

15

Bayreuth African Studies
WORKING PAPERS



RELIGION AND SPACE: PERSPECTIVES FROM AFRICAN EXPERIENCES

Serawit Bekele Debele and Justice Anquandah Arthur

15

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Perspectives from African Experiences**

Bayreuth African Studies Working Papers

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With BIGSASworks! we aim at offering Junior Fellows at the Graduate School of African Studies a platform for publishing research-related articles. This new online-working paper series provides an excellent platform for representing and promoting the idea of BIGSAS. It opens a space for showcasing ongoing research, creating transparency of the work carried out by Junior Fellows and providing a space for present articles and working jointly on them towards further publication. Each issue focuses on a certain thematic field or theoretical concept and Junior Fellows from any discipline are invited to submit papers, enabling common interests beyond the predetermined BIGSAS research areas to flourish. At the same time BIGSASworks! offers its workgroup participants deeper insights into and practical experience of what it means to be an editor. Last but not least BIGSASworks! makes BIGSAS and its research(ers), (i.e. us!), visible before our theses are published.

The name BIGSASworks! had various implications when we first chose it. First and foremost it is an abbreviation of “BIGSAS Working Papers!” Secondly, it is meant to show the work of our BIGSAS “work groups”, so indeed it is the works that are resulting from a structure like BIGSAS. Thirdly, taking “works” as a verb, it demonstrates the work that we as BIGSAS Fellows carry out, with BIGSASworks! guaranteeing us a visible output in addition to our theses.

The Editors of this Volume

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Acknowledging the Reviewers of this Volume

On behalf of the contributors, we would like to express our profound appreciation to the reviewers of this issue of BIGSASworks! This publication would not have been possible without the hard work and support of several senior scholars, who despite their busy schedules, found time to review this collection of essays. Most of these senior scholars were involved from the beginning as they took time to listen to the presentations of the junior fellows, offered insightful comments and thereafter read the papers at various stages. Accordingly, we would like to particularly show our heartfelt gratitude to the following senior scholars:

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Foreword

Everyone who is familiar with the history of Religious Studies (Religionswissenschaft), seeing the title “Religion and Space” will immediately recall the concept of sacred space as it was defined by Mircea Eliade, one of the most famous – and most controversial – historians of religion in the 20th century. According to Eliade, religious human beings would always claim that it is some kind of revelation – a hierophany – that has led to the discovery of the sacred spaces. Since he defined the task of Religious Studies as a hermeneutical one, he focused on interpreting the religious self-understanding, neglecting other aspects of human agency in the religious field. However, the cultural turn in general and the ‘spatial turn’ in particular has directed Religious Studies scholars to focus only on these other aspects of human agency, that is the conditions and even material interests under which sacred spaces are produced and constructed. As much as it is true that Religious Studies, as a non-theological discipline has to critically investigate human agency in religion, as, for instance, the production and construction of sacred space, the hermeneutical task of interpreting the religious self-understanding must not be totally neglected.

This double task of the discipline is well represented in this collection of essays written by Junior Fellows of BIGSAS. To mention just a few examples: On the one side, Eliot Tofa is much in line with Eliade when describing the various ways in which people “make meaning of their world” (p. 75). On the other side, Azza Mustafa Babikir Ahmed emphasizes “human agencies to sacralise places, driven by various social, economic and political factors” (p. 34). Justice Arthur has successfully tried to combine both perspectives, on the one hand describing “the diverse ways” in which Charismatic Christians “transform profane spaces into sacred ones”, thus highlighting “the role of human agency in the construction of sacred spaces,” and, on the other hand, presenting an example that is “in line with Eliade’s view that the utilization of various ritual techniques gives rise to the discovery of a sacred space” (p. 130). Finally, it should be emphasized that the variety of disciplines represented in this collection of essays, is in itself a contribution to the Study of Religion as a cultural phenomenon.

Prof. Dr. (Emeritus) Ulrich Berner

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Introduction

Religion and Space: Perspectives from African Experiences

Serawit Bekele Debele & Justice Anquandah Arthur

In his book, “How to build places with Words”, Martyn Smith rightly concedes that any description and analysis of events is fruitful only if we account for “where” it happens, as anything is inconceivable without setting/s¹, whatever form that settings might take (like imaginary, abstract, real, concrete, transcendent...). In so doing, he calls our attention to the centrality of the analysis of space to arrive at a fuller picture of what we are studying. Similarly, it has been noted by other scholars² that the spatial turn in cultural studies has set in and the Study of Religions (Religionswissenschaft) is also paying attention to theories of space to explore religious traditions and experiences. How are spaces conceived, constructed, narrated, contested, maintained, enchanted, disenchanted and/or re-enchanted are just few of the spatial aspects in which the Study of Religions is immensely interested. While Religious Studies seems to mainly focus on sacred spaces, investigating and analysing how religion impinges on seemingly profane/secular spaces are among the discipline’s main engagements. They are also actively engaged in the debates regarding the secular and spiritual as well as profane and sacred, how one impinges on the other and if, after all, maintaining that dichotomy is tenable in a postmodern era which is characterised by the destabilisation of categories.

Here at the University of Bayreuth, the Department of Religious Studies has also taken up the discussions and debates around space and religion. As a result, a two-phased seminar was organised by Professor Dr. Ulrich Berner, Dr. Franz Kogelmann and Dr. Magnus Echter in the summer and winter semesters of 2014. The seminar was titled, “Sacred spaces in Africa and Beyond” with the objective of “analysing the ways in which sacred spaces are distinguished from secular, political or economic spaces, both in practice and conceptually.”³ Exposing participants of the seminar to metaphors like “field” and “heterotopias”, the scholars introduced conceptual tools with which we “de-essentialize notions of sacred places as given and timeless manifestations of religious power”⁴ but rather reconceptualise them as social constructions. They compiled literature covering both major theoretical debates as well as published empirical researches on Africa.

¹ Smith, Martyn. *Religion, Culture, and Sacred Space*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)

² Kogelmann, Franz. “*The Economy of Sacred Space in Durban, South Africa*”: Presented at the Conference on Religion and Space: Perspectives from African Experiences, December 14-17, 2014, Bayreuth, Germany.

³ Berner, Ulrich, Echter, Magnus and Kogelmann, Franz. *Sacred Spaces in Africa and Beyond I: READER*, (University of Bayreuth, 2014).

⁴ Ibid.

