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REVIEW ARTICLE

Research on Media, Religion and Culture in Africa: Current Trends and Debates

By Walter C. Ihejirika

Abstract

Before the year 2000, Africa was conspicuously absent in bibliographic reviews in the field of media, religion and culture. Within the past decade, however, many African and international scholars have focused more attention on the cultural interface between religion and the media on the continent. This article attempts to sketch a general overview of this research: a presentation of the scholars involved in the field of religion and media in Africa; their major findings; the theoretical grounds for the study of media and religion within the African landscape; and a road map for future areas of study of the interface between media, religion and culture in Africa. The present work also intends to initiate a clearinghouse for researchers in this field within Africa, especially for the younger scholars just entering the field.

Key words: media, religion, culture, cultural convergence, Pentecostalism, historical churches, Catholic media, communalism, new information and communication technology, posters, Islamic media, cultural and religious hegemony, media access, televangelism.

1. Introduction:

Africa has been conspicuously absent in the bibliographic essays and overviews of research in the field of media, religion and culture.

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Rosalind Hackett has attributed this lack of interest in how new religious movements use media to the absence of interchange between African media researchers and the study of African religions. She wrote in 1998: "While media studies do exist in/on Africa... they pay little or no attention to religion, and scholars of religion in Africa for their part seem to have a blind spot for popular culture, let alone things electronic..." (Hackett, 1998, p. 259).

1.1 The beginnings of an African perspective

In the past ten or fifteen years, studies of African religion have become much more aware that the Pentecostal and other religious movements are focused on the use of radio and television. There is also awareness that the recent developments of African cultures and politics are very much influenced by religion in media. Specifically, the *interface* between media, religion and culture in Africa is increasingly an important research interest among both African and international scholars. The last three meetings of the International Conference on Media, Religion and Culture, held in Louisville, Kentucky, Sigtuna, Sweden and Sao Paulo, Brazil have included at least two panel sessions devoted to themes from Africa. Also, recent international overviews of the field have given generous mention of contributions from Africa (White, 2007). One of the most important indicators of the rapid expansion of research in this field in Africa has been the International Conference on New Media and Religious Transformations in Africa held in Abuja, Nigeria in July 2008. The conference brought together over one hundred scholars from within and outside Africa. In my response to Stewart Hoover's keynote presentation at the conference, I felt that the following observations represented my colleagues' views:

For a long time, research in the field of media and religion have been dominated by Western issues and concerns and categories deriving thereof have been used as measuring yardsticks for the field.... It is true that in the past decade, many African and non-African scholars have started to present the African perspective in the study of media and religion, but the present conference is a kind of milestone: it is the first major international conference which addresses this African perspective. Formerly, there have been individual research and individual views presented here and there, but for the first time, African and non-African scholars involved in the field have gathered together under one roof.... In years to come, historians of this field of study will look back and see this conference as one of the major events that raised it to higher levels (Ihejirika, 2008a, p. 4).

This overview takes as a starting point the Abuja conference in 2008 and moves backward to chart the development of research in Africa which has been concerned with media, religion and culture. The review follows a historical, thematic, methodological and biographical framework, with the hope that in this way it will be possible to include all the important publications involved and create a clearinghouse for the views expressed. This review also attempts to discover among major scholars the points of consensus about the directions the field might profitably take and the beginnings of a coherent theoretical base for future research on media and religion in Africa.

1.2 Delimiting our terrain: The research field - media, religion and culture

Media studies and religious studies as different fields of inquiry have a long history (White, 2000). Much more recent is the effort to bring together scholars in both fields, to bridge the “wide cultural gap of misunderstanding” (Hoover, 1997; Clark and Hoover, 1997; Clark, 2004) which has separated them and assuage the mutual suspicion harboured in both camps. This divide derived from the sociological foundations of early media studies which did not see religion as playing a significant role in building national societies. Religious leaders, for their part, often saw the mass media as trivialising and corrupting religious beliefs and practices.

The study of religious newspapers, book publishing, radio and television has steadily increased over the past one hundred years. However, the field of study under title “Media, Religion and Culture” has its beginnings only in the 1980s. As many have noted, the introduction of the culturalist perspective reformulated the fundamental question in the study of media and religion (White 1997, 2004, 2007).

The focus of inquiry in the earlier studies of media audiences (Parker, Barry and Smythe, 1955) used the transmission model of media analysis which sees the media as the carrier of meaning from the message sender in order to recreate the meaning in the mind of the receiver. The transmission model originated in the 1930s and 1940s when broadcasters were anxious to convince potential advertisers and political leaders that radio could be an effective and useful tool.

The culturalist perspective, in contrast, suggests that audience analysis must ask what *meanings* are created in the context of mediation. All actors in the process of mediation, from the authors of messages to the audiences that are interpreting messages in the light of

their own understandings and interests, are creating meanings (Alley and Newcomb, 1983). The culturalist approach in the study of media and religion asks how religious meanings, beliefs and sentiments are created in the production and use of the media.

This is not just the quest of the McLuhan tradition that was concerned with how the technology of print changed and limited the sense impact to eyes, but, rather, how communities and cultures emerge around media. It is obvious, for example, that in the evangelical tradition, so open to the media, even the theology of that tradition has changed with the incorporation of television technology (Hoover, 1988, pp. 229-246). One can also see how television has transformed an institution such as the papacy (Melady, 1999).

The culturalist emphasis has been particularly important in the African context where so much of the study of religion has been carried out by cultural anthropologists, philosophers of religion and in humanistic studies of literature and politics. The introduction of the cultural studies approach to media and communication has prepared the ground for the emergence of this interdisciplinary collaboration between media scholars, scholars of religion and social and cultural anthropologists.

There have been a number of excellent accounts of how the culturalist perspective emerged in the study of media and religion, especially those of Clark and Hoover (1997), Hoover (2006) and David Morgan (2008), but I would point out the following intellectual foundations as important.

(1) By far the most important influence in the culturalist perspective has been evolution of the cultural studies tradition, especially that of British cultural studies going back to Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson, Richard Hoggart and the work of the group of Stuart Hall in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham (CCCS). The CCCS used anthropological methods such as life stories, direct observation of youth cultures, and interviews regarding the meaning of popular genres, for example, soap operas, to see how the popular classes constructed a vibrant alternative, empowering culture. An American wing of cultural studies was set in motion by James Carey, Michael Real, Joli Jensen and James Lull creating a school of analysis of popular culture in the US. In Latin America J. Martin-Barbero drew on the urban anthropology research in that continent to show how the Latin American *telenovela* and different forms of music provide the

contexts in which Latin Americans have constructed their distinctive cultural identity (Martin-Barbero, 1993).

(2) As Morgan notes (2008, p. 5), The Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture (CSCC) in London, established for research on religious communication, played an important role in translating this cultural studies approach to the study of media and religion. For the the CSCC the important questions were how audiences of televangelists were creating cultural meanings in their use of these media or whether religious broadcasters were influential in fostering a new political culture.

(3) In the background an influence has been the cross-fertilisation of narrative theology (Shea, 1981), the life-history approach to moral development (Kohlberg, 1981, 1984), concepts of faith as evolving through stages (Fowler, 1981), the analysis of media reception as an interaction between media myth and narrative (Silverstone, 1981), and personal life histories (Fiske, 1987). Also, more participatory, communitarian theologies of communication focused greater attention on the audience construction of meaning in media use.

(4) Of major importance is the emergence of a new sociology of religion in the 1970s and 1980s challenging the earlier theories which had signalled the inevitable progress of secularisation and marginalisation of religion from the public sphere. This shift showed that religiosity could not be defined simply by the imposition of institutional religious affiliation (Beckford & Luckman, 1989; Beckford, 1989). Following Giddens' emphasis on identity construction as a characteristic of late modernity, it was evident that religious experience was shifting from denominational belonging to people's building their own belief systems taking symbols from a variety of religious traditions, defining religious people as "seekers" (Roof & McKinney, 1987; Roof, 1999).

(5) The major shift, however, was the movement from administrative research commissioned either by religious organisations to verify media effects to the analysis of the social forces which brought the televangelists to importance. Stewart Hoover's book, *Mass media religion: The social sources of the electronic church*, published in 1988, heralded this major shift. In *Mass media religion*, using the televangelist, Pat Robertson as a case, Hoover first examined at the societal level the socio-political changes and transformations in religious culture during the 1960s and 1970s that carried Robertson's Christian Broadcasting

Network to prominence. Then, using the life-history ethnographic methods of sociologists of religion such as Robert Bellah, Hoover followed the religious life histories and crises in life meaning in a sample of the devoted followers of Robertson's *700 Club*. Hoover was able to show the role of the televangelists use of television culture in shaping the new evangelistic, Pentecostal religious movements not only in the US but throughout the world. The televangelists were both a product of the cultural changes of late modernity but also one of the suppliers of symbols that people could use to define their own personal identities in this new socio-cultural context. The focus was not so much on the media but on the role of media in the socio-religious movements such as those of the Pentecostals that had a different cultural face in different parts of the world. In the US the Pentecostals and their use of media were part of a process in that cultural history—the typical practical social improvement focus of US religion—but, in Latin America and Africa, Pentecostals and Pentecostal media could be part of a very different cultural history. Central in the perspective Hoover introduced is the interface between religion and media and then the interface between religion and personal life meaning, religion and national cultural identities and political power. In Africa, as we shall see, the Pentecostal use of media—for example, in their use of popular film—is part of the convergence with indigenous religious cultures and part of the socio-political struggles in this continent.

(6) In the last ten years, centres for the study of media, religion and culture have emerged in different parts of the United States, in many European countries, in Latin America and now in Africa. Every two years more than three hundred people doing research in these areas come together in the bi-annual meetings of the International Conference for Media, Religion and Culture. This has introduced research on virtually every aspect of media and religion, and brought advances in our understanding of the relation of religious media with other aspects of our cultures..

This growth of research and the shifts in thinking have brought scholars of media and religion to recognise that an *interdisciplinary* effort is needed if they wish to chart the varied configuration of the present socio-cultural reality. Such realities include the rise of televangelism in America and many other parts of the world, as well as the emergence of varied types of Islam movements.

Gradually, the interdisciplinary effort crystallised into the network of scholars who work within the defined perimeters of media, religion and

culture. Without abandoning their original fields of specialisation in either communication, sociological, anthropological or religious studies, they were able to carve out a new field of interest which focuses on topics within the intersection of media and religion in given cultural contexts. The field thus a triangulation of theories of these three fields of study, which views them as an interrelated web within society. It is a field that seeks to address the simpler, two-sided relationship between religion and media, media and culture, and culture and religion (Hoover & Lundby, 1997, p. 3). The distinctive characteristic of research in this field is that it transcends the notion that religion and media constitute separate or equivalent and competing social categories and allows for the possibility of the interaction of the two within contemporary culture.

The present review is concerned with research done within and about the African continent; that is, research that has tried to explore the interface between media, religion and culture in Africa. This paper attempts to move beyond the study of African religion and religious movements in Africa and to sort out the religious implications of media use in the African culture. Of special interest is how the new means of communication are reshaping the contours of religious life and praxis in the African continent, especially the role of the Pentecostal media. Our major focus will be on the electronic media, that is, radio, television and the new information and communication technologies such as the Internet. Greater emphasis is given to those who have exhibited consistent, long-term interest in this field.

1.3 A Historical Overview of the Study of Media, Religion and Culture in Africa

The history of African research in this field of study has spanned a period of two decades. Using the 2008 Abuja International Conference as our terminus, we can delineate two phases in the history of scholarship of media, religion and culture in Africa: the early period beginning from 1987 and ending with the 1998 special edition on African Pentecostalism in the *Journal for the Study of Religion in Africa*; and the second period beginning from 1999 and ending with the 2008 Abuja International Conference on New Media and Religious Transformations in Africa.

Early Period (1987-1998)

The early period began around the late 1980s when researchers such as Andrew and Harriet Lyons in Nigeria did some of the first

studies of religion in the media in Benin City (Lyons & Lyons, 1987).

Three features characterised this period:

Firstly, there was a predominance of scholars who studied religion and media from the perspective of cultural or social anthropology and religious studies, rather than media theory. Scholars such as the Lyons, (1987, 1991), Birgit Meyer (1995, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2002a, 2002b), van Dijk (1995, 1997), Brian Larkin (1997a, 1997b), and Karin Barber (1997) were social anthropologists. Others like Rosalind Hackett (1991a, 1991b, 1995, 1998) specialised in religious studies, and Ruth Marshall-Fratani (1991, 1992, 1993, 1995, 1998) from political science. Only Arsten and Lundby (1993) were media scholars. In this period, most of the writings of these scholars started to shift focus from either their religious or anthropological field and began to explore the religious and cultural implications of different media practices in the continent. It could be said then that scholars of religious studies and anthropology were the ones who started the trend of research to examine the interconnectivity between media, religion and culture in Africa.

The second feature of this early period was the dominance of non-African scholars. None of the scholars mentioned above is of African origin. In this period, the majority of the Africans who would later become involved in building this field were in doctoral studies or just finishing their doctoral work.

Thirdly, the majority of the studies conducted were done in western or southern African countries. Within these two regions, the countries most prominent were Nigeria (Lyons & Lyons, 1987, 1991; Hackett, 1998; Marshall-Fratani, 1993, 1998), Ghana (Meyer, 1998), South Africa and Zimbabwe (Arsten and Lundby, 1993).

The first period ended in 1998, when the *Journal for the Study of Religion in Africa* published a special edition dedicated to African Pentecostalism. In his editorial comment, David Maxwell (1998a, p. 255) noted *inter-alia*: "What is new about African Pentecostalism is its recent growth, enormous vitality and its appropriation of the electronic media to the point that this has almost become part of Pentecostal self-definition".

A prominent theme in the four papers by Rosalind Hackett (1998), Ruth Marshall-Fratani, (1998), Birgit Meyer (1998) and David Maxwell (1998b) was the cultural and social consequences of the Pentecostal appropriation of the electronic media. Hackett (1998) makes the Pentecostal reliance on mass media technologies in Nigeria and Ghana the focus of her paper. She argued that through this appro-

priation, they have transformed the meaning of religious practice in the two countries. Marshall-Fratani (1998) draws out the political significance of the transnational character and mediation of the Pentecostal message, exploring how the global traffic in religious media enables Nigerian Pentecostals to take up religious identities which transcend or even reject the nation-state. Birgit Meyer (1998) makes a similar point about the Pentecostal rejection of neo-patrimonial politics in the Ghanaian political context. David Maxwell (1998b) explored Pentecostalism's relations with modernity (or modernities), and showed how Zimbabwean Pentecostals have fashioned their own version of the prosperity gospel to help them make the best of rapid social change.

Coming of Age (1999 – 2008)

The millennium marked the beginning of the second era of the history of research in media, religion and culture in Africa. Especially characteristic of this period is the involvement of many new scholars, notably those of African origin; for example, Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, Asonzeh Ukah, Walter Ihejirika, Dominica Dipio (gender and African film), and Abdoulaye Niang.

Also important was an exponential increase in the related literature published in journals or edited books and greater participation of Africans in international conferences on media religion such as the biannual International Conference on Media, Religion and Culture. For example, Matthew Ojo, Walter Ihejirika, Joseph Faniran, and Columbanus Udofia were participants in the Third Conference held in Edinburgh Scotland in 1999; Ihejirika, Faniran, and Asamoah-Gyadu participated and presented papers at the Fourth Conference held in Louisville Kentucky, USA in 2004. There were two panel sessions dedicated to African themes, with papers by Ihejirika, Asonzeh Ukah and Asamoah-Gyadu at the Fifth Conference held in Sigtuna Sweden 2006; and Asonzeh Ukah and Ihejirika were plenary paper presenters at the Sixth Conference held in Sao Paulo Brazil, 2008.

Also important was the amplification of the areas of research, in terms of themes and local contexts. Unlike in the first period, where reports focused on four or five countries and the Christian religion, in this period, field research was being done in many more African countries, (Dorier-Aprill, 2001; Englund, 2001; Laurent, 2001; Mayrargue, 2001) and on other religious groups, especially Islam. Especially noteworthy are the publications of Mohammed Haron (2002, 2004) and Abduolaye Niang (2006) dealing with Islamic media.

A key moment was the International Conference on New Media and Religious Transformations in Africa held in Abuja, Nigeria, July 10-12 2008. This event brought together for the first time the major scholars of Africa in this field and helped to define many of the important themes of research. The conference was organised by Prof. Rosalind Hackett, a founding scholar of religious studies in Africa, and Dr. Ben Soares, member of the African Studies Centre at Leiden and hosted by the Centre for the Study of African Culture and Communication in Port Harcourt. The conference organisers aimed to examine critically Africa's rapidly evolving religious media scene, especially the challenges of balancing freedom of religious expression in Africa's fast-growing media sector. The following questions guided the conference deliberations:

- How is Africa's religious landscape being changed by the new religious media?
- How are the modern media generating new religious communities and publics?
- How might these new publics challenge or complement pre-existing religious actors and organisations?
- In what ways are newer religious organisations, such as the Pentecostals, using the media to advance political and economic agendas?
- Are we witnessing the development of new forms of religious activism and proselytism in Africa today due to the upsurge in media growth and diversification?
- Which religious groups benefit most or least from Africa's more liberalised and mass-mediatised public spheres?
- How have traditional forms of communication or notions of power been incorporated into the new religious media?
- What is the impact of the new religious media on popular culture and the entertainment industry, and vice versa?
- Can we now talk about manifestations of religion *as* media, and media *as* religion?
- How might the conventional divisions and differences between state-run and independent media be reconfigured by new religious media?

The sixty or more papers presented at the conference explored these questions from different perspectives. In many ways the conference

defined much of the research agenda for the study of media, religion and culture in Africa.

1.2 Major Themes of the Research Field

In the last ten years, research on media and religion in Africa has entered into a great many new problems and opened new questions for study. A synthesis reveals the following as the major research themes treated by scholars in the field of media, religion and culture in Africa, listed according to their numbering of sections in this article

- (2) The Pentecostal upsurge and their appropriation of the mass media;**
- (3) Media use by the historical Christian denominations**
- (4) Muslim media and communication in African traditional religion**
- (5) African research in media, religion and culture: Methodological and theoretical groundings.**
- (6) Areas for further research and policy action.**

2. African Pentecostals and the Media

The rapid growth of Pentecostalism in the continent and its appropriation of the mass media form the major recurring theme in this research field. From different perspectives, scholars have examined the varying ways that Pentecostal movements are using the media. (Gifford, 1987, 1993, 1994, 2001, 2004; Hackett, 1986, 1987, 1990, 1998; Meyer 1998, 2001, 2002a, 2002b; Marshall-Fratani, 1998, 2001; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2008; Ukah, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2008; Ihejirika 1998, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006a, 2008d).

A first step in the understanding of the Pentecostal media is a clarification of the concept of Pentecostalism as this is developing in Africa.

2.1. African Modern Pentecostalism – Genealogy and Characteristics

In the literature, it is clear that the group which is tagged “Pentecostal” is distinct both from classical mission Pentecostalism as well as the earlier African Independent Churches (AIC). The group under review is that which have been called “New Wave Pentecostalism” or African modern Pentecostalism. They are sometimes given the collective label – ‘Pentecostals’ (Marshall-Fratani, 1998; Ihejirika, 2005, 2006a; Ukah, 2008a, 2008b; Kalu, 2008); while at other times they are tagged “Charismatics” (Ojo, 1988, Asamoah-Gyadu, 2004) or “Revival” (Dorier-Aprill, 2001).

There is a gradual tendency among scholars to use the conjoined tag ‘Charismatic/Pentecostal (Hackett 1998), charismatic-Pentecostal, (De Witte, 2005b), Pentecostal/charismatic (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2004) or Pentecostal/Charismatic (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005a, 2005b). The difficulty of achieving a neat classification of this type of religious movement is due to the diverse nature of its manifestation in the continent. One result is that terms and designations associated with Pentecostalism have come to mean different things in different contexts. (van Dijk 1992a, p. 159; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005c, p. 1). As a result of this diversity, some have suggested that we should speak of “pentecostalisms” (Kalu, 2008).

In this paper, the term “Pentecostals” is preferred as the designation for these indigenously founded groups for two reasons: Firstly, the stress in the literature is mostly on the charismatic and revivalists groups which have their roots in classical Protestantism. It thus excludes charismatic movements within the mainline churches, especially

in the Catholic Church (See Omenyo, 2002). Secondly, most of the groups treated in the literature are indigenously founded. Though they may have some link with the classical Western Pentecostalism and evangelicalism, they are quite distinct from them in terms of newness, vibrancy and visibility.

The term “Modern African Pentecostalism” is thus used to designate the indigenous Protestant Christian denominations which emphasise salvation by faith in the atoning death of Jesus Christ through personal conversion, the authority of Scripture in matters of faith and Christian practice, and clear manifestation of the signs of the Spirit’s radical transforming power, especially the Pentecostal signs of faith healing, and speaking in tongues. The Pentecostals insist that it is not enough just to be converted, but that believers should experience a dramatic outpouring of the Holy Spirit and live holy lives, by being “born again.” (Ihejirika, 2006a, p. 2; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005c. p. 12)

Kwabena Asamoah Gyadu (2004, p. 65) has identified two factors which distinguish these new churches from the established classical Pentecostal denominations like the Assemblies of God: First, they are historically younger and, second, they have remained autochthonous founder-led congregations so that the personal charisma and psychology of the leader continues to shape their orientation.

The late Professor Ogbu Kalu’s book, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (2008), presents what could be considered the most recent and comprehensive view of the Pentecostal phenomenon in the continent. This book, with additional references from other pertinent scholars, provides a brief genealogy/history and the general characteristics of this movement.

There is a clear difference between African scholars and their Western counterparts as regards the origin of this form of Christianity. While Western scholars like Paul Gifford, Rijk van Dijk, Birgit Meyer and David Maxwell link the emergence of this new wave Pentecostalism to the wind of globalisation blowing into the continent from outside, Ogbu Kalu and Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu hold that the forces that brought these groups into existence emerged internally. Kalu notes: “...it must be stressed that the events in Africa had little to do with what happened in the United States from the 1960s onward” (2008, p. 99).

Kalu credits young Africans as the catalysts that have created the contemporary forms of Pentecostalism in the continent. According to

him, African modern Pentecostalism owes its roots to idealistic young reforming preachers from secondary schools and universities.

Most parts of Africa witnessed the sudden surge of young puritan preachers in the 1970s, who signified a new cycle of revivalism that swept through the continent in the post-independence period, bringing with them a religious tradition whose face changed drastically in every decade and whose full import is still in the making.... (2008, p. 88).

Cyril Okorochoa has also reached conclusions similar to Kalu. Tracing the origin of this new movement, whose members he called the third-generation Christians, in south-eastern Nigeria, Okorochoa notes:

These are the “radical evangelicals”. Most of these Christians and the evangelical groups they lead have their roots in the “Evangelical Revival” which was born during the Biafran War. The radical evangelical Christianity of the modern Nigerian “Scripture Union Movement” is an overspill of that “revival”. Reacting against what they see as the syncretism of the second generation Christians, and rejecting the eclecticism of “urban man”.... These young people seek to recover the fervour and power of the first-generation converts, through a radical biblical literalism... though they generally refuse to be grouped together with Independent (Aladura-type) Churches whom they regard as extreme indigenisers at best or a form of “Christianised pagans” at worst. They insist on purity of faith and conduct: combining the moral austerity of early Christian pietism with the millennialism and exuberance of modern Pentecostalism, but seeking to anchor all this in a strict biblicism which reminds the observer of the European pre-reformation humanists (Okorochoa, 1987, p. 74).

This youthful upsurge was like a charismatic wind that blew through the African continent in the post-independence period. In each country, certain socio-economic and political factors determined the pattern of the early concerns. But the various strands connected across national boundaries. The movement emerged from young people groomed in the missionary churches, student-led charismatic movements in many African countries within the same period.

Attesting to the youthful origin of the movement, David Maxwell (2002) argued that these movements embody systematic attempts by young men, women, and youth to restructure social relations in the face of the intransigence of male elders, and that they represent the continuing search of the wider community for healing and liberation. The story of this youthful charismatic movement was similar in various parts of the continent - from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Nigeria, Ghana,

Malawi and Zimbabwe. Examples from west, east and southern Africa were used by Kalu to illustrate the similarities of the youthful origins of African modern Pentecostalism.

Scripture Union and Christian Union in Nigeria

Both Ogbu Kalu (2008) and Matthew Ojo (2006) underlined the central role played by secondary school and university students in the formation of modern Pentecostalism in Nigeria. The secondary school students were organised around the Scripture Union, which was introduced into Nigerian Protestant secondary schools from Britain in the 1950s. It was an interdenominational group that focused on Bible study, prayers, and hospital ministry, and served as the character formation component of mission education.

In eastern Nigeria, due to the closure of schools during the Nigeria-Biafra civil war, the Scripture Union (SU) organised bible classes in house cells which later developed into a prayer camps, engaging in deep conversion, deliverance, village evangelism and relief work. Its reputation spread like wildfire as young people formed prayer and evangelistic bands in their villages. By 1969, the character of SU had changed tremendously as people gave their lives to Christ in large numbers, and healings occurred during many hospital visits (Kalu, 2008, p. 89). In western Nigeria, a key aspect of the revival, noted by Matthews Ojo, is the participation of university students under the aegis of the Christian Union (Ojo, 2006).

A landmark in the emergence of modern Pentecostalism in Nigeria was the conversion of some young people from the Aladura churches to the Scripture Union movement. Three of these converts founded The Hour of Freedom Evangelistic Association in Onitsha in eastern Nigeria. The Hour of Freedom members travelled all over the eastern region with a vibrant evangelical fervour. They built a support network of prayer groups, as many young people from schools flocked to the outreach programmes. The Hour of Freedom became famous for the healings and mass conversions brought about in one town after another. Many of the young people, ranging in age from seventeen to twenty, boldly evangelised rural villages. Those who had joined their parents in Aladura churches caused splits within these churches as they challenged the use of certain symbols and rituals in the liturgy. For instance, the Christ Ascension Church splintered and the leader of the young rebels, Mike Okonkwo, formed a Pentecostal church, the True Redeemed Evangelical

Mission TREM (Kalu, 2008, p. 91).

Vibrant SU branches spread in the secondary schools while the university students formed Christian Union branches as formidable interdenominational evangelistic groups. These young people graduated just when Nigeria's federal government made the National Youth Service Corps compulsory for university graduates. As they dispersed through the nation, they formed charismatic groups; those who travelled abroad for foreign language courses in neighbouring French-speaking countries took their spirituality with them. Those who attended the Fellowship of Christian Union Students (FOCUS) took the message to Kenya. In northern Nigeria, they set out to establish themselves in Muslim strongholds by forming branches in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and Kaduna Polytechnic. Some ten centres of ministries blossomed in Jos, Kaduna, Kano, and Zaria between 1973-1976. Northern indigenes have since converted to Pentecostalism and become leaders (Kalu, 2008, p. 92).

The young students of the 1970s are today the leaders of the many Pentecostal churches that dot the Nigerian landscape, especially in the major cities like Abuja, Lagos, Port-Harcourt, Ibadan and Benin City.

Guerrillas for Christ: Youthful Charismatics in Eastern Africa

The massive *balokole*, a movement of "saved ones," set the stage for the charismatisation of eastern Africa in later years. It started in the Rwanda Mission that was led by evangelicals from the Christian Union of Cambridge University, most of whom had contact with the Keswick movement. It was a revitalisation movement indicating that traditional ways of being church are no longer appropriate, and no longer consistent with the gospel message. The Mukono (Uganda) theological college students called themselves "obedient rebels". They held revival and evangelistic conferences that emphasised separation from spiritually harmful cultures, confession of personal sins, and baptism of the Holy Spirit. Exclusive, enthusiastic, and belligerent in confronting indigenous cultures, the movement spread rapidly into Kenya, Sudan, and Tanzania. With a signature tune from the Luganda hymn, *Tukutenderezza Yezu*, "we praise you Jesus", they challenged the foundations of various missionary churches, disrupted the regimen of the theological colleges, and established a vibrant, ecumenical, missionary movement (Hastings, 1994; Kalu, 2008, p. 94; Kalu & Duncan, 2005, pp. 278-307).

By the 1950s, the *balokole* youths spawned the Kenyan Students Christian Fellowship (KSCF). Some formed the Trinity Fellowship, others started the Ambassadors. The youth enthusiastically crisscrossed the secondary schools all over Kenya to unite and radicalise the CU organisations. They boasted that they were guerrillas for Christ. Some of the students formed “neo-Pentecostal” ministries after their school days. For instance, Margaret Wangari founded the Church of the Lord after attending Benson Idahosa’s Christ for All Nations Seminary in Benin Nigeria (Kalu, 2008, p. 95).

Groups at Makerere University in Kampala set out to build a corps of born-again evangelists who would counteract Idi-Amin’s determination to wipe out Christianity. It is claimed that Kayiwa is the father of almost 90 percent of the thirty-five thousand Pentecostal churches in Uganda; that he has raised up to eighteen people from the dead; and that he unites the vast movement that now claims the allegiance of one-fifth of Uganda’s twenty-six million residents. In Tanzania, Festo Kingever, inspired by the *balokole* fervour, set off a revival fire whose flames reached into every church. By the late 1960s, the mainline churches became alarmed because of their loss of control and desertion by members. Kalu (2008, p. 96) argues “that the charismatic movement in eastern Africa was built on the achievements of the *balokole* movement.”

***Aliliki* in Central and Southern Africa**

Rijk van Dijk (1992b, p. 55) writes: “During the early 1970s, the populace of some of the townships of Malawi’s largest city, Blantyre, witnessed the emergence of a new religious phenomenon. Young boys and girls referring to themselves as *aliliki* (preachers) began to attract crowds by conducting large revival meetings.” The foundation for this was the intense evangelisation of Zimbabwe and Malawi by indigenous agents of the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) and Assemblies of God Africa (AOGA) in the first five decades of the 1900s.

Van Dijk described the evangelistic style of the *aliliki*: They fulminate against adultery, promiscuity, violence and theft. Furthermore, the satanic habit of frequenting bars, hotels, and discos are condemned, clear demands for a rejuvenated strict morality are put forward in an atmosphere of religious excitement and emotionalism. While the audience is urged to sing, dance and clap, sinners are commanded to kneel in front of the young people, who insist that evil objects such as knives, tobacco, stolen goods and magical amulets be handed in (van Dijk, 1992b, p. 56).

Those baptised in the spirit after the altar calls in Zimbabwe and Malawi became *kubadwa mwatsopano*, born again.

From Youth Movements to Pentecostal Churches

In the various countries, the key issue is the conception and practice of mission by the young people. They were on fire for the Lord, and expected to experience miracles in everyday life, such as supplying of one's everyday needs, healing, raising the dead, and especially their witnessing - one making a moral change in lifestyle. In all the countries, the youthful movement tended to show the same developmental phases: They started as an interdenominational Bible study and prayer group among students in organisations such as the Scripture Union, Student Christian Movement, and New Life for All. Members soon formed fellowships, perhaps as charismatic house cells; then some metamorphosed into ministries with specialised or personalised goals, and formed around strong personality types, with a nucleus and a broader patronage. These constituted the founders of contemporary indigenous Pentecostal churches in Africa and set the intense missionary tone of the post-1970 period. (Kalu, 2008, p. 98) and typologies. Kalu (2008, p. 5) notes the following obstacles militating against an accurate determination of the size of African new Pentecostalism:

- inaccurate methods of gathering data in some non-Western contexts;
- the lack of reliable census figures in regions where communities do not share the fad of statistics;
- this difficulty is compounded by Pentecostalism's tendency to splinter, a fragility that is usually dubbed as "setting up new altars" arising from intramural conflicts over doctrine, theological rifts, moral lapses, personality clashes, competing ambition, or financial crises;
- the life span of many groups in the movement can be very short: many Pentecostal groups fade as quickly as they started, decimated by schism, power failure, or funding constraints. They also age quickly; the charisma becomes routinised as the institution is bureaucratised.
- there is also a strong urban-rural divide in understanding this

tendency because many churches in the rural areas tend to be poorer and smaller. Rural areas also exhibit a stronger level of competition for turf.

Despite these obstacles, there is visible evidence of an astonishing growth of Pentecostalism in Africa. Statistical estimates are that in 2000, about 20 percent of the population of Zimbabwe, Tanzania, and Malawi were Pentecostal; 14 percent in Kenya; 11 percent in Nigeria, 10 percent in Ghana and Zambia.

Very important was the increased access to print media such as glamorous house magazines, handbills, posters, billboards, and books; the availability of clothes such as T-shirts, caps, fashion; the means to hear and perform new forms of music; the radical shift in ecclesiology from congregationalist policy to episcopacy with centralised, bureaucratised administration.

Also contributing to the growth have been the emphasis on fivefold ministry, where prophets and apostles controlled evangelists, teachers, and deacons (lower cadres of church workers), the wife of the 'men of God' organised sodalities for women; and pastors acquire degrees especially doctorates either *honoris causa* or by outright purchase. In fact, Idahosa became a reverend, doctor, professor, and archbishop!" (Kalu, 2008, p.115).

What are highlighted here are the major traits manifested by African modern Pentecostalism. These are encapsulated in their gospel of prosperity, the excessive promise and expectation of miracles during the outdoor crusades, personalising the ministries around the founders and their spouses, and finally, the appropriation of the mass media.

2.2 The various forms of Pentecostal media

One of the defining characteristics of this strand of Christianity is the appropriation and use of modern media technologies as part of their religious ritual practice. For these churches, as Rosalind Hackett notes, the appropriation and use of the media technologies facilitates the dissemination of the word to the masses, and, as such, is a tool of expansion. It is also a reflection of their globalising aspirations, as well as a calculated attempt to transform and Christianise popular culture so that is safe for consumption by born-again Christians. In short, the modern media are deemed an acceptable weapon for God's army in the battle against Satan (Hackett, 1998, p. 258).

Researchers have explored various ways in which the Pentecostals are engaging the modern media. These explorations often appear as part of extended studies of the Pentecostal manifestations in particular countries. The following areas of involvement have attracted attention: use of the electronic media, especially radio and television by Pentecostal leaders (Lyons & Lyons, 1987; Hackett, 1998, 2006; De Witte, 2003b, 2005a, 2005b; Ihejirika, 2006a); use of posters and handbills (Ukah, 1999m 2003, 2006, 2008b, 2008c; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005b); the Pentecostal production and development of the popular cinema and home video industry (Meyer, 1990b, 2002a, 2002b, 2003a, 2003c, 2004, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2008a, 2008b; Mitchell, 2004); Ukah, 2003, 2009a, 2009b). The use of audio-tapes and production of gospel music by the Pentecostal churches have also been explored (Ojo, 1988, Udofia, 2004); and Pentecostal use of the new information and communication technologies (Hackett, 2003, Ihejirika, 2008c). The socio-cultural implications of this media use also received considerable research attention: creation of transnational societies in Africa (Meyer, 2005, Marshall-Fratani, 1998, 2001; van Dijk, 2001); possibility of social and cultural hegemony leading to conflicts and divisions in some African countries (Hackett, 1999, 2002a, 2002b, 2004a, 2004b, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, f.c.2010); influencing national media laws and policies (Ihejirika, 2006c; Ukah, 2008d); and the trivialisation of religion by turning missionary outreach into advertisement (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005b, 2005d; Ukah, 2005a, 2006, 2007a, 2007b).

Pentecostal Broadcasting

The use of radio and television is an important mode of the Pentecostal media. As Asamoah-Gyadu (2005b, p. 346) rightly noted: “visual media and material culture are important for the Charismatic movements, because, as world-affirming/accommodating movements the images of well being and prosperity used are meant to underscore the efficacy of the gospel of prosperity they preach”. The Pentecostals have taken over the airwaves in many African countries. In Nigeria for instance, religious broadcasting is synonymous with Pentecostalism (Ihejirika, 2005, p. 40). Through their radio and television broadcasts, Pentecostal pastors propagate their prosperity gospel, miracles of healing and casting out of demons, witches and wizards.

It is instructive to note that the term “televangelism” in the American sense of the word is not applicable to the African religious

media scene. In the American usage, televangelists are the evangelical and Pentecostal ministers whose religious ministries revolve around their television or radio programmes (See Hadden & Swann, 1981; Horsfield, 1984; Hoover, 1988; Bruce, 1990; Peck, 1993; Alexander, 1994). American televangelists, like Billy Graham, Pat Robertson, Oral Roberts were first tent revivalists and television preachers before branching out to ancillary ministries. In contrast, their African counterparts were first leaders of visible churches or ministries before venturing into television or radio productions. In this regard, the term “televangelism” applies to African religious preachers only in a broad sense, and only once in the literature is the word applied in a secondary sense to African Pentecostal broadcasters (Ihejirika, 2006a).

Rosalind Hackett (fc. 2010) rightly identified the liberalisation of the African airwaves as the most significant development that facilitated the rise of Pentecostal broadcasting in the continent. This has occurred in conjunction with, or as a consequence of, the democratisation processes underway in many African states. The dismantling of state monopolies of the broadcast media and the commercialising of airtime and ownership have radically altered the media landscape, with significant consequences for religious communication and practice (See, Nyamnjoh, 2004; Fardon & Furniss, 2000; Meyer, 2006a).

Both radio and television stations increased dramatically in the 90s. Hackett (fc 2010) citing Panos (the Institute which actively encourages radio pluralism, as well as development-focused broadcasting in Africa and other “developing” regions), noted that between 1993 and 2001 the number of radio stations had grown from 40 to the 426 stations. They also became more diversified and commercialised in that period, moving from the region’s capital cities to local neighbourhoods where they broadcast their programs predominantly in FM. Most of these stations are community radios. Using information from both Panos (2004) and the BBC (2006, p. 30), she gave instances in specific countries on their growth: South Africa had over sixty community radio stations and Uganda had 117 private FM stations by 2002. Mali too has over a hundred. Two hundred new local community rural FM solar stations have been installed in the last few years in Niger. Before 2002, Sierra Leone had no community radio stations; by 2006 it had 24, of which 7 were religious. Most countries have at least twenty. This is why Africa is known as the “radio continent” (Mytton, 2000). It is often said that there are more homes with radios than access to running water in Africa.

Because television stations are more costly to set up than radio stations, their numbers have not grown as rapidly as the radio stations. All the same, there is remarkable increase in this sector. Television broadcast in the continent is now considerably enhanced in Africa in 1995 by the addition of digital satellite television (DStv), launched by MultiChoice (with headquarters in South Africa). Some of the Pentecostal preachers, like Pastor Chris Oyakhilome now have twenty-four hour satellite channels.

