The Mothers have to protect the civilized world from such disruptive and violating attacks, and the villagers, her children and devotees, must identify themselves with her struggle with these demons. Their world has been invaded by malignant male forces, and only by acknowledging the power of the Goddess can order, health and wellbeing be restored. The

activity and excitement of the festival reminds all participants of the presence in their midst of sacred power, a force above and beyond the experiences of everyday, material existence, and of the eternal conflict between good and evil, order and chaos.

The crucial question is, however: why are these deities female? What is it that specifically requires the presence of a divine female (a Mother) to restore the balance of society?

Most scholars, like Elmore, Whitehead and Babb, who have studied these fierce, independent Goddesses, express puzzlement and even discomfort that females, especially Mothers, should behave in such seemingly uncharacteristically wild and uncontrolled ways. Babb explains what he considers to be the fundamental key to the dichotomy between the two kinds of Hindu Goddesses: namely that 'married'. Goddesses are benevolent, givers of life, wealth, and children, and display devotion to their husbands, whereas the 'unmarried'. Goddesses are independent, malevolent, bloodthirsty, dangerous and terrible, 'surrounded with the paraphernalia of killing', all apparently attributable to 'feminine malice' (Babb 1975:222). He goes on to claim that the marriage of Shiva and Parvati shows the desirable transformation achieved by the pairing of God and Goddess, as husband and wife:

When the female dominates the male the pair is sinister; when male dominates female the pair is benign (Babb 1975:225f).

It is true that in any relationship with males, the Goddess does indeed dominate her male partners, and this reversal of the usually expected male and female roles appears to confuse and possibly offend some people. A patriarchally ordered society considers it 'natural' that women, especially mothers, should be primarily benevolent protectors of life, caring for the wellbeing of their husbands and children. The independent, untamed, angry behaviour of the Goddesses appear, then, to be an 'unnatural' reversal of the acceptable order, where women are expected to be pliable and subservient. However, this very patriarchal, and ultimately misogynist, view, expressed by Babb, simply reinforces socially accepted stereotypes and expectations, suggesting that the 'feminine malice' and frustration of unmarried Goddesses, and possibly of their human daughters, is responsible for the disruptive, harmful forces in society (Babb 1975:145). This view can only be



sustained by ignoring several crucial facts about the indigenous Goddesses: for example, the theme of sexual violence in their myths (Kinsley 1986:203); the concept of 'virgin' as applied to their sexual independence; and, closely connected to this, a male fear of female sexuality.

The analysis of Brubaker and Kinsley contradicts Babb's view, pointing to the fact that *Amman* Goddess myths frequently show that it is males who are most often violent and disruptive in society, so that the Goddess, the divine female, is then needed to protect and preserve the stability of life (Kinsley 1986:203). It is she who challenges the destabilizing male invasion, and brings about the restoration of order that is essential for society to continue to exist and to thrive. This is her role as fiercely protective Mother. So, her violence is almost entirely a reactive type of violence; a response of righteous anger to the violent situation created by invading and disruptive males.

Brubaker believes that understanding the 'untamed'. *Amman* Goddesses is connected to the male fear of the female, especially the power of her unfettered sexuality. As well as desiring them, men fear women and their powerful *shakti*: their sexual and spiritual power. One can develop this by acknowledging that women's powerful sexuality can be expressed in two different ways. Ideally, in a patriarchal society (reflected by Babb and others), they should be married, submissive to the supervision of their husbands, so that their powerful and potentially dangerous sexuality can be expressed in safely controlled ways. In a sense this serves to neutralize their *shakti*, to 'tame' and limit it to patriarchal demands and requirements. Unmarried women, widows, and to some extent childless women, are without properly defined patriarchal status, so they are regarded as inauspicious, and are feared for their unrestrained sexual power. This other alternative for women involves independence from men, possibly expressed in sexual abstinence, a self-imposed or chosen sexual restraint, which is not a negation or denial of sexuality, but to be 'virgin', like the Goddesses, in the sense of being independent of any male control or domination<sup>2</sup>. It is this second option that truly allows women as autonomous beings to express

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<sup>2</sup> The *Brahmacharini* and the *Sannyasinni*, the women who choose the status of celibate student or renunciate respectively, have achieved independence from any male control of their sexuality.

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their sexuality as they wish, to explore and discover the fullness of their own female nature, and so to unleash their physical and spiritual powers (*shakti*).

This human situation is reflected in the two kinds of Goddesses: those who are married, the consorts of males to whom they are submissive and obedient; and those who are independent, 'virgin', uncontrolled by males, and therefore potentially threatening to the usually accepted stereotype of gender relations. *Shakti* is always powerfully challenging and threatening to patriarchal institutions. The Goddess's power is directly linked to her independence and sexual abstinence.

The truth encapsulated here is that sexual relationships in a patriarchal society are nearly always ambiguous and ambivalent, where males are expected to control women, and sex is too often confused with violence and domination, which has harmful results, particularly for the female.

So the phenomenon of the Dravidian *Amman* Goddesses, keeps alive awareness of the conflict between the sexes. Can the example and independence of the Goddess challenge and assist in overcoming the institutionalized and destabilizing aggression and violence of patriarchal structures?

### **The Worship of the Dravidian Amman Goddesses in KZN**

Throughout their more than 140 years of residence in South Africa, religion has certainly been the most powerful stabilising force in the Hindu community (Kuper 1960:269; Pillay et al. 1989:145).

Because the Tamil community is the largest (approximately 45% of the total), their form of traditional religion and practice predominates, especially in KZN.

For most South African Tamil people, and many other traditional Hindus, the Mother Goddess, in one form or another, is the most visible and popular focus of their worship. The most venerated Goddesses in KZN are the *Amman* deities Mariamman, Draupadi, Ankalamman/Angalamman, and Gengaiamman; the fierce Goddesses Kali and Durga who also probably have non-Vedic origins (Elmore 1984:5); as well as Sarasvati, Lakshmi, and Parvati, the consorts of the great Gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva respectively.

Although the rituals performed for these deities in South Africa appear to have been very carefully preserved, it appears to me that ritual has tended to become divorced from its controlling mythology, with most people only aware of some very rudimentary, and at times garbled, details of the various stories.

In the recent past in South Africa many have predicted the decline and abandoning of this type of indigenous Tamil ritual, because it is a crude remnant of popular religious expression with no further contemporary relevance (Kuper 1960:215, 269; Naidoo 1982). Contrary to this expectation, at present worship of the Dravidian deities appears to be flourishing, with larger and larger crowds attending the festivals each year (Diesel 1990:29-30; 1994:89-90).

My experience in observing the annual Draupadi firewalking festival in KwaZulu-Natal for the past 12 years, and in talking to many women participants, indicates that the image of Draupadi, Goddess patron of the festival, is to some extent acting in an empowering manner for certain women.

In Pietermaritzburg media attention since 1996 focused on the fact that the all-male temple committee forbade women to walk across the fire, although other temples in the province welcomed their full participation, as do most temples in India (Hiltebeitel 1988; 1991). The committee's reasons were blatantly sexist, claiming that women were more likely to be burned than men, and that certain women wished to dominate the proceedings. Because of this, a small group of Pietermaritzburg Hindu women, led by a lively and outspoken devotee of the 'Mother', led a campaign to overturn the temple committee's ban. After several years of pleadings, petitions, and newspaper articles presenting their protests, the women were finally allowed to cross the fire at the 1999 festival, accompanied by much jubilation on their part and by their supporters (Diesel 1998b).

I have pointed out elsewhere that in the South African Hindu community, which under the apartheid system was politically, socially and religiously marginalized and discriminated against, participation in the various rituals of these festivals can bring considerable empowerment (Diesel 1998a & b). Many of the descendants of the original south Indian indentured labourers have remained relatively economically depressed, which causes considerable stress, frustration and anxiety. This results in

much physical and psychological illness. People are increasingly unable to afford doctors' fees, while others despair of the ability of Western medicine to cure their ailments. In this context, the entire worshipping community can be seen to experience a strong sense of solidarity and identity from their participation in the symbolic religious rituals with their powerful mythology. To come through the fire unscathed, is itself empowering, and is claimed by many to bring healing. Loring Danforth who researched two very different firewalking communities, the Greek orthodox Anasternaria, and the American firewalking movement, confirms that many participants are empowered and gain an enhanced sense of self-confidence, even having their lives transformed, and that it is women whose lives are probably most radically transformed (Danforth 1989:5, 96). This certainly seems to apply to local Hindu firewalkers.

The traditional status of women in Hinduism accords them little independence or identity separate from their husbands, requiring them to maintain a fairly low profile at public events. However, at *Amman* Goddess festivals in KZN, women sometimes form the majority of devotees, many of whom move out of their subservient roles to perform relatively important and visible functions which bring them considerable recognition and status. The small group of Pietermaritzburg women challenged the patriarchally controlled temple committee and won, which, together with their jubilant and safe passage through the fire, brought them a strong sense of achievement.

The trance possession experienced by many women causes them to display the wild behaviour of one of the fierce Goddesses, behaviour not normally acceptable in a respectable Hindu woman. Possessed people (women and men) are revered as divine, their supernatural powers enabling them to bless others, to act as oracles, and, very often, to heal. Many of these women are regarded with great respect and reverence, some being regularly consulted as spiritual healers and counsellors (Diesel 1998a).

Some distinction needs to be made between *Amman* religion as practised on a large scale at official festivals, arranged by temple committees where male leadership dominates, although women devotees quite often outnumber men; and the small scale largely women led healing practices operating from smaller Goddess temples, or private homes. Many women come to seek healing and advice for dealing with abusive husbands and other

problems. This women dominated aspect of *Amman* religion is extremely popular, so much so that it sometimes appears to pose a threat to the male temple leadership, some women having been dismissed as simply running 'backyard temple cults' (Diesel 1998a & b).

The growing popularity of *Amman* Goddess festivals, indicates the power still accorded these ancient female deities and their ability to remind a community, far from its spiritual home, of its roots. Local Hindus will, one hopes, attempt to recover some knowledge and appreciation of the rich symbolism and mythology of Tamil religion, which forms part of their cultural and religious heritage. Recent emphasis on the revival of the vernacular evidenced in SA Hindu circles might encourage a re-reading of Tamil religious literature, including the mythology of the *Amman* Goddesses.

### Some Myths of Amman Goddesses

The mythologies of many *Amman* Goddesses can be regarded as 'texts of terror', recounting the stories of hosts of women, usually faithful and virtuous, who were abandoned, deceived, betrayed, insulted, raped and killed by men (Kinsley 1986:200 - 204). These abused and righteously angry women drew strength from their virtue, gained victory over male intimidation and violence, bringing healing to their communities. Often human women were transformed into Goddesses, thus demonstrating the vindication of women's strength.

The Draupadi myth is a particularly characteristic and compelling example of a story detailing the experiences of a woman much exploited and misused by men.

The story of Draupadi is a dramatic epic of fortunes lost and won, of treachery and faithfulness, of defeat and final victory and vindication. Draupadi survived numerous attempts by men to seduce and humiliate her, her religious faith and purity bringing her safely through these ordeals. In the Tamil version of the *Mahabharata*, after her vindication, she demonstrated her faithfulness and purity by walking unscathed across a pit of burning coals.

The pivotal episode in the Draupadi narrative is the attempted disrobing by Duryodhana in the men's court. This is a turning point in the narrative. This insult to Draupadi reverberates throughout the rest of the epic, being regarded as justification for the awful carnage that follows (Falk 1977:96). In her anger, Draupadi vowed revenge, pledging not to retie her hair until she had washed it in her enemies' blood and is vindicated.

There are numerous other *Amman* Goddess myths which recount how women who suffered similar ill-treatment by men were then elevated to divine status, and could be regarded as role models for their contemporary sisters. This is a textual tradition which focuses on women's experience of injustice, suffering and vindication.

One of the numerous myths recounting the origins of the Goddess Mariamman involves a young Brahmin girl cruelly tricked into marrying an untouchable who had disguised himself as a Brahmin. On eventually discovering the injustice done to her, she despaired and set the house on fire, burning herself to death to expiate the evil she had involuntarily been forced to commit. When she was transformed into a Goddess, she declared to the villagers the great wrong done to her, demanded that they worship her, and wrecked revenge on her tormentor (Whitehead 1921:117f; Kinsley 1986:200).

Elmore (1913:69) recounts a story associated with the Goddess Podilamma of south India.

A young woman was sent to take their midday meal to some members of her family, low caste farmers who were working in a field some distance from their village. On the way, she met a man with whom she stopped to speak, which made her late in delivering the food. Her relatives, assuming she had allowed herself to be seduced, angrily threw her under the feet of the threshing oxen where she was trampled to death. Later, on removing the straw from the threshing floor, they discovered her body had disappeared, and only a stone was found to represent her (typical of the *Amman* tradition). A man at the site became possessed with the spirit of the girl, and she spoke through him, expressing her outrage at being unjustly killed, and demanding that she now be worshipped or calamitous retribution would befall the community. So the

remorseful villagers placed the stone at the centre of a shrine constructed in her memory.

Elmore also refers to the story of Mundla Mudamma (1913:70-71). A little girl of the Sudra caste herded cattle daily with other children. The children often played a game with stones and sticks, considered to be a boys' game. The little girl, however, won every game, despite the boys' best efforts. A traveller passing by one day was most impressed by the girl's skill particularly because of the assumption that it was not possible for a female to have superiority over males. While he watched the children playing the game, the cattle strayed into a neighbour's field. When the stranger drew the children's attention to this, the small girl uttered a shrill cry which brought all the cattle running back to them. After the traveller had told the villagers about the girl's skill, and control over the cattle, they watched her carefully. On another day when they witnessed the girl calling the cattle again in this way, they began to fear her, largely because of the traditional belief that females should never challenge the power of males. So, the villagers decided that the extraordinary girl should not be allowed to continue to flaunt gender roles, and plotted to kill her. Differing versions of the account record that either she heard of their plans and drowned herself in a well, or she disappeared, and all that was found of her was a stone. Her spirit then appeared in the village, condemning the injustice done to her, and demanding worship, whereupon the stone was shaped into her form, and placed in a temple built and dedicated to her.

Many versions exist of the commonly experienced theme involving a man with a beautiful daughter; against her wishes he arranged for her to be married to an elderly rich man whom the father regarded as a desirable husband. The girl wept and pleaded to be spared what she considered to be an undesirable and frightening fate, but the father was cruelly unconcerned about the daughter's happiness and wellbeing, and insisted on the marriage. So, after praying, the daughter went to the village tank where she threw herself in and drowned. Later, the girl appeared to one of the family members in a dream, announcing that she was now divine, a Goddess, who required their reverence and worship in order to ensure the continued health and wellbeing of the villagers (Whitehead 1921:126).

The *Devi Mahatmyam*, the great hymn of glory to the Divine

Mother, expresses very clearly many of the seminal characteristics of the Amman Goddess myths. Involving the Goddesses Durga and Kali, whose origins are almost certainly in non-Aryan indigenous religion (Payne 1979:68; Elmore 1913:5), this epic relates the necessity for a female to battle with, and overcome, a series of male demons who threatened the worlds with chaos, and whom the male deities were unable to defeat. The best known of these demons, and the prevailing sacrificial victim in Goddess festivals, is Mahisasura, the Buffalo Demon.

There are numerous accounts of women who became *sati*, by being burnt to death on their husband's funeral pyres, either 'voluntarily' or involuntarily, frequently with considerable encouragement from their family and community (Dubois:405 - 406). Many stories tell of women speaking from the flames demanding to be remembered, and worshipped as Goddesses (Elmore 1913:75; Dubois 1906:404 - 405; 408 - 415).

These various accounts indicate the persistence and power of the tradition of venerating women who have lived and died in extraordinary ways, suffering because of the demands of patriarchal traditions<sup>3</sup>. New folk Goddesses continue to be created.

This collection of ancient, and more recent, imaginative, and contemporarily potent, texts mirrors the experience of hundreds of thousands of women worldwide. They can be viewed as sacred texts because of their ability to penetrate beneath the surface and reveal some important truth about human experience, here the alienation of the sexes. They highlight the sexual abuse of women in society and within the home. Women are thus enabled to identify with the women protagonists and be freed to tell their own stories; to be assured that they are not alone. It is silence that disempowers. When women share their stories and support one another, they encourage each other to become survivors rather than victims of the structural violence engendered and fostered by androcentric culture.

## **The Amman Goddesses as Empowering for Women**

Hinduism is familiar with the practice of using Goddesses as role models for women. But generally, it has been the milder consort Goddesses,

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Elmore (1913:60): 'The tendency to deify widows who have become *sati* is always strong'.



particularly Sita, the wife of Rama, who has been presented as selfless and submissive paradigms for women in a culture obsessed with marriage (Kinsley 1986:70-78). A male dominated religious hierarchy has made use of these female images to encourage women to conform to patriarchal demands.

It is certainly a break with tradition to suggest that Draupadi, Mariamman, Durga, Kali, and other strong, autonomous Goddesses should consciously be appropriated as role models by women, as such independent, self assertive women have been regarded as threatening and potentially dangerous to the order of society. These Goddesses offer an image of womanhood freed from the demands and constraints of wife and mother, so allowing women to explore roles not defined and controlled by men.

I believe that the female figures and mythology of the *Amman* tradition offer a more powerful and liberating group of role models for contemporary women than the consort Goddesses, who continue to uphold patriarchal norms. It is exciting that these stories and rituals have retained their ancient power, and are capable of offering an explanation for, and even the alleviation of, much of the suffering endured by women, past and present.

That certain women, as well as those in KZN dealt with above, have experienced the figure of Draupadi as empowering, is borne out by the work of Purnima Mankekar in Delhi and Marie Gillespie in Southall, London (Mankekar 1993; Gillespie 2000).

Mankekar and Gillespie used the T.V. serialization of the *Mahabharata* ('an ancient tale told anew by Indian television') to question women's reaction to the episode of the attempted disrobing of Draupadi. In both Delhi and London women viewed this incident as a climactic point in the narrative, and were powerfully moved by the scene, seeing Draupadi as a symbol of female vulnerability, and finding it a frightening reflection of the contemporary oppression and abuse of women. Every woman interviewed, identified in some way with Draupadi's experience, comparing it with their own daily realities of sexual harassment and exploitation both at home and in the workplace.

These reactions illustrate the power of texts, however ancient, to challenge and empower women to gain insight into their lives, and to emulate Draupadi's rage at injustice by critiquing and working to change the conditions of injustice and humiliation they often endure.

## Conclusion

In order for the healing and empowering potential of the *Amman* Goddesses to be realised, some knowledge of their mythology needs to be recovered at a popular level. These stories relate how female deities have suffered the same violations and terrors endured by their human daughters, but whose anger at injustice, and whose ultimate victory, can motivate all women to continue the battle against the demons of patriarchy. They are able to illustrate the strength of women's energy (*shakti*), which is there waiting to be appropriated by all who wish to triumph over the circumstances of their lives.

Here is a feminist theodicy: the question of the violence done to women by patriarchal attitudes and institutions is at the heart of *Amman* mythology. A woman orientated explanation is offered for the cause, and alleviation, of the evil and suffering that is specific to their experience. The *Amman* Goddess is a 'wounded healer' figure: she shares and understands the situation of women, exploited, manipulated and often broken by patriarchal constraints and demands, lacking autonomy and powerless to take control of their own destinies. Suffering women have a figure they can recognise and identify with, able to say, in effect, 'That's me; that's my life; I too can overcome this predicament, and experience healing'. Out of affliction and agony comes hope, followed by spiritual and psychological wholeness and triumph, a central theme in religion.

Probably the most profound message of these enigmatic deities is to preserve awareness of the necessity for women to become the initiators in the resolution of the sexual conflict and injustice of patriarchally controlled society, something that is impossible for most men (cf. *Devi Mahatmyam*). The Mother Goddess summons her daughters to join in her continued battle against male violence, to convert their anger into the healing and transformation of society.

Too often in the past, the *Amman* Goddesses have been dismissed as too focused on darkness, violence and destruction, but paradox and conflict are as much a part of the sacred as are light, reconciliation and deliverance. Thus the ancient and possibly pre-patriarchal power of the *Amman* folk religion may be able to contribute to a more human scale women's spirituality, and a post-patriarchal vision that promotes a social order with more egalitarian gender relationships, resulting in the overcoming of the

endemic sexual violence that appears to be overwhelming South Africa and other societies.

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# Mwali: A God of War or a God of Peace?

Leslie S. Nthoi

## 1. Introduction

The Shona and Kalanga people believe in a High God known either as Mwali or Mwari<sup>1</sup>. Among the Shona, where there is a thriving cult of lesser spirits (the *mhondoro* cult), there is no direct oracular cult of this High God, as is the case among the Ndebele of Southwestern Zimbabwe and the Bakalanga of Northeastern Botswana (Fry 1976). Mwali is generally believed to be the Creator God. The Shona refer to him as *Musikavanhu* (the creator of human beings), *Matangakugara* (the first to exist), *Matangakuswika* (the first to arrive) and *Matangakuwonwa* (the first to be seen). A Kalanga poem of praise refers to Mwali as *Mbumbi we butale* (the Creator of the universe).

Mwali has three manifestations. First is the **Father**, who is known as *Sororezou* 'head of an elephant' (Shona), or *Shologulu* 'the big headed One' (Ikalanga). The second manifestation is the **Mother**, known in Ikalanga as *Banyanchaba* 'the defecator of Tribes, or the Mother of Nations'. Last is *Lunji* 'the needle' (Ikalanga) the **Son**, who runs errands between the Mother and Father. There are numerous Shona and Kalanga traditional prayers, myths and praise poems that demonstrate the believers' acknowledgement of Mwali's three manifestations<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Writing mainly from a Kalanga perspective, I prefer to refer to the High God as Mwali.

<sup>2</sup> See Ranger (1967; 1999). Unless otherwise stated, when we talk of Mwali, we refer to the male manifestation.

The bulk of the literature on the Mwali cult is devoted to the debate on the conceptualization of the nature of this High God<sup>3</sup>. The most lingering and controversial question in the discourse on the Mwali cult is whether Mwali is a God of war or a God of peace<sup>4</sup>. This question is best answered by exploring the extent to which Mwali can or cannot be involved in politics of violence. The debates on whether or not the cult of God Above can sanction war or insurrection against governments, whether cult officials can be involved in the organization of such insurrection, and whether or not cult centres can be used for rallying support for such activities, date back to the colonial discourse on the cult; particularly the white settlers' accounts of the role of the Mwali cult in the rebellions of 1896-1897 in Southern Rhodesia. In the settlers' accounts the cult officials are reported to have been involved in the organization of the rebellions. Cult messengers travelled between the war-front and the cult centres carrying messages and instructions from the cult officials at the centres and the leaders in the bush (Selous 1896). Although there is a general consensus among these early writers on the role of the cult in the 1896/7 Shona and Ndebele uprisings, there was one dissenting voice. On the basis of his intimate knowledge of Mwali<sup>5</sup>, W.E. Thomas (1896) dismisses the simplistic association between Mwali and the politics of violence. He argues that Mwali, the god of seasons and crops, could never have been involved in the rebellion. He characterizes this High God thus:

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<sup>3</sup> Drawing his inspiration from the Kantian logical analysis and Kaufman's argument on the theological construction of the concept of God, Walsh (2002) distinguishes between concepts of God and the nature of an external and objective reality called God. Writing from a social anthropological perspective, I make no such distinction in this paper.

<sup>4</sup> See Selous (1896); Hole (1896); Grey (1896); Thomas (1896); Baden-Powell (1897); Nobbs (1924); Ranger (1967; 1989; 1991a and b); Daneel (1970); Cobbing (1976); Werbner (1977; 1989).

<sup>5</sup> Thomas grew up among the Ndebele people, and got to know their customs and traditions closely. His knowledge of the Mwali cult is therefore more accurate than the reports written by travellers and company officials who apart from their scanty knowledge of the cult also had political interests to serve.

Mwali is a god of peace and plenty, and never in the knowledge of the natives has He posed as the god of war; for not when Mzilikazi entered the country did He help Makalanga to withstand the Matabele; nor did He ever pretend in any way to assist the Matabele *impis* which went out to war during Lobengula's time; nor did He ever assist Lobengula (or ever pretended to do so) when the whites advanced against him in 1893. He blossomed forth as a god of war for the first time during the late Matabele rising in this present year, and even to this day the natives in Matabeleland say: 'who ever heard of Ngwali being a God of war or armies?' (Thomas 1896:39).

The debate between W.E. Thomas and Selous has a modern counterpart in the Werbner versus Ranger debate on the role of the cult in the rebellions. Ranger (1967) spearheaded the modern discourse on the role of the Mwali cult in politics of violence. Although his first major work on the Mwali cult was intended as a critique of the major conclusions of colonial discourse on this matter, he unintentionally supported the argument<sup>6</sup>. The basis of Ranger's acceptance of the role of the Mwali cult in the 1896/7 Ndebele and Shona uprisings is his notion of the 'crisis conception,' which states that in a crisis situation, a traditional religious cult may play 'uncharacteristic' roles. Therefore, in the war situation of 1896/7, Mwali, a God of peace, temporarily suspended his abhorrence of blood and opposition to war (Ranger 1967). Rejecting this argument, Werbner (1977:294) argues that:

I have never heard people of the cult say that God Above is associated with the power of war or that He calls for armed struggle against a regime, however oppressive.

Ranger's (1967) early version of the crisis conception underplays the significance of the existence of a diversity of interest groups within the cult domain. It overestimates the cult's ability to rally support for a single military course (Werbner 1989). Ranger fails to account for the reasons why all interest groups and officials of all cult centres did not respond in the same

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<sup>6</sup> See D.N. Beach's (1975) critique of Ranger's argument on the role of the Mwali cult in the 1897 Shona uprisings.

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way during the crisis situation of the 1896/7 Ndebele and Shona uprisings. Three out of the four main shrines advocated a rising and it was in the areas where those shrines were influential that the rising broke out. The dissident shrine was that at Mangwe, in the southwest of present-day Zimbabwe. The chief officers there advised the people to stay out of the movement and the priests themselves took a leading part in warning whites, including missionaries, of the danger they were in. Under their influence the peoples of Plumtree and the southwest continued to 'sit still' (Ranger 1967:48). The reason for their neutrality possibly lay in their perception that the rising would not serve their interests very much (Werbner 1989:291). Possibly, their perception of Mwali as a God of peace rather than a God of war militated against their involvement in a bloody revolution. Therefore, our awareness of the divisions that cult officials have to contend with—such as cultural and ethnic affiliations and a diversity of other interests, including political expediencies (Werbner 1989:245,290,291)—leads to the conclusion that the cult's major hindrance to participation in war lies in 'the winning of consent' (Werbner 1989:293). These divisions, and their concomitant problem of failure to win a consensus, should in turn lead to different conceptions of what Mwali can and cannot do. Consequently, we should be ever wary of saying 'never'—like (Thomas 1896:39).

Nonetheless, Ranger's (1967) major work on the cult, which basically concludes that the Mwali cult was instrumental in the organization of the 1896/1897 rebellions has profoundly influenced many modern scholars writing on the role of the cult in Zimbabwean politics<sup>7</sup>, and the continuing discourse among the people themselves. To investigate further the extent to which Mwali can or cannot be associated with politics of violence, this paper focuses on the role of traditional religions in the recent Zimbabwean liberation war<sup>8</sup>. In his most recent work on the cult Ranger

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<sup>7</sup> Examples of scholars who concur with Ranger include: Schoffeleers (1976); and Daneel (1970; 1998). On the other hand, Werbner (1977, 1989); and Cobbing (1976) reject Ranger's suggestion that Mwali cult officials played a significant role in the organization of the 1896/1897 Ndebele and Shona uprisings.

<sup>8</sup> This paper is mainly based on fieldwork conducted in Southern Matabeleland (Zimbabwe) in 1993.

(1989; 1991; 1992) continues the same old argument. He asserts that Mwali cult officials were involved in the recent liberation struggle, and that guerrillas sought protection and guidance from several Mwali cult centers in Southern Matabeleland, such as Hloka Libomvu and Bembe. The main objective of this paper is to identify the image of Mwali that emerges from the post liberation war discourse (available literature and ethnographic evidence) regarding the role of the Mwali cult in politics of violence. Any contemporary contribution to this debate must investigate the cult's association with politics and politicians in the last twenty years.

## 2. Methodological Reflections

My perception of the Mwali cult imposes an approach or methodology, which has serious implications for our reflections on God. There is a difference between a federative and regional cult. Schoffeleers (1978:10), who sees the Mwali cult as territorial or federative, defines this type of cult as a 'cult which cuts across ethnic boundaries and unites different ethnic and political groups'. The terms 'territorial' and 'federative' mistakenly imply that the Mwali cult domain is congruent with some political territorial boundaries. The Mbona cult of Malawi (Schoffeleers 1978) and the Komana cult of the Batswapong of Eastern Botswana (Werbner 1989) are territorial cults, because their spheres of influence are limited and co-terminal with territorial boundaries. On the other hand however, the Mwali cult domain extends over an area of more than a thousand square miles, cuts across ethnic, cultural, political and national boundaries. It is therefore, more inclusive than a territorial cult. In Werbner's terms, it is a regional cult: that is, 'a cult of the middle range—more far reaching than any parochial cult of the little community, yet less inclusive in belief and membership than a world religion in its most universal form' (Werbner 1977a:IX, 1979:58). Therefore, Mwali is not a God of a small or local community.

There is a distinction between 'the worship of local gods' and universal religions. The worship of local gods binds a local community, and engenders attachment to a particular place. On the other hand, universal religions, which revolve around more inclusive deities, give freedom from place<sup>9</sup>. While a functionalist approach is more appropriate for the study of

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<sup>9</sup> See Tuan (1977:150 - 152) for more information on the distinction between the worship of local gods and universal religions.

local cults, it is painfully inadequate for dealing with regional cults and universal religions. A study of the Mwali cult calls for an approach that can make sense of many opposing elements within the cult itself, the problems of the competitive interaction of different categories of pilgrims at the various cult centers, the implication of exclusive and inclusive aspects of the cult on reflections on the image of God, and the cult's relation with other competing cults within the same domain. The multi-dimensional (pluralistic mode)<sup>10</sup> approach is most appropriate for studying this cult. This approach liberates us from the narrow Durkheimian tradition and the constraints of deterministic theories. Furthermore, the approach rejects any notion of homogeneity of beliefs and practices within the cult domain. It proceeds 'on the assumption of considerable heterogeneity and diversity among pilgrims' (Naquin and Yu 1992:8). This approach acknowledges that different categories of supplicants are likely to construct different images of Mwali and sacred centrality. Furthermore, different socio-political conditions may produce varying conceptions of a single deity. On the basis of the ethnography below, we test the validity of this hypothesis.

### **3. Mwali and Politics of Violence: Theoretical Perspectives**

Although Ranger has written most extensively about the role of the Mwali cult in the politics of violence, I choose to focus on Daneel's (1998) reflections on the image of Mwali, which among other things, discuss the role of Mwali in the recent Zimbabwean liberation war. Daneel's main argument is that the involvement of the Mwali cult in the recent Zimbabwean armed struggle is indeed a continuation of what started prior to the 1896/7 rebellions in Southern Rhodesia, which are commonly referred to as the First *Chimurenga*<sup>11</sup>. Below is the image of Mwali that emerges from Daneel's reflections on the recent Zimbabwean liberation war.

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<sup>10</sup> For more information on the advantages of this approach, see Eade and Sallnow (1991).

<sup>11</sup> During the war, Robert Mugabe made a rhetorical link between the recent liberation war and the rebellion of 1896-7, by referring to the recent Zimbabwean liberation war as the second *Chimurenga*. According to Mugabe, the Battle of Sinoia (the first attack of the guerrillas war) provided

Mwali has always been involved in politics. For example, He intervened on behalf of the oppressed as King Lobengula intensified his raids on Shona chiefdoms (1998:97). After conquering the Shona, Lobengula subjected them to untold cruelty. From one cultic cave Mwali promised the Shona divine intervention (Daneel 1998:97). Consequently, He caused the downfall of the Ndebele monarchy by bringing in the white settler government in 1893, which, in turn, led to the disintegration of the Ndebele monarchy. Since the collapse of the Ndebele monarchy was brought about by Mwali as punishment for Lobengula's arrogance and cruelty against the Shona, Mwali cult priests did nothing to rally the Shona chiefs in support of the Ndebele against the newly established administration of the British South Africa Company (Daneel 1998:98). Therefore, from the point of view of the Kalanga and Shona people, Mwali emerged as a liberator God during the Ndebele rule (Daneel 1998:97).

Daneel's position *vis-à-vis* the role of the Mwali cult has been greatly influenced by Ranger (1967). He contends that the whole of the Mwali cult's organisation 'acted as a central source of information and a means of co-ordinating resistance over a wide area.' Although Mwali cult officials did not provoke the rebellion, it played a significant role in ritually approving, supporting and co-ordinating a large-scale liberation struggle (Daneel 1998:98). Mwali's 'militant pronouncement' provided 'mystical legitimisation'<sup>12</sup> of the struggle, as well as powerful inspiration for coordinated and sustained action against the enemy over a wide area (Daneel 1998: 998, 100). The cult's extensive network was used to convey a defiant Mwali's declaration of war on the white settlers. At the outbreak of the rebellions, Mwari apparently issued the following directive from the oracular shrines:

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'the connecting link between the First Liberation War (*Chimurenga Chokutanga*) fought by our ancestors in 1896 and 1897 and the second Liberation War (*Chimurenga Chechipiri*) which we are now fighting' (Robert Mugabe, 'The Sinoia Tradition,' *Zimbabwe News*, Vol. 10, No. 2, March-April; cited by A.H. Rich 1983:137).

<sup>12</sup> This is indeed acceptance and reproduction of Ranger's (1996:96) assertion that the cult 'set a seal of ritual approval on the decision of the community as a whole'.

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These white men are your enemies. They killed your fathers, sent the locusts, caused this disease among the cattle and bewitched the clouds so that we have no rain. Now you will go and kill these white people and drive them out of our father's land and I (Mwari) will take away the cattle disease and the locusts and send you rain (Fleming, quoted in Ranger 1967:148).

Accepting Ranger's crisis conception, which justified Mwali's intervention in the 1896/7 Ndebele and Shona uprising, Daneel (1998:9100) asserts that although Mwali is essentially a God of peace and unity, 'when alien intrusion or unjust rule disturbs the intertribal political harmony, Mwari emerges as a militant deity, *the God of war and peace, and the God of justice opposing oppressive rule*'. Consequently, the 1896/7 rebellions in Southern Rhodesia 'saw a defiant deity going uncompromisingly on the offensive on behalf of the entire black community against white intruders' (Daneel 1998:100).

After the 1896/7 rebellions in Southern Rhodesia, the relationships between Mwali and the white colonialists on the one hand, and black and white on the other, normalized. For example, 'Mwari could still describe black-white relations in terms of the *sekuru-muzukuru* (maternal uncle-sister's son) relationship, which in Shona kinship is the most cordial relationship ...' (Daneel 1998:106). Mwari even indicated a certain fondness for the 'white *vazukuru*,' who were granted the customary privileges in their black uncle's house and yard (Daneel 1998:106). However, things changed in the period between 1967, when the recent armed liberation war began, and 1980, when the armed struggle ended. Mwari's conciliatory attitude towards the colonial government soon changed. Daneel captures this change thus:

As the struggle escalated the oracle made a *full declaration of war*. The gist of Mwari's messages throughout the struggle was: full condonation of militancy and support for the ZANLA and ZIPRA fighters who were trying to regain the lost lands; divine confirmation that this time *chimurenga* would succeed in replacing colonial rule with black majority rule ... (Daneel 1998:106 - 107).

Consequently, an intimate relationship developed between Mwali and the nationalist armed cadres. Guerrillas regularly visited Mwali cult shrines to request Mwari's power and guidance for the struggle. Mwali taught them 'how to fight, where to move and how to avoid dangerous situations...' (Daneel 1998:107). They received strategic directives from Mwari, directly relating to the day-to-day conditions of guerrilla warfare in the immediate environs of the shrines (Daneel 1998:107 - 108). Apart from these guerrillas, senior officials of the black nationalist parties (or their representatives) also visited many cult centres, particularly the Bembe and Dzilo shrines, to consult Mwari about the conduct of the war (Daneel 1998:108). There is therefore, no doubt of the 'close involvement, pervasive presence and divine initiative of Mwari,' since Mwari instigated, controlled and sanctioned the liberation struggle (Daneel 1998:110). The image of Mwali that emerges from all this is of a:

... liberator God, a God of justice, who hesitates neither to declare war on behalf of his/her oppressed people, nor to intervene militantly in a protracted struggle, both directly and through a war council. Thus the deity who sanctioned the rebellions of the oppressed black people in 1896, ... turned once again into a warlord in order to reclaim lost lands for the dispossessed and re-establish just and peaceful co-existence of all his/her subjects. In the minds of my informants there was no doubt that this liberator, Mwari of Matonjeni, was truly the original Creator God of Africa (Daneel 1998:111 - 112).

One may contrast the above views with Werbner's (1977) argument on whether or not Mwali can be involved in politics of violence. Firstly, we may note that Werbner draws much inspiration from Thomas (1896) as referred to earlier. His acceptance of Thomas's conception of Mwali leads to his rejection of Ranger's crisis conception, which has been the basis of arguments for the involvement of Mwali in the perceptions and activation of a politics of violence. Second, although Werbner did some research in South-western Zimbabwe, the bulk of his fieldwork and research on the Mwali cult was carried out in the mid 1960s in North-eastern Botswana. This is an area that has enjoyed peace and stability. I provide a perspective

on his views on the conceptualisation of the Mwali below<sup>13</sup>.

Relying heavily on Thomas' conception of the Mwali cult, Werbner holds steadfastly to the view of the Mwali cult as a cult of peace and tranquillity; a cult that abhors bloodshed and war; a cult which has a universal axiom that militates against sanctioning any violent rebellion within its domain (1977:211). Second, Mwali is both involved in and transcends local politics. Therefore, He cannot be used by one section of the population against another (1977:212). Consequently, Mwali had nothing to do with the revolt of 1896, because He is a god of peace, and is mainly concerned with the unity of the people and fertility of the land.

#### **4. Mwali and Politics of Violence: Nationalist Leaders**

At the beginning of nationalist politics in the early 1950s Joshua Nkomo, Grey Bango, Jason Moyo and Edward Ndlovu visited the Dula shrine to ask for guidance from Mwali in their struggle for independence<sup>14</sup>. Since this legendary visit to Dula by these politicians in 1953, both the shrines at Dula and Njelele have been frequented both by politicians of the now defunct ZAPU and by army officials of the ZIPRA forces during and after the liberation war in Zimbabwe. Individual guerrillas also visited the shrines during the course of the liberation war. Below is an account of the cult's association with some important ZAPU politicians.

##### **4.1 Joshua Nkomo**

Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo is the son of Nyongola Ditshwantsho Nkomo, the

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<sup>13</sup> Werbner's work being reviewed here was meant as a response to Ranger's (1967) work on the role of the Mwali cult in the 1896/7 rebellions. The reason for discussing Werbner's argument here is to demonstrate how two contrasting images of a single deity emerge from the literature.

<sup>14</sup> The account below is based solely on my interview with Mrs. Thenjiwe Lesabe in May 1993. Mrs. Lesabe is the Member of Parliament for the Umzingwana Constituency within Matabeleland South. She is an old acquaintance of the late Joshua Nkomo. Joshua Nkomo refused to speak to me, and instead referred me to Thenjiwe Lesabe who, he claimed, 'knows everything.'

son of Ditshumo Nkomo<sup>15</sup>. Joshua's association with the cult is a well-known fact. His grandfather was the first member in his family to be associated with the Mwali cult. Joshua Nkomo's birth is portrayed as divinely influenced (Ranger 1992:8; Nthoi 1995). Therefore, his association with the Mwali cult started even before his birth. His role and significance in Zimbabwe's struggle for liberation are well-documented facts that need no further elaboration here (Nkomo 1984). His association with the Mwali cult as a politician began with his legendary visit to the Dula shrine in 1953, in the company of other members of the Trade Union Movement of the then Rhodesia.

He, together with Grey Bango, Edward Ndlovu (late) and Jason Moyo, visited the Dula shrine in 1953. They had initially wanted to go to Njelele, but lost their way and unintentionally landed at Dula. On arrival at the shrine keeper's place in the early evening, they narrated the purpose of their visit to the shrine. The shrine keeper told them that since the shrine was only open to elderly people, they could not be allowed to consult the oracle. In despair, they went back to a certain Mr. Mlilo's (a teacher at Dula Primary School) place and told him of their predicament. Mlilo advised them not to go back to town, but to sleep at his home. He also undertook to wake them up around twelve mid-night and lead them to a place where they could join the procession to the shrine without being noticed by anybody. Early in the morning, the young politicians joined the supplicants on their way to the shrine, under the cover of darkness.

After the keeper had greeted the Oracle, the Voice called Joshua and Grey by their names (as son of Nyongola and son of Luposwa respectively) and asked them why they had come to the shrine. The other supplicants were very surprised for they were not aware that these young men had made their way to the shrine. Joshua Nkomo then told the Oracle that since the country was experiencing great problems, they had come to ask for guidance and assistance in their efforts to achieve independence.

After the Voice had received assurance that these young politicians had not been sent by Lobengula, they were given a good hearing. Joshua

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<sup>15</sup> Prior to being elected the second Vice President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Dr. Joshua Nkomo was the leader of the Ndebele dominated ZAPU (Zimbabwe African People's Union). He passed away in 2000.



Nkomo and his colleagues were told that their struggle for liberation would go well. They were told that the country would get its independence after a long war lasting about thirty years. Botswana, Malawi and Zambia would get their independence before Zimbabwe. Joshua Nkomo was assured divine protection during this long war of liberation.

According to his biography (1984), Joshua Nkomo himself neither makes claim to divine birth, nor does he explain his involvement in the Railways Trade Union Movement, and his subsequent involvement in nationalist politics, as divine vocation. Significantly, and contrary to the myth propagated by Thenjiwe Lesabe (see Ranger 1989), Joshua Nkomo does not claim to have been promised divine protection during the turbulent years of the protracted Zimbabwean liberation war. In fact Thenjiwe's rendition of the dialogue between the Voice and Joshua and his companions (on their legendary visit to the Dula shrine in 1953) is different from both Nkomo's and Grey Bango's accounts<sup>16</sup>. To see Thenjiwe's narration simply as a misrepresentation of facts and history is to completely miss a very important point. It is basically her impression management in an attempt to co-opt the Mwali cult, in pursuit of her political ambitions. Corollary to this is the question of why Joshua Nkomo chose to have the history of his association with the cult narrated by another person. The reason for this runs deeper than the mere fact that he was too busy to talk to me, and that he trusted the memory of a close acquaintance. Joshua Nkomo's decision to have the myth of his divine birth, and the history of his association with the cult narrated to me by a third person allows and encourages its propagation. Furthermore, a 'disinterested' presentation of the myth also enhances its plausibility, authenticity and legitimacy.

Joshua Nkomo has visited Dula and other cult centres several times after this historic visit and even after the liberation war. After the liberation war, he visited both Hloka Libomvu and Njelele shrines more than twice. In 1980 after the war had come to an end, Sili Ndlovu, the keeper of the Njelele shrine welcomed guerrillas at Njelele. There was, however, no cleansing of the guerrillas at Njelele. Nkomo visited the Njelele shrine then. In 1982 he visited Sitwanyana Ncube, the then keeper of the Njelele shrine—to organize

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<sup>16</sup> For Grey Bango's account, see Ranger (1989); and the account of my discussion with him below.

a proper welcome of the guerrillas at the shrine.

Nkomo has also been directly involved in manipulating and co-opting the cult in various ways. He has for a long time maintained a very close association with the cult, and in particular, with Sitwanyana Ncube (one of the claimants of the priesthood of the Njelele shrine). In order to win over the cult and ordinary people in the Matopo Hills, he addressed a major political rally at Njelele, in which amongst other things, he announced his bid to convert the shrine into a major international pilgrimage centre (see Ranger 1989 and 1992). Such a move would have promoted the preeminence of the Njelele shrine over other cult centres. No wonder, therefore, that there later emerged in Southern Matabeleland, the now common reference to Njelele as *umthombo we lizwe* 'the fontanelle of the nation' (Ranger 1989 & 1992). Joshua Nkomo is reported to have chastised David (cult priest) for allowing photographers to take his [David's] picture, very much against the tradition of the cult (Nthoi 1995). This was an attempt to stamp his authority at Njelele. (Reference has already been made about how he portrayed himself as 'in charge' of the Njelele shrine).

#### 4.2 Grey Bango<sup>17</sup>

Grey Bango was born on 7 December 1920. He is the son of Luposwa, who was the son of Mbubi. He is the grand-grand son of Zhobane, the legendary Mwali cult priest of the Njelele shrine. He knew at an early age that consulting the oracle of Mwali at major shrines could solve serious personal and communal problems. This was despite the fact that his grand parents had only stopped consulting the oracle after the murder of Zhobane<sup>18</sup>.

Grey Bango is a friend of Joshua Nkomo, who has tried to influence him and others, has even gone to the lengths of trying to capture command of Njelele through a *sangoma* kinswoman. In his personal capacity, and as a politician of Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), Grey Bango visited both Njelele and Dula several times during and after the liberation war. During the liberation war, when Joshua Nkomo was detained, Grey Bango

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<sup>17</sup> This account is based on my interview with Grey Bango in May 1993, at his farm near Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

<sup>18</sup> See Ranger (1967) for more information on Zhobane's murder by white soldiers at the end of the Ndebele uprisings in 1897.

repeatedly visited both Dula and Njelele, according to him, in order to consult the oracle of Mwali, the outcomes of which he communicated to Nkomo. He attributes ZAPU's poor performance in the first post war Zimbabwean elections to Joshua Nkomo's refusal to heed certain Mwali's instructions, which he was not prepared to divulge.

As a politician and Trade Unionist, he always remembered what he had learnt about Mwali during his youthful days. After the first general workers' strike of the late 1940s, the white settler government had declared a state of emergency in all the urban areas. Government troops had unleashed violence on black demonstrators, killing many in Bulawayo. Consequently, a war situation prevailed countrywide. Grey Bango then remembered what his grandfather had told him; i.e. that when a war situation erupts (like it did when Zhobane was killed) recourse should be made to Mwali. He then mobilized his colleagues in the Trade Union movement to consult the oracle. It was then agreed that the Executive Committee of the Trade Union, comprising J. Z. Moyo, Joshua Nkomo, Benjamin Mandlela Sikhwili Moyo, Edward Ndlovu, and Grey Bango himself, should visit the Dula shrine. This shrine was chosen because Mwali's Voice was believed to have moved to Dula, after Zhobane's murder (Ranger 1967).

In 1953, the above-mentioned gentlemen visited Dula. On arrival there in the late afternoon, they found many elders at the shrine keeper's place. As expected, they informed the shrine priest and the elder of the purpose of their mission to the shrine—i.e. to ask for advice from Mwali about the proper action to take in the face of the war situation prevailing countrywide. The elders chased them away because the shrine was only accessible to elderly people. They then approached Mlilo the Headmaster of the Dula Primary School and explained their plight to him, and that they were going back home. Mlilo advised them not to return to Bulawayo in vain, but rather to join other supplicants on their way to the shrine, under the cover of darkness. They spent the night at Mlilo's place.

Towards dawn, Mlilo awoke them and they joined the procession of supplicants to the shrine. Their presence was unknown to cult officials. Suddenly, Mwali's Voice was heard welcoming the son of Luposwa (Grey Bango) and the son of Nyongola (Joshua Nkomo) to the shrine. It also chastised the elders for having chased these gentlemen away. The Voice wondered why the elders had chased away these young men who had

approached the oracle on a matter of such significance. As a result of the importance of their business, the oracle resolved that no other supplicant was to be attended to that morning.

Before Mwali advised the delegation on what course of action to take, He narrated a long history of the nation's disobedience and punishment. This narration was punctuated with Mwali's sobs and crying that continued for about fifteen minutes. They were reminded of how Lobengula<sup>19</sup> had sinned and flouted Mwali's commands, as a result of which the white man had invaded and taken over the running of the country. Mwali also told them that He was already aware of the current bloodshed and a state of war that prevailed throughout the country. These afflictions were visited on the people as punishment for Lobengula's shortcomings. At the end of this narration, Mwali promised that independence would come to Zimbabwe only after a further thirty years of strife and bloodshed. However, these nationalist leaders were promised divine protection during this protracted period of war and bloodshed.

Apart from this legendary visit, Grey Bango has undertaken numerous other subsequent visits to the shrine. During the liberation struggle, when Nkomo was in Zambia, Grey visited the Njelele shrine on behalf of ZAPIU and Joshua Nkomo, its leader. Grey Bango recalls that he once visited the shrine to consult the oracle about Joshua Nkomo's security and protection. This visit to the shrine came at a time when the Smith regime was vigorously hunting down Joshua Nkomo. The oracle instructed Grey Bango to carry a message to Nkomo about how to take care of their weapons of war. The Voice also cautioned Nkomo and his guerillas against the killing of innocent people during time liberation war.

On another occasion, Grey accompanied a young woman from Zambia who was sent by Joshua Nkomo to consult the oracle at the Njelele shrine. The woman had come to get more instructions from Mwali about the conduct and direction of the liberation war. Apart from reiterating his

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<sup>19</sup> Lobengula was the Ndebele's second King. He is reported to have ordered Chief Ndiweni Faku to massacre all members of the Mbikwa priestly lineage of the Njelele shrine (Schoffeleers & Mwanza 1976; Bhebe 1976). He also banned public performances of *wosana* (Mwali cult adepts) dances within the Ndebele kingdom (Ranger 1967).

support for the liberation struggle and assuring Nkomo and other nationalist leaders of his protection, Mwali expressed his distaste for the killing of innocent civilians during the liberation war.

After the liberation war, Grey Bango undertook several visits to the shrine. For example, during the *Gukurahundi* period<sup>20</sup>, he together with Nkomo, visited the shrine in order to find out what to do about the state-sponsored massacre of the Ndebele. They were told that this problem would come to an end if they followed Mwali's instructions. Unfortunately, these instructions were not followed to the letter. In Grey Bango's view, the failure to follow these instructions led to the political problems that later faced Nkomo and the country at large. In his last visit to the shrine in 1991, he was told that when Lobengula's kingdom collapsed as a result of his sins, there was no rainfall. Now that his friend Nkomo was reluctant to visit the shrine any more Mwali would withhold rain. This was not done, hence the devastating drought of 1991/92.

#### **4.3 Thenjiwe Lesabe (MaKhumalo)**

Mrs. Thenjiwe Lesabe is a member of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU (PF)) and also the Member of Parliament for the Umzingwana constituency. After the death of Zimbabwe's First Lady, Sally Mugabe, she was appointed the leader of the ZANU (PF) Women's League, having long been Sally Mugabe's deputy in the ZANU (PF) Women's League. More recently, she was appointed Minister of Women's Affairs in the President's office. Thenjiwe Lesabe, a former member of the now defunct ZAPU, was very active in Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) [the military arm of ZAPU] during the liberation struggle, having been based in Zambia, where she was responsible for the welfare of all women recruits and combatants. She has worked very closely with Joshua Nkomo in both ZAPU and ZIPRA.

Thenjiwe's accounts of the relationship between the Mwali cult and ZAPU/ZIPRA officials are also part of an on-going discourse on the Mwali cult: *vis-à-vis* its role in politics, how its leadership is manipulated and co-

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<sup>20</sup> This refers to the period of internal strife following the first national elections in Zimbabwe, which was characterized by government's violent suppression of 'dissident elements' in Matabeleland.

opted by, and how in turn it co-opts alternative sources of power and authority (e.g. politicians and cultural organizations). Therefore, in order to make sense of Thenjiwe's accounts we must understand something of her personal agenda.

Thenjiwe Lesabe, a feminist, a mission educated Christian belonging to an established church, and something of an Ndebele cultural nationalist, emerges both in the literature on the cult and in my personal discussion with her, as a culture broker. It is a role she plays up, representing herself as someone with the most intimate knowledge of people and cult events and practices largely unknown to women of her age, and to others of her circle or category. She emerges as herself something of an oracle, with authority to pronounce on history irrespective of her own social personality and interests. What are her motivations? All this has to do with her stakes in politics. It is part of her larger intent to manipulate and co-opt virtually any source of power and authority (including divinity) in pursuit of her own political ambitions, and her own construction of Ndebele ethnicity.

As a former member of the once famous Ndebele dominated ZAPU, and like many of her former colleagues, she had to come to terms with the political realities (missed opportunities) occasioned by her party's poor performance in the first general elections. As an educated woman (who quite possibly has read Ranger's 1966 and 1967 accounts on the role of traditional religious leaders in the 1896-1897 rebellions) and a religious person; as well as a politician and something of a Ndebele cultural nationalist, it appears she made recourse to traditional religion, in her struggle to seize the moral high ground.

Thenjiwe Lesabe holds the view that there was an intimate relationship between Mwali cult centres and ZAPU politicians and ZIPRA forces during the liberation war. She also depicts this cult's support for the liberation war as a continuation of its involvement in the 1896 Ndebele uprisings. Her affection for history is responsible for her very interesting conception of the recent Zimbabwean war of liberation. The Mwali cult is at the centre of Thenjiwe Lesabe's conception of the war of liberation.

In her view, the Zimbabwean liberation war was actually blessed or sanctioned by Mwali. It was also a punishment from Mwali for the shortcomings of both cult officials and the political leadership of the country. Mwali was very displeased with cult officials who revealed secrets

of the Njelele shrine to outsiders. Such revelations include the 'incident' in which cult officials at Njelele showed white men the talking stone that was kept within the shrine. The white colonial officers came and carried away this stone. The stone, I understand, is kept in some museum in Britain. The sins of cult officials angered Mwali. In the first case, this is why Njelele ceased to speak and, lastly this is why this bloody war was sent on all the people of Zimbabwe. The other reason why Mwali punished his people with this protracted war of independence is because of Lobengula's mistakes. Lobengula was very stubborn and unlike Mzilikazi, his father, his relationship with the Oracle was not very good. Thrice he was called to the shrine to be advised about the coming of the white men and he refused to visit the shrine. Mwali then got fed up with him and allowed his kingdom to fall at the hands of the white man.

Of great importance to Mrs. Lesabe's view of the role of the Mwali cult in Zimbabwean politics is her conception of the specialization of Mwali cult centers, according to which the Dula shrine emerges as a war shrine<sup>21</sup>. This conception of the shrine is linked to the questions of ritual innovation; interpenetration of cults—the Mwali, Mtuwane Dhlodhlo war cult, and the *sangoma* cults at Dula; and the colonization of the Dula shrine (particularly during the Zimbabwean liberation war), historically associated with the Mwali cult, by the Mtuwane Dhlodhlo war cult. The reported use of the red cloth at Dula, instead of the traditional black associated with Mwali, attests the colonization of the Mwali cult centre by the Mtuwane Dhlodhlo cult, of Nguni origin. The use of *ilembu libomvu* (Sindebele) 'red cloth' at Dula—a symbol of war and bloodshed, also associated with the *sangoma* cult—has led to the shrine's association with war and *abantu ba madhlozi* (Sindebele) (people of the spirits/spirit mediums). These innovations have led to the construction of the image of the Dula shrine (by ZAPU politicians in

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<sup>21</sup> Some evidence exists for the specialization of Mwali cult centers. During course of fieldwork, Chief Malachi Nzula Masuku refused to allow a group of traditional leaders to enter the Njelele shrine. The reason given is that the Njelele shrine is only associated with rain and fertility, and not with healing. The traditional healers were instead referred to the Dula shrine, which specializes in healing. See Schoffeleers and Mwanza for more information on the specialization of Mwali cult centers.

particular and other Ndebele cultural nationalists like Thenjiwe Lesabe), as *Hloka libomvu* (Sindebele): 'Red Axe'—the axe of war.

Consequently, and particularly in Thenjiwe's whole discourse on the Mwali cult, the Dula shrine is associated with war. The shrine's association with war dates back to the period of the 1896/7 rebellions. The shrine has power to wage and stop all wars. It was at this shrine that war against the whites was planned and it was also at this shrine that the recent Zimbabwean liberation war was stopped. It is the shrine at which Joshua Nkomo was promised divine protection; and ZAPU/ZIPRA officials frequented it during the liberation war. The spirit of Mtuwane Dhlohdhlo, the Ndebele warlord lives in this shrine<sup>22</sup>. All matters concerning war come to this shrine and must be reported to Leo Mtuwane Dhlohdhlo who is the current medium of the spirit of Mtuwane Dhlohdhlo. All other shrine matters are reported to the usual keepers of the Maswabi family. Mrs. Lesabe visited the *Hloka Libomvu* shrine more than twice after the liberation war. On both occasions they had gone there to ask for political power for the Ndebele dominated ZAPU party and also to ask for peace.

Although there was contact between cult officials and the political leadership of ZAPU during the Zimbabwean liberation war, this was not a clearly stipulated party policy. However, there were times when the cultural committee of the ZAPU party advised and recommended that such contacts take place. For example, the political leadership of ZAPU repeatedly visited numerous cult centres during the liberation war. The purpose of such visits was to consult and seek protection and guidance from Mwali, as well as to ask for power during the war. Therefore, the military strength of the ZIPRA forces was partly a result of such visits to cult centres. In her view, the war could never have been fought and won without Mwali's assistance.

When the liberation war ended in 1980, and guerrillas assembled at the numerous assembly points all over the country, ZAPU officials went to

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<sup>22</sup> Ranger (1966; 1967) mistakenly identifies Mtuwane Dhlohdhlo as Mthwani or Mbabani, the Mwali cult priest of the Dula shrine, who spearheaded the Ndebele rebellion in 1896. Cobbing (1976) correctly points out that the official Ranger refers to as Mthwani or Mbabani, was in fact Mtuwane Dhlohdhlo, a Ndebele warlord, who had nothing to do with the Mwali cult. Ranger (1967) [reprinted version] has since acknowledged his mistake.



report their return to the Njelele shrine. A big feast was made at the shrine and Mwali was thanked for protecting the guerrillas, and above all, for their victory in this long war of liberation. Joshua Nkomo attended this ceremony. Since Sili Ndlovu, the incumbent priest at Njelele did not 'properly' conduct this ceremony; another 'proper' ceremony for welcoming the guerrillas was arranged by Sitwanyana Ncube in 1982, which Joshua Nkomo also attended.

In 1988, on realizing that some of the ex-combatants were being troubled by *ngozi* spirits (tormented and vengeful spirits) and that some were running mad, ZAPU officials decided to visit the shrines at Dula (*Hloka Libomvu*) and Njelele, to apologize on behalf of the guerrillas to Mwali at both the Njelele and Dula shrines. At these shrines, ZAPU leaders were first made to apologize for Lobengula's faults before they could ask for the forgiveness of the war crimes of the ex-combatants in the recent liberation war.

This is an example of the cult's concern with history and the reparation of past and present wrong-doings (including those committed by the long dead), in order for the living to be reconciled with the High God, and also to be at peace with the land itself. Those ex-combatants incorporated into the new national army, and those who were sick, were taken by their leaders to the shrines for ritual cleansing. Those who were not in the national army found their way to the shrines on their own. There was no general cleansing of the guerrillas of war crimes at any cult centre.

Even after the liberation war was over, ZAPU officials continued visiting these shrines to ask for power to defeat the Shona-dominated ZANU (PF) at the elections. During the *Gukurahundi* period, ZAPU officials also visited the shrines. When the Fifth Brigade unleashed its power and violence on the people of Matabeleland, senior ZAPU officials visited both the Njelele and Dula shrines to ask for the end of the civil war and the return of peace in the land. When the civil war reached its climax and senior ZAPU party officials realized that Joshua Nkomo's life was now at a great risk, they visited Njelele to ask for guidance. His escape into Botswana was asked for at Njelele. Sitwanyana Ncube also confirmed this during my interview with him. He claims to have performed a ritual, whose sole intent was to protect Joshua Nkomo as he fled the country<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> For ethical reasons, I withhold information on this ritual.

After Joshua Nkomo's return to Zimbabwe, ZAPU/ZANU (PF) unity talks were launched. During these talks ZAPU officials frequently visited and consulted Njelele and Dula shrines. Whenever these unity talks reached an impasse and threatened to collapse, ZAPU representatives consulted Mwali at one his numerous shrines. It was only after the Oracle at Njelele was consulted that a breakthrough was finally reached. According to Mrs Lesabe, the unity talks only succeeded because of ZAPU's close association with the Mwali cult.

Mrs Lesabe herself and Joshua Nkomo visited the *Hloka Libomvu* shrine several times after the liberation war. On almost every occasion they went there to ask for political power for the Ndebele dominated ZAPU party and also to ask for peace. She personally visited the Njelele and Dula shrines after the liberation war, and during the Zimbabwean Post Independence Unity Talks. Mrs Lesabe is strongly convinced that the liberation war would never have been won had ZAPU and ZIPRA not maintained the closest possible links with the Mwali cult centres.

Thenjiwe Lesabe's account of ZAPU's association with the Mwali cult reflects the differences within ZAPU itself, concerning their attitudes towards traditional religion in general, and the Mwali cult in particular. Such differences make it difficult to understand the actual relationship between ZAPU/ZIPRA and cult officials. For example, Dumiso Dabengwa<sup>24</sup>, the former head of ZAPU military intelligence downplays the role of the Mwali cult in mapping out the military strategy of the ZIPRA forces. Although some ZIPRA cadres deployed within easy reach of Mwali cult centres occasionally visited such shrines, this was not a ZAPU policy of military strategy. Most important, these guerrillas visited such centres neither as representatives of ZIPRA, nor of their own squadrons, but as individuals<sup>25</sup>.

Werbner reports<sup>26</sup> being told, by Dumiso Dabengwa (in a private conversation), that the Mwali cult was not a significant factor in the liberation war. Dabengwa is reported by Werbner to have said that guerrillas who resorted to the Mwali cult may well have been bands led by commanders who had been in revolt against the central leadership. If this is

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<sup>24</sup> He is now a Cabinet Minister in the Zimbabwean Government.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Dumiso Dabengwa at his house in Bulawayo in May 1993.

<sup>26</sup> Personal communication with me.

the position of the man, who, as the head of ZAPU military intelligence, was part of the effort within the party to professionalize the guerrilla forces and develop a sizeable, heavily armed standing army with the logistical capacity to sustain an effective long-term military strategy, which group within the ZAPU hierarchy sanctioned and encouraged the party's contact with the Mwali cult at whatever level? Who within the ZAPU hierarchy visited both Njelele and Dula shrines 'on behalf' of the organization? I pose these questions only to show that there is no agreement even within ZAPU itself on the nature and extent of the Mwali cult's association with ZAPU officials. I nevertheless, continue to use the term 'ZAPU' because Thenjiwe did.

However, some of my informants corroborated Mrs. Lesabe's account of the relationship between the Njelele shrine and 'ZAPU' and 'ZIPRA' forces. For example, Sitwanyana Ncube and his senior wife MaNyathi confirmed that both Thenjiwe Lesabe and Joshua Nkomo visited the Njelele shrine several times after the liberation war, to consult the oracle on national issues, and even to ask for personal favours from Mwali. According to MaNyathi, the last time Thenjiwe Lesabe visited the Njelele shrine was after the death of Sally Mugabe in 1992. Following her visit to the shrine, she was appointed the leader of the ZANU (PF) Women's League, and Minister of Women's Affairs in the Office of the President.

Finally, we must look at the image of the Dula shrine that emerges from modern literature on the Mwali cult. This image has serious implications for our understanding of both the role of the Mwali cult in the recent Zimbabwean liberation war, and on our reflections on the concept of Mwali. In the interest of brevity, I focus on Ranger's writings on the Dula shrine. In the literature on the cult the Dula shrine is mainly associated with healing and a military tradition (Ranger 1991b: 10,12). This is indeed problematic for a cult whose High God is historically known for his abhorrence of blood; a God who sends war as punishment for the transgressions of his people (Ranger 1989). This raises an interesting question about the nature of divinities associated with the Dula shrine. Below, I give a summary of Ranger's (1989; 1991; 1992) depiction of the military tradition of the Dula shrine.

As a result of its military tradition and its specialization in matters of war, this shrine is referred to as *Hloka Libomvu* (Sindebele) the 'shrine of the Red Axe.' The members of the Dhlodhlo family, that is in charge of the

shrine, are descendants of Mtuwane Dhlodhlo, a leading Ndebele military commander during the famous Ndebele uprisings of 1896, who was given 'the power to wage war—which is known in Matabeleland as the War of the Red Axe' (Ranger 1989). Since then, this shrine has been associated with war. In 1953, when Joshua Nkomo and Grey Bango (leading ZAPU politicians) visited the 'shrine of the Red Axe' or *Hloka Libomvu*, not only did *Mwali* sanction the liberation war and promise to protect Nkomo, but he actually committed Himself to the war (Ranger 1991b:11). According to Thenjiwe V. Lesabe, Ranger's main informant and a leading ZAPU politician, this is what the Voice of *Mwali* said to Nkomo:

You the son of Nyangola, great-son of Maweme, you will lead this nation. When you go into the river, I'll be with you. When you hide among the small shrubs, I'll be with you. Wherever you are I'll be with you until this war is over. Nobody will touch your body. I'll fight with you, let's go to war together (Ranger 1991b:9; 1985 & 1999:217).

As a result, Dula supported the liberation war. Owing to its association with the Ndebele past history, this shrine became closely associated with the Ndebele dominated ZAPU, and therefore 'remained a regular place of resort for ZAPU leaders.' Both ZAPU politicians and ZIPRA commanders visited this shrine to take 'instructions' and hear 'predictions' concerning the ongoing war. The ZIPRA forces derived their power from the *Mwali* cult centres (Ranger 1991b:12). The guerrillas visited the shrine for blessings and protection.

A number of questions present themselves to us: a) Which shrine did Nkomo visit—*Dula* or *Hloka Libomvu*? b) Are the injunctions of the divinity at *Hloka Libomvu* similar to those of the *Dula* divinity? c) Which divinity supported the Zimbabwean liberation war? d) By whom is the *Dula* shrine referred to as either *Hloka* or *Lembu Libomvu*?

Although the above depiction of the activities at the *Dula/Hloka Libomvu* shrine is very illuminating and exciting, it is essentially a continuation of Ranger's old argument about the involvement of the *Mwali*

cult in Zimbabwean politics (Ranger 1967)<sup>27</sup>. Most importantly, this current argument is built solely around Mrs Thenjiwe Lesabe's version of Nkomo's visit to *Dula*. This is despite Ranger's (1991) awareness of the glaring differences between Mrs Lesabe and Nkomo's accounts of the same visit. First, Nkomo unequivocally states that in 1953, he unintentionally visited the *Dula* shrine and not *Hloka Libomvu*. Secondly, that the Oracle pronounced that his country would attain independence after a protracted war. Lastly, Nkomo's account contains no promise of divine protection as Mrs Lesabe claims<sup>28</sup>.

Ranger also ignores Grey Bango's account of what the Voice of *Mwali* said to them during that visit<sup>29</sup>. Grey Bango reports that after *Mwali* had cried for a long time, He told them that a long war was coming. Like other past wars, this war was *Mwali*'s punishment for the past leaders' failure to heed His words about peace<sup>30</sup>. Both Bango and Nkomo's accounts of this historic visit to the shrine clearly demonstrate that *Mwali* is a peaceful God who only sends war upon his people as punishment. Much scholarly literature on the *Mwali* cult has stressed the cult's concern with fertility and affliction, with the peace and the well-being of the land and its people from many diverse ethnic groups. Prohibitions against the pollution of the earth by war and bloodshed have long been known to express paramount values attributed to *Mwali*<sup>31</sup>. *Mwali* is generally known to punish his people through natural disasters like drought, floods, epidemic diseases, and even through war (Ranger 1999:218). This conception of *Mwali* clearly

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<sup>27</sup> I.e., during a period of crisis *Mwali* cult priests *do* support a war policy despite *Mwali*'s primary concern with peace and the fertility of the land (Ranger 1967).

<sup>28</sup> For more detail, see Nkomo (1984).

<sup>29</sup> However, he corrects this oversight in his recent publication (1999) in which he seriously takes into account both Grey Bango and Nkomo's accounts of their legendary visit to the *Dula* shrine in 1953. Much more than before, Ranger acknowledges that Mrs Lesabe does more than merely narrate history, but also 'adds a number of claims which were probably developed as a response to later exigencies' (1999:217).

<sup>30</sup> See Ranger (1985; 1999:216 -218).

<sup>31</sup> See Werbner (1977b; 1989) and Ranger 1967:14 -21).

militates against the cult's involvement in the war of liberation. While the divinity at *Hloka Libomvu* (i.e. the one that lies at the centre of the *Mtuwane Dhlodhlo* war cult, with its own priest) is associated with war, the *Dula* divinity abhors war and bloodshed<sup>32</sup>. This is why all matters pertaining to war are referred to Leo Dhlodhlo<sup>33</sup>, while ordinary matters of fertility are referred to Ncube, the priest of *Mwali*.

The present innovations at this shrine not only indicate that a new *Dhlodhlo* cult is emerging either within or parallel the *Mwali* cult. They also indicate that the shrine is slowly being taken over by the *Sangoma* cult, originally associated with the Ndebele. What are the indications? In Sindebele, *lembu libomvu* means a red cloth<sup>34</sup>. While the mediums of the *sangoma* cult wear a 'red mantle or cloth,' a symbol of the blood of 'the violence of war,' *Mwali* cult adepts (*wosana*)<sup>35</sup> wear a black cloth, a symbol of the black clouds of rain that *Mwali* gives his people<sup>36</sup>. Supplicants to *Mwali* shrines are required to bring tobacco/snuff and a black cloth as tributary to the High God. Even ZIPRA guerrillas 'sent gifts of black cloths to Bembe shrine in exchange for protection' and not a red cloth (Ranger 1991b:14). *Dula*'s association with red is an indication of both its significant attachment to a different and possibly opposing cult—the *Sangoma* cult, and possibly its specialist function as Ranger (1991b:11) argues. This is suggested by the contrast in the use of the colours. This new colonizing cult could be the one associated with war. Mrs. Thenjiwe Lesabe portrays this shrine as having the power to wage and end war. No similar claim is made

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<sup>32</sup> After visiting the *Zhilo* shrine, Mwanza (1972:8) reports that 'Mwari is totally against bloodshed. He loves peace...'. See also Ranger (1999:218).

<sup>33</sup> To date, I have not interviewed Leo Dhlodhlo on his role at the *Dula/Hloka Libomvu* shrine and his relationship with the Maswabi priestly lineage at the shrine.

<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, Ranger (1989) initially referred to the *Dula* shrine as *Lembu Libomvu* (the shrine of red cloth) rather than *Hloka Libomvu* (the shrine of the red axe).

<sup>35</sup> The *wosana* is a *Mwali* cult adept. For more information on this cult official see Nthoi (1998).

<sup>36</sup> On the colour differentiation between these cults, see Werbner (1991:187-88).

for any other *Mwali* shrine in Zimbabwe. The *Dula* shrine is associated with two divinities. Ranger (1989:7) reports Thenjiwe Lesabe as having said:

Mtuwane was Nguni, the son of Ugogo; he was given the power of war by the shrine, by *Dula*, but when referring to the war you don't call it *Dula*. You call it *Lembu Libomvu*, the Red Axe. This was when they were fighting against the whites in 1890s... At *Dula* there are two powers there. One is for war and the kingdom of the Ndebele people. That is where mostly—I shouldn't discuss that. They are secrets of the nation.<sup>37</sup>

Either as *Lembu* or *Hloka Libomvu*, the *Dula* shrine has become associated with war. Operating 'in its role as the shrine of the Red Axe,' *Dula* gave support to Joshua Nkomo during the liberation war (Ranger 1999:217). Two divinities—one of peace and the fertility of the land and its people (*Mwali*), and the other associated with war and the kingdom of the Ndebele (the spirit of *Ugogo*, the originator of the Mtuwane Dhlodhlo war cult) share the same sacred space at *Dula*. This possibly answers the question of which divinity supported the Zimbabwean liberation war, and which divinity, whose abhorrence of bloodshed and war led to his narration of the history of the 'divinely ordained transition of regimes' to Joshua Nkomo and Grey Bango in their historic visit to the *Dula* shrine in 1953 (Ranger 1999:217).

Last, when Ranger (1989) first mentioned the military tradition of the *Dula* shrine, he referred to this shrine as *Lembu Libomvu* (Sindebele) ('[shrine of the] Red Cloth'). Subsequently, he (1991; 1992) referred to the shrine as *Hloka Libomvu* (Sindebele) ('[shrine of the] Red Axe'). For example, he speaks of 'Dula, the shrine of the Red Axe, to which Nkomo had famously gone in 1953...' (Ranger 1999:240). Ranger's conception of *Dula* as *Hloka Libomvu* is mainly based on the information from Thenjiwe Lesabe and Reader Ncube (Ranger 1989; 1999). Both are former ZAPU members and cultural brokers who seek both to legitimate the ZIPRA armed struggle and come to terms with ZAPU's poor performance during the 1980

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<sup>37</sup> For more information on the two divinities at the *Dula* shrine, see also Ranger (1999:27).

Zimbabwean general elections.

Although Ranger (1999) states that he has confirmed this conception of the Dula shrine with other groups of people, both Thenjiwe Lesabe and Reader Ncube are mainly responsible not only for promoting the image of Dula as a war shrine, but also for reference to this shrine as *Hloka Libomvu*. Neither the Maswabi Ncube family responsible for running the Dula shrine nor any other cult leaders and the general public in the Matobo District and Matobo Communal lands refer to Dula as the Red Axe. The coinage and usage of the term *Hloka Libomvu* is indeed part of the innovations that are currently taking place at this shrine. Two divinities and three different cults (*Mwali* cult, *sangoma* cult and the *Dhlohdhlo* war cult) co-exist at the Dula centre. The current innovations at Dula mark the beginning of the process of syncretism (fusion and combination of distinctive cultural elements) and colonization of the *Mwali* cult by Ndebele traditional religious cults. This colonization of the *Mwali* cult has had significant impact on the conceptualization of *Mwali*, the divinity originally associated with this shrine.

## 5. **Mwali and Politics of Violence: Cult Officials and Supplicant's Accounts**

Major *Mwali* cult centers attract different categories of pilgrims coming from diverse communities from all over the cult domain. The heterogeneity of pilgrims, all coming to these shrines with their own conceptions of sacredness and ritual practice makes these shrines a real arena for multiple and competing discourses. Therefore, any attempt to come with a single and universally acceptable conception of *Mwali* is indeed a daunting task. Below are accounts from different supplicants and cult officials on the involvement of the cult in the recent Zimbabwean liberation struggle.

### 5.1 **Sitwanyana Ncube**

Sitwanyana Ncube is one of the rival priests of the Njelele shrine<sup>38</sup>, the cult's paramount pilgrimage center. Born in 1925, Sitwanyana was nearly seventy

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<sup>38</sup> During course of fieldwork, the Njelele shrine had two rival priests: the officially recognized priest, David Ndlovu and the self-installed priest, Sitwanyana Ncube.



years old when I met him in 1993. He is the son of Machokoto, who was himself the son of Chobuta of the famous Mbikwa lineage. His real home is in the Mayenga village near Maphisa, within the Semokwe Communal lands, in Chief Fuyana's chiefdom.

The Mbikwa lineage has been associated with the Njelele shrine for a long time (Schoffeleers 1978). Sitwanyana's claimed relation to the Mbikwa lineage has been the basis of his claim to the leadership of the Njelele shrine. Sitwanyana is a very intelligent and charismatic old man, who mixes politics, his religious career and everyday life in a very interesting manner. Sitwanyana, a self-professed politician, is a staunch supporter of the predominantly Ndebele ZAPU, and remains a supporter and personal friend of its leader, Joshua Nkomo. After being forced to flee from Njelele in 1985, he lived for six years, at one of Nkomo's farm at Mguza, near Bulawayo. As a result of his political leanings, he has very little sympathy for the Zimbabwean government. He scarcely talks about the Mwali cult without mentioning Joshua Nkomo, albeit in ambivalent terms, glorifying Mambo and Lobengula (dead Rozwi and Ndebele kings respectively) and expressing hostility towards his rival David Ndlovu, President Robert Mugabe and his government.

Sitwanyana's history of association with the Mwali cult cannot be narrated without making any reference to Zimbabwean politics. He has personally been associated with the cult for slightly more than thirty years. His long association with the cult has been a mixture of fortunes: i.e. lots of controversy interspersed here and there with short periods of popularity and legitimacy. He was first installed as the priest of the Njelele shrine around 1964. Despite his insistence that he is the legitimate owner of the shrine, it does appear that his invitation by local chiefs was basically intended to ward off claims from less suitable candidates. In other words, when it became evident that the Shona wanted to take over the leadership of the shrine, it was decided that Sitwanyana, a descendent of the Mbikwa house, should be invited to take over the shrine.

In 1977, the late Chief Garret Nzula Masuku removed Sitwanyana from office after having wrongfully taken over the leadership of the Njelele shrine from his former wife, Ngcathu Mayezane Ncube. During his first absence, Sili Ndlovu was made a caretaker priest of Njelele. When Sili became sick, and therefore, unable to carry out his duties, local chiefs and

elders reinstated Sitwanyana as leader of the shrine. However, the guerrillas later forced him out of office when the Zimbabwean liberation war intensified. During his second exit from Njelele and after the death of Sili, Mayabo Bhayane Ndlovu (the elder brother) to Sili) was made the priest at Njelele. Mayabo Bhayane had earlier refused to assume cult leadership because of his Christianity.

After Bhayane's death, shortly after the end of the liberation war in 1981, Sitwanyana made his second come back to Njelele. There is a general belief that Joshua Nkomo sponsored Sitwanyana's second reinstatement. He remained in office until he was attacked and nearly killed by unknown assailants, generally believed to have been 'dissidents.' He left Njelele in early 1985, after abandoning his office, and lived for six years on Joshua Nkomo's farm at Mguza near Bulawayo. Immediately after Sitwanyana abandoned his office, David Ndlovu was appointed to take over the priesthood of the shrine. However, when Sitwanyana came back to Njelele in 1991, he installed himself as priest of the Njelele shrine.

According to Sitwanyana Ncube, it is impossible to speak of the Mwali cult without making any reference to politics. During the recent liberation struggle in Zimbabwe, ZIPRA forces visited many Mwali cult centers where they consulted Mwali about their military strategies. Mwali did not only commit himself to the liberation of black Zimbabweans, but actually aligned himself with the struggle waged by the ZIPRA forces. He personally organized and officiated at ritual ceremonies held to fortify ZIPRA guerrillas. He laments the fact that Joshua Nkomo ignored some vital instructions from Mwali, which could have led to his party's victory in the first Zimbabwean general elections of 1980. For him, Mwali is both a God of war and a God of peace. Although Mwali had earlier committed himself to the liberation struggle, his intervention during the course of the Zimbabwean Post War Internal Peace Talks led to peace and tranquility in the country.

## **5.2 Other Accounts**

Below, I present accounts collected from informants who were neither associated with national politics, nor with the Mwali cult leadership. Owing to the very nature of the Mwali cult—in that it is shrouded in so much secrecy—it is difficult to identify former guerrillas. Ex-combatants, furthermore, were reluctant to talk freely about their wartime experience.

Consequently, it was not easy to find the 'right' people with whom I could discuss the cult's role in the liberation war. The few people who were willing to talk about this topic were either outsiders to the cult leadership, or had not fought in the liberation war. Others like Siwani Ncube and Benjamin Sizungu Ndlovu were chosen by cult priests, and introduced to me as 'very knowledgeable' on the affairs of the Njelele shrine. Apart from their knowledge of the cult, they are either relatives or personal friends and acquaintances of the priests themselves. For this reason perhaps, their accounts are generally in line with their respective priests.