From our readings and discussions in the course of the seminar, we noticed that the debates regarding the concept “often run their course without major impact on empirical inquiries into matters spatial, especially where they appear too abstract, abstruse, or one-dimensional to bear on concrete research.”⁵ Moreover, there is meagre literature engaging religion and space in the African context. It is against this backdrop that we organised a 3-day conference focusing on the theme of “Religion and Space: Perspectives from African experiences” from the 14th to the 16th of December 2014. As part of furthering and enriching the heated and lively theoretical debates and also bringing perspectives from Africa to the forefront of the empirical discussions, the conference created a platform for senior scholars and junior researchers in an attempt to advance the debate through empirical analysis and critical discussion of the concept.

Furthermore, we were also of the view that any interest in space cannot afford to ignore religion as an aspect of culture. Owing to space’s indispensability in other disciplines, the conference rather emphasised an interdisciplinary approach to teasing out the concept unlike assuming a one-fits-all conceptualisation of it. While organising the conference, we were cognisant of the multiplicity of perspectives, theories and approaches from which we could benefit, if we made it open to scholars and junior fellows from various disciplines. We believe that different perspectives, conceptualisations and approaches could be used to investigate the complex and multifaceted relationships. Given the ever-rising presence of religion in the public spheres in Africa and elsewhere, we primarily targeted empirical researches that analyse the connection of religion and space on the continent.

Departing from the outdated assumption that religious spaces are essentially different and operate in binary opposition to secular spaces, our conference engaged space and religion in a more rigorous and critical manner. Accordingly, we started by posing such questions as: what are sacred spaces? How are sacred spaces produced and/or constructed? What are the connections between urban planning, which is mainly informed by modernity’s secularist overtone, and religion? What roles does religion play in human relations in space? In this light, we invited contributions from junior fellows from different disciplines. With the generous financial support from BIGSAS, we were able to invite senior scholars from disciplines like history, literature, Anthropology, Sociology, Geography, Islamic Studies with theoretical focus on religion and space and geographical focus on Africa. The conference became a platform for the discussion of the theme and also for senior and junior researchers to meet. Part of our objectives was to create the opportunity for junior fellows to present their work in front of our guests and benefit from their theoretical insights. It was after the conference that we decided to compile and publish the contributions in BIGSASWorks! Most of the contributions in this issue are papers presented during the conference and our contributors, we believe, have benefited from their participation in improving their work. In addition to the feedbacks obtained from the conference, each paper in this series has been reviewed in different stages.

⁵ Jessop, Bob, Brenner, Neil and Jones, Martin. “Theorizing Socio-spatial Relations”, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 26, no. 3 (2008): 389.

As already alluded to, religion and space are intrinsically intertwined and articles published in this issue of BIGSASWorks! discuss this multiplicity of forms of connections and interactions. Despite the fact that the papers are reflecting various disciplinary perspectives, needless to say that the central points are religion and space in Africa. The articles, in one way or another, focus on the thematic area raised and are connected with one another regardless of the methodological and theoretical variations. In so doing, the issue nurtures multi-disciplinary approaches promoted by BIGSAS.

In her contribution titled "Sacred space as space set apart-Spatial negotiations of belonging in Kibara, Kenya", Johanna argues that space, alongside ethnicity and religion is one of the building blocks of identity formation. She closely explores the Nubian community in Kibera and shows that what is depicted as Africa's biggest slum is in fact the "ancestral home" for Nubians. As such, it is a sacred space in which Nubian-ness is revered and performed.

Against the backdrop of the secularization thesis which postulates the separation of religion and politics, Chacha's article investigates the situation in Kenya and asserts that as much as secular spaces, sacred spaces are also arenas of conflicts - that which are informed by political interest than religious. Part of this is attributed to the increased participation of clergy in the political affairs of the country especially with regards to election and ethnic tension.

Refuting the scholarly tradition that posits sacred spaces as revelations, Azza asserts that sacred spaces are produced by humans in response to various social, economic, political and religious motives. To substantiate her assertion, she takes a case study of a story in the Quran and how it is mapped on two separate sites, in Sudan and Egypt. She particularly focuses on the story of Moses and his meeting with Alkhadir, the person regarded as the servant of Allah.

Taking the case of Qur'anic schools in Jebel Marra in Sudan, Bakheit argues that the mindset of students is as much about the context of their schooling as the content of what they are studying. By thoroughly describing the setting and how the school is spatially organized, he argues that the students' attitude is shaped by their environment. Thus, one must pay equal attention to the spatial organization of the school as it greatly informs their personal development.

Looking at Zakes Mda's novel titled "The Whale Caller", Weeraya brings in a literary perspective to analyse the making and sharing of sacred space between animals and humans. In so doing, she exposes how both species experience sacred spaces. Weeraya further establishes, based on the novel, that the religious behaviour of whales transforms human religious experience and behaviour. In so doing, she stretches the understanding of the complexity of spatial relationships from just being a human phenomenon to one that includes animals too.

Eliot puts two different religious traditions in conversation regarding their description of sacred spaces. He explores the resonance of sacred spaces as explicated in the New Testament of the Bible with that of African indigenous religious thoughts in Swaziland. In so doing, he establishes that virtually all religious traditions own the notion of sacred/non sacred spaces.

Unlike the wide held perception of the market as nothing but a site of economic engagement, Lohna's article introduces an additional dimension to the role of market. She asserts that in addition to their role as spaces of transaction of goods, markets are sites in which God is invoked leading to the creation of sacred spaces or sacralisation of the market. Lohna uses vegetable markets in Jos, Nigeria in which women get together not only to trade but also to take part in religious practices like group prayers and thereby transform the role of the vegetable market.

Fulera's article connects the production of sacred spaces with the process of mediation and shows the role of media in both producing and sustaining sacred spaces. While emphasising the role of media in the making of sacred spaces, Fulera cautions that the spaces produced are not readily accepted. There is an ongoing process of contesting the spaces due to the fact that this process of production is taking place in a rather secular political context which is Ghana, a country which has long adopted secularism as a governing principle.

Owing to the increased public influence of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity in Ghana, the spatial organisation of the country has experienced pronounced transformation. In his article, Justice analyses one aspect of this change. Sacralisation of previously secular spaces is what he takes up in his discussion of the Royalhouse Chapel International in Ghana. In so doing, Justice describes the process by which certain spaces like schools and hotels are converted to sacred spaces where religious services are rendered.

