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Onto the Global Scene

Adogame, Afe, Ezra Chitando & Bolaji Bateye (eds.) 2013, *African Traditions in the Study of Religion, Diaspora and Gendered Societies*. Williston (VT): Ashgate Publishing, 212 pp., ISBN 978-1-4094-4614-9 (hbk), \$99.95, special offer \$79.95

Context

The rich and complex religious history of sub-Saharan Africa and its Diaspora has received but scant attention from Euro-American scholarship in religions despite its depth of many millennia through rock art, the histories of its thousands of indigenous religions, of its immigrant religions, Christian, Muslim, Jewish and many others, and its centres of ancient Christian literate culture in Ethiopia, and of medieval Muslim scholarship in the Sahel. African diasporic religions comprise both those that emerged from the transatlantic slave trade (and across the Indian Ocean) in the past four centuries, and those African migrants have founded in recent decades. The religions of preliterate African societies and those slaves continued to practise secretly across the Atlantic were regarded as savage and without history, and relegated to anthropology, the discipline of the exotic and barbaric at the service of European colonialism. When Christian missions became a resounding success in Africa after 1900 by providing schools and hospitals, their expansion was studied by merely a handful of missiologists because of the ‘problem’ of their indigenisation. Western islamologists were never interested in the history of the spread of Islam in Africa.

Likewise scant attention has been paid to African scholarship on these religions in the sizable Departments of Religious Studies in Anglophone African public universities since the 1950s. No note was taken of their publications for the reasons detailed, and because their publications were regarded as out of touch with developments in global scholarship in religions after the steep devaluation of African

currencies caused Euro-American academic journals and books to become prohibitively expensive, causing a severe book famine after the 1960s that isolated African scholars from developments elsewhere.

Content

However, despite these setbacks African scholars of religions are producing important research on the religions of Africa and its Diaspora, for the African as well as for the global academic market. The volume reviewed, and its companion,¹ proclaim in their very titles the entry of African scholarship in religions onto the global academic scene. They are dedicated to Jacob K. Olupona, the Nigerian paragon of modern African scholarship in religions who is now a professor in African and Afro-American religions at Harvard. He and many other 'diasporic' African scholars of religions keep in close touch with colleagues in African universities, particularly through research and publication projects. Olupona does so more especially with colleagues at the universities of Ile-Ife and Ibadan in SW Nigeria, Yorubaland. That is reflected in the volume reviewed: ten of the fourteen contributions are by Nigerian scholars of religions. As a result, the volume deals mainly with religious developments in Nigeria, and especially with those in Yorubaland.

The volume has a preface, an introduction and two parts. In the preface (XIII-XIV), Ulrich Berner notes the ties between Olupona and Bayreuth University. In the introduction (1-9), the editors urge female African scholars of religions to continue to storm the strongholds of male-dominated departments of Religious Studies in African universities, because 'they have provided a promising foundation for the Africanization of the discipline' (1) by 'engendering' it (3), *i.e.* by tackling existential issues such as violence, HIV/AIDS and gender. The editors add two more avenues for Africanising Religious Studies in Africa: by rehabilitating African indigenous religions through empathic, 'value-free and accurate descriptions' (4), a methodology that will decolonise their study and demonstrate their continuing vitality and relevance; and by being 'at the cutting edge of research on African [diasporic] religions' (6). African scholars must develop African traditions in the study of African religions in Africa and worldwide. They must no longer regurgitate methods and theories develop elsewhere (8).

¹ Afe Adogame, Ezra Chitando & Bolaji Bateye (eds.) 2012, *African Traditions in the Study of Religion in Africa: Emerging Trends, Indigenous Spirituality and the Interface with Other World Religions*. Abingdon: Ashgate, 278 pp., ISBN 978-4094-1970-9 (hbk), £55

Part one examines how religion(s) affect society and are affected by them. In chapter I (14-23), Lucas Nandih Shamala (Metropolitan State College, Denver) proposes that the barbaric brutalities through advanced modern weaponry that are tearing pastoral societies in East Africa apart be curtailed by reinstating traditional peace making ceremonies, such as those of the Abaluyia of Western Kenya, that served to terminate feuds and wars after cattle theft and murder in pre-colonial times. They will promote *obuntu*, he says, ‘a Bantu communitarian way of existence’ (13) of societies that ‘seek to bind people together’ (17).

Danoye Oguntola Laguda (Lagos State University) proposes in chapter 2 (25-33) a market model of religion in order to demonstrate that Nigeria is secular only in the sense that its tense interreligious competition ‘allows for the appropriation of the values of more than one religion in the making of government policies’ (30).

Olutayo Charles Adesina (University of Ibadan) uncovers in chapter 3 (35-46) the materialism pervading the Nigerian religious scene: ‘In Nigeria, there is now a thin line between God and Mammon’ (39). As a result, ‘religion, politics, and the economic adjustment programme became insidious weapons [...] for selfish goals. [They] balkanise the country’ (36). He urges that ‘the nexus of religion, economy and politics’ be thoroughly explored (43).