The ZAPU/ZANU division and opposition, which was very much pronounced in the early years of Zimbabwean independence, is still reflected in Mwali cult politics. The Hovi river, that separates the villages of Dewe (David's power base) and Halale (Sitwanyana's), roughly marks the divide for ZAPU/ZANU political affiliations, and for the politics of the Mwali cult within the current leadership dispute. Sitwanyana draws most of his support from Halale village and David from Dewe. It is hardly surprising that Sitwanyana features so prominently in Thenjiwe's accounts of the Mwali cult. A personal friend of Joshua Nkomo, Sitwanyana is a self-confessed and ardent supporter of the now defunct ZAPU; and is himself, like Thenjiwe something of a Ndebele cultural nationalist. Consequently, there is congruence in their ideas and perceptions of the role of the cult in the liberation war. It is an agreement between Sitwanyana's political mentors and him on the one hand, and his followers or supporters in Halale, and himself, on the other.

Siwani Ncube of Halale reports that during the liberation war, Sitwanyana came to be known generally as a priest of war. This was because he used to 'pray' for guerrillas at the shrine. When they arrived, he dressed them in black cloths in order to disguise them perfectly as ordinary supplicants who are normally dressed in black cloths. He buried their guns in his kraal. Often when the guerrillas were at Sitwanyana's place National Security forces came looking for them. When that happened, Sitwanyana denied having seen them. He hid them until he was sure that they were safe enough to leave under the cover of darkness.

Chief Malacki Nzula Masuku, who has authority over the territory around Njelele, holds a different view of the relationship between the Njelele shrine and guerrillas during the liberation war. Owing to its

conception as mainly a shrine for rain and peace, the Njelele shrine has never been associated with war. Even during the old Matabele war with the whites (Matabele Rebellion of 1896/7) the shrine was not involved and regiments did not visit it. However, during the recent liberation war, guerrillas went to the shrine mainly to see what was happening, rather than seek protection and guidance in the war. They often went there without permission or knowledge of the shrine keeper. Dissidents who harassed and chased away ordinary supplicants also visited the shrine. The Fifth Brigade also frequented the shrine to look for dissidents. However, the keeper never reported anything.

Guerrillas also visited the shrine mainly to see what was happening, rather than to seek protection and guidance in the war. They often went there without permission or knowledge of the shrine keeper. This is why during the liberation war, many cult priests used to complain of the desecration of the shrine by guerrillas. Therefore, the Njelele shrine was really not involved in the liberation war.

Let us contrast Siwani Ncube's account with the views held at David's centre in Dewe. or better still with someone who is known to be openly against Sitwanyana's stay at Njelele. A majority of the elderly people I interviewed at Dewe denied any knowledge of the cult's involvement either in politics generally or specifically in the liberation war. Benjamin Sizungu Ndlovu.(David Ndlovu's younger brother) acknowledged that only a few guerrillas visited Njelele. They were however, required to remove their boots, and leave their guns buried in the sand of a little stream almost a kilometre away from the Njelele hill, before they were led to the shrine, together with other ordinary pilgrims to the shrine. A soldier without his boots and gun is for all intents and purposes, no longer a soldier. The taking off of the guerrilla's boots and guns has a levelling effect associated with Turner's concepts of liminality, *communitas* and anti-structure, through which the guerrilla is transformed into *iii Thobela* (Sindebehe) (an ordinary supplicant). It is also on the Dewe side that I gathered information about the harassment of ordinary supplicants by guerrillas. Such behaviour is not expected from guerrillas who also frequented the Njelele shrine during the liberation war.

During the liberation war, Sitwanyana was beaten up and subsequently chased away from Njelele by guerrillas. He told me that he

suspected that these were bandits acting on behalf of David Ndlovu, who was known for his support for ZANU. David's response to this allegation was that Sitwanyana, rather than himself, should know better about these guerrillas, because Sitwanyana was known to have allowed guerrillas to live at his centre, to enter and desecrate the shrine.

Related to the ZAPI/ZANU divide is ZAPU's reaction to the popular appointment of David Ndlovu as priest of the Njelele shrine. According to Thenjiwe Lesabe, 'ZAPU officials' were opposed to the appointment, not only because David was not a descendant of the priestly family original associated with Njelele<sup>39</sup>, but also on political grounds. ZAPU officials were opposed to what they considered a 'political' appointment of a pro-ZANU man to the priesthood of the Mwali cult's major shrine. ZAPU then decided to flex all its muscles, and behind Sitwanyana, their disgraced candidate.

## 6. Conclusion

The major conclusion of this paper is that it is not possible to come up with a single image of Mwali the High God. The very nature of the cult itself is a major hindrance to reaching consensus on a number of issues within the vast cult domain. First, there is no unanimity on the name of this High God, who is known by different names among the many ethnic and cultural groups that fall within the Mwali cult domain. For example, among the Venda of Northern Transvaal the 'same' deity goes under the name *Raluvhimba*, while among the Ndebele of Southern Zimbabwe he is known as *Mlimo*<sup>40</sup>. This raises an important question of whether or not Mwali, Mlimo and

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<sup>39</sup> This decision was based on the findings of their consultation with elders in various places within the Khumalo chiefdom.

<sup>40</sup> The journey of the Ndebele of Mzilikazi from Zululand to present day Zimbabwe led to their encounter with the Sotho and Tswana people, who believed in a God known as *Modimo* (Setswana) and *Molimo* (Sotho). Away from home, the Ndebele adopted the Sotho-Tswana *Modimo/Molimo* as their God. *Mlimo* is thus a poor rendition of the Sotho word *Molimo*. In fact in Southwestern Zimbabwe, people talk of the *Mlimo* cult. See Bhebe (1978) for more information on how the Ndebele came to worship *Mlimo* in present day Zimbabwe.

Raluvhimba are one and the same. In particular, the process by which Mwali became *Mlimo* needs further research that will focus on an identification of the conceptual changes resulting from the process itself. Therefore, the current conception of the nature and function of the High God is in fact a product of interaction between people, having different cultures or origins. This is why Werbner (1977; 1989; 1991) makes much of the transcultural significance of the cult and its appeal in addressing *Mwali* to a vision of an inclusive macrocosm. Given the fact that the image of God is socially constructed, it is impossible to achieve unanimity on the conception of the nature of Mwali the High God.

Second, the construction of the image of God is an on-going process, which is done in different historical and socio-political conditions, by people with different experiences and existential circumstances. God has no intrinsic nature and image, other than that which people give Him. For example a semi-nomadic people is more likely to have a God who is not limited to a specific location. On the other hand, an agricultural society is more likely to have a fertility God. In the same way, an image of a militant God is unlikely to emerge among a people living in a peaceful and calm situation<sup>41</sup>.

While the literature on the Mwali cult produced prior to the 1896/7 rebellions makes little reference to Mwali as a God of war, the same cannot be said of the modern literature. During peaceful times, Mwali is generally perceived as a God of peace and the fertility of the land and its creatures. The Mwali military tradition is completely absent among Bakalanga of Southwestern Zimbabwe and Northeastern Botswana, because these people have never experienced a serious war situation. Among these people, Mwali continues to be encountered as a God who abhors bloodshed and conflict. However, Mwali emerges as a God of war mainly in the discourse on the cult from an Ndebele perspective. The Ndebele have had to deal with the pain of the demise of their monarchy at the hands of the white settler government in 1893; their oppression under the Smith regime that led to the recent armed struggle; the Ndebele-dominated ZAPU's defeat at the first Zimbabwean general elections of 1980, and the atrocities committed against

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<sup>41</sup> A peaceful God would have been irrelevant for the Israelites living in political bondage in Egypt.

them by the Fifth Brigade during the *Gukurahundi* (period of internal strife) in the post war period. These people needed a God that would enable them to come to terms with their existential circumstances, a God that would energize and legitimize their involvement in politics of violence.

Lastly, construction of the image of God takes place in a specific place and over a period of time. The environment under which reflections on the nature of God take place, influences the concept of God that ultimately emerges. Within the Mwali cult domain are people of different nationalities, ethnic and cultural affiliations. Reflections on the nature of Mwali take place in an environment of religious pluralism. Apart from the Mwali cult, there are several other traditional religious cults such as the *Mhondoro* cult among the Shona, the *Sangoma* cult found predominantly among the Ndebele (Janzen 1994), and the cult of shades among the Shona, Ndebele and Bakalanga. Adherents of these traditional cults mix freely at Mwali cult centers. The ritual activities that take place at most Mwali cult centers have become so syncretized that it is no longer possible to distinguish authentic Mwali cult practices from those that are not. A typical example of syncretism and hybridization of traditional religious ideas seems to be taking place at the *Dula/Hloka Libomvu* shrine, where two divinities and three different traditional cults now co-exist. The image of Mwali that emerges at *Dula/Hloka Libomvu* shrine reflects the extent of 'Ndebelization' (co-option of a shrine originally associated with the Mwali cult by the Ndebele Mtuwane Dhlodhlo war cult) that has taken place. It is an image of Mwali that Bakalanga supplicants of Northeastern Botswana would not relate with. The question of whether or not Mwali is a God of war or a God of peace largely remains unanswered. For some supplicants who have experienced war and strife, Mwali is a God of war. However, for some, particularly Bakalanga of Southwestern Zimbabwe and Northeastern Botswana, Mwali remains a God of peace. While the military tradition is strongest at Dula, where a new Ndebele war cult has infiltrated the Mwali cult, it is absent at the Tebgwi shrine in Ramokgwebane village in Northeastern Botswana. It is therefore safe to conclude that Mwali can be *both* a God of war and a God of peace.

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# **Strategies for Expressing Social Conflict within Communal African Societies in Southern Africa**

**N.S. Turner**

## **Introduction**

In the realm of collective existence, minor divergences serve to confirm and consolidate the underlying cohesion of the group, as a society obviously relies on a certain common consent. In researching oral strategies in certain sanctioned oral forms of communication among Southern African communities as a means of conflict articulation, one must view these social conflicts as contextualised events in their specific social setting. This entails taking into account not only the cultural setting, but also the social discourse, the context and a review of events leading up to and surrounding the conflict situation. In some instances this involves more than just the disputing party, it involves the entire social network in which the conflict is situated. This way of viewing conflict as events in the comprehensive continuum of social life, is common in Africa and in this study particularly amongst the African people in Southern Africa. This is because of the community-based style of living prevalent amongst Africans. Social life in communal societies is the area in which values and norms function, and is the environment in which cultural traditions are formed and handed down in a predominantly oral fashion, from one generation to another. In societies such as this, where the oral mode of transmission is favoured, inter-personal communication on a daily basis characterises social discourse and interaction. It is in this environment of constant human communication and

interaction that the energy comes which may not only fuel but also defuse conflict.

This is in stark contrast to many contemporary literate urban societies in which values, norms and cultural traditions may be communicated rather through the media or through books, in memos, letters, notices and emails. This mode of communication tends to alleviate and even prevent conversation and extended oral communication. Literate societies tend to focus on individualism and an individualistic style of life, whereas in societies which are 'orally-based' and communal in lifestyle, the important element functioning throughout all social life is the network of extended human relations. Family ties and community networking are constantly respected, maintained and strengthened. Whenever kinship or social relationships are disturbed by a dispute, priority is given to restoring the balance. Jannie Malan (1997:24) makes the point about African communities that

The social context can make an important difference if the purpose of the conflict resolution process is formulated in social, relational language. Relationships that have been broken or damaged should be repaired. Wrongs should be rectified and justice restored. The whole procedure of resolving the conflict will also be regarded to be what it actually is: an event in the continuum of social life.

### **Communal Society and the Oral Mode of Expression**

When researching the topic of conflict in society, what becomes glaringly apparent is the dearth of information based on African history and tradition. There is a large amount of information that is rooted in Occidental experience, however African modes of perception, imagination and thought are a relatively new field of research. Bozeman (1976:65) writes that Africa's cultural consciousness is an undisputed fact today, but the difficulty of comprehending it compared to other civilisations arises for several reasons. The first is that African society is traditionally a non scribally-literate world in which the unity of African culture projects the sum total of values, beliefs and institutions that have been shared by countless generations. This represents a 'socially complex mosaic' of heterogeneous elements in a huge continent, where present lines of political organisation

are fluid, and where neither anthropologists nor political scientists have as yet been able to agree upon generally applicable categories of classificatory schemes. Bozeman suggests that any inquiry into the role of conflict in African politics or society requires a shift of focus to the small folk community, the form of group life that Africans themselves have regarded as enduringly meaningful throughout the centuries. It is in these small communities in which neighbours and kinsmen are in close contact that interpersonal conflicts are likely to be cast in terms of witchcraft and sorcery to account for inexplicable events such as death, illness and misfortunes. It is here, in the context of relations between people who know one another well, that frictions, jealousies and hatreds are most pronounced.

In societies that favour the oral mode of expression over writing, an individual is perceived primarily as an extension or representation of the group to which he belongs, either as a member of a family, clan, lineage, village or other grouping. The Occidental idea of the autonomous person, endowed with individual rights and responsibilities is a very different conception from that of the 'communal' African person. This then explains the affirmative African approach to conflict as a socially and psychically vital function. There is a shared perception of conflict as a structuring or constitutive force in communal affairs, where well-regulated adversary confrontations provide fitting circumstances for the blunting of socially threatening tensions. In view of the fragility of social ties between members of an African community, actual or potential conflict situations have consistently challenged the traditional genius for maintaining the closely-knit community life. Each African speech community has its own code of customs for abating antagonisms, conciliating disputants and ultimately re-establishing communal accord. There is quite obviously not one single homogeneous African approach to conflict. Nevertheless, when these are surveyed in the perspective of shared cultural patterns, certain common features readily emerge and these are as different from Western (literate) approaches as the situations that provoked them. This is because African systems of conflict control emanate from established social practice and are therefore virtually synonymous with the entirety of social life. Furthermore they depend primarily upon the medium of the spoken word.

In the realm of collective existence, minor divergences serve to confirm and consolidate the underlying cohesion of the group, as a society

obviously relies on a certain common consent. According to Coser (1956:75), communal conflict that is based on a common acceptance of basic ends, is a positive force. People in the community settle their differences on the basis of unity. Durkheim's prior research, *The Division of Labour in Society* (1934:129), echoes this sentiment when he makes the point that just as the individual depends upon society because he depends upon the parts of which it is composed, so groups, due to their interdependence, help to maintain the social system in which they function. Thus social conflict may have a positive and integrative function to play in maintaining the balance in society. In the words of Coser (1956:80):

Conflict may serve to remove dissociating elements in a relationship and to re-establish unity. Insofar as conflict is the resolution of tension between antagonists it has stabilizing functions and becomes an integrating component of the relationship. However, not all conflicts are positively functional, only those which concern goals, values or interests that do not contradict the basic assumptions upon which the social relations are founded.

Coser maintains that the absence of conflict cannot be taken necessarily as an index of stability and strength in close social relationships. These may more likely be characterised by frequent conflicts where the members feel that provided the conflicts do not threaten basic community consensus, they are free to express hostile and ambivalent feelings in specific social ways.

There exist three possible kinds of relevant expressions of feelings of hostility in behaviour. The first is direct expression of hostility against the person or group which is the actual source of frustration. The second is displacement of such hostile behaviour onto substitute objects, and the third is tension-release activity which provides satisfaction in itself without need for object or object substitution. Hostility and feelings of dissatisfaction about an individual or even a group's behaviour, is not only expressed directly, but is often expressed indirectly.

Witchcraft is a practice where hostile feelings are allowed socially sanctioned expression against the adversary. In accusing particular members of the community of practising witchcraft, the accuser often singles out the perpetrator as a means for the release of hostility which could not be

expressed safely against that person in any other sanctioned way. Reference to witchcraft in various forms of Zulu oral expression is common. Clyde Kluckhohn, who has made a study of witchcraft amongst the Navajo Indians, (in Coser 1956:43) makes the point that:

Witchcraft beliefs and practices allow the expression of direct and displaced antagonism ... and channels the displacement of aggression, facilitating emotional adjustment with a minimum of disturbance of social relationships.

Wit is another vehicle of indirect expression commonly used. Freud comments that wit permits one to make one's adversary ridiculous in a way which direct speech could not because of social hindrances. Wit may not necessarily bring about a change in the relations between one person and another, particularly if the intended target of the witticism is unaware of the source and intention of the witticism. It may, however, afford an outlet of expression to the person voicing the source of the conflict, without necessarily changing the terms of the relationship. The expression in these terms, then, merely functions as a form of tension release. This practice, which is common amongst the Nguni people in southern Africa, is commonly employed in *izihasho* (oral compositions equivalent to an oral ID document recounting one's life history and anecdotal incidents), song form, oral games as well as in naming and nicknaming practices. The humour provides the composer/reciter with a platform to pass messages which would in normal discourse be regarded as unacceptable. Mulkay (in Dowling 1996:136) refers to this function of humour as one which operates as a defence against risk and danger, claiming that,

the humorous mode can provide a protective shield against some of the dangers lurking in the realm of serious discourse.

Oral forms of combative speech in the form of insult, ridicule and witty and derisive commentary are recognised in African societies and many other parts of the world, and particularly in Southern Africa amongst the Nguni, as effective forms of social sanction. In a non-literate culture in which the word is the equivalent of the act, talking invites artistry and verbal virtuosity in the

form of repetition, and circumlocution is meant to extend rather than to contract the discourse and therewith also, the pleasure of actual and vicarious participation amongst those present. Lambert (2000:44) compares classical and African cultures in the light of 'shame' cultures in contrast to the 'guilt' cultures of the modern West. The essential difference between the two different types of cultures is that shame cultures rely on external sanctions for good behaviour, whereas guilt cultures rely on an internalised conviction of sin. He goes on to say that shame is a reaction to other people's criticism, and a man/woman is shamed either by being openly ridiculed and rejected or by fantasizing to himself that he has been made ridiculous. Thus shame cultures are highly receptive to the disapproval of others. As Taylor (1985:54) points out,

the distinguishing mark of a shame culture, and that which makes it different from a so-called guilt-culture, is that here public esteem is the greatest good, and to be ill spoken of the greatest evil.

### **The Process of Socialisation and Control**

Social conformity and order in any society obviously depends upon some understanding existing between the individuals that make up that society or community. This understanding pertains to how the activities of everyday life should be arranged and also as to what the acceptable and unacceptable forms of conduct are in a given context. How much of this behaviour is predictable and expected, and how much falls out of the understood norms, depends largely on the size and the closeness of the community or society concerned. Whatever the values and norms of a society are, they are passed on to its members from generation to generation as they mature. This maturation process, which takes place in all societal groups, is a matter of learning how to adjust one's behaviour and expectations in relation to other members of one's group. To a certain degree, this involves observing the patterns of behaviour of those around you, what is done and not done, what evokes pleasure or displeasure. In part, it involves expressly being taught what is 'right' and what is 'wrong' in terms of values for that particular community.



This process of socialisation does not cease at maturation but continues through every stage of life. In identifying various ways in which this continual process is sustained, anthropologists have repeatedly emphasised the importance of ritual and ceremonial procedures, the rites of passage such as initiation, birth, marriage and death rituals, as reinforcing and reaffirming established values. The elaborate and ceremonial feasting which attends and identifies such events may be seen to be smoothing the path through these difficult transitions as well as cementing together the unity of the group, thereby perpetuating a necessary sense of continuity. By and large, compliance with the accepted values of a society or community are unconscious and without question. However, sometimes immediate personal advantages conflict with socially approved rules, or maybe even with the perceived interests of some other person. The immediate advantage sometimes outweighs what other people think, or their disapproval, particularly those whom the person is in close contact with and may have to rely on in the future. The disapproval may vary from mere ridicule, loss of prestige, or mockery, to physical retaliation, appeal to third parties for intervention, resort to sorcery, the withdrawal of valued co-operation, or even total ostracism

### **The Nature and Form of Dispute**

In terms of the nature of dispute, dissatisfaction and criticism depend largely upon the beliefs that are held and the values subscribed to in a particular social setting. Conflict, however, remains an endemic feature of social life. We define ourselves in relation to the 'other', therefore we must constantly affirm what those differences are in an ongoing series of conflictual interactions, which amongst the southern African Nguni take the form of proverbs, riddles, *izibongo*, *izihasho*, songs, oral witticisms and games etc. This is reflected in many other societies all over the world as evidenced in information documented by Jousse (1990:79) on the *hain teny merinas* in Madagascar, as well as in numerous articles on verbal duelling such as that amongst the Swahili and Tsongas.

The sociological meaning of such conflict, therefore, is exposed in an approach that analyses it in the context of extended social processes. The dispute or source of conflict needs thorough examination in terms of its

social context in totality, its origin, and efforts to resolve it and the history of the involved parties and their particular relationships, all held in memory. Essentially, conflict or dispute in society occurs when norms of behaviour are transgressed or interpreted in a manner which renders the behaviour unacceptable to a person or persons in a particular community. The meaning attached to the term 'norms' is that they are an accepted rule or form of behaviour, which is regarded as widely practised and relevant to the regulation of social conduct.

The origins of norms of social behaviour are extremely diverse, some evolving from long established observed patterns of behaviour, some from decisions of prominent members of the society in handling disputes. What is clear is the fact that changes and additions to the normative repertoire may take place simply due to transformations in social patterns, as these become expressed in the context of a dispute. Roberts (1981:4) in his study on the Tswana people makes a point about the dispute process. He says that:

The dispute process, then, represents the main forum in which Tswana converse daily among themselves about the organization of their society, the nature and content of their normative repertoire, and the attributes of their culture.

Roberts uses the term 'Processual paradigm' to explain a theory that is traceable to Malinowski's work in 1926, *Crime and Custom in Savage Society*, which sought to explain how order was maintained in a society which lacked courts and the executive members of courts like policemen. The term 'processual paradigm' explains the parallel shift of emphasis in political anthropology from structure and institutions to processes and interaction. Perhaps the most significant of the insights gained from Malinowski's work, according to Roberts (1981:12) is

that behaviour is constrained primarily by the intrinsic properties of social relations - obligations, expectations, and reciprocities - and by the exigencies of interaction. It is therefore in social processes, not institutions, that the analysis of order is ultimately to be grounded.

Roberts (1981:14) goes on to say:

If the form and content of dispute-settlement processes are to be explained, attention must be given to the disputants' ostensible motives in pursuing a quarrel, how they recruit support, their strategic efforts to influence the procedural course of events, and so on.

In the light of the processual paradigm then, the dispute-settlement process must be situated within the logic of a socio-cultural order where value and meaning are negotiated and this negotiation depends on a shared ideology.

## **Conclusion**

Conflict amongst communal African people in Southern Africa is treated as an essential part of social life and this conflict can only be understood within a context of extended social processes dependent largely upon the beliefs that are held and the values subscribed to within a given community.

Coser (1956) supports this view in his analysis of the functions of social conflict. He quotes the central thesis of the work of Simmel revolving around conflict being a form of socialisation. He maintains that conflict is an essential element in group formation and the persistence of group life. Conflict is thus seen as performing group-maintaining functions insofar as it regulates systems of relationships, i.e. it 'clears the air' and helps to create a situation where hostile feelings are allowed free behavioural expression. Simmel's view constitutes what Coser terms a 'safety-valve theory', where the conflict serves as an outlet for the release of hostilities which, if no other outlet were provided, would adversely affect the relationship between the antagonists. Coser notes that conflict is not, therefore, always dysfunctional. Without channels for venting hostility and expressing dissent, members of a social group might feel completely crushed and may react by withdrawal.

The practice of using specific oral strategies in conflict expression is not unique in southern Africa, but is common in much of the rest of Africa and elsewhere as has been extensively documented by Okpewho and Finnegan among others.

Finnegan (1970:470) summarises the concept of 'naming' in Africa when she states that:

Names often play an indispensable part in oral literature in Africa ... they have ... many different interpretations ... from the psychological functions of names in providing assurance or 'working out' tension, to their connection with the structure of society, their social function in minimizing friction, or their usefulness either in expressing the self-image of their owner or in providing a means of indirect comment when a direct one is not feasible.

By allowing the expression of pent-up feelings of hostility, frustration and dissatisfaction, the articulation of conflict serves to maintain inter-individual and group relationships. Those who compose and express the various forms of oral texts, do so by employing familiar techniques which are commonly recognized in the oral genres throughout southern Africa.

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# The Secular Basis of Traditional Leadership in KwaZulu-Natal<sup>1</sup>

Mpilo Pearl Sithole

## Introduction

The process of economic and political transformation from colonial phase to post colonial phase is infested with social misfit between two or more systems. The dynamics of urban-rural political imbalances and the present condition whereby traditional leadership is a structural appendix in modern politics are examples of this misfit. Such situations result from the capitalist upper-hand in the economic situation and the structural displacement of indigenous institutions by institutions imposed or formed during colonial and liberation struggles. Traditional leadership in South Africa exists in a

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<sup>1</sup> The research for this paper was afforded by funds from the Traditional Authorities Applied Research Network (TAARN) that was co-ordinated by Professor Don Ray of the University of Calgary in Canada and Professor Tim Quinlan of the University of Natal in South Africa. Gratitude is greatly owed to Shahid Vawda of the University of Durban-Westville in South Africa who has been co-ordinator of this research in Durban, to Sibongiseni Mkhize of kwa-Muhle Museum in Durban who conducted the bulk of the interviews and to *amakhosi* of eThekweni municipality for participating in this research. This paper was presented at the Anthropology Southern Africa (ASA) Conference, University of Cape Town – 24 August to 27 August 2003.

spurious political ontology in which the constitution merely recognises its existence, while policy and administrative practice repeals its indispensability in administration and political responsibility in many ways (see Ntsebenza 2001).

This article argues that traditional leadership as a form of government is undergoing a precarious stage in KwaZulu-Natal, a stage that is neither a fault of state nor that of traditional leaders, but in which both systems are seeking to prevail. The basic principles upon which traditional leadership and the state are founded contradict one another so much so that there is risk of an insinuation that if the former prevails, the principles of the latter are in jeopardy. But history (of colonial conquest, indigenous customs, liberation struggle, formulation of bigger territorial boundaries) supports both institutions, whilst present circumstances (demographic mix and numbers, globalisation, industrial economy) are more in favour of the principles of a democratic state. This paper makes an argument that because of the intrinsic relationship between current diplomatic and economic system, on the one hand, and state-based democracy, on the other hand, the present form of elected government at various levels will prevail as a main political system in KwaZulu-Natal. However because of history and the surviving social functions of the system of traditional leadership this institution is likely to pose a serious challenge to the conscience of democratic government for many years to come<sup>2</sup>.

Unless the state deals convincingly with propounding its legitimacy as a power and authority over land (and people) that was historically taken from traditional leaders, the liminal transition from pre-colonial indigenous system to post-colonial democratic polities will remain infested with grudges of colonialism. Currently the alternative is happening: the institution of traditional leadership is in many ways asked to adapt and prove its worth in

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<sup>2</sup> By the time liberation came it was not only land and power whose controversies had to be resolved, it was also that *the whole polities had changed*. However, the time and issues of transformation had already displaced the significance of starting from a clear recognition and legitimate internalization of this before all the necessary endorsements were made for democracy. It is the conscience about this fact that is referred to here.

the current situation. If incumbents of this institution were to embark on a co-ordinated effort in fulfilling this challenge especially in formulating ideological basis for continued existence of traditional leadership, such initiative would perhaps ensure some longevity for traditional leadership. However the modern day predominance of governance protocols suggests that the continued existence of traditional leadership also depends on it being able to communicate in terms that suit the government protocols and procedures. This might be the recognition behind Patekile Holomisa's observation that:

One of the ironies of post-colonial Africa is the ease with which its new rulers find comfort within the governance systems of their former oppressors, while they all invariably seem not to know what to do with the indigenous systems that have somehow managed to survive the colonial onslaught. There is usually no debate about whether or not the inherited white man's courts, his Parliament, his executive arm of government or his economic systems should be retained or discarded. The debate is about which Africans must occupy the newly vacated seats of power – political, economic, social and even cultural (*Mail and Guardian* 11-17/02/2000: 29).

## **A Socio-historical Background**

This paper critically analyses the dynamics of extending democratic local development intervention in South Africa at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and locates the controversies of this process in the historical clashes between the ideals of addressing historical dispossession while at the same time adopting democracy in governance of the rural part of KwaZulu-Natal. Towards this end, an appraisal of the historical roots of traditional leadership is engaged into, followed by a discussion of concerns that were raised by traditional leaders around the redemarcation of local government boundaries in 1999 to 2000. The redemarcation of local government boundaries was a process that the government engaged in order to establish well-planned local government structures and achieve a facilitation of development in a way that balances human and economic capital with local development demand and size of 'clientele'. The paper does not impose a separation between



'traditional leadership' and 'democracy'; it merely portrays a historical legacy in which authority is a matter of ascription in one case and a matter of referendum in the other. The paper argues that the situation contains a confrontation between an out-phased moralistic socialistic approach in which ideological factors of seniority, age and gender are important; and the rationalizing Western democratic approach in which individual human rights and equality are enshrined. Depending on whether they are put on a political administrative scale or a human factor fulfilment scale both these approaches to governance could be placed differently with regard to their relevance to the twenty-first century rural population of KwaZulu-Natal.

### *Traditional Leadership in Historical Perspective*

Historically traditional leadership in Southern Africa was an institution based on kinship. It assumed a relationship of kin relatedness (blood, fictive or distant) between the leader and the people under his authority (Sithole 2000). The significance of kinship in traditional leadership can be discerned when looking at the group fissions that took place during Mfecane wars in the early part of the 19th century (Bryant 1929; Wright & Mason 1983; Argyle 1978). This period is characterised by a pattern in which some groups broke away from others – in the form of a new leader and his followers, who was often a brother or son of the ruler of the main group. A leader's relatives formed an important constituency of his people and his royal constituency. Leaders were also reputed to expand their following or 'tribes' through large polygamous households, which linked the leader to other social polities or households within their own 'tribes' through affines (Kuper 1993). There was always scope for further links through their children. Ukukhonza (begging for patronage)<sup>3</sup> was also common during this period. It was not only done by smaller nuclear and extended household units, but also by clans and small 'tribes' with their own rulers. The Mfecane period was also characterised by conquest of some 'tribes' by others. However history seems to suggest that even at the hands of conquerors, 'tribes' or political groups of this time did not lose their identity or their rulers. They were simply subjected under the authority of the conquering 'tribe'. The use of such

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<sup>3</sup> *Ukukhonza* was a practice whereby a household led by its head would approach another *inkosi* to seek patronage as part of his people.

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terms as 'clans' and 'tribes' has been rightly criticized; but for this period, due to lack of better words for polities, it seems to capture a description of polities that mixed political authority with relatedness or kinship.

It seems that traditional leadership was first and foremost based on the relationship between a leader and his people. This as I argue elsewhere (Sithole 2000) is supported by the system of kinship particularly amongst the Nguni people. Identity among the people of Nguni origin was (and still is) traced through men who were seen as the heads of their households. Identity is carried from father to son and inheritance goes down through primogeniture. At the death of his father, the eldest son adopts not just his father's inheritance, but also his responsibilities and obligations to his subjects. Identity is now ascribed through the father's surnames which were not initially fixed at household level. It was not ethnicised or 'tribalised' at polity level. 'Tribes' such as Zulu, Zwide, Mchunu, Mntungwa and others derived their names from the names of their rulers, and during fissions, respective followers adopted names of their new founders (Bryant 1929). It was only later that reference to people of several groupings and their language was made to be Zulu and this was a characteristic of both the Mfecane developments and colonial categorisations.

No particular period can be taken as the basis of standardisation of elements that define traditional leadership through time and space. However, I would like to highlight here that history suggests that traditional leadership was *first about the relationship of the leader to his people and then about boundaries*<sup>4</sup>. This is not meant in terms of one stage after another so much as it is meant as an indication of the fundamental source of 'traditionalism' in traditional leadership. The 19th century was characterised by much instability in terms of boundaries and although land was crucial to people's livelihoods its use and tenure was certainly different for indigenous polities from what it transpired to be during the colonial period and the present. The Nguni had had a political system in which suitable locality of polities was a matter of both the productive geographic space and acceptable or tolerable social relations surrounding the polity. A regional range of polity existence had been the extent of definition of land entitlements. However, all this is

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<sup>4</sup> From early writings such as including those of historian explorers to more recent historical writings, one discerns this.

highly controversial given views such as that of Holomisa's, which is discussed below. The fixation of boundaries for specific groups came with colonial interaction and it was something that happened with a high degree of colonial exploitation (Laband & Thompson 1989). Gradually both boundaries and identity were becoming fixated during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This also marked the beginning of the end of the Nguni socialistic approach to politics, in which materials (land, in particular) were a welfare consideration in social continuity. It was the beginning of a 'factorising' (individuating, 'unitising') Western approach to governance albeit fraught with intense exploitation and brutality for another century. Since this was an important period of change for indigenous politics as well, it is difficult to plot what would have transpired of the local transformation that was arrested by colonialism.

### *The Demarcation Debate in the Light of History*

Traditional leadership has survived a trying period of colonial abuse in which it was used as part of the system of indirect rule devised by the colonial powers. The boundaries of Zululand and Natal were colonially constituted and colonial powers of different origin kept shifting the boundaries according to the shifting of their own stakes in the conquest of the land from indigenous people (see the collection in Duminy and Guest 1989). 'Chiefs' were used as the hands of the government in the exploitation of people. Hence today in KwaZulu-Natal they do not like the use of the term 'chief/s', preferring the Zulu term *inkosi* (plural: *amakhosi*) instead. The socio-political and economic processes that took place earlier in the twentieth century enforced the association of 'traditional' and government-appointed 'chiefs' with boundaries. Therefore while the processes of *Apartheid*-engineered relocation and labour migrancy allowed for an affinal distance between the ruler and the people, the association of governance with the boundaries grew.

Moreover as colonial government officials imposed themselves as the superior authorities over traditional leaders and their subjects (see the Natal Code of Native Law 1943), traditional leaders lost control of the military, economic, ceremonial and political affairs of their people. This fact is a source of bitterness for some traditional leaders who still see themselves as the true governors in their communities and who argue that politicians are

servants of the communities only mandated to perform specific tasks, and thus it is them who are inferior in political positioning. The basis of this assertion is not usually elucidated but an almost sacred element of traditional leadership is discerned in it to which is added an association of property (most importantly land) to the communality of the unique polities that chiefdoms are. This is embedded in the following argument by Holomisa regarding the debatable interaction of local government, traditional leadership and the people:

An erroneous point of departure [on the part of government] is the notion that if government resources and services are taken away from traditional leaders and are placed at the disposal of politicians then the people will abandon the former in favour of the latter. Besides anything else it is immoral for people to be made to choose between traditional leaders and service delivery – they deserve and are entitled to both.

Local government, like any other level of government, does not own land. In the urban areas land is owned either by the banks, through mortgage bonds, or by holders of the title deeds who have managed to pay off their bonds. In the rural areas tribal or communal land is owned by the tribe as a collective. Despite the fact that under apartheid laws, the state is the legal owner of tribal land, factually and morally the tribes own the land and, unless one is spoiling for a fight, no one can deal with it as he pleases.

Under *African tribal law* the custody of the land is entrusted in the traditional authority, that is, *the head of the tribe* and his counsellors. As trustee of the land the traditional authority is required to act at all times in the interests and according to the wishes of the owners of the land, the people (my italics, *Mail and Guardian* 11-17/02/2000: 29)

This position may be clashing with my earlier contention based on my reading of history that kinship affinity, rather than fixed land, is the main basis for traditional authority/leadership, especially at the level of an *inkosi*. The clash is not necessarily evident though. Other than his reference to some ‘African tribal law’, it is not clear what Holomisa takes to be the primary

basis of traditional authority. His reference to 'the head of the tribe' is not accompanied by some concrete indispensability between the incumbent and the position. Hence he may only be assuming the obvious nature of kinship affinity between the people and the leader, which unfortunately is no longer very apparent in modern life. This traditional affinity has been gradually extinguished by the very fixation of boundaries on which people move and integrate regardless of their relationship to the leader. Traditionalism, however defined as coupled with the right to leadership, is thus seriously called into question. On the other hand there is a question as to whether a distinction between land ownership and governance must be maintained (Ntsebenza 2001:320), in which case the owners of the land may choose the type of governance they want. The legal status of what Holomisa refers to as 'the owners of the land, the people' needs some scrutiny via a policy and legislation analysis and an examination of the role of Ingonyama Trust Board and *iSilo* (the King) in KwaZulu-Natal.

Holomisa speaks of the ownership of land by the people as if there was a definite legalising moment in history for this ownership. Yet it seems to me that while the historical legalities of state ownership of land could be seriously questioned, so could this be the case with Traditional Authorities' hold on land. The issue of the historical era of concretization of legitimacy over land (by both the state and traditional leadership) is a serious one. It is not only issues around what piece of land rightly belong to whom, but it is also issues around the type of ownership (e.g. the communal land ownership) that need elucidation. The issue of conflation of communal land with state land in various historical epochs (Ntsebenza 2001: 320) is also one that needs clarity. Questions were also raised about the scattered nature of some traditional boundaries in relation to the demarcation debate that was raging in 2000:

The scattered traditional land of Qadi consisting of six separate pieces of land, and of Embo/Nkasa and Isimahla in KwaZulu-Natal are at the heart of the dispute over the demarcation process – a genuine demarcation issue that the affected traditional authorities are taking up with the Municipal Demarcations Boards.

However the scattered traditional land is the direct product of the drawing of provincial boundaries following the Union of

South Africa and the process of land dispossession ushered by the Land Act of 1913 (*Mail and Guardian* 28/01 – 03/02/2000).

This coupled with the fact that generally through recent history 'the various service workers [were] generally being accountable only to their regional directors within Kwazulu departments' (McIntosh 1990) complicates the issue of boundaries, service delivery and political authority even further.

*Amakhosi* and other sympathetic politicians have complained through the media about the manner in which the state has patronized traditional leadership through legislation and policy and through the inappropriate and unfriendly means of communication and consultation adopted by the Municipal Demarcations Board before the 2000 local election. The chairperson of the board Dr. Mike Sutcliffe was accused of taking a 'white' approach in the way he has done things. He defended himself by alerting people to the mix of people in the board itself, the board which, he reminded people, was not about him (*Daily News* 07/02/2000: 3). However *amakhosi* and sympathizers continued to complain about not being consulted in a traditionally appropriate manner that could on some occasions possibly involve 'official' gestures such as slaughtering an animal. 'Sutcliffe's consultation could have only included calling for submissions and setting up a cut-off date, and the *amakhosi* would not consider that a consultation' (*Daily News* 07/02/2000: 3).

All these concerns were raised in the context of one pervading fear that the project of the demarcation of boundaries was all about trying to alienate traditional leadership and make it redundant as a political institution. Given the history of mutual tensions between the state and traditional leadership (colonially and post-colonially), the manner in which service delivery has been conducted not necessarily to include traditional leadership, and the manner in which the traditional leaders have relinquished control of the economic affairs in the communities, it is not surprising that they would feel suspicious of any ordering process that is led by the government. For most duties/services (judicial, economic, even ritual) that fall within the ambit of the traditional authority there are alternative ways to them. This is not to say that people themselves do not opt to use services of their traditional leaders or feel it necessary to honour their patronage. On the

part of the government, it is not clear as to the extent to which allegations of attempts to sideline traditional leadership could be substantiated. The argument of the government and of the Municipal Demarcations Board before the 2000 local government election was that 'Demarcation is about the determination of the jurisdiction of municipalities, not about redrawing of political borders over traditional land' (*Mail and Guardian* 28/01 – 03/02/2000).

While most *amakhosi* recognize the confusion caused by the colonial process regarding boundaries and political authority, not all of them necessarily adopt a negative attitude towards the current initiatives of government. One of the *amakhosi*, for example, recognizes that:

...we inherited a situation where boundaries were drawn arbitrarily by the Whites during the Union government and not by the democratically elected government. They started making laws and removing people from one place to another and dividing them. The government continued even during the 1950s with its Group Areas Act making new boundaries so that they can be able to control us. So that's why [me and my people], after careful analysis and discussion about the local government after 1994, decided that there is no problem now in being part of democratic structures because we are the ones who voted for this government. We had to offer support because the land was being planned afresh because previously it's our enemies who had caused the problems in the rural areas. Apart from the issue of enemies we also felt that we should be part of the democratic structures so that we are clear how things are done and where we are going (*Inkosi A* interview: August 2000).

This *inkosi* believes that during the negotiations towards democracy in South Africa a strong commitment to Western democratic type of government was embraced; and he also believes that a mix of this type of governance with African democracy is feasible. His way of dealing with the unjust history, which he recognizes as much as his other colleagues do, is accepting the current state-based system of governance in the context of democratic politics, and dealing with the changed global context. Hence he continues to argue that:

We need to be part of the global community so that we are not left behind. The boundaries of the past [undemocratic governments] destroyed our way of life and the philosophies which we held dearly. Some people only concentrate on the negative influence of the Western culture on our culture, but we should not forget that culture is dynamic and will always be affected by changes. Things have to change for life to go on. The world is changing, when we were born it was not like this and when we die, it will be a different world altogether. So change is inevitable.

The above reflects different attitudes towards change in governance by *amakhosi* who all hold some subjective views around governance, depending partly on their own social and educational backgrounds<sup>5</sup>. There are also practical issues on which divergent views are expressed by *amakhosi*. These are issues such as *amakhosi*'s representation on municipalities, their voting rights in the municipal councils, clarification of their duties, payment of rates or payment for services in rural areas, and the *amakhosi*'s own remuneration. However, it seems that these issues could perhaps be tackled efficiently if *amakhosi* were to forge a united voice, or at least be able to take working decisions, about their attitude towards government so that they could start dealing with practical issues in their own forums. *Amakhosi* do have such structures at the House of Traditional Leaders, which are currently underused for these purposes.

## **Positions, Discrepancies and Continuities in the Democratic Era in KwaZulu-Natal**

Since the early 1990s the government in South Africa has worked hard to rectify injustices of the past on paper and to institute structures to implement redress and equity. Equality is defined in terms of the Bill of Rights, which assumes individuality to be the main basis upon which equality should be assessed. It is questionable whether the customs and traditions that chiefs are supposedly guarding are amenable with this assumption. However

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<sup>5</sup> For example, factors such as age, whether or not they are regents or 'traditional' *amakhosi*, how well educated they are, and whether they have alternative means of survival also could influence their views.



democracy for which a long fight has been won continues to be implemented with this assumption as its pillars. The equality of both spouses that is now propounded by the reformulated Customary Marriages Act, 120 of 1998 which came into effect in November 2000, is an example of the equality of individuals that may or may not clash with 'custom'<sup>6</sup>. It will be interesting, for instance, to follow as to how such Acts affect the giving out of sites for residence and farming to households by *amakhosi* and how the inheritance rights of widows are affected. Clearly, the issues of policy and legislation as they impact upon customary rights and practices are a major dimension of the issues around the practice of traditional governance.

During our research, *amakhosi* themselves spoke about discrepancies with regard to democratic law and customary social control. One of our respondents (an *inkosi*) lamented the manner in which it is hard to discipline people because 'If you comment on some things which are not traditional you are told people are now free' (*Inkosi B* interview: August 2000). He then talks about how the traditional customs governing sex and love are no longer respected. He and one of his headmen then talked about how the government causes disputes even within families because of instituting equality in human rights. They argued that women and men would never be equal as even the Bible proclaims so.

Another *inkosi* (C: August 2000) spoke about how virginity testing, for example, is seen as a traditional way of social control that may be very important in dealing with the problem of HIV/AIDS. However, the constitution creates a situation whereby touching another person's private parts is an infringement on privacy. In the mood of criticizing the incorporation of traditional authority jurisdictions within the eThekweni Municipality, he continues to talk about burial customs, weddings and hunting activities that may be constrained by the municipal authorities in terms of how they are conducted.

The demarcation was definitely not welcomed by all alike. Some traditional leaders regarded the process as an imposition over them and

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<sup>6</sup> *Inkosi Mpiyezintombi Mzimela* has complained publicly about how this Act impedes a man's right to decide on a polygamous household unit by requiring that a man consults his wife before marrying a second wife (*Asikhulume*, SABC1 television: 18 May 2003).

resented the demarcation of boundaries for service delivery purposes over their own. They complained that they were not properly consulted about the process. They also complained that it would cause problems of competition and conflict as some ward boundaries cut across chiefdom boundaries splitting chiefdoms into two. In some cases this situation is complicated by the fact that some 'chiefs' have unresolved issues about land that was taken from them during the Apartheid era. There are dissatisfactions about the possibility or reality of some ward<sup>7</sup> (elected) counsellors bringing more development to the side of the chiefdoms of their residence than to the other chiefdoms included in their ward boundaries.

In addition to the problems of confusion about boundaries and where people should expect to receive services, it seems that there is a problem of lack of proper rationalization of counsellors' protocols. When asked to comment on the relationship between elected counsellors and traditional authorities, one of the *amakhosi* responds this way:

Sometimes the elected counsellors do follow the *inkosi*'s instructions and respect traditional structures. They should consult with the *inkosi* or traditional authority structures. Some counsellors, however, ignore the [traditional] protocol and cause confusion. It appears as though they did not read the Code of Conduct and Constitution. Some counsellors compete with *izinduna* (headmen) and start giving out sites or open *inkosi*'s court and start adjudicating over disputes, instead of concentrating on issues of development. Some counsellors do not know their powers and functions and they do things which create enmity. They are supposed to work with development committees and *amakhosi*, but some counsellors dream of projects and just work on them without consulting the chief (*Inkosi* B: August 2000)

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<sup>7</sup> Municipal wards that indicate jurisdiction of counsellors whose role it is to facilitate development are different from wards within chiefdoms (*izigodi*) over which headmen preside as an extension of traditional leadership from the main head, *inkosi*.

Some of the problems experienced relate to lack of clarity about protocol and policy regarding the relationship between counsellors and traditional authorities. This is one of the few things that the government of South Africa is taking its time to sort out in clear terms on paper, that is, in terms of policy and legislation. This slow pace on the part of government is somewhat understandable given that the whole issue around these relationships reflects divergent values around the acquisition of public positions which, if one subscribes to only one of them, it is sometimes difficult to place the others. The KwaZulu-Natal local government has three forms of acquisition of public positions:

- Appointment – merit (this is basis upon which the municipal and other government officials are appointed)
- Election – public preference (the counsellors are elected through the voting system)
- Inheritance – ascription (the *amakhosi* gain positions through this 'tradition')

It is in the context of these ways of office acquisition that the challenge to define relationships between counsellors, traditional leaders and officials must be seen. There needs to be a candid confrontation with the issues involved such that each stakeholder can be aligned much more clearly with their functions and the lines of co-operation drawn. The issues at stake are around the relationship of each stakeholder to land, relationship of each stakeholder to management and servicing of people, and the definition of the lines of accountability for each stakeholder.

Even though the relationship of traditional authorities to land is historically fuzzy, they are the key authorities in matters involving land in rural areas. Their indispensability in the issue of land is due to the sheer significance of traditional leadership structures in facilitating a communal living existence for communities that depend on: flexible access to resources such as land for homes and agriculture, and a tie to a social system that will not exclude them on the basis of economic incapacity. While in rural areas there are payments made (for a homestead site, or for the tribal policemen to ensure peace at one's ceremony) and there are also rules stipulated (e.g. limit to exploitation of vegetation, a requirement for a household to have its own

toilet); the institutional mechanisms in place are not as impersonal and harsh as those of urban settings. Hence, even though problems are the same they do not translate into the same consequences quickly as in the urban settings. Thus we are yet to see the equivalent of street children or the homeless who sleep outside, in the rural areas. The nature of authority practiced by traditional leadership is different and befitting to the rural lifestyle.

The relationship between rural areas and urban areas is mediated by this quality of rural lifestyle as permitting a fall back arena for those who need it. Even though this is largely a matter of preferred rural lifestyle, this status of things was partly reinforced by the apartheid set-up as well. Amongst the most dreaded issues during the demarcation process was the idea of a municipality. For *amakhosi* and rural people it invoked paying rates, and probably an increase and a more rigorous enforcement of rules around social life (slaughtering of animals, night ceremonial vigils and noise control, stock control and so on). It is the kind of lifestyle of flexibility and rule enforcement with discretion that the institution of traditional leadership makes possible to preserve.

### **Conclusion: Towards a Circumstantially-specific Institution**

James (2001) argues that rural land has to be seen not only in terms of being an asset with economic potential linked to it but also as an important aspect of identity. In her discussion it is clear that livelihood strategies that have been pursued in the rural setting have depended on the small income derived by household members in towns – hence the linkage between the urban and the rural. She proceeds to argue that since the circular migration of men in particular between rural and urban areas creates social differentiation in rural life and creates a situation of dependence of rural socio-economic life on urban (wage) support, rural development may well benefit from an urban focus in development being maintained as well. The rural and the urban have a potential to ‘fade imperceptibly into one another’ (James 2001:107). While her argument is, on the whole positively suggestive, James unproblematically merges the rural and the urban without addressing the issue of whether the identity issues that relate to ownership of land in urban and in rural settings are the same and would permit easy merging.

This identity/economy dichotomy of rural life has to be carefully examined, especially for the sake of appropriate development conceptualisation. It seems arguable that the urban has not fed equitable or fair shares of production returns back to the rural, and the South African government as a machinery to facilitate this has fallen short of impact in this regard<sup>8</sup>. The labour force that has been derived from the rural to supplement and facilitate the economic lifestyle in town is being exploited in terms of not receiving fair returns to their time and labour investment towards the urban and in not being catered with basic necessities even while based in urban areas for economic pursuit<sup>9</sup>. This is rooted in a history of well planned segregationist and discriminatory strategic moves of the last two decades. The current trend in this exploitative pattern is to frustrate the rural areas directly by attempting to assimilate the current social system into the urban socio-economic system, not through releasing due development focus, but by impatiently annihilating the very structure that facilitates access to a social safety net – communal entitlement to (physical and social) space. The process is not deliberate, but based on a mission to achieve a tidy democracy followed by sound investment/sustenance balance in developing the rural areas. This is however a different ethos from the one seeing the rural area as 'somewhere to lay my head' that James (2001:107) has discovered amongst

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<sup>8</sup> Serious but sporadic efforts include some development projects done by the municipalities in rural areas, and social responsibility programmes towards vulnerable groups being required of private sector to formulate. But these still lack serious considerations for the market, they lack ways of expanding economic nodes within rural areas, and are very slow in basic infrastructural expansion. The whole ethos lacks a moral justification in serious infrastructural expenditure on what appears like an unproductive mass that will not pay back for what is brought to them, which is afforded through the productive urban centres.

<sup>9</sup> The time spent in travelling to urban centres and the time people spend separated from their families (as an alternative to yielding the costs of accommodation of people's families) are not, as they should, incurred by the urban based economic agents - not even tax derived from these agents is consciously used to deal with this dilemma.

her research subjects, and the one of being suspicious of the municipalities by the KwaZulu-Natal rural people.

The manner in which rural people become victims of a social system rather than of their ecosystem is apparent even when one takes the route of analyzing traditional leadership in terms of customs and civil society. Mahmood Mamdani in his book *Citizen and Subject* (1996) raises a crucial issue with regard to what is often seen as 'customary' law. The colonial encounter was mediated by some cultural pragmatics from both camps – the indigenous and the colonials. To the discredit of traditional leaders it is not clear why some of these practices were seen as deserving the status of being customary laws of their communities. It is not clear why, for instance the communality of land ownership is often seen to be a customary law issue, not a fact of some historical specificity. Given that people's use of land was not recorded in any form of 'deeds records' and there were no written wills, the point of reference and of verification of any use of assets would have been the *inkosi*. How has this historically translated into a freezing of communality of ownership? What are the (seemingly unchanging) attributes indicating this communality? Mamdani argues that 'The genius of British rule in Africa ... was in seeking to civilize Africans as communities, not as individuals. More than anywhere else, there was in the African colonial experience a one-sided opposition between the individual and the group, civil society and community, rights and tradition' (p.22). In reviewing literature on early Nguni polities one realizes not only their links to kinship but also their flexibility to incorporation of other groups and individuals. It would seem that people knew the right lines of inheritance going all the way up to political authority, in an embracing relationship to the smaller social units; but this does not necessarily mean that property (e.g. land) would not have been used 'individually' owned or traced to particular household units.

However with all this being recognized it does not mean that traditional leadership, the institution itself can be nullified. It carries some serious relevance for some people. While the current problems of state are that traditional authorities benefit from this rigidification of circumstances into customs; people who are historical subjects of these kinship-based polities do not want to abide by the rationalizations of the modern state that will manage and 'tax' their meager economic gains. The communal title thus makes sense – communality becomes social insurance.

Mamdani (2000) argues that the situation of exploitation lies in citizens not being regarded as participating citizens i.e. they have been ethnicised and in the process made to operate only as bounded cultural or tribal groups. Admittedly, this is a historical situation which needs to be understood in order to deal with why people are reluctant to account for the costs of living as individuals or individual households. However to prioritise this argument is to argue in terms of a technicist's approach in the application of democracy, the kind of democracy based on the individuality of human rights. While historical specificity of colonial planning and conspiratory tendencies at a political level is recognized as a necessary explanation for certain socio-historical outcomes, it fails to isolate specific circumstantial issues that make an institution such as traditional leadership *continue* to be relevant for some people. Mamdani's observed ethnicisation is helped by the flimsy nature of local governance from local point of view. The welfarist attitude by local governance towards the people has diminished and in its place competition to acquire political power is more apparent. In fact the problem is not even empirical indications that local government is less welfarist than traditional leadership; the problem is conceptual – traditional leaders are supposed to care for their people and their needs because that is the nature of the relationship between 'leader and subject'. Citizenship on the other hand merely enshrines obligations on the part of 'subjects'. Thus it is arguable which is felt to be more 'despotic' than the other, to use Mamdani's terms. A comparison of corruption is quite different from that of despotism and what Mamdani documents for traditional leadership even for KwaZulu-Natal (1996:58) may be the former.

The modern approach of articulation of democracy through representation and participation fails to take into account social circumstantial sensitivities which the alternative, often cited, but not well-articulated approach of *ubuntu*<sup>10</sup> embodies. However this is a subject of a separate paper. Suffice it is to say here that traditional leadership will remain a force to be reckoned with for as long as it provides a socio-

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<sup>10</sup> *Ubuntu* is an approach towards morality of social relations that suggests that rights need to be complemented by a proactive obligation to do good. It suggests that humanity embodies a conscious ability, entrenched into our rational capacity, to decide to be good.

economic cushion for the people, who continue to live in the imbalances of development attention directed towards the urban and the rural. People's communal identities are the route to hang on to this cushion. The assumption that where people are dissatisfied with traditional leaders they will automatically find representative government the preferred option must be scrutinized. Even those who can afford time for deeper political analysis simply argue for one of the two popular options without thinking critically and innovatively about particular historical circumstances.

Since the issues of legitimacy or the continued relevance of traditional leadership are sensitive due to the lack of defining moments in the history of the institution; it seems that administration and development of rural areas need a particular approach that allows for progress despite the sensitive issues. Such an approach would not alienate traditional leadership at this point in time in South Africa. The appropriate approach would perhaps:

- support traditional leaders with relevant tailor-made education and procedure/protocol formation,
- establish forums of dialogue and good relations between them and the elected counsellors,
- prioritise issues of land management with respect to forming core focal areas for traditional authorities<sup>11</sup>.
- establish a good working relationship between these leaders and the various other departments whose work overlaps with roles of traditional leaders – even while the unresolved legislative matters around inheritance of position and democratic election are pending, and
- attempt to establish a provincial system of accountability in the traditional leadership system and procedural means of accountability with various departments.

A fuller examination of traditional leadership will also need to engage in a debate around whether leadership and governance are different concepts and whether leadership could be of a traditional kind. Thus, traditionality could

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<sup>11</sup> Traditional leaders are managing land anyway, in a manner that does not often tally with local government planning. The issue of homestead graves is an example of how 'tradition' and local government planning often clash in their land use management.



be investigated in relation to the concept to which it is tied. What this paper has done is to tease out the secular, historical materialist elements of an institution that also claims sacred cultural ontology which another paper has to investigate. The argument in this paper has been that traditional leadership has to be viewed in conjunction with the context it serves which is characterised by a need to promote access to land as a residential and production resource, and flexibility in acquisition of land and basic amenities for daily survival for a populace at a socially impressionable yet economically frustrated level in a capitalist society. Bureaucracy and documented individualist entitlement becomes the actual problems, not necessarily the state; unless its role is being identified as anti-poor. Traditional leadership and communality in rural areas promote access to land and social space as one of the basic human rights. The commercialization of most things, and especially land, creates a situation in which traditional leadership as an institution is seen as a personification of a challenge against capitalist despotism.

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# Circle<sup>1</sup> Readings of the Bible/ Scriptoratures<sup>2</sup>

Musa W. Dube

## 1. Introduction: Circle Thinking, Talk and Acts

The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (henceforth, The Circle) was launched in 1989. Evidently, the name 'Circle' was well thought for it captures a central aspect of most African philosophical thinking. Many African societies lay a great emphasis on interconnection, interdependence and continuity of life and relationships (in its great diversities) to the extent that even death does not break the circle of life<sup>3</sup> and in many places people identify themselves with animals as their sacred symbols<sup>4</sup>. The Circle

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<sup>1</sup> 'Circle' refers to The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, an academic association of African women in religion and theology.

<sup>2</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o uses the term 'orature' to refer to oral literatures of Africa. Here scriptorature is coined to refer to African oral cultures as sacred and secular literature. Scriptorature can thus be used interchangeably with African oral cultures or to articulate the fact that African oral cultures constitute an authoritative body of literature in both the secular and the sacred spaces. This covers what is often referred to as African Religion/s.

<sup>3</sup> Among most African societies, it is believed that upon death one graduates into the community of the living dead. While in some societies rituals may be performed to help some individuals to become ancestors, it is generally held that life does not end with death.

<sup>4</sup> In Southern Africa most communities identify themselves with a certain animal, which they hold with respect. For example, I am a 'Dube' (Zebra), which means that I come from a community that identifies itself with a

perspective of life thus resists dualistic and hierarchical perspectives that often sanction exclusion and oppression. This circle perspective of life has led Ife Amadiume (1987:16f), an African Nigerian feminist sociologist of religion, to describe the gender relations of most African societies as characterised by 'flexibility in gender construction', rather than 'rigid gender ideology'<sup>5</sup>. With the current numerous crisis confronting the African continent, the emphasis on affirming a circle of life is central. One would not exaggerate to say the 'struggle to maintain life' in the continent goes beyond cultural thinking of black African people, rather, it cuts across black, white, Arabic, Asian and Latina Africans. The term 'circle' thus speaks of and to the concerns of our work as African women of various ethnic, race, age, class, religious and national backgrounds, living and studying various religions. As African women of The Circle we, therefore, do circle theology and interpret life-giving traditions found and used in the African continent from this perspective.

As an African woman biblical scholar from Botswana, 'The Circle' reminds me of two things: First, a game I used to play with other young girls. We would sit down in a circle with three-four stones. Then we would begin to sing a song while we pass the stones from one person to another. Round and round the stones would move in the circle with our song. It also reminds me of how as women, girls and children we would sit alone in *Lelwapa*<sup>6</sup>, around the fire after evening meals. Here we would either exchange proverbs, riddles, sayings and their meanings or Grandmother would tell stories, while we urge her on with our '*kolobetsa*' (continue to tell us) interjections. In the latter, the story was left to each listener to interpret its meaning, while the duty of the storyteller was to ensure that the story is well

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Zebra. My community will not kill, eat or use Zebra meat or skins. Other people will be called *Ndlovu/Thlou* (Elephant), *Kgabo/Ncube* (Monkey) *Kwena/Ngwenya* (Crocodile), etc.

<sup>5</sup> For two other books of hers, see Amadiume *Re-inventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion & Culture* (1997) and *Daughters of the Goddess: Daughters of Imperialism* (2000).

<sup>6</sup> The fireplace for men and boys are in separate areas, where they tell their own stories to each other. '*Lelwapa*' is an open space with a halfway built wall, where women sit in the evenings.

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told to capture the imagination of listeners. No doubt, part of gender socialisation was carried out in this time. Yet these circles, at play and by the fireside, symbolised our space of friendship, sharing, solidarity, intellectual invigoration, bonding time and where every woman was given the chance to speak, think, listen and work. The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians is similar, yet distinguished by the fact that it seeks to be and works for being a transformative Circle. Here imperial histories of oppression and patriarchal spaces, roles, expectations, traditions, stories are spoken out and scrutinised for their oppressive perspectives. The transformative space of the Circle makes deliberate efforts to retell old stories and to tell new stories, proverbs, riddles, taboos and sayings to create visions of liberating interdependency.

I thus imagine The Circle for Concerned African Women theologians as a group of women sitting down in a circle, singing a song of life and liberation, while they pass the stones (the sacred and secular texts; the patriarchal and imperial texts and histories; written and oral texts) amongst themselves. I imagine them sitting down solving the riddles, proverbs, sayings or telling stories of various scriptures and cultures of their lives to each other, for each other and for articulating democratic visions of liberation. The Circle is thus as space where African women theologians examine the stones in their hands on how they endorse various forms of patriarchal and imperial powers and how they can be transformed from death dealing forces into life giving energy. The Circle is a space where we sit listening to each other as we share and create words of wisdom, around the warm and dangerous fire. The Circle, as an association thus symbolises our space of transformative power of re-interpretation; of our intellectual invigoration and creative energy; of our talking and of thinking amongst ourselves in a friendly and life affirming space, while we keep the *a luta continua* (the struggle continues) spirit of seeking and working out our resurrection from death dealing forces to relationships of liberating interdependency. For this rather challenging and exciting agenda, this paper seeks to highlight some of our activities within other histories and conversations of liberation biblical/scriptorature readers and seekers, namely:

### 1. Biblical/Scriptoratural and Black Biblical Interpretations

2. Cultural/Biblical Studies
3. Circle Cultural approaches to the Bible/Scriptoratures
4. Emerging African Women in Biblical-Scriptoratures Studies
5. Moving in Circles
6. Conclusion: Circle Biblical/ Scriptoratures Interpretative Practices

## 2. Biblical/Scriptoratural and Black Biblical Interpretations

Most black African biblical scholars of the last twenty years were trained in European schools and methods. Yet their scholarship departed from the methods of Western schools for they are not overly, if at all, focused on recovering 'the author's intended meaning' or attempting to undertake a neutral and disinterested interpretation, by focusing exclusively on ancient history of the Bible. Rather, African scholars undertook to read the Bible from African contexts and modern histories. They sought to read the Bible with their own African traditions, what I have termed scriptoratures. Inculturation hermeneutics, as it has become commonly known, thus interprets the Bible with African traditions and histories to illuminate the meaning of the text in a communal life<sup>7</sup>. It concentrates on the African contexts, its cultures, current concerns and how male African scriptoratures compare with the biblical. While inculturation hermeneutics of African scholars were not gender sensitive, they insists on reading the Bible with the African Scriptoratures, that is, with other suppressed canons and with other histories, especially the history of modern imperialism<sup>8</sup>. It is on these grounds that the biblical western/feminist project of *Searching the Scriptures: Volume II*, while it motivated by gender-justice concerns to include exclude scriptures, became inadequate, for its focus on extra-biblical texts to the exclusion of the suppressed scriptures of the formerly colonised means that it is not a decolonising feminist project.

Several reasons prompted inculturation hermeneutics. First, it was an act of resistance against Western Christian imperialism, which had made

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<sup>7</sup> For a thorough review of these African hermeneutical approaches see Martey's *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (1993).

<sup>8</sup> In so far as taking local contexts as the normative point of reference is concerned, African scholarship is similar to other Two-Thirds World scholars: moreover, it is theological.

a blanket dismissal of African cultures as barbaric and ungodly. Second, African Indigenous Churches (AICs) championed the hybridisation of biblical and African cultures from their inception in 1706, leading African academic scholars to follow suite with inculturation hermeneutics. Third, inculturation was, and is driven and maintained by the fact that African scriptoratures remain a life infusing force among African societies. On these grounds we can say inculturation was partly meant to resist imperialist presentation of colonial Christianity, which legitimised the suppression of African and other world cultures. But, above all, inculturation hermeneutics indicate the authority and use of African scriptoratures amongst its people. Inculturation hermeneutics, however, was marked by a wide range, from readers whose main concerns were evangelical and who worked within the colonial framework to radical ones (Ntloedibe 2001:97-121; 2001b:498-510), who insist/ed that African Scriptorature/s should be seen and studied in their own right<sup>9</sup>.

Black South African biblical scholarship, on the other hand, was largely informed by its context of apartheid, that is, the racial and economic oppression of black people. Race and class are very important categories of analysis in black South African biblical scholarship. Thus their biblical hermeneutics combined both black consciousness and Marxist theories in their reading. An excellent example of such hermeneutics is Mosala's *Black Biblical Hermeneutics and Black theology in South Africa*. Here, once again, it seems Black South African readers have always been alive, without attempting to wear the garment of disinterested reading, nor to exclusively focus on the ancient history as the only normative history for biblical interpretation. They have always read from their particular contexts and histories and with particular concerns of their social locations.

Although the bulk of African scholarship is still focusing on inculturation hermeneutics, a number of new methods are emerging. During the process of reading and editing numerous articles submitted for *The Bible in Africa*, I found that there are some scholars whose interpretations are focused on highlighting black presence in the Bible. Some were re-visiting the colonial translations of the Bible into local languages; some scholars sought to show how these translations served imperial agendas; some

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<sup>9</sup> See also Banana's 'The Case For a New Bible' (1991).

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employed postcolonial theories (see Dube 1996; 1997), and some sought to expound *Bosadi*, womanhood, hermeneutics<sup>10</sup>. A very important feature in the new methods of biblical interpretation is African women methods, which insist on the foregrounding of gender in biblical/scriptoratural and in histories of Africa and the text. We also have the approach of 'reading with', which is an act of asserting the validity of academically untrained readers<sup>11</sup>. The latter is very important to the African continent, where the majority of biblical readers are non-academic readers, and where biblical scholars are but handful individuals, trained in Western methods of thinking. Reading with non-academically trained readers becomes a subversive act of decolonising. When added to gendered economic means and educational training, women are even less likely to be trained biblical scholars. African women scholars thus 'read with' non-academic readers not only to stay in touch with their communities and to develop methods of reading that rise from their own communities but also to keep the voices of women readers heard. Reading with the non-academic readers breaks the academic class/privilege of knowledge production and takes into account the popular readers. In what follows, I will briefly explore the recent arrival of cultural studies in biblical studies, highlighting how, by and large, it has been what some African women have been advocating and doing, by focusing on Mercy Oduyoye's work.

### 3. Cultural/Biblical Studies

Inculturation and black biblical hermeneutics; asserting the validity of popular readers places the African biblical/scriptoratural scholarship together with one of the latest ways of reading the Bible; namely, cultural studies. Academic biblical interpretation now recognises that meaning is a

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<sup>10</sup> See Masenya's 'Proverbs 31:10-31 in a South African Context: A Reading for Reading for Liberation (Northern Sotho) Women', for further elaboration and application of *Bosadi* hermeneutics (1997:55-68).

<sup>11</sup> Quite a number of scholars have already recommended or applied this approach. See Oduyoye (1993: 45-55); Amoah (1995:1). The latest work on reading with non-academic works is represented by Gerald West and M.W. Dube's '*Reading With*' (1996); and Kanyoro's *Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective* (2002).



product of the:

- a) text (with its social location);
- b) reader (with her/his social location);
- c) method(s) of reading the text - with its assumptions and questions;
- d) ethics, risks, and responsibilities of reading;

The studying of the text and the reader's social location and methods of reading has moved biblical studies from neutral or high class exegesis, to what is sometimes called cultural studies. According to Fernando Segovia (1995:29) cultural studies is a 'joint critical study of texts and readers, perspectives and ideologies'. Segovia (1995:29) holds that in cultural studies we have a

Flesh-and-blood reader: always positioned and interested; socially and historically conditioned and unable to transcend such conditions to attain a sort of asocial and ahistorical nirvana- not only with respect to socio-economic class but also with regard to the many other factors that make up human identity.

Cultural studies are/is only beginning to infiltrate biblical studies in the Western academic halls as a distinct approach. A substantial volume, consisting of various articles by different contributors, has recently come out from the Sheffield Academic press, entitled *Biblical Studies/Cultural Studies*. The introductory chapter describes the approach as 'concerned with the Bible as culture and the Bible in culture, ancient and modern' (Exum & Moore 1998:34). It describes cultural studies as investigating

Not just the Bible influencing culture or culture re-appropriating the Bible, but a process of unceasing mutual redefinition in which cultural appropriations constantly re-invent the Bible, which in turn constantly impels new appropriations, and biblical scholars find themselves... hunting video stores, museums, and other sites of cultural productions (Exum & Moore 1998:35).

They hold that biblical/cultural studies recognises 'the Bible's status as a cultural icon' and it also focuses on ideology (Exum & Moore 1998:35). As

Circle readers, we may ask two questions concerning biblical cultural studies; namely,

- Does biblical/cultural studies resonate with our African inculturation/cultural hermeneutics?<sup>12</sup>
- How can cultural studies further inform our practice?

As described by Segovia, African biblical interpretation termed inculturation hermeneutics (even the South African black biblical hermeneutics) have always been 'positioned and interested, socially and historically conditioned'. Since inculturation hermeneutics resisted any detached reading that solely focused on ancient Greco-Roman setting and biblical texts, but chose to also focus on African contexts, histories of subjugation, concerns, cultures and the Bible (see the above pages) it was driven by the facts of their contexts, their identity, their history of colonial suppression, insistence on liberation and the right to life. African readers, in other words, could not read the Bible without their scriptoratures, since this would amount to endorsing their own colonisation of the mind and denying their own identity. And given that mainstream biblical studies is largely Western in its thinking and its methods, Most African biblical scholars could not read the Bible without their popular readers and perspectives since this would also amount to the same thing.

Yet because of their cultural approach, black African interpretative practices have not been recognised, engaged or accepted by mainstream biblical studies, which was/is largely historical critical/high class in its practices. The current cultural studies approach in biblical studies, however, helps us to realise that Two-Thirds World readings were unaccepted, because biblical studies was a largely colonizing and high class practice, which upheld the interests of mainstream First World readers as the only standard and correct interpretation of the Bible. Biblical studies was largely

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<sup>12</sup> Cultural hermeneutics is a term employed by Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro to describe inculturation hermeneutics that adds gender and feminist concerns, but which also reads within the community, underlining that ultimately change must happen in and with the community. See her book, *Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics*, referred to earlier.

high-class activity of the 'Western degreed persons' one which ignored the various popular readings of the Bible and the scholars who openly read with non-academic readers. Also, biblical scholarship itself worked within the larger unequal international power relations, where the Western world regards Two-Thirds World countries as the consumers of its goods and ideas. If the current movement of biblical studies into cultural studies in Western halls is anything to go by, then it calls First World readers to recognise and dialogue with African and Two-Thirds World biblical interpretations more seriously, for the latter have always been involved in biblical/cultural studies approach. The act of ignoring and excluding Two-Thirds World's work will be hard to justify from now onwards, save if the mainstream biblical studies wishes to maintain, consciously or unconsciously, its high class and imperial biblical hermeneutics as the only acceptable interpretation.

When we turn to Exum and Moore (who define biblical/cultural studies as an approach that examines 'the Bible as culture and the Bible in culture, (in) ancient and modern' times) and ask whether the approach resonates with African women/men biblical-Scriptoratural practices, one is bound to answer yes. The frame of inculturation hermeneutics has been concerned with studying the Bible, as and in, contemporary African culture, but not exclusively focusing on ancient Greco-Roman culture. It is notable that Exum and Moore site Itumeleng J. Mosala's article, 'Race, Class and Gender as Hermeneutical Factors in African Independent Churches' appropriation of the Bible', of *Semeia* 73 (1996) 'as the first biblical scholar to draw on the work the Birmingham school', which pioneered cultural studies by an approach of studying popular cultures. Insofar as Mosala was studying a popular use of the Bible (and using a Marxist perspective to analyse it), he was tapping on a very well established inculturation hermeneutic of Sub-Saharanans. The very international status and culture of the African continent, in many ways, dictated a cultural studies approach to the Bible. That is, in a setting where commentary and interpretation is mostly expressed in popular song, sculpture<sup>13</sup>, poems, drama, and painting

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<sup>13</sup> See West (1993:54-61) where he focuses 'African Critical Resources for Reading', by analysing an interpretation of the story of Joseph by Azaiah Mbatha.

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by popular groups rather than by groomed middle-class intellectuals, African intellectuals could either choose to align themselves with high class biblical interpretations of their Western schools or listen to their own communities and popular/low class interpretations of their contexts. It was the latter that was adopted to the extent that African inculturation scholars were, more often than not, artists of fusing the Bible and their own cultures. But here they were following on the path of hybridisation championed by African Independent Churches.

#### **4. Circle Cultural Approaches to the Bible/Scriptoratures**

Some good examples of cultural biblical interpretations are found in Mercy Oduyoye and my work. In her chapter on 'Expressions, Sources, and Variants of African Theology', she writes that

Africans were trying to clarify and interpret for themselves the significance of .... Stories about Jesus and stories told by him. Just as they transmitted history orally, Africans retold these stories, elaborating them and drawing out what struck them as particularly relevant and enduring .... Africans sang to interpret biblical events (Oduyoye 1993: 45).

Oduyoye then proceeds to analyse African biblical songs for their interpretations<sup>14</sup>. The focus on towards popular interpretation and uses of the Bible is also underlined in Oduyoye article, 'Biblical Interpretation and Social Location of the Interpreter: African Women's Reading of the Bible' (Oduyoye 1995: 33 - 51).

The Bible has a special place in the hearts and homes of African Christians. The question is, how is it used? A couple of stories will suffice .... I arrived at my sister's house and saw an open Bible in the

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<sup>14</sup> In fact, when we turn to the cultural archive of songs and as a body, biblical interpretation, then we find that African American scholarship has been analysing their spirituals for a while now. James Cone in his *Black Theology*, utilized this body of cultural productions. See also Hope Cain Felder's *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*.

cot of her newborn babe. 'You have left your Bible here', I called. 'No, it is deliberate; it will keep away evil influences'. I was dumbfounded: the daughter of a Methodist pastor with a doctorate... earned in a reputable US university, using the Bible as a talisman! When I told this story in the course of social occasion in Nigeria, a discussion ensued that revealed many more such uses of the Bible: Christian lawyers who keep a Bible on every shelf of their library; house built with Bibles buried in their foundations and individuals buried with Bibles in their coffins; Bibles in cars that may never be read, but whose presence proves comforting, a sort of Immanuel, or God-with-us (Oduyoye 1995: 34).

Oduyoye calls upon African academic scholars to bear in mind these stories, 'when attempting to communicate their scholarly readings of the Bible' (Oduyoye 1995: 34). Needless to say, the task that Oduyoye puts to us, who are mostly trained in western-ways of reading, is daunting! That Oduyoye's look into the Bible in and as culture is indeed driven by her context, gender and class of her people is openly articulated as she says,

The story of 'the Bible in the Cot' should be taken together with the story of the Bible that is sung. The first women to appropriate the Bible in Africa heard it read and its stories retold. They met God in the narrative and transmitted their testimonies in 'poetic theology', singing, praying and commenting on biblical events. These women, mostly farmers, traders, often marketing their own produce and products-also had crucial responsibilities in their families and larger communities. There were women with not a minute to spare ... (Oduyoye 1995: 39).

A cultural/biblical studies approach in my work reflects two concerns. First, how the Bible was brought to colonised subjects and how that may affect the way we read the Bible. My focus highlights the Bible as journeying in histories and cultures of different readers. Thus in my article, 'Towards a post-colonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible', in *Semeia* 78, I have begun by relating how colonial paintings of biblical stories have had a great impact on how I read biblical stories. Because before I began to read the

Bible, I often saw paintings that depicted Jesus, Mary and the disciples as white blue eyed and blond people and the devil often as a black man, it affected my reading of biblical stories. That is, I read all God-fearing characters as white people and those who resisted complying with godly ways as black Africans and other non-Christian nations. This experience speaks of the colonisation of my mind and many other colonised subjects, whose first contact with the Bible was illustrated through colonially informed paintings. This self-realisation for postcolonial subjects is a must. It calls upon the formerly colonised subjects to re-examine their categories of reading and how they are colonially informed either towards resistance, collaboration and revolutionary resistance. It also calls upon the colonised subject to make deliberate efforts to interrogate their colonially framed reading practices.

Second, cultural/biblical studies approach has been dictated to me by my Two-thirds World status of an African woman of Botswana background. Because I am conscious and suspicious that I am trained in Western ways of reading the bible, I have often made efforts to get connected to Batswana ways of reading the Bible/Scriptures. This landed me amongst African Independent churches (AICs) community of readers (see Dube 1996: 11-26). Of course, as compared to my academic halls interpretations and communities of readers, these pass as popular readers and popular readings of the Bible. As a liberation reader, I also sought them out primarily because of their history of resistance; the prevalence of women leaders. The attempt to be connected with my own community of readers is a decolonising act. As I followed up AICs non-trained and non-academic readers, one of the major things I found was that the Bible was read as a divining text. It is used to divine the problems of sick patients and to recommend solutions. This was ground breaking for me. What was even more ground breaking was to find out how subversive this reading is. That is, while I found that colonial translators of Setswana Bible had translated 'demon' and 'evil spirits' as *Badimo* (Setswana Ancestral Spirits) (see 1999: 7-33), the AICs readers, however, refused to succumb to this colonially informed translation, by using the Bible to divine consulting patients. That is, they read the Bible as a divining set that allows them to get in touch with their sacred figures-*Badimo* and Jesus. In this way, they maintained the sacred role of *Badimo* as caretakers of the society against all forms of ills; against colonially

derogative translations. Through my interaction with popular readers of African Independent Churches, I have ever since tried to understand Setswana divination practices and how they can be used as a methods of reading texts and life. My efforts to use divination as a method of reading biblical/cultural texts and life are now available as published articles (see Dube 1999:67-80; 2001: 179-198).

The second question is, how can cultural studies inform and enrich our practice as African women of the Circle? The above examples speak for themselves. Since most African communities are oral societies, and since commentary about life/texts is mostly found in songs, paintings, cultures, poems, rituals, etc. cultural productions are bound to provide us with new critical questions and insights to read biblical/scriptoratural texts, especially those that arise from resistance contexts. Also because while women are more less likely be trained in academic biblical studies, they are more likely to be found amongst popular songwriters and singers. Two examples, one from a black female singer and another from a black male artist, will suffice to illustrate the point.

I was recently struck by Miriam Makeba's song, '*Aluta Continua*', where she sings, 'FRELIMO, FRELIMO your eternal flame has shown us the light of God'<sup>15</sup>. This is obviously a dramatic reinterpretation of the Bible that places salvation and divine light not where we expect to find it (Jesus, the biblical tradition, or church), but within the midst of African liberation movements (FRELIMO). Recently, I also heard a story in Cape Town about a black boy who made a black painting of Jesus in the 1960s. The painting caused a row and trouble for the boy and his family from the apartheid regime. The boy and his painting were forced to disappear until recently in the post-apartheid era. The question is, why did a black painting of Jesus strike panic to the apartheid authorities? Obviously, apartheid was grounded on an ideology of white supremacy, supported by some biblical interpretations. In such a historical setting, the image of the divine was presented as a white blond Jesus and the devil was a black male. Such images were an important part of propounding and maintaining the ideology of apartheid and white supremacy. But the other painting dared to say black is also divine, thus exposing the ideology of apartheid to be a white

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<sup>15</sup> See/ listen to *Urban Africa Jive of the Townships*.

construction of the Bible that cannot be equated with facts<sup>16</sup>. More importantly, it exposed Jesus' racial identity as a product/construct of different readers and for various political ends. His black Jesus became a critical attack on apartheid hence an immediate response was necessary to contain its revolutionary potential. Both the black and white Jesus art works provide insights on how interpretations happen, work; how they get legitimised or suppressed. They call for a new look at our texts; highlight the role of a situated real reader of flesh blood and they provide new frameworks than the conventionally accepted methods of reading. They also highlight the centrality of power relations concerning which and whose interpretations come to be accepted. If African women (and men) scholars of the Bible/scriptoratures listen to their resistance and liberation artists and explore their works, I believe there should be a good harvest of new insights to highlight on texts, reading and histories of resistance. But then the aspect of power in the world and academic hierarchy of knowledge remains an issue to contend with as to whose interpretations will be heard and engaged. Further, the appropriation of popular readings will require an ethical framework of liberation of all people to be foregrounded, for it will be folly to think that popular readers are equal to liberation readers.