In conclusion, the series does not claim to have exhausted both the empirical and theoretical debates regarding religion and space. Rather, the discussions in each article also suggest that there are developments in Africa that need more scholarly attention and a closer investigation. However, through the contributions, it greatly contributes to the debates and enriches the empirical discussions. The articles give insight into the myriad ways by which religion impinges on secular spaces, on how religion shapes the making and perception of spaces and on how much space is important in the understanding of the religious. In so doing, some of the articles reinforce the discussion on sacred spaces as social constructs that are in constant change, while a number of the contributions maintain that sacred spaces are results of divine intervention that is manifested through revelation.

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Sacred Space as Space set apart: Spatial Negotiations of Belonging in Kibera, Kenya

Johanna Sarre

Abstract

Nairobi is one of the most prominent examples of a “heavily compartmentalised”¹ and “fragmented city”,² drawn up by colonial urban planners to mirror the idea of a racially segregated society. However, religious affiliation has been equally important in the categorization of people living in Nairobi and its surrounding areas during the colonial period. Members of the colonial troops, being mostly of African Muslim origin, were classified as ‘detribalized’ natives, assumingly having lost their connection to the native reserve. They were therefore settled in the urban surroundings of Nairobi, on a military ground called ‘Kibera’. To date, Kibera has grown into a multi-ethnic, multi-religious informal settlement. The paper examines how ethnicity, religion and space are ordering principles and building blocks of identity and belonging in Kibera, now allegedly turned Africa’s biggest slum. The example at hand is the Nubian community, descendants of black African Muslim colonial soldiers, who call this settlement their ‘ancestral home’.³ On the basis of empirical findings on Nubian wedding festivities and negotiations around the Muslim cemetery in Kibera, the paper aims to show the production and intertwining of gendered, sacred, secular, public and private space as well as the performance of identity and belonging among the Nubian community in Kibera, Kenya.

Keywords: Nubi, Kenyan Nubians, Kibera, (Ethnic) identity, Ethnicity, Belonging, Home

Introduction

Colonial administrators and some anthropologists, in their service displayed a peculiar obsession with mapping people onto territory. The underlying idea was influenced by a vision of territorialized nation states and ‘a people’ seen as congruent to that territory. By drawing up so-

¹ Claire Médard, City Planning in Nairobi: The Stakes, the People, the Sidetracking, in: *Nairobi today – The Paradox of a Fragmented City*, ed. Hélène Charton-Bigot and Deyssi Rodriguez-Torres (Nairobi: Mkuki wa Nyota Publishers & IFRA, 2010): 27.

² Hélène Charton-Bigot and Deyssi Rodriguez-Torres, eds. *Nairobi today. The Paradox of a Fragmented City*, (Nairobi: Mkuki wa Nyota & IFRA, 2010).

³ Fieldnotes JS. The empirical information presented in this contribution is derived from over eleven months of fieldwork in Kibera, Kenya (carried out between 2011 and 2014) as part of the author’s PhD project. Fieldwork was financed by the DFG-funded Collaborative Research Centre (SFB) 700 and the DFG-funded Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies. An earlier version of the paper was presented at the workshop “Religion and Space: Perspectives from African Experiences” (Bayreuth University, 15-17 December 2014). The author wishes to thank the workshop participants, the participants of the course “Sozialanthropologische Schreibwerkstatt” (2014-15) and the anonymous reviewer for valuable comments on the manuscript.

called native reserves, anthropologists were complicit in inextricably linking ethnic identity to place, the latter being considered a pure physical quantity, a surface.⁴ With the so-called 'spatial turn' in anthropology and related disciplines, place has been re-conceptualized as space or locality, underlining its social constructedness rather than considering it as a topographical precondition.⁵

Nairobi's largest slum, Kibera, is commonly characterized by manifold deficiencies ranging from proper housing to financial means, from security to water and sanitation services. The scarcest resource of all, however, is space. One minority group of Kibera inhabitants identifies with the slum in a very particular way: The Nubi of Kibera, who trace their presence in the slum back to the first permanent settlement in the area at the turn of the 20th century.

In this contribution, I apply the concept of 'sacred space' to the negotiations of belonging in Kibera. The empirical examples used derive from ethnographic fieldwork including participant observation and numerous conversations about Nubi weddings and the Kibra (Nubian) Muslim Cemetery. Analysing the data regarding the *production of social space*, I will describe instances of topographical and social spatial congruence as well as occasions at which social and topographical spaces diverge or slide across each other. On a second level of analysis, I construe the production of social spaces as inter- and intra-group negotiations of *belonging* against the backdrop of a scarcity of space.

From place to space...

To substantiate my argument, it is necessary to sketch the fundamental changes which the concept of place has undergone in cultural studies.

The idea of territorial nation states and of mapping people onto territory continues to shape much of the political economy of a globalized world. However, during the second half of the 20th century, social science has come to understand that the relation between human beings and places is more complex than that. This awareness has led to the 'spatial turn' in social sciences, a re-conceptualisation of place as a social dimension: space. The links between 'the social' and 'the spatial' have been continuously debated ever since.⁶ Among the key sources for this debate are Henri Lefebvre's work "The Production of Space" and Arjun Appadurai's oeuvre "Modernity at Large". In the chapter entitled "The Production of Locality", Appadurai uses 'locality' first and foremost as a social dimension, "as primarily relational and contextual rather than as scalar or

⁴ Doreen Massey points out how perceiving space as 'surface' and "other places, peoples, cultures simply as phenomena 'on' this surface" misses out on the historical depth of the interaction as well as the others' agency in it. Doreen B. Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005): 4.

⁵ Space – see Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991 [1974]) and Massey *For Space*. Locality – see Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large – Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (London/Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1996).

⁶ E.g. in Jörg Döring and Tristan Thielmann, eds. *Spatial turn – Das Raumparadigma in den Sozial- und Kulturwissenschaften* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2008).

spatial”.⁷ Likewise, Lefebvre also emphasizes the twofold quality of space, which is both prerequisite and outcome of social processes and relationships.

(Social) space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: [...] It is the outcome of a sequence and set of operations, and thus cannot be reduced to the rank of a simple object. [...] Itself the outcome of past actions, social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others.⁸

Social space, according to Lefebvre, is both the outcome of past interactions and the basis for future ones. It is in a way imagined, but not imaginary – social space has implications of a very tangible kind, permitting certain actions while hindering others. Consequently, I use ‘space’ in the following to designate the combination of topographical place and the social dimensions and (inter)actions attached to it.

Sacred space, the concept that unites all the contributions in this volume, is a very particular form of space. I will approach the idea of sacred spaces via the idea of sacred things at first. Émile Durkheim, in his classical definition of ‘religion’, defines sacred things as “things *set apart* and forbidden”.⁹ Sacred things and, hence, sacred spaces are characterized by exclusivity and socially sanctioned access. ‘Sacred’ is that which is unassailable, inviolable.