Both the private- and public-owned media derive significant financial resources from religious broadcasting. A number of studies have examined the financial relationship between the broadcast industry in Africa and the Pentecostal preachers (Ojo, 1999; Ihejirika, 2005, 2006a, 2008c; Ukah, 2007b, 2008b). The Pentecostal movements are now seen as veritable gold-mines for the broadcast industry because of the huge cash inflow they bring into the industry.

As all studies show, the Pentecostal broadcast ministries revolve around their charismatic leaders and founders.

The use of posters and handbills

Both Asonzeh Ukah (1999, 2003, 2006, 2008b, 2008c) and Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, (2005b) have examined the use of posters and handbills by Pentecostals in their respective countries of Nigeria and Ghana. Writing about Nigeria, Ukah (2008b, p. 125) notes: "An important feature of urban southern Nigeria is the ubiquity of the Pentecostal poster: every street, every available space on a wall, pedestrian bridges, or utility pole tells a tale of a raging "poster war". Pentecostal posters compete for space with corporate and global brands such as Guinness, Coca-Cola, British-American Tobacco, etc. As different church groups engage one another in an aggressive "war for souls", the poster becomes the most favoured proselytisation, mobilisation and competition strategy." He called this usage "roadside Pentecostalism," and defined the term thus: "the signage produced by independent Christian Pentecostalist churches that is displayed on urban roads, streets, and driveways. These signs take form as billboards; posters displayed on pedestrian bridges, utility poles, and walls of buildings; banners that straddle roads; and signboards. They relay the messages of Nigeria's new Pentecostal churches, for whom we could say, following Chris Lehman (with a nod to Marshall McLuhan): "the medium is the messiah".

In similar terms, Asamoah-Gyadu (2005a, p. 19) writes: "Throughout African cities, Pentecostal/Charismatic churches also make available street overhead banners, glossy wall posters and handbills, and newspaper and magazine advertisements for impending programmes. The posters and handbills are very colourful and feature pastors, sometimes wives and local and foreign guests at revival meetings, dubbed summits or conferences. The churches also make available, at the beginning of every year, car bumpers and fridge stickers that announce the hopes and aspirations of the members for a particular year. The writings include: '2005: My year of financial success', 'My year of breakthrough', 'My year of empowerment', 'My year of increase', 'My year of exploits', 'My year of promotion', 'My year of expansion', 'My year of prosperity', 'My year of success', and so on." The posters, banners and handbills carry messages of healing, prosperity and deliverance.

More than being mere means for announcing upcoming Pentecostal events, the posters and handbills play another important role – the marketing of the founders and leaders of the particular church. Almost every poster and banner carries the picture of a well-dressed and well-fed pastor and his wife. There is a great deal of self-exhibitionism by their pastors and their wives. The posters and handbills have GO" – thus both of them shared the highest charismatic office of "Overseer." In the RCCG, the office of Mummy GO is more important and powerful than the offices of the Assistant General Overseers. The situation is similar in The Winners' Chapel, where the wife of the founder is the second-in-command (as Executive Secretary of the church), while the husband doubles as Executive President and Chief Executive Officer.

On a different note, Ogbu Kalu (2008, pp. 111-112), following William Dyrness (2001), sees the aesthetics of the Pentecostal use of the print media, manifested in their posters and handbills as a paradigm shift. Both scholars noted that Protestant traditions have problems with visual arts, and that early Pentecostalism deployed the puritan attack on certain forms of art by drawing on the diatribe in the aniconic/iconoclastic passages in the Scriptures. Early Pentecostal posters and handbills from the 1970s to mid-1980s were relatively austere, and emphasised the words of the message in a black and white background. By the late 1980s, Pentecostal representation borrowed heavily from popular culture. Pentecostal leaders soon abandoned the old aesthetic scruples and promoted their anointing as successful "big men of God".

Pentecostals and home-videos

Another important aspect of the material culture of Pentecostalism in Africa is the massive production of video-films that exploit religious sentiments, motifs and themes. Nigeria and Ghana present two locales where this phenomenon is dealing with personal problems, health needs, material lack, social stress, moral dilemmas, and spiritual entrapment.

Birgit Meyer who has studied extensively the appropriation of the home video technology by Pentecostals in Ghana discovered a close affinity between the messages projected in the home-videos and that preached by the Pentecostal churches. This affinity creates what she calls the “pentecostalite public culture” which she defined as an arena hosting a plethora of cultural expressions channeled through different media many of which resonate with Pentecostal views and morals and follow its style (2002a; 2003 a, b, c; 2004; 2005, 2006a, 2006b).

One aspect of Pentecostalism which has become entrenched as part of African home-video aesthetics is healing and deliverance from occult and satanic forces represented by traditional witch doctors and wizards. This has led to criticisms of these films as being full of elements of horror and fetish practices. However, at the end of the day, the ritual sacrifices and fetish practices are always redeemed through the intervention of a Pentecostal pastor.

Another aspect of Pentecostal involvement in the home-video production which has attracted the attention of scholars is the use of this medium as an instrument of “othering”, that is negatively projecting other Christian denominations or other religions. Home-videos that have Pentecostal input often show off these “others” as not truly religious, backward, and as the cause of the social problems besetting society (De Witte, 2005b; Ukah, 2005b, 2009a; Meyer, 2005).

Pentecostal Audio-Cassette and Music Ministry

Contemporary Christian Music as a music form is especially identified with Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism. Jorstad (1993) sees it as a manifestation of Evangelical popular religiosity. Matthew A. Ojo (1996) argues that gospel music is in fact one of the most important ways in which the Pentecostals (Charismatics) in Nigeria construct their own identity and invade public space. Wuthnow (2003, p. 141) notes that the Evangelicals (and Pentecostals) are more likely than Catholics and mainline Protestants to see the connection between music and spirituality. Pentecostals are more likely than Catholics to

use contemporary gospel music in their worship, and they feel closer to God using this music form. Contemporary Christian music is undoubtedly a music form identified with Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism. These musical renditions form an important element of Pentecostal media, especially their televangelism.

In Nigeria, as in many other African countries, the popularity of gospel music has grown contemporaneously with Pentecostalism. This popularity has led many pop musicians to change their style of music. Such Nigerian pop stars like Chris Okotie, Sonny Okoson and Ebenezer Obey suddenly became gospel singers (Hackett, 1998; Ihejirika, 2006a, 2008d). The appreciation of this type of music cuts across religious, social, gender and age barriers, and has been posited as a point of contact between differing religious groups (Ihejirika, 2008d).

Columbanus Udofia's unpublished thesis (2004) is one of the few studies that have explored the spiritual and social attraction this music form holds for people, especially the young persons. As he found out, many young people turn to gospel music in moments of tension and anxiety, for example, during the period of their school examinations.

The most recent development in the Pentecostal music media is the *One Gospel* music channel which debuted on the DStv satellite platform in 2008. The channel is solely dedicated to the promotion of various genres of gospel music.

Pentecostals and the new Information and Communication Technology

The new information and communication technologies (NICTs or simply ICTs), is the collective term given to the (second and third) generation of information technology spawned by the merger of computers and telecommunications. ICT encompasses computer systems and networks, cellular telephony, desktop publishing, multimedia production, the Internet, cable television and others (Flor, 2001, p. 2). ICT has led to the emergence of new forms of mass media culture different from the old media culture of terrestrial radio and television. The new media is characterised by a multiplicity of media producers, and by nature of the medium it is not possible to present a complete index of what is available, or even to make an authoritative guess. Above all, this is a medium which is not time-based.

Within the past decade, the religious applications and implications of these new technologies have attracted extensive research, especially in America (Zaleski, 1997; Bunt, 2000; Helland, 2000; Hadden &

Cowan, 2000; Brasher, 2001; Jewel, 2001, 2004; Underwood, 2002; Fernback, 2002; Babin & Zukowski, 2002; Hoover, Clark & Ranie, 2004; Hoover & Park, 2004; Campbell, 2006; Hoover, 2006). Helland, one of the pioneer scholars, categorised the religious application of these new media between *religion-online* and *online-religion*. According to him, *religion-online* is the self-conscious use of the online context by religious organisations or movements for purposes of publicity, education, outreach, proselytisation and so on, while *online-religion* is the online context becoming or being used as a locus of religious, spiritual or other similar practice (Helland, 2000, p. 207; See Hoover and Park, 2004, p. 122).

In Africa, the growing scholarship in the field of media, religion and culture has also started to investigate the growth of the new media and their appropriation by religious groups in the continent. Some of these studies fall under Helland's *religion-online* categorisation, like their appropriation by religious groups in the continent. Some of these studies fall under Helland's *religion-online* categorisation, like those that seek to show the globalisation dimension of religious groups, (or the projection of religious image and messages through the new media. Of special interest is the use of internet websites and satellite broadcasting (Asmaoh-Gyadu, 2008; Haron, 2004; Hackett, 2010 fc). Others can fall under the category of *online-religion*, like those that show how Africans, especially those in the Diaspora are constructing their identities through the new media (Meyer, 2001; van Dijk, 2001).

At the 2008 conference on New Media and Religious Transformations in Africa held in Abuja Nigeria, a good number of papers focused explicitly on the new information and communication technologies and their appropriation by various religious groups, including the African Traditional Religion (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2008; Omachonu, 2008; Owoeje, 2008; Taiwo, 2008; and Yahya, 2008).

Ihejirika (2008c, pp. 92-93) in a comparative study of the Catholic Church and the Pentecostal churches in Nigeria and their appropriation of the new information and communication technologies, made the following observations:

- The Pentecostal churches, unlike the Catholic Church, are still ready to invest huge sums of money in setting up these new media technologies;
- Pentecostal websites are richer and more elegantly built than Catholic websites which just present the essentials;

- Pentecostal use of the new media is directly religious in intent – providing users with Christian messages (through e-mail and SMS), while the Catholic use has indirect religious intent;
- The Pentecostal target audience is the middle class and upward mobile young adults, while the Catholic effort seems more directed at the rural youth and the marginal urban dwellers.

The Pentecostal appropriation of the new information and communication technology falls under Helland's *on-line religion* category, while the Catholic use falls under the category which I have preferred to term *in-line religion*. This I defined as "... the application of the new information and communication technologies by a religious group for the benefit of other people, especially the marginal groups in society, which indirectly boosts the image of the group, and sustains the religious consciousness of the users" (Ihejirika, 2008c, p. 92).

The socio-cultural and political implications of Pentecostal media

In considering the socio-cultural and political implications of the Pentecostal media, scholars have paid special attention to the following areas:

- the formation of de-localised and globalised identities;
- re-configuration of the religious landscape;
- possibility of hegemonising the airwaves and the concomitant exclusion of other players;
- re-designing of media laws and practice in the continent;
- trivialising religion through market-oriented and advertising praxis.

Ruth Marshall-Fratani (1998, 2001), Birgit Meyer (2001, 2006a), and Rijk van Dijk (1998, 2001) have studied extensively how Pentecostalism is the locus for the formation of de-localised and globalised Africans, both within and outside the continent. The central argument of these scholars is that Pentecostalism has formed a sort of transnational alliance through the media, a media that purveys both local and international content, linking both the homeland and the Diaspora (Ojo, 2005).

As Marshall-Fratani notes (1998, p. 280), the importance of global media is not limited to the technological possibilities it offers for the production and dissemination of ideas, images, and narratives, but that, "such images, ideas and narratives provide a series of elements...

out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, scripts which while interpreted in terms of local, everyday experience, are taken from global repertoires, and as such, provide means for imagining communities outside or in defiance of the nation-state's bid to monopolise the resources of community formation".

Through the media, Pentecostalism initiates a new type of negotiation between the local and the global, a negotiation between the "local pasts" and "global modernities". Through this negotiation, local actors are connected to global networks on the one hand, and on the other, are enabled to disseminate local appropriations of these images and narratives nationally and globally. This negotiation thus creates a constant process of circulation between global and local, in which it becomes more and more difficult, even on an analytical level, to separate these two spaces. The result of this negotiation is the "deterritorialisation" of culture via mediation, and "the creation of 'delocalised' subjects, or at least, of subjects whose individual and collective identities seem to have been formed in terms of a new type of negotiation between local and global, one in which the media has a privileged role" (Marshall-Fratani, 1998, p. 281). This dislocation, fragmentation and mobility leads to what Birgit Meyer calls a "mobile self" and a "portable charismatic identity" (Meyer 2006a).

Another consequence of the Pentecostal global media is the attempt by the movement to colonise the national public space and re-conceptualise the structure and normative basis of the nation through the production and dissemination of a multitude of discourses via the media. Being communities which do not have a fixed "sense of place" or defined locality, Pentecostalism presents a particular challenge to the state because it has access to completely new repertoires of images and narratives about "modernity", and "modernisation" which are quite different from those monopolised by the state (Marshall-Fratani, 1998, p. 281; 2001, p. 89). When the Nigerian film regulatory agency secured an injunction prohibiting the release of Helen Ukpabio's film "Rapture" which was considered as a direct attack on another Christian denomination, she went ahead and released it in some of her churches. When the Nigerian broadcasting agency "banned" Pastor Chris Oyaikhilome's miracles from the countries televisions, he went outside and set up a satellite channel (See Ukah, 2003, 2008b, 2009; Hackett, 2010 fc).

The fear of Pentecostals becoming the religious hegemonic power, dominating the socio-cultural and political sphere in Africa, has been

raised (Tomaselli, 1995; Tomaselli and Shepperson, 1997). Some scholars have examined the influence this movement exerts on other religions and the socio-cultural public sphere. Rosalind Hackett in her study of the movement in Ghana and Nigeria noted (1998, p. 265): "I would argue that there is not a Christian church in Ghana or Nigeria that has not been affected by the revivalist trends of the last few decades." In similar tones, Birgit Meyer noted that the massive presence of the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches in the mass media has impacted so much on the social structure leading to the creation of what she calls the *Pentecostalite* culture, (Meyer, 2002b) or what Marleen de Witte calls the "Pentecostalisation of the public sphere" (De Witte, 2005a, p. 24).

In many parts of the continent south of the Sahara, there is evidence that the massive involvement of the Pentecostal movement with the mass media has raised it from the fringes of the socio-religious public sphere, and given it a position of prominence as a major actor in that sphere. In this position, it has acquired the possibility of influencing public opinions and policies. But Ihejirika believes that this media-conferred possibility does not invest on Pentecostalism the religious hegemonic power par excellence. This is because the Pentecostal movement still remains basically fragmented. The Pentecostal movement in many African countries is made up of a thousand and one churches many of which may be founded by charlatans who are out to make money. Only a few of them could be considered as mega-churches with branches spread over a given country or across the continent. Thus, it is difficult for the Pentecostal movement to displace monolithic churches like the Roman Catholic Church (Ihejirika, 2005).

The final area of consideration regarding the consequences of Pentecostal media is the turning of religious media into marketing and advertising of Pentecostal pastors and their wares and the concomitant consumerism that go with such excessive advertising. Asonzeh Ukah has become the most critical voice against Pentecostalism in this regard, and has provided much empirical data, especially from Nigeria depicting the marketing strategies of these churches (see Ukah, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2008a,b). Ukah sees most of the Pentecostal pastors as mere business-minded people whose stock in trade is the selling of miracles and healings. In his article, "Roadside Pentecostalism: Religious Advertising in Nigeria and the Marketing of Charisma" he concluded:

Pentecostal advertising in Nigeria is a form of urban aesthetics. It is a form of public communication, a subset of the genre of promotional culture aimed at creating positive notions, ideas, and images of “jet-setting [religious] entrepreneurs.” It facilitates the social mobility of both service providers and consumers. It constructs a public profile for the pastors whose images literally adorn every corner of every street. Self-promotion is clearly important, especially for prosperity Pentecostalism. Roadside Pentecostalism also provides important information about events, places, and personalities in the urban environment. More significantly, as advertising material, roadside Pentecostalism may have an additional objective of manipulating, exploiting, and controlling its audiences in subtle but seductive ways. The images of leaders and church founders that saturate the Nigerian landscape play a significant role in defining the public’s needs, and these same advertisements promise to satisfy the needs they create (2008, p. 115).

3. Media use by historical Christian denominations

Paul Gifford (1988, p. 101) noted in his analysis of religious media use in Southern Africa that, in contrast to the Pentecostal churches, the historical, mainline churches do not even bother to compete in televangelism. They spend their money in other areas (medicine, education, development) but not on mass-mediated literature or communication. This observation made two decades ago to a large extent still holds true. Most of the research done in this field, as we have already noted, has been in relation to the Pentecostal use of the mass media.

Knut Lundby and his colleagues – Daniel Dayan and Hilde Arntsen have studied the media practices in the Zimbabwean Anglican church. (Arntsen and Lundby, 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 2002; Lundby & Dayan, 1999, Arntsen & Lundby, 1993). Even in this mainline church, the influence of Pentecostalism looms large as far as media application is concerned. The influence of American televangelism is very evident in this church. As Lundby notes (1998b, p. 21): “On any level of Anglicanism there is a struggle between formal, hierarchical church organisations and the charismatic movement over the shared resources of Anglicanism... Through the electronic media the field is remodelled as there is created a third polarity: a network of ‘electronic churches’ has produced new types of religious agents; television personalities or ‘televangelists’ within their ‘teleministries’”. What emerged from these studies is that the Zimbabwean Anglicans use the imaginative creations they gather from televangelism in the shaping of their local identity.

Of all the historical churches, the Roman Catholic Church seems to be the one taking the most positive turn with regard to the media (Martini, 1994). In a recent paper, Ihejirika (2008c) articulated this Catholic involvement with the media. He noted that, in the past, the Catholic Church as an institution had exhibited ambivalent attitudes towards the media, which has bordered more on the negative. Cardinal Carlo Martini, former Archbishop of Milan once made a sharp critique of this attitude.

My impression is that in our Church we have not yet understood the new challenge of the media sphere. We are awkward in communication. We have an inferiority complex before the great secular press or television or radio. We still don't know or appreciate the new language of the media with their insistence on connotation and vibration. We are ignorant of the new idioms and concepts of the religious language of today (Martini, 1990, p. 48).

Franz-Josef Eilers (1994), following Gaston Roberge (1983), sees in the relation between the Catholic Church and social communication three trends or attitudes which partly overlap. These trends, with their concomitant actions and positions are presented in the table below:

Table 1: Showing the trends in the Catholic Church's approaches to the mass media

	Attitude	Action	Position
Trend I	Suspicion and Rejection	Censorship and Control	Outside
Trend II	Imitation and Ambition	Use at all costs	Marginal
Trend III	Critical understanding	Discriminating use and compassionate service	Inside

Source: Eilers, 1994, p. 185.

Ihejirika (2008c) adds a fourth trend to those outlined by Roberge and Eilers. This new trend which he called *appreciation* started with the introduction of the digital revolution, especially with the birth of the Internet in the early nineties. The attitude that goes with it is that of positive understanding, the action is requisite use and pastoral care, and the position is that of an insider. He noted that of all the technologies of mass communication, none has been so instantly accepted and embraced by the Catholic Church as the new information and communication technologies. At the early stage of the Internet, the Vatican employed the services of an American woman who is an expert in information technology. In 1995, three years after the launch of the World Wide Web, the Vatican website was launched, and has remained the most authentic source of information on the Church in the web.

Both Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI have exhibited very positive attitudes toward these technologies by applying them to their ministries. In 1998, the late Pope John Paul II made history by sending his Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation to the Church in Oceania through the Internet, the first time such an action was undertaken. Pope Benedict XVI now engages in a periodical satellite interactive link with students from different parts of the world. Students from Nigeria and five other African countries participated in this link in 2006.

A comparative presentation of some excerpts from former documents of the Catholic Church on the media in general and recent ones on the Internet will show clearly how much the position of the Church has changed and how much the positive understanding towards the new information and communication technologies has emerged.

Table 2: Comparison of Catholic Pre-1990 and post-1990 policy statements on mass media and on new information and communication technologies

Pre-1990 Church Policy Statements

(1) Vigilante cura (1930s)

Everyone knows what damage is done to the soul by bad motion pictures. They are occasions of sin; they seduce young people along the ways of evil by glorifying the passions, they show life under a false light, they cloud ideals, they destroy pure love, respect for marriage, affection for the family. They are capable also of creating prejudices among individuals and misunderstandings

among nations, among social classes, among entire races. (*Vigilante Cura*, No. 24)

(2) Miranda Prorsus (1940s)

From the time when these arts (motion picture, radio and television) came into use, the Church welcomed them, not only with great joy but also with a motherly care and watchfulness, having in mind to protect her children from every danger as they set out on this new path of progress. This watchful care springs from the mission she received from the Divine Saviour Himself; for, as is clear to all, these new forms of art exercise very great influence on the manner of thinking and acting of individuals and of every group of men. (*Miranda Prorsus*, Nos.4-5).

(3) Inter Mirifica (1964)

It is the Church's birthright to use and own any of these media which are necessary or useful for the formation of Christians and for pastoral activity. Pastors have the task of instructing and directing the faithful on how to use these media in a way that will ensure their own salvation and perfection and that of all mankind (No 3).

Post-1990s Church policy documents

(1) The Church and Internet

It is important, (too), that people at all levels of the Church use the Internet creatively to meet their responsibilities and help fulfill the Church's mission. Hanging back timidly from fear of technology or for some other reason is not acceptable, in view of the very many positive possibilities of the Internet. Methods of facilitating communication and dialogue among the Church's own members can strengthen the bonds of unity between them (The Church and Internet, No 10).

(2) John Paul II, 2002, on use of Internet

For the Church, the new world of cyberspace is a summons to the great adventure of using its potentials to proclaim the Gospel message. This challenge is at the heart of what it means at the beginning of the millennium to follow the Lord's command to 'put out into the deep' *Duc in altum!* (John Paul II, 2002)

(3) Training of Church personnel in the use of Internet

Catholic universities, colleges, schools, and educational programs at all levels should provide courses for various groups—seminarians, priests, religious brothers and sisters, and lay leaders...teachers, parents, and students as well as more advanced training in communications technology, management, ethics, and policy issues for individuals preparing for professional media work or decision-making roles, including those who work in social communications for the Church (*Church and Internet*, No. 11).

The new positive understanding of the media is evident in the acknowledgement that instructions on the use of the media should be carried out by experts – (see the comparison in Table 2 between *Inter Mirifica 3* and *Church and Internet 11*) . With the digital revolution, the Catholic Church began to come out of her excessive dependence on the print media. (The situation in Nigeria is a clear example of this over-dependence on print media – See Ihejirika, 2006b).

Today, in many African countries, the Catholic Church is fully engaged in the radio revolution. Some of the community radios operating in the continent are promoted by Catholic Dioceses or Catholic organisations. As Patrick Alumuku, noted: “The Catholic Church has been identified with the evolution of community radio from its very beginning and also identified with efforts to use this means as an instrument of social change” (Alumuku, 2006, p. 78). Again he wrote: “the Church has been instrumental to the setting up of community-oriented radio stations. These include Radio Icengelo and Yatsani Radio in Zambia, and Radio Progress in Ghana” (Alumuku, 2006, p. 144). Many Catholic dioceses and religious organisations in Africa have become engaged in the radio ministry for education and social change. For instance, the Radio Kwizera (“Hope” in Kinyarwanda language) situated in Ngara, on the Tanzanian-Rwanda border has been a true sign of reconciliation for the Tutsi and Hutu rebels. This station was set up by the Jesuit Refugee Service in 1995, as a response to the infamous “hate radio”, Milles Collines, after the death of over a million people in the Tutsi-Hutu massacres in Rwanda (Alumuku, 2006, p. 157).

4. Muslim media and African traditional religions

Early research on Muslim media has concentrated on the religious application of such media instruments as the loud speaker and audio cassettes. For instance, Charles Hirschkind has examined the use of cassettes in public piety in Egypt where Muslims have developed a

genre known as Cassette-Dahwa built around sermon tapes to be used in fulfilling the duty to actively encourage fellow Muslims in their pursuance of greater piety and to evangelise (Hirschkind, 2006 a and 2006b; see also Kalu, 2008, p. 121). Brian Larkin has also studied extensively Muslims' use of loudspeakers and popular videos in northern Nigeria (Larkin, 1997a, 2008). A few studies have also examined the media practices among the Muslims (Baderon, 1998; Danmole, 1999).

The events of 11th September 2001 focused attention on Islam's attitude toward peace and international relations, and this is influencing how Muslim leaders and scholars see the relationship with the media world. At the recently concluded International conference on New Media and Religious Transformation in Africa, held in Abuja Nigeria, July 2008, of the 56 papers presented, 18 dealt specifically with Muslim related themes. There are, of course, a wide range of positions expressed. However, evidence of a new focus in Muslim media is the attraction of Arabic-based satellite television channels like *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya*, for the Muslim faithful in Africa. Part of this attraction, according to Alhassan Abubakar, is the use of Arabic in their broadcast which eliminates the possibility of distorting true Islamic teaching (Abubakar, 2008).

An area of research that has relevance to Islam is the issue of media access. Hackett (2006, p. 168) has noted this as a major flashpoint for socio-religious conflict in the continent. According to her,

conflict between religious groups is commonly linked to rights of access to the national media. Because of the asymmetry of resources, capacity and influence, some religious organizations find themselves at the head of the media table while others may not even enjoy the crumbs from underneath it. These patterns of exclusion and inclusion, coupled with issues of fair representation, have been exacerbated by the processes of democratization and liberalization.

Hackett's argument (forthcoming, 2010) is that the rapid deregulation of the media in most parts of Africa, coupled with a rising Pentecostalisation of the airwaves, is not leading to a happy and equitable marketplace. Media exclusion is one of the ways in which the media are implicated in religious related conflicts in the continent. (For an extensive look at the various dimensions of religious media and conflict see Hackett, 1999, 2002a 2002b, 2003, 2004a 2004b, 2006, 2007a, 2007b).

The question could be asked: are Muslims marginalised or denied access to the media which is becoming increasingly dominated by Pentecostal Christians? I have attempted to examine this question through an audience study of Muslims living in Port Harcourt, a predominantly Christian city in Nigeria. I found that Muslims are ambivalent in ascribing the blame for their marginal presence in the media in the city. The majority blamed the media houses in Port Harcourt for preferring Christian programmes to Islamic ones; others blamed their religious leaders who are slow in taking the Islamic message to the airwaves. (Ihejirika, forthcoming 2009)

Like Islam, there is also increasing scholarly attention on the involvement of practitioners of African Traditional Religion with the media. Of concern is the representation of traditional religions especially in the Pentecostal media product. Two themes dominate this involvement: re-branding and gaining access.

The image of traditional religionists presented in the media is often negative and atavistic. Marleen De Witte (2003a) in her study of Afrikania, a neo-traditionalist political-religious movement in Ghana, showed how the movement struggles with the Pentecostal Christian media hegemony. According to her, the major problem that faces the traditional movement is how to accommodate visual representation in the mass media for a religion that does not grant the visual much prominence. Ironically, in visualising African traditional religion for a broad public as an alternative to Christianity, Afrikania adopts Christian, increasingly, Pentecostal styles of representation.

Another area of research concern is the systematic exclusion of the traditional religion in the African media. Nokuzola Mndende has been investigating this phenomenon within the Southern African region. (Mndende, 1999, 2008).

5. African research in media, religion and culture: Methodological and theoretical groundings

As many have noted, the cultural studies analysis of the media, which argues that quantitative effects research really does not answer the central questions of religious media, has now become a dominant paradigm of communication research. An increasing number of scholars carrying on research on media and religion do so from a cultural studies perspective (White, 2007, p. 1). This is true of the scholars doing research in this field within the African continent.

The cultural studies approach is concerned with how individuals in groups use media to construct religious meaning in life and how this religious meaning relates to many other aspects of human life. It typically draws its theories and methodologies, not from psychology, functionalist sociology, or quantitative analysis, but from cultural anthropology, philosophy, literary studies, drama, and history. The cultural studies approach borrows from the humanistic sciences of textual analysis, literary studies, semiotics, history, cultural anthropology, and cognitive structuralism. The focus is not on behavioral response but on the creation of meaning, or, more specifically, "signifying practices" which bring about "shared social meanings" in various "languages," especially mass media languages (Barker, 2000, p. 7).

Most of the research in the field of media and religion in Africa has been carried out from the culturalist perspective. The central thrust is the articulation of the religious and social meanings emerging from the religious appropriation of the media.

Given the interdisciplinary nature of the field, it is not surprising that scholars have adopted various theoretical frameworks in their research within the African continent. The major function of theories is to provide a road map for answering research questions. As we indicated earlier, the major questions which scholars have tried to answer in this field are, firstly, what are the factors making for the growth of religious media in general and Pentecostal media in particular? Secondly, what are the socio-political implications of the rise of religious media in Africa?

Some scholars have answered these questions using various strands of the reductionist theory; others have followed the modernist theories, while most of the latest writings have leaned more towards the globalisation theories. Ogbu Kalu (2008, p. 108) made the point clear:

Certain discourses have dominated the study of religion and media in Africa: The globalism/modernity discourse.... Close by is the market theory built around the rational choice concept that profiles the religious space as being similar to a marketplace, and examines the commercialisation of religion as a commodity, because messages are packaged in a competitive marketplace.

These discourses, as Kalu has noted, have their rebuttals.

What we have tried to do in this overview is to sift through these various theoretical strands in order to arrive at what could be considered some emerging central theoretical themes in the study of media and religion in Africa. Drawing on the work of major African scholars

such as Ogbu Kalu (2008), Kwabena Asmaoah-Gyadu (1998a, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d), Asonzeh Ukah (2004, 2005b, 2008a) and my own observations (Ihejirika 2003, 2004, 2006a, 2008b), I would propose that a convergence theory offers the best framework to explain the religious phenomenon in Africa. That is, the best explanation of what kind of religious practices and use of media are emerging is

TABLE 3: Showing areas of congruency between African religious root paradigms and Pentecostal theology.

African Religious Root-Paradigm	Elements of the Pentecostal Theology
1. Expectation of power to emanate from religious forms.	Belief in a more powerful God. Strong emphasis on miraculous interventions in peoples' lives.
2. Religious power for providing children, health, and wealth, (resort to charms, ritual sacrifices, etc.).	Preaching of "Prosperity Theology". Strong emphasis on miraculous interventions in peoples' lives.
3. Attribution of misfortunes to evil forces/evil persons (Resort to traditional medicine men).	Emphasis on the power of the devil and evil spirits to harm human beings. Ritual deliverance as remedy to evil attacks.
4. Personal and collective sin as important causes of misfortunes.	Public confession and being "born again" as necessary for receiving God's blessings.
5. Causality explained by appeal to gods and forces rather than to empirical factors.	Strong emphasis on miraculous interventions in peoples' lives. Emphasis on the power of the devil and evil spirits to harm human beings.

Source: Ihejirika, 2006a, p. 112.

in terms of the areas of congruence or convergence between traditional religious beliefs and practice and religious praxis introduced by new religious movements. Pentecostalism and its media practices, which have attracted the most attention in this field, provide a good

deal of evidence to illustrate the trend toward socio-cultural convergence.

Different studies indicate that the attraction of Pentecostal media for many Africans, especially those in the urban areas, derives largely from its capacity to weld together central traditional religious paradigms and the demands of modern urban life in many African cities. The essential elements of the traditional religious belief and praxis converge today in Pentecostalism and in other charismatic movements (See Table 3).

This convergence facilitates the process of religious meaning making for the average African seeking to make sense out of the social and cultural instability which the continent has experienced since the early 1990s. This theory establishes religious media as a central mediating factor between collective and individual identities. The central argument then is that the attraction of a religious movement and its media depends to a large extent on their capacity to provide current symbols which resonate with the traditional cultural or religious root paradigms of the individual convert or adherent.

Our reading of the research on media and religion in Africa reveals a continual reappearance of the evidence of the convergence between traditional world views and practice and dominant emphases in the emerging religious movements. Although many practices are introduced through international contacts, what come to the fore are the African adaptations of these. A lot of attention has been paid to the concern of people with evil spirits and the superior power of Pentecostal preachers to control these in comparison with leaders in other Christian churches. (See the article of Kamate in this number of *African Communication Research*.) As indicated in Table 3 above, the expectation that religious power emanates from religious forms is an important African religious root paradigm. Asamoah-Gyadu (2005c, p. 76) reflects this point when he noted: "The success of Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity in Africa has lain largely in its ability to propagate itself in a 'powerful and efficacious manner' by enabling people to be set free from the dangers and troubles of life. In that sense, Pentecostal/charismatic churches serve as more credible sources of interventions for African Christians than the traditional shrines where stories of diabolical rituals often emanate. Pentecostal/charismatic churches in Africa have developed for the African context, a crisp, clear and powerful message that speaks directly to people's concern."

Media elements have been turned into sacramentals that mediate this religious power. Asamoah-Gyadu (2005d) relates how people

expecting miracles place their hands on the screen of the television while the preacher is praying for them, or buy their books to be placed on their matrimonial beds in their search for the “fruit of the womb”, especially the much-desired male child.

In our consideration of the home video and the religious in-road into it, we noted that one of the major aesthetics of this new genre is the high level of fetishism and ritual sacrifices (Meyer, 2002c, 2000d, 2003a 2003b; Mitchell, 2004; Ukah, 2006). This can be explained by the convergence of the old and new cultural belief which lays emphasis on the power of Satan and evil spirits to harm human beings, and ritual deliverance as a remedy against evil attacks.

This theory is also manifested in the allusion in the literature to the excessive show of wealth and the quest for its acquisition by both the media preachers and users (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005a; Gifford, Bouwer and Rose, 1996; Ihejirika, 2004, 2006a, 2008b; Ukah, 2007a, 2007b). Asamoah-Gyadu argues this point clearly. He noted that the images portrayed by the Pentecostal media are those of self-importance, success in ministry, economic prosperity, and the ability to spiritually empower others. The exhibition of wealth is seen as a sign of divine blessing which is one of the important elements of the traditional religion. This portrayal of prosperity is linked by Kalu Ogbu (2008) to the concept of “big man” in traditional African societies.

According to him, among the Igbo of south-eastern Nigeria, the concept represented a person of high achievement who had, by the support of his *ikenga* (personal god), performed all the traditional rituals and taken all the titles, fulfilling the dream of old age and lived with dignity. The concept is also found in the works of Ben Jones (2005) on Teso village, Uganda, and Rijk van Dijk’s (1992a, 1992b) study of youthful charisma in Malawi. Jones paints the big man as a person who assiduously climbs through the status ladder by being elected to hold civic offices. Van Dijk argues that the word *kukhwima* meant a “ripened” or “empowered” person, a person of immense status and power; being a *kukhwima* for the elderly meant having a secure power (*mphamwu*) and stronghold in the home village (Kalu, 2008, p. 113).

Kalu argues (2008, p. 114) that by the 1980s, the fascination with media technology and the hypnotic allure of the prosperity gospel quietly reshaped the Pentecostal attitude towards status, elitism, and the big man syndrome. The pastor, especially the “powerful man of God”, took over the local image and idiom of the big man. This image was not based on patronage of the traditional cults, rather it was God

who has “rubbed oil on the head of His servants”, which signifies anointing for leadership.

In my own analysis (Ihejirika, 2004, pp. 180-181), I have presented another view of the Pentecostal media which is rooted in African communalistic lifestyle. I have noted that at the heart of the communalistic sharing is the giving of testimony of what one has achieved, has done or has received. In the African communal society, no one hides his good fortune, rather effort is made to broadcast it to all so that others can admire as well as have a share in this fortune. Thus, the important role which the Pentecostal electronic media plays is not only to be found in the content of the broadcast but also the symbolic testimony which they render to the particular Pentecostal church. Every Pentecostal church that gets on the airwave is announcing to the whole society “we have arrived”, “we are a spiritual force to be reckoned with”. The presence on the airwaves confers an aura of importance and authority on the church. This also explains why most of these programmes dedicate ample space to the giving of testimonies by people who have received one benefit or the other.

The fact emerging from the literature on religious media in Africa is that these *media* play a crucial role in the convergence toward African values and African communalism.

In this regard, the religious convergence theory has a close affinity to the root paradigm theory proposed by Victor Turner. Root paradigms, according to Turner,

... are the cultural transliterations of genetic codes – they represent that in the human individual as a cultural entity which the DNA and RNA codes represent in him as a biological entity, the species life raised to the more complex and symbolic organisational level of culture. ... The root paradigm – as distinct from what is probably in each culture a wide range of quotidian or situational models for behaviour under the sign of self or factual interest- is probably concerned with fundamental assumptions underlying the human societal bond with preconditions of *communitas* (Turner 1974, pp67-68).

In Turner’s analysis, there are levels of logic in cultures and in personalities. Certain beliefs may be relatively superficial because they have been accepted along with external constraints or because they seem useful explanations in a relatively passing situation. These superficial beliefs are not strongly linked with many other beliefs or with other sectors of the personality. “Root paradigms are deeper beliefs, or a higher-order concept ... consciously recognized (though not

sciously grasped) cultural models for behaviour which provide patterns for action by individuals in social dramas and other processual units (Turner and Turner, 1978, pp 248).

The deeper beliefs are those that are the very centre of the logic of the culture and are linked with virtually every other belief or practice. In the personality, they are linked with the deepest sources of motivation, often at an unconscious level. For example, in traditional religious practice among many Nigerian ethnic groups, no action was taken without consulting the will of the spirits and the ancestors. The success or failure of every action depended on that. For more modernised, educated Nigerians, the traditional tribal spirits may be less credible, but the beliefs in the actions of the spirits still remain. In moments of great threat or uncertainty, when rational means seem less adequate, there is the tendency to seize upon beliefs and actions that are more certain. Root paradigms are more certain, as Turner notes, because they represent simply the way the world is. They are more certain because they are more linked with the whole belief system and “make more sense” (Ihejirika, 2006a, 2008b).

The thesis we are putting forward here is that certain events, actions or persons help to mediate the union between the old traditional root paradigms and the current lived social realities in which the individual tries to forge a coherent identity. The event, actions, or persons who become integrative symbols are mirrors through which the individual is able to see himself or herself more clearly. The congruency between traditional African religiosity and Pentecostalism plays this mediating role.