Musa Barnabas Gaiya (University of Jos) pleads in chapter 4 (47-59) that a civil religion ethos be inculcated in schools, because the essential ingredients for a civil religion fostering national cohesion are lacking in Nigeria despite efforts of past Nigerian governments to promote cohesion (48). This is particularly so since the born-again President Obasanjo triggered the proclamation of *sharī’a* in eleven northern states in 1999. Which proclamation is in blatant contravention of section 10 of the Nigerian constitution that prohibits the federation and its states to adopt a state religion (53).

Jacob Kehinde Ayantayo (University of Ibadan) argues in chapter 5 (61-70) that ancestor veneration may provide a model for education in civil religion. He suggests that the politicians, who led the struggle for independence, be ‘immortalised’ as national ancestors and venerated through such national symbols as the national flag, the national anthem, etc. Their veneration will foster the patriotic feelings that are direly needed for national integration.

Samson Adetunji Fatokun (University of Ibadan) compares in chapter 6 (71-81) the concept of expiatory sacrifice in the early church with that in Yoruba indigenous religion.

Part II (83-188) is on research of African diasporic religions and on gender. In chapter 7 (85-98), Abel Ugba describes the methodology he used in his PhD research between 2001 and 2005 on some of the odd-forty African-led Pentecostal churches in Dublin, Ireland. He reflects critically on his ‘outsider within’ position in that research. It generated in him the ‘double consciousness’ of ‘the stranger [who is] simultaneously near and remote, concerned and indifferent, [...] looking “both from the outside in and from the inside out”’ (90).

Mojúbàolú Olúfúnké Okome (City University of New York) and Elisha P. Renne (University of Michigan) – she is the only white contributor to this volume – examine in chapter 8 (99-114) the leadership roles of women in Aládūrà churches in Nigeria and the USA. They find that leadership opportunities are fewer for women in the USA because ‘the cultural ideas associated with women’s power in Nigeria are not held by the majority population in the USA’ (112).

In chapter 9 (115-131), the Afro-Jamaican scholar of religions Janice McLean (City Seminary, New York) compares the place of second-generation youths in West Indian Pentecostal churches in London and New York. They are confronted in both metropolises with exclusion by white society, stigmatising stereotypes, and ‘gendered racism’ demonising black males (120). In this predicament of ‘ubiquitous racial oppression’ (121), Afro-Caribbean Pentecostal churches must provide second-generation youths with a home in which they may develop the ‘hyphenated’ identities of Black-British or Black-Americans they need for surviving in their new ‘home’ societies. For some youths they do. But their ‘failure to engage with the “real” issues [these youths] face within the society [...] has resulted in the exodus of some second-generation youths’ (127), particularly in New York (126-128).

Ezra Chitando (University of Zimbabwe) pleads in chapter 10 (133-146) that African scholars of religions free themselves from subservience to Euro-American theories and methods and develop African traditions in the study of the religions by focusing on ‘African realities’, such as African male-dominated gendered societies. African female scholars of religions already do so. They have cured Religious Studies in Africa from its gender-blindness by applying gender analysis to the religions of Africa in order to achieve gender justice. They focus on the impact HIV/-

AIDS has on women and girls in Africa. Their pioneering work must be complemented, however, by research into 'the social construction of men' in African societies, and into the role African religions play in the construction and promotion of aggressive masculinities (137). They must do so in order to transform African death dealing masculinities by effective interventions (141) that 'change African communities for the better' (143). Male African scholars of religions need to 'grapple with how religion often sponsors destructive masculinities' (143).

Bolaji Bateye (University of Ile-Ife) examines in chapter 11 (147-161) how the notions of earth, nature, and purity in Yoruba traditional society affect women. She finds that 'gender specific [...] taboos [generally] discriminate against women' (156) and quotes the 'murderous' stigmatising remarks made against women infected with HIV/AIDS in songs of insult, satire, and ridicule (158-159).

In chapter 12 (163-173), Dorcas Olu Akintunde, Acting Head of the Dept. of Religious Studies of the University of Ibadan till her premature death on 15 March 2011, examines the impact of Christian Women organisations in Nigeria on their churches, education and health care and their several philanthropic activities such as prisoner visitations. But she also notes the fields they have not been active in: the exorbitant bride prices; prostitution; wife battering; the war on HIV/AIDS; the reproductive rights of women; the number of children they can properly raise; and the battle about abortion and early marriage (170-171).

Lastly, Oluwakemi Abiodun Adesina (Osun State University) examines in chapter 13 (175-188) the plight and coping strategies of Muslim women in the twelve northern states where they are caught between economic crisis, patriarchy, booming trade in prostitution, religious puritanism and *shari'a* condemning two women, Safiya and Amina, to death by stoning for adultery (*zina*). She compares the rigid attitudes in the Muslim north to the relaxed attitudes of Yoruba Muslims in the southwest. There 'the *hijab* [veil] is about the only seclusion [women] experience' (184).