A thing set apart is no longer “a thing among other things, nor a product among other products,” to reiterate Lefebvre’s words.¹⁰ Things set apart are not objects *as such* but mantled by social meaning and the subsequent rules, which make them and the practices surrounding them special and exclusive. Sacred things not only symbolize and point to transcendental entities but also to larger social contexts. They might be required for or enable certain practices but also prohibit others. In this contribution, I focus on *spaces set apart*, arguing that processes of social boundary-making establish spaces to which access is granted or denied according to social factors. These boundaries work both in an inclusive as well as in an exclusive sense in processes of community formation.¹¹

There is a considerable debate and publication activity among scholars of religion about questions of space. Another classical scholar of ‘the sacred’, Mircea Eliade, writes about the particularity of sacred spaces in the first chapter of his seminal book “The Sacred and the Profane”. While I am not so much preoccupied with the sacred/profane-binary, I agree with his statement

⁷ Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*.

⁸ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 73.

⁹ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1995 [1912]), 62, Emphasis JS.

¹⁰ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 73.

¹¹ Following Durkheim, David Chidester has pointed out the inclusive aspects of things and spaces set apart, describing them as “that which is set apart from the ordinary, everyday rhythms of life, but set apart in such a way that it stands at the centre of community formation”. David Chidester, “Sacred,” *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief* 7 no.1 (2011): 84.

about the qualitative heterogeneity of space: "Space is not homogeneous; [...] some parts of space are qualitatively different from others".¹²

Kim Knott can be considered one of the most prolific present day scholars of spatial analysis in religious studies.¹³ The beauty of her approach lies in its potential to "reconnect religion with other social and cultural fields".¹⁴ Yet, the departing point of her work is religious practice, too. In this article, the larger social contexts are ethnicity and the politics of territory in Kibera. Therefore, I want to describe practices producing *spaces set apart* without limiting my observations to the religious sphere from the outset. This is in line with Ann Taves' call for the use of 'special' instead of 'sacred'. She suggests that a

broader, more generic category of 'special things' and 'things set apart' may be more helpful for the purpose of research" (2009: 17) than "the use of 'religious' or any other first order term, such as [...] 'sacred' [...] as a means of specifying an object of study."¹⁵

I will therefore not primarily deal with the 'sacredness' in the religious sense, but with the ways in which spaces are made special and *set apart* from the ordinary.¹⁶ These spaces can be produced in 'traditional' religious places, such as mosques or cemeteries, but also in "ostensibly non-religious sites" such as the unpaved roads of Kibera.¹⁷

Consequently, the following examples are oriented towards a praxeologic reading of events, a focus on how spaces are actively *made to differ*. Julian Holloway suggests looking at the processes and practices of differentiation instead of taking for granted the binary divide between the sacred and profane. He writes:

If we focus our analysis upon the event of sacralisation we can shift our understanding away from an (already) ordered division of the sacred and the profane toward a heterogeneous ordering that relies on a practice of differentiation: a making of the sacred with the profane such that the distinction only emerges from the very practice of its making.¹⁸

¹² Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane – The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trusk (San Diego: Harcourt, 1957): 20.

¹³ Kim Knott, "Religion, Space and Place: The Spatial Turn in Research on Religion," *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* 1 (2010): 29-43; "From Location to Locality and Back Again – A Spatial Journey in the Study of Religion," *Religion* 39 (2009): 154-160; "At Home in the Secular – A Spatial Analysis of Everyday Ritual," *Jaarboek voor liturgieonderzoek* 23 (2007): 45-62.

¹⁴ Knott, *From Location to Locality and Back Again*, 154.

¹⁵ Ann Taves, *Religious Experience – A Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009): 17.

¹⁶ Taves extends her illustrations beyond "the setting apart of objects" to the "setting apart of things such as behaviours, experiences, and events." (p. 33) *Spaces set apart* are, however, missing in her "approach to the study of [...] special things." (title)

¹⁷ Knott, *From Location to Locality and Back Again*, 156.

¹⁸ Julian Holloway, "Make believe – Spiritual Practice, Embodiment and Sacred Space," *Environment and planning* 35 (2003): 1968, emphasis JS.

...and from identity to belonging

Just as the concept of 'place' has been debated and, finally, (social) 'space' has taken centre stage, the notion of 'identity' has been scrutinized, resulting in a re-conceptualization of (ethnic) identity as 'belonging'.¹⁹

There are striking parallels in the way space has come to be understood as a social construct and the ways in which the term 'ethnic group' has been de-naturalized and debated in a move that can be called the 'constructivist turn' in anthropology. This debate resulted in the development of alternative concepts such as 'belonging', which emphasizes the procedural and interactive character of (ethnic) identity formation.

In this sense, markers of similarity and difference can be used as 'raw material' to construct ethnic belonging, we-groups and boundaries of those groups. Fredrik Barth's "Ethnic Groups and Boundaries" can be considered the ground-breaking oeuvre in modern anthropological dealing with ethnic groups.²⁰ Fundamentally rethinking processes of boundary-making, ethnic identity and group membership, proponents of the study of ethnic groups have argued in a similar line to theorists of social space. The parallels are twofold:

(1) Where belonging and identification occur, they are not the product of essential difference or sameness but of attributes which are socially *made to matter* in that particular social situation characterized by relatedness and interaction rather than isolation.²¹ Similarly, spaces are not merely topographical constellations but shape and are being shaped by social processes.

(2) The constructedness of categories of identification as something 'imagined' does not mean they are mere imaginary: The related mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion "are experientially real in everyday life",²² as we shall see in the empirical examples below. The same is true for spaces: Although socially delineated, they are at times just as impermeable as a concrete wall.

Social – religious, ethnic, gender – identity often decides over access to spaces. The analysis of *spaces set apart* brings to the fore processes of identification and belonging: Who belongs and who does not? Who is therefore allowed to enter the *space set apart*? How are spaces *set apart*? How are these spaces delineated within, how is their inviolability protected against outsiders? Where and when does social and topographical space diverge? In the following paragraphs, pro-

¹⁹ E.g. Floya Anthias "Belongings in a Globalising and Unequal World: Rethinking Translocations," in *The Situated Politics of Belonging* ed. Nira Yuval-Davis, Kalpana Kannabiran and Ulrike Vieten (London: Sage, 2006): 17-31; Peter Geschiere, *Perils of Belonging: Autochthony, Citizenship and Exclusion in Africa and Europe* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2009); Gabriele Rosenthal and Artur Bogner (eds.) *Ethnicity, Belonging and Biography. Ethnographical and Biographical Perspectives* (Berlin: LIT & New Brunswick: Transaction, 2009); Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, "From 'Identity' to 'Belonging' in Social Research – Plurality, Social Boundaries and the Politics of the Self," in *Ethnicity, Citizenship and Belonging – Practices, Theory and Spatial Dimensions*, ed. Sarah Albiez et al. (Madrid: Iberoamericana/ Frankfurt a. M.: Vervuert, 2011): 199-219.