The convergence theory helps to explain the rapid growth and attraction of modern Pentecostalism and their religious media as well as the charismatic movements in the historical churches. As many studies have found, religious media are not so much a source of religious conversion, but rather the locus for religious identification and consolidation of already accepted belief systems (Hoover, 1988; Ihejirika, 2008a). As noted above, for identification to occur, there must be an element of convergence between the deep-rooted cultural sensibilities and contemporary exigencies. The failure of many religious programmes by historical churches could be traced back to this lack of congruency between the old and the new.

The convergence theory also helps to explain why the study of religious media in Africa is still strongly linked to the institutional religious groups. In traditional Africa, religious belief and praxis has a visible face — the shrine of the deity or the chief priests. Unlike a current tendency of the West, where religious beliefs and praxis are exhibited outside the confines of institutional religion, and becoming increasingly individualised, in Africa, things religious are still institutional and communitarian. An individual African cannot decide what one's religion is by himself or herself alone. This is a derivative of African communalism, which is an essential African root paradigm.

6. Areas for further research and action

There is no doubt that within the two decades of extensive research in the field of media, religion and culture, many of the major issues regarding media and religion have been opened up. However, some areas need more attention in future research. Certainly there should be more audience ethnographic research to understand the contexts of use of religious media. There is also need to understand the kind of meanings people are creating through their use of religious media. More effort should be made towards developing an African theology of the media and how different churches have different theologies of media.

Most of the studies have been urban-based. This is understandable given the fact that majority of the electronic media and new generation churches are located in the urban areas. But since the majority of Africans live in the rural areas, it is important that more attention be paid to the role of and use of religious media in the rural areas. More research should also investigate how government media policy affects the development of religious media and how religious media affect political change.

Much needed is an identifiable clearing house for media and religion research in Africa. This will help to keep track of both the scholars and their researches. Sometimes it can be difficult for scholars in Africa to know what others are doing.

It is gratifying that the research on media and religion in Africa has progressed so rapidly in the last twenty years. Given this momentum, there is every indication that we will see much further development in the coming years.

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“Preaching Music” and Islam in Senegal

Can the secular mediate the religious?

The case of rap and *mbalax* music

By Abdoulaye Niang

Abstract

The introduction of rap and *mbalax* “preaching music” into Senegal has raised the question of the role of popular music in the Islamic religious culture of Senegal. Preaching music produced by rappers (rap entered Senegal in the mid-1980s) and by *imbalax* singers (*imbalax* goes back to the 1960s) carries religious themes reminding people of Islamic principles and is played on a variety of musical instruments. Some religious leaders question this very much. This study of perceptions reveals a variety of perspectives among the public in Senegal regarding this “preaching music”: a) as a purely secular expression transgressing orthodox Islamic traditions; b) as a “polynuclearisation”, that is, recognising that preaching is no longer the exclusive research of Islamologists but can be done also by musicians; c) “politopic”, recognising that the usual sacred places no longer have the monopoly on the communication of sacred messages; d) as a strategy enabling the Senegalese public to respond to whatever marketing approach gets the religious message across to the people.

Key words: Rap, *mbalax*, Islam, sacred, profane, preaching music, Senegal, polynuclearisation, polytopic .

Introduction:

The central question under discussion here is: What is the relationship between Islamic tradition and popular music as a form for the communication of religious messages? There are now a wide variety of positions among Senegalese as to whether popular musics, hip hop and *mbalax* should or should not be used as a vehicle for “preaching”

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Islamic religious principles. The present study of the hip hop movement and the music industry in Senegal is based largely on interviews with a representative sample of men and women asking the question as to whether each person considered “preaching music” to be proper or not. All interviewees were Muslims; some of them members of Sufi brotherhoods, some not; with representatives of virtually all types of brotherhoods; with people of diverse ages and professional backgrounds. The interviews were carried out in Dakar, mostly in August and September 2007.

To reduce the great variety of shades of opinion to types which can be analysed more easily, I have coded the responses on a type of grid which locates the responses in different degrees of acceptance or rejection of the use of more secular forms of communication and music for communicating sacred Islamic principles. This model is still in the process of construction as a representation of the extremely complex pattern of attitudes toward the issue, but at present the following dimensions are being taken into consideration:

- 1) The information and communication dimension: The degree to which the performer possesses information about the position of the Qur’an regarding certain forms of music and dance, the manner in which this knowledge is shared in communication and the manner in which that knowledge is understood by audiences in the communication.
- (2) The affective dimension: The sentiments of attraction or aversion on the basis of the individual’s emotional perception of the musical genre or of the artist who performs it. One could be a partisan of preaching music because it is produced by a certain person or because one is already receptive, emotionally disposed to the music.
- (3) The normative dimension: The degree of exercise of social control which defines the parameters of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the practice (making music, listening to music, dancing) or the consequences of the practice (verbal scolding, social quarantine, approval) from the point of view of norms. This dimension defines the limits for the possibilities for deviance or adhesion.
- (4) The experiential dimension: The degree to which the person has direct personal experience of the situation of performance or forms an opinion based on the attitudes of others who have had a direct experience.
- (5) The conative dimension: The degree of motivation to act or not to act. For example, the case of the Islamic believer who is convinced

that music is forbidden by the Qur'an but does participate in contrast to the person who will not participate in any form. The conative state of the person exists prior to action. For instance, in the new sociology Raymond Boudon calls "Cognitive Sociology" he shows the importance of this dimension by putting in first place belief in the triology belief/motivation/behavior (cited in Clément, 1999).

In sum, my concern in this article is to understand the social phenomenon of preaching music as the result of the interaction of different actors—classical preachers, music preachers and the public—who move in an open and complex system of interaction that allows individual and collective choice, partially conditioned by socialisation, but also by religious rules and different forms of social control.

In the following sections, I will first outline a theoretical approach, defining the key concepts and explaining how rap and *mbalax* have their roots in religious practice in Africa or related to African people. I will then focus on the controversial "cohabitation" between Islam and music as an introduction to an analysis of the forms of secularisation of the sacred in music practice. I will also undertake a parallel examination of the patterns of communication which underly the representations and practices in Senegal for the diffusion and reception of the Islamic message. Finally, I will explore the possibility that musicians may be using the public's attachment to their *marabouts* (religious guides) as a strategy in marketing their music products. The conclusion, rather than being a final statement, is a summary of the findings which raises questions about this data and research (still in the early stages of analysis and interpretation) and which invites further reflection.

Proposing a theory of popular music in Senegalese Islamic culture

Connecting music and religion might seem to some who adhere to Islamic religious orthodoxy to be daring or inopportune since these are two fields that might be considered mutually exclusive. However, as Alan P. Merriam (1978) has indicated, popular music is not necessarily dissociated from religion. Indeed, according to Merriam's schema, an institutional religious function is included in the ten essential functions of music. Music, in fact, illustrates well the fact that the borders between the sacred and the profane are quite porous. Both the profane and the sacred are ambivalent (Caillois, 1950, pp. 24-25). The relation

between the sacred and the profane is at the core of this research and how they intermingle requires a more in-depth analysis.

Durkheim's conception of the sacred and profane is a useful starting point. Durkheim associates the sacred with society and the profane with the individual (1897-1898, p. 19; 1907, p. 7). He acknowledges, however, that the sacred cannot be confined to the religious sphere, and that the sacred and the profane are connected. For him, the sacred is, above all, a transfiguration of society (2005). This transfiguration is also noted by Le Bras (quoted in Ferréol, Cauche, Duprez, Gadrey & Simon, p. 233). According to Le Bras the sacred and the cosmogonies are symbolic representations of the real social order which emerge out of the reproductions of the imagination. The premise of Durkheim, however, is that it is necessary to keep the sacred separate from the profane to preserve the character of the sacred.

Although Durkheim's model is useful in our analysis, it does not sufficiently allow for the continual duality of the sacred and profane spheres in the Senegalese context. Durkheim does recognise this duality, but he introduces a discontinuity or disjuncture between the two. His model will need to be adapted to make it more applicable in this study. The real discontinuity, in my opinion, is not exactly the abstract one that Durkheim puts forward, but rather is found in the moments, manifestations and the varying intensities of the states of the faith which are nourished by the sacred and profane. These manifestations of the sacred and profane can be weakened or reinforced by the faith of the individual. And this characteristic of the faith is not a static matter, but is reversible, exposed to evolution and is dynamic process.

The reasons for such manifestations of uncertainty in the field of religion can be understood quite easily. It is built on the strong assumption of convictions of the "true faith" in contrast to the "fake believers".² The purity, certainty and constancy of faith are the only values which are acceptable. And this faith is supported by argument that the sacred is above reason. The "Acting Out of Negations" of faith that are possible and effectively present in all religions is evoked by scholars like Piette (2003) as an attempt to integrate the impure into the field of religion and the sacred.

The "mixed" or "systemic" model of Dubois (n.d.), which assumes the interrelation or interpenetration of the sacred and profane, is closer to the orientation of the position taken in this study. In the case of Senegal, it is really a question of emphasising the congruence of the sacred and the sacred and profane. As Odon Valle has said, "religion is

something which, with scruples at times, obliges us not to omit anything in the choice and direction of one's life" (2006). This statement remains especially relevant in the case of Islam which is defined as a complete system of life. Islam includes ritual activities, but also incorporates profane activities, especially those which touch daily life of all human communities—the political, social, cultural and economic spheres. In the biomusicological perspective of some theorists, music and dancing are so fundamental in human life that they are simply part of human existence and an inevitable part of human life (Hagen and Bryant, 2003).

Thus, one must conclude that the disjunction between the sacred and the profane cannot be absolute. In my perspective, just what configuration of relationship the sacred and profane may take depends very much on the particular cultural context in which they are found and how the roles of the key actors in these spheres are defined and played out. In spite of this interrelationship and interconnection, the presence of what is considered profane usually awakens mistrust—and this is the case in Senegal.

Today, Senegal is in the midst of a social crisis that has been widely acknowledged and remarked upon.³ A significant group of musicians, inspired by leading social actors in Senegal, have linked the source of the solution to the social crisis in music but also in the religious domain. These musicians work largely with two genres of music, *mbalax* and rap, chosen because of their links with religion and because of their predominance in Senegal's musical scene. Whatever the musical genre in consideration, this call for music to address the social crisis is an option widely discussed by Senegalese Muslims. The unanimous recognition of the existence of a certain aimlessness, a type of social anomie, is consistently used by practitioners of "preaching music" and their supporters to legitimise their activities.

One point of departure in this analysis is the attempt of the different social actors and especially the "preaching musicians" to respond to the crisis. However, for some the introduction of religious themes in popular music is a source of moral degeneration, and this raises several questions which this study is attempting to answer. Several key terms will be surfacing in this discussion:

"Classical preaching" refers to the sermons of Islamologists transmitted on radio, TV or at conferences but without instrumental accompaniment.

“Religious music” is the music produced by artists who are specialized in Sufi songs and/or Qur’anic verses or learned poetry.

“Preaching music” is music produced by rappers and *mbalaxmen*, themes of religious character (for example, reminding people of Islamic principles). This music can be accompanied by a wide range of instruments: membranophones (*sabar*...), cordophones (*kora*, *xalam*...), aerophones (flute...), and idiophones (balafon...).⁴ Both the music and the instrumentation offer very diverse possibilities for communicating Islamic principles.

Rap, Christianity and Islam

The religious roots of rap music stem from its origins in hip-hop culture. And the history of the hip-hop movement is deeply connected to religious movements. Rastafarianism as well as the philosophy of the Nation of Islam have influenced several “old school” rappers. All of these influences represent reinterpretations of revelatory religions in various ways. Rastafarianism, for example, promotes a Black Redeemer (Haile Selassie) and sets out to redefine the foundations of Christianity in a manner that is racially advantageous to Blacks. In the case of the Nation of Islam and The Five Percent, the founding myth of the creation of the human species is also the object of alterations of a racial character. The origin of mankind, from which all races come, was the Black Man. And for Public Enemy (1988), in the view of Chuck D., “Farrakhan is a prophet” (1988).⁵ In rap music, MCs are often identified as either preachers or prophets, such as, for example, the Senegalese group YatFu (2000), who define themselves as “the prophets of rap”.

These MCs often refer to mythic deities and personalities. And here a connection that must be acknowledged is the cultural convergence between Africa and its diaspora. Trickster deities such as Esu-Elegbara (Gates, 2002; Davis, n.d.), for example, can be found in Haiti, the Brazilian Candomble and, in Africa, in the Fon and Yoruba mythologies. One of the principal qualities of these divinities is their force of persuasion, their capacity to bring people to their views and to manipulate by sole recourse to their intelligence and their facility with language. Nearly all of the mythic personalities to whom the MCs refer and with whom they identify (the trickster, the pimp, the hustler, the signifying monkey) have these qualities. For the MCs the image of the trickster (made over into a positive figure) and the weapon of the MCs remains the word, a word that presents itself as preaching.

Hip Hop arrived in Senegal in the 1980s and today is deeply implanted in Senegalese popular culture, especially in Dakar. Hip Hop in Senegal has taken on different modalities. It is clear that the Senegalese MCs have not been socialised in the same cultural framework as the Americans, but they have been influenced by the same features of prophetic imagination due to the intercultural exchange of the African diaspora (Gilroy, 1993).

Hip hop is embedded in this intercultural perspective and Senegalese *bboys* practitioners or supporters of hip hop culture are trying to live according to an alternative identity model while remaining anchored in what they perceive as positive local values, among which are Islamic values. Thus, as recalls the MC M.D. of the group Slam Revolution, it is clear for the rapper, as for any other believer: "for all things, it is the Lord (Allah) who decides." This affirmation could just as well be voiced by a classical Islamic preacher

Additionally, in the song "*Adouna*", the rapper Thieuf combines with a *marabout*, Seydina S. Se'ne (Thieuf and Se'ne, 2006). They criticise the overly strong attachment to the delights of earthly life and invite people to prepare for the afterlife, which should be the way of life of a Muslim. In this clip, members of Thieuf's *dahira*, the *Maslakoud Houdda-Sobouwayou Ndioup* ("engaged in the right way") appear, and he dedicates the song to them. Other rappers, like the Pinal Gang (2004), manifest this religious anchoring by incorporating religiously inspired symbols such as Islamic theology of numerology. I did several interviews with their manager, Guèye, a.k.a. Fakk Man. According to him, the Pinal Gang *crew* uses the concept 0114. Number 0 symbolises two nothingnesses: the nothingness which existed before the creation of the world and that which will exist after the Apocalypse. Number 114 symbolises the summation $1 + 1 + 4 = 6$, which represents the 6 days of creation of the world. The number 114 represents, at the same time, the 114 *suras* of the Qur'an (Guèye, 2006, p. 6).

These various forms of adaptation of Hip Hop in Senegal suggest that "this alternative model of identity is constructed within a pluralistic framework of hybridity, combining shaping principles of global hip-hop culture with *bboys'* traditional culture of origin, sometimes (with) the new Islamic revivalism" (Niang, 2006, p. 176). Thus, Hip Hop offers the possibility for extensive interweaving between popular music and Islam in the musical texts.

Mbalax and Islam

The musical genre of *mbalax* has not always had a strong following in Senegal. It began to develop in the mid-1950s with the formation of several groups; however, urbanites generally kept their distance from music played by means of traditional and national instruments. This means that *mbalax* did not start to modernise until the second half of the 1960s. Musical productions using traditional instruments may have attracted Western devotees of the exotic, but Senegalese urbanites themselves were more attuned to other tendencies such as pop, Afro-Cuban, be-bop, reggae, soul, etc..

The first break came with the World festival of Black Arts in 1966, where the Wolof language was set to music on Western instruments. Thus, by the mid-1970s, *mbalax* came to occupy the musical centre, whereas the other genres (jazz, R & B, rock) found themselves on the periphery. The real standard-bearers of this genre (Yousou Ndur, Oumar Pene, Ismail Lô, Baba Maaal, etc.) emerged in the 1980s and later, along with genre variations (yela, afrobeat, African folk). This expansion was accompanied by the development of the concept of “world music” and helped by the international aura these musicians acquired from their international awards.

Mbalax is a genre with multiple dimensions. It harbours in its breast laudatory and festive songs, alongside other dimensions more oriented toward consciousness-raising, including Islamic consciousness-raising. But the image that is most strongly attached to it is that of a light and carefree music.

Today, *mbalax* is omnipresent, and its connections with the religious world, although atypical according to some, are tangible. These connections date from the period after independence when the state was strongly motivated to put in place a dynamic cultural policy, led by the “poet president”, Senghor. Dakar is an especially interesting case because of the obvious complicity between the state and the religious power in curbing the excess of leisure activities and any tendencies toward orgiastic practices that are prohibited by religious principles, especially through the constant intervention of a patron state. Fairly quickly after independence the central political power and the religious power established a policy of keeping Senegalese on a path of uprightness by controlling leisure activities (including music) and their places of performance (Biaya, 2002, p. 341).

Preaching music and Islam: a controversial cohabitation

From interviews conducted with Ulama (imams of the mosque of Université Gaston Berger in the Sacré -Coeur neighbourhood, etc.), and, more generally, with Islamic scholars (men and women), it became clear that there are roughly three positions that characterise the relationship between music and Islam (Qardawi, 1960).

- 1) Music is forbidden in all its forms. However, the advocates of this position, who are mostly Salafists, do not represent the majority.
- 2) Certain forms of music, mostly singing, are permissible but others are prohibited. Not forbidden are songs that motivate the individual to love Allah, the Prophet, and Islam more deeply and to adhere to Islam's positive values. But song, whatever its importance or contents, becomes forbidden when it is accompanied by any instrument.
- 3) One cannot say that all music is forbidden. It is allowed when it is positive for Islam, with an instrument or not. So, those who say it is forbidden by Islam are evoking *hadiths* that do not have a degree of authentication that is solid enough to support their thesis.

These three positions continually surfaced during interviews, but the third position—that Islam accepts music (whether *a capella* or instrumental), even if in a conditional manner—was dominant. A.N., a scholarly teacher of Arabic and the Qur'an sees no prohibition if certain rules are respected.

Islam does not totally prohibit music. Even during the time of the Prophet, even though it was just songs with tambourines, it was performed. Therefore, music is not a recent phenomenon, even if there has been an evolution with new instruments (A.N., male, 2007).

The essential criterion is that music should avoid becoming too much a form of amusement which can weaken the faith.

Another interviewee, P.E.S., takes the same position.

Islam is not against entertainment, but it wants entertainment to be wholesome. Therefore, music can be (a form of) entertainment, but it must be a wholesome entertainment in the sense that it offers words, provides messages, it comes to educate, to raise consciousness, to sensitise. In this way, it will be a vehicle for transmitting messages, if comes to educate.

On the other hand, he continues:

If it is a music that spreads indecent words, with indecent dance, it can never cohabit with the Muslim religion. It cannot go with any religion, at least if it involves a revelatory religion. Because I know well that Christianity does not agree with certain activities that lead you astray. According to me, I think that one can join the two (music and Islam). Because music as such is not prohibited by the Qur'an, but it is not encouraged. What must be avoided is that the individual attain such a state as to forget God (P.E.S. male, 2007).

Thus, according to this last reading, if Islam does not encourage music too much, it is because of the desire to reserve energy for more religiously valued practices and to protect the believer's energy from being distracted.

Another person interviewed, E.S., a musician, has no doubt that music helps to raise consciousness among Muslims and that it can support the divine word that it transmits to believers. The development of preaching music would thus be a natural path because music is made for that purpose and it is up to the musician to be aware of this.

Of course! That depends, that depends, you know! Also it is up to us who make music in relation to texts. It is up to us to try to create texts what wake people up, to remind them. Because for me, that is music! We have to try to wake people up, to remind them of what is good (for Islam) (E.S. male, 2007).

A different point of view came out in the interviews with Senegalese people who affirm what they see as Islam's clear prohibition of music.

Islam forbids music, plain and simple, because it is said that music is the work of Sheytan (Satan) and Sheytan is bad (K.D. female, 2007).

O.N., a young doctoral student and *talibe* (disciple) of Baye Niasse, affirms basically the same thing.

What the shaykh said on that (music), Baye Niasse, it is written in black and white in 'Sariman'. 'Sariman' is a poem in which he relates the difficulties he has had in attaining Allah...At the same time he advises the *talibe* who wants to adopt this path. He says that you must flee all social niceties. That is, you must avoid certain discussions, avoid profane singers, those who make music, he wrote it in black and white!...Those who use...I do not know what instrument, but he spoke of an instrument uniquely to make music...all that slows down your path in attaining Allah". (O.N. male, 2007).

This is, in fact, the heart of the question. According to these people, music is considered to be a potential obstacle for reaching the divine path. Without being necessarily inhibiting, it is seen as an incitement to deviance. The relationship between Islam and music is very problematic and ambiguous in Senegalese society. In fact, Senegalese society prides itself on being a "rhythm society". Certain musical forms predate Islam, but have continued to coexist with it. This cohabitation is not unique to music—numerous practices have continued to exist after the arrival of Islam, even though their character does not conform with Islamic principles. Still, music is a very present and visible practice, in religious activities or in a preaching form. This very visibility and pervasiveness reinforces fears of deviance. Music has the potential to carry a message that can "work for Islam", but also the potential to "destruct". This is what makes people afraid.

The source of this ambivalence can be found at least in two levels of explanation: at the level of social representations that admit the difficult, perhaps even impossible, cohabitation of the sacred and the profane; and at the level of social practices where deviant models come to reinforce these same representations. Among these models, a musical act, a dance, as an answer which forms a dyad with the instrumental music (Jousse, 1974), is the object of the strongest opposition.

Even if the music has a religious intent, it is often accompanied by reactive acts that are considered indecent and not in conformity with Islam, as one interviewee noted strongly:

Dance? Let us not speak about it! Because you show your limbs, your body, and Islam does not like this kind of thing. Because Islam, it is hiddenness, and it is for what is discrete. Especially the girls who, when they dance, adopt indecent positions, and make all kinds of

things (prohibited), and all this is not normal! Because, if one says to you to hide your limbs, you must hide them all! (Y.N. female, 2007).

Although there are some groups in Senegal (for example, the *Lawbe*, an ethnic group) who have retained the eroticism of words, songs, and dances, the majority of Senegalese people accept dance only with conditions, especially dance which some view as a potential source of disorder. This perception of the destructive potential of music is reinforced by the multiplication of some groups which are spreading types of preaching music (“polynuclearization”) and of places which support preaching music (“polytopic”).

Preaching music: a “secularization” of the sacred, between “polynuclearization” and “polytopic”

What are the general perceptions (even if these impressions are not representative of the real situation) of Islam and music? Islam, especially in its Sufi manifestations, is often perceived to be a renunciation and mastery of self. It is synonymous with “order”, “discipline” and “rigor”. Music, on the contrary, is considered a site of unbridled ego, of relaxation, of liberated energy and ephemeral joy. For some, “disorder” is considered to be a fundamental characteristic of music. According to this logic, there would be a sort of incoherence in trying to associate the two.

Alongside classical religious preaching, preaching music presents itself as a form of secularisation of the sacred in three ways: firstly, it decentralises the ownership of the sacred word, which traditionally has belonged to the erudite, and makes it possible to possess it. Secondly, preaching music takes place in non-religious locations such as places of musical performance. And, finally, preaching music is transmitted by an unusual means—music—a medium that might be considered opposed to the religious.

This “polynuclearisation” of the Islamic message must therefore be analysed in relation to the exigencies of successful communication. The form in which a message is delivered is integral to its success. From interviews and general observation, it was clear that people considered preaching music to be a more efficient technique of sensitisation than classical preaching because people are more receptive toward a medium which is decodable, closer to their everyday secular life, closer to their feelings in a modernising world and diluted with the contemporary Senegalese culture.

This is how preaching music presents itself as a secular mediation of the Islamic message, which no longer appears in its original form, but which is the object of reformulation and more or less successful translation into a new medium. In addition, the lack of credibility and social recognition experienced by musicians in Senegalese society is changing (Niang, in press). As one Islamic scholar states,

It is no longer necessary to view contemporary music as it was before when musicians wore improper clothing, smoked joints, were dirty...Actually they have changed! Really, we are very pleased about these messages in the music.

This interviewee makes the same observation about the change in the latest music, rap, which...

...actually is doing very important work to raise consciousness. Because change is inevitable, rap has changed its appearance...they (the rappers) are bringing people back on the right path (M.M., male, 2007)

People are also increasingly critical of the manner in which the Islamic message is being delivered by classical preachers because they see it as too austere and haughty in certain cases. interviewees criticised those who, according to them, go against a cardinal rule of communication strategies: the need to put your self at the same level as your audience. One interviewee noted,

People are more receptive to the musician for the good and simple reason...that usually musicians are more supple, their words are easier to listen to because they use amusement and joy to transmit the words that they want you to hear. By contrast, the preachers, Allah forgive me, not all of them, but certain of them seem to believe that the keys of paradise or hell belong to them because of the manner in which they speak (P.E.S., male, 2007).

Another interviewee said almost the same thing,

I prefer the messages delivered through music because we have the impression that the preachers' messages target only a certain group of individuals. Preachers, generally, are strict enough and very rigorous in what they advise you. They make you afraid, tell you things that are difficult to hear. You prefer that...me, I prefer to hear that by music, draw a lesson by myself (rather) than hear a sermon that is like a threat. There it is! (Y.B. female, 2007).

It was clear from the interviews with “religious” and “non-religious” people alike that Senegalese people pay more attention to preaching when it is set in attractive modes of communication. In fact, even outside of music, the preachers most appreciated by audiences today are people like Oustaz Alioune Sali who uses the radio and who is often cited as a model preacher. He connects his discourse to real experience by referring to common everyday situations, but he also represents a modest, “normal person” who likes what the average Senegalese likes, without falling prey to excess. For example, after he preaches he offers the following prayer: “May Allah make it so we have money and good wives”. This is a significant departure from many classical preachers who give the impression that they scorn the enjoyment of good and earthly pleasures.

A *marabout* whom I interviewed gave this example:

There are two things: the soul and the flesh. This flesh belongs to the living world, it consumes what is in the world. If the soul flees at death, the body returns to the earth from which it came. As Allah said, ‘The body belongs to the living world and he who lives on earth is obliged to live with what is on this earth; thus music is an element of that life’. One, therefore, cannot ignore music (A.D., male, 2007)

Moreover, the media that preaching music uses—clips, cassettes, CDs—is more visible than that of religious music or classical preaching, even if the latter actually have better exposure on TV and radio stations. Classical preaching gets maximum exposure during the month of Ramadan—a period of particular religious fervor. However, as a young vendor of cassettes and CDs in the Sandaga market remarked,

the cassettes of the Qur’an are always in the most demand during Ramadan, but once it is over, the guys concentrate more on music (P.N., male, 2007).

The most significant justification of preaching music is, on the one hand, the crisis of values that Senegalese society is experiencing (and seeking solutions to), and, on the other, hand, the argument that the meaning and importance of the message count more than the type of communications vehicle used.

Musicians are equally aware that the favourable welcome that preaching music has received from a large part of the public is a green light that reinforces their position. And they are gaining a certain

recognition—one that almost reaches the point of “idolatry”— among certain sectors of the public. It is no longer idolatry for the *marabout* (more about this later), but idolatry for the artist himself.

The crisis of models of identification, the pervasive presence of music, the “starmania” have made certain of these musicians “divinities” of a new sort. An imam, during a sermon that I attended, complained that people cried more easily when they listened to a recorded song than when they listened to the Qur’an which leaves them unmoved!

Sacralisation, as noted above, should not be confined to the religious sphere. It is a process of idealisation that graces an entity endowed with powers and attributes beyond the ordinary. Today, we can observe a displacement of the manifestation of the sacred into new areas (politics and art, for example) according to a process of “desubstantialisation of the sacred” (Rivière, 1997, p.23).

A similar process is happening with regard to the multiplication of places where religious messages can be transmitted (*polytopic*). Here, too, one distances oneself from the debatable nature of the place in religious matters (it could be a podium or a nightclub) to focus more on the objective—bringing people to Allah—and the result—making them become more pious Muslims. If the message gets through, even in places frowned upon by Islam, one can be happy when the result is positive. In other words, the ends, in this case, justify the means.

Those who defend this position evoke, by referring to the Sunna itself, the Islamic justification for seeking those who have gone astray in their places of disrepute to them on the right path. One of them, M.M., an Islamologist, gave me an example that he witnessed in France: the Hezbollah in Lyon who, when the evening prayer was finished, went to bars in order to befriend drinkers and eventually bring them back to the rules of Islam.

Finally, it is important to remember that Senegalese today are men and women with plural identities, marked by cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism. Regulated by legislation that is predominantly secular, adept in a mode of urban life that is impregnated with Western values, they are certainly Muslims, but influenced by other parameters external to religion that molds their personalities.

As one interviewee stated,

Even our religious chants are music, maybe they are music of another genre, maybe they do not have the same orientation (as other forms of music, such as rap and *mbalax*). But any sound that gives pleasure to humans is music because, in the end, what is music? It is the art of putting sounds in harmony so that they are agreeable to the ear...Doudou Kenda Mbaye (an interpreter of Tijani chants) who sings) it is as if that transports me elsewhere. It is the same thing with Method Man (an American rapper) who sings. It touches me. Likewise with Youssou Ndour (a world music singer)! Like an imam who recites the Qur'an well (*tasjuif*), that is music (P.E.S., male, 2007).

The preceding has explained this general openness to preaching music in Senegalese society and the partially expressed acceptance of polynuclearisation and *polytopic* of the Islamic message tghat could, in addition be motivated by the preoccupations of marketing.

Preaching music as a marketing strategy in the face of idolatry

Religion in Senegal is a pillar of primary identification. A vital reference, it manifests itself in different fields of daily life. At the university you will find students leaving lectures to go to prayer, dedicating their thesis with religious formulas or uttering prayers while they defend their thesis. All of these are examples of the close intertwining of the sacred and the non-sacred in Senegal and the great difficulty of clearly separating the two spheres. Religious iconography (particularly *maraboutic*) is everywhere: in houses, cars, buses, hairstyle salons, etc. Musicians have taken hold of this interrelationship and have found an attentive ear in a socio-cultural framework already well prepared to accept such a musical orientation. Indeed, some productions (notably those of rappers) are posed as veritable challenges to *maraboutic* power.⁶ Nonetheless, a strong tendency of musicians—rappers as well as *mbalaxmen*—is to sing hymns to the glory of a *marabout*.

Rap and *mbalax* have not had the same thematic evolution. Obviously, in putting the two genres together, I am oversimplifying things somewhat. Rap evolved from, and still goes back and forth, from “re-vindictive” lyrics, focused on social and political themes, to a “pornographic rap” (with obscene language and sexual innuendos),⁷ or in “luxury rap” to the tendency of expressing some spirituality.

Mbalax started out with fairly instructive messages composed by groups such Xalam II and became more laudatory with the music of,

for instance, Youssou Ndour, in his early period. *Mbalax* then became increasingly engaged with contemporary issues with Oumar Péne, Ismaila Lô, Thione Seck, before arriving at its “break out” period with its “*tassou-songs*” performed by the “Young Talents” and accompanied by new dances.⁸ However, the commercial success of *mbalax* was accompanied by an impoverishment of themes and contents. As the music became better, the lyrics took on a contrary trajectory. In fact, *mbalax* is today seen above all as dance music, especially appreciated for its rhythm, while people often look to rap for a message. But *mbalax* musicians are also inserting a religious character into their productions—whether a general religious message or actual citation of verses.⁹

Rap also has its spiritual dimension in Senegal, some of which is performed in honor of religious leaders. Rap, however, is also critical of the practices of the Senegalese Islamic community, specifically the religious festivals celebrated at different times of the year and making religious leaders into idols. The song “100 commentaries” is certainly the most emblematic of this critical tendency. The lyrics of this song says much about the crude direction this music can take.

The Muslim community seems almost broken up with its conflicting groups refusing any form of reconciliation. I ask myself if finally the faith of this community is nothing but a coat they wear. Because today, it is as if you do not have the same perception of Allah if you do not have the same *marabout* as you have. Even with your close friends there are differences: two *korite*, two *tabaski*, and two *tumkharit*!(10) They dare to neglect Allah and their faith, but they would have themselves killed for their brotherhoods. There are many, many people who will be damned and then be punished, I can swear on Allah’s name that this will be because of their *marabout*. . . Have the courage to accept the damnation of your *marabout* (when someone hits him, someone will hit you too) and there (in the afterlife), there will be no intercession nor remission (Iba & Makhtar Le Cagoulard, 1998).

Other rap groups, like Keur Gui (2004), emphasise the same problem in their music. The brotherhoods are an important variable in any discussion of preaching music in Senegal—and in all aspects of Muslim religious practice. Observation of the musical scene reveals a systematic use of the “*maraboutic* vibe” to control a public that is already familiar with references to *marabout* leaders. During concerts, the most frequent method of getting the crowd on its feet is to ask,

Will he who believes in Serigne Touba (the leader of *Muridiya*) raise his hand”. “Will he who believes in Aladji Malick (the *marabout* who has

developed *Tijaniya* in Senegal) raise his hand". You will never hear, "Will he who believes in God...."

This phenomenon, more observable in *mbalax* music culture, is also present in rap, although to a lesser extent. It is what I would define as a type of "marketing strategy bordering on an idolatry". It is a strategy which gains strength when it yields results that reinforce the tendency to sell themselves by appealing to the *maraboutic* aura—whether for the sale of cassettes and CSs or to attract people to the concerts.

Conclusion

Throughout this account of popular music in Senegal, we have been exploring the relationship of the sacred and the secular in preaching music. This relationship between music (both *mbalax* and rap) and Islam are historical, complex, and dynamic. Appreciation for this connection is negative, negotiated or enthusiastic according to one's Islamic perspective. The interviews and the review of the secondary literature on the subject reveal that there are different views of the relationship of Islam and music, different interpretations of the Qur'anic sources and different models of religious belief and practice. The typology of views proposed in this analysis is, of course, a social construction. It can be found in the cohabitation of sacred and profane and in the marketing strategy where the secularisation of Senegalese culture is an underlying constant factor.

But above and beyond the Islamic perception of music, the question of the relationship between Islam and music can be analysed more broadly in three ways:

- The contingent determination of the frontiers between the sacred and the profane;
- The question of distinct religious groups in Senegal such as the religious brotherhoods;
- The antinomy sometimes posed between ends and means. If it has been stated that "*nassiril haq bil haq*" (He who assures he victory of truth through truth), can one deduce that any non-conventional means is prohibited by religion?

Even if it leads to the desired end? Even if it raises consciousness? If music can bring people to God, can it be tolerated? Or should one only devote oneself to certain forms, on the understanding that others would be prohibited? If music can bring people to God, can it be tolerated? Or should one only devote oneself to certain forms of music, on the understanding that others would be prohibited? Or is it not simply completely forbidden? Such are the questions underlying this study.

A more profound question concerns the socio-cultural evolution of Senegal and the manner in which the Ulama think of the adaptability or the non-adaptability of Islamic principles. According to Weber (1964), the contestation of religious symbolic systems produces a constant need for renewal which manifests itself as innovations that can be brought about by a "religious virtuoso". Would preaching music be such a profound innovation? And would this renewal be a gauge of the perpetuation of these religious symbolic systems. And how does one reconcile the individual and collective levels of meaning in the "religious sphere"?

But can this evolution be valid in a system where innovation is seemingly forbidden and the norm to be followed is strictly the Sunna? In other words, can the interpretation of the Qur'an and the Sunna evolve within the broader socio-cultural changes in the world by respecting certain general Islamic principles? And along the same lines, could the profiles of "consciousness raisers" of Islam be enlarged to include other socio-cultural categories which were not previously holding this position?

I admit that I am "wracked" by this series of questions and I am far from responding to all of these queries. But it seems to me that the theme of preaching music permits us to question with pertinence the increasingly complex relationship that the Senegalese believer (and other believers) can maintain with a faith mediated by a pluralistic identity (local culture and Islamic civilization). Even more complex is the question of the sometimes rather different interpretations of the same Qur'an and the same Sunna. These sources are "normally" supposed to regulate the beliefs and practices of every Muslim, whatever his or her allegiance and culture, but the reality is different. In this reality, we can only continue to question and search for some answers.

Footnotes

- ¹ The author wishes recognize the generous collaboration of the research team from the Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa. This research was first reported in October 2007 at Northwestern University in Evanston Illinois, USA. The author also wishes to thank those who made comments and suggestions at the first presentation of this research and also at the presentation of this paper at the International Conference on Media and Religion in Abuja, Nigeria July 10-13, 2008.
- ² The variations of the faith are not completely denied. It is on the possibility of these variations that the actions, consisting in bringing back that which would be lost, are brought back. But their “normality” is not easily recognized.
- ³ Discussion of this social crisis emerged in a debate at a meeting held September 4, 2007 sponsored by the AEEMS (Association of Muslim Pupils and Students of Senegal). The topic was “Muslim Pupils and Students Faced with the Recasting of the Islamic Movement in Senegal” at the University of Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar. The debate centred around the crisis of social, cultural, political and religious values and how to use Islam for solving this crisis.
- ⁴ This follows the instrumental classification made in 1914 by Curt Sachs and Erich von Hornbostel. We must note, however, that this classification does not quite fit the instrumentation used in Senegal today. Membranophones (*tabla*, *xiin* of the *bay fall* inter alia) are widely used in religious music and in rap also. Less easy to classify in these schema are electric and electronic instruments which abound today in the *mbalax music*, and, in hip-hop music, the beatboxes and banks of sounds are very often required.
- ⁵ Some rappers are members of *Five Percent* like Poor Righteous Teachers, Rakim, Big Daddy Kane, C.L. Smooth, Black Thought from the Roots Crew, Gravedigger, Wuy-Tang Clan, Brand Nubian (1993) (the title *Allah U Akbor* which opens the album *In God We Trust* of Brand Nubian starts with the call of the muezzin; the third track, *Meaning of the 5%*, is very evocative). An important research on this aspect was carried out by Felicia M. Miyakawa (2005, pp141-142). Besides, certain rules of the Zulu Nation are rooted in Islamic principles. There are numerous references in American rap that illustrate this conception of MC preachers: for example, in the clip “5 Boroughs”, Rev. Run stands in religious dress in front of a church, leafing through what is apparently a bible (KRS, One et al, 1999). In another clip, Pharoahe Monche, dressed as a monk and illuminated, ascends into the sky (Sway et al, 1999).