Appreciation

This volume and its companion are milestones in the history of African scholarship in religions. The editors are to be congratulated for bringing to notice of the global academic community the self-conscious Africanisation of the study of the religions of Africa and its (new) Diaspora by African Religious Studies scholars. They do

so by contextualising African religions on the continent and in the Diaspora in the often harsh – political, economic, social, etc. – realities of African, and African-diasporic, societies, past and present. They do so by an approach that is both hard-nosed and empathic, factual and reformist, independent by focusing on African solutions for African issues (159), yet mindful that ‘universities necessarily have an international dimension’ (159).

The latter, however, seems a rather minimalist concession in view of the several assertions that African scholars of religions need to free themselves from all (post)colonial intellectual dependencies. Though this need for an explicit, self-conscious, well articulated African approach to the often highly complex and problematic realities of African societies – continental and diasporic – and religions is greatly to be applauded, I sense a danger here that it will be used for cultivating isolation from the scholarly contributions the present-day descendants of the former (political and intellectual) ‘overlords’ are making to the very same contextualising description and social-scientific analysis of African societies and religions in, *e.g.*, modern Anthropology of Religions, which is so far unfortunately mostly a Euro-American affair. Precisely the contextualising turn calls for a dialogue – on equal footing – with, rather than isolation from, Anthropology of Religions. Isolation would, I fear, rather harm the march onto the global academic scene by African scholars of religions that these two volumes exemplify and proclaim in their very titles.

Five more remarks may be added. Shambala seems to me to indulge in romanticising precolonial pastoral societies in Africa when he asserts that ‘in the final analysis [...] war in the Abaluyia context, as in other African societies, was sanctioned [...] in the interest of *obuntu* [...] and] was never indulged in for jingoistic interests’ (18). Laguda seems to propose a quite narrow, distinctly Nigerian view of religious pluralism when he defines it in terms of competition and strife, and as forestalling that a particular religion imposes its beliefs and practices on a society (25-27). Therefore they compete in the religious market. He ignores that there are lots of non-competitive religions, also in Nigeria. I wonder whether Ayantayo’s proposal for a national ancestral veneration (65-67) is compatible with Nigerian Islam. Fato-kun correctly states that ‘original sin’ is a Christian notion that is foreign to Yoruba and other African indigenous religions (75, 79). ‘Sin’, however, is also a notion that is foreign to them.

Lastly, Bolaji Bateye makes too sweeping a statement when she asserts that ‘the image of woman as the primeval temptress and destroyer [...] arrived in Africa with colonialism, Christianity and Islam’ (145). She assumes incorrectly that the biblical story of Eve seducing Adam in Paradise and being the cause of the death of humans by ‘the fall’, and the dismissal of Adam and Eve/Hawa from Paradise, is reduplicated in the Qur’ān. The Qur’ān, however, never mentions Hawa (Eve) by name. She is referred to only as Adam’s wife. Only in the *hadith*, sayings attributed to Muhammed, is she identified as Hawa. As for the ‘fall’, the Qur’ān states explicitly that Adam and his wife together were seduced by Iblis/Satan (*sura* 7: 19-25), and that they both ate the fruit of the forbidden tree (*sura* 20: 121). In the Qur’ān, therefore, Iblis/Satan did not first seduce Hawa and then Adam through her. In the Qur’ān, Hawa is therefore not the ‘primeval temptress’ who tempted and seduced Adam: ‘their disobedience was a joint venture. Islam rejects the idea that women are wicked temptresses, or cursed with the burden of menstruation and pain of childbirth’,² as in Genesis 3: 16, in which Eve – and all women – were ‘cursed’ by Jahweh. This should alert us to the many other significant differences between the protologies of the Bible and the Qur’ān. One is that Allah/God did punish Adam and his wife by sending them ‘down to earth’, and by creating enmity between humans there (*sura* 7: 24). But he is also said to have forgiven them their transgression of his command after their dismissal from paradise, to have shown them his mercy, to have conducted them into the right way, and to have told them to wait for his guide (*sura* 20: 120-123). There is, therefore, no doctrine of original sin in Islam, nor a need for the collective redemption of humankind through the vicarious suffering of a Redeemer sent by God, as there is in Christianity. Another major difference is that Islamic notions of ‘paradise’ are fundamentally different from the biblical/Christian ones.³

Recommendation

Despite these remarks, this volume and its companion are of great interest to all AASR members, for their content as well as for their symbolic value, for they exemplify a milestone in the history of African academic scholarship in religions.

² Quoted from www.almasjied.com/content/story_adam_and_eve (accessed 25.2.2013)

³ Cf. Chriatian Lange 2012, *The Discovery of Paradise in Islam* [inaugural address, delivered on 16 April 2012]. Utrecht: Utrecht University, Faculteit Geesteswetenschappen

Copies of them should be in all libraries of African universities and departments of Religious Studies. The prohibitive prices of these hard cover and e-book editions, however, forbid that. The publisher should therefore either reprint them speedily as paperbacks, and drastically reduce their e-book prices, or team up with publishers in Africa for editions affordable in the African markets.