²⁰ Barth, Fredrik. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1969.

²¹ Cf. Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge/London: Harvard UP, 2006): 7-27; Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity* (London: Routledge, 2008)

²² Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 11.

cesses of identification and boundary-making in the multi-ethnic, multi-religious setting of Kenya's largest slum Kibera serve as an empirical example to explore the production and workings of *spaces set apart*.

The empirical setting: Kibera and the political economy of scarce space

In Kenya, the implicit link between ethnic identity and homelands culminates in powerful discourses on indigeneity. Samantha Balaton-Chrimes summarizes the Nubian case, recognizing that "ethnic groups cannot enjoy full Kenyan citizenship [...] unless they are implicitly considered one of the '42 indigenous tribes'" which the Nubi – despite very recent public recognition – are not.²³ Hence, Kiberan Nubians are considered "non-indigenous others", which leads to their political exclusion and impedes the formalization of their claim to the land of Kibera.²⁴ Today, the Nubi of Kibera are outnumbered by people of other ethnic and geographical origins in the very place they call their 'ancestral home'.

Kibera originated in 1904 as a military training ground outside the municipal boundaries of the freshly established capital of the East African Protectorate. De-mobilized *askari* (soldiers) from the colonial troops were given land to settle there with their families "in lieu of repatriation expenses" or pensions.²⁵ These soldiers, who had been recruited from areas all over present-day South Sudan and Uganda, were united by three factors: the Arabic-based Creole *Kinubi* as common language; their Muslim faith; and the historical reference to the experience in the military service of the British King's African Rifles (KAR). Colonial documents show that the Nubi (or 'Sudanese soldiers' as they were called) were classified as 'detrribalized natives' – they held an intermediary position. Other 'natives' were restricted to live in so-called 'native reserves'. The Sudanese soldiers of the KAR were, upon their retirement, allotted land in the area of present day Kibera by the colonial military administration.

By the mid-1940s, about 2000 Nubi lived in Kibera, together with an estimated 300-600 people of other ethnic origins as house workers or tenants.²⁶ In the racially segregated Nairobi municipality, the settlement of African soldiers and their families soon "became a perpetual irritant to the European government and citizens of Nairobi as the town gradually grew out to meet it".²⁷ Rural-urban migration continued and led to the ex-soldiers and their families being outnumbered by 'outsiders' at the time of the Kenyan independence in 1963.

²³ Samantha Balaton-Chrimes, "Indigeneity and Kenya's Nubians – Seeking Equality in Difference or Sameness?" *Journal of Modern African Studies* 51 no. 2 (2013): 332

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 337

²⁵ Letter from the Acting Chief Secretary to the Union of Sudanese cited in Johan de Smedt, *The Nubis of Kibera: A Social History of the Nubians and Kibera Slums*. Dissertation at Leiden University (2011), accessed June 23, 2015, <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/17638>, 64

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 77.

²⁷ Timothy Parsons, "'Kibera is our Blood': The Sudanese Military Legacy in Nairobi's Kibera Location, 1902-1968," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 30 no.1 (1997): 89.

Today, Kibera is a sprawling slum in the Southern part of the Nairobi metropolitan area. Its estimated population of 200,000 inhabitants of various ethnic backgrounds only comprises about 8,000 Nubi.²⁸

Defining the term 'slum' is, however, difficult. UN HABITAT established that "slums can only be rigorously defined through combining different dimensions of housing, (lack of) urban services, overcrowding and tenure insecurity".²⁹ Kibera certainly 'qualifies' as a slum, given its existence on government land and its deplorable living conditions. Of all the deficiencies that characterize a slum, one is most prominent in everyday life: space. In Kibera, the lack of physical space is a catalyst for tensions in the quest to establish social spaces. These tensions can be felt in many instances – riots against rental prices and battles for the dominance in the informal land tenure are but two examples of the competition for physical space.³⁰ The struggle over space is at the same time a struggle about dominance and power within the informal settlement. As Lefebvre points out, space is not only a resource (as I will argue, for community formation), it also is a means of power and control: "space [...] serves as a tool of thought and of action; [...] in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power."³¹ In this arena of spatial scarcity, the examples of Nubi weddings and the Kibra (Nubian) Muslim Cemetery shall serve to illustrate the production of *spaces set apart* and their effect on the outskirts but also within the Nubi community.³²

The two examples depart from the same point, namely the Kiberan Nubi's particular relation to the land, moreover, to the social space they call their 'home(land)'. The Nubi are the only ones to celebrate their weddings with festive processions through the streets of Kibera and they are the only ones who bury their dead on the Kibera cemetery. Analysing the way members of the Nubi community engage in the production of these particular social spaces, the concept of *space set apart* is used as the lens through which processes of boundary-making between and among ethnically defined groups becomes visible in the multi-ethnic informal settlement of Kibera.

²⁸ According to Johan de Smedt (personal communication with author, 2011) and Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (email to author, 2014).

²⁹ UN HABITAT, *The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements*, United Nations Human Settlements Programme (2003): 3

³⁰ The clashes between Kikuyu and Luo inhabitants in 2007/08, but also between Luo and Nubi in 1992, '95 and 2001 bear witness to that (cf. Johan de Smedt, "'No Raila, no peace!' Big Man Politics and Election Violence at the Kibera Grassroots." *African Affairs* 108/433, 2009: 588f). In the recent past, negotiations between representatives of the Nubi community in Kibera and the government had resulted in the promise to issue a communal land title in 2013. Although the title deed for 'community land' will only be issued for a small portion of Kibera, it was welcomed as a late recognition of the Nubi's claim on their 'ancestral home'. At the time of writing (June 2015), however, no such title had been issued.

³¹ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 26.

³² I am aware that both examples could be analyzed as *rites de passage*. In the eponymous book, Arnold van Gennep dedicates one chapter each to "Betrothal and marriage" (116ff), "Funerals" (146ff) and even one to "The Territorial Passage" (15ff), yet with very limited attention given to space. Liminality, in his reasoning, is rather used as a metaphor than in the spatial sense of 'being at a threshold'. However, in the limited scope of this article, I focus on the aspect of social space rather than individual or collective passages from one social status to another.