## 5. Emerging African Women in Biblical-Scriptoratures Studies

With the gendered history of academic biblical training, there are very few academically trained African women scholars. Teresa Okure was a lone voice for a while. Okure wrote her dissertation on *The Johannine Approach to Mission: A contextual Study of John 4:1-42*. Okure's interest in mission

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<sup>16</sup> I once took my son to the Upper Room museum, in Scarritt Bennett Centre, Nashville, Tennessee. The museum was full of Christian art, all of it portrayed as white people. We went around admiring the art works and suddenly we came to this one painting of a black Jesus. It was written, 'black Jesus blesses children.' I did not say a word to my son as we admired it and passed on to other pieces of art. After we left, I heard my son say repeatedly, 'Black Jesus blesses children! Black Jesus Bless Children!' I knew that he liked the picture, for out of a very white art about divine characters, he found out that Jesus could be black and bless children for that matter!



continues as attested by her recent volume, *To Cast Fire Upon the Earth*, published by Cluster. In the latter, Okure propounds one of her exciting feminist visions of liberation, through what she calls hermeneutics of life. The latter holds that every reader and reading of the Bible should only proceed, *if and only*, it supports the advancement and respect for all life. Obviously, this stand point carries one of the most powerful liberation vision if carried out, for it makes no room for any form of oppression in the process of reading and interpretation and calls for the respect, not only of all people, but also life as a whole in our interpretative projects. Okure has significantly contributed to inculturation biblical hermeneutic (see Okure et al. 1990) African feminist and international forums of feminism (see Okure 1993:76-85). Her articles also appeared in volumes that dealt with social location and with recent feminist trends (see Okure 1995:52-66).

In the past eight years a number of other academically trained African women biblical scholars have begun to emerge. Some have just completed their PhD some are just about to finish. To list a few names of those I know: we have Mmadipoane Masenya in South Africa and Dora Mbuwayesango from Zimbabwe who are both Hebrew Bible scholars. Masenya's dissertation was a Proverbs 31:10-31 in a South African Context: *A Bosadi (womanhood Perspective while Mbuwayesango's PhD dissertation was on The Defence of Zion and the House of David: Isaiah 36-39 in the Context of Isaiah 1-39*. For the New Testament, Elna Mouton, a white South African and Musa W. Dube from Botswana have already completed their studies in the New Testament. Mouton's dissertation was on *Reading a New Testament document Ethically: Toward an Accountable Use of Scripture in Christian Ethics, Through Analysing the Transformative Potential of the Ephesians Epistle*. Dube wrote her dissertation on *Towards a Post-colonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*. Sarojini Nadar, a South African Indian woman has just completed her dissertation on the Hebrew Bible. The title of Nadar's dissertation is *Power, Ideology and Interpretation: Womanist and Literary Perspectives on the Book of Esther as Resources for Gender-Social Transformation*. Grace R.K. Imathiu from Kenya and Alice Laffe from Cameroon are still working on their PhDs in the New Testament while Makhosi Ndzimande from Durban Africa is completing her PhD in Hebrew Bible.

Despite the lack of trained African women biblical scholars, there has always been vibrant African biblical interpretations at the academic and non-academic levels. Many women theologians have given us a number of biblical interpretations (as attested by Mercy Oduyoye's work above). African women, like their male counterparts biblical readers took their particular contexts, scriptures and histories of colonial resistance as normative. Perhaps this is best expressed by Mercy Oduyoye when she says, 'the Bible has become part of received wisdom' (Oduyoye 1995:36). The latter (received wisdom) is characterised by the 'critical affirmation' of African scriptures as opposed to the blanket dismissal of colonial times. This strategy of imperial and patriarchal resistance is underlined by Mercy A. Oduyoye who maintains that for African women, 'scriptures are not limited to Christian sources (but) include the language of oracles, prayers, symbols, rites of African's combined religion and culture' and underlines that 'as we (African women) reread the Bible, we do not overlook the need to review the traditional interpretations of Africans own spiritual sources (Oduyoye 1996:113). A distinct feature, from black male inculturist and black hermeneutical readers, is that African women foreground a gender critique and feminist construction to both the traditions (Oduyoye 1993). They read against their multiple oppressions: against imperial and patriarchal marginalisation, paying attention on how it works with race, class, age, health status, ethnic and sexual discrimination. The wider/western feminist biblical scholarship that seeks to recognise the struggles of Two-Thirds World women against imperialism and patriarchy should be transgressing the boundaries of imperial domination, exclusion and suppression of Other World scriptures, readers and histories of interpretation.

## **6. Moving in Circles**

Our way forward as The Circle for Concerned African Women Theologians in the area of biblical/Scriptures interpretation will not only depend on training more women, but also in compiling the Scriptures and developing our own ways of knowing and articulating visions of liberation. To begin with the first, if African women and men acknowledge scriptures as an authoritative canon, then I recommend that The Circle should call upon women from various regions and countries to compile these

stories, proverbs, sayings, teachings, taboos, rituals, songs, prayers, etc under a title such as African Words of Wisdom and Life or simply Scriptoratures. It would be a wonderful, unique and challenging opportunity for African women to be involved in compiling an unclosed and liberating canon for their communities, countries and continent. While I know that African people are an oral people, who enjoy their non-literate ways of life, nevertheless, I think The Circle must compile African scriptoratures under an open and liberating canonical collection. The compilation would allow those who need to get in dialogue with African scriptoratures to have some point of reference. Such a compilation would also allow for some form of preservation. In this fast changing world, we cannot claim that the social structures that ensured the preservation of oral traditions are still in place.

Second, it is important that African women (and men) should develop their own ways of knowing and articulating visions of liberating interdependence. Most African scholars are trained in biblical methods of the West, regardless of whether they trained in Western schools or not—this is because biblical methods of reading have been transported and marketed to all areas of the world as ‘the legitimate ways of reading the Bible’. Depending on the schools or seminaries of their training, they may be historical, literary, socio-scientific critics or a combination of these. Yet it is evident that, like their male counterparts, most African women scholars have developed their own methods of reading as attested by the rise of inculturation. This trend must continue, for the masters’ tools cannot bring down his house. Some notable African women’s methods to be tapped are *Bosadi*/Womanhood, ‘reading with’ popular readers, postcolonial and the hermeneutic of life. African women should continue to problematize and develop their theories of reading. Yet I would also recommend that The Circle should continue to draw from African ways of knowing to read their scriptoratures, the Bible, the Koran and other existing canons of life for visions of liberating interdependence. Some of the methods and concepts that I believe need to be explored further for interpretations are:

1. telling and re-telling stories (Dube 2001:40-65);
2. divination as readings (Dube 1999);
3. spirit readings (Dube 1993; see also Njoroge 2001);
4. poetic interpretations (Oduyoye 1998: 61-72);

5. reading for healing (Oduyoye 1996: 114);

6. proverbial interpretations, etc.

These perspectives are ancient skills of thinking, knowing and speaking within many African communities and they deserve further employment and engagement in reading the Bible/Scriptoratures. Gladly The Circle has begun to explore, develop these as methods that can illuminate the texts for their histories of oppression as well unveil some democratic visions of liberation. The Circle has recently published *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, a volume that has begun to explore and apply some of the above methods. The volume carries some examples of the application of storytelling, divination and poetic interpretations. A good example is represented by the two story-telling perspectives. While they both use stories from ancient scriptoratures, 'Fifty Years of Bleeding: A Feminist Storytelling of Mark 5:24-43' also tells the contemporary story of Africa, by highlighting its effects on Southern African women. The latter is a good example of how Bible/scriptorature/s are read within various histories of texts, than the practice of singling out the ancient history as the only normative history for biblical interpretation. Madipoane Masenya's reading of Esther within and with Sotho stories is a good example of reading biblical/scriptorature/s for liberation and gives them equal normative status. Musimbi Kanyoro propounds an 'engendered inculturation' hermeneutic, which she calls cultural hermeneutics. Gloria Plaatjie's chapter is based on 'reading with' non-academics women readers in search of subversive feminist strategies. Of note in Plaatjie's article is that she calls for the reading of the new South African constitution as a sacred text.

*Other Ways of Reading* also continues the wider discourse of feminists that problematised patriarchal biblical language and called for inclusive Biblical translations. The articles of Seratwa Ntloedibe-Kuswani and Dora Mbuwayesango thus interrogate how the patriarchy and imperialism of translators collaborated with that of the biblical text to suppress the gender-neutral understanding of the Divine within most African societies. Such translations, they argue, marginalize women from social positions of power and further distort the image of African Religion/s. They make suggestions as to what would constitute gender-neutral translations of the Bible that respect gender-neutral understanding of the Divine. The

volume *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, is undoubtedly a major contribution to the African and worldwide scholarship.

With the HIV&AIDS epidemic wrecking havoc on African communities; with its particular impact on women and its link with social injustice, The Circle has turned its attention to reading for healing. In 2001, A Pan-African Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians Meeting was convened in Addis Abba, focusing on religion and HIV&AIDS as well as seeking ways of articulating and working for healing. Circle ways of re-reading the Bible/Scriptoratures in the light of HI&AIDS are already available in the volume that I edited, *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in theological programs*, published by WCC, 2003. However a fuller perspective will soon be available in a forthcoming volume *Grant Me Justice: HIV/AIDS & Gender Readings of the Bible*, which will be published by both Cluster and Orbis publishing houses. A total number of seven books, focusing on HIV&AIDS and from various religions and disciples are in the process of being produced and regional follow up meetings are also on the agenda. HIV&AIDS' attack on life, its gendered features and its link with injustice is a great challenge to the work of The Circle.

## **7. *A luta Continua* Conclusion: Circle Biblical/ Scriptoratures' Interpretative Practices**

Circle interpretative practises, therefore, are infused with the spirit of *a luta continua*<sup>17</sup> (a continuing/determined struggle) to live and the will to arise (see Dube 1998) against all forms that continue to hinder the fulfilment of qualitative life. This spirit of *a luta continua* strives for the fullness of life in the midst of our, communities and the world that is part of us. The phrase *a luta continua* became a popular language of the struggle for liberation during the years of fighting for independence in Africa. It expressed the determination of various African nations to keep on struggling for their liberation despite the power of their oppressors. It is thus used here to evoke that spirit of refusing to give up, regardless of the size and power of the

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<sup>17</sup> *A luta continua* is a Portuguese phrase, that was used as a slogan for mobilising masses of resistance.

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enemy and oppression. It expresses our unwavering determination to seek to experience the fulfilment of life. *A luta continua* is also used here to follow on Miriam Makeba's song<sup>18</sup> that places salvation and the light of God within our struggles for liberation in Africa, as discussed earlier. Our work as Circle interpreters should be firmly placed within frameworks of the struggle for liberation in Africa and the world. This is where God's salvation is worked out in our lives and the world.

The phrase 'the will to arise', has indeed become popular and representative of the work of The Circle as attested by the title of books and articles derived from this phrase. The phrase is indeed drawn from the story of Jesus bringing a dead little girl back to life (Mark 5:21-42). But as used here and by African women of The Circle, it does not suggest that we are waiting for a male figure to work out our liberation – to awake us to life or some kind of prince charming to kiss us to life!! Rather, the call to arise into life, *talitha cum*, is now pronounced and worked out by African women of The Circle themselves in partnership with other liberation seekers/readers and with the Divine Powers. For this re-interpretation see my paper, 'Fifty Years of Bleeding: A Storytelling Feminist Perspective of Mark 5:21-35' (Dube 1998). Here a bleeding woman called Africa calls, '*talitha cum*', to her buried children and people. They all resurrect and come back to life, but, then, that is when the real *a luta continua* begins. For The Circle, 'the will to arise' thus describes our willingness to be partners with God in the struggle to build the reign of God on earth as it is in heaven.

The ethics of The Circle thinking, talk and acts are as articulated in its name: The Circle of *Concerned* African Women Theologians. Their interpretative acts are characterised by a '*concern*' to promote all that affirms justice and life in its fullness. It is concern to respect the humanity of all, even as it foregrounds its struggles against patriarchy and imperialism. This concern is driven by an act of *a luta continua*, a continuous/determined resistance against the numerous crisis confronting us and it is spirited by 'the will to arise' from the debris of death dealing forces into life-affirming

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<sup>18</sup> It is indeed proper that we should pay heed to the singing of Miriam Makeba for she has been named 'Mama Africa', for embodying the wounds and the struggles of Africa, in the many years that she spent in exile and singing for the liberation of her country and Africa as a whole.

liberation and the realisation of the fullness of life for women, as well as to stand continuously against all those structures and ideologies that deny the affirmation of all persons regardless of their race, gender, nationality, religiosity, age, class, ethnicity, sexual identity, health and international status. At the centre and peripheries of 'circle interpretations', therefore, is a stubborn insistence of affirming the dignity of life against all forms of oppressive systems and their ideologies. Evidently, The Circle's concern takes a particular focus on women's lives, while it does not ignore other oppressed persons and categories of oppression.

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# **Kirimomo: A Hermeneutical Approach in Gospel Proclamation among the Urhobo of the Niger Delta**

**J. Enuwosa**

## **Introduction**

The research on the history of gospel music in Urhoboland is broadly divided into two parts. These parts cover the era of Adam Igbudu and the post-Adamic period. The development of Urhobo gospel music can be traced to the Protestant Churches especially the Anglican Church. The origin of gospel music in Urhoboland is not specifically known. Scholars of Urhobo studies are not certain as to how and when it began. Urhobo gospel music began in a combination of many factors. It was unconsciously fabricated with some elements of cultural influences and divine inspiration.

It is therefore the purpose of this study to establish the historical origin of Urhobo gospel music and the way it is used to spread the gospel. The study is also intended to show how the gospel music was influenced by local factors. Two basic methods are used in this study. These are the historical approach and the interview methods. The interviews were carried out randomly in several Urhobo towns: Abraka, Eku, Kokori, Ughelli, Egborode, Ewureni and Sapele. Forty persons were interviewed<sup>1</sup>. This implies that about seven persons were interviewed in each town. The people interviewed were mostly elders of Churches and some pastors. The interview

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<sup>1</sup> Some people did not respond to the interview invitations. I did not meet five persons at home when I visited them for a second time. Six persons refused to be interviewed in spite of my request because they were afraid of state security agents.

is significant because those from whom information was solicited were either contemporaries of the early Urhobo gospel music activist or pioneers of the gospel music who are still living.

### **The Coming of the Missionaries**

The coming of the missionaries is a prelude to the development of indigenous music in Urhoboland. The first attempt to Christianise the Urhobo took place in 1470 by Portuguese missionaries. This effort failed because of inadequate finance, manpower and the unfavourable climate. Towards the middle of the 19th century, Christianity came to Urhoboland from three fronts: Sapele, Urhuovie and Warri. The Church Missionary Society first appeared in Urhoboland in 1854 at Okwagbe, 1864 in Warri and 1892 in Sapele and Urhuovie (Ajayi 1981; Eriwwo 1973:34).

These missionary attempts derive from the efforts of Samuel Ajayi Crowther and some ex-slaves in Sapele. The church spread and established stations in the Urhobo hinterland. It came to be known as the Niger Delta Pastorate under Bishop James Johnson (Ayandele 1970:88; Ryder 1960:1). It has become the Anglican Dioceses of Warri, Ughelli and Oleh. The fourth diocese, Sapele diocese comes from the old Warri diocese. The Urhobo tribe is a tribe among four other tribes in the three dioceses. These dioceses came into existence by due process and by the effort of a hard working Bishop, Rt. Rev. Enuke.

The Roman Catholic Mission later came to Urhobo-land. Coming in a big way with both human and material resources, parishes were established in Warri in 1919 by Rev. Fr. Cavegenaire and Fr. Olier, Aragba in Orogun clan in 1920 by Rev. Fr. George and Eku in 1921 by Rev. Fr. Kelly. By 1924, the church has come to Ovu, Okurekpo, Okpara, Kokori, Ughelli, Ovwo, Ekuigbo, Ewvreni, Olomu and Arhavwarien<sup>2</sup>.

The Baptist Mission came to Urhobo-land in 1920. The charismatic activities of A. Omotosola in 1921 and Jove Aganbi in 1926 contributed to the spread of the Baptist Church in Sapele and Eku. From these two places, the mission came to Abraka, Okpe, Idjerhe, Agbon, Ughelli and Orogun.

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<sup>2</sup> An interview with Rev. Fr. A. Ozele, Aragba, Age 42 years, Aragba Parish Priest, 2/4/2000. Cf. Ryder (1992:2).

Makpa Mojami brought the Baptist Church to Oginibo near Ughelli in 1922. Oginibo became an important centre of the Baptist Church among the riverine Urhobo (Atanda 1988: 246).

This in brief is the spread of Christianity in Urhoboland. Within three decades (1901-1930), Christianity of various brands had entered Urhobo hinterland through Urhuovie, Sapele, Warri, Eku and Ughelli. By 1935, the entire land was dotted with mission houses, schools and hospitals. The Bible was their major material. The Niger Delta Pastorate suffered much schism and intrigues from rival denominations. This led to some mutual hostility and suspicion. The Mother Church in England also alienated them. Thus, they remained in isolation without any assistance from the Church Missionary Society in England for over five decades. Though the Baptist Mission has made some in-road in this locality, the Anglican Church and the Roman Catholic Missions have won more converts. The evangelical pressure and rivalry of the indigenous Pentecostal Churches currently confront these Colonial Churches. This has forced the three orthodox Churches to critical self-examination. They had to either swallow their pride which is embedded in a European 'slow motion liturgy' or face extinction.

Thus, Christianity came into Urhobo land swathed in Western garments. They came through the agencies of the missionaries, traders and British government. They came with the Bible, hymn and liturgical books of different types. For the first decade of Christianity in Urhoboland, Western hymns set in the metric system were used: *Ancient and Modern* for Protestants, and the Westminster hymns for Catholics. These hymns remained in vogue from 1920 to 1930. They remained till such a time when some Urhobo Christians felt bored and unimpressed<sup>3</sup>. They wanted to sing and dance in their native language for the gospel to be effectively spread among the people.

## Basic Terms

Among Urhobo Christians, the word for gospel music is '*Iyere Esiri*'. It means songs of good-news. It is popularly called *kirimomo*. But *kirimomo*

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Mr. Lawrence Oniovosa, Ughelli, Age 37 years, 13/2/2000. Cf. Onosemuode (1991: 92).

has over-shadowed the original name 'Iyere Esiri'. This term has no definite meaning. Urhobo choirmasters mostly use it. Isoko people also employ this word in their songs. It is designated *kirimomo* because Christ is asked to come nearer. For this reason, the word has become increasingly associated with Urhobo gospel music. Urhobo gospel music may be defined as the songs of praise, which Urhobo Christians coined from the Bible into their own language. They draw the songs from both Testaments and are not restricted to the Gospels alone as the title implies.

*Kirimomo* is a compound word of *kiri* and *momo*. *Kiri* is 'near' and *momo* is 'come'. Thus it can be translated as draw near, or come very close. Hence, Henry Ovie said 'It is to draw nearer'<sup>4</sup>. The term, *kirimomo* performs certain functions in the music. It is used in Gospel songs to control the rhythms and to boost the melody. It indicates as well the moment of real dancing when the choristers stop verbal action for body-demonstration. According to Matthew Idjighere 'the word precedes 'abor', clapping of hands, by the choir'<sup>5</sup>. In an actual choral situation, it is used three times by the leader of the choir as follows:

*Kirimomo kiri*  
*Kirimomo kiri*  
*Kirimomo kiri*

Draw near nearer  
Draw near nearer  
Draw near nearer

## **The Origin of Urhobo Gospel Music**

### **Early Urhobo Gospel Music: 1900-1926**

Urhobo Gospel music started from revival groups in the Anglican and Baptist churches. The missionaries came into Urhoboland and made efficient use of local resources and able Church members. A process of adaptation and indigenisation of personnel, church music and structure was put in use soon after Christianity was founded. Bishop James Johnson of the Niger Delta Pastorate appointed some local converts as agents. This action was in

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Rev. Matthew Idjighere, Abraka, Age 40 years, 17/4/2000, founder of Christ Saviours' Chapel.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Mr. Odieta Erhapowhenri, Okpara, Age 38 years, 16/6/2000, a catechist.

compliance with the policy of Henry Venn which required that a native Church must have a native pastorate in a self-sustaining system (Okologbo 1984: 19).

Notable agents between 1902 and 1917 were Omofoye Emuakpo who controlled Effurun, Oguname and Mogba areas. Efanodo took charge of Eku, Ovu and Abraka. Evwaire was the agent of Johnson in Ughelli from 1910 to 1920. He also spread the faith to a part of Isoko: Iyede, Enhwen, Emever, Owhe and Ozoro clans (Erivwo 1973: 37). Others include Oluku, Adjarho in Ekiugbo, Mukoro Kaghogho in Eruemukohwarien and Oghenebrume in Ukwokori assisted by Jacob Oluwole.

Masima Ebossa and Ejovi Aganbi were prominent agents. They were both active Christian leaders in Eruemukohwoarien and Eku respectively between 1918 to 1926. The first revival movement in Urhoboland was formed and led by M. Ebossa. Isikpe stood firmly for the Church in Ewvreni (Earawore 1984: 2f). These agents became the main bearers of the Anglican faith in the Urhobo sub-region. They had a great deal of zeal and enthusiasm to spread the gospel and convert souls to Christ. They acted as Church teachers and leaders in their own locality.

These agents had a great deal in common particularly in the method of evangelism. They preached the gospel through singing and dancing. They organised fellowships where this could happen. They prayed, fasted and preached the Bible. The missionaries had taught the agents simple English and fundamental Christian doctrines. They were used alongside the ex-slaves in Sapele and Urhuovie as interpreters, crusaders, revivalists and catechists. Onakome Edevwie in Urhuovie, an ex-slave, composed the first Urhobo revival song in 1910. The song reads:

<i>O re! O re! Urhobo O re!</i>	It is finished (twice)
<i>Otu re g' ame g' irhe O re!</i>	Urhobo it is finished.
<i>Ore ru wa kp' Ishoshi Ijesu ta re ni O re!</i> <sup>6</sup>	Worshippers of water and wood
	Go to the church because Jesus
	said it is finished.

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Mr. James Edevwie, Urhovie, Age 65 years, 22/5/2000. He is the son of Onakome. Edevwie, an ex-slave in Urhuovie, composed this song.

Mr. D. Esiovo related one early Urhobo gospel song:

<i>Edjo Sheri – O</i>	Evil Spirits have fallen
<i>O! She</i>	Oh! Have fallen
<i>O! Sheri – O</i>	Oh! Have fallen
<i>O She</i>	Oh! Have fallen
<i>Edjo Sheri – Oh! Sheri</i>	Oh! Evil Spirits have fallen, have fallen
<i>O! Sheri – O (thrice)</i>	Oh! Have fallen (thrice)
<i>O! She<sup>7</sup></i>	Oh! Have fallen.

These songs were some efforts of early Urhobo to use music to preach and teach the gospel. They were the prevailing songs from about 1906 to 1920. These songs were very effective for conversion. Many Urhobo turned out in great numbers to embrace Christianity in defiance of the traditional religious beliefs<sup>8</sup>. The songs reflect the Christology of early Urhobo Christians. It was a power Christology. This far-reaching conclusion is deduced from two concepts among Urhobo Christians: '*Orugbawa*' and '*Operu Ugbenu*'<sup>9</sup>.

*Orugbawa* means defier of evil spirits and taboos. It implies that Jesus is the destroyer of evil spirits, witches and wizards. According to S.U. Erivwo, the traditionalists designated Christianity as *Orugbawa* because members defied all taboos, totems, clan gods and ancestors with impunity. Consequently thousands who desired to be liberated from the tyranny of evil spirits, witches and wizards accepted the Christian faith. *Operu Ugbenu*, which literally means breaker of mountains, is one of the early Christian songs in Urhoboland. Ugbenu is the metaphor for obstacles and problems in life. The song means that God is the destroyer of obstacles and problems in people's lives.

By 1918, the hymn book, *Ancient and Modern* has been translated

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Mr. D. Esiovwa, Agbaro, Age 48 years, 3/12/1999.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Dr. Jude Ukaga, Benin, Age 42 years, 17/12/99. He is a lecturer at the University of Benin, Benin City.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Mr. J. Adaga, Abraka, 19/4/2000. He is the Chairman of Emmanuel Urhobo Joint Choir in Abraka Zone.

into the Urhobo language. Mr. Emedo of Orogun in 1920 published a Urhobo prayer and song book<sup>10</sup>. This prompted other pioneer Urhobo Christians to compose and arrange original biblical songs in the local language. The nature of the missions in Urhoboland led to the use of agents because missionaries were confronted with language barriers. The Urhobo and the missionaries could not communicate effectively because they did not understand one another's language sufficiently. The missionaries were also faced with the problem of inadequate manpower and finances.

Here it is worthwhile to note that Urhobo gospel music was influenced by Urhobo traditional music. Traces of the two models of dances in Urhoboland, '*Udje*' and '*Opiri*', can be found in Urhobo gospel music in words, tones, rhythm and instruments. *Udje* is a group dance. *Opiri* is Urhobo traditional highlife music<sup>11</sup>. The traditional music is rigorous because it is danced with much strength and physical exertion. Before the advent of Christianity, the Urhobo had many family and community social activities such as wrestling, festivals of clan gods, marriage, initiations and burial ceremonies. These ceremonies were accompanied with songs, drumming and dancing. The songs are composed either to praise or humiliate an individual, family or communities.

When Urhobo gospel music started, it took the form of *Opiri* and *Udje* traditional music. Their modes of drumming, clapping of hands and rigorous dancing found the expressions in the gospel music. Traces of these could still be found in some Churches today. Nevertheless, some minute differences exist in both. The pattern of dancing by twisting the whole body in *Opiri* changed into a gentle shaking of the body in Urhobo gospel music. While *Opiri* employs the whistle, Urhobo gospel music uses the clapping of hands to tell their members to mellow down their hands and voices in order to dance silently. Urhobo gospel songs are composed either to praise God or to humiliate Satan and its agents. By 1925 gospel music in Urhoboland was widespread. At the close of this decade the interest, nevertheless, began to wane.

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with P. Emedo, Orogun, Age 62 years, 25/5/2000. He is the son of Emedo who translated *Ancient and Modern* into Urhobo language in 1920.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Mr. Samuel Okotie, Abraka, Age 50 years, 13/6/2000.

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## **The Era of Adam: 1926-1982**

By 1930, Christian activities began to dwindle in Urhoboland. The Church experienced a declining membership. This low interest was caused by the fact that missionaries trained Church workers who took over the control from the agents. For example Agori Iwe returned from catechist training in Oyo in 1928 and was posted to Ughelli. The problem rose from the manner in which Church services were conducted. When the missionaries and their trained native workers took over the conduct of Church services they introduced a liturgy which was quite alien in character. Worship became characterised by rigidity, orderliness and dullness that were quite foreign<sup>12</sup> to the Urhobo Christian. The Bible was read, the preacher talked and everybody remained still. The services were stereotyped and there was no free-flow of worship. It does not touch the inner-mind because the native-trained workers strictly followed the European pattern of worship.

European liturgy does not use a strong beat. European churches also prefer soft music that appeals to the senses. People were dissatisfied and there was a decline in Church attendance because services became dreary and unimpressive.

Many people dosed away, infants fall into naps when scripture passages were being read or sermons were being delivered because they were not actively involved in worship. Motivation and enthusiasm died (Nabofa 1992: 17).

Urhobo people are not accustomed to gentle music. They are used to exciting and soul moving rhythms, 'music of heavy rhythm produced by drums, clapping of hands' (Nabofa 1992: 18), songs and dancing are characteristics of African worship. The Urhobo man is used to the *Udje* and *Opiri* dance. He wants to shake his body, he wants to sing and dance in appreciation for what God has done for him. He learns faster through songs. He would, therefore, like to transfer and exhibit these traits in his new-found faith.

To attest decline in the membership of the Church, the leaders reversed back to the methods applied by the agents of Bishop Johnson. They constituted prayer bands that were led by some active lay Christians. The

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Chief E. Ogaga, Aladja, Age 84 years, 18/8/2000.

intention was to revive the early mode of using the Bible in worship in native language, the spirit with which the early church in Urhoboland was established. This demand was the prevailing situation in most parts of Nigeria.

Hence, Rev. Ola Olude championed a revolutionary idea in Church music in Lagos. He employed the melodies of Egungun songs for gospel music in 1930s. Ikoli Harcourt Whyte of Uzuakoli leper settlement composed Christian songs in the Ibo language. The Isoko and Urhobo also had this experience (Nabofa 1992: 28f), which brought about revival movements and the rise of the gospel music of Cornelius Adam Igbudu of Araya in Isoko.

Before the advent of Adam Igbudu when the early church was plagued with dissatisfaction, Oluku Adjarho in Ekiugbo and Mukoro Kaghogho in Eruemukohwarien were looked upon for moral, spiritual and social reforms in the Church by Urhobo Christians between 1925 and 1930. The two men initiated new revival movements in Urhoboland. They preached the Bible from place to place to convert people. New converts brought out their ritual emblems for burning. Two of Adjarho's major revival songs which he composed are as follows<sup>13</sup>:

*Chi we chi we (twice)*  
*Emo ri Jesu chi edjo hweree*  
to  
*O! chi wee*

Crush to death (twice)  
The children of Jesus have crushed the devil  
death  
O! crush to death

He also composed:

*Aya rhe ra go ghene orere*  
*Aya rhe ra gi Ibaba oreree*  
*Ab' otu rega ame g' Irhe*  
and trees

Come and let us worship God, oh city  
Come and let us worship our Father, oh city.  
Including those who worship water

*Oreree, A yarhe ra g' Oghene* Oh city, come to worship God.

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Mr. John Esioghene, Agbarha, Age 65 years, 19/12/1999.

Another device by the missionaries to revamp the declining population of the Church besides using revival movements, was to organise singing competitions among the churches. They also introduced combined services in 1929. The combined services were held on a rotational basis on every first Sunday of the month (Nabofa 1992:21). The gospel music of Adam emerged out of this gloomy situation. The charismatic activities of Adam brought gospel music in Urhobo and Isokoland to the foreground. His career cut across tribes as well as denominations.

Adam, through his gospel songs, made Isoko and the Urhobo hinterland a strong Anglican base. In fact 'what St. Patrick is to Ireland is what Adam is in Isoko and Urhoboland'. His influence could be compared to the influence which Babalola exercised in the Christ Apostolic Church in Yorubaland. This made E. Onosemuode refer to him as a great musical reformer among Isoko and Urhobo Christians (Onosemuode 1991). Cornelius Adam Igbudu hailed from Araya in Isoko. He was born into a family that believed in traditional religion. The date of his birth is still controversial. Some scholars think he was born in 1886, others believe that he was born in 1918. Many people prefer the date, 1914 given by Adam's contemporary, Chief Igrude the Chancellor of Warri Diocese (Nabofa 1992: 34).

In 1925, Adam became a member and a vocalist of Isoko folk music of Usini. According to M.Y. Nabofa, Usini was a dancing club in Uzere. It was known for its classical traditional Isoko music. Adam became a member because he loved music and dancing (Nabofa 1992: 37). He was converted into the Christianity of the Anglican communion in 1927 by Mr. Michael Adarugo Akara. He withdrew from Usini club after his conversion in order to use his musical talent for Christ. At the age of twenty he was fully involved in Church activities. He had no formal education, but he learnt reading and writing in Isoko language from Mr. Michael Adarugo Akara and catechist John Mark Israel Eloho (Nabofa 1992: 45).

Adam diligently learnt these lessons in Sunday schools and privately at the convenience of catechist John Mark Israel Eloho. He used the Obe-une Isoko (Book of Isoko language) and Mark's Gospel in the Isoko language which was translated by Israel Eloho. Adam's high spiritual developments were enhanced by his ability to read the Bible because he drew his inspiration from the holy writings. He committed many biblical passages,

prayer and hymns into his memory. These efforts assisted him in his preaching, composition of songs, spiritual and evangelistic activities (Nabofa 1992: 46).

In 1938, Adam formed a prayer and musical group of five persons in Araya. It was called Ole-Orufuo, or Ukoko Orufu (Nabofa 1992: 46) which could be translated as 'Society of Holiness'. It implies physical and spiritual purity, cleanliness, and righteousness. By 1942 the choir of Adam had increased in number and had branches in other Anglican churches in Isoko. He moved around to teach the new branches his current songs. Adam took cognisance of the spiritual slump in the Isoko and Urhobo churches caused by the belaboured liturgy. He knew that preaching by singing and dancing could touch the inner mind of the individual.

Among the Isoko and Urhobo, kings and government officials are welcomed and entertained with music and dancing. For Adam, therefore, it was not out of place to worship and praise God who is the Supreme King with drums, songs, bells, rattles, flutes and dance (Nabofa 1992: 50). Adam knew that if the gospel was to be meaningful for the people, it had to be converted into songs in traditional melodies. M.Y. Nabofa discussing V. Massasi noted:

The same duty lies on us with regard to music. If Christianity is to become evident as belonging equally to the Africans with all other races, at the first possible moment the melodies of the land should begin to be collected and Christian words composed in the same metre and form as the secular words. The songs can then be used in Church to supplement if not, to supplant the translated hymns from home (Nabofa 1992: 52).

Adam's gospel hymns and chants followed the Usini rhythm. They were formed to suit the local milieu. In 1940, he translated '*Venite*' and '*Te Deum*'. Some gospel songs which he composed himself include *Jesu jo Akaba ra* (Jesus is my stronghold), *Didi Osivwi no owhu kome na* (The Saviour who died for me), *Olori tua iruo ra* (Lord begin your work), *Abe sua ile oro* (We are singing the song of praise), and *A ko mo ogaga kpobi no* (I have been given all power, Matt 28:18) (Onosemuode 1991: 93).

Adam's use of the Bible is significant. He knew the relationship between preaching, singing and dancing. Adam preached his sermons when a sufficient number of people has gathered as an audience. He used songs to relate biblical themes in his sermons because they appealed more to the people and attracted men and women in Isoko and Urhoboland. His gospel hymns are capable of striking the mental faculty of his audience and they consciously join the evangelical choir in dancing and singing. His music revived many weak Christians and won many converts. For his performances, he was often invited to conduct revival and harvest thanksgiving services in different parts of Isoko and Urhoboland. 'He preached, he sang and exhorted the people' with the Bible (Nabofa 1992: 54).

In 1946, Ole-Orufuo was changed to Ukoko Adamu (society of Adam) and two years later it became Usiwoma. This word literally means body healing. By 1950, branches of Usiwoma had been opened in the Anglican Churches in Urhobo and Isoko villages and towns. His activities in early 1960 caught the attention of Paul Umale in Benin and S.A. Asaboro in Ughelli. Both men had evangelical choirs in their respective places like Adam. They held revivals, sang, danced, preached and prayed. In 1967 the three Anglican evangelical bands in Urhoboland and Isoko merged together<sup>14</sup>. The name was changed from Usiwoma to the Anglican Adam Preaching Society. The melody and the tunes of his music were lively and understood by the people. He died in March 1982. The impact of Adam's evangelical choir is felt so much among Urhobo Christians that the history of Christianity in Urhoboland will not be complete without his name. He was an itinerant Isoko missionary in Urhoboland.

### **Post-Adam Gospel Music: 1982-1992**

After the death of Adam in 1982, the Anglican Adam Preaching Society faced internal squabbles and a leadership tussle ensued (Enuwosa 1997: 279). Musical groups on gospel songs merged in large number. Some individuals and groups began to compose hymns in the Urhobo language.

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Mr. Augustine Rukevwe, Ughelli, Age 59 years, 26/8/2000. (Nabofa 1992: 56).

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Out of this disorder, from 1982 to 1990, four choir groups emerged as the strongest evangelical bands. The Anglican Adam Preaching Society is one of them. Others are Gods Grace Ministry led by D.D. Mimeyeraye and the Anglican Ukoko Rorufuo (Anglican Holiness Society) pioneered by Evangelist S.U. Ayanyen. Both bands started under the canopy of one umbrella organisation, the Anglican Mimeyeraye Praying and Fasting Society. The society was formally launched on 13th July 1984 in St. Andrew's Anglican Church in Warri<sup>15</sup>.

In 1993, Evangelist Mimeyeraye moved his musical troupes out of the Society and the Anglican Church. In the same year, he constituted the group into a Church, which he called God's Grace Mission. Under Mimeyeraye, the mission has composed new Urhobo gospel songs. Between 1993 and 1997, Mimeyeraye has developed more than ten gospel songs in the Urhobo language. Prominent among them are *Erhari rho Oghene turaye-o* (The fire of God burn them, every evil spirit that is attacking God's children), *Emo Israeli Chiyi wanyhre Urhie obara* (Children of Israel marched through the Red Sea)<sup>16</sup>.

The Anglican Ukoko Rorufuo society is spearheading the gospel music in the Anglican Church in Urhoboland. It was not disturbed by the schism caused by the exit of Mimeyeraye. The evangelical choir quickly changed its name to the Anglican Ukoko Rorufuo in 1993. This is to reduce the side-effects which the separation with Mimeyeraye might have had on it and the floor crossing of its members to the rival group. In 1995, they composed some melodious songs. One is as follows:

*Esu jeba rhe-o Ogidio* Devil has run to its end with great trouble  
*Kasa kasa wo je rha erharhi-o*<sup>17</sup>. Anywhere you run to is fire.

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Mr. Matthew Okomeh, Warri, Age 47 years, 26/12/1999. He is the secretary to the society.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Bishop D.D. Mimeyeraye, Warri, Age 48 years, 27/12/2000. He is the founder of God's Grace Mission in Warri.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Evangelist S. Anyayen, Warri, Age 46 years, 27/8/2000. While Anyayen is the evangelist of Anglican Ukoko Borufuo, Dr. Ighedo is the President of the society.

This song was followed by other songs titled *Jesu mija ga* (I will serve Jesus), *Oto gboro ojo rhesu shei-o* (The ground should open for Satan to fall in) and *Evhi osivhina* (The Saviour is born)<sup>18</sup>. The Anglican Ukoko Rorufuo are today found in all parishes of the Anglican Church. The head of each group is called an *Osu* (leader or shepherd). He leads the evangelical band of his parish. They sing, preach and pray.

The Anglican Adam Preaching Society is an associate of the Anglican Ukoko Rorufuo because both bodies are societies in the Anglican Church. In addition, some people are members of the two evangelical choirs. The Society continues to exist. It did not die with its founder, but survived the subversive activities imposed on her by some selfish and greedy individuals. Its branches all over Urhoboland are still intact and are growing stronger. They continue with the spirit with which Adam established the evangelical band.

They conduct a service called *Iyere esiri* (service of good news) once a month. This *Iyere esiri* is a praise and worship service. The praise and worship are used to achieve two things according to elder Simon Enaowho. By them, God is praised and man is called to repentance and conversion<sup>19</sup>. In terms of the Urhobo Christian music, the Anglican Adam Preaching Society is the leading factor. Their success is based on the fact that they have been together and performed together for a longer period of time than the other groups. This is evident from the choral night held in Agbarho in December 1996. They won the overall trophy. The audience was thrilled in Agbarho with the song:

*Peter* (twice)

*Peter vw̃hi Jesu, yan rhenu rhami-o*

*Peter duvwe yarhe rheo-o Jesu*  
*kparovhe vrhe* (Mt. 14: 25-30).

*Peter* (twice)

Peter and Jesus were walking on the river

Peter was drowning, He called on Jesus to lift him up.

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with Evangelist S. Anyayen, Warri, Age 46 years, 27/8/2000. While Anyayen is the evangelist of Anglican Ukoko Borufuo, Dr. Ighedo is the President of the society.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Mr. Simon Enaowho, Sapele, Age 57 years, 23/8/2000.

Though independent Pentecostal groups exist in Urhoboland, they are still very young. They do not possess a strong choir as to compose songs. In most cases they use Urhobo gospel songs released in the orthodox charismatic groups<sup>20</sup>. Their situation is made complex by constant threats of schism. Members who are musically talented often prefer to establish their own Churches, thereby deviating from their original groups. For this reason many however lack talented choir leaders to brace the trail.

In his evangelical choir, Adam used the instruments of the Usini folk music. These instruments consist of cymbals, gongs, bells and the clapping of hands. M.Y. Nabofa noted that Adam adopted the simultaneous rhythmic clapping of hands in the 1960s (Nabofa 1992: 35). Adam Igbudu added a drum called *Alaja* to his instruments which he personally constructed. *Alaja*, according to Emanurhe Obukowo is an Isoko word for Elijah (Nabofa 1992: 35). His praying band also employed *Isorogun* or *agidigbo* (the thumb piano). In modern times, guitars and trumpets have almost replaced the *agidigbo*. This loss is detrimental to Urhobo music because the guitar and trumpets do not convey the sonorous melody of the *Isorogun* in the same way as it was done by traditional instruments.

## Conclusion

The study reveals that Urhobo gospel music is a product of certain social factors. Beside the difficulty of singing in foreign languages, which were not understood by the people, there was the genuine desire to compose gospel songs in their mother tongue that would be suitable to the environment. The gospel music was also developed as a result of the influence of Urhobo traditional music on the Christians. The music was patterned along the lines of traditional music, the *udje* and *opiri* music. A typical Urhobo person is addicted to traditional music. They sing and dance while they work in their farms, processing palm oil in their local factory, in initiation rites, marriage, wrestling, and at their birth and burial ceremonies. Traditional music, therefore, was the framework on which Urhobo gospel music was built. Christianity came into Urhobo and, some missionaries like Massasi taught that God is better praised and worshipped in one's own language (Nabofa 1992: 35).

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with Mr. Simon Enaowho, Sapele, Age 57 years, 23/8/2000.



It was, then, that J. Oboh in 1937 translated the Bible into Urhobo language and he used the Urhobo language to preach and sing<sup>21</sup>. With this translation Urhobo converts began to read the Bible in their native language. This enhanced their knowledge of the attributes of God on which they drew to compose the Urhobo songs of praise. One such song is 'God breaks the mountain' (*Oghene operu ugbenu*). This song is used to express the power of God.

Another early song of this type is '*Me urhupe rhapona, Orho nenuvwe chasa yan ebri rhe*' (I am the light of the world he who follows me shall never walk in darkness). In the attempt of early Urhobo Christians to win more converts from traditional religion, they changed most songs used in the veneration of divinities, work and initiation rites to songs of praises to God and Christ. They substituted biblical words, phrases and stories for the content of the original songs. The Igbe song, *Ejiyo kporo, Ejo erhieda* (match it to scatter, the spirit of witches) was transformed into *Jesu jiyo kporo*. Songs used in Urhobo folk tales were also converted into gospel music.

As early Urhobo Christians used music of traditional religion and folk tales to sing and dance, many non-Urhobo Christians were attracted to them. Some joined the new faith because they could no longer distinguish the songs of traditional religions from Christian songs since the Christians were using their local songs for worship. They came to believe that they are after all the same since they share the same band beat (*kon gi, kon gi, kon gi*) and idea. However, Urhobo Christians used these songs as a bait to win converts. As they became full members, they were taught the message of the good news of Christ. This enabled them to know the difference between their traditional religion and Christianity.

Hence, the future uses of Urhobo gospel music strictly lies in its unique characteristics. The gospel music will, therefore, persist because of its evangelical nature and the melody of the songs that are firmly established in Urhobo musical culture. It will also continue to survive by the fact that many Urhobo are converted through this process.

Thus, Urhobo Gospel music began among revival groups in the Anglican Church in Isoko and Urhoboland. The formation was spontaneous and intuitive. Initially they translated English hymns into the Urhobo

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Mr. Gabriel Ogba, Orerokpe, Age 72, 24/12/1999.

language. As they became more conversant with the Bible, they began to extract and compose songs from biblical passages. They were formed into short moving choruses. The songs in this way are biblical and Pentecostal in nature using native rhythms and tones. Soon they introduced into it native musical instruments such as the *agidigbo* and drums. They discarded the *adjudju* (a leather hand fan used in dancing in Urhobo traditional religion). The clapping of hands was substituted for *adjudju* though both perform the same function.

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Interview with Evangelist S. Anyayen, Warri, Age 46 years, 27/8/2000. While Anyayen is the evangelist of Anglican Ukoko Borufuo, Dr. Ighedo is the President of the society.

Interview with Mr. James Edevwie, Urhovie, Age 65 years, 22/5/2000. He is the son of Onakome. Edevwie, an ex-slave in Urhuovie, composed this song.

Interview with P. Emedo, Orogun, Age 62 years, 25/5/2000. He is the son of Emedo who translated *Ancient and Modern* into Urhobo language, in 1920.

Interview with Mr. Simon Enaowho, Sapele, Age 57 years, 23/8/2000.

Interview with Mr. Odieta Erhapowhenri, Okpara, Age 38 years, 16/6/2000, a catechist.

Interview with Mr. John Esioghene, Agbarha, Age 65 years, 19/12/1999.

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Interview with Rev. Fr. A. Ozele, Aragba, Age 42 years, Aragba Parish Priest, 2/4/2000.

Interview with Mr. Augustine Rukevwe, Ughelli, Age 59 years, 26/8/2000.

Interview with Dr. Jude Ukaga, Benin, Age 42 years, 17/12/99. He is a lecturer at the University of Benin, Benin City.

# **The Challenge of Nigerian Pentecostal Theology and the Persecuity of Scripture**

**A.O. Nkwoka**

The emergence and entrenchment of the Aladura (Praying) Churches in southwestern Nigeria in the 1920s and 1930s prepared the way for the charismatic renewal or Pentecostal resurgence of the 1970s. The Pentecostal outburst of being filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues and prophesying, faith healing and display of charismatic gifts swept through a number of African countries including Nigeria. The socio-economic conditions that confronted Nigerians after the Civil War of 1967-1970 helped the Pentecostal experience to spread as fast as the harmattan fire especially in the East which existed as the blockaded Republic of Biafra. The evangelical dimension of being 'born again' championed by Bill Roberts of the Scripture Union set the spiritual music which the youths tenaciously embraced to sing and dance indispensably. All the efforts of the mission Churches to stem the tide of Pentecostalism proved abortive, the more they tried, the more the remaining Pentecostal groups turned to new churches.

The details of how the different leading Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria started either as Bible study groups or persecuted minorities from mainline churches are all already documented by many scholars and church historians. It will, therefore, not be very necessary to try repeating the stories here. It is pertinent to note that all the reasons for the emergence of different Pentecostal churches can be summarised into three main causes. The first is the sincere desire of the 'born again' Christians to return to biblical or New Testament Christianity, which desire provoked hostilities from the authorities of the mainline churches. The second reason was that the persistence of the

charismatics in demanding for change led to persecutions, rejection and expulsion of these members who were forced to found their own churches. The third main reason was the deliberate exit from the mainline Churches of those who protested against what they saw as the unbiblical practices and worldliness of their mother churches.

One of the foremost problems facing the leadership of the new churches groups was formulating a theological stand that expressed their new identity. In many cases these leaders found out that their views were not only opposed to those of their former churches but those of some other Pentecostal Churches. Even where they seemed to be the same the human ago to chart a different identity in order not to be subsumed under the leadership of older groups necessitates the task. This state of affairs earned them, rightly or wrongly, the appellation of 'mushroom churches' by the mainline Churches. The argument was that these churches were mushrooming not because they had anything different but the leaders were ambitiously seeking their individual religious empires. But almost all of them had a strong disdain for traditional or a academic theology. I can recall my encounter with an enthusiastic 'born again' student colleague when I was studying for my first degree. The intervention of other 'born again' Christians stopped him engaging me in a physical fight when I countered his confident assertion that there were no Christian theologians. He fiercely contended that theologians were human devils who turned the Bible upside down. What A.C. Thiselton said about Walter Wink's book, 'The Bible in human Transformation' seems to summarise the academic theology. He states:

Walter Wink is sharply critical of what he regards as the professionalism of many New Testament scholars, which he believes leads them to avoid the most important issues of hermeneutics. The community of reference in New Testament interpretation, he complains, has become a professional guild of scholars rather than men and women of the living Church. The Bible was written by ordinary men, he insists for ordinary people who face practical problems in their daily lives. But the scholar is too often insulated from the Bible's own concerns. He examines the Bible, but he himself is not examined—except by his colleagues in the guild ... the outcome of biblical studies in the academy is a trained incapacity to deal with

the real problems of actual living persons in their daily lives (Thiselton 1986:143).

What Wink identified as a trained incapacity to deal with the realities of life is actually the crux of the matter. The sound theological treatise that excites the intellect which is highly valued in the Western technologically advanced societies will be near to cursing in an African milieu. As Manus rightly pointed out, those African world views which bestow an aura of the demon-infested terrain are recognised by the Church leaders and evangelists as tasks for deliverance ministrations ... typical of most of the New Religious Movements in Nigeria (Manus 1998: 1809). It is categorically true that the evil spirit forces are very real just as in the Palestinian world of Jesus' ministry. So evil spirits and their nefarious activities are no figments of imagination in Africa, They are as real as human beings.

In view of the above situation and the seeming ineffectiveness of western-trained theologians who dominate the clergy of the mainline Churches and fact that the leaders of the emergent Pentecostal Churches were products of Bible schools, academic theology was discarded. With time, help was sought from rich and benevolent American evangelists in establishing Bible Schools in Nigeria. Initially the training lasted for six or nine months as the three year theological college training was seen as pure waste of time. The *parousia* consciousness which was a driving force in the New Testament evangelisation served to justify a crash programme in the training of the new Pentecostal ministers who could not afford the luxury of long years of studies even if such studies were 'biblical'.

### **The Bible and Pentecostal Theology**

The Bible is the central source of Pentecostal theology. As M.A. Ojo has rightly noted, the Charismatics who later emerged as Pentecostals initially operated like Bible study groups, holding their meetings only on weekdays and offering Bible studies to their members, in addition to the activities of their regular Churches (Ojo 1995: 115). The Bible study leaders read Bible passages and interpreted them to the members. The perceived meanings of different passages on any topic became the basis of theologising. The vernacular Bibles did no doubt play some significant roles in the Pentecostal revolution of many

African communities as J.S. Mbiti stated. He writes:

Both within mission churches as well as in independent churches, the Bible in African languages is causing a religious restlessness. It drives Christians to examine imported forms of Christian and church life, with a view, consciously or unconsciously, to criticising, questioning, abandoning, modifying, and affirming a wide range of teachings and practices. Some of these teachings may have long historical roots and are supported by strong theological expositions and presuppositions (Mbiti 1986:41).

But in Nigeria the critical appraisal of the imported forms of Christian and Church life is done through intense Bible study based on the King James Authorised Version (KJV) which for the Nigerian Pentecostals is 'The Bible'. All other versions which in some passages differ from the KJV are perverted versions; each new translation is 'an attempt by its translators to corrupt or destroy God's Holy Word' (Weiss 1977:68). But as Weiss has clearly argued, the manuscripts available to the translators of the KJV were late and somehow corrupted even though they did a thorough job. Concerning the Old Testament manuscripts he has this to say:

The oldest Old Testament manuscripts available in 1611 were produced about 800 years after the time of Christ. But some portions of the Old Testament dating back to 200 years before the time of Christ are now available. In other words, these manuscripts are a thousand years older and closer to the original writing than the ones available in 1611 when the King James Version was translated (Weiss 1977:67).

The Nigeria Pentecostal theology centred on the KJV encompasses the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Yahweh or Jehovah, (as He is popularly called) the God of Israel, is recognised as the one Supreme God who in Christ has fully brought in the Gentile believers as the new Israel of God according to Paul's argument (cf. Gal. 3:28). This one and only true God of the universe is delightfully regarded as the God of miracles who can perform any miracle in defence of his people and gratification of his sovereignty. There is,

therefore, special preference for some passages of the Scriptures tending to what J.C. Ortiz termed the 'Gospel according to Saint Evangelicals' (Ortiz 1975: 11-17). This 'Gospel' is a selection of favourite Bible passages from both old and New Testaments resulting in a kind of neglect of difficult or tasking portions. However, as Turner (1967), Mbiti (1986) and Manus (1998) discovered in the Church of the Lord (Aladura), there is meaningful life for the Pentecostals in the Scriptures as the final authority in matters of doctrine, conduct and structures reminiscent of New Testament Christianity, forms and tradition (Manus 1998: 1810). The interpretation of Bible passages and the derived theology result from individual spiritual insights as mediated 'by the Holy Spirit' who is regarded as the author and chief interpreter of the Scriptures. The Nigeria Pentecostal stance is that any literate Christian who has been regenerated and filled or baptised by the Holy Spirit has the capacity to read and interpret the Bible having been enlightened by the Holy Spirit. The Bible is perspicuous enough for the any genuine believer to read and understand.

### **The Perspicuity of the Scriptures**

According to W.C. Kaiser jnr. 'the principle of perspicuity means simply that the Bible is sufficiently clear in and of itself for believers to understand' (Kaiser 1986:122). He went on to expatiate this idea by citing J.S. Wright to the effect that the principle implies three things:

1. Scripture is clear enough for the simplest person to live by it.
2. Scripture is deep enough to form an inexhaustible mine for readers of the highest intellectual capacity.
3. The perspicuity of the Scripture resides in the fact that God intended all scripture to be revelation of Himself to man (Kaiser 1986:122).

Kaiser Jnr goes on to argue that it is an overextension of the principle in using it as excuse against more investigation and strenuous study by believers who were not contemporaries of those who spoke the words. The truths and teachings of Scripture cannot be exhausted. One of the two related problems of the principle of perspicuity which he raised and which is central to our study is,



Why should so much emphasis be placed on advanced training of teachers, preachers, and other interpreters in Christ's Church when all believers have an anointing from the Holy Spirit, by which they know the truth (1 John 2:20)? (Kaiser 1986:123).

Kaiser pertinently argued that 1 John 2:20 was not set to deny the need for explaining of texts otherwise it would be self contradictory. A.C. Thiselton also points out that some writers do sometimes invoke the Holy Spirit to argue that hermeneutics unnecessary and even wrong since it represents an attempt on the part of man to do the work of God (Thiselton 1986:142). I dare to state that whoever claims to have mastered divine rationality is dangerously on the brink of self-deception. The perceived workings of God both in the Old and New Testaments reveal that God works in partnership with human beings. Thus in 2 Corinthian 6, Paul made the claim that he and his Gospel colleagues were 'God's fellow workers'. And when Jesus promised his disciples that they would be clothed with the power of the Holy Spirit, (Lk. 24:49) he did not mollify the earlier charge to them to be as wise as serpents (Matt. 10:16). Therefore the presence, the power or the anointing of the Holy Spirit never implied a dehumanisation or the Holy Spirit making a robot of his guest.

Jesus was reported on many occasions to have stated, in purely human language, possibly Aramaic, the purpose of his messianic mission to the utter misunderstanding of his disciples. The points to be made here is that statements are open to different understandings. A literalist understanding or interpretation of religious statements in particular, is not necessarily the complete meaning or intention of such. From Christian antiquity, there existed specialists in the interpretation of Scriptures. The specialists were however, not always right. Human rationality and traditions could be manipulated to void the original intentions as Jesus pointed out to the Jewish religious leaders (Mark 7).

The Synoptists give the impression that Jesus did a lot of his teachings in parables which according to K.E. Bailey (1983) were peasant stories from everyday life of contemporary Jews. But not even the disciples could grasp the meanings of all those simple peasant stories without the explanation of Jesus. The inferences from the Gospel according to John, tradition holds that Jesus spent about three and half years on his earthly ministry during which the disciples received an on-the-job training for the post Pentecost evangelisation

of the New Testament Church. This and the three year mysterious mission of Paul to Arabia (Gal 1:17-18) might have provided the scriptural basis for the average three year theological training adopted by many orthodox Christian denominations. Teachers whose main duty was the interpretation of Scriptures and training of believers were apart from the apostles and prophets, ranked above all the charismatic personnel of the New Testament Church by Paul (I Cor. 12:28ff). It is evident however that before the institutionalisation of the Church, there were no formal schools for theological training, the charisma imparted by the Holy Spirit seemed the *raison d'être* for their position and operations.

### **The Challenge of the Pentecostal Theology in Nigeria**

The rapid expansion of the Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria and in most cases at the expense of the membership of the mainline Churches is a challenging reality. In the assessment of Manus, they are Nigerianising their biblical theology, ministry and church buildings by using biblical messages to respond to both personal and social problems endemic to Nigerian society (Manus 1998: 1824). In other words, it could be said that they are making the Bible relevant to the existential realities of the adherents. Fortunately they do not address existential issues at the cost of other-worldly convictions of the Christian Church, in their use of the Bible, they emphasise a close link between this world and the world to come (Manus 1998: 1825). In spite of the fact that Pentecostal Churches have largely ignored conventional modern theology and the advantages of the results of the socio-critical studies in biblical scholarship in Africa (Manus 1998: 1821), they have made amazing breakthroughs in the ecclesiastical arena. It is all the more surprising that the champions of Pentecostal ecclesiology in Nigeria are neither opportunist religious charismatics nor articulate theologians but University intellectuals. The three fastest growing denominations in contemporary Nigeria are the Deeper Life Bible Church, the Redeemed Christian Church of God and Living Faith Church, popularly known as Winners' Chapel. The Deeper Life Bible Church is led by Pastor William F. Kumuyi, a former Mathematics lecturer at the University of Lagos. The General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, is Pastor Enoch A. Adeboye also a former Mathematics lecturer at the University of Ilorin. David O. Oyedepo is the

Presiding Bishop of the Living Faith Church and an architect turned preacher' (Oyedepom 1996: n.p)., who studied architecture at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Both Kumuyi and Oyedepo are the founders of their Churches. Biblical scholars and theologians may have a lot of holes to pick in the theology and praxis of these ecclesiastical giants but the point is that conventional theology is progressively losing grounds to this type of results-oriented pragmatic theology. As mentioned earlier, the Pentecostals have a preference for Bible Schools which offer short-term training in the mechanics of evangelisation, Church planting and management.

Anointing and spiritual empowerment override theological training or the charisma of office and heroic, charismatic, even authoritarian figures do rise up to provide the necessary leadership and mediation of power (Hackett 1998: 262).

Perhaps the vital operational ingredients which are visibly absent among the theologically oriented leaders of the mainline Churches are the anointing and spiritual empowerment as pointed out by Hackett. Was Jesus not anointed with the Holy Spirit and power (Acts 10:38) whereby he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil? A close study of Pauline ecclesiology shows that he could not conceive of any Christian outside the indwelling and animation of the Holy Spirit. Most of the mainline Churches duly acknowledge and reverence the Holy Spirit as a *bona fide* Personality in the Holy Trinity but his Pentecostal functions and manifestations are sidelined. The Anglican Church, for example, operates on the principle that no one can do any useful work for God without the empowerment by the Holy Spirit; Consequently the confirmation rite based on the apostolic laying on of hands in Acts 8:14-17 is a mandatory prerequisite for holding any Church post. But tragically most of the confirming bishops have no Pentecostal encounter with the Holy Spirit with the result that any confirmation candidate who dared speak in tongues and prophesy as Paul's candidates in Acts 19:6 would be highly suspect of strange and indecorous behaviours.

At the centre of Pentecostal theology in Nigeria is the prosperity gospel. The hard times prevalent in the Nigerian economy have occasioned 'the money-making activities' of many of the churches, and the conspicuous salvation/ consumption lauded by some of the more flamboyant leaders

(Hackett 1998: 260). The survival instinct in humans naturally make them adaptable to any system that gives some guarantee of successfully wading through any crisis of survival be it political, economic or religious. In fact, the prosperity gospel is not the preserve of the flamboyant leaders; it is the hallmark of Pentecostalism in Nigeria and beyond. Youth unemployment has of late posed serious national problems. One employer lamented that the employment opportunity for two hundred recently advertised attracted 38,000 applications. Within just one week, the two federal universities in Ibadan and Ife added about 8,000 new graduates to the job market. Unscrupulous individuals employ the jobless youths in violence, communal clashes, religious disturbances, pipeline vandalism and other similar heinous acts. As prosperity gospel preachers thrill their audience on not just how to succeed in life but how to make it to the top, Hackett's remark is appropriate.

Their progressive, goal-oriented attitudes attract the youth, disillusioned with the empty moral claims of their elders and leaders. Those churches with more holiness origins such as W.F. Kumuyi's Deeper Life Bible Church, with headquarters in Lagos, have a much more stringent moral outlook, but still (or because of this ) attract large numbers of members (Hackett 1998: 260).

The 'empty moral claims' of elders and leaders imply the Church elders of some churches and the new-breed political leaders who seem to be making laws for the populace with themselves above the law. In contrast to the above elders and leaders who bore the youth with sermons of obedience and good behaviour 'the ultimate icon of conspicuous salvation, displayed by the Pentecostal prosperity preachers, is the Mercedes Benz, which has developed an almost mystical value (surely not anticipated by it stolid German Makers) (Hackett 1998: 264). The theology of the often criticised Pentecostals is more practical and the theologians theologise by examples. It is a well-known fact that diseases and sicknesses are endemic in Africa, Nigeria not excepted. The cost and availability of medical science are beyond the reach of the common people. In addition, the activities of malignant spirits and their human collaborators like witches, occultists and juju-men are as real to Nigerians as physical existence. In these prevailing circumstances, the Pentecostal theology of healing and deliverance cannot but appeal to the millions of patients and

victims of ill-health and spiritual attacks. High churchmen and heavyweight orthodox theologians who usually dismiss healings and exorcisms as religious gimmicks are having a re-think from the miracle crusade of Reinhard Bonke. Newspapers are littered with the testimonies and eye-witness accounts of those who received one kind of miracle or another in those city-wide crusades. The healing miracles and exorcisms of Jesus and his disciples are not lacking in the New Testament but the 'demythologization' carried out by modern theology seems to have estranged orthodox theologians from the biblical view of the miraculous.

According to Manus, 'the success-stories of healings and miracles attract hordes of Nigerians to attend Deeper Life' (Manus 1998: 1817). The hordes cut across ethnic, social and religious boundaries and Deeper Life Bible Church is only one out of many Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria. The exodus of members from the mainline Churches has forced some of them to accommodate the Charismatics in their midst.

Finally, the Pentecostal theology as it concerns work ethics has made a significant social impact. The concept of work as God-given for which everyone is accountable not so much to the employer as to God poses a great challenge to the social norms of selfishness, corruption, laziness and eye-service. M.A. Ojo has highlighted four distinctive approaches of Charismatics (who differ from the Pentecostals only in denominational belonging) to work (Ojo 1996:58-60). First, they are prayerfully selective of the kind of work they do. They would rather remain jobless than accept an employment fraught with corruption such as in breweries, tobacco factories, or customs houses where one must compromise in bribery or face threats of death. Second, secular employments must be done 'as unto the Lord' devoid of gratifications, kickbacks, partiality or pilfering of stationery for personal use. Third, as a follow-up to avoidance of corrupt practices, 'the born-again' Christians are dutiful, conscientious and hardworking. One's seniors whether good or bad must be respected and prayed for. As one's promotion comes 'from the Lord', eye-services or lobbying for positions has no place in the working agenda. Finally, every genuine believer must find something doing in the light of Paul's directive to the Thessalonians that anyone who would not work should not eat. (2 Thess. 3:10). No one should be a parasite on his neighbours or other Christians. In pursuance of this policy, a young man was given an executive post when a wealthy employer met him as a graduate carrying blocks with

labourers at a building site. Manus' remark about the Deeper Life Bible Church is apt for the Pentecostal praxis; he states:

Deeper Life is fully aware that the biblical message promotes the achievement and realization of a just society and that its proclamation is a task which calls for Christian commitment and struggle in Nigeria. There is a belief that the Bible, the word of God, remains the only norm for measuring the sacrosanctity of social justice, fair play and righteousness in a society almost bankrupt in moral and upright living (Manus 1998: 1822).

The Pentecostal theology which seems to lack the refined philosophical ingenuity of Western theology but incorporates new forms, beliefs and structures from the Bible and the rich and religious Nigerian heritage (Manus 1998: 1823) is winning the day not only in Nigeria but elsewhere in Africa. The theology of deliverance from poverty and disease, spiritual vindication and purity of life poses a very serious challenge to the trained incapacity to function as mentioned earlier. This theology is largely based on the theory that the Scriptures are perspicuous enough for any 'Spirit-filled' Christian to read and understand. The trail is blazed not by ignorant fanatics or circumstantial opportunists but seasoned intellectuals who are causing religious and moral revolutions in the stigmatised Nigerian society.

## Conclusion

Whatever advancement the world makes, be it in science, technology, medicine or anthropology, the issue of relevance is a recurring factor. Whatever proves irrelevant faces the danger of being done away with. It is more or less an open secret that Western theology is proving irrelevant in the face of rapid technological and scientific breakthroughs. Perhaps the judgement of J.W. Montgomery (1971) that the modern theologian has succeeded in killing himself by eliminating the *raison d'être* for his own existence, is to some extent true. Modern theology, instead of advancing the course of Christianity as a relevant religion seems to have justified the view of Karl Marx that religion is a mere opium of the people.

Since the resurgence of Pentecostalism in the early 20th Century, it has advanced so rapidly that in many African and Latin American countries it more or less dominates the scene in the Christian arena. Despite 'its lack of tradition and scorn of formal theological education' (Maxwell 1998: 257), it is succeeding in areas where orthodox Christianity has failed. The belief that the Bible is perspicuous enough for any 'Spirit-filled' person to understand, leads to the independent and literal interpretation of Bible verses. A flurry of passages from both Old and New Testaments are used as proof-texts for prosperity preaching, healing and miracles of all kinds. The local efforts in making the Bible relevant to the local people are complemented by city-wide crusades of international evangelists like Reinhard Bonke who for sometime has been on a systematic tour of Nigerian state capitals.

For sure, the perspicuity of the Scripture is enshrined in the fact of God's self revelation to man but at the same time the Scripture contains truths that cannot be exhausted by any generation of scholars. The scorn of formal theological training by the Pentecostals is partially justified by the 'trained incapacity' to deal with daily existential problems. At the same time it cannot be a sufficient reason to shun a deeper enquiry into the mysteries of the Bible faith. Studies for a better understanding of God's revelations to humans began in the primal days of divine communication and may never cease till the expected consummation of all things.

The challenge of Pentecostal theology in Nigeria is very real and urgent. Perhaps the best option for Nigeria biblical scholars might be a 're-mythologized' theology of the demythologised Western theology which it is claimed, suits the post-Christian communities of the world where technology and science have relegated faith and the supernatural. The assessment of Manus concerning the New Generation or Pentecostal Churches is that:

The Bible has helped and, in fact, continues to help the Church promote a distinctively African Basic Christian Community patterned on the structures congruent with New Testament Christianity, forms and tradition. Charismatic evangelism derived from biblical religion has forced unwholesome practices of the African Traditional Religion to be condemned, cleansed, purified and what remains to be inculcated into the burgeoning African Christianity (Manus 1998: 1810).

There is no doubt that Pentecostal theology has come to stay in Nigeria and that the religious, social, economic and behavioural impact it is exerting are remarkable. If the mainline Churches had not read the handwriting on the wall and quickly made adjustments to accommodate their charismatic members when the Pentecostal Revolution swept through Africa, they would by now be very worse off for it. Maybe theologians who are well-established in Western-oriented theologizing will find solution to the challenges of Pentecostal theology in the Church's approach of accommodation, adaptation and shift of emphasis.

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# **The Prophetic Vocation of the African Scholar: A Celebration of Wholeness**

**Maarman Sam Tshehla**

True intellectual heroes in Greco-Roman tradition were those who believed their teaching so much that they were willing to die for it; philosophers who died for their beliefs were considered noble and brave. Paul stands in the Old Testament prophetic tradition of speaking God's message no matter what the cost, but he also presents his message in a manner that resonates with the best in his hearers' culture (Keener 1993: 384).

## **Introduction**

The above words by Craig S. Keener capture a number of points that this paper wishes to affirm, indeed to celebrate, with regard to African scholarship. Celebrations are in the air as South Africa, the last country on the continent to attain freedom from systematic political oppression of the indigene, reveals a decade of political freedom for *all* of its citizens. But on the continent and in a country such as ours, such celebrating demands a review of the commitments, successes and failures thus far realized. It is towards this task that I find the opening quote a useful starter.

First, the quote declares that intellectual pursuits and faith are not rivals that must be kept apart from each other at all cost. Keener finds in

Paul a life that is deeply spiritual and deeply intellectual at the same time—this he reckons is worth accenting in our modern schizophrenic world. Secondly, the quote states that noble and brave scholarship is not something a scholar does on certain days of the week. On the contrary, desirable scholarship is one that permeates the scholar's life to the extent that the scholar will gladly bear witness to it through her own life (martyrdom) if required.

The third assertion of Keener's words is that the best of the Old Testament prophetic tradition is paralleled in the best of the Greco-Roman tradition. The two are so matched that Keener does not feel it a transition to move from the intellectual philosophical to the religious prophetic. The sight of a connection between intellectual pursuit and prophetic vocation is as refreshing as the intimation that the two coexist symbiotically in a true, brave and noble life. Fourthly, and flowing neatly from the last point, the quote affirms the need to focus on one's cultural context as the primary subject and objective of one's life pursuits. The present paper endeavours to show that the virtues just outlined obtain among or at least inform the intentions of *African* scholars. In other words, where Africa is privileged as the starting point and goal of a scholar's enterprise, then the scholar tends to operate like Keener's prophet-philosopher.

Far from suggesting that I have observed or read everything that has ever come out of Africa, I shall proceed to substantiate the foregoing propositions by restricting myself to the arena of African Christian scholarship. Indeed our starting point has to be a recognition of the vastness and diversity that Africa is, as well as the potential benefits and pitfalls that such diversity bears for the African scholar. We realize, in chorus with a leading African hermeneut, Justin Ukpong, that this multiplicity is not demoralizing. On the contrary it undergirds simultaneously the free-spiritedness as well as the commonality of worldview and assumptions among African peoples. In Ukpong's own words,

[i]n spite of the evident multiplicity of African cultures, the following may be identified as aspects that are common to all African world-views and that belong to the root paradigm of African cultures .... First is the unitive view of reality whereby reality is seen not in dualistic but in unitive terms .... [Even] The human being is

not seen as composed of body and soul, but as one person with visible and invisible dimensions .... Another basic feature of African world-views is the divine origin of the universe and the interconnectedness between God, humanity and the cosmos .... The third important feature of African world-views is that of the sense of community—the fact that the life of the individual human person and also even of inanimate objects in the cosmos finds meaning and explanation in terms of the structure of relationships within the human community, and between the human community and nature .... The last feature of African world-views we shall mention is emphasis on the concrete rather than on the abstract, on the practical rather than on the theoretical (Ukpong 1995: 3-14).

From different angles, therefore, both Keener and Ukpong bring us to four aspects that I believe must be characteristic of African scholarship in general and African Christian scholarship in particular. Let me elaborate the congruency as I see it.

### **Scholarship the African Way**

In Africa therefore, both individual (physical, spiritual, psychological for example) and communal (societal relations, religious belief, natural phenomena, amongst others) integrity are the obverse of scholarly integrity. In fact, these categorizations are illegitimate even if necessary. It could suffice to say that for the African, each aspect of life is interconnected with all the others. The African scholar cannot justifiably be removed from the phenomena ordinarily referred to as community/culture, the divine, the contemplation, or the natural.

These are some of Africa's key existential and exegetical premises. I am not implying that these traits are the exclusive domain of Africa, or that they are everywhere in Africa equally realized. All I can claim is that for better or worse, and to uneven degrees, they are positively part of the African scholar's constitution and African scholarship's significant starting points. Conversely, I am also not saying that they are the sole points of departure for the African scholar. For better or for worst, modern African scholars have been trained in or outside Africa from the premises supplied

by the assumptions and worldview of the Enlightenment. But frustration with the applicability or value of such premises in Africa has always attended the African scholarly endeavour. From the early days of modern African scholarship, scholars trained in or by the West, in say the New Testament, like John Mbiti or Teresa Okure, came to find back in Africa that they had to simultaneously be systematic theologians, philosophers, missiologists, community leaders, and much else besides. This interconnected embodiment of varied aspects of scholarship, the community's manifold aspirations as well as continuity within the scholar between lived life, intellectual pursuits and spiritual convictions characterizes the African scholarly project.

These thoughts I began to articulate in an earlier article<sup>1</sup>. In a nutshell, my argument there was that the philosophy of African (biblical) scholarship (both exegetical and hermeneutical) comprises at least three aspects that co-exist in meaningful partnerships. These, for lack of better jargon, I there called: the 'scholastic', the 'contextual', and the 'ideological'. My intentions were descriptive (i.e. expression of my limited understanding of the situation) rather than innovative (i.e. forging of more novel ways of going about the task). In other words I found these categories useful in capturing what I intended to communicate, but I was thereby not casting them in stone<sup>2</sup>. Perhaps a synopsis of what they were intended to encapsulate will help drive home this point.

By *scholastic* I intended a commitment to the full range of skills that have developed the world over in the various pertinent academic disciplines. African Christian scholarship cannot be about short cuts although it cannot adopt wholesale the ex-colonizers' philosophies and paradigms that evidently still dominate the academe. For instance, the African biblical

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<sup>1</sup> See Tshehla (2003: 24-30). In this earlier article I also offer a definition and thus some justification of my tendency to see the African scholar as a hermeneut, i.e. one always seeking to explicate, serve and critique her context for its own good.

<sup>2</sup> 'Perhaps the attempt to find an Africa hermeneutic should rely less on the development of the already abundant number of exegetical-hermeneutical methods and attempt to devise a framework or perimeters appropriate to Africa and the biblical documents' (Punt 1997: 140).

scholar should possess the facility to engage the original biblical languages (as much as she engages subsequent scholarly and popular ecclesiastical biblical traditions) just as well as she should engage the outworking of the Bible as her community appropriates it in its own local idiom and ways. Kwame Bediako's phraseology is succinct,

[t]he Bible, for example, the Old Testament, is not a difficult book in Africa. If the Bible is 'not perceived as an ancient book, but as a context which people inhabit and in which they participate, especially through the Scriptures in the vernacular', then it follows that African Biblical Studies will seek fresh categories of interpretation that derive from linking the original languages with mother-tongue apprehensions in the mother-tongue Scriptures. It follows from this that Hebrew and Greek cannot be options, nor is it enough to study the Bible only in English or in French, or in Portuguese, the major lingua francae in contemporary Africa (Bediako 2001: 32)<sup>3</sup>.

By *contextual* I meant a commitment to work intentionally and systematically together with both African wisdom and heritage, however artistically articulated, and African expressions of Christianity accessible in one's region. There is no evading one's location—authentic theologising is that which is consciously carried out from, and primarily for, a specific locale. Justin Ukpong, sums up this demanding commitment in the following terms,

[i]nterpreting a text is a complex process. It involves an *interpreter* in a certain *context* making *meaning* of a *text* using a specific *conceptual framework* and its *procedure*.... Making a particular socio-cultural context the subject of interpretation means that the conceptual framework, its methodology and the personal input of the

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<sup>3</sup> See a comprehensive review of the challenges facing African Christian scholarship by Andrew Walls in the same volume in an article entitled 'Christian Scholarship in Africa in the Twenty-first Century'.

interpreter are consciously informed by the worldview of, and the life experience within that culture (Ukpong 1995: 5; e.a.).

Thirdly, by *ideological* I was urging an overt commitment from the African scholar to the privileging of African perspectives, interests and ailments in her intentional and systematic work with all the role-players on the continent and elsewhere (Gottwald 1996: 136-149). One of South Africa's important (Black) theologians, Takatso Mofokeng (1992:3), once elucidated this commitment thus,

[w]e have to be guided by Jesus Christ's choice and commitment in our swift and appropriate response. He chose the side of the poor, the weak, the humiliated and the marginalized. As such the choice has already been made for us and we have to live and work it out.... We shall consequently learn to leave out the texts that hurt and humiliate [the victims of our societies], simply because the oppressed say that they are being hurt and humiliated by them, and not because we believe it or not or because what they say has any scientific backing.

So we see that African scholarship cannot be indifferent to the dominant ideologies of our time, as much as it is hardly at ease with the academy's copious specializations. To be an interpreter of scripture therefore, for instance, means working within, with and for one's community (see West 1991 and 1999 amongst others). But it also means working with every other academic discipline, theological and otherwise. My predilection for Biblical Studies cannot be hidden:

Experience in South Africa and Brazil in the interface constituted by 'reading with', in which the subjectivities of both socially engaged biblical scholars and poor and marginalized readers are vigilantly foregrounded and power relations are acknowledged and equalized, demonstrates the need for both 'community consciousness' and 'critical consciousness'. The experiences, questions, needs and interests as well as the readings and resources of the community, are the starting point of contextual Bible study, and socially engaged

biblical scholars must allow themselves to be partially constituted by this reality (West 1999:63).

It follows then that the African hermeneut is a scholar immersed in the social and intellectual realities of her immediate and wider contexts<sup>4</sup>. These matters should be self-evident but yet they still need to be affirmed because the wider 'global'<sup>5</sup> context of our day simply is at a different place<sup>6</sup>. Let me briefly illustrate this issue.

### *The 'Global' Scholarship Context*

The nexus of inward, upward, horizontal and downward relationships or partnerships of the scholar that we celebrate and practically take for granted in Africa is not everywhere self-evident. As one of Africa's sons observes,

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<sup>4</sup> 'We have emphasized that the church must be allowed to indigenise itself, and to 'celebrate, sing and dance' the gospel in its own cultural medium. At the same time, we wish to be alert to the dangers of this process .... Thus we should seek with equal care to avoid theological imperialism or theological provincialism. A church's theology should be developed by the community of faith out of the Scripture in interaction with other theologies of the past and present, and with the local culture and its needs'. (*The Willowbank Report* 1978: 26-28). Accessible also in Stott (1996).

<sup>5</sup> I use the term 'global' when referring to the attitudes and praxes of the apparently technologically advanced Bush's and Blair's of this world—religion has its own number of such lust-struck practitioners. See Tshehla (forthcoming).

<sup>6</sup> Writing in the late 1980s Cornel West (1988:112) describes this place as, 'The most salient feature of the global context in which we find ourselves is the extent to which most of the world remains under American, Soviet, and European hegemony. At the beginning of this century, this hegemony took the form of the Europeanization of the world—with a handful of states located between the Atlantic Ocean and the Ural mountains controlling over 87 percent of the land on the globe by 1918. By the middle of this century, this hegemony had been transferred into the Americanization and Sovietization of the world'. [We now know at the beginning of the twenty-first century that North America now monopolizes the globe.]

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[t]hat kind of concern [for theological formation] is rare in the western theological academy, which has become a guild of scholars talking to each other with little relevance to, or concern for, the life and mission of the western church struggling to survive in a spiritually hostile, secularised and morally relativistic environment (Bediako 2000: 29).