In the case of the Senegalese rap, direct religious references have been present and frequent for years, with Pee Froiss Muslim later becoming Pee Froiss. One finds this in the music of Jah Soldiers, Bamba J. Fall (taken from Ahmadou Bamba, the founder of Mouridism, a very powerful sufi brotherhood in Senegal and other regions), Baye Fall Kandand (from Ibra Fall, disciple of Ahmadou Bamba), *Leer Gui* (The Light) celebrating their attachment to Mourid philosophy, Daddy Bibson and his multiple titles dedicated to his *marabout* Baye Niasse (Leer G, 1999; Daddy Bibson, 2004). More recently, there are the titles "Islam", "God is One" and "*Bess pinth*" (Judgement Day) of Baire' J. "Baye your side" (Baye Niass is their religious guide) of Maxi Krezy featuring Fadda Freddy and Ndongo D. "Santeko Baye" (for thanking Baye) of Pinal Gang, etc. (Baire' J. 2006; Maxi Krezy, 2008; Pinal Gang, 2008). It is important to emphasize that in the same album, Pinal Gang criticises some *marabout* corrupted by political money in the track "*Tayla diomi*" (I am flabbergasted) (Pinal Gang, 2008). And the famous song "*Weurngul*" (The cycle (the cycle of life, from birth to the cemetery), of Daara J., featured with Rokia Traore' Daara and Rokia Traore', 2002).

⁶ A track from the rapper Bambino, criticising openly the *marabout*, Moudou Kara Mbacke', was withdrawn from the compilation *Politichien*, in 2000. The rapper and his family were threatened and harassed. Finally, his family sent him to England in order to protect him from *Talibe'* anger. The title "100 commentaires" (100 commentaries) of Iba and Makhtar Le Cagoulard also created a great sensation (1998) because of its critical attitude.

⁷ Particularly noteworthy was a track entitled "*Roof Ko Gueen*", from a cartel (a collective), Dakar All Stars, composed of Keyti, Ass Malick, Gaston and Nix. This title was strongly criticised by feminist *B-girls* like Fatim in the track "Intro" of compilation *Moye Lolou: vol. Demb* (Wa BMG, 2005, and DJ Coumbis I censored compilation. *Brassard Rouge*.

⁸ One of these so-called "Young Talents" Papa Ndiaye Thiopet, is criticised by many Senegalese people who find his productions debauched. Author of the famous *Nekko rèleu*, he received on November 3, 2006, the award of the "Gold *Djembe*" in Conakry (Republic of Guinea), during the seventh edition of this award (Thiopet, 2005, 2007).

⁹ Some of the evocative examples are the titles "*Mbaye Sy*" of Baaba Bamba, "*Cheikh Anta Mbacke*" of Kiné Lam, "*Mouhamadou Bamba*" of Thione Seck, Youssou Ndour in "*Mame Bamba*" or more recently "*Egypt*", an album with a religious set of themes which won a Grammy Award, the album, "*Dabah*" of Ismaila Lô, or "*Diazaaka*" of

Mame Goor (Lam M, 1991; Ndour, 1995, 2004; Lo 2001; Maam Goor et le Taw Feex, 2002; Seck, 2005; Maal, 2006. All these songs are praising the qualities of religious guides.

¹⁰ *Korite*, *Tabaski* and *Tamkharit* are Muslim festivals.

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Gender and religion in Nigerian popular films

By Dominica Dipio

Abstract

Although Nollywood films are often a critical social commentary on the greed, corruption and injustice of Nigerian society, Nigerian popular film tend to portray male dominance as “natural” while women are portrayed as simplistic supporters of masculine socio-cultural power. This ideological construction of male and female roles is carried over quite consistently in religious films. The present article analyses six “Catholic” films which construct priests as super-heroes or, more enticingly, as wounded heroes while women are constructed as a passive background chorus serving the priests and singing the glories of the priests. When protagonists, women are constructed as temptresses, carriers of evil spirits and a threat to the good order of the Church. When women, especially women religious, are major narrative characters, they are portrayed as ridiculous, fatuous, and inherently evil with weaknesses that can be cured only by male religious power. Underlying Nigerian religious films is the dualistic struggle of good and evil in the world, the portrayal of the community as the preserver of the sacred, and the continual ambiguity and internal debate of religious figures.

Key words : Nigerian popular film, gender portrayal, religious film, male dominance, Nollywood, film portrayal of priests, film portrayal of religious women, moral dualism, ideological construction in African media.

Introduction:

Nigerian popular films are today a major form of critical commentary on Nigerian culture. Many Nollywood films build drama around

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Nigerian popular films are today a major form of critical commentary on Nigerian culture. Many Nollywood films build drama around the revelation of a major social evil—the endemic greed and corruption in Nigerian business and politics, the hypocritical lives of the social elite, and the exploitation of the poor. In the battle against this social cancer, Nigerian films create super protagonists and reinforce the popular hero stereotypes. Many would argue that this also tends to reinforce the ideologies of power and builds an acceptance of the structures of dominance in Nigerian society as “just the way the world is” (Johnson, 1998, pp. 101, 102, 106; Lull, J. 1995, pp. 7-9).

A number of analyses of Nollywood films point out the tendency to reinforce the ideologies of the patriarchal male protagonist (Olujinmi, 2008, p. 124; Carroll, 1996, p. 268). Institutional religion is particularly strong in Nigeria, and many Nigerian popular films deal with themes of religion (Ogunleye, 2003; Adeniyi, 2008). In many parts of Nigeria, the priest, pastor or evangelist occupies a prominent leadership position in communities, and pastoral leaders are often featured as protagonists. Catholicism plays a prominent role in public life, especially in the southeast Onitsha, Ibo area, and Catholic themes are brought into not a few Nigerian films. The evangelical pastor as super hero is a more prominent protagonist in Nigerian films, but not a few films centre around the Catholic priest as culture hero or, more enticingly, as wounded hero (Adeniyi, 2008). Women in Nigerian films are often presented as seductive threats to the virtue of men, as witches with evil powers, as weak and treacherous. Rarely are women presented as the educated and clever professional protagonist capable of confronting the typical social problems in Nigerian society. A central argument of the present paper is that the male dominance and negative female image are carried over into the films dealing with Catholic popular religiosity, especially in films that portray religious nuns.

Mabel Ekwierhoma (2008, pp. 112-113) takes issue with Nollywood for its masculinist and patriarchal imaging of women, and the exporting of the negative picture of Nigerian women around the globe. John Afolabi notes that progressive and non-traditional female characters are rarely given prominent roles in films. The repeated elevation and deification of the traditional, uneducated woman is not a reflection of reality. The educated woman, though more empowered, is often portrayed as a disaster in the domestic sphere. The success of women in the public sphere jeopardises their primal role as homemakers (Olujinmi, 2008, pp. 121-123). The women of higher social status,

though better educated, are often portrayed as dissolute, fatuous clothes horses.

Both Olujinmi (2008) and Ekwierhoma (2008) argue that Nigerian popular film constructs narrative structure, character definition and plot resolution from a male social perspective. Ekwierhoma (2008, p 116) further argues that men and women view female representation differently: what is negative and unfair to female audiences is often considered fair rendition of the reality by men. The argument of these authors is that the presentation of male and female is an ideological construction which makes unjust power relations seem "natural", "the only workable solution", "for the advantage of all" (including those treated unjustly), "what the 'community' wants", or even a "divinely ordained sacred order" (Barthes, 1973; Hall, 1977, 1982). Because the structure of representation in popular film is located in everyday scenes of Nigerian life, the logic of representation often appears at first sight common sense and objective. (Lull, 1995, 9-15).

The central hypothesis guiding the analysis of this article is that the representation of men and women in films dealing with Catholic life in Nigeria is a continuation of the general ideological construction of men and women in Nigerian films, which generally portrays women as powerless and ineffective, content with their subordination to males, obstacles to the virtues of men and often ludicrous in their stupidity. The fact that women in Nigeria are in fact ministers of government, administrators of hospitals and schools, highly ranked professionals, leading scholars and holding other roles of power and influence never appears in Nigerian popular film except in a caricatured way.

The focus of the analysis here is on the relative power and dependency of men and women and how power and dependency is used and accepted. When protagonists are portrayed with anti-social flaws, are they redeemed and saved for the community or are they simply expelled as socially undesirable? Given the central role of family and community in African society, an aspect of interest is the portrayal of how men and women deal with the problems and evils of community and whether a conflict between individual inspirations and the will of the community is resolved in favour of subordination to the community. Of particular interest is how Nigerian popular film creates a range of stereotypical models of priests, nuns, and religious lay leaders.

This analysis of the gender portrayal in "Catholic" Nollywood films focuses on seven films produced from 2003 to 2007 that feature heavily the roles of priests and nuns: *The Priest must Die* (2003) directed

by Ifeanyi Onyeabor, *The Pope must Hear This* (2003) directed by Lancelot Oduwa, *The Stolen Bible* (2006), directed by Emeka Nwabueze, *Strong Desire* (2007) directed by Ekenna Udo Igwe, *Beyond Dreams* (2007) directed by Afam Okereke, *Covenant Keeping God* (2007), directed by Obi Callys Obinali and *The Last Knight* (2007) directed by Henry Udeze.

The super-priest role model

"The Social-activist super-priest"

In *The Priest must Die*, the construction of the central character, Fr. Paul, brings out many of the classical dimensions of the super-pastor or super-priest but with a slant toward the social reformer. As one who speaks for the oppressed and socially disadvantaged, Fr. Paul's sermons reveal the oppressiveness of the power structure in Nigerian society. Although because of his education he is part of the social elite in the community, he takes his position with the poor and demonstrates a different kind of power than that of the political and economic elites. For the corrupt and powerful political leaders he is a challenge to be either destroyed or "befriended" for manipulative reasons. For Chief Ephraim, a traditional chief who wields political and economic power, Father Paul must be eliminated (hence, the Christ-figure title, *The Priest Must Die*), but Fr. Paul easily overcomes the Chief with his moral and spiritual authority.

When the priest is falsely accused by Chief Ephraim of having an affair with the chief's wife, just to get an excuse for having him transferred, Fr. Paul only prays to God to vindicate himself. He remains respectful without sacrificing his identity as a Christian leader even in the face of persecution. In contrast with the power of material wealth and influence the rich use to destroy the priest, Fr. Paul has only spiritual power.

Fr. Paul has great abilities to convert sinners, especially the perpetrators of injustice. In the new parish where he is transferred as a way of silencing him forever, his boldness remains unabated when he challenges the fearsome traditional leader to return his younger brother's wife whom the man forcefully took from the brother. The battle that this conflict generates between the priest and Chief's witchdoctor leads to a dramatic showdown of power before the entire community, to prove whose God is the more powerful. The witchdoctor whom the chief engages to defend his cause, has a premonition of something terrible about to happen. Since the diabolical powers are real, it is only

the kind of unabating prayer offered by Fr. Paul that can stand against the forces of darkness. At the most intense moment of the priest's suffering under the machination of the witchdoctor's diabolic acts, reversals begin to take place. The final outcome is the conversion of the witchdoctor and all those he represents. For the chief the tangible sign of conversion is to give back his brother's wife and to renounce his old ways. The film ends with the entire congregation rejoicing at the conversion of sinners.

Like all super-pastors and super-priests in Nollywood films, Fr. Paul is endowed with miraculous powers to carry out physical and spiritual healings, raise the dead to life, cast out demons from the "daughters of Jezebel" and unbind them from evil spells. All these make the priest both a desired and disturbing presence in the community, but because his actions and attitude are consistent with the perception of priestly ministry, the community sees him as the flag bearer of their values.

In the super-priest film it is the absolute faithfulness to the public's perception of the priestly ideal that gives him his capacity to win all, even those who consider him an enemy. What is demonstrated in the narrative is that the priest who remains steadfast in prayer and in faith is bestowed with extraordinary powers and is always miraculously saved from all dangers by God. This power is paradoxically demonstrated when the priest is most vulnerable. Since it is clear that the new parish he is transferred to is a battle front, before taking up his assignment, like Jesus before his public ministry, Fr. Paul begins his mission by a seven days retreat of fasting and praying. The parallel editing underscores the relationship between prayerfulness and success in every aspect of his mission.

Fr. Paul is an archetype of a priest; he is Christ-like and what he does is an instruction on the principles of Christian teaching. The experience of watching the film is like being immersed in a ritual space where one is instructed on the position of the priest in the community. The priest stands out as one who dispenses the mercies and forgiveness of God. As a symbolic character he is clearly identified not simply by his religious attire, but more importantly by his conduct, spiritual leadership and deep prayer life – an extreme necessity because super-priests are under attack on all fronts.¹

In the midst of all his success Fr. Paul remains humble. When he notices the converts beginning to venerate him as a miracle worker, Fr. Paul is quick to correct them: he is simply a servant of God. This attitude contrasts with that of the pastor we will encounter later in the

film, *The Stolen Bible*, a man who draws attention to himself as the special one invested with power. In *The priest Must Die* Fr. Paul stands slightly apart from the marvelling crowd; and with a raised hand he blesses and prays for all to be accepted by God as his beloved children.

Always the super-priest is created by the support of the community and he is both a symbolic and prophetic presence in the community. This narrative closure cues viewers to see the priest in his double position as a member of the community and at the same time a symbolic figure set apart in the community: a kind of paradox. Fr. Paul represents the plenitude of what a priest should be in the community.

How does the classic super-priest film portray the role of women? In *The Priest Must Die*, rarely do women appear as intelligent and discerning members of a parish. Rather, the attractiveness of the priest's example and his spiritual powers are maintained by keeping women at a distance, part of the indistinguishable mass of the chorus of the community, singing the praises of the priest. Amaka, the wife of Chief Ephraim, regrets having married a hypocritical fetish man who has no fear of God and lacks compassion for the needy. In fact, she is portrayed as a simple woman: she does not know that Chief Ephraim is a fetish man until she sees a charm fall out of his pocket during church services. In the end, Amaka provides quiet spiritual leadership in her family and accompanies her husband on his journey of conversion and reconciliation with Fr. Paul and with God. But her main role is as an admirer of the prayerfulness of Fr. Paul.

When women come to the fore as protagonists, they are more likely to be temptresses—Chief Ephraim uses his own wife as a supposed temptress of Fr. Paul—or the daughters of Eve from whom demons are driven. While the men resist conversion, women, as subordinates in the social structure, are more compliant. When Fr. Paul is transferred to the difficult parish where he is expected to fail, two women are among his main supporters, but as humble passive assistants. Monica, a widow, has devoted the rest of her life to unquestioning service of the Church, while Maria is simply the caretaker of the mission house since the death of the former parish priest.

The super-priest as "reformer in the Church" in contrast with the "hypocritical priest"

The community's desire of what a priest should be like is extended in the portrayal of Fr. Felix, in *The Last Knight*. The "Knights" are a prominent part of Nigerian Catholicism, lay men who are honoured by

their financial and other support of the Church with membership in these fraternal organizations that are reminiscent of the knightly orders of the Medieval crusades. The major conflict here is similar to that in *The Priest must Die*. Both films foreground the theme of hypocrisy, especially among those who parade as models of Christian virtue. In *The Last Knight*, the prestigious position of the knights puts them on a moral pedestal over the others.

However, half of the all male membership is made up of men who have desecrated the office and have turned it into a pure status symbol. Appearance is so important to these men that they are prepared to buy this title to create a positive impression to camouflage their evil and occult practices. The film is heavily embedded in irony: The rich and influential men dress in pharisaic flamboyance and flowery religious words issue from their lips; yet they are prepared to sacrifice even members of their families for the sake of power and wealth. The opening scene, which is a display of pomp, wealth and power of the Knights, lasts nearly fifteen minutes. As members of the secret cult whose activities are counter to the principles of Christianity, these men are “wolves in sheep’s skins”. The world in the film is caught up in a power struggle between light and darkness, and the male characters are the masterminds of this fight.

In *The Last Knight*, there are two principal priests of contrasting dispositions. Fr. Nwosu takes things at face value, and credits the hypocritical knights as men of virtue. His prayer style, that lacks depth and focus of intention, is more of a routine. He enjoys the expensive gifts Chief Ejikeme and his fellow knights intentionally give to blind him about their true identity. Instead he defends them from insightful knights like Sir David who try to warn the priest about the evil schemes of Chief Ejikeme’s group. It is the social and ceremonial aspect of Fr. Nwosu that is emphasized in the film. Soon he begins to model himself into what the knights want him to be, and sees genuine concerns from Christians as envious attacks on him. The wicked Chief Ejikeme becomes his confidant.

This priest, with all his spiritual bluntness is what the cultist knights want. His spiritual weakness is an advantage for them; and they try to influence the bishop not to transfer him. Just like those whose company he keeps, Fr. Nwosu’s prayer has ironic effects.

Sir David describes Fr. Nwosu as food on a fish hook that is waiting to be trapped any moment. This happens when Chief Ejikeme dies, and the priest who used to dine and wine with him is the only clergy-

man who can perform his funeral prayers. Only then does he comes to realize Ejikeme's full identity as an anti-Christ, but then it is too late. Fr. Nwosu has been dragged down into hypocritical mediocrity. The director's implied statement is that a priest cannot be relevant when he consorts with the people he is supposed to challenge and provide spiritual leadership for.

The super-priest model in this film is represented through Fr. Felix who questions the superficiality of the people, feels uncomfortable with the flamboyance of externalism and refuses to be bluffed by material exuberance as the benchmark for a healthy Christian community. Like all super-priests, Fr. Felix is a man of prayer, and it is his deep prayer life that defends him in the fierce battle he wages against the power of the cultist knights. It is prayer which helps him to know the truth about the identity of the knights.

Felix's replacement of Nwosu as parish priest gives the hypocritical knights the biggest trouble. On the surface, both priests are similar as they are seen as devoted to their calling; but the principal difference is in their attitudes towards the cultist knights. Fr. Felix is principally a spiritual leader in the community and he keeps a critical distance between himself and those he should guide on moral and spiritual issues. The copious gifts the knights want to load onto him do not impress him.² He seeks God's guidance in every move he takes, just like Fr. Paul in *The Priest Must Die*. When Chief Ejikeme comes to welcome Fr. Felix to the new parish, he presents it as "the most peaceful and rewarding parish" and promises him, "If you dine with us, you will have nothing to lack!" The priest is quick to discern the spiritual problems of the knights, and he immediately takes a radical and uncompromising position against them with the weapon readily available to him – prayer. Once the knights identify Fr. Felix as incorruptible and uncompromising, they treat him as an enemy that must be defeated and eliminated. A similar power play with the cultist knights is staged, and the priest as a paradoxical Christ-figure is replayed: in his physical vulnerability, he has only his rosary as the weapon to rely on. He uses this power to pray for the conversion of the men who want to destroy him. These men who are deeply rooted in their evil ways remain unrepentant to the end.

When Chief Ejikeme dies in the path of syncretism in the bid to impress both sides, his death is most ignoble, but this opens up the opportunity to contribute to the image of Fr. Felix. Chief Ejikeme is rejected by the Church. Ironically, though many consider him a highly

celebrated knight of God, he dies in his cult uniform, exposing the double identity of all his colleagues who have desecrated the holy office of knighthood. Fr. Felix's immediate role is to renew the hope of the remnant knights and to rebuild the respectable institution of knighthood to what it is meant to be.

In *The Last Knight*, the wives of the cultist knights are like shadows of their husbands. They are beneficiaries of their husbands' power and wealth but they know nothing about their sources. Ostensibly as wives of knights, their activities should support and promote the kingdom of God, but in actuality they do not even pretend to be nice. While their husbands pretend to be religious, the women are outright curish, mean and with no trace of nobility. They care only about their titles, fashion and class symbols that are also associated with their husbands. In the final analysis their boastfulness comes to nothing at the downfall of their husbands. As far as gendered power relations are concerned, there is no difference between them and the woman in the lowest social class. The exceptional ones like the Iron Lady, the wife of the man who is both a chief and a cult member, do not change the rule. The ordinary wives like Lady Miriam and Lady Bath have only their titles to boast of; they do not know the other sides of their husbands' identity as cult members. Their husbands do not consider their wives partners enough to share their secrets with. All they do is to please them with glamorous gifts: they are insignificant in this power game. As appendages of their husbands, an undesirable change in their husbands' fortunes brings the women crumbling (Dipio, D. 2008: 68-69). Although Lady Miriam wonders why one room in Chief Ejikeme's house remains locked, she does not suspect that this is the secret temple where her knight of a husband worships. She does not question the source of his wealth as long as it can allow her brag to other women.

The wives of the knights enter into the portrayal of the hypocritical priest, Fr. Nwosu as equally hypocritical. When Fr. Nwosu opens a conference of the women of the parish, the members turn out to be the wives of the knights. He prays for an extraordinary meeting that would lead to the revitalization of the parish. The meeting turns out to be extraordinary in the ironic sense that the women turned it into a competition of who is the greatest, has more money, is of higher class, and therefore should be elected as chairperson.

As morality tales crafted to fit into contemporary contexts, the films that have super-priests as central characters draw heavily from biblical stories. The directors use parallelism and juxtaposition with the ultimate objection of helping viewers reach a moral judgment (Ogunleye F., 122, 125; Dipio D., 2007). The popular culture power dynamics are seen when reversals are experienced at the end of both films. These filmic representations are expressions of the community's desire to see the priest as a redemptive figure for social justice. The image of the priest reproduced in these films is a John the Baptist prophetic voice that is forthright, incorruptible and unflinching in living the principles of the faith. In the cultural context, this image expresses the community's need for symbolic and sacrificial characters that epitomise the values of social justice; and this is realized in the priest as a community role model for virtues (see May, 2001, especially parts two and three). In no case does the image of the woman in the Nollywood films analysed here draw on the heroic prototypes of women of the bible. The virtues of the priest are brought out by men who are worthy protagonists, while the women are either simple and subordinate or fatuous chatterboxes that no one pays serious attention to.

The image of the priest as “wounded healer”

Fr. John Bosco and sexuality as the site of his healing

Many Nollywood films find an indirect path to heavy sexual relationships, and the celibacy of the priest provides an open field for exploitation from many perspectives. In *The Pope Must Hear This*, the narrative of the film is set in motion with a curse placed on Fr. John Bosco by a woman he raped just before he joined the seminary. Although the curse is kept somewhat in the background in the film, the female victim's wish that the priest be tormented by uncontrollable sexual desires all the days of his life sets in motion a path of dramatic struggle for Fr. John Bosco and continual expectation of new amorous adventures in every scene. What is significant, however, is that the priest is portrayed as a victim rather than an offender in the larger part of the narrative. The priest's action in raping women is part of the weakness of male nature. The women are the evil protagonists. At the end, viewers feel relieved when Fr. John Bosco defeats and destroys the women—the vindictive victims—who become his tormenters.

In *The Pope Must Hear This*, the entire film focuses on Fr. John Bosco's struggles with women in both physical and spiritual forms of attacks until he finally defeats them. The gender relation in this film is

interesting in throwing light on the power relations. The priest tells his several female victims/tormentors his image as a celibate priest must be protected rather than mention him as the man responsible for their pregnancies. As viewers focus on the priest's weaknesses, the catechist who is particularly hurt by the priest's problem because his own daughter is involved with him, cannot report the matter to the bishop because he has no moral authority to do so. He is aware that Fr. John Bosco knows about his own habit of stealing from the church coffers. As in *The Stolen Bible*, both have no moral authority to accuse the other.

When he defiles the chief's daughter, impregnates and thanks her "for giving him her virginity", the confounded little girl cannot understand this aspect of the priest's identity. She confesses the truth to her father, who has all along held the priest in high esteem. This leads to the priest's exposure and subsequent confession to the bishop. The confession he makes is grave enough for the Pope to hear. From this point onwards, the narrative positions the viewer to sympathise with the priest. In the first place, he is a victim of his father's ambition to have a priest in the family for materialistic reasons. Secondly, he is a victim of a curse placed on him by the girl he raped just before he joined the seminary. The rape resulted in a pregnancy. In order not to jeopardize John Bosco's chances of becoming a priest, the two families reached a compromise to settle the issues in the interest of the boy while the girl was forced to carry out an abortion. In the initial part of the narrative, this victim disappears. When she reappears in the second and third parts of the film, she is part of pack of supernatural beings that torment the priest.

The women form the majority of the priest's active parish members wherever he is posted. The entire ceremony to welcome Fr. John Bosco into a new parish after his return from Rome is embedded in irony. The charismatic song they sing, "Things are already better" fills the air. The camera focuses more on the female choir members and those presenting the priest with gifts. A low camera angle captures the priest overwhelmed by these gestures of hospitality. This ironic angle communicates the torments that are soon to begin. The irony in the out-going priest's comment that this new parish is conducive for spiritual growth is immediately realised when the mammy spirits are edited in, laughing in mockery as if to annul the statement just made. The message of one of them is clear: to harm the one who has killed her daughter. By this time, the audience identifies with Fr. John Bosco and wishes that he

succeeds in the new parish and in the fight against the tormenting spirits.

The mammy spirits wage incessant wars on the priest, always using the more devoted female members of the congregation whose motives are not suspect. The fight is now elevated to a spiritual level. The mummies recruit unsuspecting co-workers of the priest to bring him down in the defense of his celibacy. They find an effective attack point in Sr. Magdalene who has been carefully selected to be Fr. John Bosco's assistant in the new parish because of her maturity, effectiveness and competence in teaching catechism to young people. With this unsuspected point of entry, the priest's previous problems return. Now he is no longer in control of himself. He brutally rapes a school girl who is also the niece of a fellow priest. With the priest under attack, the moral life of the parish begins to go down. This is dramatically manifested by the statue of Mary going into flames, and the sacristy being desecrated. These dramatic occurrences are metaphors for what happens to a believing community when their priest is under spiritual attack. In the final show down with the women, the priest emerges a hero when through the power of prayer he destroys the mammy spirits.

At this point in the film one might expect that Fr. John Bosco would be the target of strong institutional action by superiors or bishops. Yet the bishops show interest in his rehabilitation. In the case of Fr. John Bosco, he gets a scholarship to study in Rome before moving to a new parish. Besides, as a priest with particular challenges, the Pope maintains friendly communication with him to encourage him in his pastoral work. This official relationship with the hierarchy keeps the priest in his mission; and his earlier negative experiences help to shape his new identity as a "wounded priest". At the end, he is reclaimed and turned into powerful instrument of God.

In *The Pope must Hear This*, once Fr. John Bosco defeats the furies, the font of spiritual energies open for him: he sees celestial visions and receives special healing powers to even raise the dead to life. The ultimate point made in the films is that a priest is an anointed person by virtue of his office. Forgiveness is what he has generously received from God and what he preaches in his renewed ministry. The chief who feels most hurt because Fr. John Bosco has betrayed the trust his family had in him finds it extremely difficult to forgive him. The chief, who falls ill shortly after the discovery of the priest's scandal, has used large sums of money to get treated, but to no avail. Although Fr. John Bosco's reputation as a healer has spread around the land, the chief's wife has refused

to let him pray for her moribund husband. When she finally succumbs to the pressure of family and friends to allow the priest pray for the chief, the latter gets cured. The final prayer Fr. John Bosco says for the people is inter-cut with the images of Jesus, Mary and Pope John Paul II; and the face of Fr. John Bosco is dissolved into Jesus' and the Pope's face with the words, "Behold, among the outcasts, a redeemer has been born." This metaphoric end underlines Henri Nouwen's the "wounded healers" paradigm in church ministers, where the healer shares the same vulnerability with the patient and heals from the very experience of his own wounds (Nouwen, 1979). It is a relief for the viewer that the priest, as an instrument of God has been totally reclaimed; and one can hope in the triumph of good in the mystery of a vulnerable human being as an instrument of God's power.

In empathising with the priest, viewers have by now forgotten that the vendetta female furies and the other women he has victimised are actually seeking redress for multiple crimes committed against them. At this point in the narrative it is the priest, not the women, who appears to be the victim. In this type of priest film, the image of women is clearly those persons that priests have to fight against in order to keep to their priestly calling. Women are, in effect, impersonations of evil in both physical and spiritual forms; and are out to destroy the priests (Ogunleye, p. 122).

Father Laz and Fr. Rex: Priests with a double life

While in *The Pope must Hear This* the narrative attributes the weakness of the priest to a strange curse and ultimately frees the priest for ministry, in *Strong Desire* two priests, in different ways, settle into an ambiguous relationship between their sacred office and their sexuality. Fr. Laz's struggles with women is physical, with heavy consequences on his spiritual and pastoral life. The women continue to play their stereotypical role as "temptresses" who bring the men of God down. This is especially seen in the role played by Mrs Oggi, the rich influential woman in the parish who seduces the inexperienced priest. Under her expert attacks, the hitherto valiant Laz, endowed with charismatic gifts loses all his spiritual gifts. She ridicules his feeble resistance and uses her influence to prevent him from being transferred to another parish. As far as she is concerned, Fr. Laz's being a priest is not incompatible with having an affair with her: he can still serve God and administer the sacraments to the faithful. As in *The Pope must Hear This*, in *Strong*

Desire, in the narrative resolution, viewers are positioned to identify with the priests in spite of their predatory actions against women.

In both *The Pope must Hear This* and *Strong Desire* the priests are as vulnerable as the people they lead spiritually. At times they fall desperately, although the office they occupy is a sacred one. Prayer is the source of their power; and a good priest's prayer is expected to be efficacious. Loss in efficaciousness is often an indication that he has lost the power of God in him. In *Strong Desire*, Fr. Laz loses his charismatic gifts when he stops praying and begins pursuing desires that are incompatible with his priestly calling. When he is caught up in the ambiguity of sensual and spiritual desires, his prayer life is put in jeopardy and he painfully realises that he can no longer cast out evil spirits and dispense God's mercies and love. This moment becomes the turning point that leads to his conversion, and the return of the priestly fervour is soon manifested in the charismatic gifts he needs for ministry. Moral ambiguity and indeterminacy are obstacles to the priest's effective exercise of ministry.

In *Strong Desire* the priests represent two types: Fr. Rex who is adapted to the lowest moral standards of the community; and Fr. Laz who keeps to the ethics of his calling. The whole point of dualism in the representation is to underline the moral points in the films. Fr. Rex is introduced into the film when Fr. Laz comes to him for counsel on how to deal with Mrs Oggi's advances. Fr. Rex, the elderly priest, is the one who initiates the young priest, Fr. Laz, into a double life standard, making it appear a norm for priests to outgrow the initial zeal of their calling. Fr. Rex keeps the ritualistic aspects of his ministry as it gives the right impression. His friends are rich business men who are actually conmen. As a priest his job is to pray for success in their dirty ventures, and in exchange he gets a fat cheque. He has cosily settled down to his lifestyle. Fr. Rex takes this opportunity to initiate Laz to his kind of lifestyle: expensive cigarettes, wine and women. With these, Laz progressively deteriorates spiritually and becomes an empty shell of a priest, although he remains rather uncomfortable with this existence.

The two desires for sexual activity and celibacy remain ambiguous and undefined in him. His meeting, in a night club, with a "prostitute" who turns out to be a nun incognito throws him in even greater confusion. The two, though incognito, are irrevocably attracted to each and fall in love. There is something about this "prostitute" that does not cohere with her trade, which makes Laz want to find out more about her. When this secret meeting has to painfully end they part without

disclosing their identities. The ambiguity of the situation is that this relationship seems to have brought happiness to the priest on one hand; and yet on the other hand, he sadly becomes aware of the loss of the charismatic gifts he had. This ambiguity, as we shall see in a deeper analysis, is an important filmic strategy in many of these Nollywood films.

With his conversion and return to ministry in a new parish, Sr. Rose, the “prostitute” he had met earlier and fell in love with, actually belongs to the same community of sisters where he now serves as a renewed priest. The two come face to face in a session where Fr. Laz is giving a lecture on fellowship. This unexpected encounter and discovery brings back to life the past demons that both would prefer buried and forgotten. The ambiguities about their desires threaten to return. Fr. Laz confronts this situation as he tells Sr. Rose:

We hid our identities to commit the sin of the flesh, we had the same urge and emotions; and that brought us together.... We both took an oath to remain consecrated to the Lord and we violated that oath But in our conscience we cry out to our heavenly Father for forgiveness. The Father, in his infinite goodness has forgiven and restored us back to our Faith I feel deeply in my heart that you feel the same love and passion I feel for you.

The ambiguous end of this film opens up multiple readings. As the two passionately hug, the viewer is left with the uneasy question: “Where is this relationship going given what audience knows about the two?” or, “Is this a platonic hug that moves their relationship to a spiritual level?”

The filmmaker portrays the area of sexuality as one of the most challenging for the religious people. In *Strong Desire*, after asserting that she is now fully rededicated to religious life, Sr. Rose’s frenzied night prayer reveals the turmoil in her that can neither be put to rest by the white dress she wears nor by her religious demeanour. Underneath the surface, she is battling with a volcano of feelings that are ready to erupt. This immediately shows when she encounters Fr. Laz. The ambiguity in her love life resurfaces. Her confusion (if this is not an error on the filmmaker’s part) is evident in the words she uses in her prayer as she sings, “Immaculate Heart of Jesus” when the usual reference is, the “Immaculate Heart of Mary”. In her double identity as “nun” and “prostitute” the filmmaker seems to suggest sexuality is an ambiguous zone. In the context of traditional African societies, mar-

riage and children are indisputable values (Faniran, 2008, p. 128); thus a consecrated life of celibacy becomes difficult to comprehend. The director opens the discussion on the sexuality of consecrated people by this kind of narrative resolution.

The portrayal of religious women in Nollywood films

While Nigerian popular film more often focuses on the priest, women religious are also featured in some films and this analysis chooses two films which seem more representative of the popular style of narrative construction, *Beyond Dreams* and *The Stolen Bible*. Some films have presented women religious in more heroic roles as in the case of the super-priest film. Examples of this are Afam Okereke's *Sister Mary* (2003), a devoted nun – a rejected stone – is destined by God to be a source of blessings for the community both in her earthly life and after her death; Chico Ejiro's *Festival of Fire* (2002) which tells the story of the clash between a chief priest and a religious woman through whom God manifests his power; and Tunde Kelani's *Thunderbolt* (2000). More typical is the film which uses the dedicated life of women religious as a source of the bizarre to give a plot a more unusual dramatic twist or a source of the ludicrous in films which are cast as a comedy. As *Sister Act* showed well, to place nuns who are supposedly the epitome of cloistered piety in an incongruous role as professional detectives catching thieves can be quite humorous. But Nollywood films have their own way of drawing humour from the portrayal of nuns in unusual, contradictory roles. Whereas *Sister Act* constructs the role of religious women in a rather empowered light, Nollywood films tend in a quite different direction. In this, the persons behind the pen or the camera cannot escape the influence of their subjectivity (Fiske, J. 1998: 117).

Sister Nancy: A nun turned murderer

Beyond Dreams takes a familiar theme in African contexts, the woman who would like to dedicate herself to the religious life but is forced to remain and take care of her parents or younger members of her family. This, obviously, is a rather uninteresting and must be “jazzed up” with typical Nollywood plot techniques.

The plot is set in motion when Nancy, a perpetually consecrated nun, is forced by social obligation to return home to look after her ailing father. The event of her father's illness makes the elders conclude that it was a mistake to have allowed her to join the convent in the first

place; Nancy's children would have been around to assist their would-be grandfather. As the "legitimate owners of Nancy", the elders demand that traditional family values take precedence, a quite acceptable turn in the communalistic culture of Africa. (Faniran, 2008, pp 48-50).

In constructing women's roles, Nollywood film producers take advantage of traditional community customs to design a less powerful role for women religious. While priest films encourage young men to get education, especially education abroad, and seek leadership positions and wealth for the family in communities, the woman's role is constructed as a return to the hidden domestic scene. This value system corresponds with how women are generally viewed in the Nigerian society.³ (Cudd, p. 168)

When the demand of the elders is delivered to the Mother Superior and to the religious community, the response might have acknowledged the need and might have seen a new development in Sister Nancy's religious vocation, namely familial and community service. Instead the Mother Superior is revealed as a woman of great social insensitivity when she imperiously declares the request of the elders as "barbaric". Sister Nancy is also portrayed as a person unable to see the larger service motive of her calling when she says meekly and in an insipid manner that "It is only within the convent that she feels at home as a true follower of Jesus".

When Nancy does in fact leave the convent, the film maker has no qualms in giving her a radical and strange change of character apparently to liven up the plot. She quickly enters into schemes that are totally in opposition to her religious calling. After the death of Nancy's father, her aunt, Akujo, poisons Nancy's mind with a set of ideas that lead to Nancy accusing her uncle Achebe for the death of her parents; and for manipulating her to join the convent so that he could inherit her father's property. Akujo's further claims that before her death, Nancy's mother had wished her daughter to become a lawyer and to marry a rich man from America. These wishes were supposed to have been confirmed by a holy man.

The aunt, Akujo now convinces her middle-aged niece, Nancy, to consider marrying and getting a child of her own to fulfil the wishes of her dead mother so that she may rest in peace. This cultural value system allows the film to portray Nancy as now vehemently against her religious vocation, calling the idea of a life of religious service as something foreign and undesirable for African women. As Nancy begins to parrot the values of elders that discourage education for women and

(See: Clark and Hoover, 1997; White, 2000; Clark, 2002; Biernatzki, 2002). Indeed, before the mid-1990s, in the voluminous research on religion in Africa, there was little research on media and religion.

entering into roles of service in the community, her statements and actions begin to become a seamless part of the complex social relationships and their power dynamics of her community (Hall, 1998, p. 38).

In her desperate frenzy to recover her inheritance, Nancy, who has just quit the convent, shocks everybody when she begins a vindictive scheme of revenge against her uncle. Her language and actions now have no semblance of one who has recently been in the convent. Her confrontational approach makes the people of the community wonder if she has ever been a nun. Her irreverent retort to the priest who tries to advise her to be like the exemplary women in the bible is that, "Those holy women in the bible didn't have wicked uncles – and didn't have to see their parents die in mysterious ways." Nancy is now completely under the influence of her aunt in her plan of revenge against the uncle.

An opportunity to get a child now comes when Chelsie, Achebe's daughter, returns home from America with her husband Richard to perform the traditional ritual marriage. Since Chelsie is already pregnant, it is a taboo for her to take part in the ritual in this state. Nancy, the only close and unmarried relative, is the one person qualified to stand in for her in the ritual. At first, she unwillingly accepts this humiliating challenge but then she turns it into an opportunity to pursue her desires for marriage and a child. At the end of the colourful ritual ceremony, a favourite feature of Nollywood films (Uwah, 2008), she exacts a heavy penalty by demanding Richard to treat her as a wife. This not only expresses the ex-nun's dilemma in fulfilling the traditional desires of a woman to be married and have a child; but it is also a pathetic attempt to achieve what she has lost by entering the convent.