Nubian wedding processions – A space set apart drifting across territory

Nubian wedding festivities follow a complex schedule and require at least two days of celebration, not to mention the weeks and sometimes months of preparation.³³ At most weddings I witnessed, the bridegroom's family sent the *selah* (luggage) to the bride's family on the first day of celebrations. The *selah* includes everything needed for the preparation of the bride, such as henna and lemons for the adornments, the bride's dress as specified, as well as rice, meat, salt, tea and sugar for the festivities of day one. These items were taken to the homestead of the bride's family in a colourful procession: Female relatives of the bridegroom carried them from door to door on their heads, young men helped with the heavier jerry cans and sacks. The arrival was greeted with cheering by the guests assembled in the bride's family's crowded courtyard. If the bride's family accepted the gifts – and hence, the proposal – tea and snacks were prepared and sent to the bridegroom's family in a return procession.

On day two, the marriage is formalized (*nikah*) at the mosque. At a wedding in a part of Kibera called Karanja, the home of the bride and groom were only a few houses apart. The bridegroom and a male representative of the bride witnessed the marriage vows at the nearby mosque. Predominantly female relatives, among them the mother of the bride and the groom, gathered in front of the mosque. They then accompanied the bridegroom and his best men with songs and music to the bride's home. The bridegroom and his entourage went ahead to the nearby school yard used as an open-air celebratory area, where the bride made another big entry with her female relatives singing and dancing along. Although the venues were very close to each other, the respective processions took several detours. Clearly, it was not about covering a distance in the shortest time possible. At another wedding, where the homesteads of the couple lay further apart, I witnessed a procession which took over an hour meandering through the access roads of Kibera, accompanying the bride to her husband's family's homestead. Everyone participating, however, enjoyed the slow pace and the fact that the minibuses (*matatu*) and taxis had to drive slowly behind the procession.

Lilly Kong has summarized the literature on processions with regard to the multicultural, multi-religious setting of Singapore.³⁴ She describes how processions take up space otherwise seen as public and set it apart from the ordinary: "Their performance [the processions] in public streets turn them into 'a particular space [...] to communicate, legitimate, and politicize values'."³⁵ Similar to other forms of processions, Nubi wedding processions also serve to "reinforce group cohe-

³³ The following accounts are based on participant observation at more than a dozen wedding ceremonies in Kibera which I was allowed to witness between 2011 and 2014. While I will highlight some of the common features of these weddings, I do not attempt to give a comprehensive account of 'the traditional Nubi wedding'. There is a lively discussion among members of the community as well, as to how wedding customs are (feared or allowed to be) changing. I will rather highlight some instances during these festivities to illustrate the performative production of *spaces set apart*.

³⁴ Lilly Kong, "Religious Processions – Urban Politics and Poetics" *Temenos* 41 no. 2 (2005): 225-249. Kong points out that there are two separate bodies of literature, one on secular and another on religious processions (226f). For reasons stated above, I would not categorize the Nubi wedding processions as one or the other.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 230, citing Goheen 1993, 128.

sion by emphasising belonging".³⁶ The processions temporarily turn the public space of Kibera's streets into a space of almost inviolable nature, a performance to communicate, legitimize and politicize the Nubi's particular belonging vis-à-vis other inhabitants of the slum.



1 Wedding procession in Kibera, the woman on the left wearing the traditional dress called gurbaba. Photo: Author

The access to this *space set apart* (floating through topographical space) is also socially sanctioned, the processions are sometimes defended in decisive, almost violent forms. During one procession moving from Kibera-Lindi up to another neighbourhood, Kambi Muru, along a main transport route, a motorcycle taxi driver tried to overtake the procession on the edge of the dirt road. Ignoring his increasingly aggressive attempts, the women refused to give way. Consequently, the driver lost his balance, the motorcycle toppled over and both ended up in the open roadside sewer. Telling from the comments and jokes of the onlookers, this was the rightful punishment for trying to disturb the performance of such celebratory occasion, violating a *space set apart*. Five minutes later, the road would have been cleared and the motorcyclist could have passed without disturbance. As the example shows, the procession constitutes a special and to some extent inviolable space in itself, an example of *spaces set apart* moving through and across topographic space.

Nubian wedding ceremonies and rituals – Internal boundaries

The wedding festivities are also an example of a social space which is internally subdivided according to social factors. Social boundaries are drawn between sexes in the ceremonies influenced by Muslim faith, other rituals are taking place in *space set apart* for senior family members or married women only.

³⁶ Ibid.

During the wedding ceremonies in Kibera, access is strictly organized according to gender, marital status and age. The formal proceedings at the mosque are witnessed by men only, in accordance with the local interpretations of Islamic teachings. The ensuing processions are usually made up as follows: They are headed by a group of (male) musicians followed by the bridegroom and his *uzir* (best men) and female relatives. In most cases, wedding guests were predominantly female. At one wedding, the male elders of the family sat in the living room, at another open-air festivity, men sat on one, women on the other side of the open space reserved for dancing. In another case, where the small courtyard would not suffice to accommodate the guests, boys and young men took some of the food to the mosque for the men. Gender is the social category in according to which the participants would arrange themselves within the wedding-space.

Marital status, however, also plays a role for access. When the bride arrives at the husband's family's homestead, several rituals are being performed and the bride undergoes *adibu*, the counselling by elderly female relatives on married life. On several occasions, I witnessed the unmarried women being ordered out of the room in which the elderly women gave advice and teachings to the bride (*adibu*). Thus Nubi weddings are events where certain spaces are actively *set apart* and *made special* by limiting access. Age, gender and marital status are decisive for access to these *spaces set apart*.

Renaming the Kibera (Nubian) Muslim Cemetery

As opposed to the first example, which has a strong performative character, the second example is rather based on discourse tied to certain practices. However, we can observe the aspect of *space set apart* for community formation (and demarcation of *space set apart* vis-à-vis ethnic 'outsiders') and the processes of intra-community demarcation. These two levels of negotiation of *space set apart* shall be illustrated by the second example from Kibera: The Kibera (Nubian) Muslim Cemetery.

Most non-Nubi inhabitants of Kibera are taken back to their rural place of origin when they fall sick or die. In Kibera, where the land question remains unresolved till present (2015), the Nubi are the only community using the local graveyard.

The cemetery, adjacent to the main mosque in Kibera (Makina Mosque), is surrounded by high walls and only accessible through a metal gate. This part of Kibera called 'Makina' is considered the centre of Nubi population within Kibera. The mosque is one of the largest buildings in the slum and the oldest mosque in Kibera. The keys to the neighbouring cemetery are kept by a male caretaker living nearby.