Indeed progressive pockets of the western academy appear to long for this African-type praxis of the communal integrity of life in general and scholarship in particular. Staying with the Biblical Studies guild, we encounter this manner of longing in Stephen Fowl's *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Fowl 1998) written for and with the USA and British context(s) in mind (Fowl 1998:9). In this laudable attempt at reclaiming integrity in scholarship, Fowl laments a situation that is a poignant reverse of the African reality just celebrated above. Independently confirming Bediako's observation, he bemoans 'The current situation which sees biblical scholars and theologians working in isolation from each other and from the concerns of Christian communities' (Fowl 1998:10)<sup>7</sup>. One of the main critiques in this regard, is that scholars of 'Biblical Theology' see themselves as detached from the theological enterprise. He illuminates,

[t]he discipline of biblical theology, in its most common form, is systematically unable to generate serious theological interpretation of scripture. This is due to biblical theology's persistent concern with its own disciplinary integrity. This concern leads biblical theologians to bracket out constructive theological convictions (Fowl 1998:1).

As we indicated in the opening paragraphs of this paper, African scholarship hardly boasts such self-serving mono-disciplinary obsessions. In fact one could go so far, without gloating, as to infer that Fowl has learnt the holistic

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<sup>7</sup> He says, 'my point is that to the extent that contemporary Christians (theologians, professional biblical scholars, and lay people) have lost the skills and habits ... they now need to learn those habits and skills anew for their own time' (Fowl 1998: 9, sic.).

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path from what he calls 'developing countries'<sup>8</sup>. In order to remedy this unfortunate ethos of western scholarship, Fowl advocates what he calls, a model for the 'theological interpretation of scripture'. This model emanates from the assumption that if one understands the Bible as 'scripture'<sup>9</sup>—and not just as part of a literary corpus—then the Bible is normative and authoritative for the biblical scholar just as it is for the average Christian and for her faith and practice. In contradistinction to a mere scholarly enterprise, biblical theology and cognates then become means through which the biblical scholar *practices* theology. Fowl further explains:

For the professional biblical scholar, the Bible is simply one (among many) texts upon which scholars might bring their interpretive interests and practices to bear. Christians stand in a different relationship to the Bible. The Bible, for Christians, is—their scripture... scripture is authoritative (Fowl 1998:3).

While not all western professional biblical scholars are Christian, the fruit of the labour of all professional biblical scholars retains value for the Christian<sup>10</sup>. Fowl is admittedly a member of this guild of professional biblical

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<sup>8</sup> 'In developing countries' Fowl (1998:16) concedes in a footnote, 'a whole different range of pressures ... shape[] the interests of academics'. Compare Norman Gottwald's (1985:27) introductory acknowledgement of the value of insights and experiences from the 'Third World' and how they lead to new interpretations of biblical texts on the phenomenon of prophets and prophecy.

<sup>9</sup> This is the case in Africa, and I surmise that those who try hard to deal with the Bible as though it were not scripture for Africans do so in order to appease non-African agendas. See the acknowledgment expressed more fully and critically in Punt (1997) or Tinyiko Maluleke (2000:87-112).

<sup>10</sup> 'Throughout the book I make ready and constructive use of professional biblical scholarship, while at the same time distancing the interests and purposes of theological interpretation from those of professional scholars. ... I lay out the argument for making *ad hoc* use of professional scholarship. That is, the views, results, and works of professional biblical scholars can be usefully employed in Christian interpretation of scripture on an *ad hoc* basis' (Fowl 1998: 12).

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scholars (Fowl 1998:13), however, he clarifies that hope for the regeneration of the integrity of biblical scholarship as wholesome scholarship lies with those professional scholars who keep up 'participation in particular Christian communities'<sup>11</sup>, accept the Bible as scripture, and maintain a Christian character branded among other things by 'truth-telling, as well as habits of gracious and edifying speech' (Fowl 1998:12).

Unlike Fowl, far fewer global scholars are candid about either the reasons for, or the regional scope of their studies. In making the preceding assertions, Fowl has thus partly raised the issues that African scholars have been grappling with for some time now. However, it appears to be crucial that these issues are asserted more intentionally by Africans so as to ensure that the instructive reality of African scholarship earns more than a footnote in well-meaning works such as Fowl's book. So the responsibility of the African hermeneut towards global scholarship remains urgent, as does the need to articulate that responsibility in the clearest terms possible for the respective benefits of all Africans and the rest of the globe. My focus on Africa is thus intended to celebrate as well as register Africa's strides amidst much difficulty<sup>12</sup>.

### *Some More of the African scholar's Commitments*

More needs to be affirmed about African scholarship than we have articulated thus far. In other words, in addition to the commitments to: scholarly rigour, the scholar's own immediate and wider context, a non-

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<sup>11</sup> 'If Christians are successfully to engage scripture in all of the ways they seek to, then that will generally happen in the context of their participation in particular Christian communities' (Fowl 1998: 6f).

<sup>12</sup> 'It hardly needs stating that this theological significance of the 'non-West', particularly of Africa, in the new configuration of the Christian world, is not for self-congratulation, but rather for African Christians to take up their responsibility in faithful witness to the Gospel in the new century. That this modern African responsibility comes in the wake of twenty centuries of Christian tradition, renders it more, not less, demanding' (Bediako 2000: 5-11).

fragmented approach to life, and a pro-the-disenfranchised ideology, the African scholar enshrines a few other attributes.

An African scholar who does not actively participate in a religious community is (and should remain) a sore exception rather than the rule. For instance, supernatural forces are a reality in Africa and the scholar needs to take due cognisance of this reality, that is if she hopes to have any meaning in the community. To rationalize them, or to attempt to explain or wish them away, would be a waste of time and serve simply to distance scholars from their faith and wider communities. On the contrary, the responsibility of finding fresh and contextually adroit ways of tackling such challenges rests with both the scholar and the religious community to which she belongs.

Lay Africans are active participants in the academy just as scholars are active participants in religious communities<sup>13</sup>. In the words of Moiserale Dibeela of Botswana, the African hermeneutic is 'a hermeneutic that does not only take seriously the form and world of the text, but the culture and experience of the reader ... and how they impact on each other' (Dibeela 2000: 384). The 'reader' in question is unambiguously both the scholar and the 'ordinary member in the pews'—it is the collective African hermeneut. The African biblical scholar is simultaneously a student and a sample, i.e. the subject, of African Christianity—no wonder Dibeela's paper is typically autobiographical. This is in keeping with our earlier observation that all aspects of life, including the contemplative, find mutual expression in every African. The result of this is that the insights, for instance, of an illiterate 'reader' of scripture are consequential to the scholar, and vice versa. The African hermeneut is thus never an individual locked up in some ivory tower 'working in isolation from others and from the concerns of Christian communities', to borrow Fowl's words. She is constituted by the life of the Christian community in which she participates<sup>14</sup>.

The last point we must amplify is that the African hermeneut engages in scholarship primarily in pursuit after the meaning and betterment of her life first and foremost. The service aspect of her scholarship is vital, and its relevance to real life-settings of her community and perhaps even of the wider world affords her the much-needed motivation. However, it is

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<sup>13</sup> *Inter alia*, see West (2002:66-82 or 2000:29-33).

<sup>14</sup> See the first three chapters of West (1999).

primarily critically that she connects with the age-old African tradition that saw scholarship as aimed primarily at the scholar's own quest for a better or higher form of being. Again I restrict myself to examples from Christian Africa.

Whether it was Antony or Pachomius in the Egyptian desert, or Pantaenus, Clement or Origen in the catechetical school of Alexandria, the model of theological formation was the quest for holiness and moral transformation within the student, who would then also become a model for others seeking their own liberation. In other words, one embarked on theological training not to receive information to pass on, not to acquire status through diplomas and degrees, not even to acquire skills for ministry, but to be changed inwardly. Only when one had learnt the secret of the holy life, was one recognized as being able to be of help to, and a teacher of, others (Bediako 2001: 32).

This is a far cry from obsession with self and personal interests. It is also not merely inward-looking scholarship with no interest in or relevance towards the social arena of lived experience. Rather it is a recognition that much of the political and social, and even religious, misunderstanding and conflict going on in the world results from misguided lives and skewed personal priorities than from ritual or confession. Therefore,

[o]ur feeling after a renewal of theological formation and Christian discipleship is a contemporary manifestation of what accompanied the earlier shifts, namely, new ventures of faith, new initiatives of intellectual and spiritual formation and new practical obedience to the call of the Living God in engagement with the world.... In stressing theological formation, our concern is not the production of a caste of theological professionals set apart from the day-to-day life of ordinary Christian people. Rather, it is a way of underlining and recapturing the central place of theological reflection and insight in their deep and broad dimensions for the nurture of Christian lives and minds, and for the equipping of the people of God and the transformation of society. This has always characterized movements

of new life in Christian history, when ordinary people become theologians (Bediako 2001: 29).

It is precisely because the African scholar is confident and vulnerable enough to let her fellows into her life pursuit that they too allow her to speak into their lives with authority<sup>15</sup>. She thus becomes a prophet in her own hometown—however precarious that status is as history is replete with prophets turned martyrs.

## A Prophet in her Hometown

Throughout the centuries the biblical prophets have served as the models with which other types of religious specialists have been compared. It is therefore somewhat surprising that anthropologists seldom use the word ‘prophet’ in their writings. There are two possible explanations for this state of affairs. First, when the title ‘prophet’ is given to contemporary figures, a comparison with the biblical prophets is virtually inevitable. Anthropologists usually seek to avoid this sort of comparison because of the danger of distorting our understanding of the contemporary figures by forcing them into the classical biblical mould. Second, the English word ‘prophet’ is

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<sup>15</sup> In the article already cited, Bediako (2001:30) attempts to articulate *a model for a new African theological and Christian formation for mission* that seeks ‘to provide a framework for understanding and interpreting what is actually happening within African Christianity; but it [seeks] also to suggest components for a theological formation that takes seriously these African realities and produces an integration of heart and mind, learning and discipleship, that liberates us as African Christians to share in God’s mission and transformation in the world. The model is composed of *four* overlapping circles with *three* superimposing concentric circles. The four overlapping circles are *Discerning the Signs of the Times, History and Tradition, Context, and A Mind for Mission and Transformation*. The three concentric circles from the inside outwards are *The Living God, The Bible, and Faith and Spirituality*.

ambiguous, even when it is seen against its biblical background (Wilson 1980: 22).

For what follows, I forthrightly accept culpability to perpetuation of the practice of summoning biblical prophets into my modern context. It is simply inevitable for one of my background and writing for a context such as mine to speak of prophets without making connections with scriptural traditions. It is very striking how the qualities we have been discussing as the prerogative of the African hermeneut are also qualities displayed by the prophet. Fully cognizant of the dangers of generalisations, granting the variety of contexts and periods to which the biblical prophets belonged, can we legitimately speak of the Old Testament prophetic tradition? What about the mission of the prophets, can we understand it uniformly? Whereas Robert Wilson is anxious about 'the danger of distorting our understanding of the contemporary figures by forcing them into the classical biblical mould', David Pleins warns of the same pitfall in the following terms:

To import a modern agenda about what it means to be prophetic into a starkly different ancient context serves to muddy the waters concerning how to make use of the Bible in cotemporary discussions of social ethics<sup>16</sup>.

So we are introduced to the need to learn from the biblical and modern

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<sup>16</sup> See Pleins (2001:6). I venture into this rushed précis fully aware of the vast array of issues that require the special attention I am not able to give here. For instance, David Pleins (2001:12) feels that 'The very notion of a unified 'prophetic tradition' is a terribly problematic concept, and our sensitivity to differences of social visions between and among the prophetic texts will open up significant avenues of biblical social thought. Nevertheless, generally speaking, we may agree with Norman Gottwald (1985:386) that by Amos' time, prophecy 'was achieving formalization and broad public recognition as a kind of 'regularized criticism' of the established order. One of the developing institutional habits was to draw extensively on a wide range of pre-existing speech forms... in order to deliver arresting messages that cut to the core of popular and official presuppositions about the religious foundations of national life'.

prophets, albeit at the same time it is indispensable that we respect these prophets' unique and varied terms of reference. While taking to heart all the stated precautions, we approach the matter without the simplistic analyses that see prophets merely as either religious specialists or militant social visionaries. The study of propheticism is itself a prophetic exercise. Is it any wonder then that scholars lament the muddying of waters or the ambiguity of the concepts 'prophet'? Only active participation in the phenomenon leads to such meekness.

Whenever one does what she was put on the planet to do, she inescapably earns the title 'prophet'. Whether it is Steve Biko or Musa Sono, and whether we like them or not, their lives continue to instruct ours to immeasurable extents. In other words, when the African scholar engages in the intellectual pursuit because it is the means whereby she is strategically placed to impact her society, rather than as a means to fame, status or riches, then we are looking at a prophet. If we grant this, then we need not seek to force or mould every prophet into our own image. If we indeed accede to this understanding, we shall let prophets be the people of conviction and vision that they are, people who will not let us rest on our laurels, and people who proclaim justice and divine judgment on behalf of the downtrodden<sup>17</sup>.

The critique levelled by the prophets against members of their society is twofold, according to Gutierrez. In the first place, the prophets raised the concern that just relationships be established in society, especially that the disenfranchised members of society find protection from oppression. Secondly, the prophets levelled their criticism against the forms of religious expression that held sway in their society, namely, 'purely external worship'. But prophetic religious criticism is not treated by Gutierrez as separable from the prophetic concern for just social relationships; rather, concern for a just society flows from a concern for appropriate religious values (Pleins 2001: 168).

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<sup>17</sup> 'This is what prophecy is: judgment about the present in the light of the future-judgment arrived at through the authority of God (Wolf 1983:64). Gutierrez, 'The prophetic eschatology is oriented to a future that is bound up with a concern for present historical realities' (in Pleins 2001: 165).

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Similarly,

[a]ccording to [Walter] Rauschenbach, 'When the prophets conceived Jehovah as the special vindicator of these voiceless classes, it was another way of saying that it is the chief duty in religious morality to stand for the rights of the helpless.' This advocacy for the poor functioned to extend religiously rooted ethical commitments into the public domain (Pleins 2001: 216).

Out of the collective nature of her hermeneutics, the African scholar is thus poised to make a positive contribution to the plight of African thought through her scholarship. The Old Testament prophets 'generally were lay persons .... They arose from the people of God, where they most often had been bred, nurtured, trained, and at times even supported in their work (Seilhamer 1977: 4). The prophet's authority lay in her membership in the community that recognized her to be a prophet, i.e. the spokesperson of the divine'<sup>18</sup>. But the force of her proclamation resided in the integrity of her life, the degree to which she was able to resist the lures of her society that predictably were controlled by the rich and powerful against whom she was most likely to have to prophesy. In other words, insofar as she both partook of the life of the community and remained un-coerced by the schemes of the powerful of her community, she remained a voice of sanity and justice'<sup>19</sup>. But

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<sup>18</sup> Old Testament prophets shared, among other things, the 'absolute assurance that God had called them personally into his service .... Hence, in a very real sense, right from the beginning the prophets understood themselves to be God's handpicked spokesmen and his personal messengers'. Secondly God was understood to have authored the material they uttered. 'Only when such divine messages were received did the true prophet speak, act, or write. In fact, there were periods of silence for all the prophets ...' (Seilhamer 1977: 2-3).

<sup>19</sup> 'A broader application of social scientific methods to prophecy suggests that the prophets were intimately a part of their society even as their stances towards its current directions were highly oppositional' (Gottwald 1985: 307).

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she also must beware the persuasive (manipulative) schemes of the hoi polloi<sup>20</sup>.

In every sense of the African scholar's vocation, her community and justice are as paramount as her need to overcome personal handicaps. From this perspective it is a privilege and blessing for the academy to have students who do not let go of their roots once they start being exposed to theories and worldviews that are dissimilar to their own. Instead of jumping ship, they leave behind on the academy the imprint of their sending community while assimilating what profitable material they can for use back in their hometowns. African scholarship is about keeping in very fine prophetic balance the praxis of the individual scholar, the academy and the community. To drift towards only one side of the equation at the expense of the other is detrimental to the faith as to the legitimacy of the output of the African scholar. It is a demanding occupation to be an African scholar therefore, an occupation that extends beyond mastery of tools of appropriate discourse to the skill of maintaining all these aspects in optimal balance.

I should know, coming from a Pentecostal background where theologians are not given much regard because many Pentecostals who become theologians fail to sustain the lifestyle they led prior to their entering the Pentecostal ministry. They then often move in directions that are apparently for the worst rather than the most challenging (most prophetic), being with the community and by serving the community. But there are encouraging examples of Christian scholars who on their return to their sending communities did not make shipwreck of their communal and intellectual commitments.

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<sup>20</sup> 'For [Antonin] Causse, the prophets drew on the ancient desert and tribal traditions to critique both the aristocracy and the peasants.... Causse sees in the prophetic critique a deeper grounding for the community, namely, in the notion that the society's relation to YHWH is to be based neither on ethnic ties nor ritual practices, but on a just way of life. Thus Causse maintained that the prophetic contribution to Israelite religious thought lay in its elevation of an ethical critique that operated independently from the interests of both the ruling elite and the peasantry' (Pleins 2001: 14).

## **Concluding Remarks**

It is sobering to discover from the Old Testament that 'testing the spirits' is not merely necessary; it is also extremely difficult (Wolf 1983:65).

So the African hermeneut is constantly facing the danger of inadvertently carrying either the colonising tendencies of western ideologies into her own context or a debilitating awareness of their impotence in coping with African realities. However, it is through an understanding of prophecy explained above and a critical engagement with the 'assignment' and the tools or media of the missionary enterprise, that scholarship can retain a liberating sense in Africa.

Awareness of history, a sense of responsibility, and a sober attitude are necessary lest the mistakes of our modern missionary forebears be repeated. The African hermeneut further has the moral duty to represent the plight of those in her community who are less fortunate. She also cannot pretend to be unaware of the exacting standards of thought, self-expression and discipleship to which the output of fellow-believers in her community ought to be pushed if it is to be taken seriously by others. She would be doomed if she ignored the yearnings and cries of her context. And, she is called to the sacred task of passing on the baton—the skills and knowledge she has gained, however imperfect, must be shared in humility and good conscience. As a prophet she 'cannot but speak of what she has seen and heard'<sup>21</sup> in the religious community, in society and in the academy; nor can she skirt reminding the 'rulers of the people and elders' of their own responsibilities—whatever the cost to her own life<sup>22</sup>. This is indeed a serious and exacting profession, one easily beset by mistakes that are better seen only in retrospect, but it remains the task we are humble enough to embrace as we embark on the African century.

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Acts 4:19-20.

<sup>22</sup> Peter never shirked the duty of reminding the leaders of Israel (God's chosen people to whom he too belonged) of their part in the rejection of the Messiah (cf. Acts 2:22-24 and 4:9-12).

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Any acceptable social analysis employed by Christian thinkers should take seriously the biblical injunction to look at the world both through the eyes of its victims and through the Christocentric perspective which requires Christians to see the world through the lenses of the cross (West 1988:113).

Although dominant stories have forced their way into the history books, it remains the African scholar's duty to uncover other parts of the mosaic—many of them preserved in indigenous tongues—in the interest of wholesome and modest scholarship. This surely presumes the close cooperation affirmed above between the lay theologians and professional scholars. But it also presupposes a non-schizoid scholar who is deeply grounded in both her scholarship and in her context. This is the hope that the African scholar bears for 'global' scholarship and why I wish to dedicate this article to Prof G.C. Oosthuizen. As scholar, he stood out not only because of his prophetic critique of apartheid, but especially with regard to the remarkable contributions he has made to the study of indigenous religious cultures.

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# **Towards a *Mudzimu*<sup>1</sup> Hermeneutic: A Basuto Reading of the 'Strange Woman' in the Post-Exilic Texts**

**Denzil Chetty**



***Ngoana rangoane***

***boele saken***

***'nyalle likhomo li***

**'Cousin, marry me that the cattle return to the kraal'  
(Ashton).**

## **Introduction: Kinship at the Core**

In recent years, African theologians have been challenged to develop a hermeneutical model that is born upon African soil, which could be

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<sup>1</sup> Mudzimu = 'African Kinship'.

employed across the continent, speaking to its context and inhabitants. The rising challenge for developing such a hermeneutical model to facilitate the reading of the Bible in Africa has been addressed by the efforts of prominent scholars such as Dube, Lategan, Maluleke, Mugambi, Ukpong, West and others (Getui, Maluleke & Ukpong 2001). Building upon the foundation set by these scholars, I began my personal journey in search of a common discourse shared amongst the inhabitants of Africa and the ancient society, which would have an impact upon the contextual interpretation of the Bible. I recalled the words of Mbiti:

For African peoples, marriage is the focus of existence. It is the point where all members of a given community meet: the departed, the living and those yet to be born. All the dimensions of time meet here and the whole drama of history is repeated, renewed and revitalized. Marriage is a drama in which everyone becomes an actor or actress and not just a spectator. Therefore, marriage is a duty, a requirement from the corporate society and a rhythm of life in which everyone must participate (Waruta 2000:103).

In analyzing the scenario put forward by Mbiti that marriage is a drama, in which all members of a given community participate as 'actors' or 'actresses' and not just 'spectators', my attention shifted to a similar situation in the narratives of Ezra where marriage was seen as a rhythm of life to the newly established post-exilic community of Judah.

[A] very large assembly of men, women and children gathered to him from Israel, ... and Shechaniah ... spoke up and said to Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken pagan wives from the people of the land .... Now therefore, let us make a covenant to put away all these wives and those born of them ... (Ezra 10:1-3).

The consequences of the contractual marriages to foreign women had greater implications than merely trespassing against the covenant. The corporate society was jeopardized by exogamous marriages, which required the attention of Ezra to rectify the institution of kinship, which was in threat of disintegration. These understandings related to the institution of kinship;



is not strange to Africa. Fortes (1945) noted that in Africa and a large part of Zaïre, Zambia, Malawi and Tanzania, people trace their decent unilineally, that is through father to father's father, or mother to mother's mother. As a result people are linked by mode of descent or lineages, which are the sources of certain rights, e.g. inheritance. Thus, to read the Bible in Africa is to understand the Biblical texts through the mindset of an African. Hence, it remains my objective and the thesis of this research paper, that understanding the African kinship institution and finding parallels and similarities with the Ancient Israelite kinship institution can be a valuable and essential tool in interpreting the Biblical texts among the local African communities, with new insights on African Biblical interpretation.

In developing an African Kinship Hermeneutic, my initial approach is to provide a definition of kinship for the context of this research paper. There has been a fair amount of discussion by social anthropologists such as Needham, Southwold, Rivi re, Leach, Korn, Forge, Fox and others concerning the definition of kinship (Needham 1971). My own view is that much of this debate is pretty scholastic and inconsequential. Therefore, I will not recapitulate any of it or embark on another definitional exercise. However, for the purpose of this research paper, I adopt the minimal premises of Needham (1971:3) that kinship has to do with the allocation of rights and their transmission from one generation to the next. These rights are various. They include most prominently rights of group membership, i.e. clan and tribe membership, succession to office, inheritance of property, locality of residence, and type of occupation.

This research paper aims to provide a hermeneutical model based on the integration of an African and Biblical kinship structure with which the relevant ancient texts can be read in a paradigm of common understanding and shared perceptions, amongst local African inhabitants. Hence, I have identified this approach as a 'Mudzimu Hermeneutics'. Mudzimu is an African spirit in the VaHera clan of the Shona people with the parochial self-interest in the survival of one's own immediate kin. Mudzimu literally translated means 'family' or in a more extended sense, 'kinship' (Mbigi & Maree 1995: 19). In developing this hermeneutical model, I hope to facilitate a reading of the Bible, which takes into account and stimulates an appreciation for the institution of African kinship.

## **Current Trends in African Kinship Discourses**

In attempting an analysis of modern trends, mention should perhaps first be made of the diminishing importance of the collective or group aspect of marriage. Emphasis is shifting to the individual aspect of marriage as a relationship between two persons. In regards to the prospective husband's capacity, it very often happens nowadays that a young man is an entirely free agent. His ability to provide the necessary bride-price out of his own earnings may make him, in practice, fully independent of his own kinsfolk, and even in societies where matrilineal customs have in the past made it necessary for the bridegroom to live for a period with his wife's family (like Jacob), and to render service in order to gain his bride, the tendency is for the modern suitor to ignore such requirements and to demand that a cash payment be accepted in discharge of the traditional obligation. On the woman's side such freedom is less easily achieved. Nevertheless, it seems that, in general, a marriageable girl is more likely than in former times to be able to assert her own will effectively in the choice of a husband. As for older women, there is an increasing tendency to challenge the customary principle of perpetual marginalisation and to repudiate the ideal that marriage involves the transfer to the husband's kinship group of a permanent and quasi-proprietary interest in the women's person and her reproductive powers.

In an analysis of contemporary kinship research, the following trends have taken pre-eminence in African kinship discourses.

### **(a) Marriage Strategy and Alliance**

A full review of the theoretical literature on African marriage strategies and alliances is obviously beyond the scope of this research paper. Hence, I shall limit my discussion to the major contributions made by certain kinship scholars pertaining to my research definition of kinship. According to Radcliff-Brown, the importance of marriage lay principally in its effect of creating new elementary family units, the universal, basic building blocks of kinship structures, with the role of legitimating children to provide social continuity for lineages and other corporate groups (Radcliff-Brown 1950: 5). Many Africanist descent theorists recognized that marriage was also of political significance in that it allied two distinct individuals. However, according to Fortes (1959: 209), the political implications of marriage were

clearly thought subordinate to those of consanguineal kin ties in general and in relations of particular descent.

Goody (1958) analysed marriage and family formation using the concept of the 'development cycle of domestic groups', with the emphasis on the process of social continuity. According to the perspective of Goody, marriage was considered to fulfil relatively predictable and mechanistic functions in the reproduction of kin group membership. As a result, analytical attention was directed away from patterns and processes of competition, inequality, conflict and exploitation within domestic groups and the elementary family unit, which were regarded as the unproblematic atoms of kinship.

Lévi-Strauss (1969) offered a radically different approach to marriage from that of the descent theorists — one that emphasised the role of marriage in defining and allying groups in society. Adapting Lévi-Strauss's alliance theory to the African context was Héritier, a former student of Lévi-Strauss, who extended his methods to encompass various forms of non-prescriptive marriage systems, or semi-complex systems of marriage alliance, which were relatively common in the African continent (Héritier 1981).

Meillassoux (1960:38-67), proposed the analytical model that has come to be known as the 'lineage mode of production'. Meillassoux focused on the issue of elders' power over junior men via their control over the marriage system. According to Meillassoux, control over women is crucial in such a system because of their role as 'producers of producers', i.e. women's direct participation in agricultural production, food processing, and other economic activities being considered secondary to their reproductive functions.

**(b) Marriage and Political Economy in the Formation of the Household**  
In many contemporary African societies, a large household remains a valuable political and economic asset. According to Cladwell (1982:12-14), given the economic value of children in many African settings, family sizes are unlikely to decrease significantly in the foreseeable future. Burnham noted that among the Bambara farmers of the Malian Sahel, a preference for larger household units in response to labour supply requirements related to large-scale millet farming with plough oxen. In Sierra Leone among the

Mende rice farmers, a large household composed of wives, children, apprentices, and fostered children remains the mark of a politically influential man (Burnham 1987: 45). The examples of Malian Sahel and Sierra Leone are only two, however, the relevant point to be grasped is that changing social conditions do not necessarily always move in a direction that favours smaller households. As Guyer (1981:99) has warned, we should not take the household boundary as the natural limit for a man's influence over his kin, affinity continues to be the crucial political economic significance in many African societies, whether they are housed under one roof or not.

In analysing the formation of the household and marriage in this more conflictual manner and taking seriously the notion that, despite the normative altruism of kin relations, individuals are likely to be pursuing personal interests in domestic contexts, we are confronted with the necessity of considering the ideological content of kinship norms in everyday life. According to Poewe's analysis, among the *Zambian Luapula*, different marital and family arrangements have different ideological responses for men versus women, for rich versus poor, and for Catholics versus Protestants. She goes on to describe how such ideologies are called into service in different social settings (Poewe 1981). This type of analysis, despite the slippery character of the concept of ideology, merits to be applied in other ethnographic contexts and is also evident in the post-exilic Judean community to be discussed.

### **(c) Polygamy and Monogamy**

Polygamy remains a widespread feature of African societies and one which despite the predictions of modernization theorists, does not necessarily seem to be on the decline. Even in situations where monogamy is morally valued or even legally enjoined, functional alternatives to polygamy are frequent, such as concubines or 'outside wives'. ('Outside wives' implies wives outside the legal statute of the so-called 'ordinance marriage' in several African states.) According to a study conducted by Clignet (1970), among the *Bete men* (Ivory Coast), the factors of urban residence, salaried employment, and high educational levels all correlate with higher rates of polygamy—a case in which men with 'many powers' are liable to take 'many wives' as symbols of their high status. Men's pursuit of 'many powers' through polygamy in African societies can take multiple forms but,

in the present day, economic considerations are often paramount in the decision to take a second or third wife. In certain economic circumstances where women's and/or children's productive activities are highly lucrative, polygamy may result in increased capital income for the household, and the motivation to practice polygamy may be based on the simple profit or loss system. However, if taking multiple wives represents a substantial financial drain on a man's resources, polygamy may serve to symbolize a high status (Burnham 1980).

Polygamy also contributes to an increase in female status and economic independence. This is likely to be more evident in societies where farming is not a major economic activity and where women are more directly involved in the distribution of goods outside the domestic group. The pattern of full-scale integration in the global market economy which has been impacting on African communities now for the last few centuries, diverted male labour from subsistence agricultural production to cash-crop production and wage labour. In this scenario, women were primarily responsible for the subsistence and reproductive spheres. In the upper Guinea Coast and Sierra Leone, women participated in the cash economy in separate spheres with autonomous financial authority (Steady 1987: 212).

#### **(d) Gender Symbolism**

African women, according to Burnham (1980:130), often maintain different budgets from their husbands, engage in many forms of productive labour on their own behalf, and take the major responsibility of funding their children's education. To take a particular case in more detail, Robertson (1976), writing of non-elite Ga women in Accra, notes that: (1) economic cooperation between spouses is not an ideal, (2) there is mutual suspicion between spouses concerning sharing of knowledge of business dealings, and women in trade keep their husbands ignorant of their profits lest they cut on the wives' financial support, (3) women avoid obtaining business capital from their husbands, and (4) a spouse's property is considered to be legally separate in Ga courts.

Moral judgments about the 'correct' role for women within marriage are prevalent both in academic literature and in public discourses. In analysing the question of female-male relations in general and conjugal relations in particular, I should make clear that I am not envisioning the

imminent demise of marriage as an institution in African societies. Rather, it is analytically valuable to consider that all forms of conjugal relations represent a bundle of interactional possibilities with associated political, economic and other legal implications.

As Guyer (1981:100f) notes:

... the modification of sex roles has not been ... simple, precisely because it is not just cultural. How land, labour, and incomes are controlled is an aspect of social structure, involving complexes of rights and duties, sanctions and consequences ....

Guyer continues to argue that such issues are the subjects of struggle in African societies, a point with which I would agree, although I feel that feminist theologians have done much to hide this fact in portraying ignorance to the inevitable conflict with the institution of African kinship.

### **Towards a Mudzimu (African Kinship) Hermeneutic**

The current trends in African kinship discourses offer great potential for the development of an African kinship hermeneutic. The marriage strategy theories of Radcliff-Brown, Goody, Levi-Strauss and Meillassoux, provide some basic information with similarities in Biblical societies. Perhaps, the most information about the customs of marriage strategies is to be found in Ecclesiasticus, the book of Sirach, who wrote about 150 BC in Jerusalem (Malina 1981: 111). Poewe's ideological content of kinship norms was also a prevalent issue in the Biblical society, as marriages were also contracted for reason of political alliances (i.e. the *harem* of Solomon) (de Vaux 1965: 31).

Entering into a new era, Africa has given birth to intellectuals who are challenged to discern new metaphors and insights to propel the continent into a new dispensation. The Bible as a tool of 'redirection' provides Africa with a mirror through which it can see its endeavours to rebuild the land out of the ruins of ideological branding as the land of the 'uncivilized' and a nation with no 'identity'. According to the late Biko (1996: 29), in order to destroy the African infrastructures of kinship, i.e. social, political and economical, that had been built and passed down through generations within

the African society, and to impose a system of imperialism, the colonialists were not satisfied with 'holding a people in their grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content; they turned to the past of the oppressed native and distorted, disfigured and destroyed it'. As a result the heritage of the African society was reduced to 'tribal battles' and 'bloody wars'. The complexity of destroying their identity resulted in the contemporary African child 'hating' his/her own heritage.

The current trends in African kinship discourses (as discussed above), although complex and debatable, open a new window in which kinship in Africa could be comprehended and lost heritages revived. These challenging discourses form the foundation for the development of a Mudzimu Hermeneutic. The following are the potential outcomes of an application of Mudzimu Hermeneutics.

#### **(a) Revitalization of 'Primordial' Consciousness**

An outstanding consequence of the African kinship system is its constitutive social formation of 'primordial consciousness' (Ekeh 1999:104). Wherever kinship has a powerful sway, its adherents are moved to demonstrate a community of feelings among the putative kindred when the basic security needs of its members are threatened. Primordial consciousness embodies a degree of empathy for putative kinsmen that one will not exercise for those who are outside the perimeters of the assumed kindred. Primordial consciousness also generates mutual compassion for those in the primordial fold, allowing individuals to sacrifice greatly for members whose welfare and security needs are in danger. However, it can also generate hostility to groups that appear to threaten the survival of its identity. The kinship's hold over the kindred is therefore, a great deal stronger than would be indicated by rational calculations of measurable economic benefits that its adherents gain from their interrelationships. According to Ekeh (1999:105):

... kinship is, ..., an underground spring of sentiments, which sometimes will remain dormant in periods of normalcy but which will erupt into mighty passions in periods of crisis that threaten the corporate existence of the kindred ....

The primordial consciousness that has been cultivated as an aspect of

kinship in Africa is closely associated with land and language. This dominant form of kinship has produced a specialized form of primordial consciousness that has sought to include all members who share these similar characteristics. They have a region and a specified land area that they point to as theirs, and they speak a common language. Often they will sacrifice their lives defending the domains of their ethnicity. At many times, members will sacrifice much to defend the sanctity of their kinship heritage against outsiders. The application of Mudzimu Hermeneutics results in the rejuvenation of 'primordial consciousness'.

### **(b) The Restoration of an African Identity**

There is a great determination of the people of Africa to end the feeling of self-alienation and to restore their civilization. For over four centuries, the ancestors of Africa have been in bondage. This bondage encompassed by colonial power, racism, exploitation and oppression has led the people of Africa to lose their identity, by accepting the notion of the inferiority of their cultural identity. Generations of African descendants experienced the onus of seeing themselves through western lenses. The identity of Africa that emerged after the period of initial contact with the first western Europeans was one of a 'dark continent', whose descendants were 'subhuman', 'heathens' and 'barbarous'. The mischievous understanding of the Biblical Hamitic myth, said to be of Babylonian Talmudic origin, assigned Africans the role of servants to other people because of Canaan's misdeeds (Skinner 1999: 30).

This was the intellectual and moral climate which the descendants of Africa found themselves in, when they became conscious of their position in a western Christendom. Imperial Europe wished to remake the world in its image, or in its shadows, and estranged Africans from themselves. Many descendants of Africa succumbed to these notions about themselves and accepted their existential inferiority and loss of identity. Emerging from a colonial scenario that has reaped the loss of an identity, Mudzimu Hermeneutics as a post-colonial hermeneutic, aims at rejuvenating an African identity. This hermeneutic provides a new way of looking at the continent and provides new generations with an identity of their own:

... a culture, abandoned, sloughed off, rejected, despised, becomes



for the inferiorized an object of passionate attachment... The customs, traditions, beliefs, formerly denied and passed over in silence are violently valorized and affirmed ... tradition is no longer scoffed at by the group. The group no longer runs away from itself. The sense of the past is rediscovered ... the past becoming henceforth a constellation of values, becomes identified ... (Skinner 1999: 38).

### **(c) A Restoration of Communal Relationships**

In explaining the relationships of the individual to the community, Mbiti, in his seminal study, *African Religions and Philosophy*, affirms the interconnectedness of African societies. In his chapter entitled, *Ethnic Groups, Kinship and the Individual*, Mbiti (1990:106) explains:

In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole ... when he (the individual) suffers, he does not suffer alone, but with the corporate group, when he rejoices, he does not rejoice alone, but with his kinsmen, his neighbours and relations whether dead or living.

In promoting a paradigm of communal relationships as explained by Mbiti, the kinship is first and foremost concerned with the unity of all members. A principle of Mudzimu Hermeneutics is that it seeks to use the comprehension of communal relationships within the traditional African society as a 'key' to 'unlock' the understanding of communal relationships within the ancient Biblical society.

### **A Case Study of the 'Strange Woman' in the Post-Exilic Texts**

The question that now arises is how we can read the Biblical texts in the light of these hermeneutical principles. In order to make an application of Mudzimu Hermeneutics, I have chosen a case study of the 'Strange Woman' in the post-exilic texts, which will be analyzed through a Basuto reading.

### 1. Current Exegetical Research on the 'Strange Woman'

Boström suggested that the 'Strange Woman' was not an ordinary prostitute, but a foreign devotee to the goddess Ishtar, who engaged in cultic prostitution as a fertility rite (Childs 1979: 223f). Van der Toorn (1989:205) offered an alternate scenario that the 'Strange Woman' was far from being a professional prostitute. She was instead engaged in an extraordinary act of prostitution for the sake of paying a vow. Whatever their merits, Van der Toorn's reading together with Boström's theory, are too superficial and cannot be applied to the larger complex of the 'Strange Woman' passages as will become evident.

#### (a) Who is the 'Strange Woman'?

Taking into consideration that Proverbs can be dated in the post-exilic period (Washington 1994), scholars have concluded that the 'woman' in Proverbs 1-9, portrayed as a 'prostitute', can be a reference to the 'foreign women' of the land (Eskenazi & Richards 1994: 229). Washington argued that the warning in Proverbs 1-9 against unfamiliar women was already a theme for the post-exilic sages (Eskenazi & Richards 1994: 223). With these broader interpretative issues in view, I propose to describe the particular social and economic factors that originally motivated the polemic against the foreign women in the post-exilic community. In agreement with the hypothesis of Washington, during the post-exilic period, the 'Strange Woman' was a representation of the women who did not belong to the returning post-exilic community. Relationships between the Judean men and the foreign women posed economic problems. Due to land tenure and cultic membership being linked to genealogical lineage, the prospect of exogamous marriages brought about the danger of outside encroachment upon the land holdings of the Judean congregation (Eskenazi & Richards 1994: 220-222). As a result the Judean men were forbidden to marry foreign women not only for moral and religious reasons, but also because they were a threat to the social and economic stability of the Judean community.

However, this conventional hypothesis needs relevant substantiation. In order to prove this hypothesis, an analysis of the semantic linguistics in the Biblical texts for the application of the 'Strange Woman' needs to be investigated. Under the grouping of *zārāh*, the Wisdom Literature (i.e. Proverbs 1-9), gathers an assortment of warnings against 'unfamiliar

women'. Due to the composite nature of her portrayal, the prescribed figure has no consistent identity. The woman according to Yee, is depicted as 'alien, harlot, evil, adulterous and foolish' (Yee 1989: 53-68). However, the essential attribute unifying the accounts of the forbidden woman, is her designation as *nākeriyāh* / *zārāh*. To ascertain the motivation of the sage for denouncing her, the semantic value of these terms are as follows.

According to Biblical Hebrew, the adjective *zār* denotes 'otherness' referring to what is outside the field of recognition or legitimacy (Snijders 1954: 67). As a sociological designation *zārāh* refers explicitly to those outside the pertinent kinship group, whether family, tribe or nation. Thus, the law of the Levirate marriage stipulates that 'the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside (i.e. the kinship) to a stranger' (Deuteronomy 25:5). In the prophetic literature the term *zār* denotes non-Israelites, often used to denote the enemies of Israel (e.g. Ezekiel 31:12). A similar range of meanings to those of *zār* is found in the adjective *nākeriy*. In Psalms 69:9, *nākeriy* is used to denote 'strangeness' to the household. However, as a social designation, *nākeriy* denotes 'foreignness' by reason of nationality or ethnicity (Eskenazi & Richards 1994: 230). In the exilic and post-exilic contexts the words *zār*/ *nāker* are prominent, especially in the prophetic literature where it designates the foreign opponents of Judah (Jeremiah 5:19). In Proverbs 1-9, the usage of *zārāh* with *nākeriyāh* suggests that the terminology is a reference to a foreign adversary of the Judean community. In comparison with Proverbs 1-9, are Ezra 10:2, 10-11, 14, 17-18, 44 and Nehemiah 13:26-27, where *našiym nākeriyāh* refers to women outside of the community, whom men within the Israelite community had married. Camp suggested that while deviant sexuality was preeminent in the earlier tradition of warnings against the 'Strange Woman', the secondary interpretation of the 'Strange Woman' as ethnically foreign came to the fore in support of the post-exilic marriage reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah (Camp 1985: 269-270).

#### **(b) The Social-Historical Context of the Post-Exilic Polemic against the Foreign Women (Land Tenure Issue)**

According to the thesis of Weinberg, the post-exilic Judean community was organized as a *Bürger-Tempel-Gemeinde* (Civic-Temple-Community), a religio-political unit fictively constituted as an agnatic lineage of property-holding men and their families (Weinberg 1972: 54). According to Ezra 1:5,

2:59, and Nehemiah 7:70-71, 11:13, membership in the temple community was determined by descent, within a paternal estate, i.e. property was distributed according to the divisions of this lineage. This implied that in the *Bürger-Tempel-Gemeinde*, participation in the temple cult, land tenure and citizenship were linked under the leadership of the heads of the paternal estates (Weinberg 1972: 231).

The deportees to Babylon comprised only a small proportion of the Judean population. According to 2 Kings 25:12, and Jeremiah 39:10, 40:4-12, after the deportation, the remaining Judean majority appears to have made claims to the land holdings left behind by the exiles. As members of the returning community began to return and re-establish themselves, conflict over the land was inevitable. Thus, the land tenure was a critical issue for the early post-exilic Judean community. In response to the local opposition, the returning exiles conceived themselves (typologically) as the generation of a new conquest (Ezra 9:1-2, 10-15). The true Israel, now identified with the returning community (Ezra 1:11, 2:1, 9:4, Nehemiah 7:6), had entered the land from the outside, and those presently occupying the land were excluded from the covenant community (Williamson 1989: 155). The returning community effectively classified the local Judean community (the people of the land), together with their neighbouring non-Judean people (Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites, Samaritans, etc.), as alien (foreigners) to Israel. Ezekiel 11:15-17 portrays both the non-deported Judeans and the exiles acknowledging that legal right to the land accrues to those with access to the cult (Leviticus 25:23) (Smith 1987: 81f). With an endorsement from the Persian Empire, those who took membership in the re-established *Bürger-Tempel-Gemeinde* secured their legal right to land (Davies & Finkelstein 1984: 330f). Membership into the cult and rights of land were established genealogically. Genealogical reckoning thus, provided an 'ideology of descent', which allowed the leaders of the post-exilic community to identify the true Israel, grant membership into the temple, and who would possess land.

Exogamous marriages brought more difficulties in community membership and over land allotments among divisions of the lineage. Marriage alliances had implications on property holdings. This implied that the economic stability of the *Bürger-Tempel-Gemeinde* was vulnerable to disruption by marriages outside the community. Hoglund (1991:67)

recognized marriages as a means of transferring property and social status from one group to another and related the marriage reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah to concern over property rights. This can be rendered as a support to Merton's '*exchange theory*', where we need to consider the *upward* advantages the foreign women gained by marrying outside the social boundaries of an ethnic group (Merton 1941: 362).

Thus, we can understand the emphasis in Proverbs 1-9, Ezra and Nehemiah on avoiding women outside the community, as it posed a threat to the real property holdings of the Judean collective. As within the patrilineal land tenure system women were capable of inheriting and disposing property (Numbers 27:1-11). The provision for women inheriting land aimed at securing the inheritance within the bounds of its rightful patrilineal tribe. Thus, female heirs were required to marry within the lineage of their late father. These laws, presumable post-exilic in their present form, make clear that it was possible for women to inherit land. This introduced conflicts over the land tenure issue within the Israelite tribe(s).

According to Hoglund, in order for the Persians to facilitate ease of identification for administration and taxation, they enforced a guarded ethnic identity among the returning community, to whom they entrusted regions of the imperial domain (Merton 1941: 65f). According to this thesis, the returning community risked losing their land entirely if they did not maintain themselves as a distinct community.

### **(c) The 'Strange Woman' as a Threat to the Judean Temple Economy**

The analogy of the 'Strange Woman' in the Wisdom literature associated with Ezra and Nehemiah, is not only a warning against the foreign women, but with close literary analysis it denotes the consequences of failing to heed the prohibition. Camp associated the house of the 'Strange Woman' with reference to its sinking (Proverbs 2:18) with the possession of land (Camp 1985: 251). building upon the analogy (Proverbs 2:21), that the *upright*, being those who avoid the 'Strange Woman' will inherit the land, whereas those who seek the 'Strange Woman' shall *be cut off from the land*. The reference to inhabiting the land with the warning against foreign women in Proverbs reflects the anxiety over land tenure, which was one of the motivating factors in the campaign against exogamous marriages in Ezra and Nehemiah.

According to Washington, this text related to the fear that Judean property will fall under the control of foreign families, via relationships and eventual marriages to women outside the community (Washington 1994: 240). In an analysis of Ezra's established commission to deal with the problem of the exogamous marriages (Ezra 10:16), the commission identified and prosecuted those who had married outside the community. The penalties for failure to submit to these proceedings included expulsion from the temple assembly and the confiscation of property. Thus, in sum Høglund (1992) stated that the systems of allocating territories to dependent populations will work as long as the imperial system is capable of maintaining some clarity as to who is allowed access to a particular region and who is not. Inter-marriage among various groups would tend to smudge the demarcation between the groups (Høglund 1992).

## **(2) A Basuto Reading of the 'Strange Woman' Discourse**

### **(a) The Basuto: A Historical Introduction**

The first Bantu to enter Basutoland were three Nguni groups, who crossed the Drakensburg from the east in three waves and settled south of the Caledon River. They were the Phlela, the Polane and the Phuthi. Some years later they were joined by the 'First Basuto', who were the Peli, Phuthing, Sia and Tlokoa. They were followed by other clans or tribes, of whom the most important were the Fokeng, Koena and Taung. The Tlokoa were at one time the most powerful military group, particularly in the days of the famous 'Queen' Mantatise and her son Sekonyela. The other tribes are also important, and practically all the principal chiefs today belong to the Koena, and many are related on the maternal side to the Fokeng (Ashton 1955: 3).

All these groups were scattered and more or less independent of one another. For the most part they lived at peace with one another, disturbed only by intermittent cattle raids. However, as history shows, this relatively peaceful existence was irretrievably shattered early in the nineteenth century. Shaka, a young Zulu, fired by the value of proper military discipline, began to spread war and destruction far and wide. Neighbouring tribes fled before him and burst across the Drakensburg with his regiments in pursuit. The Tlokoa bore the brunt of the first invasions, but eventually they broke under the strain and plunged southward. Eventually, a young Koena

chief, Moshesh, gathered around him the remnants of former tribes at Butha Buthe, where he fortified the Butha Buthe Mountain and held it against the Tlokoa for some time, until he withdrew and went to Thaba Bosiu. With the impregnable mountain fortress of Thaba Bosiu as his base, he restructured the remnants of the tribes into a fighting unit and slowly beat back the invaders. In 1831, the last of them were repulsed (Ashton 1955: 3). Within a few years Moshesh became the acknowledged leader of the Basuto and set about restoring the peace and prosperity of his people.

#### **(b) The Basuto: A Social Background**

All Basuto are divided into clans. These are primarily social groupings or affiliations distinguishable by name, genealogical lineage and also sometimes by totem and other cultural features. The most common clans to be found at present in Basutoland are the Fokeng, Hlakoana, Khoakhoa, Phuthing, Tlokoa, Sia, Taung, Tlounge, Khlokoe, Phletla, Polane and Phuthi (Ashton 1955: 17). Membership of the clan is determined by birth and is theoretically acquired only through the father, but there are exceptions. For instance, illegitimate children belong to their mother's clan, unless they are acknowledged by their father. According to Schapera (1938), clan endogamy was prescribed. However, women often married out of the clan (exogamy) to identify themselves with the dominant clan. According to Poewe and Merton's analysis (discussed earlier), this reflected a marriage strategy with an ideological content, which would be to gain access to the privileges of a dominant clan.

Within the clan, we have the family, which is less clearly defined, but more important. It does not consist of a particular or limited group, but shades away from the nucleus of parents and children to indefinite individual kinsmen. It is a complicated and widening tangle of relationships, involving specific attitudes and obligations towards people with whom one is connected by blood and marriage. The basic family group is the biological family of parents and children. This widens out to include parents' parents and children's children, together with the brothers and sisters of all these individuals and their wives and children. One's close kinsmen are known as '*ba heso*' (the people of our place) (Ashton 1955: 6). They form what is primarily a patrilineal group, composed of one's parents, paternal grandparents, paternal uncles and their wives and children. One is usually

brought up amongst these people, lives and works with them, assists them in ceremonies, domestic and agricultural activities, is helped by them to marry and bring up one's own children. For a woman this connection with her own people is weakened by marriage, for she has then to go to her husband's village and identify herself with his people.

### **(c) An Analysis of the 'Strange Woman' in the Basuto Society**

The search for the 'Strange Woman' within the Basuto society, is not a very difficult task. With the consistent battles for land amongst the various clans, women tended to marry into a clan in which they could reap 'wealth and power'. There are three key questions concerning the 'Strange Woman': (1) how did the 'Strange Woman' gain entry into the new clan, (2) how did the 'Strange Woman' gain access to land, and (3) how did the 'Strange Woman' pose an economic threat to the community?

Single blessedness is looked on as something abnormal and even a little sinister and marriage is regarded as a right and proper for all adults. Women usually get married after initiation or on leaving school, between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four. As the Basuto are patrilineal, (similar to the returning post-exilic Judean community), marriage between brother and sister is forbidden (Ashton 1955: 144). The closest and most senior relative that one can marry is one's father's brother's daughter. This type of union is encouraged by the desire to retain the marriage cattle within the family. Second preference goes to marriage between cross cousins. Custom dictates that one's relationship with one's maternal uncle and his family should be particularly friendly (Ashton 1955: 147). Marriage with his daughter is in keeping with this injunction (i.e. strengthening kinship ties). However, the question of preferential marriages is strongest among the families such as those of the chiefs and other leading families. They take a greater pride in their ancestry and family lineage. Due to their economical status, they are better able to indulge this traditionalism as they can afford second and third wives. However, poorer people can afford to marry only one wife, and prefer to take the girl they like rather than the one they ought to like.

As a result, exogamous marriages with other clans are intensified, although not recommended. Nowadays, there are several departures from the 'correct' procedure of marriage. A less acceptable variation, which occurs in more than a quarter of the marriages made today, is '*chobeliso*' (elopement)



(Ashton 1955: 126). In these cases the boy (e.g. Fokeng) seizes the girl of another clan (e.g. Sia), usually when she is in the fields or visiting friends, and takes her home. Even though the elopement may have been instigated or facilitated by her people (i.e. Sia) and agreed to by the girl herself, she usually makes a show of resisting, as an affectation of modesty. Her lover does not harm or have intercourse with her, but leaves her with his mother (i.e. Fokeng) who breaks the news to his father. It is then customary, that since the girl is in the house of his father (i.e. Fokeng), that the father accepts the proposal and in earnest and good faith arrange to give some six head of cattle as a first instalment of the full '*bohali*' (bride-price) to the girl's father (i.e. Sia) (Mair 1969). The motives for such elopement are numerous and complex. However, the most common is when parents do not agree with the marriage to an offspring of another clan (e.g. Fokeng to Sia). This then creates the entry for the *našiyim nakeriyāh* — 'Strange Woman', the woman outside of the pertinent kinship group. The 'Strange Woman' in the Basuto society is a parallel to that of the 'Strange Woman' in the post-exilic Judean community. She is an 'outsider', a representation of a woman with foreign traditions, totems, genealogical lineage, cultural differences and from a different land. The semantic linguistics employed in the Biblical texts to denote the 'Strange Woman' are applicable in the context of the Basuto society, depicting 'otherness' referring to an illegitimate member of that particular kinship.

The exploitation, distribution and protection of the land are controlled by the chiefs who are a parallel to leaders of the heads of the paternal estate in the post-exilic Judean community. According to Ashton (1955: 144), every chief must by law, provide all members within his clan with land to cultivate. These rights normally accrue on marriage. Similar to the strategy endorsed by the Persian Empire in the post-exilic period, payment of tax was claimed on the basis of land ownership, and land was granted to all those with accrued membership to the cult. When a man wants to build a house for himself, after getting married or moving with his family to a new village, he approaches the chief, through his father if resident there, and asks for a household or building site. The chief then inquires where he would like to build and grants his request if practicable; if not he gives him another plot of land. The site is roughly indicated to the applicant and his neighbours, and should be large enough for two or three huts (approximately

one-eighth of an acre; an additional plot may be granted for a small garden) (Ashton 1955: 142).

Application for farming land is made in the same way and usually at the same time. The original method of allotting farming land has never been described and is now forgotten in most parts of Basutoland, but it was probably similar, to that practiced by the Tlokoa within living memory. The applicant would show the local chief an area that he would like. He was then either given what he requested or told to run around the desired area. He was then granted as much as he could circle without stumbling (Ashton 1955: 145). When agreement was reached, the boundaries of the area were publicly described to the applicant in the presence of the villagers and beacons off. These areas were much larger than required or could be managed by one household and were regarded as family lands, vested in the family head for that of his own use and as an inheritance to his family. The holder may dispose of the land in certain limited ways with his chief's consent.

According to the traditional Basuto custom, when land is given to a family for cultivation, it can be transferred by process of inheritance to the wife or children but not sold (Ashton 1955: 179). The propagation of exogamous marriages and polygamous marriages brought severe consequences to the larger community. In the case of polygamous marriages, each wife, except the one who may be attached to the senior household, had their own properties and own fields (Ashton 1955: 188). Each wife was entitled to the exclusive use of the properties, its proceeds and the sales thereof. However, the 'Strange Woman' was soon to pose an economic threat to the larger clan community. As the family grew, its new members would be given their own farming plot, which resulted in a general shortage of land. As the demand for land increased, and due to no vacant land being available, applicants would have to wait for years for fields to fall vacant through forfeiture, death or emigration of the holder.

Exogamous marriages brought difficulties over the allotment of land as marriage alliances had severe implications on property holdings. This implied that the economic stability of a particular clan was vulnerable to disruption by marriages outside the clan. Once again, similar to the case of the Judean society, much of the land of a particular clan came to be in the hands of the 'Strange Woman'. In practicality the clan risked losing their land entirely, because they did not maintain themselves as a distinct clan.

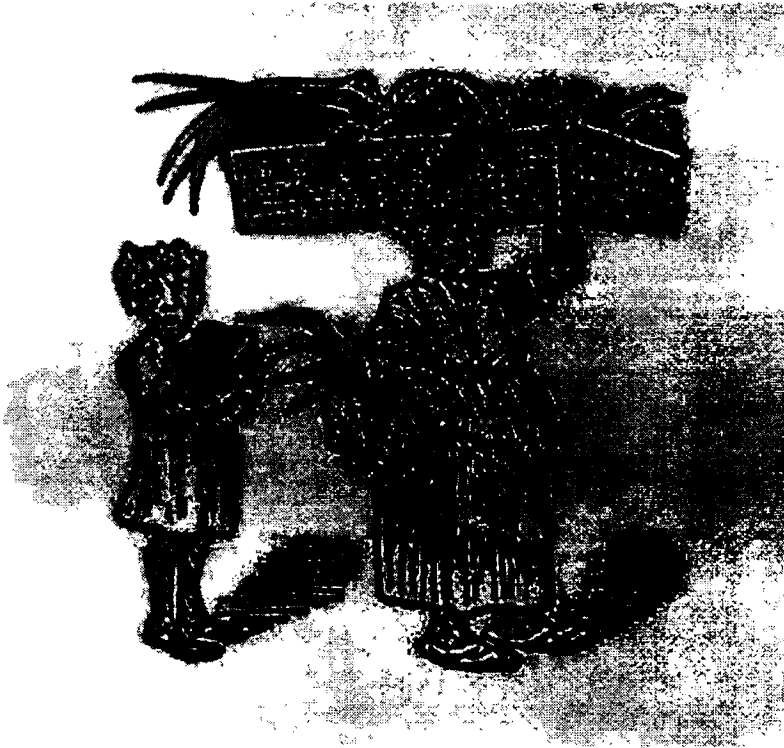
The Basuto society strived on the principle that 'grain was the artery of life' or more prosaically that the 'wealth of a Basuto community is the land' (Ashton 1955: 131). Thus, in understanding the principle of Needham's definition that kinship has to do with the allocation of rights and the transmission from one generation to the next, we can understand the emphasis of the Sages, Ezra and Nehemiah on avoiding the 'Strange Woman' as it posed a threat to the property holdings of the Judaeans and in this contextualisation, the Basuto collective.

In sum, my hypothesis is that the characteristic of most of the societies that we call primitive is that the conduct of individuals to one another is largely regulated on the basis of kinship, this being brought about by the formation of fixed patterns of behaviour for each recognized kind of kinship relation. These kinship relations were more than just cultural ties. On close analysis they depict social, economical and ideological relationships.

## **Conclusion**

The aim and objective of this research paper was to develop a hermeneutical model, which is born upon African soil and which speaks to its inhabitants, the people of the 'soil'. In response to this, I have developed a Mudzimu (African kinship) hermeneutical model, which is based on revitalizing primordial consciousness, restoring an African identity, and restoring communal relationships. The principle of this post-colonial hermeneutic is to rekindle a desire to know more about the traditional African way of life, which could be used to develop a common understanding of shared perceptions. In beginning my personal journey in search of a common discourse shared amongst the inhabitants of Africa I have discovered that Africa is a land of opportunities, a people with diversities, and a rich cultural heritage that has long been forgotten but which lies in the hearts of many ordinary people scattered throughout the continent. I still have much more to discover in this vast continent, so I offer this paper as a work in progress, and hope that it stimulates a greater interest in this field of African Kinship and the Bible.

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A glimpse of an African Woman and her daughter in the Laura Plantation  
([www.lauraplantation.com](http://www.lauraplantation.com)).

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# **The Steel Hand of Domination in a Velvet Glove of Hegemony – Aspects of Religious Discourse in China**

**J.A. Loubser<sup>1</sup>**

## **Introduction**

Though I joined a professional study tour to Mainland China in 1997<sup>2</sup> for different reasons, my interest was soon caught by something that I had not anticipated. Having grown up in apartheid SA, and having lived through and even published (Loubser 1991; 1995; 1996) on the painful process of awakening to the recognition of an ideology that at first seemed as natural as the air that one breathes, I asked myself whether the parallels I perceived between the old South Africa and present day China were imaginary. After discussions with religious leaders from all five legalised religions the conviction grew that there were striking structural similarities in the manner in which religious discourses were influenced by government ideologies. Though my perception had been sharpened by experiences in South Africa, that is not the focus of this article. However, an analysis of the theme religion and ideology in China might be helpful when dealing with religious leaders, and can assist in clarifying the issue of religious freedom. This issue has become even more relevant since 5 October 1998, when the Peoples'

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<sup>1</sup> Financial support for this study is acknowledged from the Human Sciences Research Council (SA) and the University of Zululand. The opinions expressed are solely for the account of the author.

<sup>2</sup> Religion and Philosophy Delegation to the People's Republic of China, by the US Citizen Ambassador Program Co-operating body: the Academia Sinica (Taiwan), September 1997, to Beijing, Xi'an, Nanjing, Suzhou and Shanghai.



Republic of China (PRC) officially signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights<sup>3</sup>.

## **Profile of Hegemony**

After different shades of repression and oppression, leading up to the harsh persecution during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1971) the PRC is now heading for an era of unprecedented religious freedom. Some questions arise: What would the limits of this freedom be? How would the Party justify this freedom to itself? Are religious bodies merely tolerated, or is some active role foreseen for them in society? From the discussions with religious leaders it was apparent that the government's role was ambivalent. On the one hand, religious activities are controlled by perhaps the strictest regulations found in the world, while on the other hand religious leaders admitted that they received some assistance and even encouragement from government officials.

For my analysis I shall employ the concept of hegemony used by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, as further developed by a number of scholars (conveniently omitting finer nuances of interpretation)<sup>4</sup>. In doing this I am aware of how precarious it might be to apply a concept developed in 'Western' thought to Chinese conditions, given the illusive difference between conventional Western and Chinese thought patterns<sup>5</sup>.

Somehow, the idea of hegemony comes to mind when scholars think of China<sup>6</sup>. Let us first begin with a brief profile. In the original classical Greek usage, hegemony denotes 'leadership' and was used to describe the hegemony of one city-state over another. During the revolution of 1905 - 1907 Lenin used the term 'hegemony of the proletariat' to describe the

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. article 'Dissidents call on Blair to press China on Rights, Environment', published on the Internet at [cnm.com](http://cnm.com), October 5<sup>th</sup>, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> For an overview of the development of Gramsci's thought over 33 years, its inner contradictions and varying interpretations, see Lumley (1977: 25-42).

<sup>5</sup> For a description of some of the differences, cf. Gernet (1982) esp. the section on language and thought, pp 238-247.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Marme (1987: 437), Weiss, 'The New Hegemony' (1988), Letter in *International Herald Tribune*, Tuesday, May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1995 by Kok-wei Lim.

position of one party with regard to other groups in society, while working out the theory of the expansion of the bourgeois democratic revolution into socialist revolution<sup>7</sup>.

In 1926-1927 Gramsci linked on to Lenin for his definition of hegemony, but went far beyond<sup>8</sup>, giving it the definitive meaning it today has in international scholarship as an analytical tool for examining the 'complex interconnections between culture and politics which the idealists have suppressed'. The concept of hegemony calls 'attention to the wide variety of cultural manifestations in which ideology appears' (Adamson (1980: 176). Gramsci's basic observation was that force ('domination')<sup>9</sup> was insufficient to keep a group in power, and that it needed the consent of the masses. It is the 'predominance of consent over coercion in that concept' that has commended Gramsci to a wide range of theorists, who began to examine ways in which such a consensual basis can be achieved and maintained (Martin 1997: 33).

In a normal situation a government would be stable if it exercised not only coercive force, but moral and intellectual leadership (hegemony) that enjoys the consent of the masses. Should a situation occur that disturbs its consensual base, a government becomes unstable and an 'organic crisis' or 'authority crisis' sets in, creating the condition for a 'counter-hegemony'. New governments either achieve power by first seizing it and afterwards seek to establish hegemony, or a new hegemony first develops and is then promoted to a position of power. It is the latter process that concerned Gramsci as he applied this theory to the Italian state of the early twentieth century<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Soviet Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 1985 as published on the Internet, accessed August 1998.

<sup>8</sup> In "Notes on the Southern Question" in Gramsci 1978. See Adamson (1980:172-173).

<sup>9</sup> 'Domination', indicates a state's monopoly by means of force and its role as final arbiter of all disputes (Adamson 1980: 170; also 242).

<sup>10</sup> In the US the leading exponent of this theory has been Michael Harrington. American socialists struggle to wrest ideological hegemony away from the ruling class, and gain hegemony for radical ideology, as described in the pamphlet 'Toward a Democratic Socialism: Theory,

To establish a viable counter-hegemony, Gramsci went beyond the conventional 'class alliances' of the communist movement, and argued that alliances have to be formed with a broad range of civic and cultural organisations, which could include religious bodies, with the Party assuming a hegemonic role. The evolution of a class-consciousness thus coincided with a movement that involved not only an economical awareness, but also a broader moral and intellectual awareness (Adamson 1980: 171). Thus a 'moral and intellectual bloc' is formed, also known as the 'historical bloc'<sup>11</sup>. Hegemony has to be pioneered by articulating intellectuals who mediate between the aspirations of the masses and the socialist party. At a certain stage in the development of a counter-hegemony, the masses are catapulted out of their passivity and become the conscious agents of history. This is technically known as the 'cathartic moment'. Once the party controls the state, it needs to continue with the process of consolidating its hegemony.

As an analytical tool, hegemony supersedes the conventional definitions of ideology as either 'false consciousness' or a 'system of ideas'<sup>12</sup>. Hegemonic ideology seeks to legitimate a certain status quo that is maintained by force. In modern (undemocratic) states it does not do away with domination, but seeks to consolidate and reaffirm it. A successful hegemony conceals the coercive force of the state as much as possible. Therefore it seeks to establish a moral and intellectual rapport between the rulers and the masses, and is maintained by constant moral and intellectual pressure, reinventing itself from time to time as the agent of change in

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Strategy, and Vision' (1991) by Joseph Schwartz, member of the DSA National Political Committee.

<sup>11</sup> The idea of a 'bloc' was adapted from Sorel (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 42).

<sup>12</sup> Ideology: A system of beliefs, practices, attitudes, values, ideas and language that justifies a status quo. 'Hard' ideology derives its usage from Napoleon Bonaparte, and implies a fanatical commitment to a particular set of ideas. This definition informs the gut reaction many people have to the term as being associated with 'deception', 'distortion', or 'falseness'. The term may also be used in the sense of a 'soft' ideology, indicating the set of beliefs that people live by. In both cases ideology is involved in framing human experience, explaining reality, imposing sense and order on society and is expressed through language and ritual.

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society. As it controls the parameters of social discourse it becomes embedded in the institutions of society to such an extent that the systems it created are accepted as part of the natural order. As is the case with all forms of ideology, it lives by a number of myths that represent a simplification of reality and define the limits of critical enquiry. Usually it is the 'charismatic leader' or the heroic struggle of the 'historical bloc' or the 'cathartic moment' that becomes the paradigmatic myth. At the stage when it enters the social subconscious to such an extent that it appears natural, it operates as a closed, self-explanatory hermeneutic circle. At the same time hegemonic ideology is deeply agonistic, portraying counter-hegemonic elements as the enemies of peace, while extrapolating all opposition to cosmic evil. This ongoing process is technically known as the 'war of position'.

In summary one can say that there are three types of hegemony: (1) a neutral definition of hegemony as leadership; (2) hegemony as a positive consensus generated by the leading group in a democratic society; and (3) hegemony as a tactical strategy to maintain domination in an undemocratic society.

In this article I shall argue that Gramsci never completely broke with the third definition, and that this is also the definition that is operative in the PCR. The investigation will explore the ramifications which this kind of hegemony has for religious freedom<sup>13</sup>.

### **Questions and Responses as Traces of a Religious Discourse**

At the risk of oversimplification I now present a brief, generalised sketch of the religious discussions that took place over two weeks at numerous institutions. Place-names and names of interviewees are omitted.

*Q: How did you survive the Cultural Revolution?*

*A:* Religion had to be practised underground. In some cases members were protected by their communities. Many were executed while others survived

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<sup>13</sup> Though the concept of hegemony is often mentioned in literature, I am aware of only one article in which Gramsci's theory has been applied to the present China, cf. 'Ideological superstructure in Gramsci and Mao Tse-Tung', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35: 1 Jan-March 1974 (author unknown).

lengthy interrogations and 're-education'. All the sanctuaries were closed, many were destroyed while others were desecrated. (The present Government is seen as the 'liberator' from the horrors of the Cultural Revolution, just as Mao was seen as the 'liberator' from Japanese and Nationalist aggression.)

*Q: How do you assess the current atmosphere in the religious communities?*

A: They were brought closer by the hardships of the Cultural Revolution. There are examples of Christian and Buddhist groups assisting one another to reconstruct their sanctuaries. Though Protestant and Catholic Christians do not engage in internal dialogue, the relationship is cordial. All religions enjoy greater freedom than in the past and are optimistic. Otherwise secularism and worldly demands take their toll on the faithful.

*Q: Are you free to propagate your religion?*

A: Yes, within the set limits of the sanctuaries. This does not prevent outsiders to participate. No religious programmes are allowed in the media and on the streets. An example exists where Buddhist monks took down 'illegal' way-side shrines erected by laymen, in order to comply with current legislation. The printing of textbooks and sacred texts are allowed but restricted, while there are regulations controlling the intake of new members. The Government seems to be sensitive to the rapid growth of Christianity among the youth and the elite.

*Q: What are the main problems facing your religious activities?*

A: Too few facilities to train leaders, too little resources for printed materials, too much bureaucracy.

*Q: Do you experience any interference from the Government in your affairs?*

A: Bureaucratic red tape makes it almost impossible to find new premises for buildings. In some cases the local officials are helpful, though they tend to view religious bodies as their subordinates. As China is a huge country it is conceivable that there are areas where the local officials have not yet implemented new policies and are hostile to religious matters.

*Q: Is the practice of your faith anyhow compromised by the socialist policies of the Government?*

A: No practises are allowed that are dangerous to a person's health or to the economic welfare of the communities. This relates to issues such as dietary laws, faith-healing, proselytising and religious holidays especially in the non-Christian religions. In general, religious groups have adapted to this, since it does not affect the central tenets of their faith. Also all licensed religions have to comply with the 'three-selves principles' (self-government, self-support and self-propagation) and to oppose imperialist and counter-revolutionary elements<sup>14</sup>.

*Q: Can you inform us about the position of religious groups that are not licensed by the Government?*

A: They have made their choice to defy Government and they often represent extremist positions. By and large the licensed religions are not too concerned with those groups and would advise them to seek legalisation.

*Q: Are you aware of the persecution of people because of religion?*

A: Those who are prosecuted and brought to trial are guilty of criminal offences. (An example of a preacher who went on trial for raping young girls was cited on more than one occasion.) Also those who indulge in 'superstition' or profit from people's superstition are liable to be prosecuted.

*Q: What about the situation in Tibet, and especially with the Dalai Lama?*

A: Tibet was always part of China and enjoys autonomy. There are now more Buddhist temples than before the PRC's intervention. The Dalai Lama has been invited to return provided that he refrains from insisting on the independence of Tibet<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Adopted in the Christian Manifesto of 1950 and signed by 400,000 Protestant Christians, and afterwards applied to other groups. See Geffré & Spae (1979: 99-100) for background information.

<sup>15</sup> Background to the PRC's ruthless politics regarding Tibet is given in Weiss (1988: 38-39). Much the same tactics is now applied to the Taiwan-issue: international isolation, recognition that the territory belongs to China, promises of limited autonomy and prosperity.

*Q: Do you enjoy full citizenship?*

A: No, only atheists believing in materialism are admitted as members of the Party, which is a prerequisite for holding office. Rare exceptions are made for people from the autonomous regions.

*Q: How do you evaluate the Tiananmen incident of 1989? Do you have religious critique of the state?*

A: That was an unfortunate incident. A difference between religion and politics is observed, though religion can serve a positive role in the construction of a patriotic, socialist society. Religious values can counter corruption as occurs occasionally among officials — as also reported in the newspapers.

## **Evaluation**

The absence of a critique of state policies and theory about how religion could support a future democracy was noteworthy. It is also telling that academics in religion, philosophy and social sciences were not familiar with Western disciplines such as hermeneutics or deconstruction, of which few have only remotely heard. The historical criticism of Western theology and proponents of the different varieties of liberation theology had apparently not yet arrived in China.

A preliminary response among our delegation to these answers was that the spokespersons were inhibited by the threat of reprisal from the side of the Government and that they gave prescribed answers. Surely, they were aware of the severe repression reported by human rights groups—in 1993 there were 500 complaints before the China Christian Council of abuses at local level, property problems and violence against members (MacInnis 1996: 289). Surely, they also knew that Chinese authorities in Tibet have chosen a young boy as successor to the late Panchen Lama (second to the Dalai Lama) ignoring the boy selected by Tibet's religious leaders (MacInnis 1996: 289). Especially noteworthy was the 'amnesia' regarding the underground Protestant and Catholic churches. And surely, they were aware that the policy to extend private ownership (affirmed by the 15<sup>th</sup> Party Congress concluded on the 21<sup>st</sup> September) would lead to an increased

pressure for democracy as evidenced by the Tiananmen-demonstrations of 1989? The latter was obviously a taboo subject.

Could it be that the leaders were so comfortably co-opted by the system that they did not really care about the wider issues? Were they deliberately toeing the Party-line? Or did they lack courage or proper information? As the talks proceeded the impression grew that our discussion partners were sincere rather than cynical. They all, rather convincingly, affirmed how free they were since the public practice of religion was allowed in 1979 and sought the demonstrate China's new open door policy. Such a finding obviously lead to the question as to *how it is possible for 'good' people to have been co-opted to such an extent by a repressive system?*

In the next section I shall argue that this phenomenon can be adequately explained by the concept of hegemony.

## Aspects of Hegemony

### Growing Importance of Hegemony

For an observer it is obvious that the Gramscian concept of hegemony finds a textbook application in present-day China.

With the open-door policy adopted by the Constitution of 1978 and the economic reforms of the 1990s new groups, such as entrepreneurs, are steadily on the increase<sup>16</sup>. At an incremental pace more groups are entering the social space also shared by religious bodies. These diverse civil associations have in common that they are voluntary associations based on consent and persuasion. This is exactly the situation foreseen by Gramsci where mere domination by the rulers is not enough to remain in power. In 1926 when he began using the word hegemony in its new sense he mentioned that 'the proletariat can become the dominant class to the extent that it succeeds in creating a system of alliances which allows it to mobilise the majority of the working class population ...'<sup>17</sup>. He takes this idea of

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. article by Nicholas Lardy in Ying-Mao Kau & Marsh (1993: 103ff.), and speech by Li Luye permanent representative of PRC at the UN, also in Ying-Mao Kau & Marsh (1993: 443ff.).

<sup>17</sup> In "Notes on the Southern Question" in *Selections from Political Writings 1921-26*. (1978: 443).



hegemony beyond the proletariat, introducing the idea of a political leadership grounded upon a 'conjunctural coincidence of interests' in which the participating sectors retain their 'separate identities. Moral and intellectual leadership requires that an ensemble of ideas and values be shared by a number of sectors (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 66f). This theory requires communist strategy to put hegemonic tasks increasingly more central, especially when dealing with capitalist systems (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 60). There can be no doubt that Marxism-Leninism in China is undergoing such a radical transformation that it is even thought to be on the decline (in Ying-Mao Kau & Marsh 1993: 408-429; 437).

The Party is thus forced to abandon its class ghetto and 'to transform itself into the articulator of a multiplicity of antagonisms and demands stretching beyond itself' (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 58). What is needed is hegemony, intellectual and moral leadership of the party, winning the consent of civil associations, including the religious constituent. For this, two factors are instrumental: the formation of an 'intellectual and moral bloc' and the development of a new type of intellectual leadership.

### **Moral and Intellectual bloc**

Gramsci defines hegemony as spiritual and moral leadership that operates through persuasion and consent. A social group might assume a hegemonic role when it articulates cultural and belief systems that are held to be universally valid by the general population. 'The social group or class that is capable of forming its own particular knowledge and value systems, and of transforming them into general and universally applicable conceptions of the world, is the group that exercises intellectual and moral leadership.' An example of such a (positive) hegemony is that of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Reformation that countered the domination of the old Roman Catholic system breached the gap between the clergy and the laity and created a hegemonic relationship between the people and the intellectuals. One result of this was the translation of Scripture into the vernacular languages. Thus the Reformation succeeded in translating its values into universal categories that went beyond the boundaries of the church and found general acceptance among the public (Fontana 1993: 35-37). By achieving this, a 'historical bloc' was formed.

### **'Organic' Leadership**

The Party as the dominant group aspires to a leadership role in society. According to Gramscian theory this role requires the emergence of an *organic* intellectual within the people themselves. Thus the concept is born of a democratic philosopher who *articulates* the hegemonic ideology (Fontana 1993: 140).

The organic and dialectical interaction between intellectual and the masses resembles a relationship between teacher and student, where the teacher is also a student and the student is also a teacher. Through this totality constituted by the interaction of thought and action, the level of consciousness of the masses is raised. Consequently this transcendence does not destroy the different social spheres, but rather links them on a higher level, involving them in an open-ended reciprocal transforming relationship (Fontana 1993: 33-34). Thus the socialist party conforms to Gramsci's Machiavellian model of the 'New Prince' as hegemonic innovator and reformer, who closely and inextricably linked with the people, and, together with the people, uses the new political knowledge to engage in the *verità effettuale* and by so doing transform reality ...' (Fontana 1993: 147).

The implication of such a theory for religious bodies in the PRC should be obvious. These associations are now respected as separate social entities that must become part of the 'intellectual and moral bloc' under the hegemony of the Party. It is in this light that one has to understand the role of the Institute of World Religions at the Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing (founded in 1964), and the Religious Affairs Bureau. These two bodies, the former with an academic and the latter with an administrative task, are to serve, in Gramscian terms, as the collective 'new philosopher'. In theory these bodies are not to see their role as that of domination, but rather as mediator between the true interests of the religions and the Party. A question that remains is whether this process can really be as reciprocal and open-ended as foreseen by Gramsci when power is monopolised by the Party.

In an ironic sense this idea of hegemony deconstructs the philosophical base from which it arises. What it calls into question is the base/superstructure model of classical Marxism (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 58). Gramsci himself argued against a determinist understanding of base and

superstructure, saying that such a correspondence did not permit a simple reduction of one to the other. 'Economic conditions merely set the limits to forms of superstructural activity, they did not directly determine them' (as quoted to this effect by Martin 1997: 50). However, in spite of these insights, Gramsci did not manage to rid himself of Stalinist elements. His relatively undeveloped understanding of the systemic nature of language, prevented him from taking the subsequent step of completely separating the notion of hegemony from proletarian classism. This was only later carried through by post-structuralist thinkers (Brandist 1996: 108). Gramsci's essentialist notion of the historical bloc, which Laclau & Mouffe (1985) deplores as a step backward, is still, according to my observation, alive and well in the PRC, and preventing democratic plurality. With the Party monopolising the state in China, it is clear that the same contradiction exists as has been observed by post-structuralists in the thought of Gramsci, who stopped short of defining hegemony in such a way that it compromises the monopoly of the Party..

### **War of Position; Politics of Consent**

The present situation of religious organisations in China is further elucidated by the Gramscian concept of a 'war of position'. As the PRC responds to a continuing diversification of society, due to internal economic pressures and the demands of globalisation, the war of arms is replaced by a 'war of position'. The rigid social distinctions of classical Maoism—the Army, the Workers, the Party, etc.—are now opening up to new groupings, viz., the religious communities, civil bodies, new classes of entrepreneurs. This is the reason why China is entering a phase where *hegemony becomes more important than ever*.

The Leninist conception that a small cadre of professional revolutionaries could divine the 'true interests' of the working class, proved to be an effective strategy for underground organisation in repressive societies. However, Leninism's track record in democratic capitalist societies is dismal because citizens in 'bourgeois' democracies believe they should openly participate in determining their 'true interest'. As China is allowing more civil freedom, the classical Marxist theory that the class that has the means of material production at its disposal, at the same time has

control over the means of mental production, comes into difficulty, necessitating an extension of theory. This corresponds to Gramscian theory that 'accepts social complexity as the very condition of political struggle and ... sets the basis for a democratic practice of politics, compatible with a plurality of historical subjects' (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 71). For the Party to maintain its hegemony in the new environment, it constantly has to conquer strategic moral and intellectual positions in society. The war of position seeks to assemble the 'disaggregated' social entities around the hegemonic core. The intellectual instrument through which this war is waged, is technically described as 'articulation'.

### **Articulation as Weapon in the 'War of Position'**

The concept of hegemony supposes a theoretical field dominated by the category of articulation. Articulatory practice can be understood as a discursive structure, which constitutes and organises social relations (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:93, 96). As religious discourse in the PRC inevitably articulates and structures social reality, it also becomes the target of a war of position.

The *elements* on which articulatory practices operate were originally specified as fragments of a lost structural or organic totality (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 93). 'The status of the "elements" is that of floating signifiers, incapable of being wholly articulated to a discursive chain. And this floating character finally penetrates every discursive (i.e. social) entity' (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 113).