Nancy's situation of ridicule and misery is only heightened by portraying her next to her friend, Evelyn, who recently "happily" married an elderly but rich man for material reasons. Evelyn further nettles Nancy by giving her the advice she herself received from her mother that there is nothing so sweet as the joy of motherhood. Then you have someone to give you water in your old age. She repeats to Nancy that time is passing for her. Like all women she is a flower that soon will fade. These words disturb Nancy deep into the night driving

her toward her next desperate moves. She realises that her opportunities for a conventional marriage or getting a rich old man are getting remote. She now descends to simply grabbing an occasion to have "her womb opened by a baby". The narrative takes the viewers further into the humiliations of Nancy showing her unsuccessfully trying to turn Richard into a husband by forcefully moving into his house. She tries to charm him, manipulate him with fake pregnancy, ruin his marriage with Chelsie through witchcraft, and attempt to harm their innocent baby when it is finally born after twelve months. But the evil both Nancy and her aunt, Akujo, try to commit against the baby boomer-angs in a not untypical Nollywood twist of plot. Both women are stricken with blindness when they try to harm the baby.

In the narrative resolution, all three who are involved in wicked acts, Nancy, Akujo and Ekwe, become losers. Their final confessions and the conversion of the two women before the priest and the community become their saving acts. Both women end up on their knees: blind, weeping and begging for forgiveness. Their confessions point to the malicious Ekwe who masterminded the chain of evils that caused the deaths of many in the community.

In the end, every one except Ekwe is restored in the social setup of relationships. Before he is made to drink the poisonous concoction he has prepared for Achebe as his next victim; he is given a chance to repent before God and the community. However, he does not believe God can forgive him. From the community's perspective, he is an abomination to be buried in the evil forest. Meanwhile, the priest's guidance to Nancy and Akujo to forgive Ekwe only shows how difficult forgiveness is. In their blindness, they are eager to ask for forgiveness from Achebe's family. However, it is not so easy for them to forgive Ekwe when they realise he is responsible for the deaths of their dear ones, and for manipulating them into evil ways. The women regain their sight only after painfully forgiving Ekwe. The priest emphasizes that forgiveness as a value is a difficult bridge to cross, but it is what eventually sets one free. The priest's role in this situation is to help the community experience the healing and forgiving love of God. No one is excluded from this love, except those who reject God and the positive values of the community.

Once again the male religious role emerges as noble, wise and powerful in the community. The priest is the only way that one can truly come to God. The women are portrayed as witless, valueless, guided by evil motives and easily influenced by the slightest sugges-

tion. The female religious role, in contrast to that of the priest, is portrayed as shallow in its spirituality, of little or no use to the community, not esteemed by the community, and bereft of any useful education. Nancy as a nun or ex-nun has no kinship to spiritual leadership. At the psychological level the entire narrative is a process of her humiliation and reduction of self esteem, which is a form of oppression (Cudd, p. 176). The worthlessness and evil of both the general female role and the women's religious role are made to seem "natural" and "socially acceptable" by their questionable appeal to African traditional values.

Women religious as the Image of the Ridiculous

The Stolen Bible is another example of Nollywood's construction of a plot of crude humour by placing women religious—supposedly the symbols of piety, social correctness and religious propriety—in roles that are exactly the opposite. Whether the audience realises that it is intended to be only a joke is questionable because of the heavy satire that is running through the film. More important for our present analysis is that whereas the male religious role, no matter how much of a social failure it may portray, is somehow redeemed and rehabilitated by the community, the women religious are, in the end, simply thrown out on the refuse heap of the community. The community, instead of trying to redeem them, rejoices that they are expelled from the community in large part because there seems to be no saving value for women and women religious in this interpretation of African culture.

The narrative of *The Stolen Bible* is set in motion when a young woman named Apollo, out of habit steals the bible of an elderly woman from a prayer house and is cursed by the distraught woman. The curse gives her an urge to steal whatever she lays her eyes on. The plot is given a humorous turn when a Mother Superior of the nearby convent saves her from a crowd about to lynch her for having stolen something from a supermarket. There are different reactions to her stealing "illness". The Mother Superior's unlikely response to this is to invite her to become a nun, although this makes the convent seem like a refuge for social failures. Apollo's father sees this as a big obstacle in getting a suitable husband and the mother, too, would rather have her daughter married rather than become a nun. Nevertheless, three months later, Apollo wears a religious habit. Unfortunately, the religious attire does not cure the stealing, and the adventures begin with all the gender and socio-cultural dynamics that this implies.

Apollo much prefers the company of her former school mates to her fellow nuns. The actions of a nun and a thief become quickly intermingled. One day "Sister Apollo" is offering them a religious pamphlet but the next day the thief Apollo is sharing her stolen booty with them. Through her influence, the friends soon catch the contagious curse of stealing.

Worse still, the stealing illness begins to spread in the convent. When Apollo steals Sr. Judith's golden chaplet and cross, other issues come to the fore: questions about Sr. Judith's relationship with Fr. Joseph who gave her the "expensive" gift. In her compromised position Sr. Judith does not report the theft to the Mother Superior who is likely to pose questions that she is not prepared to answer. When Sr. Judith suspects that Apollo has stolen her golden chaplet, she begins secret threatening messages to Apollo to find the 10,000 naira needed to buy another golden chaplet in replacement. As the stealing curse spreads in the convent, unlikely culprits appear. The second thief, a humble looking nun who notices Apollo hiding the golden chaplet in the flowers, "innocently" removes the golden cross before taking the beads to Sr. Judith to identify. She is seen as worse than Apollo because she combines lies with theft. Gradually, the morality of the nuns is portrayed as sinking to lower levels than that of the lay school friends of Apollo.

The heavy satire and ridicule of the nuns never lets up. The mother superior, pompous, pretentious, judgemental, without compassion, dressed in immaculate white is portrayed as exaggeratedly farting as she takes a lone walk through the convent grounds.

The plot deepens as Apollo and her nun friends decide to steal money from the Igbo cult shrine in a desperate attempt to raise money to replace Sr. Judith's chaplet and save her from Fr. Joseph's suspicions. The stealing illness now begins to have a physical impact on the nuns. They have pangs of diarrhoea and parts of their bodies are horribly swollen. Pus oozes and flows from the swollen body parts with unbearable stench and they are afflicted with continual farting.

The nuns, not understanding the nature of the curse, now summon one of their members, a medical doctor in Europe, to carry out complicated operations on Apollo and her colleagues. She also has little to offer in the line of virtue. Besides looking pretty in her white religious habit, the accessories she wears like her matching shoes and a showy pair of earrings beneath her veil, make her look a trendy woman of the world. When she emerges out the theatre with her pretty face and

white dress messed up with a mixture of pus and blood, she is disgusted and declares the case is beyond her competence.

The film ends with a final struggle against the witchdoctor at Igбудu shrine who represents the forces of evil in the community. Apollo, Sr. Clara, Sr. Judith and the other young nuns want to go to the shrine in this final struggle with the source of evil, in part because they incited Apollo to steal from the shrine, which they think has brought on their illnesses. But the mother superior orders that no sister is allowed to go anywhere near the shrine, seen as a place of idol worship. As far as she is concerned, darkness and light cannot mix. Ironically, she insists that the nuns are light and that should keep away from darkness.

Far from being sources of light, the nuns, stricken in their illness, are crumpled to the ground hardly able to move. To emphasise this ironic dissociation of the Mother Superior from the nuns and the rest of the people, the high camera angle captures her looking down upon Apollo and her colleagues who are desperately sprawled on the ground. She remains imperious and uncompassionate in refusing to provide transport to take the stinking nuns to the shrine for the final battle between the powers of darkness and light. Following the example of the Mother Superior, the taxi driver also does not want to help these nuns. They end up being taken in wheelbarrows through the streets of the town.

Even then, the nuns arrive too late. They arrive only to witness the outcome of a battle between the cultists and the leading politicians of community. It is the community leaders who have fought the battle with the evil spirits and won. The “holy women”, lying in their ludicrous state in the wheelbarrows are on the periphery of the action and have no significance in this public “political” space.

Ada: A lay woman of humble but strong character

The person who finally gets the nuns out of their predicament and frees them from the curse is a young lay woman, Ada, active in the charismatic renewal movement. Of all the characters analysed in these seven films – super-priests, wounded priests, women religious, knights and their wives and women helpers in the parishes –, Ada, is the only normal, balanced, straightforward, “real” person whose religious virtues seem to be honest. All the other religious personages seem to be ideological constructions of one kind or another.

Ada is introduced as a militant Christian, who has the qualities of being unflinching in faith. For her, being a born-again Christian is like a new found treasure that cannot be compromised with. In an effort to

interpret the strange ailment that has stricken Apollo and her friend, she immediately suggests going to the pastor for prayers, though Apollo's father contradicts her on this at first.

Ada is also contrasted to the pastor who takes his privileged position as a spiritual leader rather selfishly. He thinks he alone has the prerogative to intercede to God on behalf of the community. Ada, who acknowledges the pastor's spiritual leadership, gives him due respect to take his position as the man of God. However, viewers soon realise that he is self-indulgent and is simply out to prove *his* power. As a man of God, he feels personally humiliated when Apollo's father insists on the medical option rather than prayers for the cure of the girls. Ada, on her part, does not see the medical and prayer options as mutually exclusive: the girls need prayer even in the hospital.

At this moment of confusion, the pastor threatens to stop praying for the girls since God's power in *him* is being doubted. It is Ada who pleads with him for Christ's sake to ignore the humiliations he receives and to continue praying for God's intervention. The high camera angle emphasizes the pastor's authority over the wretches sprawled on the ground, waiting for him to relent and pray for them, as he stands and looks down on them. The camera angle emphasizes the irony of the situation when the pastor proves powerless to handle the situation that he claims to have received divine inspiration about. The truth of the matter is, just like the rest, he puts the pieces of information from the girls together in order to understand the cause of the problem. Because he wants to create the impression that he is special, he does not share with the people the information he gets from delirious Apollo. Instead he keeps telling the desperate people he has a special revelation from God. He vehemently objects going to the shrine because he claims God has given him a different revelation.

As the group goes to the shrine, it is not the pastor but Ada who leads. The pastor appears petty as he still continues to nurse his hurt feelings about the "revelation" he has received being ignored by the people. His lack of faith and pride veers towards a scandal; but Ada continues reminding him to keep his faith in God: "It is the foolishness of the things of this world that God glorifies himself with!" This charismatic young woman is part of the "foolishness" as far as the pastor is concerned.

When Apollo's mother notices the pastor's overwhelming arrogance, she gets impatient with him and tells Ada to stop importuning him for prayer as if he were God. As Ada prays, the pastor stands aloof and

watches with hurt pride. This is the first time Ada experiences empowerment as a prayer leader. At the authoritative mention of the name of Jesus, the controversial bible goes into flames. It is at this point, after witnessing the dramatic destruction of the bible, that the opportunistic pastor joins hands with Ada in prayer.

The pastor appears to be a man of little faith depending on signs. It is ironic that instead of Ada looking up to the pastor for guidance, it is she who guides, advises and encourages him in faith at this critical moment. The film levels all and inverts the conventional. The threats from the witchdoctor who addresses Ada as a mere girl and warns that women do not speak before Igbudu shrine is responded to by a counter word of authority from Ada. The result is the ultimate release of the girls from their malediction. From a gender point of view, the film empowers the ordinary woman and implies that neither the nuns, nor the pastor have the prerogative to see themselves as the special instrument of God's revelation: all believers can be used by God as instruments if only they believe. This is typical of popular culture's melodramatic reversal that offers special pleasure for the subordinate social groups. This is an oppositional pleasure that resists the hegemonic meaning (Fiske, 1989, p. 127).

The leadership of the nuns in matters spiritual is continually questioned. In the fight with the witchdoctor at Igbudu shrine, the nuns are peripheral, even though one of their members is a victim of the malevolent attack. Although the Mother Superior insists on the nuns as "light", Sr. Apollo's involvement with "darkness" and what this reveals about the other nuns continuously punctures the Mother Superior's attitude. This further emphasises their being portrayed as decorative, peripheral and irrelevant to the battle to deliver the girls from their malediction (Johnson C. in D. Dipio, 2008, p. 23). The parading of Sr. Apollo and her friends in wheelbarrows through the township, as the procession heads to the shrine, continues to demean the institution of the religious women.

The film continues to invert the social expectations of religious women by portraying Ada, the charismatic young lay woman, rather than the nuns, as the most significant spiritual leader at the shrine, the kind of leadership seen in the super-priests such as Fr. Paul in *The priest must Die* and Fr. Felix in *The Last Knight*.

Die, *The Pope must Hear This*, *Strong Desire* and *The Last Knight* the priest protagonists are in the forefront in the physical fight against evil. The triumph of the men reinforces the institutional structure of society.

The nuns, prominently portrayed as religious, are powerless in the battle to deliver the girls from their malediction (Johnson in Dipio, 2007, p. 23). This is the kind of pleasure that popular culture as a ritual experience engenders and allows. In a structured social order such a view of religious women might be frowned at, but popular film creates a space and allows for pleasure both at the level of the producer and the reader to portray and interpret the impermissible (Fiske, 1997, Chapter 12, Pleasure and play, and Chapter 13, Carnival and style).

We also see a typical strategy of ideological reinforcement. Ada, a valiant and believable woman, comes to the fore with a surprising twist of the genre of the religious film. But she is a lay woman who appears with no sponsorship or support of the community. Her spiritual strength is her own. She continues to support the pastor as the institutional leader of the community and when he fails she comes in with her personal support. No male figure uses his power to redeem and raise up the women religious here in a way which would change the structure of power of the institutional church. A woman is brought in to solve the weakness of religious women, but in a way that preserves the institutional structure of male dominance. The dominant coalition of powerful institutions in Nigerian society is maintained.

The dialectic of ideology, dualism, community values and ambiguity

With surprising consistency the presentation of women's roles in Catholic religious institutions in these films confirms the arguments of Olujinmi (2008), Ewrierhoma (2008) and Afolabi (2008) regarding the ideological construction of women in Nigerian popular film. While the power of the priest is presented as the protagonist of an underlying sacred order, the women are defined as passive supporting figures in this power structure or, if they threaten it, they are purged by the forces of nature. When priests are portrayed as vulnerable they are redeemed and restored by this underlying order working through the community, but no power comes to save the women unless it flows from the priest. The celibacy and other sources of spiritual power of men emerges as part of a larger force which imposes itself through the consensus of the community. While priests are portrayed as fighting injustices and corruption in Nigerian society, women are, at best, peripheral to these evils.

One of the major mechanisms of this ideological construction of power relations in the portrayal of the institutional Church is the moral

dualism which is particularly dominant in these religious films. The world is essentially a dichotomous struggle of good and evil. The characters are not making decisions out of their own unique and idiosyncratic moral resources but rather they are puppets being moved by an underlying clash of creative and destructive forces in the structure of nature. Nigerian popular film is constantly bringing to the fore the action of good and evil spirits. Priests and other protagonists have power for good as long as they are in union with the underlying sacred order and sacred sources of power. Women are not part of the good powers in this natural order, but are more generally inherent instruments of the evil. Men, like Fr. Paul, Fr. Felix and Fr. Laz, to protect their own contact with sources of power, must keep a distance from women.

This dualism also appears in the presentation of characters as symbols and anti-symbols. The virtues of the super-priest such Fr. Felix are made more clear by the juxtaposition with the priest of hypocritical mediocrity, Fr. Mwosu. The redeemed priest, Fr. Laz is raised up by placing as a foil Fr. Rex who seeks no redemption and is only a shadow of a priest. It as if the dualistic order of the universe has broken out into the social order of priesthood itself and is expressing itself through them. This dualism is also revealed in the belief that those who are faithful to the underlying order will be rewarded with financial success. In *The Pope Must Hear This*, when Fr. John Bosco goes home in a new car one neighbour wishes that "his useless son, who has become a lawyer, could have become a priest". In general, the good and successful priest is portrayed as a source of economic well being for the family.

The ideological construction of social power is also expressed by making the community the expression and instrument of the natural and sacred order. When the priest is acting in union with the forces of good, the community rewards him. In *Strong Desire*, Fr. Laz is given a shining new car as an expression of gratitude by praying for the healing of a member of Chief Jone's family. In *The Pope must Hear This*, the community welcomes John Bosco to their parish with several gifts, including a brand new car. Once a priest gives himself fully to his pastoral work, he experiences the generosity of the Christian community that overflows to the priest's family members. Fr. John Bosco's friend offers a scholarship for the priest's younger brother to study abroad. What the community requires in return is that the priest prays, counsels and blesses them.

Although the ideology of dualism and communalism is ever present, one of the most intriguing aspects of Nigerian popular film is the ambiguity and debate in the lives of the protagonists and in the life of the religious community. These spaces of ambiguity are found in the agonising decisions of protagonists. In these moments of doubt, the support of the community is in question and there is lack of clarity in who precisely is the "hero" in these films. This occurs most often precisely when the protagonists turn their back on the sources of power that the ideology sets out to defend. Two areas which are particularly important sites of ambiguity are sexuality and the quest for wealth, two areas in which the power of the male as religious clashes with the ideological construction of the power of men in African society.

In the area of sexuality, the fidelity of the priest to the vows of celibacy is portrayed as the source of the spiritual power that the priest can bring to the community. Fr. Paul has power over Chief Ephraim because the accusation that Fr. Paul is having an affair with the Chief's wife is so clearly false. Once Fr. John Bosco overcomes his sensual weakness, the font of spiritual energies opens for him. The priests weak in commitment to their celibacy, Fr. Mwosu and Fr. Rex, are weak in their spiritual influence. Fr. Laz, in the moment that he fails in his commitment to his celibate vows, begins to lose his spiritual powers and can do nothing for the community. But a continued questioning hangs over the commitment of the priest regarding celibacy because to see it as a source of spiritual power is against the ideological insistence on the power of men over women in the women, significantly a woman portrayed as a prostitute, over whom he can exert power and bring to be the passive object of his pleasure. Sr. Rose is presented as the prostitute, submitting entirely to the power of the male purchaser. The film ends, not with a resolution of the narrative in terms of sexuality either as a source of spiritual power or as male dominance but with Fr. Laz and Sr. Rose in an ambiguous embrace. Let the viewer decide how the narrative could or should be resolved.

A similar ambiguity is found in the area of the male quest for wealth as a source of power. Clearly the preferred ideal is the religious protagonist who is above the passionate desire for wealth. Fr. Paul and Fr. Felix, as "super-priests," fight against injustice and corruption and cannot be corrupted themselves. This, again, is a source of their spiritual power and ability to defend and serve the community. Fr. Rex is portrayed as a weak priest whose friends are conmen. As a priest his

job is to pray for their dishonest success in their corrupt enterprises. But at the same time, all men who are strongly male and occupy their successful role in the structure of power and leadership of the community are ostentatious in their show of wealth and use their wealth generously in the community to consolidate their power. Fr. Samuel's father shows his power in the community by giving generously to the building of the church and is generous to the poor tenants living in the flats he owns. Fr. Samuel's father who is already rich encourages the priestly vocation of his son as a kind of visible gift to the community to show himself as the typical African "big man".

Yet the ambiguity over wealth seeking is clear. Fr. John Bosco's father, who is poor living in a poor community, looks on the priesthood as a source of material wealth. Throughout the film, Fr. John Bosco is portrayed as a source of wealth for the family. By the end of the film, the father gets the things he wants from his son, but he is portrayed negatively, a greedy, dishonest and ruthless landlord. To the poor rural community where Fr. John Bosco comes from a priest is what everyone desires to have in their family as a "profitable business". But when a woman brings her son to the priest to encourage him in a priestly vocation, the priest's advice is that "There are priests who should not have become one". Although Fr. John Bosco disagrees with his father's idea of the priesthood, he accepts the material things given him without a murmur. The perception of the role of wealth is left open-ended and ambiguous in the film.

The world and becomes a vengeful, scheming witch of a woman. Would Nancy have done better by remaining in the convent fulfilling her vocation? Whether the religious vocation of women can benefit the community—the final court of judgement—or is it irrelevant for the community is an open question that flows through these ideological constructions of the institution of religious women. Even in the *The Stolen Bible* where Ada is made the female protagonist to rid the evil in the community, she is constructed not as a part of institutional religion but as a lone individual who draws her resources not from the community but from her own self-reliant character and personal inspiration.

In discussing this theme of ambiguity, one must also call attention to a curious omission. In these films priests and religious are constantly responding to the commands of bishops and other authorities as they are moved from parish to parish or from community to community, but questioning the authority of bishops or disobedience to this essen-

tial aspect of Nigerian power structure is never even hinted at in the narrative plots. Although corrupt politics remains part of the background, none of these films dealing with religion ever calls into question specific parts of the structure of power—military leaders, despotic presidents, bishops and cardinals.

Conclusions

Throughout all this sample of religious films, one can never forget that Nigerian popular films are social commentary, opening up a wide range of social issues and asking questions about the possibility of social change. But one must also not forget that Nollywood is a film industry which continues to exist by knowing how to entertain and attract audiences. One of the greatest pleasures of the audience is meaning making. Various studies of the home video phenomenon have called attention to the fact that audiences are typically a small group viewing and conversing in the home with a running commentary on the images presented and on the development of the plot. Film producers know what audiences enjoy and plant scenes and twists of plot to produce that enjoyment. Audiences also expect some degree of correlation between the representation and Nigerian reality, and producers try not to stray too far from that reality. Film producers also know that the popular press carries commentaries on the films. This creates a triangular relationship between the producer, the audience and the critic that is bound to play on the underlying discontents with the dominant cultural constructions and preferred readings. Producers of Nigerian popular films are walking a tight rope between the ideological constructions that reproduce a power structure, the dualisms that preserve an underlying moral order, the demands of propriety placed by the community, the suffering and discontents of the audience and the glaring contradictions of a Nigerian society that is moving from a traditional ethnic culture into a modern globalising society. Nigeria has more wealth from oil money and overseas remittances than virtually any other African country, but simultaneously less security of electricity, transportation and employment than any other African country. Nigeria is also reputed to be among the most religious nations in Africa and at the same time one of the most administratively corrupt nations. Nigerians and many other Africans use home video watching as one way to make sense out of all this. The flourishing institutional churches and the burgeoning new mega-churches are another major site for making sense of this. The home videos on religious themes are

a meeting point of the world of videos and the world of religion. Religious videos, a very significant part of all the videos, meet many of the sense-making needs of Nigerian communities and individuals (Ogunleye, 2003).

The people of Nigeria experience in their video priests, pastors, communities of religious men and women, fraternal organisations, and lay leaders in parishes and Pentecostal movements all of the contradictions of their country. In the video menu of super-priests, wounded priests, heroic women religious (most not treated in this paper), doubting and ridiculous religious women, corrupt knights and outstanding lay charismatics we find an ideological construction sufficiently close to the existing power structure and preferred readings in Nigeria to get the general assent of the public. The presentation of male figures as super priests, redeemed priests or central protagonists in virtually all narratives of Catholic religious videos suggests that the correctness of male power may be the preferred reading, but there is enough tongue-in-cheek in much of this to imply that it may also be questioned. There is sufficient ambiguity, polysemic richness, and exaggerated buffoonery to provide space to think of a different possible world in which males may not be so dominant.

Footnotes

¹ The religious habit – the physical symbol – is what identifies the priests and sisters. In *Strong Desire*, they go incognito when they are doing something not in line with their calling.

² He is particularly against receiving gifts of (cooked) food from women. He brusquely refuses the food Lady Bath brings him in the spirit of cultural hospitality with an almost unpleasant comment that she should give it for her husband. This, within the cultural practice sounds anti-social. On the other hand, in *The Priest must Die*, Fr. Paul gratefully receives the delicacies Amaka brings for him; although this leads to Chief Ephraim accusing her of having an affair with the priest.

³ Discussions with some Nigerian women after the presentation of this paper at the conference in Abuja affirm the fact that a Christian Nigerian family considers itself blessed when it has a reverend father among the members.

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Examining the Nexus of Religion, Media, and Conflict in Africa

By Rosalind I. J. Hackett

Abstract

In the expanding research on media, religion and culture in Africa, not enough attention has been given to the intensification of old socio-religious polarities and the generation of new forms of religious intolerance and conflict. The protection of religious pluralism and freedom in media vaunted by many governments is not necessarily borne out in terms of current patterns of media ownership, access, programming and transmission. More specifically media policy favoring unbridled commercialization is tending to foster the “pentecostalisation” of the media. The present article focuses on four aspects of this increasing lack of balance in religion and media: inequitable access, encroachment, defamation, and consumerism.

Key words: imbalance in religious media, religious intolerance and conflict, government policy in religious media, Pentecostal dominance in the media, religious pluralism in the media.

Introduction:

We are currently enjoying a long overdue boom in scholarship on religion, media and culture (see, for example, Hoover, 2006; Hoover and Clark, 2002; Hoover and Lundby, 1997).¹ Research on Africa by African and Africanist scholars (mainly anthropologists and scholars of religion) is beginning to bear fruit and feature in international publications (see, e.g., Larkin, 2008; Ihejirika, 2006; Meyer, 2006; Hirschkind, 2006; Schulz, 2006; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005; Haron, 2004; Ukah, 2003; Hackett, 1998, 2003, 2006, 2010fc). Despite the reluctance in communi

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cations departments in African universities to engage religious media as an area of academic inquiry, some religious studies departments and theological institutions are beginning to develop courses in this area. The reasons for this development are patently obvious to anyone familiar with the African context—the airwaves are alive with religion of one form or another. In fact, some media outlets are even dependent on the revenue from religious broadcasting to stay alive.

In this essay, I argue that there has been a lack of attention paid to issues of conflict in this emergent research on the intersections of religion, media, and culture, specifically in Africa but also in the field more generally. Conversely, the religious factor is absent from recent publications that investigate the relationship between media and conflict in Africa (notably following the Rwandan genocide) (Frère, 2007; Frohardt, 2003; Onadipe and Lord, 1999; Article 19, 1996). Instead, I propose that Africa's new media revolution is replicating, if not intensifying, old polarities, as well as generating new forms of religious intolerance and conflict. The religious pluralism and religious freedom vaunted by many governments is not necessarily borne out in terms of current patterns of media ownership, access, programming, and transmission. Given the limitations of space, I can here only sketch out some of my ideas on these questions—and primarily in relation to broadcast media. A more extensive, empirical treatment can be found in a forthcoming publication (Hackett, 2010fc; see, also, Hackett, 2006b).

I appreciate that my somewhat negative angle on the efflorescence of modern media technologies across contemporary Africa may appear counter-intuitive in light of more optimistic notions of modernisation, globalisation, and free markets. However, I want to shed light on the less equitable side of the rapid deregulation of the media, in particular the rising Christianisation—or rather Pentecostalisation and evangelicalisation in many parts of Africa—of the airwaves.² As one would expect, the deleterious effects vary in terms of context and intentionality. Following the move away from earlier scholarship on media imperialism and fatalism, that viewed consumers as primarily victims, there is now more persuasive research on mass-media effects (Preiss et al., 2007). Moreover, human rights experts have cogently demonstrated how the failure to respect the precarious rights relating to freedom of expression and freedom of religion and belief can provide a warrant for broader discrimination and, potentially, conflict and violence (see Boyle, 1992). As the media proliferate and pervade every-

day life, it is not surprising that they are seen as responsible for influencing, if not generating, these new patterns of religious and cultural intolerance.

As a scholar of religion in Africa, I am struck by how the mass media in Africa represent an increasingly significant interface for negotiating the power relations among and within religious groups, and between religious groups and the state. Stewart Hoover, one of the leading thinkers in the field of religion and media, reminds us of the “double articulation of the media” in that they are both shapers and products of culture (Hoover, 2006, p. 8)(see, also, Williams, 1974; Silverstone, 1981). Wishing to emphasise this paradoxical angle, I contend that a focus on the interplay between media, religion, and conflict can prove instructive in a number of ways. Exploring this nexus can shed important light on changing processes of identity construction in Africa’s rapidly changing public spheres, and the capacity of modern media to constitute new communities and publics (on Egypt, see Hirschkind, 2006), and new senses of self and other.³ Moreover, it can take us to the heart of what broadcasting law expert Monroe Price calls the new “market for loyalties” and its attendant conflicts (Price, 1994; see, also, 2002). It is noteworthy that religious identities often trump ethnicity in the quest for public recognition in mass-mediated public spheres—pointing to the new sites, symbols, and strategies which must be investigated in seeking to understand inter- and intra-communal tensions.⁴ As many post-colonial African states face new challenges in managing religious diversification and pluralisation, it becomes increasingly germane to recognise the salience of the media in mediating the complex hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces, and social and discursive processes that shape religious coexistence. This particular focus can supply what has been termed “clues to conflict” (Frohardt, 2003), or the flashpoints in religiously competitive contexts.

From a more long-term perspective, a new attention to the intersections of media, religion, and conflict can also open new windows onto the ways in which communities experience cumulative alienation through negative and/or under-representation and eventually resort to violence. We should look in this connection to the recent scholarship on ethnic minority media (Cottle, 2000, Browne, 2005), on mediated conflict (Cottle, 2006), on media framing in relation to political participation (Price, 1992; Gilboa, 2002), and U.S. foreign policy (Entman, 2004), as well as perceptions of terrorism (Norris et al., 2003). The

current phase of “media effects” research can identify a significant effect of media violence on aggressive social behavior (Christensen and Wood, 2007). Finally, in considering the merits of deploying media as a central category of analysis in religiously related conflict settings, some positive outcomes can be foreseen. If modern media are perceived to be part of the problem pertaining to cultural anxieties relating to (religious) difference, they may also be part of the solution.⁵ Arguably, this can devolve into interesting forms of engaged scholarship. Indeed, Robert White argues that normative claims have always been an inherent part of communication studies, linking it to the development of democracy, human rights, and communitarian values (White, 2003, p. 192). (See, also Ginsberg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin, 2002; Tomaselli and Young, 2001; Husband, 2000).

In keeping with the thrust of this special issue, I contend that Africa provides an exciting regional location for observing and understanding the types of development adumbrated above, since media liberalisation has occurred relatively recently (since the early 1990s), and relatively rapidly, in most countries. It permits us to compare how state and non-state actors are negotiating this new mediatisation of the public sphere. The expansion and diversification of the media sector (see, e.g., Ansah, 1994) has occurred in conjunction with, or as a consequence of, the democratisation processes underway in many African states (Nyamnjoh, 2004). The dismantling of state monopolies of the broadcast and print media, and the commercialising of airtime and ownership, have radically altered the media landscape (Fardon and Furniss, 2000), with significant consequences for religious communication and practice.⁶ Yet the spirit of deregulation of late capitalism, and collusions of state and global capital, result in a “taunting mix of emancipation and limitation” according to anthropologists Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff (2004, p. 31).

In my studies of broadcast media in Africa—which, as can be gleaned from above, are multi-disciplinary in nature in that they seek to address both institutional, programmatic, as well as audience factors—I have identified four main areas which give rise to discontent and conflict: inequitable access, encroachment, defamation, and consumerism. Under *inequitable access*, I include all the complaints about bias in media ownership, as well as production and transmission. That it takes Coptic Christians in Egypt more than five decades to be able to launch their own TV station, that in some parts of Muslim-dominated northern Nigeria, Christians have no access to airtime, particularly at

the state level, while in Ghana (where no licenses are granted to religious stations), private FM stations in the Accra region stack their primetime early morning programming in favor of their predominantly (Pentecostal/charismatic) Christian audiences with gospel music, Christian perspectives on social issues, and pastors as presenters (De Witte, 2003, p. 177; Hackett, 1998). Then there are all the inequities over the granting of licenses or censorship that negatively impact some (usually minority) religious communities over others.

With the ever-increasing technological power of new media, many fear their growing capacities of *encroachment and displacement*. This can manifest as media blitzes and saturation, as penetration of previously “protected” spaces, such as national territories, neighborhoods, and homes, by electronically magnified messages of spiritual and social empowerment. It can be articulated in a discourse of displacement, as epitomised in the crusades of German Pentecostal preacher Reinhard Bonnke and his Christ for All Nations campaign to cover the African continent—from Cape to Cairo—with the blood of Jesus by the year 2000.⁷ In the increasingly market-driven media sector, carefully drawn up allocations for religious broadcasting may be compromised by religious organisations with greater purchasing power (often the newer Pentecostal churches that are more media-oriented), whether in South Africa (Hackett, 2006a), Ghana (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005), or Nigeria (Ihejirika, 2005).

Many religious groups have long competed for followers by trying to malign or delegitimise the opposition, but the power of new media takes such discursive strategies to new heights, and greater consequences. *Defamation and demonisation*, especially when aggressively expressed and massively circulated—as with Nigerian video-films that often portray traditional religious ways as backward, if not nefarious—can cause offense. Muslims in Uganda have complained about the lies perpetrated about Islam by Christian evangelists using the airwaves, and a Pentecostal radio station in Kenya was physically attacked in 2006 for urging Kenyans to convert to Christianity. Religious leaders whose messages are predicated on identifying, sensationalising, and nullifying the religious other, such as Dr. O. Olukoya and his influential Pentecostal deliverance ministry, Mountain of Fire and Miracles (Meyer, 2005, p. 303; cf. Ukah, 2003, p. 221),⁸ and the late South African Muslim preacher, Ahmed Deedat, whose polemics against Christianity were widely publicised and circulated in many parts of

Africa (Westerlund, 2003), can now extend their influence far beyond their headquarters, whether in Lagos or Durban.

The final area I wish to address in this brief discussion of emergent areas of conflict that derive from the new aggregations of religion and media in post-colonial Africa is that of *commercialism and entertainment*. The rise of commercial media that have to appeal to the widest possible audiences and retain government approval has led to fears about the loss of public interest programming and its capacity to promote civil society values. The consumerist model also raises the specter of neo-colonialism being nurtured by multinational media, notably out of South Africa (Nyamnjoh, 2004, p. 71; see also Nyamnjoh, 2005, p. 51). In addition, while independent media can offer more choice, they can also foster enclave-oriented programming, thereby reducing the options that religious communities have to interact with or learn about each other.

The paradoxical effects regarding the rise of new religious media that I have wished to draw attention to in this article must be seen against the broader global debates about the paradoxes of new media developments (McChesney et al., 2005; McChesney, 2000). There is general agreement that the new world information and communication order has only enjoyed limited success to date. Many doubt that the Habermasian unfettered intermediate space for rational-critical communication has been realised (see Anderson, 2003; cf. Hendy, 2000). There are also concerns that the market approach to the broadcasting industries has not always yielded the desired outcomes in terms of balanced growth and reliable revenue. Many lament the dominance of radio and TV channels by foreign broadcasters. Writing of Latin America, Jesus Martin-Barbero contends that thinking about communication from the perspective of culture “unsettles” the “technological optimism” of some communication scholars (Martin-Barbero, 2006, p. 44).

It is not hard to find proponents, however, of the potential for new media technologies to challenge state and corporate hegemonies (Fatoyinbo, 1999; van Binsbergen, 2004). For some, the future of broadcasting in Africa lies with low power radio broadcasting (LPFM) stations with their capacity to operate against the trend of commercial media monopolies. Others see the potential of local cultural production, such as cartoons, music, and video-films to provide outlets for social and political critique (Nyamnjoh, 2004; Mbembe, 2001).

In the introduction to their important volume on the anthropology of media, the editors rightly argue that it is inappropriate to predicate research in this area on “oppositional logics” because of the “simultaneity of hegemonic and anti-hegemonic effects of ‘technologies of power’” (Ginsberg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin, 2002, p. 23). Similarly, as noted by Hyden and Leslie, writing of the rise of informal media of communication in Africa in the last decade, it may well be that neither the radical conception of the media as a top-down agency nor its antithesis of the media as a bottom-up agency of empowerment is adequate to help us understand the role of media as agents of transmission of cultural and political values (Hyden and Leslie, 2002, p. 23). So the jury is still out on these key developments, and much will depend on local media, religious, and political environments, as well as the influence of international organisations.⁹

These ambivalent discourses on the new media feed into current debates concerning appropriate or inappropriate imbrications of the media and religious expression, as well as the place of religion in, and which type of religion is best for, Africa’s changing public spheres. The secularist paradigm of many civil society and international non-governmental organizations results in little serious analysis of the intersections of religion and the rapidly transforming media sector. But clearly one cannot ignore the power of the media in whatever form. A young Muslim activist from Ibadan told me that he did not have to switch on his television to know that the media in his traditionally pluralistic city are now dominated by Christian evangelists. Similarly, who can avoid, let alone not be drawn to Reinhard Bonnke’s Christ for All Nations juggernaut when it rolls into town, with its capacity to stage glittering crusades for hundreds of thousands of people. Many a non-Christian has gone with the flow, seeking miracles amid the catharsis and anonymity of a mega-spectacle. This may be about greater religious choice, but it is also about the rise of more exclusivist forms of religion, better equipped than ever before with their media prowess to effect changes in the social and moral landscapes of African societies.

And finally, one can only hope that the growing body of scholarship on new religious media in Africa—especially if it attends to issues relating to conflict, as I have tried to argue here—will not only stimulate new research but also redress the relative inattention to religion shown by those international organisations whose business is media training and development.¹ For, as the recent BBC report on media

development in Africa indicates, religious media are far from insignificant in the overall political economy of broadcasting (2006, p. 31).