My own attempts to visit the graveyard may serve to highlight the ways in which the cemetery is constructed and perceived of as *space set apart*, in this case governed by the interpretation of religious rules on gender. After one of my interlocutors had agreed to show me the graveyard, several deaths occurred. Since burials were taking place daily, which women are not supposed to attend, it took several days until I could enter and be shown around. Therefore, I gained a

first-hand experience of the inaccessibility of *space* temporarily *set apart*. I was also able to observe a change in the labelling of the cemetery which hinted at negotiations of ethnic belonging.

When walking through Makina in summer 2014, I noticed a change which illustrates the important role the cemetery plays in the struggle for the recognition of Nubi land claims within Kibera. During previous visits, I had gotten used to walking past the metal gate inscribed “KIBRA MUSLIM CEMETERY”. The spelling of “Kibra” already hinted at the Nubi dominance over the graveyard; most Nubi call the settlement ‘Kibra’³⁷ while official signs and maps indicate ‘Kibera’. When I returned to Kibera after a few months of absence, the metal gate had been painted afresh. Now, the large white letters read “KIBRA NUBIAN MUSLIM CEMENTRY” (sic) instead of “KIBRA MUSLIM CEMETERY”.

This new title on the gate encompasses all the aspects of the ongoing negotiations taking place in the multi-ethnic, multi-religious slum that the Nubian community calls their ancestral home. On the one hand, it supports the claim that it is the Nubi community that has a natural, final and long-standing historical relation to this locale. As one of my interlocutors explained to me when visiting the graveyard, the fact that his ancestors had been buried here substantiates Nubi first-comer claims to Kibera and proves that they had -and still have- no other ‘ancestral homeland’ to fall back on. On the other hand, the inscription also narrows down who is supposed to find a final rest within the settlement’s only cemetery. Although my informants stated that in practice, every Muslim who died in the vicinity of the cemetery would be allowed to be buried there, the change of label was a significant one. By focusing on the Nubi community, boundaries of access were redrawn; the space of the cemetery was *set apart* for people having a share in the religio-ethnic community.



2 The entrance to the Kibra Nubian Muslim ‘Cemetery’ in July 2014. Photo: Author

³⁷ Meaning ‘bush, thick forest’ in *Kinubi* according to several Nubi interlocutors.

Burial and belonging – Space set apart and the adherence to community values

Additionally, a proper burial and final resting place depend upon adherence to collective norms and values (e.g. honesty, trustworthiness, discipline) as assessed by respected representatives of the Nubi community, e.g. the Kenyan Nubian Council of Elders (KENUCE).³⁸ While I was in Kibera, a Nubi youth had been killed in a robbery and the event, the rumours around it and the question of where to bury him were prominent in several conversations among members of the Nubi community. Some people argued that someone caught (and killed) stealing or involved in other criminal activities would not be interred at the Kibra Nubian Muslim Cemetery. First and foremost, they insisted that a thief should not benefit from the free services offered by members of the community, such as washing the body at the mosque, praying for the deceased or a grave dug by volunteers (which can all be interpreted as practices to confirm the belonging even post-humously). Instead, the family of the deceased person would have to take the body to the Lang'ata Public Cemetery, where they would have to pay for these services.

In conversations with some of the Nubi elders, this economic argument was enforced by a second set of arguments with a strong focus on social sanctioning: In trying to uphold the image of 'the Nubi' as an honest, trustworthy figure, criminals were expelled from the community even after their death. Through their criminal actions, they had forfeited their right to be buried at Kibra Nubian Muslim Cemetery.

Access to the final resting place depends on the adherence to community values and norms. The cemetery is a *space set apart* in the religious sense, underlying religious rules for access. It is, however, also a *space set apart* in the sense that it is set apart for community members who prove worthy of being buried there. Additionally, it is a token to sustain a historical relation between the Nubi community and their ancestral homeland that is of central importance for present-day negotiations of land tenure vis-à-vis outsiders and competitors in the scramble for a scarce resource: space. In this regard, the cemetery is not only the outcome of a process of boundary-making but in turn also serves to negotiate the inner and outer boundaries of the Nubi community in Kibera.

Several authors have analysed African struggles concerning the questions of whether or not to be buried in one's (ancestral) home or where this 'home' is to be found.³⁹ In the article entitled "Burial and belonging", Susan Reynolds Whyte analysed the debate about the rightful burial place of women as the central (and final) negotiation of belonging. In the process, borders and relations between kin groups are drawn and re-drawn.

³⁸ In several conversations, the Chairman of the KENUCE, Issa Abdulfaraj, pointed out this code of honour, which is based on military values (Meetings with KENUCE 2011; 2014)

³⁹ cf. David W. Cohen and E. S. Atieno Odhiambo, *Burying SM – The Politics of Knowledge and the Sociology of Power in Africa* (London: Currey/Heinemann, 1992); Peter Geschiere and Josef Gugler, "Introduction: The Urban-rural Connection – Changing Issues of Belonging and Identification," *Africa* 68 no. 3 (1998): 309-319; Susan Reynolds Whyte, "Going home? Burial and Belonging in the Era of AIDS," *Africa* 75 no. 2 (2005): 154-172.

In quite a few cases, these negotiations not only serve to determine where a person finally belongs, but may have effects on who will own the land in the future. In the absence of formalized land tenure, graves on a piece of land serve as a proof of long-term residence and, in many instances, helps to attain customary rights to the land. The negotiations around the Kibera (Nubian) Muslim Cemetery are an example of the negotiations of ethnic belonging and the human-place relationship.

Conclusion

Based on the concept of 'sacred space,' I have outlined Lefebvre's concept of space as socially constituted rather than topographically given and as both prerequisite and outcome of social interactions, a view which is at the basis of re-conceptualizations of space in modern cultural and social sciences. Based on Durkheim's definition of 'sacred things' as 'things set apart', I have suggested to analyse sacred space as *space set apart*, spaces which are actively *made special* by members of the Nubi community in Kibera, Kenya. In doing so, I have questioned the use of approaches which depart from the category of the sacred (in the religious sense) in favour of a theory of spaces set apart, which allows to link religion to other larger social contexts such as ethnicity, belonging or the politics of space.