It is not the poverty of the signifieds but, on the contrary, polysemy that disarticulates a discursive structure. That is what establishes the overdetermined, symbolic dimension of every social identity. Society never manages to be identical to itself, as every nodal point is constituted within an intertextuality that overflows it. *The practice of articulation therefore, consists in the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning; and the partial character of this fixation proceeds from the openness of the social, a result, in its turn, of the constant overflowing of every discourse by the infinitude of the field of discursivity* (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 113).

This theoretical angle explains why it is possible for Party hegemony to enter into the religious discourse even in the most subtle ways. This also explains why it is too simplistic just to conclude that religious leaders are collaborators or puppets of the regime when they articulate a certain optimism and defence of the system. The 'nodal points which partially fix meaning' may have been initiated by the Party, but is inevitably shared by civil communities.

The open and incomplete identity of every social entity also predicts some interpenetration of religious discourse into articulation by the Party. Laclau & Mouffe (1985:114) are of the opinion that '... the very identity of the articulatory force is constituted in the general field of discursivity [and that] this eliminates any reference to a transcendental or originary subject'. This may be going too far in the case of the PRC, where the Party itself continues to act as a 'transcendental subject'.

### Agonism

It is noteworthy that military metaphors such as 'struggle' and 'war' goes hand in hand with the exercise of hegemony. According to Laclau & Mouffe (1985: 136), 'the two conditions of hegemonic articulation are the presence of antagonistic forces and the instability of the frontiers that separate them'. The presence of these two aspects shows why the 'war of position', *vis-à-vis* a military war, is now so important. Antagonistic rhetoric abounds and is directed toward the anti-imperialist and unpatriotic attitudes, the perpetrators of the Cultural Revolution, corruption and counter-revolutionary attitudes. The instability of frontiers is related to the inevitable demands of economic globalisation and diversification, as well as the growing demand for democracy<sup>18</sup>. Thus the war of position with its varying frontiers requires a continuous adaptation to the shifting social landscape in which it is 'impossible to find ... that final anchorage [which is] not offered us by any sutured totality' (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 137). This indeterminacy of the social, which gives a primary character to antagonism, assures the existence

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<sup>18</sup> Whereas Mao Zedong focused on the continuous struggle within the Party for ideological correctness, Deng Xiaoping argued that true socialism can only be built on a highly developed economy (in Ying-Mao Kau 1993: 429).

of the articulatory and hegemonic practices (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 145). As we shall see in the next section, this antagonistic 'war of position' is waged between unequal contenders.

### **Concealment of the State's Monopolising Power**

The Party in the PRC does not apologise for its totalitarian approach or for keeping a monopoly on coercive power (Cf. in Ying-Mao Kau 1993: 74). Whereas the elected Congress has the privilege of presenting legislation, the Party retains the veto right on laws passed. As the executive arm of the state it interferes with jurisprudence at every stage of the process (Ying-Mao Kau & Marsh 1993: 60-102). From the point of view of a liberal democracy this amounts to domination, regardless how deftly it is concealed or mystified as hegemony. Hegemony in this case serves as 'the vehicle whereby the dominant social groups establish a system of "permanent consent" that legitimates a prevailing social order by encompassing a complex network of mutually reinforcing and interwoven ideas affirmed and articulated by intellectuals' (Fontana 1993: 141).

Adamson (1980: 236f) is rather optimistic when he alleges that Gramsci, through advancing the revolution as a 'war of position,' has resolved the radical disjunction between violent means and ethical ends which has plagued classical Marxism. Though Party philosophy seeks to move away from military coercion, the 'war of position' is now conducted from the top. Gramsci would not have had a problem with this, for he had an absolute insistence on the centralising aspect of the party, where minority dissent is seen as 'extremely dangerous' (quote by Adamson 1980). From the point of view of a multi-party democracy, however, one has to agree with Laclau & Mouffe's rejection of Gramsci's idea of a 'dichotomically divided political space' (1985: 137) where a single political space is seen as a necessary framework for the logic of articulation to arise—there are not one, but *many* spaces.

As manifested in China, hegemony is merely supplementary to 'domination'. It complies with Gramsci's statement that: 'The supremacy of the social group is manifested in two ways: as "domination" and as "intellectual and moral leadership." A social group is dominant over those antagonistic groups it wants to "liquidate" or to subdue even with armed

force, and it is leading with respect to those groups that are associated with it' (Quaderni del Carcere 3: 19: 2010). How the PRC maintains hegemony among religious groups through the concealment of its power becomes evident from the brief review of religious policies in the next section.

### **Hegemony and Domination**

An example of the concealment of domination behind the façade of hegemony is the fact that every revision of the constitution since 1954 professed 'freedom of religious belief' although public practice of religion was only allowed after 1979. In the new constitution adopted in 1982, Article 36 on religious freedom still does not define the limits of that freedom:

Citizens of the [PRC] enjoy freedom of religious belief. No organ of state, mass organization, or person is allowed to force any citizen to believe or not believe in religion. It is not permitted to discriminate against any citizen who believes or does not believe in religion. The State protects legitimate religious activities. No person is permitted to use religion to conduct counterrevolutionary activities or activities which disrupt social order, harm people's health, or obstruct the educational system of the country (taken from MacInnis 1996: 286).

The corresponding policy statement, Document 19, issued in 1982 by the Central Committee of the Communist Party is to date the most comprehensive statement on the issue. It envisages the 'Party's work with religious professionals', the 'restoration and administration of places of worship', the 'education of a new generation of clergy', the 'Party's relations with religious ethnic minorities,' and the international relations of China's religions'. There is also a section on 'criminal and counter-revolutionary activities under the cover of religion. 'This is aimed at the practitioners of superstition, including members of secret societies, sorcerers, witches, phrenologists, fortune-tellers, and geo-mancers who "swindle money from people who earn their living through their own labor"'<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Quoted in MacInnis (1996: 286); see also Geffré & Spae (1979: 98).

It seems that bona fide practitioners of religion in the five licensed religions are seen as not being in conflict with the ideal of building a strong, modern, socialist nation as long as they are kept within certain boundaries (not harmful to interests of the nation; and not instruments of foreign interests). This approach develops an idea expressed by Mao Zedong and re-affirmed since 1975.<sup>20</sup> However, the authorities do experience problems: Many splinter and underground groups do not acknowledge the national associations that have been set up for their religion. (These are significant enough to draw attention from the government, and are the main objects of repression.)<sup>21</sup> The distinction between religion (world view and ethical conduct) and 'feudal superstition' (cheating people out of their money) is an obscure one, and open to varying interpretations by officials. MacInnis therefore calls the position of religion in China, 'a tenuous freedom' (1996: 289). From the above it is evident that the power of the state mostly remains unobtrusive for members of the licensed religions. The 500 complaints of government interference that came before the Christian Council in 1993, would appear to them far and few in-between.

The contrasting of hegemony with domination proves thus to be misleading. Both have to be seen as two extremes on a continuum that includes other elements as e.g., constraint, co-option and an measure of imposed authority (Adamson 1980: 242f). The best description of the present situation is that we have to do with a state of repression: repression by a Party with a steel hand in a velvet glove—the steel hand of domination in the velvet glove of hegemony.

### **Selfpresentation of the Party as Agent of Change**

Together with the mystification of government domination as hegemony, one

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<sup>20</sup> In 1940 Mao Zedong wrote that 'communists may form and anti-imperialist ... united front with ... religious believers, but we can never approve of their idealism or of their doctrines', quoted in Geffré & Spaë (1979: 98).

<sup>21</sup> Among these are indigenous Christian groups as the Jesus Family, the True Jesus Church and the Little Flock who have not joined the licensed three-selves church (Geffré & Spaë, 1979: 100).



also has to bear in mind that the government has a monopoly on information. It could well be that the religious leaders interviewed were honestly not aware of instances of repression or had received biased information, but Party propaganda involves more than the manipulation of loose bits of information.

Various strategies are employed to keep up the moral and intellectual pressure that eventually determines the parameters of social discourse. In order to pursue hegemony, it is in the interest of the Party to upstage itself as an agent of change. On a flight from Beijing to Xi'an we were surprised to receive wallets as gifts from the 15<sup>th</sup> Party Congress as a sign of the new economic policies. In the streets of Nanjing, the usual red banners across the roads proclaiming the results of the Congress, carried notices that they were sponsored by Nashua. The impression created, was that the Party is once more progressive and on the verge of 'liberating' the Chinese people, this time through economic reform. Thus an image of reasonableness is portrayed. The hope is kept alive of greater freedom and prosperity. The rhetoric of nationalism and world peace also serve these purposes (Weiss 1988: 42-51). Such rhetorical strategies are, however, supported by a deeper and more pervasive awareness, related to the hegemonic theory of catharsis.

## **Catharsis**

In societies where socialism is struggling for hegemony, theoreticians look forward to a 'cathartic moment' when through collective action each individual metamorphoses into a conscious agent of history (San Juan 1991: 83). This is when the oppressed classes make the transition from 'economic-corporatism' to their own hegemony (Adamson 1980: 173). Gramsci describes it as follows:

The term 'catharsis' can be employed to indicate the passage from the purely economic (or egoistic-passional) to the ethico-political moment, that is the superior elaboration of the structure into superstructure in the minds of men. This also means the passage from 'objective to subjective' and 'from necessity to freedom.' Structure ceases to be an external force which crushes man,

assimilates him to itself and makes him passive; and is transformed into a means of freedom, an instrument to create a new ethico-political form and a source of new initiatives. To establish the 'cathartic' moment becomes therefore, it seems to me, the starting-point for all the philosophy of praxis, and the cathartic process coincides with the chain of syntheses which have resulted from the evolution of the dialectic (Gramsci 1971: 366-367).

In the case of China, that cathartic moment lies half a century in the past—in 1949 when the communists achieved supremacy. One could argue that China's case where domination has to be maintained, it is strategic for the Party to keep the memory of that catharsis alive. Thus the history of the Long March and of the humiliation at the hands of the Japanese and struggle against Chiang Kai-Chek turns into myth and the story of the dominant party becomes the story of the people. To the extent that the Party is able to relate all its present strategies to that central myth, it is able to assume a hegemonic role. And it is in the power of this myth that one has to look for the inability of religious leaders and academics alike, to come up with a critical analysis of their present situation.

### **Hegemonic Institutions Promoting the Historical Bloc**

Another way in which the Party promotes its hegemonic role among religious communities, is through the institutions it created. Reference has already been made to the ambivalent role of the Institute of World Religions at the Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing and the Religious Affairs Bureau. At one remarkable meeting with an official of the Bureau, the meeting was organised at the local headquarters of the Protestant Church, with their leaders invited to be present. This was explained as a demonstration of the good relationship that existed between officialdom and the Church, and of the fact the Bureau 'has nothing to hide'.

In assessing the role of a regulating body such as the Bureau, the concept of the 'historical bloc' is illuminating. Adamson explains that the 'historical bloc' as the social formation of an intellectual-mass dialectic (Adamson 1980: 176 with reference to Gramsci 1971). On the one hand a historical bloc is the effort to infuse a socialist dimension throughout society

by means of class alliances; on the other hand, once such a bloc has been achieved, it is the maintenance of 'a relatively stable relationship between structure and superstructure, between the productive, economic life of a society and its political and cultural awareness, between its being and consciousness'.

Gramsci's notions of hegemony as well as the historical bloc circumvent sharp and deterministic distinctions between base and superstructure. In this he moves away from the 'Second International Marxisms' where the superstructure is treated as a mere epiphenomenon, while Lenin's voluntarism also assumes that a new superstructure can be built independently from the base. Gramsci rather conceives of this distinction as a 'circular movement within an organic whole, rather than as a linear, mechanical relationship' between cause and effect (Adamson 1980: 178-179). According to Adamson:

... Gramsci thought that a great many civic institutions could be restructured to aid in the process of transforming "common sense" through "catharsis" into "philosophical reason," but a party would always be necessary to spearhead a revolutionary challenge (Gramsci 1980: 207).

It seems that the role of the Bureau fits this description. Under the banner of mutual co-operation, religious bodies are co-opted into one of the most elaborate systems in the world for regulating religion, with branches of the Bureau extending to all cities and towns where religion is practised. Whereas the Party can keep a firm control on the actions and critical voices of religious members, this control is staged as a hegemonic control rather than direct censorship and interference. For a balanced view, one has to keep in mind that religious leaders have occasionally expressed their willingness to participate in socialist programmes<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. statement to this effect by the National Christian Conference in 1961, and the participation of sixteen prominent leaders from four religions at the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in 1978 (Geffré & Spae, 1979: 102).

## **Determining the Parameters of Social Discourse**

Reference has already been made to the observation that none of the religious leaders and philosophers we met managed to come up with an articulated critique of the present Chinese state. In the sections above, various backgrounds have been sketched for understanding 'blind spots' such as these. The thesis of this article is that this silence was not due to deception, but has to be understood as an indication of the hegemony exercised by the Party. The various aspects of this type of hegemony—an increased need for hegemony leading to an emphasis on the war of position, a concealment of coercive power, the presentation of the Party as agent of change and preserver of myth, and the influence of regulating bodies—all contribute to the formation of a discourse in society that determines the parameters of religious language. This happens to such an extent that the present hegemony subconsciously determines the range of questions being asked.

We can turn to Gramsci and some of his interpreters for an examination of how this mechanism functions. It was his studies in historical linguistics that lead him to the formulation of his view on hegemony in the first place. Breaking away from idealist conceptions of consciousness, he sided with the Russian Formalists and others who saw language as a social given that structures consciousness (Brandist 1996: 94f). He also moved away from the romanticism of Croce, no longer seeing language as individual artistic expression, but rather as a social product and cultural expression of a given people (Brandist 1996: 98). It follows that the group that assumes hegemonic role, is also the group that succeeds in structuring the consciousness of the whole of society. As Brandist explains:

Discourses seek to bind other discourses to themselves according to two principles; either by establishing a relation of authority between the enclosing and target discourses or by facilitating the further advancement of the target discourse through the enclosing discourse' (1996: 103). Thus an effective hegemony produces an authoritative discourse that serves to conceal and subjugate the conception implicit in social practices 'to produce a state in which the contradictory state of consciousness does not permit any action, any

decision or any choice, and produces a condition of more political passivity (Brandist 1996: 104).

When a hegemony has this effect on the social discourse, it is no longer perpetuated only by the conscious articulation of intellectuals, but becomes embedded in the social subconscious.

For Gramsci a party was progressive when it adopts a *democratic* centralism, keeping previously dominant forces within the bounds of legality, and raising previously suppressed voices to an equal level where all compete freely according to their intrinsic merits (Brandist 1996: 103). However, in an advanced situation the unified language becomes a model of the 'tyranny of abstract ideas and dogmas over life' in the words of M. M. Bakhtin (who had czarist Russia and Stalinism in mind). Dialogue and debate merely become means for the acceptance of the perspective emanating from the centre; the result is known in advance, 'all accents are gathered into a single voice.

Though the open door policy of the PRC seems to move in the opposite direction, the 'single voice' causes many voices not to be heard—from the Dalai Lama to religious citizens in the highest chambers of government and the contributions of overseas scholars. This is an indication of how successful the domination of the Party is.

### **Naturalness Entering the Subconscious**

A last aspect of hegemony we look at is the way that it affects public opinion. On this issue Gramsci (1978, ref II 426-432) wrote:

What is called "public opinion" is closely connected to hegemony, namely with the point at which civil society makes contact with political society, and consent with force. The state, when it wants to undertake an unpopular action, creates adequate public opinion to protect itself; in other words, it organizes and centralizes certain elements within civil society. The history of "public opinion": naturally, elements of public opinion have always existed, even in Asiatic satrapies. But public opinion as we understand it today was born on the eve of the fall of the absolute state, i.e., in the period in

which the new bourgeois class was struggling for political hegemony and for the conquest of power

Hegemony, when successful, is internalised by the general population permeating the entirety of consciousness, saturating the consciousness to such an extent that it informs the structure and content of their 'common sense'. This is what Gramsci called 'ideological hegemony'.

When the masses believe, without questioning, that the dominant culture is authoritative then they have fallen into a hegemonic relationship. Acting as a mechanism of ideological control, hegemony allows for the ruling class to guide the praxis of the people without directly intervening in their personal affairs. In this way the existing social order is affirmed in a manner that appears to be natural and transcendent of institutions. As a result, hegemony provides a vehicle for the constant assimilation of change in culture, appropriating the discourse of social movement while promoting the agenda of the dominant group.

## **Empty Spaces in Religious Discourse**

We can now return to some initial questions: How free is religion in present-day China? What are the limits of that freedom? Why do good people belonging to the major religions appear to support a repressive system? What accounts for the empty spaces in the present religious discourse? Is it because people are ignorant, or choose to be ignorant? Or because piety prevents them from having anything to do with politics? Or because they hesitate to challenge the system realising how vulnerable they are?

As already stated, my thesis is that it is more than just fear of reprisal; more than just national pride, and more than just a lack of objective information. They are in the grip of an extremely powerful hegemonic ideology making use of a number of inhibiting factors. These were implied in the previous sections, but can now be listed explicitly:

- Fear. For many the trauma of the Cultural Revolution is still fresh. No-one would like to risk a repeat of that.
- Making the best of existing opportunity. The astonishing recovery of

religion after the utmost suppression renders leaders wary to test the limits of freedom.

- Gain. The system favours the licensed religions against sectarian groups.
- Uncertainty. I found educated Chinese to be ambivalent about democracy, agreeing with the position of Deng Xiaoping that since 80% of the population are living in conditions of relative poverty they 'cannot be trusted, at present, to vote wisely at national elections'<sup>23</sup>.
- Fear of the evils of capitalism—pornography, exploitation, poverty.
- Innate patriotism, summed up by the saying, 'Love country, love the Lord and love peace.' No contradiction is perceived between faith and patriotism<sup>24</sup>.
- The lack of a clear alternative vision.
- Conservatism. For most of the past centuries Chinese religion was controlled by the state and many may feel that this not an unusual situation.

With inhibiting factors such as these, thoroughly exploited by the present hegemony, it seems that the critical self-reflection of the people, spearheaded by intellectuals, that is supposed to be the starting point for a new order<sup>25</sup>, is absent. Whereas I could gather no evidence of the latter among academics or religious leaders *inside* China it seems that the totalitarian control of the Party will remain undisputed for some time to come—in spite of the 'impossibility of closure' of social entities. It is unlikely that religious leaders will be pivotal in new democratic initiatives as in East Germany and South Africa. Even after political change, it may take many years for the hegemonic structures to shift.

Do religious bodies have a role to play in preparing the way for democracy? The answer to this is a difficult one and constantly avoided by the leaders we interviewed. However, if hegemonic theory holds any water, one can predict that religious bodies will—together with a spectrum of other

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<sup>23</sup> Quoted from a summary of Deng Xiaoping's position. He foresaw at that 'socialism' would only be achieved toward the middle of the next century, enabling such elections (in Ying-Mao Kau, 1993: 424)..

<sup>24</sup> Cf. interview reported in article by MacInnis in Geffré & Spae (1979: 102).

<sup>25</sup> Gramsci as quoted by Fontana (1993: 146).

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civil associations—have to play a role in any democratic counter-hegemony that might be formed. China is nevertheless far from a Gramscian ‘organic crisis’. Such a crisis may only arise when the ruling class fails in some major undertaking which it has requested, or forcibly imposed (like losing a war). Only then it will be apparent that the old hegemony has broken down and the ground prepared for a counter-hegemony (Martin 1997: 47f). Given the notorious regularity with which periods of religious freedom has been succeeded by repression, one could ask: What would happen if the Party perceives its domination to be in real danger? Gramsci would have advised further politicisation, but Mao opted for destruction (cf. Adamson 1980: 243).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion one can say that the Party in PRC is most successful in presenting its own domination in hegemonic terms. Force is kept out of sight; consent is sought, facilitated and mediated. The findings of this article should give the Party ample reason to be satisfied. Insofar as ideological hegemony in China thrives on concealment, one might ask whether it would be in the interest of the Party to allow papers like this one to be read.

South Africans who have grown up in a society saturated with apartheid ideology, knowing how long it took the public at large to gain insight into the domination of the ruling class and how they were duped into different degrees of hegemonic consensus, may feel that they have a special understanding for the Chinese religious leaders and academics described in this article. The South African experience can assist one to realise why these leaders are trying to explain the inexplicable, rationalising the irrational, talking against their own better judgement, while believing themselves to be objective. But my Chinese visit also brought me a measure of hope, for the fact that one could establish contact, and could sometimes ask a radical question, is exactly the dynamics that might kindle a new critical understanding.

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# Jihad: Between War and Peace

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## Introduction

The term *jihad* means striving, endeavouring, making an effort, exerting oneself or fighting. Yet *jihad* is associated in the popular mind with force, violence and conflict. The fact that several current Muslim resistance movements have proclaimed *jihad* against their occupiers (e.g. in Iraq) or their own governments (e.g. in Algeria), are using Islamic symbols to depict their cause and resorting to kidnapping, beheading and martyrdom operations (commonly known as 'suicide bombings') reinforces this perception.

The term *jihad* has been used by Muslim scholars to refer to peaceful activities, e.g. the intellectual effort by jurists to arrive at a judicial ruling, propagation of Islam through speech and writing, spiritual development through physical and moral discipline, etc. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the famous Indian Muslim scholar and leader of the Indian National Congress before independence, and later federal education minister in India offered the following explanation of *jihad*:

There are serious misconceptions regarding what is *jihad*. Many people think that *jihad* means only to fight. The critics of Islam too labour under this misunderstanding, whereas to think thus is to utterly narrow the practical scope of this sacred commandment. *Jihad* means to strive to the utmost. In the Quran and Sunna terminology, this utmost exertion, which is undertaken for the sake of truth rather than personal ends, is indicated by the word *jihad*. This effort could be with one's life, or property, or expenditure of

time, or by bearing labour and hardship, or fighting the enemy and shedding blood.

To cite the French writer, Marcel A. Boisard, Muslim scholars distinguished between four types of *jihad*: the 'war' waged by the heart (the internal moral and spiritual struggle), the tongue (the effort of calm preaching), the hand (the effort to correct error and enforce good conduct) and the sword (armed conflict with the enemy of Muslims) (see Kolocotronis 1990:109).

Despite this, the only dimension of *jihad* that is consistently highlighted by the media and has become entrenched in the public image is the one involving the use of force. This meaning of *jihad* is so widespread that even Muslims immediately associate the term with conflict and war. For many, the peaceful pursuit of intellectual, moral and spiritual development seems virtually incongruous with the term *jihad*. This reduction of the term has been criticised by contemporary scholars such as Mustansir Mir (1987:112) precisely because it detracts from its wider meaning, including private effort, social action, monetary expenditure, etc.

In this article, I will highlight the various dimensions of *jihad*, demonstrate that peace is the norm in Islam and assess the current prospect for global *jihad*. As a prelude, I will interrogate the causes of conflict in the Muslim World.

### **The Causes of Conflict in the Muslim World**

Many scholars, analysts and observers charge that religion is a fundamental cause of conflict, citing as examples conflicts that have occurred between followers of different faiths or denominations, e.g. the Crusades (between Christians and Muslims), the war in Yugoslavia (between Bosnian Muslims and Serb Orthodox Christians and between the latter and Catholic Croats), and the India-Pakistani wars (between Muslims of Pakistan and Hindus of India). The current conflicts in the Gujarat state of India, northern Nigeria, and southern Sudan are all presumed to be motivated essentially by religious factors for the following reasons:

1. The conflicts are between two diverse faith groups, viz between Hindus and Muslims in India and between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria and the Sudan.

2. The dispute in India is over a site which some Hindus claim was the birth-place of Ram and on which they are determined to rebuild a temple - supposedly on the ruins of the original temple - after having demolished the mosque that was built by the Mughal emperor Babur (Barbari mosque). In the case of Nigeria and Sudan, the conflict is attributed to the imposition of the *shari`ah* by the Muslim majority on the Christian minority.
3. Many Muslims globally support the Muslims of India, Nigeria and the Sudan; in a similar vein, many Hindus the world over support the Bharatiya Janata Party's ideology of 'Hindutva' and many Christians support the Christians of Nigeria and the Sudan.

It is my contention that it is not religion *per se*, but a variety of political and economic factors that either drive or intensify these conflicts and that religion provides a useful tool of mass mobilization and justification. It is well established that in India, for instance, the Bharatiya Janata Party carefully manipulated the Barbari mosque/Ram temple dispute to gain support at the polls (Platvoet 1995:209).

In Sudan, the Southern People's Liberation Army (SPLA) has for long been discouraged from reaching a settlement with the Sudanese government because it has been receiving funding from Britain, Israel and the United States as well as arms from the USA (Adar 1998). There is a growing perception that the US government has great interest in the oil deposits in the region, and will not be averse to the establishment of peace between the warring parties. Even in the case of Nigeria, it does appear that Muslim politicians have carefully appropriated the *shari`ah* issue for political gain.

The underlying cause of the conflict between the Chechens and Russians, Kashmiris and Indians and Palestinians and Israelis is generally understood to be essentially political. Nonetheless, the fact that Chechen, Kashmiri and Palestinian resistance movements depict their struggle not merely in political terms but as a *jihad*, reinforces the view of some political analysts that Islam's legalization of warfare (*jihad*) encourages Muslims to take up arms, provides justification for violence and confers legitimacy on their hostility towards the 'other'. Since September 11, the popular perception that Muslims are prone to violence by virtue of their faith has

been validated by the proclamations of Usama ibn Ladin, as well as of several resistance movements in the Muslim World. 'We are on the firm road to *jihad*' Usama is said to have told the Arab television channel, al-Jazeera (Daily News September 2001).

While the above-mentioned resistance groups are engaged in a bitter struggle (*jihad*) against occupation, others are occupied in a violent confrontation (also classified as *jihad* by supporters) against their own regimes. Depicting all resistance movements as anti-Western is, therefore, erroneous. Even al-Qa'idah which is now projected as the model of anti-Westernism had no objection to working closely with United States military advisers in their *jihad* against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Furthermore, many regimes in the Middle East are currently being challenged by one or more resistance movements – some based inside the country and others based outside.

There is substantial evidence to suggest that much of the violence against governments and foreigners in the Muslim World is perpetrated by those who feel a deep sense of frustration, betrayal and helplessness. The causes of their disenchantment are not only socio-economic, but also political in nature. That explains why the leaders of militant groups and their followers are not all economically deprived or socially marginalized; in fact, some are extremely wealthy and belong to the elite families, such as Usama himself.

In the light of this, it will be naïve to assume that violence in the Muslim World will be eradicated simply through poverty alleviation measures or social upliftment projects. It is true that granting people civic rights such as voting, freedom of association, etc cannot substitute for a lack of basic necessities such as food and shelter. Hence Muslim governments cannot afford to ignore the economic and social aspirations of their people. However, while this may satisfy an immediate need (of the destitute sectors of society), the long-term political aspirations of the people – including greater freedom of expression, participation in governing and decision-making, recognition of human rights- will have to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

## **Dimensions of Jihad**

Both the Qur'an and Hadith – the primary sources of Islam – sanction *jihad*.

The Qur'an permits fighting against those who attack Muslims (Qur'an 9:13, 22:39) or oppress the weak (Qur'an 4:75). There are many traditions which describe the excellence of *jihad*.

In principle, *jihad* is considered a collective obligation (*fard kifayah*) on Muslims which could be transformed into an individual obligation (*fard 'ayn*) where circumstances warrant it. Some scholars described *jihad* as a pillar of faith in which case it would be regarded as an individual rather than a communal responsibility. For Mawdudi (1980:141) *jihad* is as much a primary duty as are the daily prayers or fasting. In the early centuries of Islam, there were two fundamental approaches to *jihad* among Muslim scholars: offensive and defensive. According to the former, Muslims are obliged to conduct *jihad* against non-Muslims until they accept Islam or submit to Muslim authority. Permanent peace between Muslims and non-Muslims is not possible; only a temporary truce is admissible (Tyan 1965).

Among those who admit *jihad* as a defensive measure, as a means of warding off aggression on Muslim life, property and honour (Hashmi 1998:425-426), there were two positions: those who support taking the initiative against the enemy and those who oppose it. In the case of the former, action to prevent oppression and persecution of Muslims outside the lands of Islam would be legitimate (Peters 1979:123-127). This means that Muslims would be obliged to intervene on behalf of their co-religionists who are persecuted and/or oppressed in foreign lands.

Another dimension of *jihad* was introduced by the Sufis. While they affirmed the significance of *jihad*, they focused on its inner dimension. In their view, the greater *jihad* (*al-jihad al-akbar*) is an inner war - primarily a struggle against the base instincts of the body - as a means of gaining spiritual insight. In support, they cite the Prophet's statement to the soldiers who had returned from a battle against the Romans that they had returned from a minor to a major *jihad* (Ashraf 1987:126).

In more recent times, the revolutionary and political nature of *jihad* assumed greater significance. The doctrine of *jihad* played a significant role in anti-colonial resistance movements in the Muslim World - particularly in India, Algeria, Libya, Sudan and the Caucasus (Lewis 1991:146). As a consequence of colonization and the formation of secular nation-states, *jihad* lost its momentum. The failure of the Ottomans to mobilize Muslim soldiers serving in the British, French and Russian armies against their colonizers



signaled the end of mass mobilization in the Muslim World.

Subsequently, however, revivalists – led by Abu'l A'la Mawdudi (1903-1979), Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949) and Sayyid Qutb (1906-1956) – who inherited the mantle of leadership from the resistance movements, emphasized the role of *jihad* in establishing an Islamic government. Mawdudi (1980:7) declared: 'To alter the old tyrannical social system and establish a just new order of life by the power of the sword is *jihad* ...'.

A point of departure is that revivalists justify *jihad* against fellow Muslims. Before directing *jihad* against external enemies, they argue, Muslims must first deal with their own rulers. Leaders who are not committed to Islam and governments that fail to enforce the *shari'ah* can be deposed (Hashmi 1998:425-426; Peters 1979:130-135). Significantly, Islamists consider *jihad* mandatory for all Muslims, making it an individual rather than a collective duty. They are highly critical of scholar like 'Abd al-Qadir al-Sufi who argues that Muslims must wait until attacked before embarking on *jihad* (1978:46).

The revivalists' position echoes Ibn Taymiyyah's notion of *jihad* as an indispensable feature of legitimate rule. Ibn Taymiyyah (1268-1328) declared that a ruler who fails to enforce the *shari'ah* rigorously in all its aspects, including the performance of *jihad*, forfeits his right to rule. A strong advocate of *jihad*, he personally participated in the battles against the Crusaders and Mongols who occupied parts of the Muslim World (Sonn 1990:132-138).

Shi'ah revolutionaries have a similar perspective. Ayatollah Khomeini (1903-1989) contended that jurists, 'by means of *jihad*...must expose and overthrow tyrannical rulers and rouse the people so the universal movement of all alert Muslims can establish Islamic government in the place of tyrannical regimes' (Khomeini 1981:108,132). Ayatollah Muhammad Mutahhari, a top ideologue of the Iranian Revolution, considers *jihad* as an essential feature of Islam. Since Islam has political objectives, it must sanction the use of armed force to achieve these. Though Mutahhari accepts the importance of *jihad* for defensive purposes, his definition includes defence against oppression, which would require armed intervention beyond the boundaries of Islam (Mutahhari 1986:89).

As for the validity of *jihad* in the contemporary world, there are several crucial issues that need to be considered. While *jihad* as a legitimate

instrument for self-defence is not challenged by Muslim scholars in general, there are serious questions with regard to its application.

1. In what context should military *jihad* be applied?
2. In what context should peaceful *jihad* - viz negotiation, legislation and education - be applied?
3. Is *jihad* mandatory for every Muslim?
4. Can Muslims intervene in the affairs of other states in order to put an end to the oppression of their co-religionists?
5. What methods of *jihad* are permissible?
6. Is 'suicide bombing' a valid mode of operation in the *shari'ah*?
7. Can resistance movements overthrow existing rulers?

Esposito (2003) argues that radicalized groups 'combine militancy with messianic visions to inspire and mobilize an army of God' which through *jihad* will liberate Muslims from authoritarian regimes and western governments. Their leaders use Qur'anic verses selectively, not in their historical context, in order to engender an attitude of hate and intolerance toward these 'enemies' and reject the principles relating to *jihad*. They operate independently of any authority and ignore Islam's guidelines on the conduct of war such as the following:

- treating prisoners humanely (Qur'an 47:4)
- reciprocating the enemy's call for peace (Qur'an 8:61; 4:90)
- not killing civilians or non-combatants, especially women and children (Abu Dawud 1984:2:739).
- not using torture against enemy soldiers (Shaheen 1999:4-5)
- not mutilating the corpses of fallen soldiers (Abu Dawud 1984:2:738)

The taking of hostages and beheading of captives that we now witness in Iraq are measures that do not fall under the definition of *jihad*, according to the majority of reputed Islamic scholars. At the meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Conference in Malaysia in April 2002 attended by the Foreign Ministers of over 50 Muslim countries, the Prime Minister of Malaysia declared that while resistance to foreign occupation is legitimate,

all deliberate attacks on civilians should be classified as acts of terror.

This brings us to another phenomenon that is highly debated in Muslim circles, viz *istishhad* (martyrdom operation), more popularly known as 'suicide bombings'. There is dispute over the legitimacy of this method which started in the early 1980s, when Shiite resistance groups began to use this tactic. The leading Lebanese Shiite scholar, Shaykh Muhammad Husein Fadlallah, publicly declared his reservation about these operations during the 1980s. His followers among the *Hizbullah* then turned to Iran in order to legitimize these operations.

Subsequently, 'martyrdom operations' were adopted by the Palestinians in their struggle for independence. In 1989, Islamic Jihad published a *fatwa* that legitimated these types of operations (*istishhad*) and classified them as a form of *jihad*. Since April 1993, *Hamas* has also supported this position and in 1998 presented a book that granted legitimacy to suicide operations on its official website.

In 2000, the phenomenon of suicide bombings expanded to two other areas of Islamic struggle : Chechnya and Kashmir. In both cases, especially in regard to the Chechen fighters of Arab and Afghan origin and the Kashmiri Islamist organizations of *Lashkar-I-Taiba* and *Hizb-I-Mujahidin*, their operations received 'official' sanction from the religious scholars (Paz 2001).

Nonetheless, while some scholars such as Shaykh Uthaiman of Saudi Arabia, Shaykh Tantawi of Egypt, Shaykh Yusuf al-Qardawi of Qatar, Shaykh Ahmad Qubeisi of Iraq and Shaykh Ahmad al-Zein of Lebanon view these operations as a legitimate strategy in *jihad* (Special Report 32,1:09:2004, <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sr&ID=SR3204>), others reject them on the basis that they constitute a form of suicide (Suicide Bombing in Islam, <http://www.submission.org/jihad/suicide.html>). Another reason for rejecting 'martyrdom operations' is because, more often than not, they harm civilians, either through injury or death.

In direct contradiction to the revolutionary position, some contemporary scholars espouse a fundamentally peaceful vision of *jihad*, arguing that all the wars waged by the prophet and the first four caliphs were of a defensive nature. In contrast to the traditional division of the world by jurists into *dar al-harb* (abode of war) and *dar al-Islam* (abode of Islam)(see

Hashmi 1998:425-426), they emphasise a third category: *dar al-sulh* (abode of peace) or *dar al-'ahd* (abode of contract) (Mir 1991:119-122)). While earlier scholars made allowances for temporary alliances, they argue that Muslims may enter into permanent peace treaties with non-Muslims. While they do not reject the notion of *jihad*, they perceive it as encompassing all forms of political and social action to establish justice.

Falur Rahman and Asghar Ali Engineer have called for a redefinition of *jihad* in the contemporary context. Rahman (1980:63-64) views *jihad* as an instrument for Muslims to establish an egalitarian and just socio-moral order.. For Engineer, *jihad* is using democracy and democratic institutions to realize the noble goals of Islam (On the multi-layered concept of *jihad*, <http://www.tehelka.com/channels/commentary/2001/dec/11/com121101jihad1.htm>).

## Peace the Norm

The norm in Islam is peace and not violence. In the words of Sayyid Qutb (1977:9) : 'In Islam, peace is the rule, and war is a necessity'. The Qur'an (8:61-62) directs Muslims to respond positively to any overtures to peace by the enemy in the time of war. The Prophet of Islam is reported to have advised his followers '... never (to) desire aggression or war...' (Rahman 1981:1:507). He took to fighting only when his own life and faith were threatened, and he was left with no alternative.

However, as soon as hostilities between him and the Quraysh and then between him and the Jewish tribes ceased, he seized the opportunity for establishing peace treaties – leading to the Truce of al-Hudaybiyyah in the first instance and the Treaty of Khaybar in the second (Qasimi 1987:83-86). In fact, when he first arrived in Madinah, he had a Charter drawn up in which the Jews were accorded citizenship rights, with guarantee of their personal security, freedom of worship, etc. The relationship between Muslims and Jews was to be based on mutual advice, assistance and consultation (Kolocotronis 1990:144).

The Prophet entered into a treaty with the Christians of Najran and ordered that reverence should be shown for their place of worship. After the conquest of Makkah, he forgave all those who had persecuted him and his followers and who had exiled them from their mother city. This act of

forgiveness is unprecedented in ancient or modern history. This demonstrates that his primary objective was to stop his enemies from aggression and not to kill them.

It is on the basis of these precedents that jurists allowed the negotiation of truces and pacts, as well as other rights and privileges. Several caliphs made peace treaties with the Byzantine emperors. The 'Abbasid caliph, Harun al-Rashid (r 786-809), is known to have established an excellent relationship with the Roman Emperor, Charlemagne. According to Adam Metz, Muslims showed great respect for synagogues and churches. Under Muslim rule in Spain Christians held conferences in Seville (AD 872) and Cordova (AD 852), and Jews and Christians were not forbidden to hold any post under the government or any other job.

Despite the fact that after their conquest of Jerusalem the Crusaders mercilessly put to the sword thousands of Muslims, the great Kurdish General Salah al-Din Ayyubi (popularly known as Saladin) who led the Muslim reconquest of the city in October AD 1187 proclaimed a public amnesty; and forbade the execution, the plundering, or the torture of Christians. Muslims and Christians generally lived amicably together throughout the Middle East. Even the conflict between Jews and Palestinians only emerged after World War I – when the Balfour Declaration paved the way for their immigration from Europe to Palestine.

The Qur'anic directive to respect the people of the Book has generally been honoured by Muslims throughout history. In Egypt the Copts have been on terms of close friendship with the Muslims since the first centuries of the Muslim conquest. Likewise, in Syria the various Christian communities have lived in peace. Jews fled from Christian persecution to Muslim countries for refuge, and were never persecuted. And it is noteworthy that the Arabic-speaking Jews of Palestine – the old immigrants from Spain and Poland – have always supported the Muslims and Christians who oppose the transformation of Palestine into a national home for the Jews.

## **The Prospect of Global Jihad**

It is a truism that there are divergent views and perspectives among Muslim scholars on most contemporary issues. An interesting case is that of Salman

Rushdie who was condemned to death by an Iranian court but afforded an opportunity for repentance by the *shaykhs* of al-Azhar in Egypt. While Usama ibn Ladin may be very popular with the Muslim masses for political reasons, there are many *shuyukh* who do not support his call for *jihad* against the United States. Recently, many Muslim leaders and scholars have disassociated themselves from his pronouncements on *jihad*.

The concept of *jihad* as a moral struggle touches the daily lives of many Muslims, and not only Sufis. *Jihad* as warfare, though far better known, has had a narrower impact. In recent history, it has not mobilized Muslims en masse or transcended ethnic, geographic, sectarian or political divisions within the Muslim world. Though a sizeable number of Muslim individuals and groups have classified their resistance as *jihad*, few governments have done so. The conception of *jihad* as warfare in defense of the Dar al-Islam did not produce a Pan-Islamic resistance to colonialism. The many movements that arose to resist European expansion or occupation were regional or local, tied to a specific leader or regime. In most cases, *jihad* against colonialism formed a part of a program of religious reform and renewal. Such was the case of al-Ikhwan a-Muslimun of Egypt.

Just as the Ottoman call for *jihad* failed to mobilize Muslims against their colonizers, the call by popular leaders such as Usama is likely to have limited appeal. This is borne out by the fact that recent invocations of *jihad* against Israel have not overcome division among Israel's opponents or produced an effective mobilization of their capability against Israel. Saddam Husayn's call for a *jihad* against the United States, as a strategy to convince his critics of his commitment to Islam, did not gain much support. The same applies to Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatullah 'Ali Khamanei's designation of war against U.S. forces as *jihad*.

In Afghanistan, though the idea of *jihad* did attract considerable support from the rest of the Islamic world, only three Islamic states (Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Iran) actually allocated significant resources to the *mujahidin*. Furthermore, it did not unite the Afghan resistance, which remained divided by social, political, ethnic and ideological differences. The other outside participants in the Afghan resistance were individuals who represented a marginal element within the Islamic world. The involvement of *mujahidin* on the side of the resistance movements in Kashmir, Chechnia and now Iraq is limited – though there may be considerable moral support

for these movements in the Muslim World.

Given the above, there seems little prospect of a global *jihad* against the West, despite Samuel Huntington's prediction of a clash between Islamic and Western civilizations (1993). However, the one region where the prospect of a universally-supported *jihad* is very real is Palestine – not only because Palestinians are arguably the most traumatized of the Muslims involved in resistance, but also because of the presence there of *al-Masjid al-Aqsa*, the third most sacred shrine in Islam. If the Israelis demolish or seriously damage *al-Masjid al-Aqsa* with the intention of rebuilding the Temple of Solomon on its ruins, there is little doubt that this action will have global consequences. Muslims throughout the world will rally in defence of what they consider to be their sacred site – even at the cost of their lives.

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# Religion in the Political Culture of Kenya

**Hassan Ndzovu**

## **Introduction**

The idea that religion exerts an indirect social control has a long history. As an institution, religion is believed to be comprehensive covering all realms of life involving human beings. Generally, all departments of life ranging from social, cultural to political have been influenced by religion in different ways. It is on this premise we see religion emerging as a force that has significant political implications in society. From time immemorial, religion and politics have been inseparable. In great ancient civilizations of the world, religion and politics were closely related and intertwined. This made it difficult for people to clearly ascertain whether they were dealing with a king with sacred powers, or a priest with political authority. It appears the two offices were inextricably linked since the beginning of time. In almost all the continents of the world, the priest-king phenomenon was a common feature. To mention but a few, this phenomenon was evident among the Egyptians in Africa (Ralph 1991:57), the Romans in Europe (Ralph 1991: 232), the Assyrians in Middle East (Kukah 1993:VII), and the Incas in Americas (Kukah 1991:VII).

Islam and Christianity, which predominate the religious realm in Kenya, each has its own theocracy. Historically, both have been state religions in different places of the world, and have even survived into modern times. Today, there are around not less than fifteen Muslim countries proclaiming Islam as the sate religion (Moazzam 1981:5).

This paper attempts to examine the interaction between religion and politics in Kenya. This will be preceded by a global description of a general

interplay of religion and politics together with an analysis of the views regarding religion and politics in Islam. Finally, an attempt will be made to discuss the challenges of radical and politicized Islam in Kenya.

### **The Relationship between Religion and Politics**

To understand more clearly this subject of religion and politics, Carl F. Hallencreutz and David Westerlund suggested a comparative model of three different policies of religion. These are: (a) confessional (strict); (b) generally religious; (c) secular or liberal or Marxist. According to the two authors countries with a confessional policy of religion ensure that a certain religious community is politically established with a more or less intimate interaction between religion and politics. This alternative is the one predominant in most Muslim countries. However, at one time in European history confessional policies of religion existed as there were states founded on religious basis. The strict pursuant of confessional policies is usually found in theocratic states and the Islamic Republic of Iran is an example of such a state. In this country the state apparatus is subordinate to Islam and religious leaders have a strong and decisive voice in political affairs. Nevertheless, in other countries with a Muslim majority, as well as in some predominantly Christian and Buddhist countries such as Sweden and Thailand, a modified confessional policy is observed. In a Muslim majority country this modified confessional policies can be seen in form of Islam being declared as a state religion and privileged in various ways. Despite these privileges, the religious leaders and institutions are to some extent subordinate to the interests of the state (Westerlund 1996:2f). This is the case in countries such as Malaysia, Egypt, Libya, Pakistan among others.

Turning to the secular policy of religion, it is observed that this policy evolved after the American and French revolutions of the eighteenth century. This policy is today adopted in many countries of the world. According to this alternative, it presupposes that there is at least a formal demarcation between religion and politics. The tendency in this policy is to limit the role of religion to a private affair. However, in the liberal form of the secular policy of religion, religion is respected and seen as an important resource in society. Individual as well as corporate religious freedom is provided for to a greater extent. As a result of that policy, religion may in

practice have a significant role in political life (Westerlund 1996:3). The other form of secular religious policy is the Marxist version, which is the opposite of the liberal one. This version is believed to have been established in the Soviet Union in 1917 and China in 1949. It is a policy that is characterized by an ideology that has a negative view of religion. Countries whose regimes are inspired by a Marxist critique of religion have a strong ideological divide between religion and politics, and therefore corporate religious freedom may be subordinate to the prerogatives of political order (Westerlund 1996:3). The main objective of states with this form of policy is to completely banish religion from the consciousness of the people and presumably leave them with only politics. In such states only the political power would define the social order that would keep the state together. This policy has not been successful in the countries it was introduced as it has always been challenged by the citizens. The explanation could be because of humankind being inherently religious. The only being that cannot do without religion. Lastly, the generally religious policy of religion is more ambiguous than the other two alternatives. In this policy a state may in principle be guided by religion, but it is not institutionally tied to any specific religious tradition. It is a situation where the country can be said to be operating on a middle ground. The best example of this middle option is Indonesia where one of the five pillars of the state ideology, *pancasila*, refers to belief in God as one of the bases on which the Indonesia nation should be built (Westerlund 1996:3).

A general survey of the globe reveals that the mixing of religion and politics has persisted over time. In the United States, the bedrock of scientific and technological civilization, religion and politics cannot completely be regarded as separate. Despite considering itself as a secular state, in America religion and politics are also harmonized and intertwined. On the one hand American politicians inject religious feelings into the veins of the public when soliciting for votes, and on the other, some religious organizations are getting involved in politics of the state. This is clearly illustrated by the conservative wing of the Protestant church that has been exercising religious influence on the politics of the country since 1973. In 1976, Jimmy Carter played with the religious emotions of Americans, which eventually enabled him to win the US presidency. He was reported to have claimed to be a born again Christian who if elected as president, would

moralize the secularized society by reviving ethical and family values among others (Haqnadvi 1995:19). In 1991, during the tenure, of George W. Bush, the president is observed to have hosted the evangelical Billy Graham at the White House and later participated in church service with him. Together they prayed for the success of the Gulf war I. Coincidentally, it is after the church service that President Bush went ahead and invaded Iraq in January 15, 1991 (Haqnadvi 1995:19).

In Latin America, similar cohesion of religion and politics is also evident. The case of Chile will suffice as an example. Lucy Behrman declares:

The priests may have influenced politics by sharing the ideas of the elite who passed through their schools. Also indirectly behind the political scene, the church definitely did contribute large amount of money to favoured politicians. Openly and directly the priests sought to politicize the masses in church, approved directions by organizing Christian Trade Unions and social groups (Behrman 1977:183).

According to Behrman, in Chile, church priests have managed to politicize the masses in churches by organizing Christian Trade Unions and social groups. In order to have greater say in parliament, the churches have financially supported politicians of their choice to win elections.

In Europe, the fusion of religion and politics has not gone unnoticed. For example in Britain, the head of the state is constitutionally a member of the British monarchy. He or she is also expected to be the head of the Protestant church (Alkali 1993:258). Since today the head of England is the Queen, formally she is by right the Governor of the Church of England. More to the interaction of religion and politics in this state is that the Archbishop of Canterbury is partly appointed by the prime Minister who is the head of the government. Further, in case there are major doctrinal changes which requires to be made in the church of England, they need the approval of the British parliament either directly or by delegation (Mazrui 2003). Turning to the Middle East, one does not need to be told that the state of Israel was created on the basis of religion. Since its inception Israel appeared as a religio-political movement. The concept of the promised land, which is strongly defended by the Jews is itself a religious idea as it is based

on Genesis 15. Up to now, the same religious language and symbols are used in the politics of the country. The interplay of religion and politics in the region is illustrated more graphically by the state of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Both are Islamic states claiming the usage of *sharia* as their constitution.

Through its influence, religion has undoubtedly served as a means of political dominance and opposition in Africa. In a state like Nigeria, religion has extensively been used to influence the direction of that country's politics. To cite the words of Rotimi T. Suberu:

What is indisputable is that no discussion of democratic prospects and problems in Nigeria can be regarded as complete without careful attention to the religious elements in civil society (Oyediran & Agbaje 1999:45).

The above quotation illustrates to us how deeply entrenched religion is in the politics of Nigeria. This deliberate mixing of religion and politics has been argued as the vital cause of religious clashes in Nigeria. Clestus N. Chukwu (2004:1-22) believes that until the Nigerian political elites learn to separate religion from politics, the development of a viable democratic political culture in the country will be a difficult exercise.

On the eastern borders of Nigeria, the intellectual ideas and works of some Sudanese Islamists were the driving force behind the creation of the Islamic Republic of Sudan. It was in September 1983, when the Islamists in Sudan received governmental support with the introduction of *sharia*. Today, through the mutual courtship of religion and politics, Islamism remains the official ideology in Sudan. Since the implementation of *sharia*, specifically the Islamic penal code, it has emerged as the major source of conflict between northern and southern Sudan. Through the restoration of *sharia*, the northern administration has been able to amass support, thereby clinging to power no matter how undemocratic their policies are viewed by the southerners. As long as *sharia* remain incorporated on the statute books of Sudan, it will be difficult for any non-Muslim political movements to make peace with the northern administration. Until they are removed, any efforts to attain peace will be a mirage. To the Sudanese Islamists, the issue of *sharia* is not negotiable due to its ideological significance, and thereby

perhaps the most profound barrier to peace in Sudan (Hansen & Twaddle 1995:32-44).

Down to East Africa, in Tanzania religion has also to some extent been dragged into the politics of that nation. During the struggle for independence of that country, Catholic Church leaders were alarmed by Muslims' domination in the struggle. Before the merger with Zanzibar, in Tanganyika, there was greater involvement of Muslims in the political struggle for independence. To counter this domination the church leaders encouraged young educated Catholics to be actively involved in the activities of Tanganyika African National Union (TANU). The church leaders saw this approach as the surest way of keeping the assertive Muslims at bay (Njozi 2003:6).

This call perhaps is the one which led to a Roman Catholic politician, Julius Kabarage Nyerere taking a more central role in the political activities of TANU and thereafter becoming the first president of independent Tanzania. After independence, under the leadership of Nyerere, Tanzanian Muslims felt neglected in the sense that they believe there have been deliberate efforts by the government to maintain the privileged position of Christians. This perception is the one which has provoked Tanzanian Muslims who are now becoming more vocal in demanding their religious and political rights. And since their demands threaten the privileged position of the dominant group, Hamza Mustafa Njozi (2003:11) claims that Muslims in Tanzania are often labeled 'Muslim extremists' or even more conveniently, 'members of Al-Qaeda'.

Given the large number of Muslims in Tanzania, their prominent role and involvement in the country's politics is expected. Like elsewhere in the Muslim world, the phenomenon of militant and radical Islam is also common among Tanzanian Muslims. This phenomenon was illustrated by the 1993 demonstration that was marked with anti-Christian slogans. In this demonstration, several Christian butcher shops and bars were attacked and destroyed. The reason given for these attacks was that these places were selling pork and alcohol which are regarded as *haram* (forbidden) in Islam. Later in 1998, the US embassy in Tanzania like the one in Kenya was bombed and among the suspects were both foreign and local Muslims (Oded 2000:167). All these developments taken together are cited by scholars and commentators as examples of Islamic fundamentalism evolving in Tanzania.



## **Religion and Politics: An Islamic View**

There seem to be divergent views on the question of religion and politics from scholars. The contention is that there those who hold the view that religion and politics are integral, while others take the different position that the two are separable. The view that there is no distinction between religion and politics in Islam is such a prevalent one. Those who claim that religion and politics cannot be separated argue that from the very beginning of the history of Islam, religion and politics were not separate entities (Westerlund 1996:317). Their main defense is that Islam is a complete religion not only in terms of theological belief and worship, but also as a way of life which guides social, economic and political behaviour. As their evidence they draw from the life of Muhammad as both a messenger of God and a political leader of the state of Medina. After his death, they assert that the rightly guided caliphs took control of the affairs of the Muslim community in the same line pursued by the prophet. It is out of this background that the traditional jurists had forged a link between religion and politics by giving a religious legitimacy to political power. This has enabled the political Islamists to continue maintaining that religion and politics cannot be separated (Ayubi 1991:3). The ultimate objective of this mixing is the creation of an Islamic state. According to Islamic political theory, this state is supposed to be subordinate to *sharia*. It is the *sharia* which outlines the general norms and functions of the state (Kukah 1993:116). In other words such a state is expected to be guided with the principles of the Quran and Hadith, and to reflect the one established by the prophet in Medina. Its citizens should not all be Muslims as there hardly been such a situation through out the Muslim history. In fact even the seventh century prophet's state in Medina was a multi-religious state. What is required is all the citizens irrespective of their faiths to abide to the law and policies of the state (Mutalib 1993:50). However, as in other types of political systems those who do not subscribe to the ideological or philosophical basis of the state (in this case the non-Muslims) are not to be given leadership positions in government. The best they can occupy are the highest administrative positions of the state (Mutalib 1993:67).

The opposite view, however, maintain that there is a separation between religion and politics in Islam. This idea of the separation of religion and politics is today in the academic circles is referred to as *crastianism*.

Among scholars who believe that there is erastianism in Islam is Norma Salem. She aptly put her position in the following words:

In the first place, the Arabic language does distinguish between the concept of *din* (religion) and *siyasa* (politics), *dawla* (state) and sultan (power). The fact that many Muslim thinkers argue in favour of subjecting politics to the exigencies of religion indicates that such an ideal situation did not always exist either historically or even ideologically (Hunter 1988:151).

In the same line of erastianism in Islam, Nazih Ayubi argues that the original Islamic sources (Quran and hadith) have very little to say on matters of government and state. This view is clearly illustrated in his own words where he said:

Islam is indeed a religion of collective morals, but there is very little in it that is specifically political i.e. there is very little in the original Islamic sources on how to form state, run governments and manage organizations. If the rulers of the historical Islamic state were also spiritual leaders of their community, this was not because Islam required the religious leaders (Imams) to be also a political ruler (Ayubi 1991:4).

In agreement with Ayubi is Muhammad Said al-Ashmawi who commenting about the question of an Islamic state asserted that:

... there is no passage in the Quran about such a state and form of government, because the essence of religion, including Islam, is man, without regard to his terrestrial location, racial division or variety. Until the death of the prophet, there was no state in Islam; Medina approximated a city state. There was only a Muslim community led by the prophet. The basis of loyalty was religious belief, not any territorial state or nation. The Quran and sharia always addressed themselves to the faithful, not the citizens. In fact the idea of citizenship was alien and unknown to Islam (Cudsi & Dessouki 1981:187).

From the arguments propounded by the three scholars, there seem to be a consensus that the Quran and hadith of the prophet never dealt with the question of a form of government. In their view, religion is concerned with man and society, not with states and empires (Cudsi & Dessouki 1981:187).

The proponents of erastianism in Islam argue that religion and politics were brought together in the historical Islamic state by way of the state appropriating religion. There was indeed a connection between religion and politics through out much of the history of the Islamic state, but this was the out come of the state taking over religion as a legitimizing shield for its activity. Islam did not give the historical Muslim state its character; on the contrary, the historical Muslim state had, over the centuries, imparted its features on the Islamic tradition. This is the reverse of the European experience where, historically, it was the church which appropriated politics. Secularism in the West has involved a gradual exclusion of the church from the domain of politics. It was a relatively easy process because religion was institutionalized. As a result of this, once you removed the church, it implied that you had also removed religion from politics. In Muslim societies such a process could not work because there is no church as such in Islam (Ayubi 1991:5). Given the limited nature of political stipulations in the Quran and Hadith, Muslims have had from the start to borrow and to improvise in the developing of their political systems. This process was inspired by (i) the *sharia* as represented in the Quran and sunna; (ii) Arabian tribal traditions and (iii) the political heritage of the lands they conquered, especially Persian and Byzantine traditions. The influence of the first source was more noticeable during the era of the first four rightly guided caliphs, the second during the Umayyad dynasty and the third during the Abbasid and Ottoman dynasties (Ayubi 1991:6f).

Agreeing to the foregoing position, Al-Madhi argues that instead of the Quran being rigid, it took an open attitude to the adoption of useful ideas and institutions of foreign origin. It is out of this conviction, he believes that caliph Umar adopted several ideas and institutions. For example, the land tax called *kharaj* and the bureaucratic system of *diwa*. That dynamism in Islam was inspired by the Quran and shaped by the examples of the Prophet and his companions. According to him, While Islam is integral to politics and society, there is a distinction between that which is immutable and that which is subject to change and development (Esposito 1983:233). He further

adds that there is no particular system of Islamic government. All those who theorized about such a system have simply expressed historically relevant means of applying Islamic political injunctions. An Islamic system of government requires a set of general principles, for example, the need to politically organize society, the need to base that on popular participation, the imperative of justice, and so on; second, the requirement to apply Islamic legislation. Any system that fulfill these conditions is entitled to be called Islamic (Esposito 1983:236).

## Religion and Politics in Kenya

According to Almond and Powell, they have identified three aspects of political culture. These are (a) system, (b) process and (c) policy aspects. The system aspects include the people's notions about the nature of political community and the appropriate bases of political legitimacy. This political community refers to a collectivity whose members feel that they should be in the same state. Whereas, process aspects deal with the way people should relate to politics and the way they should conduct politics. And finally, policy aspects pertain to people's ideology, their image of the good society and their ideas about the issues politicians should address (Tapper 1991:35). In Islamic theology, all Muslims are supposed to constitute an *umma*, a community of believers who accept the divine basis of society. This is because religious community is synonymous with political community, and the state is its political organizations. Though in an Islamic state there may be non-Muslims who enjoy protected status, but they do not have equal rights and duties with the members of the *umma*. The reason is because they are subjects of the state but not members of the political community (Tapper 1991:36). We would now want to relate this theological model within the Kenyan context, by analyzing the religio-political relation of Kenya in both the pre-independence and post-independence eras.

### *Religio-Political Relations in the Pre-Independence Period*

Before Kenya became a British colony, such a theological model partially corresponded to the Sultan East Africa Dominion which was a form of an Islamic sultanate. The dominion covered the capital Zanzibar, and the coastal regions of Kenya and Tanzania. This implies that the Kenya's coast

had had a long tradition of sultanate rule before it was annexed by the British as a protectorate. In this dominion Muslims and non Muslims existed as distinct political entities. Until 1875, if one was to participate in the political affairs of the dominion such as holding an administrative office, one had to be a Muslim. Non-Muslims were free to practice their religion without interference, in return of recognizing and obeying the political authority. There was no way the non-Muslim could rule the dominion because they were not members of the dominion's political community. Obedience to political authority in the Sultan East Africa Dominion was secured in great part by attributing divine qualities to it. The social system would be maintained because it was divinely ordained. In short, religio-political system controlled both political and social behaviour, directing them to its support and harmonious operation. The establishment of colonial structures and the efforts of the nationalists paved the way to the transformation of political system such that the basis of political legitimacy shifted to secular ones.

But before that was done the polity gave as much legitimacy to religion, as religion did to the polity. Furthermore, the religion of the state was sunni Islam. This form of Islam accepts temporal power as being legitimate, and tended to accord legitimacy to whoever was in power (Tapper 1991:41). The clear distinctions of a political nature between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Islamic sultanate should not be taken as sufficient evidence that the former were a unified political community. There were racial and sectarian differences that split the *umma*. Thus, the dominion had both the African Muslims and *shia* sects. It happened that both were not integrated into the political community, rather they were suppressed. The political community was supposed to be dominated by Arab Muslims and of the sunni affiliation. This explains why with the advent of nationalism in Kenya, the African Muslims supported the view for unitary Kenya. The nationalist effort was to inculcate a sense of Kenyan nationality with equal treatment to all citizens. The Arab-Muslims on the other hand, found it difficult to accept an ideology that challenged their monopoly of politics and their superior social status. As it became clear that the Arab-Muslims will now compete for positions with the rest of Kenyans (whether Muslims or non-Muslims), Islam was turned to as a means of securing and preserving their privileges, but to no avail. The spread of the ideas of

nationalism among the non-Muslims and African Muslims, prompted further revisions in the ideologies of integration among Arab Muslims. This was important as the spirit of Kenyan nationalism seem to have been dominating.

The Kenya's war of independence was waged in the name of a new political community. Upon attaining independence, efforts were launched to shape the population which remained within the boundaries of the state into a new political community. Membership in the new political community was acquired by being a citizen of the nation-state. Citizens were expected to develop a Kenyan national identity so as to enhance their feeling of attachment to the political community. This required the sultan's subjects at the coast to adjust and accept the new basis of community membership, which previously was religiously based. From that moment a new political community emerged in Kenya, with members whose religious characteristics did not affect their membership. All citizens are by definition, members of the Kenyan state, having equal rights. Religious affiliation is not mentioned in the laws as a criterion for membership in the political community. However, examining at the behavioural level, some segments of the Muslims at the coast continue to view their society as a collectively characterized by Islam. Although there has not yet been any comprehensive research on this.

The rise of the nation as the prevalent form of collectivity with which people identify, inform us that the nationalists efforts may have been successful in helping redefine the nature of the political community. Contrary to Islamic theology which views all believers as belonging to a collective unit and also refusing the division of the *umma* into political communities without a religious base, the nationalists ideology taking nation as the appropriate unit on which to build the political community, appeared to have permeated the Muslim community in Kenya. Today, most Kenyan Muslims, while being aware that they share a common religion with a number of people in the Middle East, they do not seem to think that this commonality warrants their incorporation under the same rule or political system.

During the colonial era, freedom of religion was guaranteed but no extra effort was made to encourage Islam. Theoretically the British colonial power respected Muslim sensitivities in so far as religious practices and feelings were concerned. This would help explain why *sharia* courts existed in Kenya and why the *kadhis* were on the pay roll of the colonial

administration in the country. Nevertheless, generally, the imperial administration together with different Christian missionary societies considered Muslims in Kenya and the whole of East Africa as a threat to their religious and political interests in the colony. To combat that threat the British administration often co-operated in formulating and implementing a wide range of policies whose intent and effect was to favour Christians and weaken Muslims (Njozi 2003:2).

### *Religio-Political Relations in the Post-colonial Period*

After independence, Kenya adopted a constitution that did not elevate any religion in the country as a state religion. Its policy was to separate religion as much as it could from the politics of the country. This perceived separation could none the less be said to be inconsistent and ambiguous. Attempts made by the state to separate religion from politics have not successfully separated the behavioural relation between religion and politics. References to God are embedded in the national fabric such that some Deistic concepts are woven into the mix. For instance the country's national anthem opens with "Oh God of all creation", which is a prayer to the Ultimate Reality. The opening ceremony of every parliamentary session is always preceded by prayers offered by the representatives of the various religious groups who have been invited to the chamber. It is here we concur with John O. Voll (1982:276) who observes that:

The old ideas of the separation of church and state in many countries clearly do not signify the separation of religion from politics.

This is true of Kenyan situation. Despite Kenya being a secular state constitutionally, one never fails to see contradictions from the actions of its politicians. We shall illustrate the contradictions in a short while after giving a brief background of how Africans perceive religion.

Generally, Africans conceive of religion (any religion) as a total way of life involving deep rooted beliefs and practices handed down from one generation to another. According to John S. Mbiti (1969), in this way of life there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular. If one accepts this African conception of religion, can one honestly say that any African of whatever religious persuasion is capable of sincerely separating

that 'total way of life' from other engagements such as politics? It would be extremely difficult for anyone who understands the religious nature of the Africans to expect them to separate religion from their other life engagements, including politics. This is because as Mbiti (1969) further rightly observes:

Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the field 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 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.

The above quotation clearly reveals to us the religious nature of Africans. Since that is how their religious nature compels them to instinctively behave, then African cannot help bringing religion into their politics.

It is not difficult in Kenya to realize that there is an omnipresence of religious behaviour among the ruling class. This was much more perfected during the reign of Daniel arap Moi. President Moi sought to cultivate his personal image as devoted Christian. He was seen frequently and in well publicized Sunday expeditions to church. In some of his speeches at times he would quote the Bible. This attitude enhances behavioural brotherhood between the church and the state hence integrating religion with politics. This attempt to establish courtship with religion did not prevent the main church bodies (Protestant and catholic) and some Islamists groups from criticizing the bad governance of the president. It is out of this that Moi found solace with the fundamentalist churches. According to Paul Gifford, these are the new brand of churches in Africa that have resolutely refuses to challenge government authorities on their bad record. Their principle is never to engage in any social analysis of political structures. Most of these churches are Pentecostal and the US influenced churches (Westerlund 1996 :198-215). In Kenya they include the Gospel Redeemed Church, African Church of Holy Spirit, Seventh Day Adventist, and the newer influenced



American churches under the umbrella the United Evangelical Churches of Kenya (UECK)<sup>1</sup>.

Since these churches divert attention from its deficiencies, the government uses them for support it offers to continue staying in power. This suspicion is likely to be valid because at a time when the Moi regime was under increasing pressure to become more democratic and accountable, the fundamentalist churches were busy offering their political support. This ridicule could be evident after the widely rigged elections of 1988. Reinhard Bonnke's magazine declared Kenya as truly privileged to be ruled by a born again head of state<sup>2</sup>. More to this courtship between religion and politics in Moi's regime was illustrated during the visit made by the international President of the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) church. During his 1991 visit to Kenya, the church president paid a courtesy call on President Moi. In their discussion Moi took the opportunity to commend the SDA church for their role in preaching the gospel and for being good missionaries in Kenya. It appears that to Moi a good religious body was one that did not indulge in politics of criticizing his government. In his reply, the church President commended President Moi who he described as a champion of religious freedom and expression. He assured President Moi that the SDA church together with its followers would continue supporting and being loyal to the government<sup>3</sup>.

Under Moi, Kenya's political structures had become so characterized by corruption and mismanagement that in November 1991 external donors refused further aid, pending the introduction of some system of accountability (Harden 1991:248-68). In the midst of widespread agitation for multiparty democracy which Moi was strenuously resisting, an official of Potter's House (an American denominational fundamentalist type) came to his support. This strange support was covered by one of the country's daily which reported that:

A Pastor [of the Potter's House] said yesterday that Christians

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<sup>1</sup> This is an umbrella body of about sixty churches most of which are affiliated to the United Evangelical Churches of America.

<sup>2</sup> *Revival Report* B/1989 E, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Kenya Time* December 1, 1990, p2.

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should be paying for the government instead of criticizing it. [The pastor said] 'As an American citizen who has lived in Kenya, I do not believe that a multiparty political system will work at this time in Kenya.' He said he had been to many developing countries and Kenya was one of the fastest developing he had been to. 'I believe that this is the result of good leadership. I want to thank President Moi ... for the outstanding job [he has] done', [the pastor] said<sup>4</sup>.

The same sentiments that Kenya was not ready for multiparty politics were echoed by Moi in his crusade to kill the agitation for plural politics. This did not stop other religious bodies in Kenya to continue pressuring for an accountable leadership. At this particular moment in time when the government was under sustained criticism from several sources, the African Church of the Holy Spirit held a special service in Nairobi to pray for the government. During the service over 1,200 followers together with their leader Bishop Kisanya registered as KANU members. The church resolved to support KANU and President Moi<sup>5</sup>. Nevertheless, with his support from the fundamentalist churches, Moi had to give in to the will of majority Kenyans – the acceptance of multiparty politics.

As the first multiparty elections of 1992 were approaching, more support for Moi surfaced from the United Evangelical Churches of Kenya (UECK). The head of their parent affiliate body (United Evangelical Churches of America), Rev. Charles Hardin led a delegation to Kenya for a major convention. This was in November 1992 only a month before the elections. And just before the convention, Rev. Hardin, his colleagues and the Kenyan leadership paid a visit to President Moi to confer and to pray with him. Moi took the opportunity to advise them to avoid ungodly behaviour, to have no antagonism to the state, and to stay out of politics. Moi's message and patronage was not lost on the UECK, as the ensuing convention became something of a promotion of Moi. This led to a statement signed by UECK leaders challenging the negative comments of the other churches (Westerlund 1996:207). This declaration gave Moi some assurance that it was not all the religious groups in Kenya that were opposing his

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<sup>4</sup> *Daily Nation* July 2, 1991, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Standard*, March 30, 1992, p. 4.

administration. It is at this point in time that the Protestant NCKK, the Catholic church and the IPK had come out with politically harsh statements critical of his regime. After the elections in December 1992, Moi won but through mass irregularities. As the opposition and NCKK were still debating whether to challenge the results, the UECK leaders came out again strongly rebuking the NCKK and urging the opposition to accept the results.

In March 1993, Pastor Paul Yonggi Cho of Yoido Full Gospel Church of Seoul came to Kenya for a crusade. He had a well publicized reception with President Moi at state house, where Moi referred to his preaching as a 'blessing' for Kenya. In his last crusade, which Moi attended, Cho is reported to have preached the following:

.... [He] called on Kenyans to have faith in God in order to be delivered from the economic crisis facing the country. He said that Kenya was a blessed country because it had a God fearing leader. The South Korean preacher urged Kenyans to trust in Jesus in order to prosper ... [Pastor Cho said] that God gave the President wisdom to lead the country<sup>6</sup>.

Like other fundamentalist churches we have observed Cho's preaching was mere political. At exactly the same month (March), the London Financial Times, reported that the Kenya's economy had been plundered by Moi together with his few closest cronies. They have stolen million of dollars into their personal accounts thereby adversely affecting Kenya's economic development.<sup>12</sup> At a time when foreign and local press were pointing out that the root cause of Kenya's economic retardation was because of the state sanctioned corruption, a visiting religious head was preaching to thousands that Moi was ruling with wisdom bestowed by God himself. To him, the Kenyans were unable to prosper due to lack of commitment to God. Cho's preaching may have been a blessing for Kenya, but it was certainly for Moi.

### *Islamism in Kenya*

Through out the history of Islam, the Muslim world has witnessed the emergence of renewal movements within itself. These periodic renewal

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<sup>6</sup> *Daily Nation* April 1, 1993, p. 6.

movements were always stimulated by various factors, significantly political decline and socio-economic crises<sup>7</sup>.

Since these renewal movements were emerging in different eras depending on the prevailing circumstances, Youssef M. Choueiri suggests three names to describe a specific movement in a specific era. These names are: revivalism, reformism and radicalism.

According to Choueiri, revivalism refers to those Islamic movements that had emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The period that witnessed the emergence of revivalist Islam is said to have been characterized with financial crises, demographic dislocations and agricultural stagnation (Choueiri 1990:20). It is against this background that religious revivalist movements began to sprout in order to reinstate Islam in its pure and original state. Thus, Islamic revivalism made its appearance and exerted an enduring impact in the outlying areas stretching from Sumatra and Indian sub continent to Central Arabia and northern Nigeria (Choueiri 1990:20).

By contrast, Islamic reformism is a modern movement that came into being in the twentieth century. This movement conducted an open dialogue with European culture and philosophies in an attempt to grapple with what it appeared to be intolerable state of Islamic decline. By studying the pre-industrial phase of Europe, its exponents hoped to unveil the pre-conditions of building viable political structures and sound economic basis (Choueiri 1990:9). Thus, when Muslim religious leaders and politicians realized that their societies were in a state of decline in comparison with European nations, they felt there was need to correct the defect. It is this awareness of decline, which turned out to be the main theme in the discourse of Islamic reformists.

Lastly, Islamic radicalism is the latest attempt to establish an Islamic state. Its ideology is closely related to the anxieties and ambitions of certain strata of society, particularly the low and middle class professionals. It happened that by the mid of the twentieth century, both revivalism and reformism were superseded by the emergence of sovereign nation-states through out the Muslim world. It is argued that these new states carried out varied programmes of development and in the process they relegated Islam

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<sup>7</sup> *Financial Times* March 24, 1993, p. 6.

to a personal sphere (Choueiri 1990:10). Consequently, Islamic radicalism is viewed as a direct reaction to the growth of the nation-state and the peculiar problems of the twentieth century. Among the founders of this movement are al Maududi and Said Qutb.

Islamic resurgence in Kenya has been evident both in its radical and conservative forms. Perhaps, its radical face was can be claimed to have been presented by the IPK while its conservatism form has for a long time manifested itself through SUPKEM. Like in most countries in Africa, Islamism in Kenya is emerging as a force of political opposition. In early 1992, IPK was formed and wanted to participate in the political election of the country. The party's its intent was the desire to join the rising voice of national democracy and liberation. It had declared that its aim is to bring about a just constitutional government that upholds the ideals of democracy, human rights and removal of all forms of discrimination at all levels. However, the party was not given the opportunity to participate in the elections. The government failed to accede to the appeals of IPK (Muslims) to register it as an official political body. Instead it declared that there was no way it could register IPK as a political party. In response, youth within the IPK steered the organization on its militant direction. This new direction radicalized the IPK with respect to the state, and took a step towards a united Kenya Muslim identity in the Coastal town of Kenya.

The actions of the Islamist groups in Kenya are not only directed against the state, but also against the national umbrella organization (SUPKEM) representing Muslims. This umbrella organization could not wholly identify with the radical political Islam of the IPK. This could be attested by their publicized visit to the state house at a time when the IPK was engaged in street battles with the state. The SUPKEM was intent on acting as the sole guardian of Muslim affairs in Kenya. Perhaps, to the officials of SUPKEM, the political ailments of the community could not be treated through embracing radical Islam. All along the SUPKEM has maintained a more moderate and co-operative approach to the state in Kenya. Consequently, this conservative constituency to some extent scuttled the radical anti-state Islamic ethos of Islamic resurgence witnessed in Kenya. Nevertheless, the challenge posed by IPK to the government redeemed the complacency of the community with the state until then. Given the experience of political disturbances and frequent violence between the

government and members of IPK, the influence of Islam should not be underestimated in the national politics. Although, Islam in Kenya will continue to be a religion of minority in the years to come, its impact on politics at the national level cannot be ignored (Ayubi & Mohyuddin 1994: 154).

## Conclusion

In this paper we have attempted to show how humankind is both notoriously religious and political at the same time. The idea of the separation of religion and politics is only theoretical. The call for the separation of the two is often echoed to the convenience of the moment, which has been difficult to uphold.

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# Facing the Reality of the Ethiopian Encounter

A.L. Pitchers

## Introduction

This paper was prepared as a response to the suggestion that we dedicate a scholarly article to possibly Africa's most famous 'Africologist' on his 82<sup>nd</sup> birthday. That famous person is none other than Prof. G.C. Oosthuizen, an inspiring friend and mentor.

For my contribution, I am indebted to insights which I received from a visit to Ethiopia, and critical observations by my colleague J.A. Loubser, who read a paper on Ethiopia based on a social / historical perspective. My emphasis, however, lies in the field of the theology of The Ethiopian Orthodox *Tewahedo* (one nature) Church. The beliefs of this body are my main concern in this paper. The purpose in investigating it, was to ascertain the role of the Church in leading Ethiopia to the point of achieving its former glory. The intention on my part was to locate a focal point, if any, which would aid the now famous African – and of late, South African – aim of an 'African Renaissance'. My intention involved the examining of the doctrines of the Church to ascertain the social impact of that body. The central observations will be found in the conclusion to this paper. At this point, it should suffice to state that for a country which has made a great impact on human civilization, the deprivation and poverty was staggering. It is a society that has not as yet fully entered the age of print, let alone encountered the industrial revolution. Yet, it is of foundational import for Christianity (if not religion), in Africa (if not worldwide).

I must emphasize that I tried to minimize my use of English text books on the subject (there are very few in print anyway). On the other hand, the Geez manuscripts are voluminous. Unfortunately, many of the famous



theological works were plundered by the British under Napier in 1849 for 'safe-keeping'. The method of personal interviews, consequently, features prominently in this manuscript. These interviews are reflected in the bibliography. (I am thankful for and indebted to Loubser for keeping accurate records of the interviews).

A great deal of general material may be located on the web under Ethiopia most of which, economically speaking, is extremely negative. One may sum up the attitude of the International Monetary Fund (I.M.F.) and World Bank (W.B.) in their assessment of Ethiopia in particular, and Sub-Saharan Africa in general, as follows: Norms for good governance as defined by the above world-bodies are an absolute pre-requisite for funding of development projects in such countries. Financial structures and institutions must 'get their houses in order'. Government interference in the Private Sector must be absolutely minimized. Furthermore, the (illegitimate) government of the Democratic Republic of Congo (D.R.C.) and the genocide in the Great Lakes region are being closely scrutinized by the above institutions. Zimbabwe's land reform and South Africa's excuses for turning a blind-eye to its procedures have not gone unnoticed. Human rights activists find many problems with the excesses of certain African cultural practices, e.g. female circumcision. Africa's *tragedies* do make international headline news. Child slavery and the treatment of the Masarwa by one of our rather well-off neighbours do not go unnoticed. Angola, Mozambique, and most other Sub-Saharan Countries experience different grades of food shortages with, in some places, people facing starvation. The international bodies request an answer. Colonialism and apartheid are now viewed as excuses rather than sound economic reasons for the problems of Africa. The Far-East is constantly referred to as an example of an area that has 'suffered' all the above negative factors yet still promotes economic growth. For example, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, and numerous others, which are now listed as the 'Asian Tigers', despite their background, deliver vast growth.

With Ethiopia, the situation is not different. Why was it that when the Dutch directed the sugar plantations and the British developed Ethiopia's cotton trade, the country flourished? Anyway, Ethiopia, that majestic country, was never colonized except for a very short period under the Italians (1936 - 1941). The W.B. and I.M.F. are in no mood for excuses. These facts are available on the web (Brander, Levy & Heinz 2002; see also

Loubser 2000). Loubser also points out that the fertile Ethiopia has the world's third lowest per capita income accompanied by its people suffering from the frightening HIV C strain.

This country, with its illustrious history and past economy is virtually bankrupt as a result of its flirtation with Socialism under the Derg rule of 1971 - 1991. Who now will develop its numerous resources? However Abegaz (1994:321) believes that the misgoverned economy and poor general governance of the country require immediate attention. This is a fact, but who will oversee the transformation?

The reality then, is a glorious past with an unknown future. If Ethiopia is to gain or surpass its former glory, it seems as if it should heed the statements of the W.B. and the I.M.F.

It is my contention that Ethiopia must allow its Christian principles to guide it into the future. With the above background in mind, I turn to Ethiopia's Ecclesiastical development. The Church has proved to be the factor holding the same 51 million people together.

## **The Origins of the Ethiopian Church**

One of the most important legends for this church relates to the acquisition of the 'Ark of the Covenant'. According to Kebra Nagast (*The Glory of the Kings: The True ark of the Covenant*) the glory of Ethiopia developed as follows: The Queen of Sheba went to visit King Solomon to ascertain the source of his wisdom. After displaying his splendour, Solomon deviously enticed Sheba into his bed.

At a banquet he fed her many thirst-producing, but sumptuous foods. They went to sleep together in the same room, but on opposite sides of the chamber. A pact had been made after supper that Solomon would not make any advances towards her as long as she did not partake of anything belonging to him during the night in question. Cleverly, Solomon placed a bowl of water in the middle of the room. Unable to endure her unbearable thirst, she snuck out of bed to drink. Solomon, having feigned sleep, immediately, accused Sheba of breaking her word. She then obliged him with her intimate company, leaving for Cush the next day. A son, Menyelek I, resulted from the union.