Footnotes

- ¹ Earlier versions of this paper were aired at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, where I was a Visiting Rockefeller Fellow from 2003-04, at the European Association for the Study of Religion conference in August 2005, and at the African Studies Center, Leiden in March 2007. Portions of the text appear in: "A New Axial Moment for the Study of Religion? *Temenos* 42,2: (2006), 93-111. I am grateful to Dr. Rivka Ribak for critical comments on this essay.
- ² In pointing to the emergence of a less tolerant, even at times, aggressive, religious broadcasting culture, I want to underscore that this is not in the league of the type of inflammatory, mass-mediated messages that led to genocidal cleansing in Rwanda (Gourevitch, 1998), or deadly Muslim-Christian riots in Nigeria in 1987 (Hackett, 2003; Ibrahim, 1989)
- ³ This has been epitomized by the work of Birgit Meyer and her associates. See, e.g. the website of the Pionier research program at the University of Amsterdam: "Modern Mass Media, Religion and the Imagination of Communities" <http://www2.fmg.uva.nl/media-religion> (accessed February 21, 2009).
- ⁴ In fact, in the BBC World Service 2005 survey *Who Runs Your World?* a majority of Africans put religion above any other factor, and surprisingly few identified ethnicity as the most significant factor (6%) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4246754.stm> (accessed September 16, 2005).
- ⁵ Meyer and Moors emphasize the contestations and politics of difference that accompany the emergence of new, mass-mediated religious publics (2006, 12).
- ⁶ This is well articulated by Jon Anderson (2003) in his research on media in the Muslim world.
- ⁷ <http://www.cfan.org/> (accessed May 11, 2009).
- ⁸ <http://www.mountain-of-fire.com> (accessed May 11, 2009).
- ⁹ The public disagreements over the launching in November 2005 of satellite television for the Coptic Christian minority in Egypt are an excellent case in point. <http://www.copts.net/detail.asp?id=813> (accessed December 20, 2005).
- ¹⁰ See, e.g. UNESCO's "Communication Training in Africa: Model Curricula" http://www.unesco.org/webworld/publications/com_training_en.pdf (accessed May 11, 2009); UNESCO's programs on "Media in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations," http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=22225&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=-465.html (accessed May 11, 2009); OneWorld Africa <http://radioafrica.oneworld.net> (accessed

May 11, 2009); Panos Institute's "Pluralist Media for Peace and Democracy"
<http://www.panosparis.org/gb/pluralisme.php> (accessed May 11, 2009).

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Rosalind I. J. Hackett



“CATCH THE ANOINTING”: Mediating Supernatural Power through Enchanted Texts and Tapes in African Charismatic Christianity

By J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu:

Abstract

In the African sacramental view of the universe, the divine power is seen as present and operating in the physical reality so that all physical phenomena are expressions of divine power. Founders of the Pentecostal/charismatic movements (New Religious Movements) are seen as especially endowed with this divine power or anointing (from the traditional Christian view of sacred oils as able to confer divine power on ordained ministers), and their words carry in a special way this divine power. All media such as books, magazines, video tapes, radio and television broadcasts—even the physical television set— which carry the words of the founder or those ordained by the founder also carry the power of the founder’s word. This word is seen as capable of carrying out the divine will that nature be fulfilled in good health, human reproduction, agriculture, success in business and all other aspects of the physical world. This sacramental view of the power of the mediated word is spreading not only in Africa but around the world.

Key words: Pentecostalism, anointing of the Holy Spirit, sacramental world view, enchanted texts, new religious movements, Ghana.

Introduction:

Many people have received the anointing through listening to tapes and reading books, but they do not understand what has happened to them. Many of those who have received the anointing through this channel cannot teach it because they do not fully understand it.

Author Biographical note

Dr. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (asagyadu@hotmail.com) is Senior Lecturer at Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, Accra, Ghana and is the author of *African Charismatics* published by Brill. This essay is a preliminary study on enchanted texts and other audio-visual resources in African-led Pentecostalism. The title is not original to me. It belongs to a book on the subject matter before us in which the author, Bishop Dr. Dag Heward-Mills of the Lighthouse Chapel International.

I believe that it is my duty to teach this simple and real method of catching the most essential ingredient in ministry – the anointing (Heward-Mills, 2000, p. 2).

The Lighthouse Chapel International belongs to a new stream of Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity that has been burgeoning in Africa since the late 1970s. It has an indigenous leadership, the churches are mostly an urban phenomenon, and they appeal greatly to Africa's upwardly mobile youth. Pastor Enoch Aminu's Pure Fire Miracle Ministries based in Accra, Pastor Matthew Ashimolowo's London-based Kingsway International Christian Church and Pastor Sunday Adelaja's "Church of the Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for all Nations" based in Kiev, Ukraine, are other examples of this new type of charismatic Pentecostalism. The presence of the last two churches in Europe underscores the important international profile of the new churches and their leaders. I will use the expression "charismatic Pentecostal" to distinguish them from such classical Pentecostal denominations as the Assemblies of God and the various apostolic churches that trace their roots to the 1906 William Seymour Azusa Street Revival movement. The message of the new churches is oriented towards biblical prosperity in both its spiritual and material senses and these messages of empowerment have proven very popular with significant numbers of them growing into mega-sized congregations with powerful media ministries.

Media Resources

For the purposes of this presentation it is worthy of note that the charismatic ministries, as they are popularly called in Ghana, have completely transformed the African religious landscape partly through their innovative appropriation of modern media technologies and forms. For both the producers and consumers of these media materials, they possess a certain sacramental value in which physical things are conduits for ontological graces. This is for instance evident through the uses that this type of Christianity makes of what David Morgan (2007) refers to as "image texts". He describes below how this works in the American context:

Texts appear throughout the interior and on the exterior of storefront churches in the manner that devotional images and icons populate the walls and altars of Catholic, Orthodox, and some liturgical Protestant churches. These texts may be characterized as "image texts" inasmuch as they combine the features of textuality with visuality, creating a

visual artifact that is neither purely text nor image, but both. Rather than operating as icons that visualize the appearance of a sacred figure, the Evangelical image-text visualizes the Word of God - the Bible as a living text, as the holy spoken word, the speech of God. And it visualizes the authorizing utterance of the pastor, the charismatic leader of the community whose speech conveys the anointing of the Spirit of God (Morgan, 2007, p. 221).

We are dealing here with transnational movements so what David Morgan describes within contemporary American Evangelicalism is evident throughout the neo-Pentecostal world, including its African-led versions whether located in Africa or abroad. The import of my reference to African-led charismatic Christianity lies in the fact that, generally, Africans take a sacramental view of the universe. Convictions that there are no sharp dichotomies between what is physical and what is spiritual tend to be stronger in African than in Western thought systems. Accordingly, as Ghanaian theologian, Kwame Bediako, explains, in the African context, the “physical” acts as vehicle for “spiritual” realities (Bediako, 2000, p. 88). African cultures share this sacramental worldview with Pentecostals whose pneumatic emphasis include the ability of the Spirit to mediate God’s power and presence through words and objects (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005). This sacramental worldview, which is a shared worldview, is what explains the import of Morgan’s image-text in African charismatic Pentecostalism. Due to its theological emphasis on unmediated access to *Transcendence*, Pentecostalism has often been presented as a religion that de-emphasises ritual and the use of sacramental objects in the transmission of faith. The African-led Pentecostalism we discuss here, present “negative instances” of this paradigm. They innovatively utilise new media in fascinating ways, to mediate the “anointing” of the Holy Spirit. Words, texts and images of the anointed of God, when reduced to print or captured on various audio-visual storage systems, are believed to possess the same powers that inspired their initial oral delivery.

Religious Sensations and the Anointing

Thus, in addition to their traditional characteristics as Pentecostals the media forms an important part of the self-definition of this type of religion. The African sacramental view of the universe has crept into African charismatic Pentecostal culture. Books and recorded sermons serve as a major means of pastoral care and as channels of blessing or

interventions in crisis. For instance, in *Catch the Anointing*, Pastor Heward-Mills teaches what he calls “the art of soaking in tapes”:

Soaking in the messages from tapes is a scriptural practice. “Soaking” in tapes simply means to listen to the words over and over again until it becomes a part of you and until the anointing passes on to you! When a tape is fully “soaked”, both the Word content and the Spirit content are imbibed into your spirit. The anointing is not something you learn, it is something you catch (Heward-Mills, 2000, p. 9).

To that end, one finds Birgit Meyer’s idea of “religious sensations” very apt in understanding the uses of the resources under scrutiny here. “Sensation”, Meyer explains, encompasses “feeling” and “inducement” which is inspired by those “sensational forms” that makes what is transcendental “sense-able”, as she puts it. According to Meyer, “religious feelings are not just there, but are made possible and reproducible by certain modes of inducing experiences of the transcendental” (Meyer, 2006, p.8). I find that the examples that Meyer gives resonate with my own understanding of sacramental objects and their uses in charismatic Pentecostalism:

[The] notion of “sensational form” can also be applied to the ways in which material religious objects—such as images, books, or buildings—address and involve beholders. Thus, reciting a holy book as the Qur’an, praying in front of an icon, or dancing around the manifestation of a spirit area also sensational forms through which religious practitioners are made to experience the presence and power of the transcendental (Meyer, 2006, p. 8).

My understanding of enchanted texts and audio-visual material has been greatly helped by the work of David Morgan, particularly through his two seminal publications, *The Sacred Gaze* (2005) and *Visual Piety* (1998). However, I use the work of Meyer extensively here because much of her research has been based in Africa, and precisely on Pentecostal Christianity. Belief is mediated, and so it follows, as Morgan notes, that we must think about the mediums through which this happens. As he explains: “Belief happens in and through things and what people do with them” (Morgan, 2005, p. 8). I contend that those material media we consider here do serve to induce therapeutic feelings of religious excitement and hope in practitioners. Even when produced in Africa, sacramental media resources circulate freely, even among the faithful who live abroad. In the African Christian context, the ultimate sacramental material among these is the Holy Bible which, as we will note below, has acquired a symbolic and ritual use in African

revivalist Christianity. In modern times church magazines, books and audio-visual materials have acquired similar statuses. Pastor Aminu for instance, specialises in praying for women with reproductive health problems, a key concern that makes women some of the chief clients of pneumatic Christianity in Africa. At a special service to pray for such women in December 2006, he encouraged participating couples to buy copies of his magazine, *Pure Fire*. Keeping that magazine on one's matrimonial bed, he explained, would induce the divine anointing required to make conception possible. In a traditional context in which diagnosis rarely rules out supernatural causality the magazine, having acquired an enchanted quality following prayer, was expected to ward off evil and make effective God's miraculous power of procreation for couples.

New Religious Movements in Post-Communist Europe

Charismatic Pentecostalism belongs to the category of New Religious Movements (NRMs) that emphasize "charisma" and the mediation of power. Such NRMs affirm the world and modernity and effectively appropriate sophisticated modern media technologies creating formats that mediate spiritual experiences based on encounters with the Holy Spirit. Through the media and other sensational forms, NRMs manifest their presence within public space in order to bring not simply a message of transformation to the public but also to establish a constituency for the charismatic personality at the center of it all. The theology or religious orientation of charismatic Pentecostalism has a decidedly interventionist focus and the charismatic person at the center of it is the human channel of the graces that the followers seek.

Things associated with his person including, his or her words and external objects he or she touches acquire the required sacramental potency for serving various religious ends. It is precisely this type of interventionist theology that has served as a great attraction for post-communist Eastern Europeans. Thus Meyer is right in pointing to the need to investigate "how all kinds of practices of religious mediation and the sensational forms produced and sustained by these mediation practices are situated in those broader structures that characterize neo-liberal capitalism" (Meyer, 2006, p. 28).

The adoption of new media, to return to Meyer's thoughts on religious sensations, does not happen in a vacuum. It is linked, she notes, 'with broader social and cultural processes' (Meyer 2006, p.15). The collapse of the communist experiment has left millions of people

bewildered, disappointed and overwhelmed by the challenges of building personal and communal lives within new capitalist structures. The stresses of negotiating one's way in nascent capitalist systems has led to social problems with increases in drug abuse, prostitution, armed robbery and other such social vices. The problems have exposed the deficiencies in state machineries that are supposed to deal with the social costs of adjustment. In modern Eastern Europe NRMs of both Christian and other religious persuasions including various versions of Islam have either been introduced, or where they were dormant, have found new leases of life in response to the desire for spiritual fulfillment. The dichotomy that the Western world created between sacred and secular realms of existence has thus not been sustained in the Eastern European contexts under study. Denominational loyalties to Eastern Orthodox Christianity have also largely been eroded in the religious lives of many people. Significant numbers are seeking refuge in religion. They have found new places to feel at home in the ministries of NRMs that promise divine solutions to social and personal tremors.

Embassy of God Movement

Pastor Sunday Adelaja, a charismatic Pentecostal whose ministry is to bring hope to tens of thousands caught in the quagmire of the capitalist experiment has become an icon in Ukraine through an interventionist ministry that is bringing the needed hope to masses. Pastor Adelaja started the 'Church of the Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for all Nations' in 1994. It belongs to the Word of Faith movement and indeed, that was the original name of the church until it was changed in 1992 to reflect its broader mission and desire to engage with the world. At its fourteenth anniversary, Embassy of God claimed a membership of twenty-five thousand adults. Membership is distributed among its various branches mainly within Eastern Europe but now also with about six in the USA. The central assembly in Kiev attracts upwards of eight thousand adults to its three services every Sunday. More than 90% of the membership is Eastern European. The current name of the church as Catherine Wanner explains, "signaled the church's new mission: to establish a public role for religion and to bring the faith to 'all nations' through extensive missionizing" (Wanner, 2007, p. 211). This is a stream of charismatic Pentecostalism in which spoken words constitute sensational forms. Once spoken, they acquire lives of their own, a quality that is sustained when they come to be

captured in print or as audio-visual material. At every Embassy of God event, a lot of physical space is devoted to the marketing of Pastor Adelaja books and tapes and are actively promoted with their active uses linked to the positive destiny of consumers. Testimonies are invited from those who have experienced the relevant religious sensations simply by reading a book, listening to a recorded message or viewing an audio-visual version of Pastor Adelaja's sermons.

Anointing in the Embassy of God's media ministry

In charismatic Pentecostalism, as noted, words have a performative force behind them, an ontological quality that is not lost even when they are captured in print or on tapes. Thus, book and tape distribution is a central part of charismatic Pentecostal media culture. Religion in the media has contributed immensely to the availability of these alternative resources of supernatural succor. Marleen De Witte perceptively captures this interface between technology and religion through the Weberian notion of "charisma". Charisma refers to extraordinary gifts of grace "denoting the gift of authority, the power to capture people's attention, to evoke devotion, to make believe, to captivate and to enchant". In the words of De Witte:

Media technologies like television and film can make things and persons more beautiful and attractive than they really are, while at the same time presenting them as true and accessible. They give them a mystical kind of authority and makes people desire to follow them (De Witte, 2003, p. 174).

Pastor Sunday Adelaja, is just that kind of "mystic" whose charisma is not only evident through his personal presence and ministry but also mediated through the "plurifold" media resources that he makes available to the public.

The media, in all its various forms, has been given a critical role in Embassy of God. Pentecostal Christianity, with its emphasis on what Meyer calls a "mobile self" and a "portable charismatic identity", is a religion that speaks to experiences of "dislocation, fragmentation, and increasing mobility" (Meyer, 2006, p. 28). The church has taken advantage of the opportunities that the collapse of communism and increasing engagement with the West has brought to countries like Ukraine. Thus much of Pastor Sunday Adelaja's influence has come from this powerful media ministry. At the center of it all is his own charismatic personality as the anointed of God who exudes Holy Spirit

power for the benefit of a following seeking various forms of intervention from God. It is Pastor Adelaja's sermons, which invariably come in series that are eventually published as books or reproduced on CDs, DVD's and distributed across Eastern Europe. These days they go as far as the USA, increasing his transnational influence as an "exporter" of spiritual power. The impressive interactive website of Embassy of God offers the opportunity for the wider public to access the anointing available through Pastor Adelaja's ministry.

He has developed a strong international network and so his books and their contents are religiously appropriated by other pastors who work under his "covering". I use covering in the same sense as Ogbu Kalu uses "Elijah's Mantle", signifying a process of mimicry in which younger pastors read the books, listen to audio tapes and watch the video tapes of their mentors and imitate what they see and read (Kalu, 2008, pp. 123-146). This is the way to catch the anointing, according to Heward-Mills: "'soaking" in books written by anointed men is an invaluable way of associating with them...The words of anointed men of God contain the Spirit and life" (Heward-Mills, 2000, p. 4). The list of books available through the Adelaja stable is impressive. They include:

The Road to Greatness (2006); *Spearheading a National Transformation* (2006); *Kings and Judges of the Earth* (2007); *Mighty Warrior: How to Become Mighty Through Prayer* (2007); *Accessing Divine Wisdom: Wisdom is the Key to Reigning on Earth* (2006); *Victorious Despite the Devil: A Successful Christian Living in Spite of all Odds* (2006); *How to Hear the Voice of God* (2007); *Life and Death in the Power of the Tongue* (2005); *The Jesus you Never Knew* (2006); *Pastoring without Tears* (2007).

Pastor Adelaja, by his own count, has churned out close to seventy books since the ministry began. There are three observations that I wish to make on these books, including those published in Russian and the electronic versions of Pastor Adelaja's teachings. First, they are all published by the ministry's own publishing house called, Fares Publishing; second, there are pictorial representations in all of them that tell the story of Embassy of God and Pastor Adelaja's successes in particular as an anointed servant of God; third, the church members do not make such a big distinction between how Pastor Adelaja's live teachings are received and how they are treated when in print or in the various electronic formats. It is the sense of reverence with which the visible material, whether books or tape recordings, are received that contribute to their sacramental value. Thus an investment in these materials

literally constitutes an investment in one's blessing and prosperity. At a 2007 Winter Fast in Kiev, there was an extensive attention to Pastor Adelaja's publications and tapes through personal promotion of the items during preaching. Prayers were constantly offered at every opportunity that the Lord would make a way for the publications to be accepted and accessed by the un-churched world. A whole session of the prayers on December 5, 2007 was thus devoted to this course. Members prayed, aggressively and fervently, that the Lord would help the books to gain acceptance and therefore influence the world outside of Embassy of God.

The idea was that if the world was to be influenced with the Christian message, then people should read "such truths as written by Pastor Adelaja". During one such prayer session at the 2007 Winter Fast the leader exhorted the congregation along the following lines: "the books contain 'revelations', 'anointing', and 'vision', and they were also 'inspired' by the Holy Spirit". The congregation was therefore urged to pray and even repent of the fact that the books of the "man of God" had not been handled as responsibly as they should. The subject matter of "books and influence" seemed quite important to the meeting. Bose, the wife of Pastor Adelaja herself, at one point, came to the microphone and in a combination of glossolalia and plain language, implored God to intervene and show "us" ways in which Pastor Adelaja's books may be made accessible to the world and more and more influential through the anointing they bring.

Enchanted Media and the African Worldview

The prayers offered at the Winter Fast were indicative of the fact that the use of pictures and images in the media materials are not done simply for their aesthetic values. It is for this reason that some scholars have drawn attention to the other expression "aisthesis", understood as organizing "our total sensory experience of the world and our sensitive knowledge of it" (Meyer, 2006, p. 18). In this type of charismatic Pentecostalism, it is the personal psychology and the perceived graces on the life of the leader, his charisma, which drives the people. In line with this thinking, Wanner makes the important observation that the strategy that Pastor Sunday Adelaja has employed to bring non-believers under conviction and to yield such impressive and rapid growth "trades on spiritually rooted understandings of illness and cure." The original and core membership of Embassy of God as she rightly observes, is constituted by "recovering addicts, and their grateful family

members, who see the addict's cure and transformation as a 'miracle', testimony to 'God's grace'" (Wanner, 2007, p. 212). The understanding of the roots of social crises to be fundamentally spiritual also determines the choice of therapy which, for a Christian charismatic movement, invariably means prayer and deliverance. This worldview, although present in western Pentecostal thought, is available in African thought systems in a very central way.

Thus, it should be considered important when Wanner notes that although there is nothing Nigerian, or even African, about the services the Embassy of God offers, the doctrine espoused by Pastor Adelaja draws on trends in theology that are well developed in Nigeria. Those familiar with the work of scholars like Birgit Meyer may be aware of the strong worldviews of mystical causality that are reflected through Ghanaian-Nigerian films. In these films the Pentecostal pastor, who is a charismatic or a thaumaturge, to use the expression preferred by Bryan Wilson, is above all else an interventionist on account of the anointing of the Spirit upon his life. The charismatic leader has the power to bless and curse and the effect of such a personality in African prophetic religions cannot be underestimated as explained by C.G. Baëta:

[Prophetism] appears to me to be a perennial phenomenon of African life, and the basic operative element in it seems to be personal in character. Whether in relation to or independently of events or developments in society, the individual endowed with a striking personality and the ability to impose his own will on others, believing himself and believed by others to be a special agent of some supernatural being or force, will emerge from time to time and secure a following. Powers traditionally credited to such persons, of healing, of revealing hidden things, predicting the future, cursing and blessing effectually, etc., will be attributed to him whether he claims them or not. ...Such things as the above-mentioned endowment, inward illumination, a sense of divine vocation, spontaneous enthusiasm ...are facts of life and their effects on African society (Baëta 1962, pp. 6-7).

Being synonymous with "the functional power of the Spirit", anointing has traditionally been associated with the "spoken word" and "touch" or the "laying on of hands". Thus it is said of the founder of an early 20th century African charismatic movement, the Nigerian Garrick Sokari Braide, who worked in the Niger Delta that:

As his reputation for holiness grew, so too did a superstitious reverence for his person: people sought physical contact with him in order to receive healing or protection from danger. The water in which he

washed was collected and dispensed as containing magical properties. His words were received as charged with spiritual force (Sanneh 1983, p. 182).

The key word in the process of mediating the supernatural here is “anointing”, which is understood in this stream of Christianity as “the power of God in action” and strongly present in the ministry of the prophet. Anointing has great emotional appeal when it comes to African religious sensibilities because the indigenous religious context itself is one in which “power” determines the viability of religion. Thus, the key concept of anointing is germane to our understanding of the popularity of contemporary African-led charismatic Pentecostal Christianity such as the one led by Pastor Adelaja in Eastern Europe. It will be difficult to remove his style of ministry and interpretation of social crisis and misfortune from his African background. Whether he *consciously* brings that background to bear on his ministry or not thus becomes a moot point.

Charisma and the Enchanted Word

In *Visual Piety*, David Morgan argues that although language is a symbolic form that is generally shared, “it should not be understood as an isolated or autonomous operator in the construction of reality. Language and vision, word and image, text and picture”, he continues, “are in fact deeply enmeshed and collaborate powerfully in assembling our sense of the real” (Morgan, 1998, p. 9). With the introduction of new media into the ministries of contemporary African-led Charismatic movements, anointing can now be mediated through texts and tapes as well containing the “spoken word” of the anointed. These words, like those of Braide, are believed to be charged with a spiritual force that can make things happen. Thus to “catch the anointing”, as Dag Heward-Mills has titled one of his books, “you have to read my books and listen to my tapes” because “for many people, the close association with [great] men of God is not possible except through the medium of books and tapes” (Heward-Mills, 2000, p. 4). This is a religious exercise that members and believers in the ministry of the leaders of charismatic Pentecostalism take seriously. What we have in these developments are not mere texts and tapes but enchanted new media that mediate supernatural power.

In his dated but still well acclaimed volume, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, G. van der Leeuw discusses the importance of the “writ

ten word". Writing, he notes, could have magical connotations as "a method of gaining power over the living word" (Van der Leeuw, 1963, p. 435). The Muslim world is already familiar with the power of the printed word. The Qur'an is "cosmic truth", and that means, they take a transcendent view of the holy book by looking at it as the verbatim word of God. In the words of Wilfred Cantwell Smith:

It represents the eternal breaking into time; the unknowable disclosed; the transcendent entering history and remaining here, available to mortals to handle and to appropriate; the divine become apparent. To memorize it, as many Muslims have ceremonially done, and even to quote from it, as every Muslim does daily in his and her formal prayers and otherwise, is to enter into some sort of communion with ultimate reality (1993).

That worldview means that the Qur'an as printed word is enchanted in a way that other sacred books may not be. The closest that the Bible comes to in terms of words communicated directly to be written include the examples of Moses and the Decalogue, Ezekiel and the words of prophecy contained in the book under his name, and Revelation in which the glorified Christ asks John to write down his messages to the seven churches. The Bible and Qur'an, as a result of the African belief in the power of words to bless and to curse, have been put some very innovative uses in popular Christianity. The Bible is *holy* and in the African imagination, what is holy exudes power that could even be dangerous. In African hands therefore, the Bible has been received as something that is more than written text for academic study. Beyond the written text and its interpretations, the Bible quickly acquired new uses as a sacred book with inherent spiritual power. In one of the most popular African independent churches (AICs) in Ghana, a copy of the Bible is kept perpetually on the table from which the prophet speaks. Sometimes it is tied to the ailing part of a person's body to mediate healing. The symbolic and talismanic uses of the Bible are therefore quite common particularly in independent the world. Eastern Europe offers a prime example of the transnational nature of contemporary Pentecostalism and its innovative appropriations of modern media technologies. In the process African sacramental worldviews have found a place to feel at home in the hearts and lives of people going through challenges similar to those of Africans as they attempt to find their way within the maze of capitalism and its numerous challenges. Belief occurs through the medium, which is the locus of religious sensations. The new African charismatic Pentecostal religion we have

encountered here has taken the uses of the media to another level. In an Eastern European context in which religion is thriving within post-communist space and minds the fascinating ways in which the media is being used, as we have seen, defies the prevalent Western thinking that capitalism and neo-liberal economic policies will succeed in edging religion out of the lives of people.

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Pentecostalism in Kinshasa

Maintaining multiple church membership

By Rigobert Kamate

Abstract

Although some research suggests that conversion to Pentecostalism implies a total break with previous religious membership, the present study, reporting the religious life histories of a representative sample of persons indicates, that most people active in the vigorous Pentecostal growth in Kinshasa (8-10 per cent of the total religious membership) carry on multiple church practices. While most maintain their basic identities in their original church for social reasons, they are more active in the Pentecostal churches because of better biblical instruction, a deeper prayer life, better response to immediate problems such as health crises and because of warm social interaction. Especially important in multiple membership is the access to services of revival churches through television and radio in the privacy of their homes while the practice in the churches of origin is a public social routine.

Key words: Pentecostal/Revival churches, African Pentecostalism, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kinshasa, African Pentecostal, multiple religious membership, religious media, Pentecostal media, Pentecostalism and music child sorcerers

Introduction:

Much of the attractiveness of Pentecostalism in Africa is due to the fact that it opens up much more direct access to forms of religious experience which the more institutionalised churches do not foster or permit (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005, pp. 10-13). The historical churches gradually exert more control from experiences of doctrinal aberration when the "layman" is allowed freedom of interpretation of the Bible or

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freedom of expression in rituals. Without pre-established guidelines imposed by authorities, disputes and divisions quickly arise among lay participants. The claims of miracles, healings, and direct inspiration of the Spirit are often dubious and open to ridicule. The classic routinisation of charisma tends to move the definition of normative expression of religious experience into the power and control of appointed ministers who have been trained to discern what is valid and permissible.

Pentecostalism has emphasised a variety of forms of direct control over one's religious experience. Foremost is encouragement to read the Bible and have the direct experience of the personal inspirations relevant to one's personal life at the present moment. People reading the Bible in the Pentecostal mode often come away claiming enthusiastically that for the first time they have experienced the Bible, something that their former church never told them about or permitted. Secondly, Pentecostalism opens up the possibility of expressive participatory prayer, dance, music (Kalu, 2008, p. 121), and the gift of tongues. Thirdly, people are attracted to the healings and other immediate problem solving such as finding a job. As Asamoah-Gyadu notes (2005, p. 13), "In almost every case people developed an insatiable desire to read the Bible, to pray and to join in fellowship with like-minded believers".

Many members of the established churches in Africa pass over definitively to different churches that are centred around "born again", Pentecostal experiences, especially when their beliefs and forms of worship are only loosely organised around the churches they have been members of (Ihejirika, 2006). Some authors maintain that Pentecostalism "...implies a total break with the convert's former beliefs, expressed as a total conversion, a second birth committing the whole individual (to new beliefs)" (Mayrargue, 2001, p. 286). This constitutes a total rejection of former church membership. More common than is often recognised, however, members of the historical churches in Africa may continue to maintain various degrees of activity in their churches, but also participate in the various Pentecostal experiences that are rewarding to them (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005, pp. 62-63).

This may be especially true in African countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo where Catholicism is relatively strong—perhaps the largest percentage of Catholics of any country of Africa. Many people have social connections to Catholicism or continue the rhythm of Catholic observance in part because it is part of the national

culture. It is easier for some to remain a Catholic or other major Protestant denomination, but also to participate in the Pentecostal experiences that are available. This is especially true where participation in Pentecostalism is carried on, in part, through following Pentecostal radio, television, video and other media that enable one to live quite fully an evangelical spirituality in the privacy of one's home and still carry on worship in one's church of membership.

The present study was carried out in Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to explore and understand better the nature of this multiple membership. The study had four major objectives:

1. Understand better what aspects of the Pentecostal experience are particularly attractive to members of the established churches, experiences that they feel they do not get in their present church.
2. Determine what practices and linkages do people active in the Pentecostal churches maintain in their churches.
3. Are there differences in this dual membership among those who are Catholic or, alternatively, are members of major Protestant groups such as Methodists or followers of indigenous African churches?
4. Do the demographic factors such as age, gender, education or other variables influence the nature of this dual membership?

Revival churches in Kinshasa

In the Congo, the term "revival church" is preferred to "Pentecostal" (Dorier-Apprill, 2001, p. 293). The evangelistic missions to the Belgian Congo can be traced back to 1919 (Anderson, 2004, pp. 110-111), but Kalu (2008, p. 5) states that in 2000 Pentecostals are only 8 percent of the population of the Congo, much less than the estimated 20 percent of the population in Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Malawi. The more recent growth of the revival churches in Kinshasa is attributed to the arrival of Sonny Lee Osborn in the Congo (then Zaire) in 1980. The great crusade of Osborn set in motion the organisation of a great variety of congregations throughout Kinshasa. The Pentecostalism of the Congo is generally recognised as one of the most vibrant, expressive Pentecostalisms in Africa (Konde, 1994; Elongo, 1997; Nkeni, 1999; Ngindu, 2003; Kalu, 2008, pp. 45-46). One of the most significant characteristics of Pentecostalism in the Congo is the adaptation of the popular music to the gospel message (Manda Tchebwa, 1996).

Kinshasa is also noted for the widespread phenomenon of “child sorcerers”, and combating the curses of these sorcerers is a major activity of the revival churches in Kinshasa (de Boeck, F., 2005).

Mvuzolo (2004, pp. 12-14) presents a typology of five major currents of “revival churches”.

The closest to historical Pentecostalism are the Assemblies of God, the Pentecostal Temple La Borne, traced back to Pastor Jacques Vernaude, a Francophone evangelist of Swiss origin. Nearly every commune of Kinshasa has a branch of the Temple La Borne which rejects all ecclesiastical organisation.

A second current, the groups of “Spiritual Combat”, who follow the leadership of Mama Olangi, is popular mainly in Kinshasa and in Brazzaville. The Ministry of Spiritual Combat insists on integrating the converted, especially women involved in polygamous marriages, into groups of great solidarity, demanding loyalty above the family.

A third group of revival churches, “the power of sanctification”, is piloted by Pastor Kiziamina Kibila, Rev. Tambu Lukoki and Bishop Kandianza Mwana Mbo. This movement emphasises the expulsion of demons through spiritual power, but also stands out for its legitimisation of polygamy based on Old Testament models such as Solomon’s 80 concubines.

A fourth revival group, strong in the poorest sectors of Kinshasa, is the Messianic Church of Predestination led currently by Neema Sikatenda, the son of the great Prophet Sikatenda,. Given its origin in the east of the Congo, it is most popular among Swahili speaking Congolese, and has placed great emphasis on the classic features of Pentecostalism such as spirit possession and speaking in tongues.

Most important of all these currents with the greatest following are the “prosperity churches” led by the flamboyant televangelists, “Archbishop” Fernando Kutino, founder of the Church of the Army of Victory, General Sony Kafuta Rockman, founder of the Church of the Army of the Eternal, and the Apostle Leopold Mutombo Kalombo. These have the most popular TV programmes, and, at the time of this study, commanded the greatest identification among the twenty persons who gave life histories in this research.

“Archbishop” Fernando Kutino (self-proclaimed to distinguish himself from the Catholic “Archeveque” of Kinshasa) repeats that he does not preach poverty but getting wealth. He himself is evidence of this quest with his limousines, luxurious palace in the neighbourhood of the rich followers of Mobutu and his costly clothing. Although in

exile in Belgium following accusations of arms trafficking, his triumphant return to the Congo in 2006 was celebrated by a revival crusade in the Stadium of the Martyrs in Kinshasa which is said to have attracted 100,000 persons.

Fernando Kutino, the founder of the television channel, Radio-Television Message of Life (Radio-Television Message de Vie, RTMV) began his TV career by peddling videos of Jimmy Swaggart and Pat Robinson to the local TV stations. Eventually he developed his own television programme, "Saving the Congo", (transmitted also by radio), which he himself conducts. The programme consists mainly of lessons on the Bible, commentary on the socio-political situation in the Congo (with advice for the political leaders of the Congo) and answering telephone calls from the viewers.

Sony Kafuta Rockman, originally with an academic degree in criminal investigation, is widely known for his struggles to build a huge church in the heart of Kinshasa and for his television channel, The Army of the Eternal (Radio Television Armee de l'Eternel- RTAE) launched in 1999. Sony Kafuta did biblical studies in Kenya and is known in the Congo for his campaign for the dignity of women. His best-known television programme, frequently mentioned by the women in this study, is "The Daughters of Sarah" (*Filles de Sarah*), which he himself hosts with readings from the Bible, personal witnessing, stories of conversion of his viewers, and excellent choral pieces redolent of the contemporary Christian music popular in the Congo. In general, his programmes are considered of higher professional quality than the other religious television programmes in Kinshasa.

All of these forms of "revival churches" highlight themselves as "warriors" against the everyday problems of the people: the unemployment, poor health, postponed marriage due to lack of income to support a family, the abandonment of wives and mistreatment of women, the diabolic possession of children, and a host of other typical problems of the poor in Africa.

The Pentecostal movement in Nigeria remains an important reference point for the Revival Churches in the Congo. Pentecostal pastors come from Nigeria for campaigns of evangelisation, and Kinshasa is flooded with Pentecostal videos produced in Nigeria. Virtually all those interviewed were watching Nigerian videos, especially regarding possession by evil spirits and how to combat the evil spirits.

The methodology in this study

In order to select a representative sample for personal life-history interviews of twenty followers of the major television and radio programmes in Kinshasa, a brief questionnaire was first distributed to 700 young people at the religious services of Archbishop Fernando Kutino and also of Sony Kafuta Rockman. The questionnaire provided information on (1) age, sex, social status, etc., (2) the original religious identity (Catholic, Protestant, etc.) and (3) the degree to which they were followers of evangelical radio and television programmes. From this list a total of 100 were selected and the 100 were engaged in focus group discussions on their perception of the programmes. From this 100 a further twenty were selected for private, life-history interviews. The present article is based on the twenty religious life histories.

At the outset, the interviewees were simply asked to tell their life history, and when that was exhausted they answered a series of stimulating questions seeking greater detail about their religious experiences that brought them to be followers of the major televangelists in Kinshasa. All of the life histories revealed that their religious practice in the revival churches is the centre of their religious experience, but virtually all indicated fairly clearly if they have ties to their former religious identity.

Results of the study

1) Catholics who now draw spiritual inspiration from Pentecostal broadcasting

Many followers of Pentecostal programmes and Christian music maintain their Catholic identity and, in various degrees, continue to attend Sunday Catholic services, but have gradually found in the Pentecostal broadcasting their major religious activity. They are particularly attracted by Pentecostal organisations and programmes that respond to their major problems and aspirations in life. The programme, "The Daughters of Sarah", for example, is especially appealing to women for whom life has not been just or rewarding.

Wivine, a Catholic who enjoys Pentecostal radio and television

Wivine is a twenty-six year old graduate nurse, unmarried, and still living with her parents. She considers herself a Catholic, but now the television programmes of the "Daughters of Sarah" are so satisfying

for her that she rarely goes to Catholic services. Her first contact with non-Catholic groups was in response to the invitation of a Protestant friend to participate in the Campus Crusade for Christ at the Protestant University of Kinshasa. She was deeply impressed by the warm, friendly atmosphere in contrast to the relative anonymity of her Catholic parish. At this point she began to follow the Pentecostal discussion groups which lead to the Baptism of the Spirit. She also began to follow the television programme of "Daughters of Sarah" conducted by Sony Kafuta and then was attracted to the services of Sony Kafuta in his Army of the eternal Temple. Wivine is deeply moved by the life stories and witnessing presented on the "Daughters of Sarah". She described in detail the account of Brigitte, single, a professional graduate like herself.

Brigitte was made pregnant by the director of the company where she worked. He refused to recognise the child and, once pregnant, Brigitte was disgraced and abandoned by her family. . . But thanks to her friends in the "Daughters of Sarah" she was given warm support. . Her brothers and sisters in Christ not only helped her find a new employment at Celtel, but she was introduced to a friend who took her as his loving wife and adopted the child born out of wedlock.

I watch these kinds of television programmes regularly and these personal stories are a great inspiration to me .Television gives us the occasion to follow the preaching of Sony Kafuta, the witnessing and the films right in our own home. The biblical programmes are so helpful to me. In my (Catholic) parish of origin, there were rarely explanations of the Bible. But the television programmes are always biblical and I can get this instruction here in my own home.

She finds the home video films imported from Nigeria to be especially inspiring. She is deeply aware that evil spirits and sorcerers abound in Kinshasa, and the Nigerian films gives her reassurance that these are conquerable. She finds the gospel-rock music, the musical styles of her native Kinshasa adapted to the evangelical religious styles particularly enjoyable. In short, Wivine's involvement in Pentecostal broadcasting has transformed her from being a rather drifting, isolated, lost person to a person of greater purpose in her professional nursing role with a life that religion has made meaningful, full of friends and personal enjoyment .

Justine, Catholic but goes to the Pentecostals for healing

Justine is 27, married and the operator of her own hair-dressing salon. She is relatively active in her parish of St. Anne. The sorrow of

her life has been continual miscarriages. Her parish priest has given her holy water, and she recites the psalms of the morning prayer. Justine attends mass every Sunday and the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament every Thursday. But after a friend invited her to the Army of the Eternal she found far more comforting the spiritual advice and teaching there.

I was struck by the warm reception I received at the Army of the Eternal, and when I told a deacon there about my problems of miscarriages, he helped me very much to pray. From time to time he visits me. I understand that their teaching is no different from ours (Catholic), but there they give much more time to prayers of intercession. Each time I have a health problem, I go to the "Clinic of Jesus the Healer" at the Army of the Eternal and I find people to pray over me. They have a specific prayer for every kind of illness.