When Menyelek reached adulthood, he returned to Jerusalem only to astound Solomon by his resemblance to King David. After being crowned King David II, Menyelek longed for his own country. On deciding to take his leave some of the nobles wished to accompany the Crown Prince. However, they desired to remove the Tabernacle and the Ten Commandments and resituate them in Ethiopia, the New Zion (Nagast Brooks 1998:17 - 81). The Ark, while 'stored' somewhere near Axum, is existentially present in every Ethiopian Orthodox Church. A replica of the ark is displayed during *Timket*, the time of the Epiphany, commemorating the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan (Merah 1 1999:74).

According to Ethiopian tradition, the country followed Judaism as understood by the nobles who had left Jerusalem with Menyelek I. One still finds a remnant of Jewish worshippers called 'Felashas'. Most of these 'Jews' were airlifted to Israel in the 1970's to avoid further persecution. Loubser and I visited them at Gondar and Bahar-Dar, where their synagogues were evident and in use. Apart from tradition, very little is known of this group's origins. Are they ethnic Jews, the descendants of the nobles accompanying Menyelek? Who knows? The Orthodox theologians disregard them completely. The Orthodox Church maintains though, that the Falashas' form of Judaism is pre-Talmudic (Church of Ethiopia 1997:3). In our discussions with various Christian Priests, it appeared that the Falashas were simply intransigent Ethiopians who refused to convert to Christianity (Discussions 1999).

It is assumed by the Orthodox faithful that Christianity came with the arrival of the Eunuch, who on returning from Jerusalem, met Philip and was baptized by him (Merahi 1999:31). The role of Frumentius in 330 A.D. is acknowledged as the official link to the Orthodox line of Churches as he had been ordained and commissioned by Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria in 334 .A.D. From that time, Christianity became the official religion of Ethiopia and the country flourished. The decline of Ethiopia began with its frequent wars against Islam, whereby the country was denied its usual trade routes.

Ethiopians, as a result of their long Christian heritage, have the moral fiber to turn the tables on their critics. The country needs, however, to return to its Christian roots via the pathway of primary education and medical development all involving a Christian direction and work ethic.

## **The Place of the Trinity in the Ethiopian Renaissance**

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) places great emphasis on the place of the Trinity in the Godhead. In the Trinity, the Father is the heart, the Son is the word and the Holy Spirit is the life principle (breath). Not only is the Trinity active in the world, but it is especially active in Ethiopia, God's country. Ethiopia is directed by the Father's heart (love) acting in His word, for to all Semites a word is not static but active, causing something to happen. The Father spoke his word in the Son, and 'it was so', as envisaged in the creation story (Tensae Publishing House 25). The trinitarian God, is an Acting God. It is this trinitarian concept that led the E.O.C. to oppose the Derg by portraying the E.O.C.'s role as that of the country's socially concerned body. The E.O.C. took the lead in the instituting of social programmes. This act by the Church involved developing the fishing industry, food distribution, family therapy and re-forestation (Meadot 1988:16ff; Loubser 11). The resources of the E.O.C. are extremely meager though (Pankhurst 1990:181). God, in Ethiopian thought, is the God of Action for the people of Ethiopia.

The Father who has sent the Son and the Holy Spirit to redeem the world, is the same Father who causes His face to shine upon Ethiopia. Saints, musicians, hymn writers and the presence of God's Ark in that country all help to bring joy to the heart of God. Unfortunately, in days gone by, the land had neglected to acknowledge the presence of the Triune God in its midst, by failing to give heed to fasting and obedience to the liturgy. As a result of the above neglect, greed and disrespect for the clergy and one's brothers and sisters had become the order of the day (Merahi 1999:49f). However, since the presence of God, through the Ark, in Ethiopia, God's Angels, Raphael and Michael, continue to care for the land and its peoples.

## **The Position of Mary in Ethiopian Thought**

The E.O.C. clearly teaches that Eve, the mother of humanity, while leading humanity into sin, has been redeemed by Mary the mother of God. In a painting at a church on an island in Lake Tana, one sees Satan seducing Eve at the tree of knowledge. Adam does his best to drive the snake away, but Eve determinedly participates of the forbidden fruit. Eve attempted to reach up to the status of God despite Adam's attempted intervention. Mary, on the other hand, did not attempt to disobey God, but humbly stood at the foot of

the cross. God, therefore, has blessed womanhood, for Mary has reversed the consequences of Eve's sin by her humility. Jesus, because of Mary's faithfulness to him has raised her to the status where her humility is a reason for worshipping her. The worship of Mary's humanity leads directly to the next point, where, in the doctrine, due to the divine nature in Christ, Mary replaces Jesus' humanity - hence the worship of the 'mother of God'.

### **The Monophysite Doctrine of Christ**

Protestants, Catholics and the Greek Orthodox Church, following Chalcedon, teach that Christ is one person with two natures, one divine, the other human. The E.O.C. together with its sister churches, the Malabar Syriac, Coptic, and Armenian churches all without exception, believe that Christ had but *one* nature, a divine nature. The E.O.C. goes no further than Nicaea (The Ethiopian Orthodox *Tewahedo* Church 1996:126.), hence the word Monophysite, one nature. The Council of Nicaea, 351 A.D., clearly states that the Son is of one substance with the Father begotten not made. Chalcedon, however, in 471 A.D. accepted to the Nicene Creed, but added the following: Christ is consubstantial with the Father as to the divine nature and is consubstantial with us in his manhood. Such a thought was totally unacceptable to the E.O.C. and its sister churches, Christ is divine. That means that He is God wrapped in a human body. All his actions, all He is, even as He walked this earth, was God in the form of human flesh. In fact it was only His 'covering' that was human. Consequently, on the cross, while the human appearance succumbed to death, His soul or nature returned immediately to the Father. There is thus no humanity whatsoever in the risen and ascended Christ according to the Patriarch's secretary (Loubser & Pitchers 1999). This understanding of the E.O.C. runs contrary to the tenets of the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches, all of which accept the Chalcedonian definition.

Due to this peculiarity of the E.O.C., constant conflict with the Portuguese explorers was the result. The final outcome to this saga meant that the Jesuits as well as all other Catholics were deported from Ethiopia. The E.O.C.'s faithfulness to its traditions is admirable although misguided, leading to absolute bigotry, from either Catholic or Protestant standpoint. Loubser and I encountered much resentment from certain E.O.C. priests in Addis Ababa when we attempted to discuss theological differences. As

outsiders, we gained the impression that we were welcome only to listen, and not question. Leading out of the above encounter, it soon became apparent that while tourists' dollars were welcome, the same did not apply to the individual foreigners. Africans from other part of the continent may learn that, being true to one's considerable heritage, requires transparency.

## **The Concept of Salvation**

The doctrine of sin seems extremely vague to one who approached the above church from the 'outside' as a Protestant. The text books that I consulted had nothing to say on the subject. On approaching the church leaders, however, it appeared to us that sin consisted mainly in a failure to observe the liturgy by which they meant feast days and holy days. Included in the idea of sin was a failure on the part of the laity to give alms to the church who would then distribute those gifts to the priests as well as the needy. Sinning on the priests' part was limited to greediness, which also included failure to pay workers and meet the needs of the poor. Immorality was frowned on as was polygamy. It thus appeared that sin was limited to the transgression of a form of institutionalised legalism.

Salvation was the natural result of good works. An example of salvation in application was revealed in a painting on the Lake Tana Church at Gondar. Here one noticed the picture of a cannibal who had eaten more than 100 people, weighed in the balances for his sins. One day he gave a cup of cold water to a needy individual and immediately he found forgiveness. The attending priest quoted a Biblical verse in explanation to this act, pointing out that Jesus had said that in as much as you give a cup of cold water in my Name to the needy, you give that water to me. The cannibal was instantly forgiven all his previous sins and rejected his cannibalism. Much of this sounded strange to Loubser and to me, individuals, who had been brought up in a tradition characterised by belief in 'Justification by faith'.

One may quite accurately state that much of the Ethiopian culture is retained in a manuscript and art form portrayed in their churches. The distribution of Bibles was extremely limited, while bordering on the unaffordable as well.

Sermons as reflected in the practices of churches elsewhere are unknown. Liturgy, rather, plays the most significant role in the Ethiopian Church, and respect for the Liturgy, including the kissing of the cross,

results in the many Christian blessings one may receive. Forgiveness of sin by kissing the cross is foreign to Protestants.

By an overabundance of 'good works' one may maintain a relationship with the ancestors, or those who may have passed from this life to the next with many of their sins unforgiven. Through a transfer of merit, one may assist to set free the souls in the 'nether-world'. This action seems to differ from African 'ancestor' worship where one receives blessings from those who have died. The concept, to my thinking, relates to the E.O.C.'s understanding of Purgatory.

There are similarities between Islam as we understood it and the E.O.C. Of interest to me was that Zewde agreed with Loubser for the former states that the differences between Christianity and Islam were not pronounced in earlier times of worship (Zewde 1998:6). This factor is underscored by the calls to worship, the removal of shoes on entering a place of worship and the general laws of cleanliness. The dietary laws are the same. Both abstain from the same foods as required by the book of Leviticus. These laws are requirements for salvation.

### **The Doctrine of the Last Things**

One may ask how important is such a doctrine for the 21st Century? The interesting issue lies in the fact that the E.O.C.'s doctrine of the above as interpreted by its priests emphasizes the point that Ethiopians are the faithful remnant of the old rejected Israel. The place of Christ's return is likely to be at Lalibela. As proof of Ethiopia's status as the 'New Israel', one need only look to the name of the last King of Ethiopia, Hayla-Sellase I, Lion of the Tribe of Judah (deposed in 1974).

### **The E.O.C.'s Relationship with other Churches**

The E.O.C., as seen earlier, maintains an inter-communal relationship with its sister Orthodox Churches. It is also a part of the W.C.C. Because of its Monophysite doctrine, any act of full communion could only take place should the Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox and Protestants return to the doctrine of Christ as having one nature as espoused by the E.O.C. This doctrine was taught by St. Mark in Egypt, St. Matthew in Ethiopia and St. Thomas in India. At this point, discussions on this issue are in progress (The Church of Ethiopia, Past and Present 1997:99-100).

Being the 'True Church', the E.O.C. opposes proselytism among its flock as they alone retain the apostolate tradition according to Patriarch Abba Paulos of Ethiopia (The Church of Ethiopia, Past and Present 1997:8). We did not find our interaction with the E.O.C. a very happy one.

The re-action of the E.O.C. to other churches is understandable in the light of Roman Catholic attempts at repression, finally encapsulated by the Italian Catholic invasion in 1936. (According to the E.O.C. the Italian invasion is dated 1928 as Ethiopia uses the Julian calendar and ancient Hebrew time). The Church further suffered great martyrdom under the Communists, yet it stands as a beacon to God's care for Ethiopia. (The Church of Ethiopia, 1997:18)

### **Theological Training in Ethiopia**

On visiting the Holy Trinity Theological Seminary, Loubser and I were impressed by the high theological standard of the Seminary. The library, which had, prior to the Derg regime, been housed at the Addis Ababa University, was excellent. Its one and only computer did not work however, but the books were of a very high standard. Protestant commentaries and theological works abounded.

The lecturers with whom we held a Seminar on the 'Third Quest for the Historical Jesus' were very highly educated. The Malabar Church Indians (classified by the Ethiopians as whites), had been educated at the famous Serampore University in India, having read for Master's and Doctor's degrees. A matter that concerned us was that the students from the Seminaries were not acceptable to the E.O.C. they were considered somewhat liberal theologically speaking. The E.O.C., according to the Seminary teachers, preferred the method of teaching priests at the local churches, where a theological curriculum was in place.

### **The Reaction of the Ethiopian People to Famine and Hardship**

Ethiopia is a country of great beauty, but a country of contrasts with famine and hardship ever at hand. The very moving book by Azeze, *Unheard Voices: Drought, Famine and God* in Ethiopian Oral Poetry under the section on Perceptions of God points out that the starving peasants hold God responsible for their plight and numerous deaths. God must, they feel, be



called to account for allowing such a predicament to befall the country. 'God is presented as a negligent and thrifty master' (Azeze 1998:98f). One of the poets, while holding God accountable for all the country's famine and sorrow, points out that the people have failed to give due respect to Mary as part of their (the people's) obligation to her (Azeze 1999:101). To sum up the above section, both the divine and the human are involved in the blame for Ethiopian tragedies in Ethiopia from the poet's point of view.

### **The E.O.C.'s Contribution to Transformation: What are the Lessons for South Africa?**

For the following section, I have relied to a large extent on *The Church of Ethiopia, Past and Present*. 1997. EOC: Addis Ababa. Loubser's paper on 'Two Revolutions Behind', remains an outstanding source for Geo-political deductions on Ethiopia. I have made extensive use thereof.

A clear statement of the Church's mission is reflected below. 'The fundamental Mission of the Church is to provide spiritual and social services to humanity' (COE P.P. 1997:94). One should not lose sight of the fact that this book carries the Imprimatur of the Patriarch. Additionally, the E.O.C. is stated to be involved in directing plans for road-building, the establishment of clinics, areas for live-stock breeding, developing plans for self-help schemes, the sinking of wells and the provision of orphanages. It is negotiating with all the warring parties both inside and outside its borders while extending hospital services to the populace (COE P.P. 1997:97). Loubser and I, on our short stay, failed to witness any church action in the above areas. What we did observe was the tremendous supply of humanitarian aid from outside Ethiopia. The above scenario did not seem to me to hold out any hope for Ethiopia inspiring an African Renaissance in any way. The country after the Derg Rule, remains at the point of collapse, morally, socially, economically, and with regard to health (HIV/Aids). Ethiopia, that great Empire of the past, offers the third lowest per capita income in the world to its people. Up to half the children under five years of age are malnourished, while millions of Ethiopians depend on foreign aid for food (Loubser 2000:3). Yet we encountered constant xenophobia accompanied by accusations of acting like colonialists. 'Leave us alone' seemed to us to represent the prevailing attitude (Loubser 2000:4), and this attitude from a country that was colonized for only six years! It was clear to

us that for the country to prosper, it had to heed the call of the I.M.F. and W.B. for good governance. Furthermore, Ethiopia will have to change its attitude to foreign aid and tourists, The E.O.C., however, must teach its people to alter their outlook towards those who wish to assist. No one is really interested in phasing out Ethiopian culture. Rather, there is a genuine desire by outsiders to assist that country. The aim is that Ethiopia should be self-sufficient. Ethiopia, through the unlimited influence of the E.O.C., should seek partnerships in an attempt to enter the industrial age. Ethiopia in line with the rest of Africa needs to do 'some soul searching' and then mend its ways by linking up with outside help, e.g. the I.M.F. and W.B.

There is a need to involve women in Ethiopia to a far greater extent not only in the role of the E.O.C. but in society as well. Female circumcision is an abomination and the human rights activists should give this issue their immediate attention. It is a fact that in earlier times women played a large role in government as under Emperor Yaqob (1434 - 1468) but their place in the E.O.C. is limited. Here we have an example of the state treating women in a manner better than the church. Pankhurst, in his, *A Social Study of Ethiopia* (1990:67-72) acknowledges the honour that Ethiopia gives to Mary. It is perhaps surprising that women play such a lowly role in the churches. Their positions are limited to the status of church helpers as they are not entitled to ordination in any form. The E.O.C. must give this matter its attention in modern society (Pankhurst 1990:329).

Does the government and E.O.C. countenance slavery? It is very difficult to offer any final conclusions except to say that the law allowing pagans to be enslaved does not appear to have been rescinded by any law as yet, even though slavery is frowned upon (Pankhurst 1990:328).

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## **List of Interviewees**

Burkhard, Dr. Peter, Mekane Jesu Church, Addis Ababa.

Demissie, Dr. Abebe, Acting Head of the Centre for Biodiversity.

### ***A.L. Pitchers***

**Gebregziaber, Kashaz, Religious journalist at Patriarchate, Addis Ababa.**

**Gebru, Solomon, Patriarchate, Addis Ababa.**

**Melaku, Lule, Holy Trinity Theological Seminary of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.**

**Molinaeux, Dr.Louis, Polio expert, previously medical practitioner near Gondar.**

**Muche, Bilal, Western Gojam Culture Tourism and Information Department, Bahir Dar.**

**Tedik Tsega, Aba Kale, EOC Priest, Gondar.**

**Tekle Haimanot, Aba Wolde Tinsael, EOC Priest, Bahir Dar.**

**Vaidian, Father M.M., Holy Trinity Theological Seminary of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.**

**Wolde Hanna, Minasse, Patriarchate, Addis Ababa.**

**Yigsaw, Getnet, Tourist guide, Gondar.**

# Pan-African Thought and Practice

**Pakiso T. Tondi**

At any moment, depending on internal and external factors determining the evolution of the society in question, cultural resistance (indestructible) may take on new forms (political, economic, armed) in order to fully contest foreign domination (Cabral 1973:40).

## **1 Introduction**

It was under the auspices of Pan-African thought and practice, which engulfed Africa and its people in the Diaspora early in the 1900s, that the situation of the socio-cultural, political and economic subjugation and domination of Africa by Europe was vehemently intellectually and politically challenged. Actually 'by the end of the nineteenth century the former slaves began to understand what had happened to them and from the Caribbean the concept of Pan-Africanism was born' (Clarke 1991:100). The fact that Africa, not because of its own doing, was not making progress and that its people continued to be amongst the wretched of the earth became a cause for concern amongst a nucleus of African intellectuals in Africa and the Diaspora (Pheko 1999:10).

For the total suppression and domination of the African personality in all its forms and content, European imperialists employed various strategies that were all intended to depersonalise and empty the former of its religious and cultural heritage. In the following definition Cabral (1973:40) aptly captures the significance of culture as a tool for self-definition and self-reliance when he notes that:

... culture is always in the life of a society (open or closed), the more or less conscious result of economic and political activities of that society, the more or less dynamic expression of the kinds of relationships which prevail in that society, on the one hand between man (considered individually and collectively) and nature, and, on the other hand, among individuals, groups of individuals, social strata or classes .... [It] is simultaneously the fruit of a people's history and a determinant of history, by the positive or negative influence which it exerts on the evolution of relationships between man and his environment, among men or groups of men within a society, as well as among different societies.

What this implies is that, as part of the strategy to dominate the world-view and behaviour of the African personality, European cultural imperialism alienated and dislocated the people of African origin and descent from their own tools of self-expression as people in relation to others in the universe.

Therefore, the explicit purpose of this contribution is to record and analyse pro-African heritage strategies that can be identified from existing Pan-Africanity literature (since the late nineteenth century). The main objective here is not to deal with the detailed facts about the historical development of Pan-Africanism movement per se. Rather, it is to identify those crucial factors that actually contributed to the birth of the idea of Pan-Africanism as a socio-cultural movement, and to show how effectively the thought was utilised by the people of African origin and the Diaspora to respond to practices related to the slave trade, European imperialism of Africa and racism that accompanied the latter. In the main the objective is to capture the essence of Pan-African thought and practice, meaning its philosophical implications, and thus locate it within the discourses that represent the quest for self-determination, self-expression and self-definition by African communities. The aim is to establish how the thought provides better understanding of the concept of the African Renaissance and its significance for Africa's development in the twenty-first century.

What is important in this exercise, especially in the 'African Century' and its complexities of the global village, is to note the fact that Pan-African thought is '... but one instance of a universal phenomenon, which takes different forms according to time, place and historical setting' (Geiss1974:6).

## **2 A Brief Survey of Factors that Contributed to the Development of Pan-African Concepts**

In essence, as it is apparent from the writings of its first proponents, the idea of Pan-Africanism was intended to challenge the main activities of European imperialist domination, namely, the slave trade, European colonisation of Africa and racism (Thompson 1969:3). These activities were at their height in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In actual fact, as Prah (1997:24) indicates, one of the largest single factors that contributed to the ultimate task of the conceptualisation of the idea of Pan-Africanism by African intellectuals such as William Edward Burghardt DuBois (1940; 1963; 1964), Joseph Casely-Hayford (1911) George Padmore (1956), Alex Quason-Sackey (1963) and others, was the Berlin Conference of 1885, at which Africa was carved up and apportioned amongst European powers without her consent.

At this stage it needs to be mentioned that it is rather interesting to note that amongst factors that provided foundations that developed the meaning and content of Pan-Africanist thought was the education that Africans gained from the countries of their colonisers and exposure to ideals of equality and civil rights that some of the first exponents of the ideology experienced in Europe and North America. In this relation Geiss (1969:5) asserts,

Pan-Africanism is thus predominantly a modern movement. It is the reaction of the most advanced, most intensively Europeanised Africans and Afro-Americans to contact with the modern world. Its representatives have been African or Afro-Americans who in many cases have had an academic education in Europe, America or West Africa, or who were exposed for a long time to modern influences in their own country. They embraced the European and North-American principles of equality and democracy and on this basis elaborated their own ideology of emancipation from White supremacy.

From the preceding argument it can be concluded that theoretically the Pan-Africanist thought was intended to be a counterpoint to the cultural and psychological effects of colonialism and Western racism.

## **2.1 The Slave Trade and the Experience of Slavery**

The idea of Pan-Africanism as a protest movement by people of African descent and the African Diaspora against European colonisation of Africa can also be understood clearly in terms of the practices of the slave trade and the abolitionist movement to which it gave rise (Geiss 1974:16).

As already indicated in the preceding chapter, the wars in Africa that emanated from slave trading due to the demand by European and American capitalists led to a state of instability. 'As the trade gathered momentum the instability grew'. As a result 'the West African scene down to Congo ... became a theatre of war for capturing slaves' (Thompson 1969:4). The reality of this barbaric and selfish activity was such that '... the slaves produced wealth for the European and American world – wealth which laid foundations of European economic prosperity', and 'Africa in turn received nothing that contributed to growth either economically, politically or culturally' (Thompson 1969:4). This marked the beginning of the exploitation and underdevelopment of Africa, which are still being felt today in the twenty-first century and its globalisation processes.

From the very beginning of the operations of slave trade, resistance and protest against the degradation of Africa and its people took various forms. 'Africans transported across the Atlantic to Western plantations were unwilling victims of circumstances beyond their control' (Thompson 1969:4). Alluding to the same factor Geiss (1974:8f) points out,

along the same routes taken by 'goods' which made the slave trade profitable – in particular the slaves themselves, who were treated as chattels – there travelled ideas which from the late eighteenth century onwards were to make Pan-Africanism a political force – at first unconsciously, but later knowingly.

This denotes that the three points of transatlantic slave trade [Western Europe, (specifically England), Africa (specifically West Africa) and the New World [meaning West Indies and USA]] became the centres for the resistance and the intellectual development of the Pan-Africanism ideology. What Geiss (1974:8f) implies here is that from the earliest struggles against slave trade and the experience of slavery itself traditions developed that led to the Pan-Africanism ideology. The language of the abolitionist movements also formed the background to Pan-Africanism in its broader sense.



## **2.2 European Colonisation of Africa**

The forcible and dehumanising acts that characterised the occupation of Africa by Western European powers was not a walkover as it appears in some of the literature on the subject. As a matter of fact 'having partitioned Africa [at the Berlin Conference in 1885], the Western European powers found themselves confronted with the problem of pacifying the people whom they had brought, or attempted to bring, under control' (Thompson 1969:12). Here it needs to be mentioned that, 'before the period of colonial expansion ...Europeans were not concerned with territorial annexation'. Instead 'they only wanted cheap labour for their New World colonies, and as Africa provided a vast reservoir of slaves, the whites bought blacks and transported them to the Western Hemisphere' (Padmore 1956:76). What actually led to the interest in Africa, especially in the latter part of the nineteenth century, was the stiff economic competition among the Western powers, which in turn gave rise to imperialistic expansion (Padmore 1956:76).

The process of occupying Africa, which was formalised at the Berlin Conference, was humiliating to the people of Africa in that the continent was turned into '... a mere pawn in European diplomacy, and her people, the defenceless victims of unregulated exploitation' (Padmore 1956:76). This became unacceptable to people of Africa and the Diaspora, and resistance to European colonisation of Africa manifested itself '... in various forms: political, cultural, religious and even economic, including opposition to forced labour' (Thompson 1969:12). One of the examples of these acts of resistance against European colonisation of Africa became the rise of Ethiopianism in Southern Africa, which represented a religious resistance. In this relation Geiss 1974:134) notes that:

around 1900 an ecclesiastical emancipation movement termed 'Ethiopianism', got under way in Africa, in partial liaison with Afro-American churches in the USA and based upon Psalm 68:xxxii. Religious pathos reinforced the claim to political equality; for this reason Ethiopianism and the African churches form part of the historical background of Pan-Africanism and also comprise of its substance.

Quoting Psalm 68 verse 32 ('Ethiopia shall soon stretch her hand unto God')

and regarding Ethiopia as synonymous with Africa, Afro-American intellectuals and theologians, such as James W.C. Pennington and Henry Highland Garnet, argued that the passage is a biblical prophecy that Africa would ultimately be redeemed (Geiss 1974:132). The concept of Ethiopia had a liberating element in that amongst Pan-African exponents it was used as a symbol for the demand for equality.

## **2.3 Western Racism**

In an endeavour to address the demons of racialism and the destructive behaviour patterns (namely, inferiority complex for the victims and superiority complex for the perpetrators) that became its manifestation, Africans and persons of African descent developed a race consciousness which leaders of the Pan-Africanism movement employed to unite people together (Thompson 1969:18). A clear understanding of the meaning and the implications of racism in this context is necessary. Prah (1997:82) describes racism as:

A power relationship; a social and ideological construction which raises superficial biological attributes to objects and markers for social and economic domination or subordination.

The above-mentioned situation predetermined the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. A closer look at the processes of European imperialist colonial domination of Africa and its people in general reveals that colour has always been conveniently used as an instrument of subjugation and exploitation. In this regard Prah (1997:2) observes that,

while this exploitation and oppression has been primarily economic, the myth of race and colour has been the language for defining and justifying this practice.

## **3 The Meaning and Content of Pan-African Thought and Practice**

As a phenomenon that evolved out of a situation of anomaly – whereby African people were expected to derive their identity from being a negative

image of others – ‘it is difficult, perhaps even impossible, to provide a clear and precise definition of Pan-Africanism’ (Geiss 1974:3). This can be ascribed to the fact that the Pan-Africanism movement as a vehicle of protest that accommodated diverse dehumanising experiences of people of African origin and descent it has no single founder or particular tenets that can be used as a definition (Ackah 1999:13).

However, from the notions that were advocated by the first proponents of the thought and from ideas that floated around in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, in an attempt to capture what constituted the form and content of what represented the core of the meaning of the Pan-Africanism ideology, Geiss (1974:3) explains the thought as a complex phenomenon that was at that time understood as:

1. Intellectual and political movements among Africans and Afro-Americans who regard or have regarded Africans and people of Africa as homogenous. This outlook leads to a feeling of racial solidarity and a new self-awareness and causes Afro-Americans to look upon Africa as their real ‘homeland’, without necessarily thinking of a physical return to Africa.
2. All ideas which have stressed or sought the cultural unity and political independence of Africa, including the desire to modernize Africa on a basis of equality of rights. The key concepts here have been respectively the ‘redemption of Africa’ and ‘Africa for Africans’.
3. Ideas or political movements which have advocated, or advocate, the political unity of Africa or at least close political collaboration in one form or another.

According to Thompson (1969:38), considering the factors that led to its birth as a socio-cultural movement of a people who were fighting to assert themselves in a world that was hostile to their existence, Pan-Africanism may be seen as an idea that:

...was concerned not only with protest but also with fashioning of a coherent philosophy which would enable the African as well as ‘Negro’ man not only to enhance his material welfare but to elevate

him from the centuries of humiliation which has been his lot and thus enable him to re-establish his dignity in a world this has hitherto conceded him none.

From the quotation above it can be safely concluded that as an alternative vision to dominant European vision the aim of Pan-Africanism thought and practice was and still is '... to exalt African history and rediscover the African personality that had been subjugated under European domination' (Ackah 1999:12). From a radical position, which is identified with people such as Dr Motsoko Pheko in the South African context, Pan-Africanism thought can be understood as a '... movement by Africans for Africans in response to European ideas of superiority and acts of imperialism' (Ackah 1999:12).

Similarly, gleaned from the literature that evolved from the first conference in London in 1900 and the ones that followed, Prah (1997:81) describes Pan-African thought and practice as,

... an ideology for the emancipation of African people or people of African descent, on the continent and in the Diaspora. It has never been espoused as a credo for the domination or political exclusion of non-African peoples. In this respect, it differs radically from the Herrenvolk ideas of Hitlerian Germany, the Baaskap Philosophy of Apartheid, or sentiments which inform the myth 'Britannia Rules the Waves'.

In his analysis and description of the evolution of Pan-African thought and practice, Ackah (1999:13f) asserts that 'the experience which is understood as black and its political manifestation, in a broad sense ... is better understood in terms of a thematic approach'. He argues that these themes are what '... encapsulate the social and cultural aspects of black experiences over time as well as more widely known economic and political aspects of Pan-Africanism' (Ackah 1994:14). The four themes that can also be said to have contributed in the conceptualisation of Pan African thought and practice are:

- i. *Pan-Africanism: A Universal Expression of Black Pride and*

**Achievement:** In a process to subjugate and dominate people of African origin and descent European imperialism alienated and marginalized African cultural heritage. As a result, specifically during the epoch of transatlantic enslavement, people of African descent deemed it right to '... defend black culture and propagate the notion of a distinct black contribution to humanity and civilisation' (Ackah 1999:14). Two of the chief exponents of the notion of black pride are the Negritude poets, Aime Cesaire and Leopold S. Senghor. Around 1934 Cesaire and Senghor found a journal of their own, named *L'Étudiant Noir*, which they used as a vehicle to propagate their literary conception of Negritude – 'the stress on all African elements, especially the cult of Black womanhood, the rejection of modern civilization of the wild African landscape' (Geiss 1974:319). Senghor (1970:179) argued that, 'Negritude is nothing more or less than what some English-speaking Africans have called the African personality'. In South Africa the notion of Negritude was expressed through the Black Consciousness Movement that was led by Steven Bantu Biko (Ackah 1994:14). Biko (1978:91f) explained the Black Consciousness ideology as '... an attitude of mind and a way of life, the most positive call to emanate from the black world for a long time', which in essence is about the '... realisation by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers, around the cause of their oppression – the blackness of their skin – as a group to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude.

- ii. ***Pan-Africanism: A Return to Africa by people of African Descent Living in the Diaspora:*** As a way of protest against the merciless shipment of people of Africa to Europe and the Americas Martin R. Delaney, who was '... no mulatto but the first full-blooded Negro among the Afro-American leaders in the USA', (Geiss 1974:87), started a movement that encouraged people of African descent in the Diaspora to return to Africa. What set Delaney apart was the fact that, 'in contrast to most of his coloured fellow-countrymen he was proud of his black complexion and for this reason he always rejected vehemently the doctrine of the inferiority of the coloured people' (Geiss 1974:87). Between 1831 and 1832 he visited Africa, which he referred to as 'the land of my ancestry', and 'two years later he published his call for Afro-Americans to emigrate from the USA' (Geiss 1974:88). Though the

National Emigration's re-emigration project was not a success it was of historical significance in that amongst other things, 'it also produced the clearest and politically best-founded statement of Pan-African ideas to be made during the nineteenth century'.

- iii. *Pan-Africanism: A Harbinger of Liberation:* The brutal occupation of Africa by European powers, especially after the Berlin Conference in 1885 became totally unacceptable to the people of African descent and a host of their intelligentsia. This epoch was characterised by activities of physical exploitation of Africa accompanied by the ideological torture of racism. 'It is no small wonder therefore that given a history of such awful treatment that the clarion cries of freedom and liberation have echoed throughout the recent history of black experience' (Ackah 1999:16). One of the chief exponents of this expression was Frantz Fanon whom Ackah (1999:16) describes as 'the revolutionary Pan-Africanist, from Martinique' - who took the liberation call personally to heart and to show his commitment he became physically involved in the struggle to end colonial rule by the French in Algeria just after the Second World War.
- iv. *Pan-Africanism: The Political Unification of the Continent:* Closely linked to the theme of the liberation of the African continent is the clarion call for the '... unity [of Africa] in the form of political and economic unification, [which] became the theme of Pan-Africanism' (Ackah 1999:17). Kwame Nkrumah became the chief exponent of this expression, 'he believed that the only way to resolve the problems of imperialism and neo-colonialism in Africa was the form of unitary socialist government' (Ackah 1999:17). This expression gave birth to the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).

Ackah's (1999) thematic description of the Pan-African thought and practice shows that the meaning and content of the concept was shaped mostly by historical events that confronted the people of African origin and the Diaspora. This means the fight against European imperialism and racism was the propelling force in the evolution of the Pan-African movement.

Due to its complexity as a thought that emerged as an emotional, political and intellectual response of the African to the European colonisation of Africa and racism that accompanied it, Pan-Africanism is/can

be defined in both a narrower and broader sense. In the narrower sense the definition of the ideology is limited to a political movement for the unification of the African continent, and 'the broader definition includes cultural and intellectual movements, even those that aim at a wider solidarity, i.e. anti-colonialism or Afro-Asianism' (Geiss 1974:7). 'In essence Pan-Africanism is a movement by Africans in response to European ideas of superiority and acts of imperialism' (Ackah 1999:12).

### **3.1 The Broader Meaning of Pan-African Thought and Practice**

In its broader sense the Pan-Africanism ideology can be traced as far back as the close of the 18<sup>th</sup> century – a period that is regarded as the pre-history of the movement. With the founding of the church that became known as the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1816, an African-American by the name of Richard Allen and his followers in the city of Philadelphia, planted the first seeds that laid the foundations for Pan-Africanism thought (Geiss 1974:34). 'The name 'Africa' expressed the need to emphasise solidarity with Africa. It was an expression of Africanism' (Thompson 1969:8). The founding of the church represented an attempt at self-assertion by people of African descent in the Diaspora. Later the church spread as far as Africa. The preachers and bishops of churches that followed the African Methodist Episcopal church's example became the first Afro-American intellectuals who wrote polemical treatises against the defence arguments of racial inequalities that were purported by slave masters (Geiss 1974:34).

The idea was intended to eradicate negative notions about the African personality that existed and as such formed the foundations upon which strategies of socio-cultural and economic underdevelopment of Africa and European racism were and still continue to be based. European racism as an ideology was used as an excuse for the dehumanisation of the African people and the socio-economic underdevelopment of Africa as a continent. The following is an example of one of the depersonalising caricatures of the African personality that prompted African intellectuals to respond:

*The European was described as 'light, lively, and inventive' while Africans were considered to be 'cunning, slow, and negligent' [c.a.] (Prah 1997:77).*

Notions such as this, which are basically about socio-cultural power-relationships, were employed by some of the distinguished European philosophers as a means to perpetuate and rationalise the practice of slavery and colonial subjugation of Africa and its entire people in the world.

As an idea that 'stands for the economic, technological, social and political ... [development] ... of a whole continent' (Geiss 1974:5) the broader meaning of the Pan-Africanism ideology is crucial in this study in that it helps in the understanding of the meaning of the concept of the African Renaissance as another counter-hegemonic idea within the context of the continuing struggle against European colonial domination even in its new guises in the twenty-first century.

### **3.2 The Narrower Meaning of Pan-African Thought and Practice**

Pan-Africanism thought in the narrower sense can be specifically identified with both the first Pan-Africanism conference in 1900 and the two distinct conferences which were held both in Accra in 1958 (Thompson 1969:24; Pheko 1999:10). The latter were distinct in that they were the first conferences to be held on African soil and as such signified the Pan-Africanism movement's second phase in its historical and intellectual development. The meaning of this is that Pan-Africanism in the narrow sense can be categorized into two epochs: the period of the Western 'Negro' contribution that was marked by the London conference, and the period of African involvement that can be identified with the Accra conferences (Thompson 1969:27).

### **4 The first Pan-African Conference of 1900 and its Significance in the Ideological Development of Pan-African Thought and Practice**

The sitting of the Pan-African conference in London, from the 23 to 25 July 1900, was the first ever held to propagate these ideas, and it was attended by a small group of men and women who were '... Africans and Afro-Americans from the New World, who met to discuss the position of their respective groups and the defence of their interest' (Geiss 1974:176). The



idea of such a meeting was the brainchild of Henry Sylvester-Williams, who was a West Indian barrister. 'As a barrister in London he represented the interests of African tribal chiefs, mainly over land disputes' (Geiss 1974:176).

'This conference was the beginning of a structural, ideological concept of Pan-Africanism', precisely because 'at this conference [the people of African origin and descent] did not ask for freedom'. They actually '... asked for a means of preparing African people to enter the modern world' (Clarke 1991:105). Thus it is maintained that this conference marked the launching of the first phase of the Pan-Africanism movement in the broader sense – '... a period of nationalist gestation in Africa when ideas were being evolved by African, Afro-American and Afro-West Indian intellectuals' (Thompson 1969:27).

As Thompson (1969:24f) points out, amongst other things this conference aimed at the following:

1. to act as a forum of protest against the aggression of white colonisers;
2. to appeal to the 'missionary and abolitionist tradition of the British people to 'protect Africans from the depredations of Empire Builders';
3. to bring people of African descent throughout the world into closer touch with each other and to establish more friendly relations between the Caucasian and African races;
4. to start a movement looking forward to the securing of all African races living in civilized countries, their full rights and to promote their business interests.

It is clear from the above that the conference represented the first organised efforts outside of Africa to protest against Western European domination and degradation of the African people. The desire for the unity of Africans and peoples of African descent was clearly expressed. In essence 'the meeting put the term "Pan-African" into circulation and stressed the need for equity between the races' (Gann & Duignan 1967:91).

In an attempt to bring the situation of the people of African origin and descent to the attention of the whole Western European world, Pan-

Africanism ideologists, such as the then President of the Pan-African Association, Bishop Alexander Walters, General Secretary, Henry Sylvester-Williams, and Chairperson of Resolutions Committee, W.E.B. Du Bois formulated a statement which stressed that:

In the metropolis of the modern world, in this the closing year of the nineteenth century, there has been assembled a congress of men and women of African blood, to deliberate solemnly upon the present situation and outlook of the darker races of mankind. *The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line, the question as to how far differences of race – which show them-selves chiefly in the colour of the skin and texture of the hair – will hereafter be made the basis of denying to over half the world the right of sharing to their utmost ability the opportunities and privileges of modern civilisation* (e.a.) (Thompson 1969:26).

Though this appeal is said to have not had any effect on European imperialists at the time (Thompson 1969:26) it is still echoing today, precisely because it addressed a practise and behaviour that continues to polarise the human world-view and relations along race and colour, rich and poor. From the above-mentioned statement it is clear why most of the problems of Africa that are related with underdevelopment are always linked to European advancement and prosperity.

## **5 The Role that W.E.B du Bois Played in Shaping Pan-African Thought and Practice after 1900**

In the list of names of African-American intellectuals who attended the first Pan-African conference in London in 1900 was that of Dr W.E.B du Bois, who was known and recognised as 'an Afro-American leader, journalist, historian and sociologist' (Geiss 1974:233). Earlier on, in 1897, he is reported to have made a statement to the effect that, 'if the Negro were to be a factor in the world's history it would be through a Pan-African movement' (Legum 1962:24). Considering this pronouncement it will be right to conclude that for Du Bois the first Pan-African conference meeting was a dream come true and a step-forward by people of African origin and descent

in their struggle against European colonialism and racism. At the first Pan-African conference he declared that:

The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line – the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea (Legum 1962:25).

This statement has been echoing throughout the decades until today, in the twenty-first century. Personally, for Du Bois the conference had an immense influence on him to an extent that 'three years after attending the London conference, in 1903 he broke [ties] with the then hero of Negroes and of white Americans, Booker T. Washington' (Legum 1962:25). Du Bois is said to have differed fundamentally with Washington in that he had a problem with the leadership of the latter which in his eyes '... was based on counsels of moderation, patience, education and hard work which he offered as the recipe for Negro advancement' (Legum 1962:25f). As a person whose thinking was most of the time dominated by his colour, contrary to Washington's 'moderate' ideas, Du Bois '... preached the need for an open and vigorous struggle to win equality of rights' (Legum 1962:26). In this connection, Geiss (1974:211) writes that:

The modern civil rights movement in the USA developed out of this conflict between the moderate conservative wing [represented by Washington], which was ready to accept the long-term subjugation of Afro-Americans, and a militant wing [represented by Du Bois] which revolted against this prospect.

However, the difference in ideas and strategies between Washington and the Afro-American Du Bois was nothing compared to the strong and fierce opposition between the latter and the Afro-Jamaican Marcus Aurelius Garvey. Concerning the opposing personalities of these two leaders Thompson (1969:42) explains that:

The differences in their upbringing coloured their outlook. The one was a scholar and university don, the other a mass leader, largely self-taught; the one a retiring figure, the other a showman and great

orator; the one diplomatic in his approach to his people's problems, the other a vociferous and daring character.

The two leaders did not only differ in their personalities, they also radically stood opposed to one another in their objectives on how the colonised and oppressed should deal with their situation of suppression and domination by their colonisers and oppressors. On the one hand Du Bois:

limited his aim to securing for Africans the right of participation in the governments of their respective countries or the application of the mandatory or trusteeship system where the people were deemed unready for self-rule, he also advocated eventual self-rule (Thompson 1969:42).

On the other hand, standing radically opposed to Du Bois, Garvey in his objectives and programme of action is reported to have:

sought to unite all Africans the world over, to establish a bridgehead on the continent of Africa from which to fight colonialism and weld the whole of Africa into a united nation (Thompson 1969:42).

Among other things in his strategies Du Bois '... aimed, through appeals to the colonial powers and the nations of the world (represented in the League of Nations), to bring the plight of black folk everywhere under serious consideration' (Thompson 1969:44).

## **5.1 The Du Boisan Congresses between 1919 and 1927**

Following the first Pan-African conference in 1900, between 1919 and 1927, Du Bois organised four Pan-African Congresses that became known as the Du Boisan Congresses, and as such marked the First Phase of Pan-Africanism. The congresses are:

- i. The First Pan-African Congress: Paris (1919);
- ii. The Second Pan-African Congress: London, Brussels and Paris (1921);

- iii. The Third Pan-African Congress: London and Lisbon (1923);
- iv. The Fourth Pan-African Congress: New York (1927).

Thompson (1969:55) indicates that, the first and the second congresses showed promise for 'the growth of the Pan-African idea', but the following last two are reported to have been '... disappointing and revealed a diminution of its forces'. These congresses characterised the first Phase of the Pan-African thought and practice which had its shortcomings in as far as the chief objective of Pan-Africanism is concerned.

The first congress was held from the 19 to 21 February 1919, and on its conclusion it adopted a lengthy resolution which nowhere addressed itself to Africans' right to independence (Legum 1962:29). In addition, its notable shortcoming is that it failed to address the crucial question of holding subsequent congress as an aspect that was important for the life and work of the Pan-African movement as a movement that had as its programme the dismantling of colonialism (Geiss 1974:240).

In as far as the second congress is concerned Geiss (1974:242f) notes that it:

...met in several sessions, first in London and then in Brussels and Paris, the composition varied accordingly. In London Anglo-American and Afro-American elements predominated; in Brussels and Paris a francophone element was added, this led to acute tensions and eventually to virtual schisms.

Generally, linked to the Pan-African idea, among other things the congresses were held for the purpose of maintaining the continuity of the Pan-African movement, the unity of the people of African origin and descent. Unfortunately the congresses could not rise to these challenges. In addition, in terms of their chief objective, namely, self-determination of the people of African origin and descent, they achieved nothing substantial until 1945 (Thompson 1969:56). In fact, 'the tangible results of the congresses were meagre and their impact slight in every respect', and looking at their outcomes one thing certain is that 'they did not develop a clearly defined self-sufficient concept which might have helped to give Pan-Africanism greater intellectual discipline' (Geiss 1974:258). One of the factors that

contributed to the movement's failure to achieve its chief goal was the fact that it was mainly confined to intellectuals and this rendered its arguments rigidly rationalist (Gann & Duignan 1967:91).

Given the fact that the four congresses, of the First Phase of the Pan-African thought and practice, became associated personally with his name and somehow represented the vision that Du Bois had on the agenda of the Pan-Africanism movement Geiss (1974:25) writes that:

Du Bois missed his opportunity to give Pan-Africanism a rational basis ... He was fond of sentimental hyperbole and was almost obsessed with the racial problem – in part, it seems, because his personal pride had been hurt .... Thus Du Bois may be regarded as a typical product of the confrontation between the old and the new, between traditional Africa and the modern world, out of which Pan-Africanism, along with other movements sprang. In this respect, for all his personal weaknesses, he is nevertheless representative of Pan-Africanism and it is no coincidence that Padmore gave him the honorary name of 'Father of Pan-Africanism'.

Nevertheless, the Du Boisian congresses had something to be proud of in that they '... outlived the Garvey redemption movement. The collapse of the latter came on his deportation from the United States of America in 1929', and this meant an end to the Back to Africa movement (Thompson 1969:54).

## **6 The Fifth Pan-African Congress and the Role that George Padmore Played to Resuscitate the Pan-African Idea**

Though the period between the last of the Du Boisian Congresses in 1927 and 1944 – regarded as the actual meetings that prepared for the Manchester Congress in 1945 – have no known activities that marked continuity of the Pan-African idea, '... several gatherings were held which, viewed historically, have the appearance of preliminary conferences prior to the congress proper' (Geiss 1974:356). However, these gatherings could not in anyway be linked directly to the Pan-African congresses that had been held under the leadership of Du Bois between 1919 and 1927 (Geiss 1974:356).

Here two examples of such several gatherings mentioned above are considered. The first one is the Paris conference that was organised by Timeko Garan Kouyaute at the beginning of 1934 (Geiss 1974:356). Kouyaute, a West African and a friend of George Padmore, 'after his expulsion from the communist movement, organized a conference to work out a programme on which Africans and Afro-Americans could unite on a worldwide scale' (Geiss 1974:356). However, in terms of its goal of organizing a congress that will act to bring all Africans together, this conference did not achieve anything of significance, precisely because '... no congress of this kind took place either in 1935 or later' (Geiss 1974:357).

After Kouyaute's Paris conference, 'on 14 and 15 July 1934, another conference on Pan-African themes took place, this time in London' (Geiss 1974:357). The main aim of the conference was to address the racial discrimination that confronted coloured workers and students in Britain. This conference was attended by representatives of various and differing organizations that ranged from those that were conservative Pan-Africanists and those that were radical Pan-Africanists and somehow they could be identified with the views of either Du Bois or Garvey (Geiss 1974:357). Some of the organizations that attended were the West African Student's Union (WASU), the League against Imperialism, the Ceylon Students' Union, and the League of Coloured Peoples. Nothing of significance that could be linked to Pan-Africanism came forth in this gathering and in addition speeches of speakers had nothing tangent as '... they mainly served to impart information' on the situation of racial discrimination of people of African origin and descent (Geiss 1974:358).

After several attempts by the ageing 'Father of Pan-Africanism', Du Bois and other leaders such as, Dr Harold Moody, the Jamaican leader of the League of Coloured People that was described as the conservative component of Pan-Africanism, the Fifth Pan-African Congress assembled from the 15 – 19 October 1945 at the Charlton Town Hall, Manchester, and was attended by over two hundred delegates from all over the 'coloured world' (Thompson 1969:58).

Amongst those who attended, this significant congress that was soon to change the political landscape of colonised Africa, were Africa's young leaders, who were '... a collection of unknowns, soon to win fame, notoriety and power in their own countries' (Legum 1962:31), namely, Wallace

Johnson from Sierra Leone, Obafemi Awolowo and Namdi Azikiwe both from Nigeria, Jomo Kenyatta from Kenya, Hastings Banda from Malawi, Peter Abrahams from South Africa, Ako Adjei and Kwame Nkrumah both from Ghana and lastly, Jaja Wachukwu from Nigeria (Abdul-Raheem 1996:4).

It needs to be noted here that the meeting of the Fifth Pan-African Congress was in the main made possible by the collaboration of the Pan-African Federation (PAF), which was a federation of several groups that had emerged between 1927 and 1944, and George Padmore's International African Service Bureau (IASB). The leadership of Padmore was outstanding. He was '... Moody's counterpart on the radical-left wing of Pan-Africanism', and was actually born as Malcolm Ivan Meredith Nurse in Trinidad, in 1902 (Geiss 1974:350). From the look of the affairs that preceded this last congress to be held outside Africa, and as Geiss (1974:353) asserts, Padmore as a predominant leader of the Pan-African idea at the time managed to succeed in organising the gathering in that, he

personified several of the historic elements which played an essential role in the development of Pan-Africanism. His career extended to all terminal points of the classical 'triangle' of Pan-Africanism – the West Indies, the USA, Europe and Africa ...With his dynamism and his insistence on intellectual precision and political action he exerted a strong influence upon the young African and Afro-West intelligentsia between 1935 and 1958 – by the strength of his personality, and by means of articles and several books, lectures, contributions to discussions and a wide circle of personal contacts.

It is possible that it was through the advice of Padmore that the organisers of the congress were strategic in that 'with due deference to his earlier contribution to the Pan-African movement Du Bois was confirmed as Chairman during the rest of the conference' (Thompson 1969:58). In a nutshell, the deliberations of the congress,

centred on the grievances of the delegates which they regarded as the direct result of slavery and the colonial system, with their



concomitant racism and social insecurity (Thompson 1969).

### **6.1 The Results of the Fifth Pan-African Congress and their Implications for the Continental African's Quest**

A careful study of the discussions of the Fifth Pan-African Congress reveals that, from the radical resolutions that emerged from the congress floor, for the first time since the First Pan-African Congress in 1927, the distinction became clear between, on the one hand, 'African Diaspora's quest for identity', and on the other hand 'the continental African's quest for a sustainable lifestyle' (Ackah 1999:61). A new breed of African nationalists who attended the congress made it their business to clarify issues. 'They rejected assimilation, demanded independence outright, and tried to organize mass movements to secure these ends' (Gann & Duignan 1967:97). As a result, the aspirations of the continental African became clearly articulated in Kwame Nkrumah's *Declaration to the Colonial Workers, Farmers and Intellectuals*, which in brief emphatically declared that:

against imperialist exploitation the colonial peoples should concentrate upon winning political power, and for this an effective organization was essential. The tactics recommended were strikes and boycotts – non-violent methods of the struggle. The intellectuals in the colonies and the educated elite generally had to play their part in organizing the masses (Geiss 1974:407).

In terms of the main objective of the Pan-African idea, namely the combating of colonialism, one contributing factor that made the Fifth Pan-African Congress to be successful and a historical landmark was that,

in order that detailed discussion might be facilitated and adequate resolutions framed, the continent of Africa was divided into regions, and apart from broadly general resolutions on the conditions of 'coloured people', local resolutions, which emerged, reflected the peculiar problems of the various regions (Thompson 1969:58).

The above is an aspect that has been missing in previous congresses that were held between 1919 and 1927. The latter has always been clouded by

the 'African Diaspora's quest for identity'. The congress was unique in that when it finally concluded on the fifth day delegates had a feeling that they had participated in a historical event that was a landmark in the history of the Pan-Africanism movement. As Geiss (1974:408) notes,

it was the first evidence of vigorous self-assertion after an interval of almost two decades; at the same time it gave an impetus to efforts to achieve the immediate goal of national independence (Geiss 1974:408).

For the first time delegates from Africa went back home with a basic idea of both the philosophical and political framework for their programmes of struggle against continued European colonialism and racism in their various countries.

## **7 The Second Phase of the Pan-African Idea and the First Two Accra Conferences of 1958**

In addition to the resolutions of the Fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester, which had a far-reaching political-will to tackle European racism and colonialism, a number of advantageous factors contributed to the launching of the Second Phase of the Pan-Africanism idea. Amongst these factors was the change in the world climate on the colonial question. As indicated by Thompson (1969:119),

... change in attitude generally, and especially, within the territories of the colonial powers, gave and added weight to the plea of the colonial peoples in Asia. A curious combination of factors emerged of this attitude. It marked a reversion from the attitude in the preceding era before the [Second World] war when colonialism was more defensible. The Atlantic Charter, by asserting the rights of all peoples to choose the governments under which they would live, prepared the ground for a more vehement anti-colonialism.

The attitude that is described above bore some fruits in that it was accompanied by granting of independence to colonies such as India, Pakistan

and Burma in the years 1947 and 1948, and these events became encouraging to African organizations that fought for nationhood and the unity of Africa (Thompson 1969:120).

The other favourable factor that became a bonus to the launching of the Second Phase of Pan-Africanism became the independence of Ghana in 1957 (Thompson 1969:119). With the attainment of sovereign status by this West African country, a message was sent throughout Africa that, 'what some had thought impossible had happened; a Negro-African government had come to being determined to assert that Africans could govern themselves' (Thompson 1969:124).

## **7.1 The transplantation of the Pan-Africanism movement in Africa**

After the Manchester Pan-African Congress of 1945 with its powerful resolutions that were intended to totally uproot European colonialism and its racist practices, Pan-Africanism remained in the realm of ideas (Thompson 1969:126). It was only thirteen years later that the Pan-African political movement landed in Africa in 1958 after Ghana's independence. The event of the independence of Ghana was of historical significance in that it

removed one of the disabilities under which the [Pan-African] movement had operated in the first phase, namely, the absence of a base from which propaganda and ideas could be disseminated (Thompson 1969:126).

Legum (1962:38f) points out at the time of its transplantation the movement had in its possession a programme of ideas and action, which he summarises into nine points, namely:

1. Africa for the Africans: complete independence of the whole of Africa. Total rejection of colonialism in all its forms, including white domination.
2. United States of Africa: the ideal of a wholly unified continent through a series of inter-linking regional federations within which there would be a limitation on national sovereignty.

3. African renaissance of morale and culture: a quest for the 'African personality'; a determination to recast African society into its own forms, drawing from its own past what is valuable and desirable, and marrying it to modern ideas. Modernism is heavily accentuated.
4. African nationalism to replace the tribalism of the past: a concept of African loyalty wider than 'the nation' to transcend tribal and territorial affiliations.
5. African regeneration of economic enterprise to replace colonial economic methods: belief in non-exploiting socialist or communalistic types of socialism; International Communism is rejected outright.
6. Belief in democracy as the most desirable method of government based on the principle of 'one man one vote'.
7. Rejection of violence as a method of struggle, unless peaceful methods of struggle – Positive Action – are met with military repression.
8. Solidarity of black peoples everywhere, and a fraternal alliance of coloured peoples based on a mutual history of struggle against white domination and colonialism.
9. Positive neutrality (as it was then called): non-involvement as partisan in power politics, but neutral in nothing that affects African interests.

These nine points focused on the situation of colonial Africa and the strategies that could be utilised to dismantle European colonialism and the racism tendencies that accompanied the practice. In addition, the ideas that were expressed became the principles that later were used as ideological framework, by people such as Nkrumah in his concept of *African Personality* and *Consciences* (a philosophy and ideology for decolonization), in their struggles against colonialism, and their endeavours to build their nations.

As it shall be demonstrated in the next section of this study the idea of the African personality became one of the main pillars in the process of the revitalization of African cultural values that were eroded by European cultural domination. The first two Pan-African conferences to be held on the African soil were held in Ghana, Accra, in April and December 1958

(Thompson 1969:126). Eight African governments that were independent at that time, namely, Ethiopia, Liberia, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Sudan and Ghana, attended the April conference. (Geiss 1974:420). These governments on behalf of Africa as a whole issued joint declarations condemning colonialism and the apartheid system in South Africa (Geiss 1974:420).

In December of the same year, 1958, the first All-African Peoples' Conference was held. It purposefully linked itself with the Pan-African tradition and as Geiss (1974:420) points out it was nearly declared the sixth Pan-African Congress.

The wider implications of the first two Accra Conferences of 1958 ushered Pan-Africanism into the realm of Realpolitik (Thompson 1969:126).

## **8 The Meaning of the Notion of the African Personality or Negritude Conception**

As already mentioned in the preceding chapter, in the late nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century, Edward W. Blyden was the first to use the term 'African Personality' (Thompson 1969:7). In its modern connotation Dr Kwame Nkrumah, at the first Conference of Independent African States, first used the term in April 1958 (Quaison-Sackey 1975:75).

In his speech that was intended to prepare the Ghanaian nation for their country's hosting of the above-mentioned conference Dr Nkrumah declared that:

For too long in our history, Africa has spoken through the voices of others. Now what I have called an African Personality in international affairs will have a chance of making its proper impact and will let the world know it through the voices of Africa's own sons (Quaison-Sackey 1975:75).

In this relation the concept represented 'the cultural expression of what is common to all peoples whose home is on the continent of Africa' (Quaison-Sackey 1975:75). From the statement that was made by Nkrumah, Quaison-

Sackey (1975:75) maintains that the term African Personality may be understood as both 'a concept and a force',

not as a simple reaction to the colonial past, but as a complex and positive reaction to – indeed, a re-creation of – the distant past, too. For in attempting to rid his continent of foreign and colonial domination, the African is attempting nothing less than the ultimate recapture and reassertion of the dignity of the individual – a dignity which the colonial system attempted to reduce and, in some cases, to exterminate altogether.

What is obvious from the above-mentioned definition is the fact that the concept of the African Personality had as its main objective the decolonization of the mind of the new African in the era of the eradication of the European colonisation of Africa. In addition the concept challenged the practices of racism that accompanied colonisation.

## **9 Conclusion**

In this contribution a brief account was given of factors that led to the emergence and evolvment of Pan-African thought and practice, namely, the slave trade, European colonisation of Africa and the racism that accompanied the latter. The people of African origin and descent developed and used the Pan-African idea as a means to confront their situation of socio-cultural, political and economic subjugation and domination by European imperialism. Given the effects of European colonisation of Africa and racism, Pan-African thought and practice are understood here as a vehicle that was used to reclaim African history and rediscover the African Personality that had been subjugated under European cultural domination.

Furthermore, in the role that was played by African and Afro-American intellectuals such as Sylvester-Williams, Du Bois, Garvey and Padmore is noted. The Fifth Pan-African Congress that was held at Manchester in 1945 has been identified as a historical landmark on the road to decolonization. Kwame Nkrumah played a major role in the transplantation processes of the Pan-Africanism movement into Africa, by making Ghana a home for the movement.

It was only the post-colonial discourse that emanated from the Fifth Pan-African Congress and the first two Accra Conferences of 1958 that ushered Pan-Africanism into the realm of *Realpolitik* and provided an ideological framework for the decolonization process of Africa and its people.

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# **The AMEC Schism in Namibia (1946)**

**Hendrik Rudolf Tjibeba**

## **1 Introduction**

The aim of this article are to discuss the historical-chronological developments of the AMEC schism from the Rhenish Mission Society (RMS) in Namibia during the year of the schism, 1946. It will show that there are a few Nama leaders who played a formative role in the founding of this important church in the country.

The most significant background elements to the schism, are the events related to Mangona Maake Mokone's break from the Methodist Church in South Africa in 1892, the rising tide of the founding of African 'independent' churches in southern Africa, the RMS and the Nama people in the South of Namibia during the first half of the twentieth century, and the RMS during the period, 1914-1945. Before proceeding to the main focus of the article, I highlight some points related to this background information.

## **2 Mangona Maake Mokone**

Toward the end of the twentieth century, the Ethiopian church became a very significant church, attracting ministers from other churches. Mangona Mokone played a significant role in the rise of Ethiopianism in South Africa.

Mokone was born in 1851 in Bokgaga, in the Pedi area. He left his home in the wake of a war with the Swazi's during which his father was killed (Madise 1994). In Natal he found employment as a domestic worker in the household of a pious woman, Mrs. J. Steele. At Durban he was in the service of the Methodist Church. He became a local preacher and applied for the Methodist ministry. He received his theological training at the Kilnerton training College in Pretoria. He also worked there as a teacher.

Why did the Ethiopian church come into existence? On this point Coan (1961:86f) observed that there arose,

a crop of young men who had failed to follow in the footsteps of their predecessors. The native preacher could no longer sit with his white brethren in the same gathering. The native preacher was to have his own black conference where he and his kind could convene and not always report proceedings for approval or rejection.

This was too, because they experienced petty discrimination. Coan continues to say,

On calling on his white brother, the native preacher could no longer enter by the front door as he was wont—the back entrance was good enough for him, no matter what the nature of his business. Many among the native ministers began to question the attitude by their white brethren. There grew a spirit of discontent, which eventually showed itself.

Many Black Ministers began to question the discrimination practices in the church. Discontent was widespread. This is a main reason why Mokone decided to break away from the then white controlled Methodist Church. On 24 October 1892 he handed his resignation letter to Rev. George Weavind the supervisor of the Methodist Church in the Transvaal. In it he stated:

I hereby give notice that at the end of the month I will leave the Wesleyan Church ministry and serve God in my own way. It is no use to stop for I won't change. If you like I can pack up all I've got and leave tomorrow morning before breakfast.

Your grumbling servant  
Mangena Maake Mokone (Madise 2000:267).

In his resignation Mokone was very clear to start his own church. He indicated that he wants to serve God in his own way. He asked the General Superintendent for a Certificate of ordination in the Wesleyan church, and that he was leaving on his own accord (Coan 1961:89).

The following is a list of grievances that Mokone sent to the Head of the Methodist Church and which also served as his 'declaration of independence'. Due to their founding significance, I list them all.

1. Our district meetings have been separated from the Europeans since 1886. And we were compelled to have a white chairman and secretary.
2. Our district meetings were held in a more or less barbaric manner. We were just like a lot of [criminals] before the landrost for passes. What the white man says is infallible, and no black can prove or dare prove it wrong.
3. This separation shows that we can't be brothers.
4. The wife and children of Native ministers have no allowance from the Society whatever. Only the whites have it. This is no doubt one of the reasons for the separation of the district meetings.
5. The Native ordained minister is of no use to his people. He cannot exercise his rights as a minister or be placed in a position of trust as one who is a fellow labourer in the Lord. But the candidates of the whites will be placed over the black man as superintendents.
6. Native ministers get from £24 to £50 per annum, while the white ministers get £300 per annum.
7. In the Transvaal, no Native minister has the right to use the Mission property, moveable or immovable. All the whites are supplied with ox-wagons and furniture from the Society.
8. It is a great shame to see the homes of Native Ministers and teachers. A stable is preferable. At Waterburg I was obliged to build my own house, and, at Makapanstad I spent £3/12/0 on the house for reeds and skins, etc.
9. The Native minister holds class meetings and prayer meetings, visits the sick, pray for them, preach, bury and teach school, while the white minister's work is to marry, baptize, and administer communion. They will never go to visit the sick or pray for them, and when they die, your Native minister must go to bury your own people. This is not Christianity, nor brotherly love, nor friendship. If this is true, then white ministers are unnecessary among the black people.
10. The white ministers don't even know the members of their

circuits. They always build their homes one or two miles away from the congregation.

11. No Native minister is honoured among the white brethren. The more the Native humbles himself, the more they make a fool of him.

12. We have been in the Wesleyan Ministry for 12 years, and not one of us has ever received the Minutes or the Annual Report. We are simply ignorant of our own work. We are called 'Revs' but we are worse than the boy working for the missionary, for he will now and then see the missionary notices. What advantage is to be obtained by remaining in this Society?

13. As Principal of Kilnerton Institute, I was not esteemed as one who belongs to and has any say in the school. A student may be discharged, or may leave school, and no one would tell me anything about it until I hear it from someone else not in any way connected with the Institution.

14. When a student is sick, the poor [person] will be sent for to come at once to the classroom, shivering under his blanket. He is then asked in the classroom what is the matter, and is then told that he is lazy, not sick, and to hurry and get better. The boy who speaks rather straight will be considered a bad one. If all this is so, where is justice? Where is brotherly love? Where is Christian sympathy? God in heaven is the witness to all these things.

Mangona Mokone

Kilnerton, October 23, 1892 (Madise 2000:268f).

Mokone experienced and lists various forms of discriminatory practices. These relate to petty discrimination which all suffered, but also structural practices. For instance, the two synods, black and white, with the continuing presence of white ministers in leadership positions in the black synod, were for him an indication of discrimination. He fought discrimination in the church. However, he became convinced that had no other option but to resign from his post. He had come to the conclusion that the Church was not prepared to change (Madise 2000:270). At one point, and referring to the main Christian values he adheres to, he judges and says: 'This is not Christianity, nor brotherly love, nor friendship'. Toward the end, he says, 'Where is brotherly love? Where is Christian sympathy?'

In November 1892 while the white Wesleyans were having their missionary congress in Pretoria, Mokone and his followers held a protest meeting outside. It was then that he decided to break away from the Methodist Church and form an independent church, the Ethiopian Catholic Church in Zion. The first church, an old tin shanty, was dedicated on 2 November 1893, by Rev. J.W. Underwood. He preached from Genesis 28:19, the same text Francis Asbury used in July 1774, when Bethel A.M.E. Church, Philadelphia in the United States of America was dedicated (Pillay n.d.:1).

In his own inaugural sermon, Mokone declared that the establishment of an African Church is to be understood as the fulfilment of biblical prophecy concerning the final liberation of the African people. He referred to the words of Psalm 68:31 ('Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God') (Denis 1994:88).

### **3 The Founding of African 'Independent' Churches in Southern Africa**

The phenomenon of the rise of the independent church movement in South Africa signalled the coming into being of an ever-increasing number and variety of separatist churches under indigenous leadership and control (Coan 1961:418). Kamphausen (1994:83), for instance, describes this period as follows:

The making of an indigenous clergy in the last century and in the beginning of this century has to be understood in terms of a conflictual process which in many cases led to the establishment of African Independent churches and which found its first expression in the historical movement called Ethiopianism. The underlying conflict arose out of the fact that the missionary enterprise was interpreted by African Christians as an integral part of western colonialism, which was very often uncritically supported by European and North American missionaries.

This form of colonisation mainly centred on the fact that the missionary organisations did not draw indigenous Christian leaders into their ranks. Even though they were more than ready to fulfil all responsible leadership activities,

they were treated as not sufficiently qualified to, for example, minister the sacraments. This meant that in all activities and decisions, black Christians were treated as if they were secondary Christians who did not really qualify as such. Before I address this issue from the AMEC perspective in Namibia, I provide a brief overview of developments concerning the interaction of the RMS and the Nama people during the first half of the twentieth century.

#### **4 The RMS and the Nama People in the South**

The RMS worked in a number of areas in southern Namibia: Warmbad, Gibeon, Berseba, Hoachanas, Gibeon, Maltahöhe, Mariental, Stampriet, Kranzplatz, and Keetmanshoop. By 1889 it had 3 300 members on 10 mission stations, which increased to 6 500 by 1902 (Buys & Nambala 2003:83). Some of the churches were influenced by the Bondelswart rebellion against the German colonial government – losing members – while others were not. For instance, the people of Berseba did not partake in the 1904-1907 Nama revolt, with the result that the growth of the church was not disrupted (Moleah 1983:14)<sup>1</sup>. In 1922 a second revolt occurred, this time against the South African authority, due to a dog tax (Emmett 1988:224)<sup>2</sup>. In 1918 many members died due to the worldwide flu pandemic and in 1923 the work of the RMS was further hampered when many Hereros turned their back on the Rhenish Mission Church. They returned to their traditional roots as part of the Ethiopian movement, which flooded many parts of Africa during these years.

In some cases, the revolts meant that people would desert the stations. At other times, they would flock to the stations, and also provide labour for the development at the stations. Due to the changes in fortune of these stations, some served as main centre at one stage or another. Another issue

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<sup>1</sup> See the archival material at ELCRN, VII. 7.19, Windhoek, 1946/1947.

<sup>2</sup> Windhoek became the headquarters of the German government in 1890, causing many people to converge on Windhoek. Originally the Rhenish Missionaries served the whole community, but in 1895 the Germans obtained their own minister, Pastor Siebe. In 1904 missionary Meier arrived to minister to the Herero, and related groups. In 1903 the Peace Church of the Rhenish Mission Church in Windhoek was inaugurated, with 526 members. See the archival material at ELCRN VII. 7.19, Windhoek 1946/1947; and also Vedder (1946:19-22).

which divided the people and impacted on attendance at the stations was the allegiance of Hendrik Witbooi. When he supported the church, people attended church activities. For instance, Gibeon was evacuated by the Rhenish Mission after the departure of Hendrik Witbooi in 1887, and then served the people from Berseba. In 1894 Witbooi returned and started to rebuild the church. Also, after the revolts during the first few years of the twentieth century, the churches were deserted again (Kössler 1999:25f). However, only at Gibeon, at the handing over of this large district to missionary Fritz Meyer in 1939, the Gibeon Church had 5815 members with 2748 communicants in the Church.

With Keetmanshoop, it was different. In 1866 a male mission was established here. The local Christian Chief had a strong influence on the people and succeeded in staying clear of tribal conflict. After the first church building was washed away in a flood in 1890 a new building was inaugurated in 1895. Gradually this town became the Southern headquarters of the government, resulting in many people of all kinds assembling at Keetmanshoop. By 1903 the Church had 1400 members, the largest congregation in Namaland at the time. In 1907 missionary Niemeyer was appointed for a hundred Herero people in Keetmanshoop. By 1910 the congregation had 3500 members (Baumann 1967: 11-119).

## **5 The RMS in the period 1914 – 1945**

In the period 1922-1957, the Rhenish Mission Church in Namibia experienced severe decline due to two factors: war and secessions. The two main secessions were those of the Nama (who formed the AMEC) and the Herero (who formed the Oruano Church<sup>3</sup>). However, it also suffered severely during and after WWI (1914-1919) and again during the period of WWII (1939-1945).

During WWI, most of the Rhenish Church Centres were replaced or closed down. The Augustineum training College at Gaub was closed in 1914,

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<sup>3</sup> The tribal chiefs, under the leadership of Chief Hosea Kutako, were the driving force behind the founding of the Oruano as a Herero Independent Church in 1955 (see Sundermeier 1973; and Mbeunde 1986 for further information).

only to reopen again at Okahandja in 1923. Vedder's plan to establish missions for Kaokoland were halted, and, where missionaries had to be moved out of dangerous territories, the churches in these areas, basically dissolved. Many congregations also had to move around during the war and at times lost all property. There was no support from Germany, no normal growth of work, with only some financial support from the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC).

Martial law during WWII, after 1939, disrupted the church again. Six missionaries were detained, while another six were under house arrest. They could not make or receive pastoral visits. No meetings could take place, not even of the church executives. Ministry on farms was also prevented by the mentioned military regulations. The closing down of the Paulinum Seminary for the training of Evangelists and pastors immediately after completion of the first three year program (1938-1940) came as a severe blow<sup>4</sup>.

Paulinum was closed after its principal, missionary Fritz Pönnighaus was detained by the South African military. The Rhenish Mission Church, which already had a backlog with respect to the training of indigenous leaders, would have to wait for another 8 years before pastoral education could resume. The financial needs of the Rhenish mission were severe. It was only partially relieved by donations from South Africa and the U.S.A. This financial crisis during the war motivated deliberations between the Rhenish mission and the DRC about the possibility of the DRC taking over the Rhenish mission in Namibia, in a similar way to its take-over of Rhenish Congregations in South Africa. The Nama people were against this move (Menzel 1978).

## **6 The RMS and the Nama Leaders Before 1946**

In order to just point to some of the main items necessary to understand the dynamics which were important during this period, I refer to some archival material, and summarise them under headings of dates.

### **6.1 1900 - 1909**

There are two main actors referred to during this time, namely Captain Hendrik Witbooi and the teacher and minister, Petrus Jod. As already stated,

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Dr. Pastor W.A. Wienecke, Windhoek, Namibia. 20 November 2002. (Dr. Wienecke is a retired Pastor of the RMS.)



Captain Witbooi broke away from the RMS during the time of the revolts against the German occupying forces, but that he was readmitted later again. In a brief attempt at a historical survey of the AMEC and these events, it is stated:

It was in fact, about 1900 that the Ethiopian Movement was felt in Namibia. The *Missionary Review* of April 1905 reported that the leader of the Nama insurrection, Hendrik Witbooi was a Christian that they trusted. But he had been convinced that the Ethiopian Movement leader in that region was a prophet sent by God to free the blacks from white domination. Hendrik Witbooi had thrown himself heart and soul into the plans of those who are preaching a Black church for black people in Africa. Although at one point Witbooi was excommunicated from the RMS, secession did not take place. He was readmitted into the church by sympathetic missionaries. The Namibian mission work continued to be stable for a long time. But stability does not mean the absence of injustice and discrimination. Black church members continued to be discriminated against by the missionaries. The church leadership remained solely reserved for the missionaries, whereas Africans served at best as evangelists and workers of the missions<sup>5</sup>.

Reflecting on Petrus Jod and his collaboration with the revolt, the author of the same document said:

These ideas were not without effect on the missionaries. Many of them had become strong representatives of the German colonial establishment. In 1909 Präses Fenchel rejected the employment of Petrus Jod as a teacher in a mission school, because he was part of the revolt against German occupation, 1904-1907.

In his 1946 document to Dr Vedder and the other 'revered elders of the Rhenish mission', where he reflected on his service of 37 years in the RMS,

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<sup>5</sup> Box SWAA 1423: A216/6. Rhenish Mission General. A brief unknown attempt at a historical survey of the AMEC with a focus on education and a few perspectives on white rule in SWA/ Namibia. Since the document quotes from the Windhoek Observer of 26 January 2002, it is of recent origin.

Petrus Jod made a few important points on his experiences. In his explanation of his own activities during the time of the revolts, he said:

Through God's grace I have been working in the service of Rhenish Mission of 37 years.

In the year 1909 old missionary Spellmeyer referred me to the missionaries' conference at Warmbad and took me there for the former Präses Missionary Fenchel from K'hoop to examine me in front of the conference. At that time Präses Missionary Fenchel said, 'I cannot accept a Nama teacher from the tribe which rebelled against our German Government as a school teacher. Anyhow, all my experiences with Nama teachers have been bad.'

Because of this remark I went back home from Keetmanshoop. And so it came to be that up to today I carry this label: 'never had an education.' But I as a young guy of 21 years, I had to bear these difficult words the Präses said. Only because of old Missionary Spellmeyer I stayed in this service<sup>6</sup>.

He then reflects on how he had to start his teaching and ministry work without any infrastructure or support, i.e. except Rev. Spellmeyer's support. Such conditions continued throughout his career. He also asserts that he has been 'neither a hindrance to a missionary nor a counter-worker .... [However] If you are not white, then all [these assertions] will not help'<sup>7</sup>.

## **6.2 Early 1920s**

As elsewhere in Southern Africa, there was widespread fears of a 'native uprising' during this time. Amongst many other examples, I quote the following.

This meeting assembled for the purpose of securing arms and ammunition for the European population of the town and district as the police have become nervous of news received of a contemplated

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<sup>6</sup> Documents on the AMEC, RMS archives, Wuppertal, Germany. Letter by Petrus Jod addressed to Präses Missionary Dr. Vedder. 1 July 1946.

<sup>7</sup> See previous note.

Native Rising. Informed them that their fears were groundless and whatever intentions natives had or contemplated the government was fully alive to the conditions<sup>8</sup>.

This issue also relates to the suspicion of insurrection from Nama people who possessed weapons<sup>9</sup>.

### 6.3 1922

Finally, the next quotation provides a sample of the kinds of issues which the Nama experienced as problems during this time. It is these, and how they relate to farms and property, that is important for understanding the general condition which the Nama evangelists and teachers trained by the RMS and who would become the leaders in the schism, shared.

We WITBOOI BEOPLE desire and request that farms be given us for our own property, for life .... The following are the farms which we have chosen: GIBEON as capital. RIETMOND, as the promised legacy of our late Father and Chief Hendrik Witbooi, JAKALSFONTEIN, VISRIVIER .... These are the farms which we as natives know ...<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Box 1851: A396/8 Native unrest in Gibeon (1915-1954). Letter by Maltahöhe magistrate to Secretary for SWA. 28 May 1921. The insightful document, Box SWAA 489. A50/227, Letter by the Superintendent of Krantzplatz, Gibeon, addressed to the Native Commissioner, Mariental, on 'Native unrest' of 14 November 1948 is also headed by: 'Onrus en Propaganda onder Nie-Blankes in Namaland'.

<sup>9</sup> Box SWAA 1851/ 1396/8. Response by the Secretary of South West Africa. 19 February 1921.

<sup>10</sup> Box SWAA 1122A158/6 Native Reserves (1918-1931). Memo by Nama leadership addressed to an unidentified senior official in the SWAA Administration. It deals with the grievances of the Nama leaders on farms and property and is signed by I. Witbooi, H. Witbooi, P. Witbooi, C. Lambert, J. Witbooi, Jephtha Kuhanga, Andreas Keister, Jakob Stebe, Filleppus Karigumab, Niklas v.d. Westerhuis Didrik Keister, Jakobus v.d. Westerhuis. 22 September 1922. Note that these farms originally belonged to the Nama.

The other issues the leaders complain about, concerns the under availability of branding irons to the Nama, but especially the paradox in which the Nama are caught with the government requiring taxes and the farmers they work for only paying in stock.

.... Wherewith shall we pay these taxes? Will the law accept our taxes in cattle, goats, clothes and drink with which we are paid our wages at the store? We have no cash, only the white people have this. We can only get it by working and now we cannot even get it in that way<sup>11</sup>.

#### **6.4 1925**

From government documents during this period, it is evident that there was a continued fear of 'native unrest' and 'indigenous resistance', and that these were to be controlled through the pass law system. There is a continuous scrutiny of people and their movements. The possibility of the Nama acquiring weapons and rising against the government, was also related<sup>12</sup>.

#### **6.5 1939**

In his letter informing Vedder of his intended break away from the RMS, Petrus Jod refers to the fact that the RMS has made numerous promises, but never kept them. Amongst others, this relates to better education and schooling, also for himself. Worse is that, where he headed a practical school, there were decisions taken to close the school without even consulting with him. He also asserts that he and his fellow ministers and teachers, will, together – and presumably together with the AMEC to whose leadership they will become subject – attempt to turn these promises into reality. There is a general sense of malaise in his letter.

As far as my strength went I had wanted to serve together and I know that my colleagues have the same longing. We only want us and our people to get on. All we got, however, was promises and our own

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<sup>11</sup> See previous reference.

<sup>12</sup> Box SWAA 1851/ 1396/8. Letter on 'Native unrest in Gibeon' by the Magistrate of Maltahöhe to the Secretary of South West Africa. 19 January 1925.

hope, all those years. So I ask myself: With what enthusiasm should I still work on? ....

.... But my brothers and I do not do this work because of some white missionary pushing us but to help our people to advance .... Now the school has been closed again, without us getting to know this. We were not even told a single word about it, but nevertheless, it will be us whose fault it is that it has been closed.

Even with all this I was committed to the work of the Rhenish Mission. But what does all this help me?....

This is why—in the time, which I will still, live, if the Lord will give me this—I am looking for my people and me somewhere else for the things (+gona-!gû: I will go and beg for them) you have promised to me, to us, to our people, but which you have not kept until today<sup>13</sup>

Except for someone like Rev. Spellmeyer, there has developed a big gulf between the white missionaries and the Nama missionaries and teachers. It appears that the white missionaries had a different agenda than enhancing the lives of the Nama, or to do so only up to a point.

Apart from this general impression that Petrus Jod experienced from the RMS throughout his thirty-seven years of service, we also see that there were also political undertones among the Nama, with regard to their relationships with the government of the day.

It is definitely true that it is due to the fact that they did not experience political independence or collective governance, that such sentiments also fed into the schism as it was actively initiated in January 1946. We can say this because many of the religious leaders who initiated the schism were also politically active at some point in their careers.