I appreciate Radio Sango Malamu and Radio Message of Life (both Pentecostal) for their messages which are strictly religious. I like their biblical teaching...their eloquent preaching, their accounts of miracles, their sessions of deliverance (from evil spirits) and the witnessing. Their programmes are full of good contemporary gospel music, especially the evangelical music and the new "hits" of the Makoma group.

She still has not been able to have a child, but during the day in her hair-dressing salon, she tunes the radio to the gospel music to make her daily work a pleasure and entertain her clients as well.

Isidore, a miraculous deliverance from an evil spirit

Isidore, now 24 and unmarried, is a student in the final year of his studies at the Atheneum of Victory. For years, he recounts, he was suffering from continual depression, bad temper and turmoil. He attributes his cure to his Pentecostal friends.

I did not know it at the time, but I was possessed by an evil spirit. One day when the teacher entered the classroom, for some reason I have never been able to explain, I walked over to the teacher and shouted in his face, "Get out! The next thing I knew, I was hitting the teacher and all those who tried to calm me. I was taken home by my school mates and I was given drugs to calm me. I dropped out of school, and for months I remained at home in a dark room. One day they took me to the meeting of a prayer group at the Army of the Eternal. One of the young people in the group noticed that I was constantly fingering a ring on my finger that a girl in my class had given me. When they tried to remove the ring, I resisted fiercely. But finally they removed the ring—I realise now it was the source of my possession—and then I was plunged in prayer and I sang out loud in joy. That evening I returned home exhausted, and

all the next day I was in a deep sleep without nightmares. Then I returned to finish my studies without problems.

Isidore continues to participate both in the groups of the Army of the Eternal and those of the Catholic charismatic renewal. He remains a Catholic and does not seek a second baptism, but he recognises that his deliverance from the evil spirit came from the Army of the Eternal. "After all", he says, "it is the same God and I profit by the teaching in both of the churches". He increasingly enjoys Pentecostal television, especially the programmes on miraculous cures, and he thinks that this can inspire others to seek healing in the Spirit. He also watches frequently the Nigerian videos that dramatise the actions of the evil spirits. He is not entirely convinced by the "gospel of prosperity" of Kutino and Sony Kafuta, but he thinks the witnessing encourages Catholics to actively seek healings and the gift of the Spirit.

Eulalia, finds the truth of the Bible in Pentecostal broadcasts

Eulalia, a student, 24, attends mass in her Catholic parish with her fiancé, an employee of Vodacom, and they are planning to be married there in the parish of St. Anne in a couple of months. What also gives her joy is the conviviality she experiences in her new friendships at the Army of the Eternal. She finds the source of her spiritual growth in the services at the Army of the Eternal and in the television programmes on the Bible, especially those of Pastor Kawata.

I detest the preaching on the gospel of prosperity and the tithing, but I like Pastor Kawata because he avoids talking of giving money and because he explains the teaching of the Bible on the gifts of the Spirit. This has led me to participate in the services at the Army of the Eternal where I have received Spirit possession and seeing Jesus in a marvellous cloud of light. I feel that the Catholic Church has hidden from the people the truth of the Bible. I am pleased that now we Catholics can get the teaching about the Bible on radio and television—and it does not cost anything.

Papy Tex, prefers Pentecostal television to the monotonous sermons in his parish

Papy Tex, 28, is a university student and unmarried. He is attempting to run a barber shop but, in reality, is unemployed. He attends mass in his parish, but also goes frequently to the Army of the Eternal. His first contact with the Army of the Eternal was through the invitation of a friend, and he was much impressed by the warm friendship he experienced there.

I really like the television broadcasts of General Sony Kafuta Rockman and I admire the elegant suits and neckties he wears. What I like about the Pentecostal television and radio is the rich variety of programmes, the explanations of the Bible, good preaching, the witnessing of conversions and healings, the miraculous praying for the unemployed and the enthusiastic evangelising campaigns. It is far better than the monotonous, drab sermons in my parish church. I recently borrowed the CDs with films of the Old Testament and I am fascinated by this. I also obtained tapes of the preaching of Sony Kafuta, and I went to Sony Kafuta to ask him to pray that he find me employment. I told him that I want to get a job in an office and leave the barber shop which gets me almost nothing. Sony Kafuta's prayers are powerful in getting employment, finding a marriage partner and managing to get visas to travel to Europe.

Emile: The revival churches speak the language of the ordinary people

Emile, 34, is a teacher by training but presently is making a living as a tailor. He is not a member of the Army of the Eternal and is relatively active in his Catholic parish of St. Luke, but he does follow the television and radio broadcasts of the Revival Churches.

I listen to their biblical programmes regularly. I think the televangelists are admirable because they speak in the ordinary language of the people and they have brought the message of the gospel to thousands of people. They allow the people to participate in the programmes with call-ins, witnessing, personal accounts of conversion and deliverance from evil spirits. Usually, these are the voice of the poor, who are not otherwise heard in political and economic circles. The Revival Churches have enabled refugees and those displaced by war to be heard. When a poor person goes to the Catholic priests they are usually ignored, while the Revival Churches listen to them.

Leticia, admires the programmes of the "Daughters of Sarah"

Leticia, 31, a mother of three children one of whom will soon be making her First Communion, attends mass in her parish church, but also comes to the Army of the Eternal and other temples of the Revival Churches. It has been through the television and radio broadcasts that she has been attracted to the services in The Army of the Eternal.

I admire especially the programmes and activities of the "Daughters of Sarah" because of the good results in the lives of the young women who participate. Churches such as the Army of the Eternal are important because they offer a variety of activities that appeal to all ages, all levels of education and all social classes. I listen all the time to Radio Sango Malamou, the televangelists Deny Lessi, Sony Kafuta, and the "Daughters of

Sarah". I agree with the teaching about prosperity being the fruit of a godly life and with the duty to pay the tithe. I have not seen any person gain prosperity through their activities in the Revival Churches but I have faith in following the path of God. There are exaggerations in the televangelists, but I feel that this is justified because it is publicity for the gospel. Thanks to television the explanation of the Bible reaches also the people in their homes, especially to the poor.

I admire the plan of evangelisation through the mobile phones which the Revival Churches have set in motion. The assistants of Sony Kafuta have responded to my telephone call for prayers for the safe travel of my young brother setting out for studies in Belgium. At times I telephone directly to Sony Kafuta during the transmission of the "Daughters of Sarah" and he faithfully answers my calls on the programme. I have in my house many recordings of the programmes of Sony Kafuta, video films produced in Nigeria on the demons, and other videos on the Bible.

She sees many people of her parish in the services at the Army of the Eternal, and talks with many in her parish who are equally grateful for the radio and television programmes of the Revival Churches. She sees no conflict between these Churches and her Catholicism.

Protestants active in the revival churches

Solange, finding a church which advances the cause of women

Solange, now 27, has a degree in law but works as a public relations officer in a large mobile phone sales company in Kinshasa. Her fiancé is now in Paris getting his doctorate and she considers him to be "the man of my life". This upwardly mobile young woman was brought up as a Methodist and occasionally attends services in the Methodist church especially at the marriages and family baptisms of her friends.

I have found real spiritual renewal in the evangelisation campaigns of Sony Kafuta's Revival Church at the Army of the Eternal. I have received the gift of tongues and the baptism of the Spirit. In the Methodist Church I knew the life of the commandments, but now I have experienced the life of the Spirit. The centre of my Pentecostal activities is the "Daughters of Sarah" movement and I find great inspiration in the television broadcasts of the Daughters of Sarah, especially the teaching on the Bible and moral renewal in the Congo.

What has particularly inspired me is Sony Kafuta's promotion of women as the national patrimony of the Congo and the basis of the renovation of Congolese society. The fulfilment of women is to be found in their education and professional life, but also in marriage, motherhood, and the Christian education of the children. I accept the military symbols of Sony Kafuta in defining women's role as a "combat" for the transformation of Congolese society. I believe in the gospel of prosperity – that if one lives the gospel, one will find economic advancement.

Bertha, converted by the exorcism of her little daughter

Bertha is a member of the Church of Christ of the Congo and attends services there regularly, but after the exorcism of her daughter, Sandra, by a deacon at the Army of the Eternal she has become a devoted follower of Sony Kafuta. Much of the interview with Bertha was a long account of the strange demon possession of her daughter and the attempts to perform an exorcism. In the background of the account are references in this interview and in other interviews to the widespread possessions of children by spirits that are sent by child sorcerers. The Pentecostal Revival Churches are seen in Kinshasa as the most powerful source of deliverance and protection from these evil spirits.

Sandra was possessed by a terrifying evil Spirit that made the child bleat like a goat and spit things out of her mouth. After various attempts at exorcism I took my daughter Sandra to the Clinic of Jesus at the Army of the Eternal where a deacon struggled with and finally banished the evil spirit. I continue to live in fear of the evil spirits and I have the videos of Fernando Kutino, the videos from Nigeria and of other evangelists regarding the deliverance from evil spirits. I follow the television programmes of Fernando Kutino, Sony Kafuta and other televangelists for the comfort and the reassurance of God's protection that I get from these programmes.

Rose, the story of a husband brought back to marital fidelity

Rose is 29, a university graduate and the mother of a small child, but for some years she has been living the pain of her husband's affair with another woman and his refusal to accept civil and religious marriage with her. She was active in her Church of the Disciples of Kauka and never had any interest in the televangelists in Kinshasa. Rose seemed quite happy to tell the story of how she came to frequent the Army of the Eternal.

One evening after the television news, a well-known televangelist, Mama Olangi, came on. I was not interested because I thought the televangelists were phonies, but to please my friend who was a follower of televangelists I let the programme run. It happened that this programme was about how to bring husbands back to marital fidelity, but all this seemed an unreal utopia to me and unrelated to the problem of my own marital life. By chance one of the husbands who gave testimony of his return to fidelity worked with Vodaphone exactly the same as my own husband, and the story of this Jacob was exactly the same as my husband Eric. At the end of the programme, Mama Olangi asked all those watching who had similar marital problems to touch the screen of the television set to receive deliverance from marital problems sent out on the waves of the television

broadcast. I was so carried away by the similarity with my own marital problems that I automatically reached out and touched the screen as the choir sang a well-known hymn, "Break the chains". To our enormous surprise, just at that moment my husband Eric—who almost never was at home—walked in, sank into the divan next to me and began to whistle the hymn along with us. Then, with tears streaming from my eyes, my husband embraced and kissed me. Today, Eric has accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour and we are preparing for our civil and religious marriage.

Now Rose watches the televangelist programmes frequently, especially Mama Olangi, and she comes to the services at the Army of the Eternal regularly because she finds that it is the answer to all her problems. Everything at this church is so rewarding that she attends her former church less and less.

Achille, a firm believer in the gospel of prosperity

Achille is 32, a university-trained specialist in rural development and now the director in an ONG cooperative of market women selling vegetables. He attends the Baptist Church regularly, but finds his inspiration in the television broadcasts of Sony Kafuta Rockman and the programmes of "The Daughters of Sarah" which he thinks would be of great help to the women in the cooperatives he works with. Achille is unmarried, in part because his salary in the ONG is so low, but he aspires to have his own business. His business interests explain, in part, his support of the gospel of prosperity.

In my view that it is correct that a servant of God is always dressed elegantly, contrary to what many people think. I am convinced that a pastor should wear clothes like that. They are high style. The clothing of Kutino reflects his own message of prosperity which he teaches is normal for a servant of God. It is normal for a servant of God to travel in a luxury car. A servant of God should not live in poverty. I think that a worker merits his salary and I believe that the Bible says this clearly. How can a pastor direct the people if he walks around on foot. How can a pastor visit the faithful and pay his travel bills to visit his community if he has no money?

I visited Kutino in his office one day and I asked him to pray for my prosperity. A month later I was appointed the director of the department of planning of the ONG (where I work). I quite willingly pay the tithe because a pastor needs the money to carry out the duties. And his prayers bring prosperity to all of us. I want to become a businessman because this ONG does not pay me enough. I expect my church to help me have some prosperity in my life.

Achille's interest in the gospel of prosperity is sustained by his regular following the television programmes of Kutino and spends all his spare

time watching the other major televangelists. He is also a great devotee of the gospel rock music of Kinshasa and finds his enjoyment in this music.

**Former Catholics who have left Catholicism to become Pentecostals
Mireille, finding strong protection from the evil spirits**

Mireille was formerly a member of the Catholic parish of St. Luke, but she has definitively left Catholicism after a demon was cast out of her husband, a Rosacrucian, and he was cured at the point of death.

I changed churches two years ago; I and my oldest son have received the baptism of the Holy spirit. The priests (at St. Luke) do not give any real spiritual protection to combat Satan who roams about everywhere. When you have problems they only give you a few drops of Holy Water with a little prayer. They leave you to disentangle your problems alone in your house. The deliverance from evil spirits does not Exist at St. Luke's. When the parishioners have problems they come to the clinic Of Jesus (at the Army of the Eternal) like at Bethel. The Catholic Church is only good for celebrating big feasts—weddings, baptisms and the like.

Much of the interview dealt with the terrifying experience of the exorcism of her husband.

As a Rosacrucian he did not want medical attention, but some charismatic Pentecostals prayed over him. During the exorcism the room shook and the evil deeds of his life were written on the wall of the room like on a movie screen—swindling, violence, lying, corruption, idolatry, debauchery...everything. He witnessed that the people praying for him not were strong but acting under the action of the Holy Spirit. My husband found God at that moment and received the baptism of the Holy Spirit...he has now burned all his Rosacrucian books and paraphernalia.

At the heart of Mireille's conversion is her fear of Satan. You know that Satan roams about like a roaring lion.

You must pray all the time. The evil spirits surround us all the time. You must be in constant contact with the Holy Spirit to be protected from the claws of Satan who goes around everywhere in the city to enter into children. My husband became a Rosacrucian to be successful in business, but he ended in the slavery of Satan... You must pray above all for the protection of children who are more and more possessed by the sorcerers... Children who are not yet ten years old. Yesterday there were a dozen of these children on television...freed from Satan.

Mireille's companion in prayer now is Radio Sango Malamu which she was attracted to by Congolese gospel music.

"This is a moment of relaxation after a day of housekeeping. And I follow the Bible lessons, instructions by correspondence. The radio has become for me my only friend but also teaches me how to read the Bible. The Bible dramas are wonderful. I also watch the Pentecostal television programmes, especially the witnessing and the evangelising campaign of Jaerock Lee, a Korean evangelist, broadcast from the stadium. I was able to follow this thanks to the magic of television. My friends have touched the television screen and they recovered their sight, obtained visas for Europe, found work, received promises of marriage and so many other things.

Samy, involved in the life of the Christian community

Samy, 34, is a senior police officer now finishing his university degree. His conversion to the Pentecostal church came through the healing of his little daughter. He has little to say about his former Catholicism and he is not without some criticism of the Pentecostal televangelists for their continual insistence on tithing and the gospel of prosperity. But he finds deeply rewarding his prayer group. He was not particularly attracted to Pentecostalism by the radio or television programmes and even today does not find too much time to watch television. The healing of his nine-year-old daughter was remarkable. Pentecostal brothers came to pray over her...they thought she was dead. Now all his family is active in the Army of the Eternal.

Didier: From a dissolute Catholic life to a devout Pentecostal life

Didier comes from a very devout Catholic family with an older brother who is a priest, a teacher of theology, and a older sister, a nun. But Didier himself was wasting his life in drink and carousing with women and with few religious convictions, Catholic or otherwise. One day a friend invited him to a talk on the Bible. With nothing else to do that day, he went with his friend.

During the talk I was suddenly struck with a hunger for God. I hesitated to leave the church of my family, but each time I fell into a bad life, I realized that my Catholicism did not help me to rise up. Instead, I gained more and more strength and inspiration from the Pentecostal meetings. Finally, I decided to abandon my Catholicism and give myself totally to the action of the Spirit. I was baptised in the Spirit and began a new life. I had to confront my Catholic family who considered me a rebellious sectarian, but for me it was more important to live a good life than to be part of any particular church.

Life has not been easy for Didier. He eventually married and faced many difficulties. But his prayer brought his wife through a difficult period of childbirth and brought him through a disastrous automobile accident that has left him partially crippled. In it all he has found a deep peace and union with God. The fact that he has the gift of tongues convinces him that his body is truly a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Part of his joy as a Pentecostal is the fact that he is a musician and a fanatic follower of gospel music close to all the top music groups of Kinshasa. He thinks that the adaptation of the Congolese music to the gospel is a great source of sanctification of the people of the Congo, especially the young people.

Jules: Convinced that the Pentecostal music will convert the young.

Jules was only a marginal Catholic and has little to say about his former Catholic identity. He was converted when he attended a prayer meeting with his friend Yoko at the Army of the Eternal. His friend suddenly walked forward giving his life to Christ, and Jules, pulled by some invisible force, followed him. In that moment he was struck by the Holy Spirit and began to testify before the gathering of young people.

Jules also is a musician, playing the guitar. He recognises that there is some controversy about gospel rock, but he is convinced that it is for the good of young people. He plays and sings in the Army of the Eternal.

Protestants who have left their churches to become Pentecostals

Yves: CCM music is now the centre of his life

Yves was formerly a member of the Church of Christ of the Congo, but he has left that church now and finds the Army of the Eternal his home. He 30 years old, an employee working in the office of Vodafone. In fact, by luck, the radio in his Vodafone office was always tuned to Radio Sango Malamu and he grew to love the gospel rock music. One day he heard an interesting explanation of the coming of the Son of Man at the end of the world and the offer to pick up a copy of the talk at the Army of the Eternal. When Yves went to get the copy of the talk he was struck by the wonderful friendship he found there and began coming regularly. He now goes frequently to the meetings

for personal intercession, something he never got in his Protestant Church. And he finds the wonderful warmth and hospitality making him at home. He listens to Radio Sango Malamu in every spare moment he gets and feels that the Pentecostal musicians are making a great contribution in Kinshasa.

Jacquie, former African independent church, now lives in the world of televangelism

Jacquie, 28, trained as a nurse but, with a husband who does not work and in bad health herself, barely feeds her husband and children with her stall in the central market of Kinshasa. Given the precarious existence of her family, Jacquie lives constantly begging God's mercy that she will have customers, begging God to give her the health to drag herself to the market, begging God to protect her children from evil spirits. Sometimes she prays all night. She feels that the Army of the Eternal church is a school of prayer: fasts, all-night vigils, testimonies of the Spirit, special prayer sessions for the sick and indigent. "The sessions of prayer in my former church of the Independent Church of Kimbangu never organised such wonderful times of prayer".

Jacquie watches almost every broadcast of every televangelist in Kinshasa and follows also the broadcast videos of exorcisms sent from Nigeria. She sometimes calls in during the broadcasts to ask them to pray for her desperate needs. But she is particularly inspired by the wife of the "Archbishop" Fernando Kutino, whom she feels surpasses all other televangelists...

Mama Emilie Kutino opens up with profound understanding the problems of women and provides Christian solutions. She surpasses her husband the arch-bishop by far. Really the problem with Fernando Kutino is that he wanders off the topic, plunging pell-mell through biblical themes without really explaining them...his preaching is as confusing as flock of screeching chickens. He continually exaggerates, talking all the time about the gospel of prosperity and tithing as if there was nothing else in the Bible. And here I have to say something about the wonderful preaching of the Apostle Mibiye of the City of Bethel Church and Radio Sentinel. Here the word of God is truly preached in Spirit and in truth, especially the programmes for children.

Jacquie knows all the radio and television evangelists in detail and can give her own evaluation of their pros and cons. She thinks it is marvellous that so many people, like herself, have been led to salvation by the radio and television.

DISCUSSION

These accounts of recent religious life history reveal how at least this sample of residents of Kinshasa combine their searches for a more satisfying religious life. Although some felt hurt by some negative experience in their former Catholicism or Protestant group and had rejected their former denominational identity, most had no great difficulty combining the best of various denominational opportunities. If people in the USA and parts of Europe are religious “seekers” (Hoover, 2006, pp. 50-56), so also Africans are “seekers” looking for that combination of beliefs and practices that are most satisfying to them. In nearly all of the cases, the radio and television broadcasts figured strongly in what they found more satisfying in the Revival or Pentecostal Churches.

The central question in this study was why they had come to the Army of the Eternal and what was attractive and satisfying there. A very frequently mentioned satisfaction is the warm, family-like reception that they found in the Revival Churches, so much of a contrast with the large impersonal congregations especially true of the Catholic parishes which tend to be very large with relatively large numbers attending the religious services. They found that they could always reach out and find a helping hand in the Revival Church.

Another frequently mentioned set of satisfactions are the ordinary aspects of the pastoral work of the Christian Churches: more satisfying explanations of the Bible, preaching that is more inspiring, spiritual reading that is more directly related to their problems, attention to personal problems and needs by the deacons and ministers. It is not clear whether the ministers of the Revival Churches are better trained in this or if good pastoral communication is simply part of the culture of these churches.

Often frequently mentioned is the superior capacity of the Pentecostal Churches to deal with the problem of evil spirits and devil possession. The belief in good and evil spirits is a central part of African cultures and a major expected capacity of religious practitioners, whether traditional, Christian or other religions, is the ability to prevent attacks or possession by evil spirits and to drive out evil spirits. The fear of sorcerers is widespread among people in Kinshasa and the phenomenon of child sorcerers is uniquely present in a major way in Kinshasa. The people interviewed generally think that the priests of the Catholic Church do not have concern over this issue and do not have significant power over the evil spirits. A significant number of

those interviewed became convinced followers of the revival Churches because of the power of warding off religious spirits.

An attraction of the Revival Churches that is closely related to power over spirits is the belief that the Pentecostal ministers and groups have much greater power to heal. Virtually all of those interviewed had had some experience of healing or deep consolation during periods of major health problems. The broadcasts also give people much reassurance in this regard. Certainly, the Revival Churches have much stronger health ministries than the older Christian churches.

Virtually all of those interviewed had had the experience of Baptism of the Spirit as a quite deep and emotional spiritual experience. Some of the Catholics did not feel that this was a necessary step since they already had the sacraments. The experience of a much stronger interior awareness of spiritual gifts in life was widely expressed by almost all.

One of the unique aspects of the Revival Churches in Kinshasa not generally found among Pentecostal movements is the strong promotion of women, especially in the organisation of the "Daughters of Sarah". In the interviews some of the women mentioned that they gained a strengthening of their identity and capacity as women, especially since virtually all of those interviewed are professionally employed.

There was considerable debate and even rejection of the so-called "Gospel of Prosperity" among virtually all. Occasionally, an interviewee agreed with the somewhat flamboyant life style of the major televangelists and thought that seeking wealth should be seen as an integral part of the life of the Christian. None of those interviewed were from an impoverished background. All had some secondary school education and many were university-trained professionals. It is significant that the Revival Churches are especially attractive to these upwardly mobile, relatively financially stable persons. When one considers the massive unemployment in urban Africa, especially among young men 20 to 35, it is significant that there was almost no one who was unemployed at the time of the interview. The general impression of these interviews is that the Evangelical and Pentecostal churches appeal especially to employed, striving lower middle-class persons who are relatively serious about life and are striving to improve their lives morally, economically and in general life style. Almost all have a relatively stable marital and family life — this is part of their conversion and this is what they feel grateful for. The unemployed

young men of Africa are often rather “lost” school drop outs, unmarried (in part because they could not support a wife and family) with relatively low level of general culture and relatively little of the moral earnestness we see in these interviewees.

Finally, nearly all take a great satisfaction in the gospel music that is the Evangelical adaptation of the popular music of Kinshasa. As is well known, the most popular music in Africa is that of the Congo, and the Congolese are particularly proud of their good popular music. There was almost universal agreement that one of the great accomplishments of the revival churches is the ability to bring popular music and other aspects of the African popular culture to the service of the gospel. This is particularly attractive to the young people of Kinshasa and is seen as a remarkably good influence in the young people.

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New Research Methodologies in Media and Religion:

An International survey

By Robert A. White

Abstract

The present article reviews increasingly sophisticated research methodologies in the field of media and religion available for studying a wide variety of questions and issues: assessing the audience impact of religious broadcasting; verifying the claims of religious broadcasters; evaluating religious reporting in the press; the application of the uses and gratifications methods to religious media; using life-story methods in religious audience research; analysing how audiences use general TV programming to reaffirm personal religious identity; analysing personal construction of meaning in religious media; using methods of political-economy for critical examination of social power operating in religious media; and assessing the role of religious media in non-Western countries in the globalisation process.

Key words: Research methodologies in media and religion; analysing impact of religious broadcasting, audience construction of meaning of religious media; culturalist study of media and religion, political economy of the religious media, religious media and globalisation.

Introduction:

There have been major strides in the methodologies for studying media and religion over the past thirty years. Religion is not an easy subject to study because it is so subjective and difficult to define. People can choose to call virtually any practice or set of attitudes "religious". Whereas major political institutions such as the state are relatively stable over time, religious institutions are rapidly changing. In the 1960s research on religion focused on the institutional sites of ritual, but today the focus has changed radically to personalistic constructions of meaning and identity. Adding media to the subject of research makes the question even more complex because the

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approaches to media studies have become so varied. From the rather simplistic and fallacious models of media effects at the beginnings of media research we now understand how complex are the uses of media by audiences.

In spite of these complexities we have at our disposal today a great range of quite sophisticated methodologies for better understanding of virtually every major question in the area of media and religion: from measuring audiences and impact of religious broadcasts, to the role of the press and now Internet in religious faith development to the way audiences use different kinds of film and television to define their religious identities. In this article, we would like to review some of the methodologies that are available to those who wish to study some aspect of media and religion..

The meaning of “research methodology”

In the present article, “methodology” does not refer simply to the techniques of valid data gathering such as sampling procedures, questionnaire development and forms of interviewing. Rather, methodology here refers to the logical linkages between a theoretical model of the causality of a phenomenon and the verification of that theory in a given socio-cultural context (Bailey, 1994, pp. 34-35). Methodologies are the approaches used to generate valid *explanation* of the factors involved in a given social or communication process. For example, if one would wish to explain the rapid growth of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria or in the Congo (See the article of Kamate in this issue) in terms of the theory of revitalisation movements (McLoughlin, 1978) which asserts that such movements are due to “severe meaning crisis” in the lives of people, then the *methodology* would focus on the links between the concept of meaning crisis and the concrete indicators of meaning crisis among adherents of Pentecostal movements. A description such as Kamate has given in his article in this issue suggests that the people drawn to Pentecostal experiences are people who have high expectations of the benefits of modernity—good health, educational opportunities, good-paying employment—but experience severe deprivation due to the chaotic processes of modernisation in a Congo torn by war and bad governance. The present article attempts to follow the development of methodologies in the field of media and religion that are part of a continual search for more adequate *explanation* of the phenomena of media and religion in contemporary societies

The expansion of the institutional support of research on religion and media

Over the last twenty-five years the field of media and religion has rapidly become an established field of *academic* research throughout the world. Before the 1970s, the study of media and religion was largely a matter of broadcasting institutions and religious institutions wanting to know, for example, the size of the audience for religious programming. In the 1980s, however, major global socio-political movements—Evangelical fundamentalists, Islamic and Hindu revitalisation, even Jewish fundamentalism in Israel—began to make religious practice and religious aspirations a major instrument of social movements (Meyer and Moors, 2006, pp.11-15). Virtually all of these movements have claimed the mass media as a major source of their influence and the source of their capacity to bring about major socio-political and cultural changes. Not only media specialists but virtually all of the social and policy sciences were attracted into research to ask whether these religious movements and their media really were accomplishing the changes they claimed, and, if so, what were the implications for major socio-political power shifts. Research on media and religion quickly became a much more important focus for the sociology of religion, political science and media studies.

The rapid development of research and research methodologies in the last thirty years

There are now in various parts of the world some thirty or forty university degree programmes, research centres and specialised institutes for policy analysis on media and religion. There are at least two academic journals dealing exclusively with media and religion, the *Journal of Media and Religion* in the US and *Communicatio Socialis* in Germany, and a continual flow of articles or special issues on media and religion are found in all social science journals. Virtually all of the major communication research associations such as The International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) have a special section dealing with media and religion. Typically there are from ten to fifteen books dealing with some aspect of media and religion published every year and a number of major academic publishers such as Routledge have established book series in this area. In this age of dictionaries and encyclopedias, there is, of course, an *Encyclopedia of Religion, Communication and Media* edited by Daniel Stout (2006). One will find at least one or two international conferences

dealing with media and religion every year. Perhaps the best known is the biannual conference of Media, Religion and Culture which draws between 300 to 500 participants and usually has some 75 to 100 peer-reviewed academic research papers presented. This conference, which moves around the world, was last held in 2008 in Sao Paulo Brazil and will be held in Toronto in August, 2010. There are also many regional conferences on media and religion such as the conference held in Finland in 2005 and the conference on "New Media and Religious Transformations in Africa" held in Abuja, Nigeria in July 10-12, 2008.

1. Audience surveys to determine the "impact" of religious or other programming

Widely used are research methodologies to help church administrators and religious programme producers determine how large their audiences are, the composition of audiences and the impact in terms of new knowledge, changed attitudes and changed behaviour. The methods and methodologies for this kind of research were developed largely in America in the period from 1940 to 1965 when broadcasters were trying to convince advertisers, directors of political campaigns and religious broadcasters that radio and television could have significant "effects". Broadcasters and researchers were fascinated with the power of new-found tools of psychology to influence deeper attitudinal and personality changes (Parker, Barry and Smythe, 1955).. Without question these studies have been and continue to be important for administrators, especially when there are major controversies among church leaders about how great is the impact of a given type of questionable broadcasting (as in the case of the televangelists in the US in the 1980s) and when new strategies and investments in types of media are being considered.

Broadcasting organisations are constantly measuring the size and intensity of audiences of religious programming, in part, because of the pressure to reduce this programming by some and the demands of the churches that it be maintained. Some of the best studies of audiences of religious programming have been carried out by Barrie Gunter, formerly head of the research division of the Independent Broadcasting Authority in Britain. Two of these studies, *Seeing is believing* (Gunter and Viney, 1994) and *God watching: Viewers, religion and television* (Svennevig, Haldane, Spiers and Gunter, 1988) have provided some of the best materials on the methodologies of surveys of religious uses of television.

2. Research on the effects of media violence

One type of effects research of interest to church administrators, educators and their allies among political leaders is dealing with the influence of anti-social media portrayals in the media, especially influence on impressionable youth. This goes back to the 1920s, when parents and religious educators were concerned, perhaps justly so, with the visual power of Hollywood popular films and the tendency of Hollywood producers to exploit the immaturity of youth. The Payne Commission established in 1935 mainly by a coalition of churches in the US carried out a major survey costing more than \$200,000 which asked questions about film use and moral attitudes and behaviour to test the hypothesis that there is a high correlation between seeing certain types of films and having certain patterns of behaviour. This study confirmed what virtually all research on the effects of violent or pornographic media continues to show: the “impact” of film or other media on youth depends very much on the family background, the subjective cultural background, the education for critical use of the media and other factors influencing the subjective interpretation of the *meaning* of the film (Rowland, 1983, pp. 92-99). This and other studies have not concluded that anti-social content of the media have no impact on youth—indeed there is growing evidence that there should be concern for content—but that the focus should be on certain types of media, the use of media by young people and the social background of youth. The periodic summaries of research on the anti-social influences of the media (Potter, 1999; 2005) have become much more nuanced and sophisticated in recent years, but they do confirm the need for this research. These studies over the years have proved very useful for those with parenting responsibilities, religious leaders, educators, those working with media policy and representatives of organisations negotiating with media producers.

3. How religious broadcasts influence audience values and attitudes

A frequent type of study is more concerned with whether religious broadcasting is actually increasing the religious knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of audiences. A landmark study of methodological importance was carried by the National Council of Churches in the US in the 1950s when charismatic religious figures such as Bishop Fulton Sheen and Billy Graham were appearing in prime entertainment time

with high audience ratings and seemingly had significant influence across denominational lines. The central question was whether television could be an effective means of evangelisation and merited more emphasis and investment. The study was designed by senior researchers with a large sample of television users in a middle-sized American city but with a combination of both survey questions and in-depth interviews. The study was focused on the impact of religious broadcasting on social attitudes such as racial integration and other pro-social behaviours. The methodology, typical of the psychological emphasis of media research in the US at the time, focused on the how religious programmes influenced the capacity of personalities to cope with their social environment.

The study found that members of audiences were attracted to religious television personalities because they were fascinated with their rhetorical entertainment capacity but also because they supported their existing religious convictions and gave reassurance that the religious perception of the world is a valid, reasonable one. The study confirmed that the viewers of these programmes were more religious people and heavier viewers of television which meant that they were lower-status, with less education, more elderly and more female. The programmes also appeared to help viewers “fine-tune” their existing ways of coping with problems in family, work and community and therefore were helpful in “reducing anxiety” — a major conclusion of this psychologically oriented methodology (Parker, Barry, Smythe, 1955).

4. Verifying the claims of religious broadcasters

A somewhat different approach to broad surveys of audience interest in religious programming was carried out in the early 1980s at the height of the controversy over the claims of the televangelists such as Pat Robertson that they were winning huge audiences and having a major influence on the moral and political values of the people of the US. Most religious broadcasters finance their expensive broadcasting activities by direct donations from the audience, and they attempt to motivate the audience to contribute by claims of large numbers of religious conversions and other personal benefits through their broadcasts.

In this case a survey was carried out by the academically prestigious Annenberg School of Communication and the Gallup polling organisation to measure religious broadcasting use by the general US public. The study was funded jointly by all major religious denomina-

tions in the US to determine the actual size and composition of the audience. The results of this study, summarised well by Stewart Hoover (who participated in the research design) in a still widely available book (Hoover, 1988, pp. 91-96), confirmed many similar studies:

(1) The change in broadcasting regulation procedures in the US in the early 1960s allowing religious groups to purchase broadcast air time gave those groups with capacity to raise funds for religious broadcasts, especially evangelical groups, a virtual monopoly on religious broadcasting far beyond their actual membership and audience size.

(2) Although the televangelists were claiming that 30 to 40 percent of the American public was following their programmes, the actual size of the audiences of evangelical broadcasters was closer to 5 to 10 percent of the public.

(3) The claims that the programmes were reaching out to the unchurched, attracting a new, less religious audience and converting cultural and political leaders were generally unfounded. The audiences of religious programmes are typically people of more intense religious practice and heavy media users implying that they are less-well educated, more elderly, more female, and more rural.

(4) Heavier viewers of religious programming tend to be socially and politically more conservative, probably due to their social composition (rural, less-well educated, elderly, female).

(5) There is little evidence that the "electronic church" is increasingly a substitute for conventional participation in local congregational religious activity. People may be "falling away" from local congregations in some cases because these fail to satisfy their needs, but they are rarely attracted away from local worship by more attractive broadcasting personalities.

(6) In spite of the increasing dominance of airtime by televangelists there is no increasing tendency of non-religious people to watch religious programming.

(7) The major contribution of the electronic church is to offer devout people, especially heavy radio or television users, a much richer parallel source of devotional activity.

5. Research on religion in the press

Although much of the research focused on radio and television, there has also been considerable study of the print media. Buddenbaum has carried out some of the most extensive research on

the quality and methods of religious journalism and religion in the press (1986; 1998; Buddenbaum and Mason, 1999).

A somewhat different question is the concern among religious leaders that the press does not see religion as an important topic to cover and that the press does not consider religion a topic of interest to its readers. Journalists have a reputation of irreligious attitudes and little religious practice with little respect for religious figures.

With this general hypothesis a major study was carried out in the mid-1990s by Stewart Hoover and his associates in the United States to determine the degree of interest in religious coverage in newspapers and the degree of satisfaction with press coverage of religious activities. Again, at least part of the data was gathered through the Gallup polling organisation with the following results:

(1) At least 66 percent of the public who read newspapers daily think that religion is an important topic to cover. The majority of the public see the secular press, not their own denominational religious publications, as the major source of religious information (Hoover, 1998, pp. 113-114).

(2) When asked to rank the perception of religious coverage in relation to other topics, respondents rated the topics in the following order of importance: education, health, business, food, *religion*, entertainment, personal advice, fine arts and sports. Evangelicals tended to rate religion higher in importance, but still after education, health and business.

(3) When asked what *type* of religious news is most important, the religious news items rated highest were those of religious pronouncements and positions and ethical and social issues such as the abortion issue. Local church news and issues were next in importance. National and international religious news rated about midway, and items such as religious experience, surveys and polls, religious movements rated low.

(4) Regarding television news, the American public is not very opinionated as to whether television has sufficient religious news or that television tends to treat religion negatively. There was a moderate tendency to say that there should be religious news in the prime-time news reports and in the news talk shows. There was also a tendency to see local news as treating religion negatively.

(5) Studies of religious reporting in American newspapers and news magazines shows that there is a general trend toward hiring specialised religion reporters and trying to give religion a much more informed and intelligent treatment in the news. Journalists interviewed in the study generally recognised their culpable ignorance regarding religion and

they expressed a desire to get some training and orientation regarding the reporting of issues of religion.

The applications of the “Media Uses and Gratifications” Methodology to Religious Media

The uses and gratifications methodology (MUG) is particularly useful for programme producers who want to know how to attract and serve particular audiences by responding to the information and other needs of a target audience. It is also useful for those working in the education and animation of particular groups such as youth and those who want to know the role of media in the lives of these groups. The (MUG) approach attempts to be much more respectful of the audience interests than the effects research and, in general, produces more valid and useful data.

One of the best summaries of the MUG research in the area of religious media has been done by Peter Horsfield (1984, pp. 84, 118-124). The study of Udofia on the uses and gratifications of Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) for Nigerian youth (2004) is an example of the focus around four basic questions:

- (1) What media does the target audience use most or, if the focus is the CCM, what kind of CCM and what singers are most popular among Nigerian youth?
- (2) How did you get to know of these media? This reveals the social groups and the media culture of the social networks which are the main users of this media or this genre.
- (3) What are the times and contexts when you most use and enjoy this medium. In the case of the use of CCM by Nigerian youth the contexts of use were moments of sadness and disappointment, tension such as preparation for examinations or moments of conflict with parents and family, boredom, but also moments of celebration. In short, CCM, like most pop music, is important for Nigerian youth as a form of mood control among young people who are trying to develop patterns of stability in their personalities.
- (4) How has the use of the media developed since the person first started using the genre or programme. In the case of CCM, many young Nigerians described the role of CCM as important in the development of their religious life. Although there were many factors in this, CCM was described as an important in major turning points in their lives.

Typical results of UGM studies in the US

Although Uses and Gratifications Methodologies (MUG) often use large-sample survey methods with closed “yes-no” answers, this can be deepened by a subsample of life histories. In the case of the study of the use of Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) by Nigerian youth, in-depth interviews were carried out with a selected sample to reveal much more complex lines of influence of CCM in their lives.

Results of Uses and Gratification Studies in the USA

Horsfield's (1984, pp 118-124) summary of the various MUG studies of religious broadcasting in the US revealed that, in general, the main uses of religious programming are personal inspiration, companionship, and support in emotionally difficult moments. Particular programmes, for example, on the Bible, may provide background information, interpretation and other explanation that make the Bible much more intelligible. In general, people are, above all, entertained by outstanding religious personalities, and they may like the music, ritual architectural settings, and rhetorical capacity of the broadcast personalities. Identification with the central personality behind the broadcast is an important gratification.

Another methodology in media uses and gratifications research is to examine how important religious programming is in the overall use of media. Frank and Greenberg (1980) found that for various audience groups, religious programming had the following descending order of importance:

Elderly female (191 rating): The highest interest in religious programming was found among elderly females who tend to follow religious activities from their home in order to maintain social integration, overcome loneliness and enliven an otherwise rather isolated life.

Home and community-centred females (164 rating): religious programming provides information and skills for existing religious interest, useful for family nurture and support of local church activities,

Lower-status, high family-centred TV use (164 rating): Religious programming reinforces family values, providing some intellectual stimulation.

Older males, more rural and retired (136 rating): Religious programming provides social contact and reinforcement of traditional values.

Typical groups with low interest in religious programming are **youth interested in competitive sports and science/engineering (39**

rating); cosmopolitan, highly educated people with interest in self enrichment (31 rating); and males interested in mechanics and outdoor life (13 rating).

The life-trajectory, audience construction of meaning of religious programmes

The development of the cultural studies approach to audience research in the late 1970s and early 1980s moved the focus from whether the message selected by the sender had an impact or might be useful to the audience to the subjective meaning that given members of the audience might construct depending on the socio-cultural background of the members of the audience. Audience research methodology in this tradition remains aware that there is a preferred reading or decoding of the message, but is open to the possibility that the decoding could vary from agreement, to debate of the message, to rejection or to using the elements to construct a very particular meaning around the life history of the particular member of the audience. The focus is on how audiences construct a religious subculture in their life context using the rather restricted elements that a given programme producer provides for particular audiences. This methodology introduces the explicit awareness of the *power* of the producer and reveals the extent to which the audience struggles and tries to counter that power.

Stewart Hoover (1988) provides an example of a particularly useful adaptation of this approach to audience reception and construction of meaning. Hoover was attempting to answer the questions as to whether the electronic church *audience* in America was using the materials provided by supposedly powerful televangelists to construct a significantly different evangelical, religious and socio-political culture in America. In short, the key question was the socio-political power of the televangelists in reshaping American religious and socio-political culture, a widely mooted question in the 1980s in the United States—and now elsewhere in the world.

The study interviewed in depth a small sample of 20 families from the dedicated audience of Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN), members of Robertson's *700 Club*, people committed to financing Robertson's broadcasting and the numerous institutions of his religious movement. The interviews were structured around the initial question of how the members of the family became rather dedicated followers of Robertson's TV programmes and involved with

the various para-church aspects of Robertson's movement such as local discussion groups and ministries with youth or visits to prisons. In almost every case there was some form of crisis of life meaning that led them to friends who would suggest Robertson's broadcasts and movements as a site to rethink their lives. The description of the life crisis in interviews would lead to retracing the religious life history from childhood because the "reconversion" was usually a re-integration of life, gone astray in the modernisation process in the USA, usually with elements of traditional religious background but also elements taken from Robertson.

The analysis of the data was as much a matter of methodology as the data gathering. The following became focal points in the methodology of analysis.

(1) Central in the analysis was the life trajectory, the process of "search" for a meaningful integration of life. The life trajectory indicated the origins of central values in childhood, the wandering away from this in the typical mobile, pluralistic society, the chance link with CBN through friends, and the various and curious ways that the people had contact with the Robertson movement. Getting elements to reconstruct lives did not necessarily come from devotedly watching the TV programmes, but from even chance meetings in this pentecostal movement. The methodology did not assume that Robertson had certain effects or that this programme responded to needs, but that the audience was actively constructing the meaning of their lives from CBN and from many other sources. The focal point was the life trajectory, not the media.

(2) The methodology was open to diverse models of life trajectory. With the focus on the life search, it became evident that denominational origin, which had once been major explanation of beliefs, was not a major factor. All subjects were moving across denominational lines to Robertson or any other source that could be helpful, and the "openness" of television and the movement was a factor in this mobility.

(3) The methodology was open to social sources of mobility toward Robertson: people with more education and financial resources preferred Robertson to the Bakkers, a less sophisticated form of televangelism, and found it easier to identify with Robertson, son of a senator; politically, most came from a background that disposed them to Robertson's more conservative politics.

(4) The methodology was quite open to many different linkages with the Robertson movement, not just the television programme. Many were attracted to the social outreach to youth and prisons; some were attracted to the life-enhancing discussion groups. Running through it all was the continuing theme of the “culture” of American religious life that could be traced back to DeToqueville: religion is important because it improves my life and the lives of others in a nation.

(5) The methodology used by Hoover did adopt, to a certain extent, a central emphasis of cultural studies, namely, the critique of power—asking not just what culture is being created but *who* is influencing the construction of meaning. The approach did reveal, to some extent, whether the people in the sample were debating and struggling over the meanings that Robertson, his movement and other televangelists were projecting.

(6) Finally, the cultural studies methodology has enabled the analysis to respond to questions as to whether the electronic church is contributing to the change of the national religious, political and economic culture. The life-history method has focused more on the level of personal values, but the interviews do reveal a tendency to erode denominationalism and strengthen the evangelical religious culture as a common denominator. Politically, we see in the interviews a tendency toward an individualistic, voluntaristic approach to major problems of social justice, human rights, the civil society and poverty.

A different approach to the role of media in life trajectory, meaning search

A study by Walter Ihejirika (2006) in Nigeria used a methodology similar to that of Hoover, but with several significant methodological differences: rather than start with a group dedicated to a televangelist which is bound to emphasise the role of media, Ihejirika studied the life trajectories of 20 individuals/families that moved from Catholicism to an evangelical church but did examine carefully the role of media in the meaning search. Secondly, he compared Catholics who converted to the evangelical church with Catholics who suffered crises but remained and even deepened their Catholic identification.

Ihejirika found, like Hoover, that the interpersonal networks were more important than the mass media in reorganising the life meaning around evangelical values and institutions. The media were important only later, after “conversion”, a source of continued nurturing of values

in the new religious organisation. Secondly, Ihejirika found that the force propelling change in one's religious life among both converts and those who deepened their Catholic commitment was a crisis of meaning in life. Thirdly, the major factor influencing the response to crisis by conversion or by deepening present convictions was the degree to which the religious dimensions of the personality were or were not closely structured around the religious symbols of the religion of one's origin. For example, a man who had faced great crises in life and doubts about his Catholic faith eventually deepened his commitment to Catholicism because Mary the Mother of Jesus, so central to Catholicism, was important in the meaning structure of his life.

What Ihejirika's methodology added was this comparative methodological approach and not using a methodology which assumed that media is necessarily important in the life trajectory. Ihejirika's methodology also revealed the *process* of reorganisation of the personal belief system around the symbols of Nigerian Evangelical culture, which was often a return to a distinctly Nigerian religious culture.

A distinctive field of study emerges: "Media, Religion and Culture"

Until the early 1990s most of the research on media and religion was concerned with the effects and influence of religious broadcasts. Typical of this were the series of studies of the televangelists to determine whether or not the electronic church was having the effects claimed. There was relatively little research dealing with the broader issue of the role of media and religion in contemporary cultures, and research methodologies were not based on any broader theories of the role of media and religion in contemporary societies. Studies might point to the personal charisma or the management ability of a given televangelist to explain why this person had a strong following, but there was little explanation in terms of the *socio-cultural conditions* that brought a particular type of religious leader to prominence (and excluded others) and generated masses of avid followers of such a televangelist at a particular point of time in the twentieth century. By the early 1990s the search for deeper, broader and more adequate explanations generated a move from the narrow focus on media and religious effects to create a field of study dealing with media, religion and *socio-cultural conditions*.

One of the best indicators of this major turning point is the publication of the book, *Rethinking Media, Religion and Culture* (Hoover and Lundby, 1997) in the mid-1990s. The focus of the chapters in this book

was not simply a report of particular effects or uses of particular religious programmes, but the role of mediated religion in late modern societies. Graham Murdock (1997), a major media scholar in Britain, and J. Martin-Barbero (1997), likewise an important media theorist in Latin America, introduced explanations of religious media in terms of the collapse of Weber's inevitable march of rationality and reassertion of the centrality of the sacred in the analyses of the postmodern world view of authors such as Bauman (1992). They point to the increasing centrality of religion in media as one of the best methodological indicators of the "re-enchantment" of contemporary culture. The major point of Murdock is not that religion has now somehow returned, but that religion should be brought back into the study of media. "... as I have argued, it (religion) must be seen not as a specialized topic in media studies or the sociology of religion, but *as part of a wider effort to understand the institutional and cultural transformations of modernity and the dynamics of re-enchantment* (italics added) (Murdock, 1997, p. 100).

Other chapters in the "Rethinking" book follow a similar theme. Lundby (1997, pp. 146-164), in his analysis of the introduction of ancient Norwegian sacred rites in the opening of the 1994 Winter Olympics of Lillehammer, Norway, draws on Berger and Luckmann's (1971) theory of the social construction of reality. Gabriel Bar-Haim (1997) in his chapter draws on the theories of religion of Durkheim. My own chapter explaining the role of media and religion in the construction of contemporary cultures (White, 1997), draws on the explanation of the emergence of social institutions in late modernity of sociologist Anthony Giddens (1984).

In short, the authors in *Rethinking media, religion and culture* are suggesting that the focus of this emerging field, as Murdock and others propose, is to explain the role of media and religion in five basic questions regarding the construction of contemporary cultures:

- (1) *What kind of culture is mediated religion creating;*
- (2) *How do media and religion figure in the construction of cultures;*
- (3) *What powerful figures are working through media and religion to construct cultures;*
- (4) *How are media and religion responding to and contributing to the globalisation of cultures.*
- (5) *Whether this is the kind of culture we want to create and whether this is the way we want religion and media to be used in constructing cultures.*

The great variety of themes in the chapters in *Rethinking media, religion and culture* are a good indication of how the field was beginning to expand in the direction of these questions. Janice Peck's chapter (1997), "Psychologized Religion in a Mediated World" and her book, *The Gods of televangelism: The crisis of meaning and the appeal of religious television* (1993), are a good example of the use of the methodologies of rhetorical content analysis in answer to the first question: *What kind of culture is mediated religion creating.*

Hoover in his chapter (1997) indicates much of the emerging research methodology to study "*how media figure in the construction of cultures*" with his emphasis on the analysis of how people use the inventory of religious symbols from media to construct their own personal identities. This became the focus of research in Hoover's Center for the Study of Media and Religions at the University of Colorado.

The chapter of Tomaselli and Shepperson, at the University of KwaZulu Natal in Durban South Africa, introduces the methodology of political-economic analysis as a response to the question of power, "*Who is working through media and religion to shape the cultures we are constructing*".

Janice Peck (1997) also introduces the question of globalisation and suggests methodologies for analysing uses of media for global religious movements and the influence of global capital.

Significantly, it is the theologians among the authors who introduce questions evaluating whether this is the kind of culture we want to create with this combination of media and religion. Peter Horsfield (1997) questions the tendency of the prime-time preachers to turn religion into a marketable commodity, a means of getting rich quick, and giving Pentecostal movements a monopoly over religious media. Badaracco (1997) questions the image and role of women that are projected in religious media.

Lynn Schofield Clark and Stewart Hoover do an admirable job of explaining the intellectual foundations of the methodology of this emerging field in their introductory bibliographic essay (1997, pp. 15-36).

This focus on the relationship of media and whole cultures was influenced in part by the thinking of McLuhan and especially Ong (1981; 1982) who explained particularly well how the changes in media changed whole cultural epochs. (Ong is quoted profusely in *Rethinking media, religion and culture*.) More important, however, has been the

influence of the cultural studies tradition that was formed initially in France and in Britain and then developed in the United States, with the strong influence of James Carey (1989). In the post-World War II period, Europe was undergoing profound socio-cultural transitions and leading intellectuals in France such as Bourdieu (1977; 1984) and in Britain, Raymond Williams (1961), E.P. Thompson (1963) and Richard Hoggart (1957) were interested not only in studying the causes of this but to provide a definition of British, French or other European national cultures which was not simply an imposition of middle and upper class “proper” cultures. Cultural analysts such as Stuart Hall (1980a; 1980b) and others at the Centre for the Study of Contemporary Cultures in Birmingham, UK were important in providing a framework for showing how the media were fundamental in shaping contemporary cultures—though as Murdock notes (1997, pp 87-88) British cultural studies tended to treat religion as a “residual” matter.

8. Defining the meaning of religion

One of the methodological problems that presents itself in the move from an institutional-denominational focus to a culturalist focus in the study of media and religion is that the definition of “religion” becomes less clear. There was no problem about the meaning of religion in the pre-1990s era because it meant visible institutional-ritual structures or even more specifically, “evangelical, Pentecostal televangelists”. But when the focus shifts to a very subjective interpretation of the meaning of life, then it becomes more difficult to separate areas of human culture that are considered distinctively “religious”.

Some have maintained that there are substantive areas of human experience that are to be called religious and others profane or secular. Peter Berger (1967) left a lasting influence on religious studies when he defined the religious as a cultural activity located in the boundaries between the island of meaning socially established as real, commonsense and rational, and the areas beyond the boundary that are considered dream, hopes, and mythical goals. Religious institutions monitor this “border area” between the ideal, hoped-for world and the more secular world of pragmatic certainty.

Some prefer a functional definition of religion as any form of ultimate meaning in a person’s life. Others note that both substantive and functional definitions assume “definitional essentialism”, that is, that religious behaviour is a distinct part of human behaviour. Greil and Robbins argue that religion is not a distinct form of behaviour but a

category of discourse, a way of speaking about experience in a way that is constantly being renegotiated in the course of social interaction (Greil and Robbins, 1994, p. 6). Much contemporary research on media and religion—that of Stewart Hoover would be an example—would come close to this definition as a category of discourse based on what is experienced and expressed. In practice, most people refer to the religious in their lives as closer to what is for them “ultimate meaning”, but they tend to speak of this in terms of the institutional religions in their cultural context (Cf. Hoover, 2006, pp. 23-24).

9. Studying the role of media in the definition of religious identity

Since the early 1990s there has been a rapid expansion of the study of media and religion as a theoretical discipline in itself with dozens of major books, articles and research projects. Some of this has had a more pastoral focus. Many of the methodologies indicated above have been continued, but the culturalist focus—examining how people are using the media to construct a religious meaning and values in their lives—has tended to be dominant (Hoover, 2002; Mitchell and Marriage, 2003). The emphasis on finding religion in popular culture is evident from the titles of the books:

In this research there is much debate but also growing consensus on culturalist methodologies of research. Stewart Hoover, in his book, *Religion in the Media Age* (2006) provides one of the best summaries of these methodologies, especially those methodologies developed by the Centre for the Study of Media, Religion and Culture, at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

(a) A focus on the construction of religious ideals and identity.

The research from the early 1990s on was concerned more with the ordinary people who may not have had any dramatic conversion and were not part of any significant religious movement. The families interviewed were a spread of social status, religious background, urban and rural. The method was a series of interviews with these families that might start with a general, open-ended description of who they were, their life routines, their religious practice, their family problems. When the spontaneous accounts dealt with religious practice, the life ideals and struggle to live these values and pass them on to their children, media use and use of religious media, the interviews would return to focus at much more length on these aspects until the families

interviewed had exhausted the family members desire to tell all and tell more.

(b) A focus on everyday life in the small circle of the domestic household (Hoover et al, 2004)

Virtually all studies of the use of media indicates that “media” means *all* the media that come into the home and are used in the home: the TV set, the newspapers, magazines and books, the CDs of film or music TV, the computer and access to Internet. The use of this media implies a negotiated social interaction among those who live in the household and tends to follow a set of rules based on the relative social power and values of people in that context. Parents, for example, have more power and more influence in the making of the rules, but teenagers also make demands based on their peer-group values. Some of the studies focused on the domestic group as a whole, with all of the family members together. Other studies tended to focus on the young members of the group, some the elderly, some women, but always as members interacting with others in the domestic household.

(c) A focus on the “struggle” to define and realise one’s personal ideals and identity

There is consensus in the sociology of religion that religious values and practice in the context of cultural pluralism of late modernity are less and less a matter of ascription by family, community, nation, or ethnic origins and more a matter of personal “construction” in a very personal process of “what makes sense (meaning) to me” according to what fits my personality, my interests, my talents, my friends and whatever else is salient in my circle of awareness. The interviews assume that all members of the domestic circle are constructing their “selves” in order to live out a set of public roles according to what each person feels suited for and will be the best way to realise personal values. Since the focus is on the self in the domestic circle, the interviews tend to dwell more on the identity construction as a father, a mother, a life partner, a son or daughter, but constructing a public identity outside the home obviously influences the effort to live and affirm ideals in the household context.

(d) A focus on the media as a repertoire of symbols useful in defining personal ideals

The interviews assume an active selection of relevant symbols and active re-interpretation of the media content to respond to the demands of identity definition at this particular moment in one's life and according to the need to define the values in the domestic circle. For example, if parents think that a particular programme emphasises values important for them and their children, they might make it a rule to follow that programme. Then, in family discussions (it is assumed that all media content is filtered through some interaction), the value portrayed will be selectively adapted to the values that the parents think important and the children find motivating or acceptable in their life context. The interpretation of the meaning of the programme is quite selectively subjective and may not be at all the "preferred reading" that the producer intended...or may not even be part of the objective content of the programme. It is the identity search and affirmation that determines what is taken from the programme.

The term "symbol" is used because symbols are created in a community context as the ideals that are important for the communities' survival. Symbols have motivational, aspiration-creating power and are important for the integration of identity. Interviews tend to draw out discussions of these important symbols, and data presentation tends to highlight these symbolic ideals and the role of the media as a source of these symbols.

(e) Data in interviews is solicited in the form of narrative episodes

"Tell me the story of..." would be the typical stimulus question. What is sought is the story of the personal search to construct an identity and ideals. There are always life histories of all members of the domestic circle, dwelling on the life crises in which the personal life ideals were formed in the past and lived in some way up to the present. But more important are the narratives of the present struggles to define identity and ideals in one's personal life and in the lives of the people in the domestic circle. The data sought is the way the media are being used in this moment as a repertoire of symbols. What the studies want to find out is the use of the media as a source of religious symbols in the ordinary, everyday life of the typical people of a national culture. The interviews do not focus on media only but on the entire symbolic communication environment (friends, school, local churches) so that it is possible to see the relative importance of, for example, the TV medium in the midst of all other sources. Not surprisingly, in most of these studies the TV medium appears to be

much less important as a source of *religious* symbols than books, films and music.

Although each narrative account is unique and cannot be generalised as mathematically-defined quantitative data pretends to do, yet what is revealed in each case is the internal coherence of the meaning. This is the scientific argument underlying most ethnographic research. Each case is unique, but the forms of coherence approximate many other cases and one begins to see a pattern in the cultures of the search for identity.

(f) What are taken as indicators of religious symbols

These studies assume a functionalist rather than an essentialist definition of religion, that is, whatever symbol serves subjectively as concept of the general order of existence, is a religious symbol for that person. In practice, a symbol is considered religious if those interviewed consider this to be religious. This depends very much on the religious culture and the nature of the religious institutions of the national and cultural context where the studies are being made. In the USA, where there is a strong Christian denominational culture, the religious language used and understood by most is connected to denominational religious affiliation and identity. A television programme, film, book or piece of music is considered religious if it has some denominational or quasi-denominational connection. Much depended on the life histories of the people interviewed, what these people considered religious and what the culture of the domestic context considered religious.

(g) What are considered "religious programmes"

It was also necessary to have some knowledge of the current media fare that was considered religious at the time of the interviews or a definition of what could be considered religious media by those interviewed so that references to this could be picked up more easily and discussed with interviewees. For example, at the time of many of the studies in the USA a TV programme which featured helpful angels appearing as ordinary friends was evidently religious because most religious world views of different religious traditions incorporate angels. Yet the programme did not feature any particular denominational symbols. The programme was very popular and virtually all interviewees had seen at least some episodes and become rather deeply involved. Because the programme had been seen by so many people,

but was open to so many different interpretations, this became an ideal reference point for discussions of “religious TV”. The fact that the multiplication of channels on TV and the Internet made much more religious programming available to a broader range of religious interests was important for testing hypothesis about the use of religious media. More was available to more assiduous seekers of this.

(h) The different levels and dimensions of reception of media

The interviews take into consideration, first, that the experience of the religious symbols in the media can be direct, that is, in the use of the media itself, second, in the discussions with others about the media experience and, third, in the people’s theory of the role of media in their lives. If media content somehow becomes a powerful symbol in one’s life, some thoughtful people become reflexively aware of this. For example, some religious figures have written about the impact of a religious film or a religious book in their lives. In other contexts the religious meaning which was latent in one’s own experience is brought to consciousness and becomes a meaningful symbol through discussion with others. Finally, there are many “lay” theories about the potential of television or film or music to convey a religious experience. There is a common view that film is a more “religious medium”. Television is widely regarded as “trashy” and inherently incapable of being a source of religious symbols. Others think that television is, today, one of the most important sources of religious experience in contemporary cultures (Martin, 1981). This can influence people to seek out film or even some television programmes as a source of inspiring identity symbols.

(9) Discovering how persons negotiate with the symbolic environment

The CMRC methodology included a series of steps or questions to get at the way individuals “negotiated” with the symbolic environment, especially the media environment. A first focus dealt with the symbols themselves, especially those that were life-defining, and the source of these symbols. Secondly, it is important to note how individuals negotiate—pick, choose, reject, modify—these symbols into their own identity systems. Thirdly, it is important to note how people justify and explain how they negotiate symbols. This often is related to a major crisis-of-life-meaning complex. Fourthly, it is important to note how individuals resolve the contradictions and conflicts in constructing a

coherent life narrative. Fifthly, attention is directed to the power of the symbols to bring about this cohesion in their lives.

The constructivist methodology does not assume infinitely varied types of constructing a coherent life narrative—that would not reveal much predictable knowledge about how media are used. Rather, in a given national cultural context there are a limited number of ideal types of how the public uses the symbol environment of the media to construct their religious identity. The CRMC found that in the United States there are roughly five models of religious identity construction each with a fairly predictable process of negotiation with the media symbolic environment:

- Born-again Christians from the large evangelical tradition;
- Main-stream believers who identify with the traditional denominations;
- Metaphysical believers and seekers who do not fit into any denominational mould; but have constructed their own identity from many sources;
- Dogmatists who reject any change and link their belief system to some element seen as “fundamental” and unchanging.
- Secularists whose identity construction is based on some sense of social progress.

As will become obvious later in this article, in the analysis of media and religious identity in other cultural contexts such as Israel, India, Iran or in different African countries, there will be a quite different set of ideal types of negotiation between religious identity and media environment.

The use of the media for identity construction for these groups is sufficiently predictable to enable interviewers to detect fairly soon what kind of person is in the interview and to guide the discussion into processes of negotiation with the environment of that person. Obviously, every individual is absolutely unique in this identity construction, “a universal singular” in the terminology that the CRMC has borrowed from the French existentialist philosopher, Sartre. This definition of religion and the construction of religious is very much of an “operational definition”, that is, it is defined in terms of the operations that are used to get at a meaningful configuration. But it does fit well with the very existentialist epistemological perspective that is currently dominant in the study of media, religion and culture.

The limits of the "constructivist" methodology

The focus of the methodology described above is to discover how individuals in audiences find, in the media inventory of symbols, those symbols which are significant in defining personal identity. In fact, this methodology concludes that the popular media, especially television, are of little *conscious* relevance in identity construction (Hoover, 2006, pp 281-282). Music and film are considered by many as more "serious" and "sacred" and therefore more relevant. Yet virtually all of the people interviewed in the various research projects at the Centre for the Study of Media, Religion and Culture and in many other similar research programmes reveal persons with fairly well-defined belief systems and fairly strong identities. In the context of the US, with its strong religious culture, strong personal identity of a more religious type usually means membership in some religious denomination. There are vestiges in all of the life histories of a moment of strong identity definition. One asks, "What was the source of identity symbols at that defining moment and did the media, even popular media, play a part in that?"

The constructivist methodology does not answer those questions because it tends to focus on the use of media by individuals in the present moment of their lives. The methodology is very "media focused" rather than structure of identity focused. If the methodology had focused more on the history of the moment of "conversion" or basic life identity formation and would have asked what were all of the symbolic inventories involved with that moment, one could have seen what were the symbols and sources which are important in the basic life meaning of those persons. In some life histories there are even vestiges of what popular media were important in the basic formation of life meaning. But since the methodology focuses on the present and on the media such as mainstream television, it is difficult to know just what has been the role of the media in identity formation.

A second limitation of the constructivist methodology is that it prescinds almost entirely from the political-economic context, that is, the structure of power and mediations such as social class and social movements. Again, the methodology is very "media-centred", and does not examine closely the mediations which are influencing the uses, interpretations and constructions of meaning that are being

made. These mediations may be much more directly related to the rather strong definition of life meaning that most expressed rather than to the media.

10. A methodology which focuses on the influence of media in the structure of life meaning

David Morgan (1998, 2005), in his extensive research on the importance of popularly reproduced sacred images, has used a variety of methods to discover the meaning of these images for the people who have them in their homes, churches, personal shrines, favourite devotional books or other locations. In one of his major research projects Morgan (1998) used a methodology which, in contrast to an approach which focuses on the use of media in the present moment, invited members of the public to explain the role of an image in shaping the *whole* of life's meaning. Morgan began with the hypothesis that the devotional paintings of Warner Salman, a prominent American religious artist, especially his portrayals of Christ, were of significant importance in shaping the meaning of religious lives, especially among major Protestant denominations in the United States. To test this hypothesis, Morgan placed a simple advertisement in seventy-three religious publications of diverse confessional and denominational affiliation in the US. The advertisement featured a small black and white reproduction of Salman's *Head of Christ* and asked "What has the imagery meant for your devotions, worship, prayer, family or friends?" The ad prompted no less than 531 letters, many with detailed life histories.

From the many quotes from letters that Morgan presents in *Visual Piety* (1998), it is evident that writing letters enables people to reveal—in a way that they might not be able to do in direct interviews—their intimate feelings about an image and how they related their personal identity to their subjective construction of the meaning of the image. Many other studies of media have also invited letters as a way to help people reveal identifications with characters and story lines of popular programmes. Ian Ang's study, *Watching Dallas* (1985), based on 48 letters from women in the Netherlands who followed the American serial fiction programme, *Dallas*, was the basis for one of the most influential books on subjective reception of serial fiction television.

The method of inviting anonymous letters gets responses from people who feel deeply enough about a topic to take the initiative to *voluntarily* write a very intimate and expressive letter. The letter writers are free and are less influenced by the interactions of interviews. The letters may not be typical of all people in a public, but Morgan found in 531 letters continually repeated themes so that one could deduce a common subjective experience. The invitation elicits a response which summarises a person's whole life and the central meaning structure of one's life. For example, many commented that Salman's portrayals of Christ had been in their homes or in public view throughout their lives and had accompanied them always, especially in crises that had deepened their whole life commitment.

The analysis of the content of letters method appears especially useful in the following aspects:

- The revelation of how people identify with a particular image, that is, how the person relates the perception of his or her own personality to what the person sees in the image. For example, in the image of Christ, all the values and all that Christ stands for is summed up.
- The function of images in the life of the person is revealed: maintaining the stability of the personality and identity over a lifetime, a symbolic source helping the person to know how to define each unfolding stage of life.
- The relationship of the person's life story, problems they have had, and what they know about the life story and heroic elements of the personage of the image. The image enables them to seek help either in the knowledge of personal courage or even in present intercession to face life crises at this moment. Thus the image becomes associated with the ability to overcome life crises.
- How the image was important in particular life crises, in short, the role of the picture in the evolution of each person's life story.
- What particular aspects of the image touch them emotionally. This can be related to what the creators of the image have said they were trying to communicate through the image.
- Why the image is placed in a particular place in a home, carried on a person, or placed in an automobile. That is, does the

subject see a relation between the place of display, the identity of the beholders and the symbolism of the image.

The methodology of letter writing offers some of the most convincing evidence of the importance not only of visual images, but of media in general, in the development of personal religious ideals.

11. The political-economy of religious broadcasting

Over the last twenty years the production of religious material culture—sales of videos, music, religious jewelry, clothing, and books—has become a major industry. As religion has become more of a private choice and less of an institutional, communitarian affiliation, many more people are buying religious books, videos, and music CDs as a major form of religious practice. Many are defining their religious identity by wearing distinctive clothes, jewelry and by using devotional items. In the US alone it is estimated that more than US\$ 80 billion are spent on religious material culture every year. Also, as religion becomes more of a personal search, the religious public is increasingly defined as a market, with churches forced to learn how to become a business enterprise to survive. Indeed, in the US the young seekers expect that they will be sought out and pampered by all the most clever marketing methods. In Europe religion tends to be more private and personal and preserves more of a sacred aura, but in the United States and increasingly in Africa and Latin America the nicest thing one can say about a church is that it is guided by good corporate management principles. This implies that a church employs good corporate communication, spotless public relations, the latest advertising and marketing techniques and especially good media relations.

The evangelical and Pentecostal Churches are especially attracted to good marketing methods. It is not surprising that these churches support a capitalist free market ethic, unregulated media, the gospel of prosperity and high income generation by tithing. The scandals that have afflicted some churches are attributed to their lack of good management; the CEOs (bishops, for example) are the main targets of criticism. Most of these churches take a strong interest in libertarian politics because they want the legislation that will favour their business-like activities. In short, the creation, use and abuse of economic and political power becomes increasingly central in the study of media and religion.

Among the many recent books providing methods of analysis of the economics of religion those that stand out are the classic work of R.L. Moore, *Selling God* (1994), Mara Einstein's, *Brands of Faith* (2008), Lynn Schofield Clark's *Religion, media, and the marketplace* (2007), and David Chidester's *Authentic Fakes: Religion and American Popular Culture* (2005). Vincent Miller's *Consumer Religion* (2003) presents a more theological perspective. All of these come close to being texts of business ethics (or lack of it) in the area of corporate marketing of religion. These describe the ways that large transnational corporations such as Rupert Murdoch's NewsCorp and Wal-Mart are moving into the large-scale selling of religious material culture that often takes advantage of young religious seekers in their most vulnerable moments.

Mara Einstein, who comes from a background in marketing research, briefly explains in *Brands of Faith*, how the book, *Left Behind*, based on rather obscure evangelical theology about the imminent coming of the end of the world, sold more than 50 million copies and how the book, *A Purpose Driven Life*, written by California mega-church pastor Richard Warren has sold, so far, more than 25 million copies and has generated a whole industry of seminars for pastors, videos, films and other forms of material culture. Religious books are now continually on the best seller lists, thanks to very well planned writing and marketing approaches. Mel Gibson's *The Passion of Christ*, a film in Aramaic and Latin, generated box office revenues of hundred's of millions of dollars and sold 4.1 million DVDs on the first day of its release, thanks to one of the most carefully orchestrated marketing strategies in the history of film. For example, Sam's Club, a division of Wal-Mart, sold bulk packs of the film called "churchpacks" of 50 DVDs or VHS tapes.

Where business promotion and religious values begin to blur is in the area of church "marketing consultants", hired to promote the growth in membership of churches. In 2000 it was estimated that there were about 5,000 church consultants in the US claiming fees up to \$3,000 a day. They help pastors incorporate multimedia technologies, recommend changing the content of sermons, make demographic assessments of the area to analyse needs and interests and use sophisticated marketing techniques to draw larger crowds.

Bringing in the critical dimension of political-economic analysis

Mara Einstein's *Brands of Faith*, provides an extensive description of how churches are increasingly transforming their founders' "great commission" into forms of corporate communication and even militant politics. Einstein, Chidester and Moore are bringing in some of the methodology of the political-economy tradition for empirical analysis of concentrations of socio-economic power and the resulting social injustices and social exclusions. Although some of the study of the televangelists has revealed cases of personal greed and exploitation of gullible followers, there has been relatively little use of the tools of political economic research to reveal the way the socio-economic strategies of new religious movements are altering the structure of social opportunity and upward mobility of excluded minorities.

In the period from roughly 1870 to 1970 many major religious revitalisation movements interpreted their founders' great commission to mean the promotion of social justice in areas of education, health and employment, the removal of barriers of racial and gender exclusiveness, the social responsibility of economic power, interreligious and ecumenical dialogue and the defense of human and civil rights. Today, with the emphasis on corporate communication in churches without the emphasis on corporate responsibility, there is much more stress on individual amassing of economic wealth and power. The emphasis on domestic morality has little relationship to social morality, and the emphasis on essentialistic personal morality is less and less aware of the socio-cultural diversity of contemporary societies.

Mara Einstein does have chapters on "The politics of faith brands" and "Has religious marketing gone too far?", but there is still need for more explicit critical methodologies to understand how movements emphasising Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life*, Joel Osteen's *Become a Better You: 7 keys to Improving Your Life*, or other strategies on how to build a mega-church—all so highly touted by *Fortune* and other business magazines—are influencing the structure of social opportunity and inclusiveness in the US or other parts of the world—including Africa.

12. The international comparative study of religion and media

The analysis of media and religion has tended to be dominated by methods of research on American televangelists and by the social-psychological perspective of American sociology. The comparative

national variable, the socio-cultural context of the US, tends to be assumed (or suppressed) and rarely enters into the methodology. This collection of fourteen case studies of independent religious broadcasters in ten different countries in four continents, edited by Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors (2006) brings a quite fresh and innovative theoretical and methodological perspective. The central question being asked is how these religious broadcasters are bringing about a change in the context of debate in the public sphere in countries where the public arena largely dominated by the developmentalist secular nation state, is often passively cooperating with the major Islamic, Hindu or other cultural religions. Broadcasting has been defined as public service, but has become controlled by a secular political bureaucracy that has become part of a dominant educated governing elite. As the legitimacy of the developmentalist nation state has declined and modernisation has brought new aspirations to “excluded” lower-status group, religious reformers have used “new media” with an air of modernity to gain legitimacy in the public sphere.

The claims to greater legitimacy in the public sphere of the religious reformers in comparison to the stilted empty rhetoric of the nationalist broadcasting is, firstly, their more authentic expression of the religious tradition that underlines the national identity and, secondly, their innovative and imaginative use of “new media” such as commercial broadcasting formats, community and pirate radio, video cassettes, and Internet combined with interpersonal networks.

The studies seek to understand how religious media are a vehicle to bring religion into the public sphere in a much more explicit and socio-politically powerful way—calling into question the progressive secularisation thesis and the rationalist conception of the public sphere of Habermas. The analysis also avoids using the concepts of the civil society as not applicable to these non-Western socio-cultural contexts.

The methodology of the case studies, as they are presented here, tend to focus on three different aspects of the media, religion and public sphere relationship:

- (1) How religious discourses, practices and forms of organisation change as new media are adopted
- (2) How the presence of mediated religion transforms the public sphere and is played out in the new politics of identity and difference.

- (3) How the blurred boundary between religion and entertainment, facilitated by forces of commercialisation, offers new possibilities for the proliferation of religion while also addressing questions about the limits of religious representations.

The methodology of the case studies tend to focus on the following:

- The history of the movement and the charismatic leaders and how the difference evolves into a politics of identity. Often there is an appeal to excluded identities of lower-status rural and urban people.
- How the movement has tried to gain a voice in the public sphere, has been blocked by a secular developmentalist control of media and has ended up with innovations in the use of media technology and alternative media to gain access to the public sphere.
- How religious movements use the popular culture and entertainment formats to reach a more youthful globalising audience, distance themselves from traditional religious and civil authorities, build links with the oral, visual popular religion of lower-status sectors, emphasise a more puritan discipline that reinforces the struggle of poorer people striving to be upwardly mobile—in short, to examine how these new movements use media to gain legitimacy in the public sphere through the mobilisation of new audiences.
- Examine also the contexts of reception: informal discussion groups in family, kin groups and neighbourhoods; the ability to link to local interpersonal networks of larger socio-religious movements.
- Examine how the media searches for and articulates the aspirations of religious “seekers” who do not quite fit in with any traditional religious framework because of exclusion of youth, women or university educated people.
- Above all, examine how leaders of movements manage to open a space in the public sphere for religious conceptions of national development which do not fit the classical conceptions of civil society or public sphere.

What this collection of studies and its excellent theoretical introduction does well is to introduce ways of thinking about and analysing power, politics and religious motivations which complement the more social-psychological approach of the media, religion and culture

tradition. In various ways, each of the essays stresses the processes of the cultural hegemony of religion. Each case study analyses a different approach of excluded religious identities gaining admittance into in a configuration of hegemonic alliances and managing to use media in a way that strengthens the cultural capital of the excluded identities. This has its global significance also. Whereas global socio-economic and technical power may have been allied to a certain type of secularised Christian identity, now various forms of Islamic, Hindu and other religious identities have cultural capital in global hegemonic alliances.

Concluding with an apology

In this brief survey of the methodologies of research in the culturalist approach to media and religion, some topics that merit a much greater discussion can only be mentioned briefly. In research dealing with religion on the Internet, Heidi Campbell's *Exploring Religious Community Online* (2005) and Dawson and Cowan's *Religion Online* (2004) are noteworthy. For studies of religious education and the media, Mary E. Hess's *Engaging Technology in Theological Education* (2005) is in a class by itself. In the area of religion and popular culture, Forbes and Mahan's *Religion and popular culture in America* (2005) and Stout and Buddenbaum's *Religion and Popular Culture: Studies in the Interaction in Worldviews* (2001) stand out. Finally, three excellent recent surveys of the field are De Vries and Weber's *Religion and Media* (2001), Horsfield, Hess and Medrano's *Belief in Media* and Morgan's *Key Words in Religion, Media and Culture* (2008).

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