## **7 The RMS and the Nama Leaders: January 1946**

In 1946, former graduates of the missionaries, under the leadership of Zacheus Thomas and Petrus Jod started to organize themselves in order to demand self-determination for the church. At a meeting at Keetmanshoop, the leaders of the schism developed a 'Protokoll über die bei der evangelistenzusammen-

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<sup>13</sup> See note 5.

kunft festgelegten Punkte', which outlined the procedures they would follow for the schism if the RMS does not allow black leadership – amongst the other concerns they had. In summary, the items in the 'Protokoll', which indicate that they felt that these were grounds for the schism – and were to be kept 'secret' – are:

1. That the Southern RMS congregations would be handed over to the DRC and an article in the 'Burger' of 31 October 1945, reporting that RMS - Congregations would be handed over to the DRC. (This was to be propagated in the congregations.)
2. That the Nama leadership 'will resist such an act .... [and] will not be guided any more by a white church, if the missionaries continue with this without consulting [them] and treating [them] with such contempt'.
3. That they 'will only stay with the RMS if the style of leadership changes, and they incorporate our guidelines for leadership'.
4. 'Cooperation between missionaries and [the Nama leadership] is non-existent, [and they] are only informed after [the White leadership] decided.
5. The development of 'mother tongue classes' for Grade 4s. So, they decided to 'compile stories from [their] tradition for [an illustrated] book'<sup>14</sup>.

The letter which was made public, was titled, 'Agitasie teen die blanke Genootskappe' (*Protest against the white Societies*). It has six paragraphs. In the first, it states:

On behalf of the non-whites and the non-white church members from the Southern part of SWA, that so far served under the spiritual ministry of the RMS, we wish to state that the congregations refuse to

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<sup>14</sup> Archival material. 'Protokoll über die bei der evangelistenzusammenkunft festgelegten Punkte', 12 January 1946. (This document is signed by Zacheus Thomas as chair, Petrus Jod as co-chair, and Markus Witbooi as secretary and assistant scribe. The others present are: Johannes Dausab, Jakobus Jod, Daniel Dausab, Johannes Josob, L. Snewe, E. Jager, and Hendrik S. Isaak.)

further serve under the governance of any white Society, the RMS or the DRC. Our motivation will be clear from the following<sup>15</sup>.

The document then refers to the fact that the Nama has been served by the RMS for nearly one hundred years, that the RMS has failed to make them independent, and that the social and moral condition in which both the Nama and white people find themselves, are due to the policy of the RMS in SWA.

The third paragraph shows why the policy will never bring about upliftment and development (*opheffing en ontwikkeling*). It refers to the evangelists' and teachers' own experiences of the RMS missionaries, the difference in policy with the Finnish Missions in Ovamboland (which encouraged teaching/ training and independence), and RMS 'books' in which it is explicitly stated that it is not policy to uplift and develop the Nama people. The most serious however, is that the funds the church members provide were not used for church reparations and other expenses, and also that they were not spiritually served. It closes with the sentence: 'Therefore, we are not prepared to serve under the direction of this Society'<sup>16</sup>.

The fourth paragraph focuses on the humiliating attitudes of the whites towards non-whites. In the most important part, it says:

The reason why we refuse to serve under any white Society is: because of the degrading and humiliating attitude of some whites including some contemporary ministers, concerning non-whites. Though we do not wish to be whites, or even to be counted as their equals, we are nevertheless conscious that we are nevertheless human beings, people with eternal souls, human beings who, as far as it concerns the temporary, form a definitive part of society<sup>17</sup>

The last two paragraphs and the conclusion focus on the fact that the governance policy had to be based on the congregation and the church board.

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<sup>15</sup> The actual letter of the notification of the breakaway from the RMS, signed by the Nama leaders in Keetmanshoop. Pastor P.A. Schmidt handed the letter to Dr Vedder. 12 January 1946. Editor's translation. ELCRN archives.

<sup>16</sup> Editor's translation.

<sup>17</sup> See note 15 for the source. (Editor's translation.)

It says:

Finally, if the RMS continues to exist, and we have to remain under its spiritual governance, we refuse to continue with them, unless the current policy and management change. If this is the case, we demand that the congregation and church be managed by the congregation. The authority rests with the congregation, i.e. the church council, with the minister not having unilateral power.

Evangelists, elders and sextons form the church council, with the minister as chair. All church matters must be discussed and dealt with at semi-annual church council meetings. We may elect a secretary and a treasurer who will be responsible for the control of all institutional activities and income and expenses. No income will be accepted and no expenses paid without the knowledge and approval of the church council.

IF, IN FUTURE, THE CHURCH IS BASED ON THIS  
SYSTEM, THEN WE GO ALONG.

Otherwise not<sup>18</sup>.

For the AMEC which would come into existence later this year, it is significant that this policy proposal in the last two paragraphs effectively takes the decision making power out of the hands of the white missionaries (and also ministers), and puts it in the hands of the congregation. It is also important to note that the same is done as far as money is concerned.

From this time forward, Zacheus Thomas and some of the congregations in the South, especially Keetmanshoop, Mariental and Maltahöhe opposed the appointment of white ministers or chairs for meetings. This is evident from a letter by Dr. Vedder to Zacheus Thomas and his co-workers in the RMS-congregation Keetmanshoop. He responded to their rejection of such leaders during February, March, April and May, i.e. on their rejection of the committed Evangelist from Lüderitz and also other white

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<sup>18</sup> See note 15 for the reference. The document is stamped with the stamp of the 'Evangelists- and Teachers Association', Namaland, and signed by Z. Thomas, J. Dausab, D. Dausab, J. Jod, and M. Witbooi. (Editor's translation.)



missionaries appointed in the South (for example Neumeister in Keetmanshoop), in his letter dated 6 May 1946. Here he argues that the Nama must be grateful for such leadership, because it is sponsored from Germany!

Now I ask you: What supported your ministers and sisters all this time? Have they become an expense for the congregation? Do you not know who have supported you? Missionfriends in Germany did this<sup>19</sup>

The RMS was fully supported from Germany. After the First World War the Rhenish Mission was almost bankrupt, and the funds available were spent for German personnel rather than for institutions for the education of Namibians. Even so, the RMS continued to reject the request for equal Nama and German leadership.

Further, the missionaries under the leadership of Vedder did not show any reluctance to enter into the agreement with the South African government, which ensured government funding for the mission schools for the price of government control. The agreement ensured that schools for Africans should not offer more than four years of education (Lessing 2000:13). This meant that such basic schooling prevented further education, and only produced Namas with a basic schooling, fit for farm labour.

One needs to also point out and appreciate the pioneering nature of the early missionary endeavours in their education and training activities. Kössler (1999:20) observed:

The missionary stationed in Gibeon from 1903-1939, Christian Spellmeyer, occupies a quite special place in mission annals. At a very early date, Spellmeyer advocated financial autonomy of the mission congregations as well as a largely independent role for the 'eingeborene' evangelist and teachers. In particular, he had made considerable efforts from the mid 1920's onwards to push the missionary society towards consenting to ordain as pastors suitable persons among the chief evangelists. These efforts were frustrated by his superiors but appreciated by the locals.

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<sup>19</sup> Archival material. ELCRN Archives. Letter of Dr. Vedder. The content is in Afrikaans. Windhoek. 6 May 1946. (Editor's translation.)

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Another positive effect of training was that the local ministers were better acquainted with the customs and traditions of their fellow believers. They not only spoke the same language they could also easily speak to the hearts of the people. Training and equipping the local people were very important in the history of mission work. This makes it even more difficult to understand why the RMS prevented the ministers to take full control of their ministry.

Missionary work was also accompanied by increased infrastructure and facilities. Pastors, evangelists and teachers received training. Seminaries were built to produce capable co-workers to serve the community better. The church acknowledged her responsibility in the fields of education and health.

Despite such positive events in mission history, the missionaries were not prepared to accept African Christians as equals. For example, for many missionaries it was unthinkable that black Christians were capable of being in charge of their congregations, without any assistance from the white missionaries. For this reason, first the AMEC and secondly, the Oruaano Churches formed as members broke away from the RMS. They revolted against dependence on the RMS and the missionaries' refusal to ordain Africans as pastors.

## **8 The RMS and the Nama Leaders: May - July 1946**

The seed that was planted by Mangena Mokone in South Africa spread to Namibia. There is also evidence that Dr. Gow who was sent from America to South Africa and who was stationed in Cape Town visited Namibia shortly after the schism. From this it seems as if the leaders of the AMEC schism had contact with him but no direct proof could be found of this. However, in his report to the Native Commissioner of Mariental, the Superintendent of Krantzplatz near Gibeon wrote on 14 November 1948.

The schism in the Rhenish congregation took place on 3 July 1946. After this, a certain Dr. Gow visited Southwest. He is the leader of the AME movement in the Union [of South Africa], and originally ... from America ....

They [the leaders] think that, of all the churches, it would be the AME that would help them .... On a question to one of the leaders, as to the reason why he joined the AME, he answered: 'One should

not remain crawling among stones; one should also stand up and walk',<sup>20</sup>

Despite such possible contacts, it is certain that the grievances of the Nama leaders were authentic and focused on local experiences and concerns. From the available correspondence the events and perspectives around the three months of May - July 1946 can be listed according to these documents. These are as follows.

### 8.1 May 1946

Above, we have seen what Vedder's response was on the Nama RMS leaders' rejection of the white missionaries. He tried to make a case that the white missionaries were there to help, and, that since they were being paid from Germany, such money was only for them and not for the indigenous people<sup>21</sup>.

Since the schism leadership has also already communicated their intention to break away from AMEC already on 12 January 1946<sup>22</sup>, the RMS leadership knew about their intentions. In order to address this, Superintendent Rust who was stationed at Lüderitz wrote a general letter to RMS personnel and church members when it became evident that the schism is imminent<sup>23</sup>.

The newsletter of Missionary Rust to the brothers and sisters in Namaland heated the debate of administering the congregation. His newsletter from Lüderitz complains about the Nama evangelists' and the teachers' rejection of missionary Neumeister's appointment at Keetmanshoop. Rust thinks the Nama leaders complained because they wanted to have Zacheus Thomas as their pastor. He feels, however, that none of the Nama Evangelists were yet ready to represent the legal right of RMS in such a big place with such a high number of administrative problems as Keetmanshoop.

He also mentions the DRC-article in the *Burger* and the RMS's work among the 'heathens'. They say, if they are still heathen after 100 years of

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<sup>20</sup> Box SWAA 489. See above.

<sup>21</sup> Box SWAA 489.A50/227.

<sup>22</sup> See note 15.

<sup>23</sup> The documents on the AMEC in the holdings of the RMS archives, Wuppertal, Germany. Letter by F. Rust addressed to the RMS members in Namaland. 9 May 1946.

RMS, then they can well live without the RMS, and that the missionaries would not be able to bring them any further anyway. In other places they already have indigenous pastors such as in Ovamboland. Rust commented: 'Why did they not talk to us?' but he ignores that the Nama had a history in which they already sporadically complained about this issue<sup>24</sup>.

Rust met a delegation of 20 men who said to him: 'We do not want any white missionary anymore, neither Neimeister nor Eisenberg'. He quotes Zacheus Thomas who said to him (without being asked), 'There is a thing that is called communism, that goes through the whole world, and maybe it will also come to us'

Rust considers it would be good if Zacheus Thomas were to serve Warmbad congregation and Tötemeyer (when discharged from the internment camp) to serve Keetmanshoop congregation. This was the full report of Missionary Rust, during his visit to Keetmanshoop<sup>25</sup>.

In our opinion Missionary Rust wants to diffuse the hostile environment, which was prevailing. He also wants to restore the situation to calmness; but, because he reports to the RMS head office, he reveals the same blind spot they all conspired to uphold, namely not to acknowledge the reality of the Nama grievances. After receiving his report the Nama leaders sent the following letter to missionary Rust from Keetmanshoop:

The Superintendent  
Mr. F. Rust  
Lüderitz

Dear Superintendent

We have tried our level best to have the congregation change its view. However, we were unsuccessful.

The congregation clearly declares that, under no circumstance, will she stand under RMS governance. The church council came together and read Mr. Rust's letter and considered the issue.

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<sup>24</sup> Rust addresses the issues stated in the document, 'Agitasie teen die blanke Genootskappe', ELCRN archives. See note 15 for the reference.

<sup>25</sup> Archival material Berlin. 0098-0102. Newsletter: Rust to the brothers and sisters in Namaland. 09-05-1946.

After thorough considerations, opinion moved into a different direction, according to the votes. The council decided to follow the road of the congregation. So, since we follow the road of the majority, we the elders and evangelists, herewith give our final answer. And declare that, we secede unconditionally as from today, and will look for assistance from any other Church society.

We shall serve the congregation with the Evangelical Christian ministry in which we were educated<sup>26</sup>.

From the perspective of the AMEC, this letter of 13 May 1946, should serve as the historical one, indicating the date that the Keetmanshoop congregation broke away from the RMS. The others would follow later. The official recognition of the break was only acknowledged on 3 July by the RMS.

There are two further communications from the Nama leaders in Keetmanshoop during May 1946. The first letter is dated 27 May 1946 and is signed by five Nama leaders, including Zacheus Thomas.

Keetmanshoop  
27/5/1946  
To the Superintendent  
Mr. Dr. H. Vedder and Ministers  
Local

Dear Sirs

After our thorough deliberations, we returned to our previous decision<sup>27</sup>.

We do not see the possibility to continue on the basis of mere

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<sup>26</sup> Archival material. ELCRN archive. The letter is in Afrikaans. Windhoek 13 May 1946. 377. The letter is also available in Box SWAA 1423: A216/6. Rhenish Mission General. Letter by Nama leaders to Mr. F. Rust, Superintendent of the RMS based at Lüderitz, stating that they are breaking away from the RMS. (Editor's translation.) The letter is signed by J. Eipinge, Z. Hange, S. Pietse, E. Thomas, D.V. Neel, J. Jantse, J. Cloeté, J. Dausab, Th. Windstaan, J. Februarie, Z. Thomas, P. Bantam, A. Murine, and P. Gertz

<sup>27</sup> This is the one of 13 May 1946.

promises. Therefore, we stick to our decision, since we believe that the Lord will help us.

We do however thank the RMS for what she has done for us.

With best regards.

Signed: Salomon Pieters, Zach Thomas, John Dausab, Th Windstaan, and Dirk van Neel<sup>28</sup>.

Dr. Vedder reacted to this letter of the Nama leaders as follows. The letter is dated 1946, with no indication of day and month.

Beloved Co-workers  
Of our Rhenish Mission Congregation  
Keetmanshoop!

This letter is my last word to you before I leave [for overseas]. And with this I give you my hand again, and pray: 'If you will, stay in the Rhenish congregation and work with us under the governance of the RMS'!

Dr Vedder then refers to the sheep's need for a shepherd, that some of the members of the congregation do not want to support the schism, that these are simple people only looking for the word of God (and who do not receive the correct leadership from the schism leaders), and that the leaders must not lead the church astray. He says that he had asked the leaders repeatedly about their grievances, but that they only showed 'bad faith'. He continues to ask that they should forgive and forget, make a new beginning, and the says:

You asked for more: You wished more authority for the evangelists

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<sup>28</sup> Box SWAA 1423: A216/6. Rhenish Mission General. Correspondence between the Nama Leaders and Dr. H. Vedder. The letter by the Nama leaders is signed by five Nama leaders including Zacheus Thomas. The others are: Salomon Pieters, Johannes Dausab, Th Windstaan and Dirk van Neel. 27 May 1946. It is also present in: ELCRN correspondence between the Nama leaders of the 1946 AMEC Schism and Dr. Vedder and Superintendent Rust. Letter by Nama Leaders to Dr. Vedder. 27 May 1946.

but cannot understand that we cannot put the administration of such a large congregation in Zacheus' hands. I say to you evangelist-brethren: Do not look for a greater responsibility than that which has been trusted to you.

This point is repeated, and with reference to 1 Peter 3: 14, he exhorts them to 'suffer' for the cause of justice, and not follow the 'liar from the beginning', who says, 'You do not need the Mission, and must take the leadership of the congregations into your own hands'. At present, he still uses evangelists and elders who must bring the majority to him. Later, the enemy of truth will rise up against the church and God's Word, in public and not only against the Mission management<sup>29</sup>.

Similar to Rust above, Vedder interprets the decision to break away as only the wish of Zacheus Thomas, to control the congregation. This is a blatant and conscious misinterpretation. It does not take into consideration the actual proposal for a policy change as found in the last two paragraphs of the 12 January 1946 'Protest' document.

In a confidential letter of 31 May 1946, Vedder nevertheless identified eight points or rules in terms of which the RMS internally should deal with those who participate in the schism. These rules are as follows:

1. Every person who wants to leave must hand in his congregational membership card in person to the missionary of the station; the members of the congregation were baptized and confirmed one by one, have received Holy Communion one by one and promised faithfulness towards God and the congregation one by one. So they can leave this commitment only one by one. If membership cards are collectively handed in this is not a declaration of leaving. Membership contribution cards and baptismal certificates will not be handed in.
2. Like before, services will take place regularly in the church. It is the property of the Rhenish Mission, which will not allow resigned

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<sup>29</sup> Box SWAA 1423: A216/6. Rhenish Mission General. Correspondence between the Nama Leaders and Dr. H. Vedder. I give the abridged version as present in a summary that Minister Mayer prepared for a 'deputation' meeting in Keetmanshoop on 4 September 1946.

preachers to take services therein. If numbers are small we will think of Jesus' word, in which he promised those who come together in his name to be near them, even if there are only two or three.

3. Only faithful members of the congregation will be allowed to take part in baptism and Holy Communion, not those who resigned.

4. The membership cards, which were handed in, will be kept safely and will be given back to those who ask for them, if they admit they did wrong to leave.

5. From the day of his declared resignation an evangelist will not receive a salary any more.

6. Teachers who have resigned will stay employed. The education administration (school board) will not permit the mission to dismiss them. The children of members who have left will stay in school as long as their parents send them; as even the children of heathen are accepted in our schools.

7. Our teachers will continue their teaching as usual, likewise our nurses. They are not to ask whether somebody is a member of Rhenish Mission or not. Their service is for everybody.

8. Churches, schools and living quarters, which are not on land that is registered in the name of the Rhenish Mission, will stay the property of this society in every respect.<sup>30</sup>

These rules were obviously used in practice. They could also serve to prevent some from leaving.

## **8.2 June 1946**

The preparation for the schism since January 1946 triggered the growing resolve among the Nama to control their own affairs. This relates to the schism from the RMS, although political undercurrents were active. It was the first time that such a strong voice of protest was heard from the indigenous church in Namibia, i.e. to gain independence from mission control.

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<sup>30</sup> Archival material, Wuppertal. Mayer's summary of the main events on the schism, from 13 May 1946 to Vedder's recommendations as to how to deal with members who broke away from the RMS, 31 May 1946. He made the summary for the 'deputation' meeting in Keetmanshoop on 4 September 1946.

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The most significant communication during June 1946 is the 3 June 1946 letter by Dr. Vedder in which he verbally repeats the first paragraph, the reference to Zacheus Thomas, and the issue about 'greater responsibility', in his request of late May 1946. He closes the letter by saying that they should remain in their calling and not work for division<sup>31</sup>.

The spiritual leaders of the Nama speaking Rhenish Churches in the South (at Keetmanshoop, Mariental, Maltahöhe, Gibeon, Hoachanas and Bethanie), together with a large number of members subsequently severed their association with the Rhenish mission, and seceded. They soon joined the AME church. Katjavivi (1989:1-29) observes:

In Namibia the AME had a tremendous appeal in Southern Namibia, the majority of the people, including the most influential portion of the community, became its members and supporters.

Another figure who appeared on the scene during the 1940s and 1950s, proselytizing for the AME church in the central part of Namibia, with his headquarters in Windhoek, was Rev. M.M. Sephula. Many people joined the AME as a result of his efforts. Most Herero members, however, left the AME church when the Oruaano church was established in 1955.

Alfred Moleah observes that Christian churches' complicity in colonial policy and practices and white paternalism and racist arrogance towards Africans, caused resentment, which at times flared into revolt and rejection. Continued refusal by the Rhenish Mission Society to provide further education and training to black pastors, as well as give them greater authority and leadership roles, led, in 1946, to a breakaway and the formation in the South of Namibia, of the Nama Teachers and Evangelist Association at Maltahöhe. The Herero identified the RMS with German colonialism, and after the German loss in the Second World War, its influence among them simply melted away. The RMS was later able to make a partial recovery among the Herero, but without significantly mending its ways (Moleah 1983:103f).

The missionaries bemoaned the failure of the Evangelists to trust them and come back to them for 'enlightenment'. The authors of the 12 January

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<sup>31</sup> Archival material. ELCRN archive. Letter of Dr. H. Vedder is in Afrikaans. Windhoek. 3 June 1946.

1946 'Protest', alleged that the RMS was also planning to sell them to the DRC 'behind our backs like slaughter cattle'. Kössler observes: 'An examination of the record shows that the break of trust was indeed one-sided'. The correspondence between the RMS directorate in Namibia and their headquarters in Wuppertal, Barmen, Germany as well as that with representatives of the DRC reveal without the shadow of doubt that the transfer of the RMS stations to the DRC was a strategy that had been developed over many years. A central figure in the plan was Dr. Heinrich Vedder who officiated as Präses from 1937. Whilst the transfer may not have been the missionaries' preferred option, given financial constraints it was treated as realistic possibility. The possibility of independence for (or even consultation with) the Namibian congregations apparently did not even enter the minds of the missionaries. This attitude is connected closely to a line of thinking that seems to have been self-evident to the missionaries. They situated their work quite naturally and unquestioningly within the framework of a German cultural calling, set in nationalist and colonial terms (Kössler 1999:23).

However, missionary Spellmeyer understood the problems of the Nama leaders very well. He often came up with original views, he looked beyond the conventional, and he was original in his thinking and reacted in that way to many problems. One of his greatest advantages is that it was very easy for him to live in two different cultures, that is, the African culture and the culture of the Europeans. He appreciated the two cultures. Spellmeyer was very interested in the Nama culture and was very enthusiastic throughout his nearly four decades of service in the South. Since he came from a Western culture, he tried to bring the two cultures together in his mind and this played a major role in his work. On this point Pauly said:

The 1946 AMEC schism among the leaders could have been avoided, if Dr. Vedder seriously listened to the advice of Missionary Spellmeyer who worked for the greatest part of his ministry among the Namas. In short, Spellmeyer's wish was to ordain the Nama leaders<sup>32</sup>.

There was also another missionary F. Pönninghaus who favoured integration. He stated in 1937:

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with Pastor. P. Pauly, 20 November 2002, Windhoek. (Pastor Pauly is a retired minister of the RMS.)

Why are there not indigenous pastors in SWA, or is there only indignation in South West, for I had spoken for that aim, that we should allow the natives in South West Africa to become pastors (in Sundermeier 1973: 18)<sup>33</sup>.

### 8.3 July 1946

For July, the most significant correspondence, is the letter by Petrus Jod, to Dr. Vedder in which he reflects on his thirty-seven years in the service of the RMS and how he and other Nama people have experienced the RMS and its leadership<sup>34</sup>. What is important for July, is that he wrote this about 47 days after the final break from AMEC perspective (in the letter from Keetmanshoop), and two days before the final recognition by the RMS that the schism has indeed take place. The final recognition of the break by the RMS could be due to the fact that Vedder and others still thought that, as significant leader, Jod would not join the secession. From this letter, however, it is clear that he has joined it, and that there is no hope for reconciliation. He lists all the issues which he found wrong in the RMS from personal experience. Vedder, in his letter of two days later, therefore, had to accept the schism.

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<sup>33</sup> Joining the RMS in 1921, Missionary Pönningshaus ministered for 30 years as spiritual leader amongst the Nama in Namibia. He first served as minister in the Nama speaking congregation of Windhoek (1922-1933), then for four years in Okahandja, and then as founder and first principal of the Paulinum Theological Seminary at Karibib since 1938. Interned during WW11, he used his time to publish a series of sermons for every Sunday of the year, as well as a catechism handbook for use in Christian Education and Sunday Schools (Baumann 1967:187). When he was released, he continued with the theological training of indigenous ministers, returned to Germany at age sixty-eight in 1953, and continued his ministry by preparing a new translation of the Bible in the Nama language. This task lasted for a period of 14 years (1953-1967). It was completed in 1967, when it was published and inaugurated festively by the Bible Society at Berseba. The University of Bonn awarded missionary Pönningshaus an honorary doctorate for his gigantic work. In 1975 he died at the age of 90 and was buried at Otjiwarongo (*Immanuel*, news magazine of the ELCRN, July 1975. p. 10).

<sup>34</sup> See note 6 above.

As stated above, the issues include Präses Fenchel's statement that he could not 'accept a Nama teacher from the tribe which rebel-ed against our German Government as a school teacher. Anyhow, all my experiences with Nama teachers have been bad'. He has also given all his time and energy in contexts without any infra-structure, and without adequate appreciation; that, if you are not white, it does not help you to work for a white organisation; that Vedder did not treat him right; and that he could not further continue his work only on the basis of promises. On the last two issues, he said:

As I said so and did not answer, he [Vedder] jumped at me and threw words at me like: 'You are an Evangelist and in our service, and when you are asked you must answer, and you must do what you are told. And this is the southern synod, and you as an evangelist should help to bring God's flock together, but you cause division. Instead of helping to build up you pull down, and you take the missionary's work away from him. This is not what an evangelist should be like'.

In case I would stay in the service of the Rhenish Mission after these words, I would hear these same reproaches and have to answer these same questions after every incident, which would eventually happen. What kind of help do I still have here?

As far as my strength went I had wanted to serve together and I know that my colleagues have the same longing. We only want us and our people to get on. All we got, however, was promises and our own hope, all those years. So I ask myself: With what enthusiasm should I still work on?<sup>35</sup>

Jod then denies that he made it difficult for the missionaries to do their work. He also denies the fact that he is one who destroys the church or functions as counter-worker (*Gegenarbeiter*) and gives examples of his commitment and work. Every time he comes back to the racial distinction that is made by the RMS—that Nama missionaries are not treated on an equal footing with the whites. He also repeatedly points out, that decisions are forced on them and that they are never consulted, even on their own affairs. He concludes again by referring to the promises of the missionaries, but say that he will now look for their fulfilment somewhere else. He restates his commitment to God, because,

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<sup>35</sup> See note 6 above.

as he says, 'HE will not leave us, when we don't leave our faith, and we are only leaving Rhenish Mission'<sup>36</sup>.

#### **8.4 The Immediate Aftermath of the Schism in 1946**

From available documents, the most significant events are the September meeting the RMS organized in Keetmanshoop and that Pastor Mayer compiled the information for, and the minutes of the meeting of the Commissioner of Native Affairs with Captain David Witbooi and the Council members and inhabitants of Gibeon in October 1946.

In the first document, Mayer says that Brother Eisenberg, (more than 70 years old) serves there together with the evangelist Zachäus Thomas. He also explains that there are 'a Nama-Bergdama congregation, a Herero-Ovambo congregation and a Coloured congregation (Bastards)'. He then explains that Brother Neumeister was called to Keetmanshoop because Brother Eisenberg wanted to retire. He says that the Nama leaders objected to this 'in a long letter'. He replied to this letter and they did so in turn, giving reasons why they object. The main point—as stated above—was that they wanted to serve under their own leadership, and not that appointed by the RMS.

In his second paragraph he continued to refer to the letter of 13 May 1946 to Superintendent Rust and then reports what the sequence of events were on RMS side, and how the RMS congregations broke up according to ethnic lines. On the issues involving himself, he says:

The following accusations were made against me: I had not seen to it that the evangelists got the gown—which had never been promised to them. I had not improved the school education. Their children were still not able to go on to Standard 6. They totally forgot that most parents take their children from school before Standard 4. In 1926 I had stated in a letter to him that it would not be wise to wake up sleeping dogs.

This I had indeed written. I had told him at that time that—if the higher Standards were introduced by government law—our teachers would get into a scrape because they would have to be dismissed and new teachers would get their posts. Soon enough they

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<sup>36</sup> See note 6.

will demand higher qualifications from the schools. We, however, should be careful not to wake up sleeping dogs.

Further, I had not seen to it that the girls got a center to train them as nursing sisters. This is correct. Nevertheless, we don't even have a real hospital, except for the hospital in Rehoboth, which was opened last year. In another letter I had written: 'Wait for another century, and then many wishes of today will be fulfilled.' He, however, did not want to wait for 100 years.

Mayer then turned to Petrus Jod and the situation at that point.

Petrus Jod of Maltahöhe, whom we had expected to oppose Zachäus Thomas' arguments and to help us, agreed to all of them. There were no additional complaints. The declaration of leaving/resignation was repeated. The schism had happened. They were not impressed when we explained to them what the consequences would be. All buildings of the stations plus church and school belong to the Rhenish Mission Society. Their declaration of leaving/resignation meant that they would resign from their work and not get any salary any more. They just withdrew silently. Oh, if they had accused us not to give them freedom enough to evangelize, but to do everything without them, or that the salaries were not enough, then we would have co-operated with them. But they did not want to co-operate. They wanted to stick to the decision they had taken. To justify it, they had searched in the old letters for points to use as a weapon. Zachäus had a whole bundle of such letters.

He then elaborates on Zacheus Thomas:

What were the reasons for such a course of action? A tree has many roots, not only one. This schism (*Abfallbewegung*) did not come out of a congregation but started with the evangelists, especially Zachäus. He drew the other two evangelists to his side and was in union with Petrus Jod of Maltahöhe. Even the teachers of Keetmanshoop and the elders of the congregation came under his influence and leadership. The gown plays an important role. The letter of 1926, in which I explained to him, that the gown is only for those who had passed certain exams,

and that a person who had not passed them, would be ridiculous in the gown, had been accepted at that time. He wrote me in answer to this letter, that I should not believe, that he really aimed for it, it was only the elder from Lüderitzbucht, who is not among the living any more.

He then makes the following judgement:

The influence of communist propaganda is affecting the indigenous people. Either the indigenous man must be on the same level as the white man; or the white man, also the white missionary, must leave the country. They will not suffer the patronizing of the white men any more, not even the patronage of the church through the white missionaries. In Keetmanshoop they themselves noticed that there are many church fellowships among the whites. There are more than ten church buildings of several denominations in Keetmanshoop. In the South African Union there are more than 510 different denominations officially registered among the indigenous people. New names for few denominations are hard to find. The indigenous people manage all these. All this confuses our people. If then something happens that excites them, the ball is set rolling ....

He then turns to the issue of the AMEC:

On top of this the African Methodist Episcopal Church dedicated their first church in Lüderitzbucht a short while ago, and it seems as if there are close connections to Keetmanshoop. A teacher's union is to be founded in Walvisbay. In the holidays in our congregation of Gibeon a similar meeting is to take place. We must be prepared ...<sup>37</sup>.

The text closed with the summary of the eight points Dr. Vedder stated in the letter of 31 May 1946 (see above), in terms of which the different RMS congregations should deal with members who wanted to join the schism.

The other event took place in October 1946. According to the minutes of the meeting of the Commissioner of Native Affairs with Captain David Witbooi and the Council members and inhabitants of Gibeon in October, the

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<sup>37</sup> The previous 6 references all come from the reference in note 29.

meeting addressed six issues. These six issues were: livestock, grazing money, the further supplying of water, the feeding of children and older people, the appointment of a welfare official, and the problem caused by the closing of the industrial school. Then follows statements by Captain David Witbooi, Johannes Jakob and Diedrik Keister, with a response from the Commissioner. The main significance of these reports, is to see how the schism has also affected the Nama community, i.e. in terms of how people who worked and lived together before, were divided. Since the Damaras decided to remain within the RMS, the division also affected Nama-Damara relationships. They reflect the impact of the schism on the Nama people, the divisions it brought about, and how the issue of collected money by the different churches was to be treated<sup>38</sup>.

## **8 Conclusion**

The motive for the Nama secession was the search for greater independence, recognition as fellow Christians and equal co-workers in the mission, and full acknowledgement of the authority and leadership of the indigenous leaders. In this regard it is remarkable that those mission congregations who had no white missionaries – where the distinction was not glaring – and where only Nama Evangelists worked, remained loyal to the RMS. The name of Pastor Hendrik Isaak is worthy to be mentioned in this regard.

These items, however, were symptomatic of the larger structural problem, namely the racial distinctions allowed by the governments of the day. The leaders of the schism opposed the transfer of the RMS to the DRC, which, through its catering for white Afrikaners supporting the National Party, covertly supported racial distinctions. In this context Sundkler, an authority on independent churches in Africa observed: 'The German missionaries tried a difficult balancing act between concern for the African population and a conformation with South African "Native" policy'. Given the fact that the Nama leadership's discontent with the RMS arose and manifested independent of this issue, this is a naïve and simplistic view, which ignores the whole history of indigenous discontent with colonial power. This showed particularly when the government in Pretoria appointed the greatest of the Namibian

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<sup>38</sup> Box SWAA 1192/ A158/98. Magistrate of Mariental to the Head of Native Affairs, Windhoek, which is attached to the minutes. 19 October 1946.



missionaries, Dr. H. Vedder, as Senator with responsibility for African affairs—a great honour from the point of view of Pretoria. At that time, Herero reaction was sharp: ‘He, who after all is our father, goes to government in South Africa’ they felt.

The Herero, deeply injured and almost annihilated by their colonial masters at the beginning of the century, hesitated for years until in 1955 they too, took the definite step. They joined the Oruaano church. Oruaano means ‘fellowship’—what they had been looking forward to in the mission church but had not found there. The Nama further south criticized the programme of the missionaries and instead joined the AMEC in 1946 (Sundkler 2000: 842f).

An underlying motif, which manifested in the early twentieth century revolts, and sporadically surfaced through the first fifty years of this century, only became clear after the merger with the AMEC. This was the desire for political emancipation and independence, especially in Gibeon and Maltahöhe, the old tribal area of the Witboois. Chief. Hendrik Witbooi’s political ideals of liberation from German Colonisation which dates from the 1890s, were revived due to the secession and the joining of the AMEC. Evangelist Petrus Jod was honoured as a resurrected Hendrik Witbooi (Buys & Nambala 2003:177). More importantly, however, is that the events of 1946 constitute a significant conscientisation of the Nama people in a larger domain. By default, and even though many Nama in the RMS and Damara, Herero and Ovambo in the South did not join the AMEC, the same is true of these other fellow citizens. The AMEC schism of 1946, can therefore be said to have been important not only in the formation of a new church in the country, but an important even in the political conscientisation of the people. It was an important factor which eventually fed into the political struggles against the apartheid government, and the 1960 uprisings.

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## Interviews & Archival Sources

- See the relevant footnotes.
- ELCRN - Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia.

# **The Long Walk to Freedom: From Religious Instruction to Religion in Education**

**Manila Soni Amin**

## **1. Introduction**

Whenever there is a change of government, the first change it would make, is to the system of education and South African governments past and present are no exception to the rule. A brief journey through Education in “South Africa” reveals that from the darkest days of colonisation, the only form of education available to Blacks in this country was Religious Instruction (RI). Reading was taught to enable the reading of the Bible. Writing had to be taught because in the absence of a large number of Bibles, excerpts had to be written down and committed to memory. Secondly, there was a need to learn the master’s language to facilitate communication. Thirdly, there was a need to learn basic arithmetic to be effective workers.

A brief journey through education in South Africa will enable us to determine the politics and philosophies that informed the education systems. The walk from R.I. in the mid-1650s to Religion Education (RE) in the Revised National Curriculum Statement in 2002 is indeed very, very long and spans three and a half centuries. Although I will discuss the origins of RI very briefly to give my presentation some historical perspective, my emphasis will be on the post-apartheid period.

## **2. Education during Colonial Rule in the Cape**

Soon after the arrival of Jan Van Riebeeck in April 1652, to establish a settlement in the Cape, he proclaimed a colonial mission on behalf of the

Dutch East India Company (DEIC), *in which the name of Christ may be extended, the interests of the company promoted*. Initially, education was used as a tool to colonise the country and “to convert the heathens” to Christianity. The aim of colonial education was to win over the so- called “savage” so that there would be minimal resistance to European domination.

The religions, languages and cultures of people of colour in South Africa have been the target of colonialism from the very first arrival of European settlers to the shores of the southern tip of Africa. During DEIC rule in the Cape, no other religion or even Christian denomination except the Dutch Reformed Church was allowed to teach or preach. Religious leader, and avid proponent of interfaith dialogue, Omar (1998:3) explains the harsh law in operation at this time:

In order to enhance the Dutch Reformed missionary efforts a special religious decree known as the Maatsyker Placart was enacted at the Cape. In terms of this decree no other religion or Christian denomination could be practised in public. Baptism had to take place in accordance with the Dutch Reformed tradition only and anyone who ventured to convert others to their faith was liable for a death sentence.

This Maatsyker Placart is an indication of the depth of religious intolerance and discrimination in South Africa from the earliest days of colonization. Language, education and religion were used as tools to convert the slaves and the indigenous people and possess their land. Slaves would have to learn the Master's language so that orders could be communicated more effectively and to teach “Christian” morality. As Molteno (1983:19) asserts

... the more total the slaves' subjugation was, the less they would have resisted the system of forced labour in which they found themselves trapped.

He further explains that although the slaves were torn from their homes, separated by thousands of miles “they still had each other and their beliefs”. It is this minimal ideological base of independence that had to be removed if the slaves were indoctrinated with their master's religion (Molteno.1983:22).

The aim was to hold captive the minds of people and impose the master's beliefs selectively. Thus, one can see that the hidden curriculum was already at work in education in the Cape, which was the first settlement in the country and had set a pattern for the rest of the country. Barely one month after the arrival of the first "shipment" of slaves who totalled 170 in number, slave schools began and the following entry was made in Van Riebeeck's diary:

17 April 1658

Began holding school for slaves... to induce them to learn the Christian prayers, they were promised each a glass of brandy and two inches of tobacco, when they finish their task. (Christie 1983: 32).

The above is an indication of the lengths to which the colonisers went to *induce them to learn the Christian prayers*. It also illustrates how Christianity itself was abused and exploited by the colonisers to enslave the indigenous people and take their land, how alcohol and tobacco were used to further "enslave" the slave community. The effects of offering that brandy are still nightmares for the families of workers on the Cape wine lands where workers are still paid by the "tot system".

In 1676, the first suggestion of segregation in schooling came from within the church. Although some writers suggest that the segregation was linked to issues of class, I believe that all slaves in "South Africa" were people of colour, so by implication it was racial segregation. The church also instituted separate worship institutions which contradicts any suggestion that race was not the issue. In 1685, a separate school for slave children under twelve was established.

During British rule the religious laws were relaxed slightly in that all the Christian churches could now spread the word and conduct schools. Schools were developed along social class and for the higher classes there was no emphasis on Religious Education although it was there in practice. In 1893, by Proclamation No. 388, for the first time real discriminatory legislation regarding education was possible and separate church schools could be established for poor whites.

### 3. Christian National Education (CNE)

South African society has been divided, with people and institutions divided along racial and ethnic lines. Like a cancer, apartheid stretched its long tentacles in all directions and made it difficult for religious, linguistic or cultural communities across the racial divide to come together. Not only did apartheid South Africa align itself with one religion, it was informed by only one denomination of that religion.

Christian National Education was the name given to the National Party Government's intention to control all education institutions for blacks by implementing (CNE) principles of white supremacy formulated in 1939. It was felt that this policy could give concrete meaning to the Afrikaner ideology of white supremacy.

The roots of CNE may be traced back to 1902 after the Anglo Boer War. The two former Boer republics established CNE schools in opposition to the English medium schools of Milner and especially to counter-act the aggressive Anglicisation policy of British rule. The few CNE schools were symbols of hope for the Afrikaner movement. When the National Party was established, this movement gained political character. After 1915, NP caucuses gave it support and in 1918, a cultural organization, the Afrikaner Broederbond was established. It was destined to play a major role in all aspects of South African society and life and would find its fulfilment during National Party rule. It was dedicated to:

arousing Afrikaner self-consciousness, and to inspire love of Afrikaans language, religion, traditions, country and people (quoted in Willis 1994:28).

Education was seen as a key area to ensure an Afrikaner - dominated South Africa. Thus, in 1948 when the NP gained control its first mission was to control education. The implementation of a countrywide CNE policy with its 14 articles based on Calvinist doctrines began in 1948. The following introduction to the document states:

We want no mixing of languages, no mixing of cultures, no mixing of religions, and no mixing of races. The struggle for the Christian and National School still lies before us (Willis 1994:29-31).

The words clearly illustrates the racial roots of Afrikaner ideology of the time. It contradicts the suggestion that self determination was the motivating factor of apartheid rather than race. I interpret self determination as a consequence of the ideology and not the cause. All the articles were an expression of the worldview of the Dutch Afrikaner people derived from Calvinist philosophy. However, Langham Dale, the first Superintendent-General of the Cape was the architect of the proposed education policy in 1893 (Quoted in Willis: 1994: 6). Ironically, this was the year of the First Parliament of World Religions held in Chicago.

The clearly demarcated living areas and segregated education resulted in a situation in which, South African children could go through life without having the opportunity to know or understand children from groups other than their own. Apartheid education imposed on our learners aimed to promote euro-centred, colonial, cultural, racial and Christian domination. Education for people of colour was a dialectical struggle, between the values, language, religion and culture of the home and that of the school. School culture was highly influenced by western concepts of values, norms, religion, language and supposed supremacy. The philosophy of Christian National Education and Fundamental Pedagogics informed this style of education, as did the belief in white supremacy. Each community lived in its own little fish bowl and "trained" its children separately.

## **4. Post Apartheid South Africa - The Long, Long Walk to Freedom**

### **4.1 Democratic Change**

With the democratisation of South Africa, we find that suddenly we are out of our fish bowls and thrust into the ocean. The ocean has potential, for great openings and opportunities on the one hand and for suicide on the other. This means we have two choices. We can learn to benefit from our diversity and make use of all the available opportunities thereby creating a rich and diverse patchwork quilt of cultures or we can sacrifice our languages, values, traditions, cultures and adopt euro American cultures.

Apartheid South Africa had segregated communities so that each had little knowledge of the cultures (arts and literatures, customs, traditions, histories and experiences, languages and literacies, religions, and

worldviews) of their fellow South Africans or of the world at large. Instead there is suspicion and disdain of the cultures of all non-western peoples. A knowledge of the cultures of fellow South Africans particularly and the world in general is crucial for people to learn to respect one another and for nation building. It is essential for people to understand one another.

While the issues of race and gender are increasingly being addressed since 1994, cultural apartheid continues and could replace racial apartheid unless it is tackled head-on. The agonising labour pangs of the new South Africa struggling to be born can hardly be heard above the deathly cries of the old, which consistently offers the strongest resistance.

Education is a major transmitter of culture yet education does not reflect the diversity of the country. The historical background of education in the country illustrates that at no time has there been an approach to education that has been inclusive of all the cultures of South Africa. In other words at no time has the diversity of South Africa been addressed by the education system (Soni-Amin 1999).

I will now discuss the process of attempting to implement Multi-Religion Education in South African Schools. I will begin with my own experiences of teaching multi-faith education in Apartheid South Africa. Although I am dealing with the post-apartheid period, the following very important experimental process was begun during the turbulent eighties and began preparing me as much as it prepared my students for what was to become a reality-post-apartheid South Africa.

## **4.2 The First NEST School - Uthongathi**

During the eighties, the New Era Schools Trust was established. As its name suggests it aimed to prepare learners for a new era in South Africa, a post-apartheid South Africa. Unlike other private schools, that began as white schools and slowly opened its doors to learners of colour, Uthongathi was established as a non-racial, non-sexist school from its inception in 1987. Ironically, it drew twenty-five percent of its students from each of the four classified "race" groups in the country. Professing to be non-racial it used race as a category to admit students. Similarly, hoping to offer a multicultural education it set out to draw from the various cultures of



learners. Unlike other private schools, the staff also consisted of teachers from the various “race” groups. “African” teachers of indigenous origin were not only employed to teach “African” languages. In addition to a Zulu teacher, a history teacher, a mathematics teacher, a Computer Science teacher and soon a Deputy Principal were employed from this ethnic group. Merit on the basis of fair representation and commitment to multiculturalism were key to staff employment.

I was fortunate to be appointed to the staff of this private school, Uthongathi, the first of the NEST schools at its inception in 1987. It was to open up my horizon, and expose me to what was going to be post-apartheid South Africa. While the founders and the Board of NEST had the vision of an ideal to attain, it was the students on the ground, the staff and more especially the style of the Principal, Mr Richard Thompson that were responsible for the “successful” evolution of this school. The language, the culture, the religion, the history, the gender, the ethnicity, the ethos came under scrutiny as the questions, came rushing in as pupils challenged the validity of some school rules. They challenged us at every turn! Their keen spirits, their ability to question issues led to the evolution of a school which I describe as not only South Africa’s *first truly multicultural* school but to date it is the “*only truly multicultural school*” in South Africa. Students questioned the use of English only as the language of communication in school while Zulu and Afrikaans were to be only to be used in the classroom for teaching and learning the language. All students at Uthongathi had to learn three languages but English was lingua franca and the language of teaching and learning for the future leaders of South Africa.

Students questioned, “Why can’t we use our mother tongue to speak on the play- ground and in the dining hall?” It led to Tuesday becoming a Zulu day, when all teachers and students had to use Zulu for communication. Afrikaans was never going to be outdone and the Afrikaans teacher also protested. So, Thursdays became the day for communication in Afrikaans. In this way it was the learners who implemented “multilingualism” a term that has now become cliché yet very few understand how it can be implemented in institutions of learning.

I used to teach English and History and was probably the first teacher in the country to teach Comparative Religion at the High school level to a very religiously diverse group of students. However, Second

Language speakers of English had to attend English as Second Language classes to improve their English so they could not attend these classes. A visit to the Hare Krishna temple, the Mosque, the Synagogue and the Cathedral, awakened their interest in Religion Education. At the next Indaba, (monthly meetings between staff, Principal and students), where all these issues were discussed, students challenged the Principal saying that if we wanted to expose them to multicultural education, how could we deny them attendance at the Comparative Religion class! So, the students won and Uthongathi was another step closer to evolution. They questioned “why could girls wear earrings while boys were not allowed to do so? How can that be non-sexist?” The Principal Richard Thompson came to the staff and said, “what now?” Well, replied one smart young lady “Ask them to wear a pair of studs, just as the girls do and not a single one!” Guys don’t wear a pair of earrings- they wear one. So, not many took up the challenge. One young male from grade seven wore a pair of earrings (Amin, Soni-Manila. 1998: Address to WCCES, C.T. SA).

These anecdotes tell people in education how the early battles of the first true integrated school were fought , lost and won. We know that schools have been and are contested areas in South Africa. These anecdotes are also a tribute to those students who were responsible for educating the staff just as much as staff, were expected to educate them. It also reveals that “transformation” and “change” is not instant and that you cannot order it like you can order a pizza which will be delivered free in thirty minutes. The road to freedom, transformation and equality is long, painful and hazardous. Just as Madiba’s walk to freedom was long, the road to real “freedom” in learning institutions, where we accept not only people of all races and ethnicity and impose our culture, religion and language but where we respect the cultures, religions and languages of our learners in our curricula and daily lives is a very long way off.

#### **4. 3 The National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI)**

Discussions about religion in education began soon after De Klerk’s twilight speech when he un-banned all the political parties and freed former President Mandela. The NEPI document asserted that the Religious Instruction or indoctrination established religious discrimination and coercion in education (quoted in Chidester). NEPI offered three alternatives.

- 1) Eliminate religion totally from the curriculum but held that neglecting religion, which played such an important part in South African life would be denying our religious diversity.
- 2) Establish parallel programmes in Religious Education for each religious group, which would be a continuation of apartheid education and the promotion of particular religious interests.
- 3) Implement a multi-religion education programme in which children learn about religion. It should have clear educational objectives and promised tolerance and respect for diversity.

There were debates and discussions but the main question states Chidester (1994), was: "whether a compromise could be worked out that accommodated both options two and three"?

This would mean serving individual or particular interests on the one hand and learning about religion, religions and religious diversity on the other. No agreement could be reached but the debate was destined to continue in different places at different times and probably different people.

#### **4.4 The National Education and Training Forum (NETF)**

Serious transformation strategies began in 1994, when the National Education and Training Forum (NETF) established working committees to decide on policy, principles and interim curricula for all subjects. Professor Kruger of UNISA and I were the only persons who were elected for representation on both committees, that is one for Curriculum Development and the other for Policy Formulation. However, when the two committees were collapsed into one and a set of names was sent to Ms Mary Metcalfe the MEC for Education in Gauteng, neither Professor Kruger nor I were on the short list. Ms Metcalfe rejected the list, as it was not balanced in terms of race and gender. I was then invited to serve on that committee.

From the very first meeting of the NETF committee, it was a struggle with one of our conservative brothers taking over the chairmanship of the committee without consultation. Members sorted the matter and at the second meeting we had a neutral "outsider" on the chair. As in all other subjects there were eight persons on the NETF subject committee that formulated the interim policy and suggested options for Religious Education. During this process there was an opportunity for the public to respond to

whether multi-faith education should be introduced. To my surprise, as early as 1994, the majority of the responses were that Multi-faith education should be introduced. These were mostly submissions by universities and colleges and were carefully thought out. The chairperson of the committee suggested that in the light of public submissions multi-faith was the way forward. The following week, a barrage of submissions had come in. They were mostly copies of a typed letter with numerous signatures on them. Each of these was a negative response to the suggestion of multi-faith education. There were individual letters also which showed that people were genuinely concerned and had questions. The main thrust of the letters illustrated that people assumed that they had to become practitioners of all the religions or World Religions. This means that people could not differentiate between the academic study about religions and the confessional approach to religion as taught during the apartheid era. One very indignant response was "I do not think that Muhammad or the Buddha are Gods!" I thought that if the Prophet Muhammad, PBUH, heard that he would turn in his grave, but not the Buddha, for he was cremated!

While collating and analysing the public responses an alarming and most degrading and unethical situation was exposed! One of the teachers responded on a letter that was sent to the school. It stated: "Important decisions are being taken in Pretoria with regard to Religious Instruction. Biblical Studies will be out and World Religions will be taught! Fax your objections immediately ... (Amin 1987-2002). This meant that some one from the committee had sent the faxes to schools creating a situation of mass hysteria, urging them to object to the introduction of multi-faith Religious Studies. It was in black and white. The fax number of the sender was on it. After a dressing down by the chairperson, the committee continued its work.

Finally, the principles were laid down and policy options designed. While some members suggested that some degree of multi- religion education should be taught, the two inspectors of Biblical Studies were of the opinion that schools should be given a choice. Others felt that "the degree to which multi-faith education was implemented could be negotiable but that every school should implement World Religions and any other combination it selected." Some of us felt that we were back where we had started! The committee could not agree and the matter was put to the vote. The group for multi-faith had one vote more. By the next meeting

NAPTOSA had contacted a teacher from Cape Town who was on the Committee and who voted in favour of World Religions to vote against it. He was devastated but once again the reactionary element had succeeded in blocking democratic educational reforms. The reason for the resistance was, “where would children get nurturing into a religion?” My response, “for years we have been sending our children to Madressas and Hindi and Tamil schools in the afternoon,” was greeted with:

You do not understand, white parents will not take the trouble to send their children to school in the afternoon!

This means that because “white” parents would not take the extra trouble to ensure that their children learn their religion, the entire country must be denied the study of religions and religious diversity practised in South Africa. Following this step, Religion in Education was destined to take eight years to find its feet in post- apartheid South African schools. The result of the 1994 consultations was the Accommodation Model.

The title ‘accommodation model’ reveals the tensions that went on in the Committee. For some members on the committee, it was a condescending accommodation of religions other than Christianity. One of the members of the Catholic Institute of Education was on the committee and she fought hard for multi-faith education. According to the Accommodation model, parent bodies had the right to select the type of Religious Education that would be taught in their schools.

The Committee formulated principles for religious education and an interim policy for schools to select from. The following options were made available and parent bodies may select one or more of the options:

- African Traditional Religion
- Christian Religious Education
- Hindu Religious Education
- Islamic Religious Education
- Jewish Religious Education
- Education in world Religions

(N.E.T.F. Field and Phase Committee for RE:1994).

As was expected this proved to be problematic and very few schools offered the subject. The reasons for this are varied. In the Western Cape, teachers complained that they were intimidated by the Provincial Department. The Department maintained it only wanted to know which schools were opting for multi-religion education and what they were doing. Were the teachers mistaken or were their fears justified? Why were they afraid? It does seem odd that none of the public schools opted to reach multi-faith education while private schools did.

Most schools took the easy way out and opted not to have RE while others continued as they had done in apartheid South Africa. The Accommodation Model resulted in the diminishing of the status of Religious Instruction generally and of Biblical Studies especially, which had had a stronghold on education of the “African” and Coloured communities, explicitly and all communities implicitly lost its grip. The desire to keep students ignorant of the religions practised in South Africa has led to the death of Biblical Studies and Religious Education and has set us back ten years. With the exception of some of the private schools, it died a natural death. Among the few schools that offered Multi-faith education, were the private Catholic schools. One needs to commend them for their perseverance of multi-religion education. What emerges from the consultations for Religion -in -Education is the fact that *people do not see or do not want to see the difference between Religious Instruction /Religious Education and Religion Education on the other*. David Chidester (in Dept. of Didactics 1990:30) explains the difference very succinctly;

In the old regime, religious education was directed towards compelling learners to make a confession of faith. According to a manual for Biblical Instruction published as recently as 1990, learners were expected to embrace a particular version of Christian faith. Not merely acquiring knowledge, Children must personally accept, and trust for their personal salvation the triune God introduced to them in the Bible.

Similarly, one of the aims of the syllabi for Religious Instruction in The Primary teacher’s Diploma urged the teacher to *bring the light of God’s word to the students*, thus blurring the distinction between school and church (Amin 1987-2002).

Religion Education on the other hand says Chidester, “is teaching and learning about religion, religions and religious Diversity.”

#### 4.5 Curriculum 2005

When Curriculum 2005 was being designed, two Biblical Studies inspectors represented the sub-field “religion” in the Life Orientation learning area. The reactionary attitude of the two representatives for “religion”, refusing to accept the principle of all religions being included in the curriculum, resulted in there being hardly any explicit mention of religion education in the curriculum. Educators had to discern what they could. Some of us selected outcomes for the teaching of religion across the curriculum. However, for educators with no background knowledge in religions, it was difficult. Further, there was still resistance from many quarters and breaking this internal barrier has proved to be difficult. The Western Cape Education Department had urged all teachers who were teaching multi-faith education to report to the supervisors of Religious Education. While the Supervisors suggest the reason behind this was to keep them informed of what was happening, the reality experienced on the ground was different. Teachers felt that it prevented them from doing creative work.

A former Biblical Studies Inspector was appointed Director of Religion Education by the Department of Education in the nineties. He seemed to have had minimal effect in arriving at a solution or creating an environment for a suitable solution. Although the position of Director seemingly contributed to his movement slightly from the far right, the proponents of Religion Education see little visible influence or progressive effect during his term of office. In other words, he was not able to work out an acceptable solution. The persistence of religious communities requesting Religious Education albeit single faith and the department’s intention to promote religion- in -education based on constitutional principles, led to the establishment of a Religious Education Committee in 1998, to formulate a policy for the country by the Minister. This body, in its introduction to the report asserted, that the controversy with regard to the provision of religious education in South Africa arises out of the different understandings of the term *Religious Education*. They claimed that broadly speaking there were “two ways of understanding it”:

- *Educating learners to be religious*
- *Educating learners about religion and religions*

In order to meet the requirements of the different positions held by the committee members and the broader South African community, we have agreed to accommodate both these understandings of the nature of religious education in our policy proposal thereby making it possible for individual schools to provide the religious education that meets their particular understanding of the term, provided that, in doing so, they do not violate the Constitutional Rights of the learners or educators in their school community (1999: Department of Education, Report of Ministerial Committee).

The above statement reveals the politics within the committee, which was partly a reflection of the politics in the broader South African community. Some of us in the Minister's Review Committee were of the opinion that Private schools would also have to implement some degree of multi-faith education to ensure that all the stated outcomes were achieved. Any discussion surrounding the need for private institutions to be bound by the policy was immediately dismissed by the Director of Religion Education.

In terms of the Report of the Ministerial Committee on Religious Education- 1999, Government Gazette No. 19775 published 23 February 1999, schools offering Curriculum 2005 (It was being introduced in phases) would have four basic options to choose from with regard to the provision of religious education. While it would be compulsory for public schools to deal with the religious content in Curriculum 2005 and to deal with it from a multi-faith perspective, the degree to which a school did this was left to its discretion.

## **4.6 Proposed Policy for Religious Education (Feb. 1999)**

### **The four options**

1. The school offers Curriculum 2005 as it is, dealing with those outcomes, assessment criteria, range statements and performance indicators that contain specific religious content in the same integrative way as with any other that



the curriculum requires. ( It has been explained by the review committee to mean it has to be taught from the perspective of a variety of worldviews).

2. The school offers Curriculum 2005 in a way that makes explicit the many contributions that religious education can make to the outcomes. The religious education dimension adopts a multi- perspective approach.

3. and 4. Options 3 and 4 provide for additional religious education to be offered during flexible time. Using part of flexible time, a school may offer a single programme, a multi-religious programme, or a range of single perspectives or both. The main criteria being that all learners should participate and should be catered for.

This meant that RE was integral and inherent in Curriculum 2005. It also implied that it needed to be included in the school syllabus and should be taught from the perspective of a variety of worldviews. Another implication was that public schools may not ignore the subject.

It is interesting to note that The Western Cape Department of Education, Curriculum Committee for R.E. responded to this proposal by suggesting that only options 1 or 2 be offered in the province.

Although it was said that the policy options were for public schools, it was felt that independent schools seeking to do justice to Curriculum 2005 needed to take cognisance of the policy. I argued that to ensure that the required outcomes were realised, for the GET band, all learners would have to have achieved the relevant assessment standards. I was told by the director that I was only supposed to review the document according to public responses and that the legal representative of the Department of Education had assured the committee that they could not enforce this policy on private schools. I still believe that while policy cannot be forced on private schools, they need to ensure that every learner realises all the outcomes and achieves the assessment standards.

#### **4.7 Proposed Policy for the FET Band**

The discussion document *The Restructuring of the Senior Certificate Curriculum*, (the fourth Draft, August 1998, p.68) recommended that provision be made for compulsory instruction in Physical Education,

Guidance and Religious Education with combined credits totalling 5 for Fundamental Learning. It has already been accepted by FET that two credits may go to religious education presented from a multi-faith perspective.

In addition, learners may select a core elective in religious education, for academic study for the FET band. The following courses could be offered at either the HG or SG for the Senior Certificate under the Human and Social Sciences sub-field:

- \* African Christianity;
- \* African Traditional Religion;
- \* Biblical Studies;
- \* Hindu Studies;
- \* Islamic Studies;
- \* Jewish Studies;
- \* Religious Studies.

The above policy document, (Report 1999) was warmly welcomed by the public and many of the public responses were very positive. By the time the Report was published for public submissions and the Review committee had completed their report after reviewing public submissions, the new Minister of Education decided to halt the process. Although many educators felt this was a blow to religion education, Professor Asmal has consulted very widely before coming up with a plan. From the time, Professor Asmal became the Minister of Education he used every opportunity to discuss the unconstitutionality of teaching only one religion in a public school. I believe that in this way he was preparing the way for Religion-in-Education, based on constitutional principles.

#### **4.8 Religion in Western Cape Schools**

There was no progress on Religion in education with regard to the new policy. It must be noted that there was a difference between the policy of the WCED and implementation (Amin Case Studies RE 1987-2002). In 1999, I approached an ex-student of mine who teaches in Mitchell's Plain in the Cape Flats to teach a multi-faith lesson for Education Express, the television programme for teachers and learners. We discussed the format of the lesson

but the next day, I received a frantic call saying she was too busy to participate in the video. I learnt that her Principal would not allow it. She was so afraid of her Principal that I had to ask a teacher from an ex-model C school to teach the lesson. I had done a workshop with them using -Rainbow Religions. This reveals that although there are some teachers who can teach multi-faith lessons they are terribly scared of autocratic Principals, guided by religious fundamentalism, who still run the roost in our schools.

Apart from conservative Deans of Theology, even Education Deans have been very slow in implementing multi-faith education in their teacher education programmes. When I suggested to the Dean, that we move in the direction of new discussions, he said "but nobody told us anything! The Department has not sent anything to us!" This mentality of waiting for instructions arises from Apartheid South Africa's autocratic style. I believe that with the available competition from overseas universities and colleges in the country education faculties need to be pro-active and wherever they see a gap or need they need to respond to it.

## **5. Religion Education in the Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy:**

In February 2001, at the Values, Education and Democracy Conference Albert Nolan of "Challenge" magazine clearly distinguished between "religious education", which he described as "nurturing a religious consciousness and ...should be done in churches," and that the aim of "religion education" was to "provide knowledge about different religions". Amin discussed the implementation aspects. She asserted that qualified teachers should teach the subject, the importance of training of teachers to teach the subject, the need for the correct use of terminology with regard to African Traditional Religion and the need for the use of positive terms when discussing aspects of African Traditional Religion as it has become customary for many to use negative terms such as 'witchcraft', 'superstition', 'fetish' and so on. The Manifesto asserts that the South African Constitution guarantees the freedom of all religions and the observances that go with them. The school may not promote any one of these over another. The Constitution guarantees the right to equality, to non-discrimination on the basis of religion, and to freedom of belief, thought and conscience. "Religion Education" in schools can contribute to the values of

diversity, tolerance, respect, justice, compassion and commitment in young South Africans. Schools have reason to provide learners with knowledge about the diversity of religions ... and the morality and values that underpin them.

It adds:

Furthermore, it can teach students about a world of religious diversity, and, at the same time, encourage them to think in terms of a new national unity in South Africa (Manifesto:2001: 44).

The Manifesto, with information on the approach to and principles of teaching RE and facilitating assemblies reads like a suggested policy on Religion in Education:

- Religion Education and consciousness about the role and effect of religion- will be integrated into the General Education and Training Band, specifically in Life Orientation and Social Studies.
- “Religion Studies” will be introduced in the Further Education and Training Band for matriculation purposes as an optional, specialised and examinable subject.
- Religion Education should be should be motivated by educational outcomes and taught by trained professional educators rather than by professional clergy.
- Because “religion education” should be taught according to educational rather than religious outcomes, educators –particularly those in Life Orientation and Social Studies- will require significant retraining.
- According to the Constitution, schools may be made available for religious observance so long as it is outside of school hours, association is free and voluntary rather than mandatory, and the facilities are made available on an equitable basis to all who apply. School governing bodies need to be familiarised with these conditions.
- Weekly assemblies are a long-standing tradition of many of our schools, and play an important role in bonding and unifying the school community. Nevertheless they should not be compulsory and

should, under no circumstances, be used as occasions for religious observance.

- Like the rest of the school's programmes, the assembly should be an occasion for affirming and celebrating unity in diversity. Accordingly if religious materials are used in assembly, they should be presented in the framework outlined for "religion education" as an educational exercise rather than as a religious ceremony. School governing bodies need to be empowered with ways of transforming assemblies from being occasions for imposing religious uniformity to being forums where diversity is celebrated, along with the values of our constitution (Manifesto 2001:43- 45).

Chidester's comment on the new "suggested policy" illustrates succinctly the final analysis after decades of consultation on the part of the department: The Department of Education has found that trying to accommodate the particular, with the teaching about religion was an educational contradiction rather than a viable compromise (Chidester: 2002:4; Mangena 2001). This discussion, debate and negotiation is as foreign to us as democracy.

## **6. Public Response to New 'Policy' Suggestions**

### **6.1 Response to Deputy Minister's Speech**

The Deputy Minister of Education Mosibudi Mangena spoke about the future of religion in South African public schools in June 2001 at the Annual Conference of the Students Christian Union. He said:

Public schools must uphold the principle that their educational responsibility lies only in the teaching and learning about religion and religions. This is different from the religious education, religious instruction or religious nurture provided by the home, family or religious community.

...We assume that as learners develop creative and critical thinking abilities about religion and religions, they will also develop the capacities for mutual recognition, respect for diversity, reduced prejudice and increased civil toleration that are necessary for a peaceful coexistence in a democratic society.

In outlining the new “policy” for religion in education, based on constitutional values and educational objectives, he asserted that within the framework of a democratic South Africa, the role of religion in public schools must be consistent with core constitutional values of a common citizenship, human rights, equality, freedom, tolerance and so on.

...Policy on the role of religion in education must be driven by the dual mandate of respecting religious diversity and building national unity (Mangena 2001: Address; Dept. of Education Draft ...).

The headlines in *The Teacher*, in response to this speech screamed: “Keep God out of the public schools says Mangena.” Mangena had outlined a framework guided by constitutional rights and freedom. Yet the media, in this case, *The Teacher*, a newspaper dedicated to teaching and learning and meant to contribute to the development of the teacher deliberately misrepresented the speech. This is a good example of media sensationalism, which could have had serious repercussions. While the Minister certainly did not invite God into the schools, he did not exclude God from the schools. The “policy” outlined was based on educational outcomes and constitutional freedom. There was no mention of God. This irresponsible sensationalism tells us about the quality of our media and the communities, who are fed by the sensational media.

## 6.2 Response to: The Revised National Curriculum Statement

In the draft Revised Curriculum Statement for public comment, religion is located within the Life Orientation learning area. It is seen as part of social development viewed within a Constitutional Responsibilities and Human Rights framework. The relevant outcome read:

The learner should be able to demonstrate an active commitment to constitutional rights and social responsibilities and shows sensitivity to diverse cultures and belief systems (DOE 2001).<sup>xv</sup>

This outcome was the target of criticism. It was argued that one could not enforce “active” commitment to the Constitution. Thus, the outcome has been changed to read:

The learner will demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to constitutional rights and responsibilities and show an understanding of diverse cultures and religions (DOE 2002).

This outcome is loaded and unpacking it has resulted in five Assessment Standards for every grade originating from this outcome. Each Assessment Standard deals with different aspects such as human rights, constitutional promotion, social relationships, culture and religion. The resulting controversy was beyond anything I had imagined. Firstly, there were some very good comments and these were a pleasure to read and the team was happy to incorporate these ideas. Secondly, there were people with genuine concerns but thirdly, a host of letters were objections written and in many cases this was done without having read the curriculum. We found that there was no understanding of what the study of religion in a democratic society entailed. There was mass hysteria and emotional responses rather than thoughtful logical arguments. The curriculum, based on constitutional principles was regarded as an ANC ploy to enforce a particular religious worldview. The Christian Democratic Party was among the most vocal in its objection to a policy that promoted the principles of the very constitution that they as Members of Parliament swore by, while other opposition parties who are supposed to represent all religious groups, made no attempt to ease the situation.

One of the assessment standards read that learners in grade nine should be able to:

Debate at least three Basic Rights which illustrated tensions such as 'right to life and abortion', 'freedom and authority', and 'equity and affirmative action'.

The word "abortion" was taken out of context and responses suggested the curriculum promoted abortion when in fact it encouraged debate. The response to it was mind-boggling. The assessment standard stated: Discuss "the celebration of life cycles in South Africa by at least four cultural groups," was met with: "Life cycles! Reincarnation! There is no reincarnation in Christianity!" (Amin 1987-2002).

Firstly, the study of life cycles does not mean ‘reincarnation’ but what Shakespeare has termed the “Seven Ages of Man” or to use “Christian” lingo Baptism, Christening, Confession, Marriage, Death and the Afterlife. Secondly, supposing it was about “reincarnation” so what! Curriculum designers for a country as diverse as South Africa do not have to be guided by any one tradition. Suppose I was designing a curriculum, I could very well discuss reincarnation in those traditions that believe in it and discuss the Doctrine of Original Sin in Christianity. A curriculum developer would know what to discuss in each of the traditions when selecting a theme.

The public responses illustrated that we need to teach all South Africans about religions in South Africa especially adults. The interesting point about the public response is that people from various and differing points of view were joined in their criticism of the curriculum. In other words, the left, the right and the centre were all unhappy. I believe that is supposed to mean we must be doing something right! Chidester’s identification of the philosophical thinking behind the various objectors is useful to illustrate how “opposition has come from a range of different Christian points of departure.” He has identified four different Christian positions - “Reconstructionist, Protectionist, Ecumenical and Interfaith.” (Amin 1987-2002).

He notes that at a meeting at The Christian Centre in Cape Town, “Concerned Christians” argued that the main problem with the curriculum was, “the active promotion of a single set of values under the guise of tolerance.” It was labelled “a New Age worldview” and state support for “a secular humanism worldview.” It was claimed that it was in “total contradiction to the constitutional provision of freedom of religion... an act of religious discrimination against Christians.” This group of Christian Reconstructionists has been very loud in its objection to the curriculum and have been writing letters, staging media events and organising public meetings. I need to reiterate that one needs to read the curriculum in terms of constitutional principles and human rights. If the state supports or promotes it, it is promoting human rights and the constitution, which is its task. The portfolio committees discussing various aspects consist of members of all political parties. Many critics label multi-faith as an ANC policy and forget that it is a policy based on the South African Constitution which was our point of departure. As Curriculum Designers we did not consult with the



government, the ANC or any other political party but worked with the Constitution and educational objectives.

The home-schooling group, the Pestalozzi Trust, which is directly linked to a group in the United States and to the work of R. J. Rushdoony, the American founder of Christian Re-constructionism, vehemently opposed the curriculum on "constitutional grounds". He wrote: *Segregation or separation is a basic principle of Biblical law with respect to religion and morality*. Rushdoony opposes any form of civil toleration of religious difference. His disciple Gary North, aims for the construction of a *Bible-based social, political and religious order which finally denies the religious liberty of the enemies of God* (North 1982: 25, quoted in (Chidester 2002:6).

Following the publishing of the draft of the revised curriculum, at the Parliamentary hearings in Cape Town, a member of the Pestalozzi Trust cut a cute figure, brandishing a copy of the South African Constitution, using it to assert his constitutional right to oppose the indoctrination of "a particular worldview". Interestingly he was using the Constitution to deny the freedom of all "other" religions, and held the view that the "inclusion of a variety of religions," was "a particular worldview" (Amin, Manila Soni. Case Studies RE 1987-2002). One needs to ask whether the South African Pestalozzi group is aware of the Pestalozzi ideals. If the answer is affirmative, then South Africans need to be made aware of this.

The Protectionists, formed the second set of objectors who had enjoyed the privilege and protection of the apartheid regime and who would like to maintain the status quo. Professor De Villiers, chairperson of the Society for Biblical Studies, which recently changed its name to Biblical and Religious Studies attacked the policy as "a new ideology in school religion." He lamented the fact that particular faiths were not allowed alongside the "other". The term Religious Studies has been used by academia throughout the world, to refer to the study of World Religions. Does Professor De Villiers imply expertise in interdisciplinary work by using the term "Religious Studies"?

The third category of objectors was the Christian Ecumenical organisation, the South African Council of Churches, which supports the learning about religions and religious diversity but would like provision for particularism also.

Believing that religious education in public schools is a complex and sensitive issue; that it is important for learners to be informed about the various religious beliefs of the people of South Africa; and that spiritual resources of religious communities are crucial in the building of a just, moral and peaceful South Africa;

Conference resolves that the General Secretary should initiate engagement with the Education Ministry with the intention of promoting a religious education policy that makes provision for both a multi-religious approach and for single faith learning programmes (SACC:2001).

A fourth group of objectors may be described as proponents of Interfaith who promote the study of World Religions. Among this group were colleagues I have worked with. They were people I would have counted on to strongly support the implementation of multi-faith education. Their reasons for objecting were different from the Pestalozi's. While they were proponents of Multi-faith Education, they criticised the curriculum for lack of explicit use of the term "religion". Their objection was noted and the term "religion" is now used in the Curriculum Statement. Further, the Director of the Catholic Institute of Education argued: 'The new policy, will not invite the learner to the challenge of spiritual and moral development, or to the free commitment to a specific faith commitment' (Faller 2001).

Faller's statement reminds me of the need for the teacher "to bring the light of God's word" as described in CNE curricula. As an educator, I am prepared to listen to a student who comes to me to discuss her/his faith commitment but for me to exhort the learner to do this is to propagate and I am definitely not a preacher but a teacher. Speaking to the Dean of Theology at a South African university, I suggested that if Biblical Studies was taught from a confessional aspect, teachers should to be taught separately from preachers. I said, "You send me preachers and my first task is to convert these preachers to teachers". He asked, "What is she talking about?" I know that he was not being sarcastic but honestly had no idea about the difference. This illustrates the depth of ignorance that exists with regard to teaching about religion even in academic circles.

Discussing the various groups and their objections illustrates that although it may be said to belong to some form of Christian church, each of

the discussed groups had different reasons for objecting to the new curriculum. Yet they joined hands in forming an opposition to the policy.

Following the public submissions, adjustments were made where it was thought necessary or possible. In other words the curriculum designers moved slightly to the right so that they could include the right and meet them at the centre. For those who object to multi-faith altogether there is no hope unless they are prepared to meet for interfaith- dialogue. The term 'religion' has now been included with an explanation:

The term 'religion' in this Life Orientation Learning Area Statement is used to include belief systems and worldviews. Religion Education in the Revised national Curriculum Statement for Grades R- 9 (schools) rests on a division of responsibilities between the state on the one hand and religious bodies parental homes on the other. Religion Education, therefore, has a civic rather than a religious function, and promotes civic rights and responsibilities. In the context of the South African Constitution, Religion education contributes to the wider framework of education by developing in every learner the knowledge, values, attitudes and skills necessary for diverse religions to co-exist in a multi-religious society. Individuals will realise that they are part of the broader community, and will learn to see their identities in harmony with those of others (Revised National Curriculum Statement 2002, Dept of Education, Pretoria).

## **7. The Way Forward**

As South Africans we need to constantly remind ourselves that South Africa is a country with diverse communities and we need to constantly assert that:

We, the people are African Traditionalists, Buddhists, Christians of various denominations including African Independent churches, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Baha'is Rastafarians, Secularists, Zoroastrians and a number of worldviews too numerous to mention. We speak a variety of languages and practise a range of cultures. We are not a homogenous society.

Our present constitution guarantees the rights of all our people to practise and propagate religion. The freedom that is enshrined in our constitution must be the catalyst for an education that reflects the diversity of our population and the cultures of all our people. Not only have the oppressors denied us that right in the past, but even today, the effects of their “cultural bombs” plague our society where ethnicity reigns supreme. When I speak of ‘ubuntu’ as a South African philosophy, I am told that it is a Zulu and not a South African philosophy. It leaves me wondering whether Zulu traditions were not part of South African culture! Within this context of diverse languages, ethnicities, religions and cultures, religious and cultural pluralism can be a response not only to manage diversity, but for nation- building and effective citizenship for all South Africans.

My aim in this presentation was to discuss the long and painful process of arriving at Religion Education in South Africa. Multi-religion Education has been included in the Revised Curriculum Statement for the General Education and Training Band to be implemented from 2004 onwards. It will be assessed like any other subject and has educational rather than religious outcomes. Teaching is assigned to qualified professional teachers and not to clergy. This is a big battle won for recognition of diversity and for the promotion of pluralism specifically and education generally. However, the time to sit back has not arrived yet because there is a gaping wound in the education system with regard to Religion in Education. As has been illustrated, the process of introducing multi-faith religion education in school education has not been without pains and finally some gains. Unfortunately, the next process, curriculum development for the (FET) Further Education and Training that is for grades ten, eleven and twelve, has begun but there is no religion in Education at all! This cannot be allowed to continue.

I have discussed the policy –type guidelines outlined for Religion in Education in the Manifesto on Values and Democracy. “Religion Studies” will be introduced in the Further Education and Training Band for matriculation purposes as an optional, specialised and examinable subject. The FET process has begun and there is no study of or about Religion whatsoever. I urge this august assembly to take the matter further. While the FET process is still in its infancy, we can ensure that we take all necessary steps to have it installed. I reiterate that openness and inclusiveness are still

on the horizon and that the struggle continues - as Madiba has said:

*It is A Long Walk to Freedom.*

Ministerial Committee on Religious Education

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# **From Denial and Displacement to Re-adjustment: Indian Diaspora in South Africa<sup>1</sup>**

**P. Pratap Kumar**

One of the most unique and important changes that occurs in a society when a new community enters is the presence of diversity and difference. The new people are different in many ways—colour, race, religion, culture, worldview, goals and ideals—from the local communities. In the process of making a living among the local communities, the immigrant community needs to negotiate these differences. Both the new community and the locals are different to each other. This mutual difference is the breeding ground for mutual suspicion, prejudice and alienation. The immigrant community disrupts the social, cultural and economic order of the locals. In its initial stages the immigrants tend to be more in a mode of assimilation and gradually renegotiate their presence by establishing their own life-style, worldview, cultural and social institutions. This in the long run not only changes the landscape of the locals, but also the immigrants become different from their own ancestors. In other words, they not only force a new identity for the locals, but also for themselves – hence their own alien-ness from their mother land and its people. The South African Indian story remarkably captures this scenario.

When, for instance, the Parsees immigrated to India during their persecution in Persia, they made agreements with the ruling Hindu kings in the

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<sup>1</sup> This article was presented as a paper at the Indic Religion Conference, Delhi 18-21 December 2003.



west coast of India that they would be loyal subjects and assimilate into the culture. Generations on today, they are a remarkable force in Indian politics and economy. They have renegotiated their presence in the Indian society. Even though they did not become politically separate entity, they certainly became a distinct group with their culture, religion, social and economic presence and negotiated a place for themselves in the larger Indian milieu. The Jewish community also did the same. These examples show not so much assimilation as the model that they had followed. But rather in a vast cultural diversity of India, they had created their own space for their cultural and social identity. It is the diversity and difference that marks these examples. The Indians in South Africa are none the different.

Discussing the new religious pluralism in America, David Machacek points out that the old paradigm of assimilation had to give in to a greater recognition of diversity. He says,

Instead of assimilating American social practices and cultural beliefs and values, the new immigrants, often using religion as a primary resource, appear to be actively renegotiating the terms of American social and cultural life (Machacek 2003:147).

The Indian immigrants to South Africa went through, I shall argue, three stages as it were before they renegotiated their religio-cultural and social space within what is often popularly referred to as the 'rainbow nation'. These stages are—the initial denial, displacement and the eventual readjustment. To all these stages, or rather processes, it worked in both directions. That is, the denial involved both self-denial and the social, political and cultural denial by the dominant group (the white community). The displacement involved a self-displacement in both cultural and social but also in physical terms. It also involved displacement by the politically and economically dominant community (white) vis à vis what became known as 'group areas act'. The eventual readjustment, as in the two previous two processes also involved both the oppressor and the oppressed. It is the result of a very conscious and deliberate renegotiation of political, economic, social and cultural space, unlike in the case of the American experience of the immigrants.

## **The Denial**

In the second part of the nineteenth century, at the request of the Natal government, the then government of India acceded to the request to supply cheap labour to work on the newly introduced sugarcane plantations. Since by then the slavery was strictly abolished in the British colonies (1833), a new system called the 'indenture system' was devised to introduce cheaper labour supply in the colonies (Thomas 1985; North-Combes 1991; Motwani 1989). It is a moot point whether the local African labour supply was inadequate, unsuitable, unreliable and so on. The plantation owners in the Natal colony, nevertheless, motivated for the Indian labour on the grounds that the local Africans were not reliable and not skilled in the agricultural sector. Newspaper advertisements went out in India requesting for labour supply using a attractive slogan—'gold for chillies!' The first shipment of Indian labour arrived in Durban in September 1860. In the next six years there were more than 6000 indentured workers were brought and in those six years already complaints about ill-treatment were reported and between 1866 and 1874 for nearly ten years the scheme was suspended (Thomas 1985: 25). When it was resumed in 1874, promises were made to protect their religious and cultural rights and the newspaper advertisements in India made it a point to refer to those promises. Between 1874 and 1911 when the immigration of the Indians was finally stopped, there were about 146000 new immigrants brought to Natal. These new immigrants included both the indentured Indians and the 'Passenger Indians' or the merchants who came at their own expense in pursuit of trade (Henning 1993: 56).

During this formative period between 1860 and 1911, Indian immigrants made tremendous efforts to assimilate and adopt the colonial master's culture, such as acquisition of English language skills, changing their dress code to western garb, the etiquette, and so on and so forth. All of these social and cultural changes were often due to the voluntary efforts by the immigrants to please the masters. Then there were forced attempts to make the immigrants to conform to the European way of life. The colonists forced the Indians to have their rituals and prayers conducted only on Sundays as it was the only day of rest. In an effort to further subjugate the immigrants, they introduced harsh punishments for lapses at work, restrictive measures, such as poll tax and penalties for becoming free from the indenture system (Gandhi

1972: 118; Meer 1980: 690)<sup>2</sup>. It is this double sided denial that is the hall mark of the Indian identity crisis. On the one hand, they denied their own language, culture to adopt and assimilate into the new society. On the other hand, the colonial masters denied their self-dignity by subjecting them to harsh measures in an effort to control them.

The Indian immigrants arrived in South Africa motivated by economic prospects. It is that dream to succeed in the new world that kept them going and made them to give up something very close to their heart, viz., their language and culture only to bemoan that loss some generations later. Wearing hats and conducting themselves like the European had become the standard for the Indian to achieve in order to conform. Their self-denial on the one hand, and the social denial by the dominant society on the other is not merely at the external changes of life-style, but it is the very thinking and consciousness that was affected, and as such it went to the very core of their being. In other words, assimilation into the dominant culture was seen as a window of opportunity to access the prosperity presented by the colonial economy.

Despite their many attempts to assimilate into the colonial culture and thereby to gain access to the economic prospects, life was not made easy for them. It did not take very long to realise that their dream of becoming economically prosperous was not only difficult but almost impossible in the face of harsh treatment from their employers. By the 1890s the Indian community had spread to Transvaal, Cape and Free State colonies. Many indentured labourers, upon completion of their contract, opted to become free

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<sup>2</sup> It must be noted that such poll taxes were not peculiar to the Indian labourers. It was part of an overall colonial approach to African labour in the colonies 'the intention being to force them [African labourers] into the wage sector, on the theory that African farmers were underemployed on their own land. Taxation of this kind began in Natal in 1849, and in time it spread to nearly the whole of colonial Africa' (Curtin et al. 1992:519). Text in paranthesis is mine. The amount of tax paid by the African labourers was far greater than that was charged to the Indian indentured labourers. For instance, in Transvaal the African labourers who worked and lived on the European farms had to pay 125 sterling pounds a year and those who worked on the European farms and lived elsewhere had to pay 25 sterling pounds a year (see Curtin et al. 1992:519).

and become self-employed in engaging themselves in various small scale farming activities, such as vegetable gardens. Some entered the service industry by becoming waiters, butlers, and so on. The relative progress made by the Indian community in various fields caused serious concern, mainly among the colonists as opposed to the plantation owners. While the colonists were afraid of economic competition from the Indians, mainly from the merchant classes, the plantation owners supported the continuation of the indenture system. The colonists, nevertheless, managed to force the government to impose annual penalty of three pounds if the indentured labourers did not return to India upon the completion of their contracts. According to the original agreement, the indentured labourers could either renew their contracts or return to India. But if they remain and become free of the contract, they were liable to pay the three pound penalty and one pound tax (Gandhi 1972:118; also see Meer 1980:690). Let alone the indentured Indians, even the merchant classes could not pay such penalty. The harsh laws on the one side and the brutal treatment on the farms on the other made the immigrants very desperate and frustrated.

Already by the end of the first decade of their arrival in Natal, the indentured Indians had begun building temples, shrines and other cultural centres to strengthen their community bonds and to fall back on their religious and cultural heritage in times of hardships. These religious and cultural centres became the places where they could go and find some solace and comfort. As I noted in an earlier study:

These early temples and schools seem to have become centres of religious and cultural activities. Reading of the scriptures, story telling and staging religious dramas became the activities of these centres where people could meet not only for social activities but also for religious activities. These centres seem to have provided the much needed sense of belonging as members of one Hindu community (Kumar 2000:18).

As I shall show later on, these cultural and religious centres became the tools for negotiating their new identity and claim their due space in the diverse landscape of South Africa.

The denial of self identity and value imposed upon themselves in an attempt to become part of the broader colonial game of political and economic expansion reduced the immigrants to the level of disposable commodity in the ever changing labour market. No wonder the colonists saw no permanent value for the Indian immigrant and hence their call to repatriate. All further immigration to Natal stopped in 1913 amidst the controversy about the working conditions of the indentured labourers. Those who remained in the colony and moved about the different provinces in search of economic prospects became people with no home. The government of India sent emissaries to negotiate their citizenship during the early part of the twentieth century but to no avail. They continued to be treated as non-citizens and only in 1961 in the life time of the third generation of the immigrants the issue of their citizenship was resolved (Bhana and Pachai 1984:240).

### ***The Displacement***

The displacement of the Indians from India due to colonial expansionism between 1860 and 1913 is euphemistically called 'indentured' labour system. In practice it was not very different from the displacement of people from Africa through slavery. As such, the phenomenon of displacement became the hallmark of the colonial period. It is an older form of movement of capital equipment from one place to another. In the context of modern globalisation people displace themselves voluntarily today and sell their skills in the larger global market place which has no national boundaries. A sense of displacement could also be experienced by the modern immigrant, even if it is not the same. Undoubtedly, the sense of displacement experienced by the mid nineteenth century immigrants in the context of colonial expansion is unparalleled by its characteristic of total helplessness in the foreign land and in the face of many unfriendly laws that militated against them.

The Indian immigrants in Natal became displaced by the lure of economic prospects first on their own accord to some extent. That is, they offered to come to Natal as indentured labourers. But once in the new land, they suffered several displacements as they were moved from farm to farm and colony to colony and finally in what became known as Group Areas Act. The Orange Free State became independent from the British Empire in 1854, Natal

progressed from being a colony to acquiring Responsible Government in 1893, Transvaal colony, Representative Government in 1907, The Cape Colony Representative Government in 1853 and later in 1872 became a Responsible Government (Curtin et al. 1992:312). Eventually South Africa as whole was declared Union of South Africa in 1911. In 1940 the Nationalists came to power and in 1950 they introduced the most infamous Group Areas Act that forced Indians again out of their homes and were resettled in several townships that were earmarked for the Indians under the apartheid principle of 'separate locations' for separate race groups. By this time Indians built a substantial number of temples and mosques and other cultural centres and when they were moved out of their locations, they left those places of cultural and religious significance. Even though some temples and mosques were moved from those previous locations, some were left in tact, such as the Second River Temple at Cato Manor, Sufi Mosque at Riverside Road in Durban. Thus, the Indians may have been moved out of their previous locations, but their landmarks, such as temples and mosques with mango trees in those complexes were left intact.

When the Indians moved to the new areas, such as Chatsworth and Phoenix, they began to engage in a vigorous activity of building their religious and cultural centres again, only this time with much more conscious attempt to stay. The 1961 ruling by the government to give Indians the citizenship status (Pachai 1979:57) and the subsequent establishment of the infamous House of Delegates in 1984 for Indian affairs under the new system of government known as the Tricameral Parliamentary System (Motwani 1989:33) enabled the Indian community to deepen their roots into the South African soil and to begin to assert themselves as a people. They used the system and began to become prosperous in business, service sector and in various fields, such as education, law and medicine.

### ***Resistance and Readjustment***

The narrative of the Indian resistance to the various forms of denial and displacement perhaps began quietly when the first batch of indentured labourers protested at the brutal treatment meted out to them on the farms. The fact that already by 1874 the 'Protector of Indian Immigrants' (Law 19 and 20) was established (Henning 1993:54) shows that the promises made by the

European farmers were not fully delivered and that there were many irregularities in the system. Coupled with the brutal treatment on the farms, the anti-Indian sentiment was visible by the 1890s. This anti-Indian sentiment was due not only to the relative economic success that the Indian made after becoming free from the indenture system, but more importantly due to the growing commercial activities of the 'free passengers' or the merchant class. (For more discussion on the merchant class politics see Swan 1985.)

Gandhi's passive resistance movement needs really to be located in the context of the merchant class resistance to the European colonists' control of trade as Swan rightly points out in her work (Swan 1985). Of course, the granting of 'Responsible Government' status to Natal colony in 1893 assisted the European colonists to introduce the Act 17 of 1895 to repatriate the Indians (Motwani 1989:15; Brain 1989:261). Gandhi arrived in Natal in 1893 and was quickly involved in the merchant resistance politics. Being a victim himself of racial discrimination when he was thrown off the train in which he was travelling, he was able to understand the harsh treatment to which both the indentured labourers and the merchant class Indians were subjected to. Even though his immediate call was to assist the merchant classes in their resistance against the European colonists' oppressive laws, Gandhi needed the broader support of the indentured labourers as well in order to make it a common Indian problem rather than something exclusive to a section of the community. The role that Gandhi played in the resistance politics was quite crucial, especially in the period between 1907 and 1910 in Transvaal area in dealing with the oppressive laws against the Indian immigrants (Kumar 2000: 5). It is also about the same time that the Black Africans were also beginning to assert themselves for their political and economic rights. The year 1912 saw the founding of the African National Congress (ANC) and the subsequent leaders of the ANC found inspiration from the resistance politics of Gandhi, especially in his passive resistance movement. There is, however, no evidence to show that Gandhi was directly involved in the struggle of the African communities. But the successors in the leadership of the Natal Indian Congress that Gandhi helped found during his time in South Africa did forge stronger ties with the African leaders in their common struggle against the colonial domination and the white minority rule.

It would be missing the point if we do not pay attention to the role played by religious institutions, their leaders and their symbols and religious

centres in the overall resistance against the colonial domination in South Africa. The sheer presence of a substantial number of religious centres, temples, mosques and other institutions of the Indian community throughout South Africa even by the end of the nineteenth century needs to be seen as a major social resistance to the colonial oppression. The temples, mosques and the various religious centres built by the Indian community during the early years as an escape from the oppression of the colonists gradually became centres of resistance. First, they changed the landscape of South Africa for good by entrenching non-European culture in the midst of the dominant European culture. Even when the Nationalist government, under the Group Areas Act, removed the Indians from their former locations to designated townships (Chatsworth, Phoenix and so on) they could not totally change the landscape. Some of the oldest and prominent temples and mosques stayed in the former Indian locations even after they were occupied by the whites (e.g., Sufee Sahib Mosque in Durban North, Cato Manor temple). The Grey street in Durban, which cut right through the heart of Smith and West streets, had to be kept intact with all its Indian business. The cultural impact on the Durban landscape by the Grey street Indian set up is undoubtedly remarkable. Thus, all of this mere presence of the Indian centres of culture and religion was in itself a social and cultural resistance that enabled the Indian immigrant to later both draw from them as well as use them to lobby for their religious and cultural rights in South Africa.

Much of resistance discourse tends to focus more on the revolutionary politics and ignores the more silent resistance that people can offer through performance of religious rituals, establishment of religious centres, insistence of their languages vis à vis European languages for communication and various forms of the arts and culture. The role that mother tongues of Indian immigrants played in the days of the colonial rule and later during the apartheid era has been well documented. The role that the Ramayana and other Hindi poetry, the Tamil and Telugu religious songs played in instilling self pride and national pride in their mother country India is remarkable (Lutchman and Shukla). At a time when the community was faced with the oppressive social system, religious rituals and cultural centres have provided the Indian immigrant a sense of solidarity, identity and community (Kumar 2000:211). Much dependence on vernacular poetry, songs, music and films by the Indian immigrants had to do with the fact that they could derive comfort and also find



social and personal identity in those forms of culture. Most certainly they provided opportunities to resist the cultural domination by the colonists and later by the white culture during the apartheid.

Nearly a century and half had gone past since the Indian immigrant made his home in South Africa. Starting from Gandhi and during the apartheid period many prominent Indians aligned themselves with the Black African struggle for freedom. Many went to jail and even to exile. When the apartheid government finally came to an end in 1994, many Indians played vital role not only in the negotiation process for a new constitution, but also served in prominent cabinet positions in the new government and have contributed enormously to the emerging and developing democracy in South Africa. The new constitution has provided for the recognition of Indian cultural and linguistic rights and practices. Indian customary marriages have been given due legal recognition, which they did not enjoy in the days of apartheid. The Indian immigrant is no longer an immigrant but has acquired a unique status of being a South African Indian. He is proud to be South African and also proud of his Indian heritage. It has become a moot point whether Indians in South Africa should consider themselves South African first and Indian second or the other way around. When the Government of India made an offer of dual citizenship to South African Indians, much controversy arose with most people criticising the double standard of the Indians. That is, on the one side wanting to be South African and wanting to be Indian on the other. Most ordinary Indians tended to reject the Government of India offer to take up dual citizenship. For them citizenship was a political act whereas being culturally proud of their Indian culture is a natural sense of who they are and where they came from. As the Indians, after so much of struggle in South Africa, continue to readjust to the changing social and political environment of South Africa, they need to demonstrate their dual identity of being socially and politically South African and culturally Indian. In this readjustment process they need to resist the temptation of totally denying their own unique identity of their past and at the same time become genuinely South African. Whether in South Africa or anywhere else, the immigrant community has to continuously go through this resistance and readjustment processes.

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# **Africa in the Twenty-first Century: An Alternative Vision for the Second Struggle for Liberation**

**Itumeleng Meko**

The end of colonial rule in Africa, beginning in the 1950s, also brought the newly independent African states into the center of a Eurocentric ideological struggle involving neocolonial forces in the area of economic development or modernization. Capitalist powers in Europe and the United States were keen to demonstrate that the road to sustained economic growth lay in a replication of Western historical experience. The inherited chain of economic dependence forged during the colonial era ensured that economic, political, and educational models central to capitalist expansion would continue to play a hegemonic role in determining post-independence African development strategies. As a consequence, since the 1950s, the issue of development has engaged the attention of all independent African governments, making Eurocentric development strategies the foundation of policy decisions in post-colonial Africa. However, after nearly a half century of firm belief in and adoption of imported Western development ideologies and strategies in efforts to achieve modernization, it is painfully evident that Africa continues to be underdeveloped, poor, heavily indebted to its colonial masters, and struggling with insurmountable internal socio-economic problems (Abrokwaa 1999:646).

## **Introduction**

The problems of modern Africa in the post-colonial period are a mockery to the so-called independent or liberated Africa. The conditions of the African

people are worse than the colonial period. These conditions do not just need 'reformation' or World Bank or IMF inspired assistance. They demand an alternative outlook or vision from cultural or foreign motivated development strategy to an inward or indigenous strategy. This alternative indigenous strategy of development should reflect the needs of the indigenous people, socially, economically, politically and spiritually. This alternative vision will enable us to look inward for economic problems and not outward for aid, foreign investments or loans. This alternative vision should also suit local conditions of the African people. An unevenly developed African continent has specific characteristics for each region if not for each country which must be taken into account for any development. Strategy is to be formulated. Africa has been made a prototype of Europe for too long and the same European strategies have failed to raise the socio-economic conditions of the African people. African leaders therefore must make their own analysis in organizing a radical development strategy suitable for their communities. African leaders must take political and economic leadership, and stop subjecting the fate of African people to foreign investors. Africa needs liberation from the different forms of imperialism it has been subjected to – i.e. by and through the IMF, World Bank or so-called 'foreign aid' agencies.

African leaders fit well into the description of Adam Curle (1971:116) as:

... the local agents of the foreign corporations, officials who smooths .. the way, ministers and others whose good will it [is] desirable to purchase labour leaders who [can] control workers.

Chango Machyo (1996:57ff) shares the same sentiments:

The white guards were replaced by black ones, otherwise everything operated as usual. The only difference was that the black guards were not as experienced and therefore not as confident as the white guards. The mess they made is due to lack of experience in the management of the system. That is why, they have had to depend on white 'experts' to advise them on how to manage the colonially

erected system. It is therefore correct to assert that since the colonial system never changed, the real riches of Africa remain the ruling class of the former colonial powers; the African who took over from the white officials have remained mere governors – agents of the foreign ruling class. That is why, apart from Libya (which has since 1969 revolution maintained a very high standard of living for all its citizens), no government in Africa, whether civilian or military and regardless of the quality of leadership, has brought about any fundamental change. Hence the appalling State and conditions of Africa people today.

Without any alternative change in the system, no genuine liberation, development and progress can be expected. Alternative vision must lead to the renaissance of the African people. Paul Baran (1960:13) asserts that:

... only a sweeping reorganization of society, only an all-out mobilization of all its creative potentialities that can move the economy off dead center.

African renaissance will be a mere political rhetoric if it cannot come with an alternative vision for African development in this post-colonial but also neo-colonial period. Failure to do this will be neo-colonial perpetuation. The only alternative therefore is change or revolution. African leaders must identify ways of getting rid of their foreign dependence, economically, culturally, politically and otherwise. This is the challenge of African renaissance at the dawn of the twenty-first century. According to Chango Machyo (1996:54) poverty has made Africans undignified beggars. He wrote:

African governments, churches and what have you elevated begging to a profession. Because all of us are beggars, we have no respect for each other, no mutual trust. We therefore loathe to learn from each other's experience. We all look to the masters, the donors, all the time to tell us what to do.

## **African Intellectuals' Liberation: Ideological and Political Dimensions**

One of the biggest obstacles to revolutionary fundamental changes in Africa is mental colonialism, conservative, reactionary and dependent thinking of the African intellectuals on so-called educated class. Trained by colonial masters, African intellectuals are mere students ready to carry out orders of their masters. Their intellectual training has breed a dependency syndrome on them, and left them with the pride of Cambridge, Oxford, London Universities where thy have been trained to be better colonial agents. Hence they cannot be contrasted with the mission of librating the African continent. Chango Machyo explains the condition of the African intellectuals:

Generally speaking, the educated African is not a revolutionary. And the higher up in the educational ladder he or she climbs, the more conservative, revolutionary and dependent he she becomes. The role of the educated African is to seek to be on the 'the safe side' ' where the chances of falling into things, of 'eating' are brightest. Those who seemed to be revolutionary during their youth, slowly but surely shed their revolutionary outlooks as they grow up. They change their colours, and preach 'moderation' and 'must be realistic' joining the continuing efforts being made to de-revolutionize the masses – the peasantry, and workers – and urging them to forgive and forget (Machyo 1996:58f).

The same sentiments are expressed by Chancellor Williams (1987:333):

... often, a 'black official', once elected to office, turns out to be as conservative and reactionary as any [white] congressman from the back woods of Mississippi.

African intellectuals and revolutionaries therefore on ascending political power became as conservative as their ex-colonial masters and sometimes rude in carry out the instructions of their ex-colonial masters. Their intellectual dependence has betrayed the African revolution for political emancipation. Their intellectual training has not only tamed them, but made them better civil servants of the colonial system. It has not made them to be better leaders, radical policy makers and project initiators and developers. Not critical thinkers and developing personalities but mere puppets ready to be manipulated by the West and thinks them with crumbs for tables of their

masters to keep them happy. This is the kind of education that Walter Rodney (1976:264) describes as 'education for subordination, exploitation with creation of mental confusion and the development of underdeveloped'.

This kind of thinking about the better whites for guidance is also expressed by African-American scholar Walter Mosley, when he was reflecting on the experience of black people in the United States in the last hundred years. He writes:

As far back as we can go, there was a white face that we looked to for the source of pain. The white man enslaved, the white man freed, the white man opened the school door, the white man tested me and found me lacking. The dynamic is the same (cited in Seepe 1998:10).

The history of the struggle for liberation in Africa was intended to change this white paternalism still embraced by African leader and intellectuals. The 'talking on behalf of blacks' and the 'thinking on what is best for them' that was acted by colonial masters is still continuing even after colonialism. White people in Washington, London, Paris decide black implement the decision. When those decisions do not bear fruit they (blacks) are chastised for being dictatorial, corrupt, inexperienced, communists, and undemocratic. And the same black people continue to ask for more advice and expertise which at the end does not work in the African context. Sometimes they even make as their own 'the ideologies and value system of the oppressors ... even when the result is demonstratively against themselves (Williams 1987:331). In Africa foreign ideologies and value system are embraced in the name of religion, progress, modernization even globalization (Machyo 1996:60). African intellectuals according to Sekou Toure must be conscious and committed representatives of their people. For him 'the political leader is by virtue of his communion of idea and action with his people, the representative of his people, the representative of a culture' (Toure 196:2). African intellectuals must also aid in the decolonization and rehabilitation of Africa and African personality: 'It is in terms of that decolonization that the African intellectual will bring to Africa an effective and valuable aid.' (Toure 1996:12). Julius Nyerere, one of the Pan-Africanist advocates recognized that African intellectuals have a contribution to make for the development of Africa and its people. He wrote:

... that intellectuals have a special contribution to make to the development of our nation, and to Africa. I am asking that their knowledge, and the greater understanding that they should possess, should be used for the benefit of the society of which we are all members (Nyerere 1974:28).

Genuine African development will take place the day African intellectuals play a vital role of determining the destiny of their people – that day that African intellectuals take charge of determining the African future. Their education should not serve interests of their Western mentors and isolate them from their people. Julius Nyerere (1974:27) speaking to the African intellectuals observed:

We can try to cut ourselves from our fellows on the basis of the education we have had; we can try to carve out ourselves an unfair share of wealth of the society. But the cork to us, as well as to our fellow citizens, will be very high. It will be high not in terms of satisfaction forgone, but also in terms of our own security and well-being.

The problem with African intellectuals is that they want to operate in isolation from the ordinary people, and yet demand the support and vote of the same people. Their social class places them above ordinary people sometimes even makes them undermine ordinary people. Sekou Toure asserts that no social class or stratum is above the people and that they have the capacity, politically and consciously to guard their power and win the liberation struggle. He writes:

... no social strata, no group of workers, no proletarian category can pretend to be more revolutionary than the people, because the people are highly conscious of their needs and aspirations, determined to transform the conditions of their existence, jealous of their sovereignty and resolved to effect their complete emancipation (Toure 1972:12).

The renaissance of Africa will only be possible when her intellectual work



together with the ordinary people for their advancement. The tragedy in which Africa is today is because her intellectuals have absconded from their responsibility of developing their people. The purpose of education is to liberate and develop. It is to make a person fully human. This is a challenge to African renaissance as we enter the twenty-first century. Only intellectually free Africans can free themselves from Western intellectuals' tentacles of intellectual superstition. Antonio Gramsci (1971:335ff) has this to say about the dialectic between intellectual and mass development:

The process of development is tied to a dialectic between the intellectuals and the masses. The intellectual stratum develops both quantitatively and qualitatively, but every leap forward towards a new breath and complexity of the intellectual stratum is tied to an analogous movement on the part of the mass of the simple,' who raise themselves to higher levels of culture and at the same time extend their circle of influence towards the stratum of specialized intellectuals, producing outstanding individuals and groups of greater or less importance.

### **African Leadership must Chart Political Direction for Democracy**

To say African leadership must chart political direction in Africa is recognition of the fact that there is a rejection of the current state of affairs, where African leaders are not leaders but followers, agents and messengers of Europe. One of the main criticisms of Africa since independence has been one-partyism, dictatorships and military coups. However most African countries have since gone the multiparty route with elections held regularly, thus introducing the so-called democracy which is said to be leading in one-party states, dictatorships and military governments. Democracy in Africa however did not really mean the government of the people, by the people, for the people. It was a democracy designed by Europe in order to perpetuate European domination in Africa. It was never an African democracy designed by Africans to suite the African context. Neither was the democracy patriotic and dependent on African national interests. Even the policies that came out of such democracies were not in the interest of the African people but the

IMF or World Bank or Europe for their benefit from the wealth of the continent. Democracy which means the ability of the people to determine their destiny was never such in Africa. Instead Africa has continued to be a puppet of Europe with her leadership always ready to take instructions about her people. The democracy that Africa has experienced failed to establish the hegemony of the people. The objectives according to AM Babu (1996:96):

... can be realized only if the following is adhered to society: commitment to unity all the popular forces that seek to suite them or those who seek to sell the country to external bidders. They must commit themselves to struggle against those who seek to obstruct the democratic process or seek to hamper people's economic aspirations or undermine their well-being through exploitation for individual interest of the more powerful and more privileged.

African leadership must lead the movement to conserve African national heritage, direct national asserts and natural resources to the African people and develop African economy. The political objective of such new African democracy must be to achieve state power which African leadership does not have at the moment. The power given to African leadership through democratic means has been minimized by the IMF and World Bank, together with imperialists in Europe. Africa won its independence on the strength of its political nationalism. This African nationalism was anti-imperialist, and anti-predatory – it was a nationalism of resistance and therefore, progressive in essence. This African nationalism must be extended to our democracy. African democracy must strengthen African nationalism that while we remain internationalists in outlook we must base our internationalism on our African nationalism. African nationalism must assist African to survive international assimilation. African democracy must be about the unity of the African people. African leaders must prevent European policies and interests, not just to isolate them from their people but also divide their people into different social strata, rich and poor, literate and illiterate, civilized and uncivilized, moderates and radicals. African unity must be about unity and serving a common African cause. African renaissance will be a rhetoric if Africans cannot take charge of their destiny. The primary

objective of African democracy should be to change the current democracy in Africa from colonial orientation.

### **The Dakar Conference and its Significance for African Intellectual Emancipation and Thought: Molefi Kete Asante's Views**

The recent conference of African intellectuals held in Dakar, Senegal has to be welcomed as one of the greatest achievement in African political and intellectual unity. In this conference of African intellectuals, five hundred intellectuals from Africa and the Diaspora participated in this event organized by the African Union. For the first time African heads of states engaged African intellectuals of all professions and experts on matters affecting Africa as a continent and the African Diaspora. This kind of an initiative is long overdue and will advance the African course. Molefi Kete Asante (2004:31) explains:

The African heads of state and intellectuals referring to the legacies of heroes such as Zimbi of Brazil, Yanga of Mexico, Nat Turner of US and Nanny of Jamaica, spoke with vigour and enthusiasm about the possibilities of an African renaissance. We had come together to see how African intellectuals could envision the future

Molefi Kete Asante (2004:31) commenting on the Dakar conference also has this to say about African intellectualism and the vision for the future.

If there must be material advantage to scholarship let Africa set the terms, let the governments of Africa establish the awards that will attract the best minds of Africa.

We must assume an Afrocentric stance on everything that affects Africa. I ask you to question all ideas that are non-African, not to dismiss them for being foreign but to see if they are consistent with our goals and aims. We must all learn to be the people of our ancestors, not the servants of international imperialist masters. This is the source of our victory and the revival of the glory that bring us together with each other. We must talk and we must act. We must

harmonize and we must be ready to create chaos in the lives of those who will seek to retain control over African people.

According to Asante African intellectuals and politicians must not be allowed to abandon Africa to the nightmare of the imperialists who seek to regain control of Africa. The best way to do this is through an Afrocentric ideology. He describes Afroncentricity as a quality of thought or action that allows the African person to view himself or herself as an agent and actor in human history, and not simply objects who are acted upon. This according to Asante will give Africans 'a perspective as a subject, not from the margins of being victims or being an object in someone else's world. We are creators, originators and sustainers of our ethics, values and customs. We seek to replace no one we seek only to be for ourselves as a way of being for the world' (Asante 2004:31). For Asante the question of African determination is very important in their quest for freedom. He writes:

We must act like we are owners of ourselves before we claim our birthright as Africans in the traditions of our ancestors. We must not allow others to define us as outside of history or the world. We must put ourselves firmly into our own experiences. Our political leaders must have good strong, bold and loyal intellectual guidance (Asante 2004:31).

Asante also wishes for a Pan-African solidarity within the African world community, a desire for the revitalization of Africa, a consciousness of victory and some accountability to the objectives of African renaissance. The hegemony of the West in all its forms, whether capitalist, Marxist, Christian, secular, socialist and globalist has to be challenged by the African consciousness. Africa he argues must determine its own destiny and not rely on saviours from outside Africa. Africa he argues cannot be saved by grants and develop on handouts and restricted gifts from the West (Asante 2004:31).

### **African Leadership must Chart Economic Direction in Africa**

It is an open secret that political independence did not bear any fruit for African people due to poor economies or lack of economic prosperity. AM

Babu (1996:97) sums up obstacles that blocked the way to Africa's economic prosperity:

- dependence on the developed world to help our development
- excessive use of our socially necessary labour time in the production of useless goods for export, instead of producing useful goods for our own human and development needs.
- Continued deterioration of commodity prices which weakens our capacity for capital formation.
- Unproductive use of borrowed money (and the corruption that entails) and the consequential debt-servicing at very high and unjustified rates.
- Poor energy policies that make our countries heavily dependent on oil-imports for our needs thus depleting our meagre foreign exchange earnings; and
- An irrational world economic order which cannot change from a position of weakness.

African leaders must change the economic structure from its present imperialist orientation. Africa must develop an independent, self-sustaining economy out of the current IMF and the World Bank's economic policies have benefited the West by ensuring a steady flow of wealth from the poor African continent with effect of debt-servicing. Africa therefore has no choice except to find an alternative way of starting the capital accumulation process, which includes stopping such massive wealth leaving the African continent. The net outflow of 200 million dollars from Africa alone to the West, if retained can enrich Africa. African leadership need to discard an illusion that development is only possible through foreign aid. Africa has capacity to accumulate wealth and capital from within her shores. The only problem that retard such accumulation is the hostility of the IMF and World Bank to those operating outside their debt schemes. It is true that we live in the global and interdependent world. However it is the interdependence of the exploiter and the exploited, whereby only one section benefit. African participation in the global economy has not been on the precondition of her benefit and prosperity but that of the imperialists. This economic imperialism in Africa must be stopped. As M. Babu (1996:116) said:

We made a fatal mistake right at independence. We had a choice then between siding with the merging world socialist movement and (merciful), being cut off from the capitalist 'world economy' or remain junior partners in an economy dominated by the US and the ex-colonies powers from whom we had just emerged from colonialism. In Asia, only China, North Korea, and Vietnam chose to join the world socialist movement which sought to bring about a completely new world order, a socialist world. In Africa none went that way, although we invented various forms of 'socialisms' (African socialism in Tanzania, 'worker' or people's republic in Guinea, Ethiopia, Angola, Mozambique, Somalia etc.) to fool the masses while we were putting them more firmly under the grip of Western domination

Modern economic order to which Africa is a slave was designed to wage war against socialism and to provide alternative to socialism especially in poor countries. Providing international military stabilization was not the only objective of the IMF and World Bank but also to strengthen the Western grip on the world economy. African countries became members of those institutions after independence. Three decades after independence Africa as AM Babu (1996:117) asserts, has 'been demoted from the status of independent and honorable members of these institutions to that of their 'obedient' servants .... It is disappointing that African leadership is still insisting on these systems even though they never worked for Africa. Africa is the richest continent in natural resources, which could have long propelled the continent to the level of an economic colossus. The end of colonialism in Africa it seems left Africa without a significant pool of managers and administrators. There was only an over supply of politicians, who immediately assumed position for which they were unsuited. Instead of building on the economic foundations laid down by the colonialists and adjusting them to suit the needs of their people, they depleted whatever they found by overspending on military and others useless, projects. The ordinary people could not benefit from foreign loans. The loans of the IMF and World Bank could not produce modern infrastructure such as housing, schools or hospitals. Those in power, their relatives, and cronies were the sole beneficiaries of the resources meant to benefit the downtrodden. Therefore

Africa was not just a victim of circumstances beyond their control but also self-inflicted corruption and greed of its leadership. Since independence Africa has suffered from lack of honesty, committed and responsible leadership. Those in power have always served their own interest instead of the interests of the people. Coups, one-party states, life presidencies and centralization of power must all be understood against this background. It is such atmosphere that plundering the economy of a country occurs, without any sense of shame. For Africa therefore to prosper from present position, corrupt and greedy leadership will have to be discarded. Only competent leadership is vital for successful economic reform. African leadership cannot improve the conditions of their people without understanding how their economies are run. When an economic crisis emerges in Africa, the African leadership usually fail to acknowledge that the problem is both internal and external. Rather, they insist that the causes are neo-colonial and imperialist conspiracies. To succeed in repairing Africa's economy the African leadership will require not only economic competence, but the capacity to change when things are obviously wrong and not working.

### **Lifting the Foreign Debt in Africa**

A number of world leaders have called for the cancellation of foreign debt in Africa. Groups such as Jubilee 2000, the pope, top world politicians and celebrities have called on the rich western countries to write off the debts of African countries as a millennium gift. The United States of America has already cancelled the debts in that it will enable poor African countries to concentrate more on internal developmental issues such as education, job creation, health etc. The debt burden made African countries even weaker while correspondingly creditor, under the IMF and World Bank leadership benefited through their insistence on conditionality and reliance on the old divide and rule policy over debtor countries have a choice either to renounce the debts on the 'odious principle', which is a perfectly legitimate ground in international law, because the people were not consulted when the debts were made and the governments that contracted the debts were mostly illegal either because they were military regimes who came to power through coups, or one-party dictatorships or apartheid governments like in South Africa which did not enjoy the mandate of the people. These loans therefore

were corruptly contracted therefore African people were not obliged to honour them. The West also has to account for the past plundering and present exploitation of Africa's vast wealth and treasures. Therefore if properly thought it is actually the West which owe Africa.

### **Can the West Help Africa to Resolve her Problems?**

It must be stated categorically that the West is not responsible for assisting Africans to resolve their problems. Africans must clean their own mess. It is the West that has contributed to Africa's economic decline. Therefore the best thing that the West can do is to leave Africa alone. Africa at the moment is not ruled by Africans but by the West through its international bodies and multinational co-operations. Though the West has always championed itself as a democracy in Africa, the democracy it pursued was a hindrance to Africa's development. The West never understood the complexities and nuances of African problems. America has been the worst with the tendency to prescribe simplistic solutions. As George Ayittey (1992:348) wrote:

It would be helpful if Westerners would listen to what Africans themselves have to say about their own problems. But the arrogant we-know-best attitude of some Westerners stands in the way. Even when the West chooses to act, it is hobbled by colonial, racist, and imperialist baggage that renders its help suspect and ineffective. It is annoying when Westerners cannot denounce African dictators for reasons of 'racial sensitivity' but then stand in the way of true African democrats who want to get at these hideous tyrants.

Foreign aid in Africa also seems not to be working for Africa. Foreign aid has become a Western instrument of subjugation with a baggage of conditions fitting Western interests. It has become a means to control the local affairs of Africa with threats of withdrawal of such aid where such control is resisted. In fact the West has used foreign aid, diplomatic channels and economic leverages to suit the arms of poor African countries. Hence the West has been responsible in Africa not just for economic disaster but also for maintenance of dictatorships in Africa for its own interests. Its economic interest in Africa has prevented it from condemning black tyranny. George Ayittey has this to say:



In struggle for democracy you lead, follow, or get the way. If it were up to this author, the West could stay out of the political arena in Africa and concentrate on promoting its own Western economic interests. It cannot do 'business as usually' and then hand over the money to African dictators, hoping that they will reform themselves. As we saw ... this is not only futile but worse, it impedes the African struggle for freedom. More significantly, the demonstrations and strikes that forced political changes in Benin, Cape Verde, Sao Tome, and other African countries, were all internally generated, occurring with little or no help from the Western help or Western governments and intellectuals to make up their minds. Africans initiated the action and took to the streets themselves (Ayittey 1992:349).

In view of Western hindrance of progress in Africa, it would be best if Africans make their own case for reform. Internally generated reform usually has a better chance of lasting success. Essentially it is up to Africans to decide which political and economic system are most workable for Africa. As Stuart Fowler wrote:

The simple reality is that there are no philanthropists in the world of international politics and economic relations. There are only hard-headed political realists who, at best, may do some good for others provided it also serves their own interests (Fowler 1992:122).

Any Western involvement is always portrayed solely in terms of humanitarian aid selflessly given to help the victims of poverty and barbarity in Africa. This is the picture that is good for Western ego, but in reality hides the real intention of Western involvement. It also needs to be remembered that neither the IMF nor the World Bank exists for economic justice. They were designed to maintain a stable environment for international economic order that is dominated by the industrialized nation of the West. Even ethical considerations played some part but in reality decisions will always give priority to the interests of the dominant nations that control these institutions.

## **How can Africans Help Themselves? Recommendations and Prospects for the Future**

One of the legacies of colonialism that stands in the way of Africa's liberation and development is a syndrome of dependence. Its most obvious symptoms are intellectual, economic and cultural dependence. With this syndrome of dependence colonialism has left the legacy through which Africa will remain a perpetual slave of the West, and whenever they are confronted with problems will turn to their former masters for solutions. Africa has remained a property of the West. This is evident in African countries belonging to bodies like the Commonwealth which is nothing else but a communion of the former colonial power and her previously colonized. For Africa to be genuinely free and solve her problems, Africa must debunk all Western intellectual dependence and take the initiative to solve her problems. As Stuart Fowler (1995:156) says:

I do not wish to imply that no independent African thought exist. It does, and it is encouraging. However, there is still too much tendency to depend on Western models in African intellectual, social and economic development. Again, this is not to say that these should not be interaction with the Western world in which Africans, learn from the West. However, the key word is interaction, in which a two way traffic of ideas replaces the one way traffic from the Western world to Africa.

Africa for too long has been a consumer of Western ideas even sometimes to her own detriment. Western intellectualism has not helped Africa solve her problems of poverty and underdevelopment. Instead it has plunged her further into poverty. The only solution therefore is in African initiative and independent action. Africa cannot move forward and begin the process, by continuing its intellectual dependence. This has made African leadership to seek outside 'approval' for whatever projects they initiate while they become unpopular with their people, their electorate, and not the West. As Ntuli (1999:186) says:

While Westerns are practically searching for new paradigms to fashion their lives, we as African people continue to be caught in the

West's mirror of fascination. Africa has entered into the era of post-colonialism with its multiple discourse. The issue of identity is of critical importance, since this affects the direction(s) in which Africa must transverse and who determines this direction(s).

An African initiative will enable Africans to take their destiny into their own hands, thus preventing Africa from a place for the attainment of Western interests. Africa cannot afford to continue to serve the West even otherwise after independence. The other thing that Africans can do to solve their own problems is to build strong social structures independent of the political order to check on the power of the political order (Fowler 1995:157). One of the serious problems of post-colonial Africa is that there are no checks and balances. Since independence in the 1960's there has been a systematic curtailment and virtual banishment across Africa of freedom and civil liberties. African freedom has remained a fantasy. Independence did not bring a better life or even greater political and civil liberties. Hence George Ayittey (1992:10) wrote:

Africa has been betrayed. Freedom from colonial rule has evolved into ghastly tyranny, arbitrary rule, denial of civil liberties, brutal suppression of dissent, and the wanton slaughter of peasants. This malicious betrayal drives the deep sense of disillusionment, despair, and anger pervasive among Africans. It is difficult to convey to Westerners a sense of the depth and breadth of this betrayal.

This strong social structure can be the network of community organization, media, professional bodies, churches and other interest groups. Only such organizations independent of the state and its politics can be an effective watchdog against state abuse of power, corruption, human rights violations, and tyranny. Political parties whether opposition or democratic cannot be entrusted with the watchdog mission. Some opposition parties in Africa have become corrupt in the process. In the history of Africa state inhumentalities have failed to provide effective check on how the state exercises its powers, Africa has inherited from colonialism, political structures based on arbitrary, authoritarian exercise of power (Davidson 1992:208). As result, African leaders inherited such structures and continued where their colonial masters

left. Even where regular elections took place, they never changed these political structures. Democracy in Africa did not bring effective political accountability to those who are governed. Democracy in Africa was just an illusion hence Africa needs a second liberation.

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# Before Gandhi: Leo Tolstoy's Non-violent Kingdom of God

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## Review Article

*The Kingdom of God is within You: Christianity not a Mystic Religion but a New Theory of Life.*

By Leo Tolstoy

1893 (Reprint of 1894 translation by Constance Garnett, published in 1894.)

Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1984

Wishing our esteemed colleague, Professor G.C. (Pippin) Oosthuizen, well on his eighty third birthday recalls another congratulation of an octogenarian. On his eightieth Count Leo Tolstoy received good wishes from an Indian barrister, M.K. Gandhi. This auspicious contact between these two great personalities led to a sequence of exchanges that resulted in the older one acknowledging the younger as his heir. There is one more point of correspondence between Oosthuizen and Tolstoy. Both had the vision of a singular truth that they pursued with razor sharp clarity. For Oosthuizen this vision was the realisation that the rise of the African Initiated Churches represented a fundamental challenge to the dominant paradigm of the history of religions. Tolstoy's vision consisted of an insight into the power of non-violence that challenged the rudiments of society. It is with these thoughts that I wish Prof. Oosthuizen all of the best on his eightieth-third birthday and present this review article to him in gratitude for his contribution to my intellectual development.

## **Dangerous Ideas**

In 1884, five years after his Christian conversion, Count Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) published a booklet, *What I believe*. This was soon banned in Russia. Nevertheless it circulated widely in various forms and drew positive and negative responses from all over Europe and America. In the follow-up book, *The Kingdom of God is within you* (1893), Tolstoy responds to the feedback on his initial statements and rounds off his arguments. He had been working on it for two years. This was already some decades after having written *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, both considered to be of the best novels ever to have been written.

Why were his ideas so threatening to the state? The reason for this can be found in the fact that the primary impulse for his conversion was the realisation that the teaching of Jesus, 'Resist not evil' (Matt. 5:39), was seriously meant and implied the refusal to use any kind of force. As a consequence citizens were advised to refuse service in the military, refuse to pay voluntary taxes, refuse to participate in government unless compelled. Starting from his basic statement, Tolstoy discovered how this insight allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the teaching of Jesus, as found especially in the Sermon on the Mount. In a philosophical and theological sense one can observe that his principle of non-violence derived from a secularisation of the Orthodox idea of *theosis*. According to this, a person can attain perfection and participate in the divine nature by practicing self-evident, eternal truths. Of these, non-violence seemed to be the central truth.

This discovery lead him to launch an incisive criticism of the Christian Church and the European State. Both were murderous and hypocritical institutions that 'hypnotized' people to use violence against their own brothers for the sake of perpetuating the privileges of the wealthy and decadent minority over the exploited masses.

His analysis had the semblance of a Marxist, but also Dickensian, division of European society in terms of rich and poor, exploiters and exploited, masters and slaves. This certainly sprung from his experience of the nineteenth century Europe. However, one can easily see how such a simplistic analysis prevented him from adopting democratic concepts, which were available at the time. Perhaps Tolstoy's major deficit is his lack of understanding of the working of democratic values and human rights.

Reading *The Kingdom* presents an uncanny *déjà vu* of conditions that led to the communist revolution three decades later, which for him would have been unthinkable. He still argued from the point of view of a comprehensive *corpus christianum*, as it existed in Russia and Europe. All social arguments were arguments from within Christianity.

Tolstoy realised that the present order in Russia could not last. The future that he foresaw was one in which a human, rational, and truly Christian public opinion would turn the tide against the hypocritical misuse of power. His own analysis fostered the belief that such a public opinion would replace the old system. As eloquently stated in his last chapter, truth would be the ultimate victor.

## Tolstoy and Gandhi

The importance of Tolstoy's conviction for today does not reside in his passion for the poor or his incisive analysis of social conditions. Such sympathies have been refined over and over again over the past 110 years with mounting passion and precision. His importance is rather in his vision of a non-violent world as the next step in the social evolution of humanity. That he had indeed struck a prophetic chord, is attested by the aftermath of his non-violent philosophy. Mohandas Gandhi first read *The Kingdom of God is within you* in South Africa in 1894. This was the one book that had made the deepest impression on him ever. He re-read it in prison in 1906. Correspondence ensued between Gandhi and Tolstoy. In 1908 Gandhi sent Tolstoy a message of congratulation with his eightieth birthday. In 1909 Gandhi read Tolstoy's *Letter to a Hindu* in which he urged non-violent action instead of terrorist activities. In 1910 Gandhi gave the name Tolstoy Farm to the place in India where families of peaceful resisters formed a futuristic commune. Already while in South Africa, Gandhi had begun a Tolstoy Farm near Durban (Gandhi 1927:276ff). In the last months of Tolstoy's life Gandhi sent him a copy of his document *Indian Home Rule* written under Tolstoy's influence. Tolstoy's last long letter written before his death in 1910 was to Gandhi.

The above contacts adequately show that Tolstoy was directly instrumental in laying the spiritual foundation for that *satyagraha* movement of Gandhi. There is thus a movement from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount to Tolstoy's vision of a peaceful world, and from Tolstoy's vision to the



*satyagraha* of Gandhi.

The paradoxical force of forcelessness thus entered the stage of history. Whereas Tolstoy conceived the vision it was Gandhi who converted it into a political force. As Martin Green pointedly stated in his foreword to *The Kingdom*, 'every now and then, when one person induces others literally to believe in soulforce, it enters into bodies and masses and actions—a beam of light passes into solid matter and moves it'<sup>1</sup>. What was for Tolstoy an intellectual concept was translated into political action by Gandhi, his acknowledged heir.

### **Tolstoy's Vision**

In the following sections my investigation will vacillate between three aspects. Firstly I wish to investigate his understanding of the Sermon on the Mount as his primary source. Secondly I intend to examine his application of the Bible to his social reality. Lastly I shall present a moderate criticism of the preceding.

Tolstoy quotes the 1838 declaration of William Lloyd Garrison at length and with his apparent approval. Garrison and colleagues only acknowledged one King and Lawgiver while rejecting the notion that all governments are ordained by God (p. 4). Wars, whether offensive or defensive, were regarded as unlawful. 'We believe that the penal code of the old covenant—an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth—has been abrogated by Jesus Christ, and that under the new covenant the forgiveness instead of punishment of enemies has been enjoined on all his disciples in all cases whatsoever. To extort money from enemies, cast them into prison, exile or execute them, is obviously not to forgive but to take retribution' (p. 5). This position rests on the understanding that the 'sinful dispositions of men can be subdued only by love; that evil can only be exterminated by good; that it is not safe to rely on the strength of an arm to preserve us from harm; that there is great security in being gentle, long-suffering, and abundant in mercy; that it is only the meek who shall inherit the earth; for those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword' (p. 5).

The declaration intends to 'assail iniquity in high places', thus hastening 'the time when the kingdoms of this world will have become the

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<sup>1</sup> *Kingdom* 1894:xi.

Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ' (p. 6). Their only weapon is 'the foolishness of preaching' (as extended through lectures, tracts and petitions). The Messiah's suffering is taken as example. Through non-violent activism they strove to become participants in his suffering (p. 7).

Another American, Adin Ballou, drew up a *Catechism of Non-Resistance*. He vigorously attacked a culture of military honour and duty. His Biblical starting point was also the injunction of Jesus not to resist evil. Thus Jesus forbade people to take an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, bloodshed for bloodshed and life for life (p. 10). The Biblical references for this are noteworthy. According to the *Catechism* three passages served to illustrate the rule of retribution advocated by the men of old (p. 12, NIV):

Gen 9:6 — 'Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.'

Exodus 21:12, 23-25 — 'Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death. ...But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.'

Deut 19:18,21 — 'The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against his brother, then do to him as he intended to do to his brother. ... Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.'

It is understood that Jesus thus forbade what Noah, Moses and the Prophets had instructed. The new rule is: 'Non-resistance is salvation; resistance is ruin' (p. 15). This was also the message of the Quakers and Mennonites since 200 years before Tolstoy. Others in this line of thinking were the Bogomilites, the Paulicians, the Waldenses, Albigenses and the Moravian Brothers. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century a Czech, Helchitsky, argued that a follower of Jesus cannot be a soldier or ruler, he cannot even take part in any government or trade or be a landowner (p. 20). Tolstoy also cites to the same effect a book by one Dymond (*On War*, London 1824), and another one by Daniel Musser (*Non-resistance asserted*, 1864).

In refuting criticism against of position, Tolstoy marvels at the inconclusiveness of the clergy on the issue whether one should obey Christ's

teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (p. 30). He wrote: 'A very great deal was said in connection with my book of having incorrectly interpreted this and other passages of the Gospel, of my being in error in not recognizing the Trinity, the redemption, and the immortality of the soul. A very great deal was said, but not a word about the one thing which for every Christian is the most essential question in life—how to reconcile the duty of forgiveness, meekness, patience, and love for all, neighbours and enemies alike, which are so clearly expressed in the words of our teacher, and in the heart of each of us—how to reconcile this duty with the obligation of using force in war upon men of our own or a foreign people' (p. 31). This is then the central problem that Tolstoy addressed in his book.

### **Replies to Critics**

Tolstoy's position becomes clear in his response to the five major objections lodged against his belief. In his dealing with these questions, the reader can gauge the outline of a 'theology'.

The *first* objection to his vision contended that Christ did not oppose the use of force, that it was permitted, and even required, in both Testaments (p. 32). Tolstoy's reaction to this response was that it mainly came from high-ranking people so intoxicated by power that they distorted everything in the Old and New Testaments that they could, and changed it into a heathen and pagan meaning and then held this forth as the foundation of Christianity. They referred to the punishment of Ananias and Saphira, that of Simon the Sorcerer, etc. to prove their point. 'They quote all the sayings of Christ's which can possibly be interpreted as justification of cruelty: the expulsion from the Temple; 'It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for this city,' etc., etc. According to these people's notions, a Christian government is not in the least bound to be guided by the spirit of peace, forgiveness of injuries, and love for enemies' (pp. 32-33).

The *second* objection came from those who acknowledged that Christ did indeed preach about turning the left cheek, and giving the cloak also. They acknowledge this as the highest moral duty. However, they maintained, the world and all good men would come to ruin if the wicked men in the world were not contained by force. This was also the position of John Chrysostom whose views were already treated by Tolstoy in his 1884 book. To this he replied: 'This argument is ill grounded, because if we allow

ourselves to regard any men as intrinsically wicked men, then in the first place we annul, by so doing, the whole idea of the Christian teaching, according to which we are all equals and brothers, as sons of one Father in heaven<sup>2</sup>. Secondly, it is ill founded, because even if to use force against wicked men had been permitted by God, since it is impossible to find a perfect and unfailing distinction by which one could positively know the wicked from the good, so it would come to all individual men and societies of men mutually regarding each other as wicked men, as is the case now. Thirdly, even if it were possible to distinguish the wicked from the good unfailingly, even then it would be impossible to kill or injure or shut up in prison these wicked men, because there would be no one in a Christian society to carry out such punishment, since every Christian, as a Christian, has been commanded to use no force against the wicked' (p. 33).

The *third* objection makes a distinction between personal and social ethics, maintaining that Christ's non-violent instruction was only intended for the personal sphere. Where evil is directed against one's neighbours, you are to defend your neighbour, if need be by force.

Tolstoy replied to this by pointing out that such a distinction is completely foreign to the teaching of Jesus. 'Such an argument is not only a limitation, but a direct contradiction and negation of the commandment' (p. 34). The use of force then becomes a question of how danger to another is defined. Tolstoy points out that if this is the argument, there is no occasion for which the use of force *cannot* be justified. This was the argument for burning witches and killing aristocrats.

Jesus had put this argument to rest when he ordered Peter in Matt. 26:52 to put away his sword. Peter was, after all, not defending himself, but his Master. In the gospel narrative such a distinction between personal and public well-being is made by Caiaphas. The High Priest saw in Jesus not a danger to himself, but to the whole people – thus his statement that it is better for one man to die than for the whole people to perish.

There is one more argument against this seemingly unselfish justification for violence. How can the defence of others be presented as

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<sup>2</sup> This is a remarkable statement, for it denies the doctrine of the 'total depravity'. In this sense Tolstoy is in line with the Orthodox theology, which on this point departs from Augustine and the Western tradition.

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preventive violence if the violence to others had not yet been committed (p. 35)?

A *fourth* objection states that the demand for non-violence is indeed a valid and important demand of Jesus. However, like all other demands, human beings are not able to keep it at all times. This demand is said not to have more nor less weight than all other commands. Proponents of this view reject the position of 'sectarians' like Tolstoy who regard it as indispensable to Christian life. To this Tolstoy responds that those who wish to be deceived are easily deceived. A direct conscious breach of the command is replaced by a casual breach of it. 'But one need only compare the attitude of the teachers of the Church to this and to other commands which they really do recognize, to be convinced that their attitude to this is completely different from their attitude to other duties' (p. 36). Tolstoy further referred to the command against fornication. The clergy, for instance, would never point out cases in which that command can be broken. Not so with the command of non-resistance. Though not pointing out how any other command can casually be broken, the teachers of the (Russian Orthodox) Church are quick to point out that this command should not be taken too literally. The fact that law courts, prisons, cannons, guns, armies, and wars are under the immediate sanction of the Church, points to the fact that this command is not regarded as being on the same level as the others. This response is merely a way to conceal their not recognizing this command.

The *fifth*, and according to Tolstoy the most usual response is that it is not worth talking about the demand for non-violence. The suggestion is thus created that the issue has already been resolved and does not need any further discussion (p. 37). A certain English preacher Farrar presented an ingenious argument. He propounds that Christ had lain down 'great eternal principles, but do not disturb the bases and revolutionize the institutions of all human society, which themselves rest on divine sanctions as well as inevitable conditions' (p. 39)<sup>3</sup>.

Such then were the objections and strategies Christians put forth to suppress or avoid the contradictions that the challenge to non-violence

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<sup>3</sup> Remarkably, the same argument was much later used to explain why the teachings of Jesus suspend the creation ordinances of God which could be detected through Scripture (the Old Testament) and experience.

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placed them in. Freethinkers did not fare better. There were those who misunderstood the dictum of no resistance to evil as the sum total of what Tolstoy was saying, or otherwise assuming that it also implied the relinquishing of all forms of confrontation with evil (p. 43). Some Russian critics even assumed that Tolstoy had invented the rule of non-resistance to evil personally (p. 43). He found himself being opposed by the two camps in Russia. On the one hand the 'conservatives' opposed the rule because it would prohibit them from suppressing the evil perpetrated by the so-called 'revolutionists'. On the other hand the revolutionists rejected it because it would prohibit them from overthrowing the conservatives and resisting the evil of their oppression. Many freethinkers accused Tolstoy of being so naïve as to think that a simplistic doctrine such as the Sermon on the Mount can have any bearing on advanced societies. Others accused him of ignorance of history, i.e., ignorance of all the vain attempts in the past ages to apply the principles of the Sermon on the Mount to life (45). To all this Tolstoy remarked that none of his critics seriously engaged themselves with the problem of relating Christ's teaching to life. In reality the criticism from all sides agreed on the point that Christ's teaching cannot be accepted, because it required a change of their lives (p. 46).

Tolstoy's ultimate problem was how to resolve disputes 'in which some men consider evil what other men consider good' (p. 46). He states that there is only one of two options: either one needed an absolute criterion of what is evil, or one should not resist evil. What did he think of the democratic solution of leaving the definition of evil to certain (elected) persons or assemblies of persons? To this he responds simply, because there would always be persons who do not recognize this right in the authorised assemblies, this can also not be a solution. He became convinced that the majority simply do not understand Christ's teaching, or the problems that this teaching solves (p. 47).

### **The Perversion of Christianity through Power**

Tolstoy held that through the ages only a small minority of Christians really took Jesus seriously and followed his teaching (pp. 48-84). How did it come that the vast majority became derailed? Tolstoy's explanation made a deep impression on Gandhi, from whom we have the popular saying that he would

have been a Christian if it were not for the Christians. The background of this saying, lies within the pages of Tolstoy's book.

According to Tolstoy, Christ taught in terms of simple, direct truths that could be understood without proof. It is only when the simple truth cannot be accepted by human beings that a process begins by which the truth is increasingly obscured. 'The most difficult subjects can be explained to the most slow-witted man if he has not formed any idea of them already; but the simplest thing cannot be made clear to the most intelligent man if he is firmly persuaded that he knows already, without a shadow of a doubt, what is laid before him' (p. 49). The latter statement provides the reason why complex theological doctrines, supported by supernatural miracles, had to be contrived. One reason for the development of the Church was to provide an organisation that could propagate these. Thus the notion of 'church' is in his opinion inherently anti-Christian. The same applies to the doctrines of the Church. He argues that if a man can be saved by a doctrine of redemption, by sacraments and by prayer, then he does not need good works. It was a case of 'the Sermon on the Mount, *or* the Creed. One cannot believe in both' (p. 75). He also remarks, 'I have often been irritated, though it would be comic if the consequences were not so awful, by observing how men shut one another in a delusion and cannot get out of this magic circle' (p. 77). Tolstoy describes an example of this. At the Optchy Hermitage he observed how a monk refused to give the Gospel in Russian to an old man seeking some religious reading material for his grandson. He rather offered accounts of relics, holidays, miraculous icons, etc. (p. 78).

Tolstoy drew a sharp distinction between the natural and the supernatural. He commented: 'The proposition that we ought not to do unto others as we would not they should do unto us, did not need to be provided by miracles and needed no exercise of faith, because this proposition is in itself convincing and in harmony with man's mind and nature; but the proposition that Christ is God had to be proved by miracles completely beyond our comprehension' (p. 54). The need for miraculous manifestations in order to rationalise what the human mind refuses to understand, is already present in the Bible itself. When the question 'whether to baptize or not the uncircumcised' arose among the disciples and led to the meeting in Jerusalem according to Acts, 'the very fact of this question being raised showed that those who discussed it did not understand the teaching of Christ,

who rejected all outward observances...’ (p. 54). Once the correct principle was established by the meeting, the decision had to be guaranteed by supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit, descending on them as tongues of fire. Though in the narrative order of Acts the meeting only followed after the outpouring of the Spirit, Tolstoy maintains that Acts was written long after the events and that the logical order of events was the reverse of the narrated order (p. 55).

In contrast to the convoluted doctrines of the Church that needed supernatural proof and guarantees furnished by revelations, the teachings of Christ are direct and simple. In this regard Tolstoy introduced the concept of truth. The latter made such an impression on Gandhi that it became his key concept. Gandhi’s autobiography was subtitled as ‘The story of my experiments with truth’<sup>4</sup>. For Tolstoy truth is something that does not require any proof, especially not supernatural proof, but appealed directly to a person. He explained: ‘In the place of all the rules of the old religions, this doctrine [of Christ] sets up only a type of inward perfection, truth and love in the person of Christ, and—as a result of this inward perfection being attained by men—also the outward perfection foretold by the Prophets—and the kingdom of God, when all men will cease to learn to make war, when all shall be taught of God and united in love, and the lion will lay down with the lamb’ (p. 50). From Scripture Tolstoy quotes two passages to illustrate the direct simplicity of truth as professed by Jesus:

John 7:17 — If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.

John 8:46 — ... If I am telling the truth, why don’t you believe me?

By keeping the words of Jesus one shall know whether they are true. Guided by truth, a person can progress toward perfection. No proofs of this doctrine were offered in Scripture except its truth. The only fulfilment of this teaching consists in walking in the chosen way, ‘in getting nearer to inward

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<sup>4</sup> Gandhi, M.K. [1927] 2001. *An autobiography, or The Story of my Experiments with Truth*. Translated from the Gujarati by Mahadev Desai. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House.



perfection in the imitation of Christ, and for outward perfection in the establishment of the kingdom of God.' This is the essence of the teachings about the lost sheep and the prodigal son. Blessedness consists in progress toward perfection (p. 52). This is also the meaning of sayings like, 'Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth,' 'No man having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God,' 'Rejoice not that the spirits are subject to you, but seek rather that your names be written in heaven,' 'Be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect,' 'Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness' (p. 52). Fulfilment is found in uninterrupted progress toward the attainment of ever higher truth (p. 52)<sup>5</sup>.

### **A New Theory of Life**

In line with contemporary theories, Tolstoy proposed a theory of life consistent with his belief system. According to this theory, mankind develops through three stages. First man has an *animal* view of life, then a *pagan* view of life and finally a *divine* view of life. The animal view of life only concerns the individual and his impulses. The pagan view of life embraces society and its rules, but the divine view of life embraces the whole world and extends to the principle and source of life—to God. For Tolstoy, 'these three conceptions of life form the foundation of all the religions that exist or have existed' (p. 89). The 'man' (sic Tolstoy) who holds the divine theory is ready to sacrifice his individual and social welfare out of love. He worships God in deed and truth. Tolstoy sees it as inevitable that society would eventually develop from the second to the third phase. One could either appropriate this truth through spiritual insight, or acquire it over an extended time through trial and error. Yet great philosophers and

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<sup>5</sup> Seemingly two different streams of thought are here combined. On the one hand, we find a reflection of the doctrine that a person can through exercise become ever more holy. On the other hand we find a secularised version of the doctrine in the Orthodox tradition which is called *theosis* and presents the ideal for a Christian. By more and more partaking in divine nature one eventually attains *theosis*. More than any other theory, this provides the explanation for Gandhi's strenuous fasting and asceticism in order to 'see all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face' (Gandhi 1927:420).

men of science—Kant, Strauss, Spencer and Renan—did not understand the significance of Christ's teaching in the advancement of the third stage. They did not understand that his teaching is the institution of 'a new theory of life'. They did not believe that Christ actually had meant what he said in Matt 6:25-34 ('do not worry about food or clothing') or Luke 12:33-34 ('sell all you have') (pp. 93-94).

In this regard two misconceptions arise. The first is that the teaching of Christ consists in rules that are to be followed (which of course they cannot keep and therefore seek to alter or abandon). The second is that the aim of Christianity is to teach humanity to live together as one family and that the love of God can be omitted in this process.

Tolstoy argues that we are so far removed from the Christian ideal that we are not in a position even to judge the truth of this. For pursuing the truth, he suggested the image of crossing a rapid flowing river in a small boat. If you wish to land on the opposite side as close to the place from where you had set out, you better not go with the flow of the river, but row against the stream. You may not land where you aim for, but it will be farther upstream than when you just follow the stream. In the same way a person aiming at divine perfection should go against the urges of his animal and pagan nature (p. 98). True life, according to previous (pagan) religions consisted in following laws; 'according to Christ's teaching it consists in an ever closer approximation to the divine perfection held up before every man, and recognized within himself by every man, in ever closer and closer approach to the perfect fusion of his will in the will of God, that fusion toward which man strives, and the attainment of which would be the destruction of the life we know' (p. 98). One should never be deterred by the loftiness of the ideal. 'To let go the requirements of the ideal means not only to diminish the possibility of perfection, but to make an end of the ideal in itself' (p. 99). Perfection consists in setting free the Son of God, which exists in every man, from the animal, and in bringing him closer to the Father (p. 100).

Elsewhere Tolstoy speaks of the 'endless road to perfection' (p. 101) indicated by the five commandments of the Sermon on the Mount. These are (1) not to desire to do ill to anyone, (2) perfect chastity, even in thought, (3) to take no thought for the future, to live in the present moment, (4) never for any purpose to use force, (5) to love the enemies who hate us. These are

attainable stages on the road to perfection.

Scientific minded people, as well as communists and positivists, seek to reduce the Christian teaching to a rational love that benefits the whole of humanity. For Tolstoy this is merely the second phase, viz., the social/pagan phase of human development. Love on the animal level, is purely directed to the self. On the second level it is directed to family and clan (pp. 102-104). Humanity is a fiction and it is impossible to love it as the pagan view demands, he says—'in reality the possibility of this love is destroyed by the necessity of extending its object indefinitely' (p. 106). Something more is necessary. 'Christian love is the result only of the Christian conception of life, in which the aim of life is to love and serve God' (p. 107).

By statements such as these, it becomes overly clear that Tolstoy is not a humanist or a rationalist. Though rejecting the need for supernatural proof for the Christian view of life, the object of love in the divine sense is not found 'outside self in societies of individuals, nor in the external world, but within self, in the divine self whose essence is that very love, which the animal self is brought to feel the need of through its consciousness of its own perishable nature' (p. 107). This is indeed a mouthful. It is this statement that allows the reader an understanding of the title of the book, pointing to the way in which the Kingdom exists within a person. Whereas social love is something external that demands the suppression of the internal animal love, divine love is also internal, but in a deeper and more real sense than animal love. Living in Christ-like love is living according to your real inner nature. The aim of humanity is to subject the external self to the internal self (cf. p. 107). Love is the essential faculty of the human soul. Man loves not because it is in his interest to love, but because he cannot but love (p. 108). Happiness does not depend on loving this or that object, but on loving the principle of the whole—God, whom he recognizes within himself as love, and therefore he loves all things and all men (p. 108).

## **Coming of the Kingdom**

In extensive arguments over several chapters Tolstoy explored the moral bankruptcy and internal inconsistency of various sectors of modern society. The superficial arguments in favour of war, the immense material and human waste involved, the dehumanisation of society come under scathing attack.

European society, with all its technological advances (Eiffel Tower and the telegraph), is indeed a house built on sand (Matt. 7:24-27, p. 186). If ruling people meant the use of force, it also meant doing to others what you would not like done to unto you. Consequently, ruling means doing wrong (p. 242).

It is inevitable that human conscience will develop and inaugurate a new order. That this is possible is shown by many examples from history. The acceptance of the Christian view of life will emancipate men from the miseries of our pagan life (as formulated in the title of Chapter 9, p. 208). Such emancipation will not only depend on individual improvement, but on the establishment of a public opinion. When this Christian public opinion is put into action, it could happen that the worst elements in society gain the upper hand. The most cruel, the coarsest and least Christian elements could overpower the most gentle, well-disposed and Christian elements and rise by violence to the upper ranks of society (p. 247). This would inaugurate a process in which the seduction of power can become explicitly clear and be criticised. 'Men who are in possession of power and wealth, sometimes even those who have gained for themselves their power and wealth, but more often their heirs, cease to be so eager for power and so cruel in their efforts to obtain it' (p. 248). Under the constant influence of Christian opinion society would be Christianised over a length of time. 'Power selects and attracts the worst elements of society, transforms them, improves and softens them, and returns them to society. Such is the process by means of which Christianity, in spite of the hindrances to human progress resulting from the violence of power, gains more and more hold of men. Christianity penetrates to the consciousness of men, not only in spite of the violence of power, but also by means of it' (p. 249).

For the change to a Christian society it is not necessary for everyone to become a Christian. Only a critical mass of Christian minded people are necessary (p. 251-254). Tolstoy foresees this to happen in the world as a whole. 'To bring under the sway of Christianity all the savage nations outside the pale of the Christian world—all the Zulus (sic!), Mandchoos, and Chinese, whom many regard as savages—and the savages who live in our midst, there is only *one means*. That means is the propagation among these nations of the Christian ideal of society, which can only be realized by a Christian life, Christian actions, and Christian examples. And meanwhile, though this is the *one means* of gaining a hold over the people who have

remained non-Christian, the men of our day set to work in the directly opposite fashion to attain this result' (p. 259). Colonialism is therefore condemned in the strongest terms. When exactly this change in world history will occur, remains uncertain—as Christ has already explained to his disciples (in Matt. 24:3-28, p. 277). In the interim time man has to obey God rather than men (according to Acts 4:19 and 5:29, p. 366).

'The sole meaning of life is to serve humanity by contributing to the establishment of the kingdom of God, which only can be done by the recognition and profession of the truth by every man. 'The kingdom of God cometh not with outward show; neither shall they say, Lo here! Or, Lo there! for behold the kingdom of God is within you' (Luke 17:20,21).'

## **Conclusion**

It would be easy, though futile, to dwell on the theological and political deficiencies of Tolstoy's vision. On about every thought and idea as expressed in *The Kingdom* volumes have been added over the past century. His prediction of a Christian public opinion that would change history foundered on the senseless violence of the World Wars and the Communist revolution in Russia.

Tolstoy also did not develop his ideas into a comprehensive system, nor did he bother to relate them to the theological tradition of the past two millennia. He wished to make a singular point, and that he did most eloquently. If it were only for his influence on Gandhi, his work would be remembered as a landmark in intellectual history. However Tolstoy's work will gain in importance in the future for another reason. The reason is that he raised a moral issue in a fresh and relevant way and applied it relentlessly to society. Tolstoy's statement that the majority of the people of the world have not understood the problem of violence and how Jesus solved it remains as valid as ever. Until we have a new world order in which peaceful means of settling matters have displaced the senseless use of violence and force, this will grow in importance. How to deal with a host of war mongers, rogue states and killers of the innocents in our present world, that is the problem that Tolstoy solved by a very simple and direct injunction: 'Do not resist evil!' Gandhi was honest and brave enough to face this challenge and laid the foundation on which other great men such as Dr. M.L. King jnr. and chief Albert Luthuli could build.

# Keynote Address

## Science versus Indigenous Knowledge: A Conceptual Accident

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This paper was inspired by someone whom I have chosen to call Professor Chapman's engineer. This engineer appears in a quote from Professor Chapman, Dean of Human Sciences at the University of KwaZulu-Natal at the beginning of the program layout of the Ingede Conference<sup>1</sup>. When Prof Chapman's engineer is asked for a difference between African engineering and Western engineering he answers politely, with some impatience to the question, that there is only one kind of engineering. This situation in which we are challenged to produce work that is sensitive to the context that we are working in, while we are universal in techniques or approach used, often creates a split in our consciences. This is a result of an insinuation that in being context specific there are silos of comprehension into which scientific work has to be translated in order to make sense to the local. On the other hand, the fact that we can communicate, is testimony that we continue to understand each other's values, while at the same time we feel stifled by them when imposed on us.

This paper attempts to deal with the ambivalence of our consciences regarding context specificity (in this case African Scholarship) and universal knowledge that is often known to emanate from science. Since science is often associated with the West, the starting point in this paper is: What is Western

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<sup>1</sup> Ingede: African Scholarship Conference held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> to the 25<sup>th</sup> March 2004 at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Musical Recital Hall, Westville Campus

about science? The aim is to unpack our constant reference to knowledge as universal, on the one hand, and our reference to science as Western, on the other hand. The working hypothesis, of course is that the West has its own indigenous knowledge and that when we conflate the West with science, we are committing perpetual alienation of the rest of the world from science, thus defeating our own argument about the universality of knowledge. There is a strong argument to be made for a historical association of Western knowledge with science in recognition of what the West has done for the structured quest of scientific knowledge, but an absolute association that is often made between Western knowledge and science should be challenged. Of course this is a result of a conscious attempt by some writers to associate Western scholars with science. For example Robin Horton's essay published in 1967 and republished in 1993 cast an opposition between 'Western Scientific Knowledge versus African Traditional Thought', even in its title. There was also exaggerated 'othering' of the rest of world cultures cast in terms of their cosmology of existence

The second issue that this presentation would like to forcefully challenge is the association of science with absolute objectivity. Here the argument proposed in this paper is simply that there are two types of rationality (the power to reason): The cause-and-effect reasoning, upon which most of natural sciences are based; and consciousness reasoning, or what I would like to call the persona-centred reasoning, from which various social values are articulated and which constitutes the difference between our successful application of positivism and what escapes it. It is often the conflation of these two forms of rationality that results in the conflation of indigeneity and science, and the wrong association of Western indigeneity and science.

The association between cause-and-effect and persona-centred reasoning is responsible for camouflaging power issues that are associated with knowledge generation. These forms of reasoning do not carry the same level of objectivity. Fukuyama (1992), for example, in his sincere belief in the absolute objectivity of science best illustrates the danger of the conflation of persona-centred reasoning with cause-and-effect objectivity. He outlines how humans are destined for the same 'objective' fate the principles of which, he claims, could be discerned from natural science. His argument, of course, is the inevitability of capitalism. The telling title of his book is *The End of*

Modern natural science is a useful starting point because it is the only important social activity that by common consensus is both cumulative and directional, even if its ultimate impact on human happiness is ambiguous (Fukuyama 1992: xiv).

... modern natural science establishes a uniform horizon of economic production possibilities. Technology makes possible the limitless accumulation of wealth, and thus the satisfaction of an ever-expanding set of human desires. This process guarantees an increasing homogenization of all human societies, regardless of their historical origins or cultural inheritances. All countries undergoing economic modernization must increasingly resemble one another: they must unify nationally on the basis of a centralized state, urbanize, replace traditional forms of social organization like tribe, sect and family with economically rational ones based on function and efficiency, and provide for universal education of their citizens. Such societies have become increasingly linked with one another through global markets and the spread of universal consumer culture. Moreover, the logic of modern natural science would seem to dictate a universal evolution in the direction of capitalism (Fukuyama 1992: xiv-xv).

In reading such universalized convictions, the feeling of suffocation by an imposition of other people's values can be real. One cannot help but be struck by the assumptions and the matter-of-fact manner that informs this passage. While, for example, technology and education are such desirable acquisitions for all societies, it is striking how these are portrayed here as having the potency of steering social evolution towards one destiny – economic (post)modernism. It is also inferable that the social organizational units 'based on function and efficiency' that must replace 'family', 'sect', etc. will prioritize the individual as the main agency of social operation. 'Global markets' and 'universal consumer culture' are the highlighted ingredients in the homogenization of humanity. The unilineal, albeit western-centred direction of human progression, and the objectivity of the process are taken for granted. This will all be the result of the triumph of scientific principles, even



in social life, over the irrational, less calculated forms of 'communitying'. How much of all this is inevitable and scientific, and how much of it are simply the values of Western indigenous knowledge, is not even posed for pondering. Fukuyama wants to argue that all of it is scientific and it is a nonnegotiable journey and destiny of humankind.

There is an urgent need for us to unpack what we mean by science, what we mean by that it is objective, and what its associations are with our value schemes or choices of action – so that it is clear what is inevitable and what is guided by our values. The fact that we regard a system of knowledge as both universal and Western should give us clues to the unavoidable entanglement of knowledge in our value schemes. If we were to liberate social science, especially from its association with the West, we would simultaneously be liberating indigenous knowledge from entrapment in uniqueness, mysticism, and stagnation into which it is locked in the minds of most people. This is more urgent to deal with in the social sciences as the issue of the relationship between rationality and value creates tension between the analyst and the subjects. Let me tease out this relationship briefly.

Rationality is our main tool to analyze and decipher knowledge; it is a power 'to reason' 'to disaggregate and reconstitute' according to 'certain principles' of association and dissociation. To reason is an act of attributing value or judgment in a particular act. To reason can therefore not stand alone: it is completed by the values that make a judgment on why action is or should be taken. If rationality is a distinctively human attribute, then judgment or morality that comes with reason is a distinctively human obligation. To highlight this let us ask the question: Is abstract human action possible? There are two contexts that I know of in which abstract human action is observed: in certain forms of madness and infant movement or gestures. In both these situations action is said not to be rational. There may be debates about whether abstract human action is possible, but there is no debate about that it is undesirable.

It seems that judgment, value, or to be categorical about it, morality is a requirement of rationality which is a characteristic of being human. This merger between the power to reason and morality is called *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* is recognition of the fact that reason and morality cannot exist without one another. Thus when people act in a manner that is cruel or harmful to others their actions are often described as lacking *ubuntu* or as informed by *ubulwane*

(animalhood). In other words, they relegate themselves from deserving to be seen as humans. Once an act fails to meet the fair judgment of an average human, it brings into doubt the human status of an actor. Thus in *ubuntu* is contained the limits of objectivity and the limits of subjectivity. In other words, one may not act irrationally and one may not act in a manner that only suits oneself as values are communally negotiated. This, I propose, goes to the heart of our problematique. Since rationality is detachable from objectivity (i.e. since pure objectivity would preclude value), science is an ideal that we can only approach from various points of indigeneity of our perspectives. There is no pure science; especially there is not pure social science.

In an attempt to pull out concretely the suggestions tabled in this paper let me dispel a couple of fallacies. Firstly, although many people often talk about 'Western science', most often assume science to be Western. Both these are fallacies, but more especially the latter. While the institutionalization of the pursuit of knowledge is Western in origin, science must be regarded as the potential of the human mind to strive for universal principles in a certain field. Thus to talk of Western engineering and African engineering is to talk of *converging* forms of scholarship – the degree of the scientific convergence from both of these is determined in the identification and consensus on universal qualities in both of them. This is not a proposition of a political compromise with regard to issues of intellectual property, nor is it a relativist projection of knowledge in the way of a postmodernist tradition. It is a deconstruction of intellectual inequality that was historically constituted in a way that emphasizes a common human capacity towards intellectual streamlining in the context of varied socio-cultural expertise.

Secondly, the objectivity of science is often exaggerated. When it comes to objectivity there is a continuum, the extreme edges of which are quite dangerous to reach. For me science is the universality of operative principles that we often aspire to reach but can never reach absolutely and completely. Perhaps the lack of objectivity that is often levied hurriedly towards the religious realms of cultures must be reconsidered. Ntuli (2002) argues that:

To separate one's self from the phenomenal world is to objectify that world. This is what an African worldview rejects. It perceives human beings and the phenomenal world as extensions of each other. And it

is through this that a harmonious balance between humans and nature is maintained (Ntuli 2002: 56).

Thus, I think we have to realize that the continuum stretches from cause-and-effect rationality, to persona-centred rationality, to an engagement with spirits for those gifted that way. One can only graduate in this continuum; the fallacy often committed is that one at the extreme end does not understand the one at the other end. This creates false silos of comprehension.

Thirdly, science versus Indigenous knowledge is a false opposition – all knowledge has indigenous origins and can only strive for objectivity and universal application. Science constitutes agreed upon variables and units. This works well for empirical investigations, although it is subjected to the power to decide and choice of variables. In the case of social science the variables and values become too intertwined and the units become a means to dictate value. Hence rights are often seen to be targeted to individuals; and families and communities must align themselves accordingly – such that communality of land, for example, in rural areas is such a contentious issue.

In Africa, there is little in the name of policy or official practice that emanates from the collective nature of social relations that is often observed in this continent. For example, while the Bills of Human Rights that African governments have created and adopted are good ethical documents, one wonders why the Bills of Human Responsibility have not been adopted in line with the obligations of *ubuntu*. To challenge the opposition of science and indigenous knowledge will interrogate the tendency of posing indigenous knowledge in opposition to change. In our opposition of science and indigenous knowledge we are responsible for creating authoritative spheres of stagnation. Traditional institutions must be challenged for stagnation. For example why should critiquing the appropriateness of *ilobolo* be cast as an imposition of Western feminism on African culture when in fact the context in which this practice takes place has changed.

In conclusion, while it is possible to talk about this at an abstract level of thought, there are real challenges on the ground pertaining, for example, to how official development and professional practice have ignored people's perspectives of their problems and solutions, merely out of assuming the scientific and analytical superiority of its own discourses. The suggestion that the scientific potential is universal is a suggestion that cross-cultural

communication does exist and must not be doubted. Cross-cultural values and capabilities, with specific geographic and historic justifications, must be respected as long as they do not compromise our cross-cutting human values. The latter must challenge the former where contradictions are perceived, but science must not override culture unnecessarily. The difficult trick is to identify the limits of objectivity and the limits of subjectivity i.e. to acknowledge that we can negotiate values and come up with our own standards of excellence. Just as much as I am suggesting a co-ownership of science, the co-ownership of values is possible – though not all values will be shared completely. Part of the challenge is knowing when to pull back from posing judgment.

Scholarship is a halfway mark between indigenous perspective and science. It is an attempt to pinpoint exactly what has potential to be scientific in what starts out as indigenous knowledge or is an indigenous, context-influenced quest for knowledge. Thus different scholarships – African, Western, and local scholarships (American, British Kenyan, South African, etc.) – must exist without any apologies.

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## *Alternation*

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Contributors must submit *one computer-generated and three double-spaced printed copies* of the manuscript. The computer-generated copy may be on double density floppy or stiffie in Word Perfect 5-6, Word for Windows 6 or ASCII. If accepted for publication, 10 original off-print copies of the article will be returned to the author.

Manuscripts should range between 5000-8000 and bookreviews between 500-1000 words. However, longer articles may be considered for publication.

Attach a cover page to one manuscript containing the following information: Author's full name, address, e-mail address, position, department, university/ institution, telephone/fax numbers, a list of previous publications and a written statement that the manuscript has not been submitted to another journal for publication.

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