The empirical examples have shown the production of *spaces set apart* in inter- and intra-group negotiations of *belonging* against the backdrop of spatial scarcity in the densely populated slum. The wedding processions are an example of *space set apart* which drifts across topographical space. While this may make it seem futile, the vehement defence against intruders shows that the social delineations of *spaces set apart* are at times no less impermeable than a concrete wall. By applying the concept of spaces set apart to the wedding ceremonies, I have shown that the negotiation of belonging does not only happen at the outer boundaries of the Nubi community, but that access to space set apart also depends on gender, age and marital status, even within the ethnic community or kin group.

The example of the renaming of the Kibra (Nubian) Muslim Cemetery has shown how *space set apart* is not only the outcome of past interactions, but also enables or prohibits present and future ones, e.g. regarding the legitimization of the Nubi's claim on their homeland Kibera. On the one hand, the cemetery is a proof of the Nubi's particular historical belonging to Kibera, on the other hand, this belonging is negotiated in the event of death, especially when the deceased has acted against proclaimed 'community values'.

All the examples have underlined that space is much more than a topographical given entity or precondition. I have shown that conceptualizing 'sacred spaces' as *spaces set apart* opens a new perspective to research spatial practices and negotiations, which bridges the sacred/profane-binary and extends beyond the sphere of religion. In doing so, we can link the religious to other larger social contexts, co-existing in one and the same space. Studying the ways in which spaces are actively set apart sheds light on such phenomena as identity, community formation and belonging. In linking *spaces set apart* back to Lefebvre's concept of (social) space, we can analyze

them as a very special kind of social space, maybe the social space per se, which is simultaneously shaped by social interaction and shaping interactions.

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Tensions between Sacred and Political Spaces in Kenya, 1990-2007

Babere Kerata Chacha

Abstract

Over the last decade or so, one event has surprised observers of Kenyan politics—the increased participation of the clergy in the political sphere and their role in ethnic and electoral conflicts. This development presents an intriguing puzzle in the nature and dynamics of religion in Kenya. One might say that the traditional public spaces are irreversibly shrinking and collapsing. Even more so, the loss of secular engagement with the public or ways of spatial experience would definitely affect the role of traditional public space in building up a civic identity, and even destroy the very sense of ‘traditional Christianity’. Consequently, cultural factors such as ethnicity and religion have become more important in people’s search for fundamentals on which to build their hopes for the future. The paper examines both the sacred and secular spaces as sites of conflict: conflicting memories, conflicting values, conflicting interests, and conflicting narratives of place. I examine approaches and strategies of creating secular and public spaces in contemporary Kenya and conclude that ethnicity is propelled in Kenya through tensions that are continuously created between political and religious or sacred spaces.

Keywords: Sacred Space, Secular Space, Religion and Politics, Kenya, Prophecies and Elections

Introduction

In Kenya the sacred spaces have over the years increasingly continued to act as a site of political protest and/or compromise. There is the site—where the political gets its ‘visible presence’: “place within which political groups can stake out the territory that allows them to be seen and heard. Only by claiming space in public, by creating public spaces diverse social groups can become public. In this sense, public spaces are absolutely essential to the functioning of the democratic society” For instance, two cases can be used in support of this in Kenyan politics. First, a few years ago, one Edward Njoroge, a Managing Director of the national electricity company in Kenya (KenGen) was accused of engaging in ‘dirty electricity deals’ involving a grand corruption of 8 Billion Kenyan Shillings (78 Million US Dollars). It is alleged that instead of clearing his name in the public domain and/or at the anti-corruption authority, or even proving his innocence in court, he invoked the spiritual excuse by buying an expensive space in a local daily with his picture appended on the advert saying:

I have never made a single shilling over and above my emoluments at KenGen Company and these allegations are without basis and their sole intention is to tarnish my person and portray me as a corrupt public servant...I wish to thank those who stood by me in these trying moments, your prayers and good wishes have kept me going. Finally, I have been encouraged by the words of Jeremiah 15:20-21 which says ...I am with you to rescue you and save you. I will save you from the hands of the wicked and redeem you from the grasp of the cruel.

Indeed, the director was cleverly using public and sacred expediency, invoking religion as an excuse or a space for hiding. Whether he was guilty or innocent, the very incident of corruption in the public space suggests that it should be open and accessible to all, regardless of social or material status. Furthermore, the emphasis on a normative ideal of public space is centered at formulating a definition of 'common good,' and has its echo in longing for articulation of the principles of 'spatial justice.' In addition, a recent UN report indicated that members of the Mungiki (a criminal gang in Kenya) were turning into and masquerading as Christians to avoid police arrest. The report went on to say that they even go to the extent of getting baptized but later return to their old vices.

The second case is found in the International Criminal Court (ICC) politics in Kenya. Despite the fact that there is need for more complementarity between the ICC and African mechanisms for justice and peace-building, there has been a spirited cold war between the Kenyan politicians and the ICC. The accused who included the President, Uhuru Kenyatta and his Deputy William Ruto, had planned series of national prayer rallies across the country; thus finding a space for political mobilization in the sacred. In these circumstances, it becomes fashionable that rallies, become a space for convergence of political interest groups and clergymen. However, these prayer congregations often turned into platforms for political intolerance and spaces for propagating exclusivity, which are at variance with the fundamentals of the religion in which the meetings were called. The prayer rallies incite and promote siege mentality and curtail reconciliation as one author puts it:

In their quest to extend their political battles, politicians have hijacked religion. They have teamed up with some religious leaders who are easily coerced and bribed. They will change the message of holy texts on the sound of the shilling. It's unfortunate that they have chosen to pal around with politicians who spread hate and intolerance in a country that's still recovering from the effects of the post-election violence. If these prayer meetings were well intentioned, then by now we should have seen restitution of lost property and reconciliation of communities. On the contrary, what we have seen is a rallying call to marshal support for the ICC suspects to avoid accountability.

From the above case, therefore, we see that while the expansion of democratization and broadening of political space has provided new impetus for religious expression, the interplay of these trends becomes complicated with the increasing influence and implications of religious actors for democratic discourse, for constituency mobilization, and national cohesion. Kenya's reli-

giously diversified people make the process of nation-building very complicated and difficult. Consequently, the political sphere of Kenya is highly influenced by the religious one.

This paper therefore, explores the debates and the controversial subject of the increasing presence of religion in the public sphere to illustrate how religious diversity in Kenya has led to the modification of a clear dichotomy between the 'public' and the 'private' in everyday life, thus providing crucial and relevant insights regarding many of the complex aspects of the relationship between religion and the political space. Kenya is a secular state that separates politics and religion, attempting to confine the latter to the so-called private sphere. While in the global north, secularism has been associated with decreasing religious allegiances and the emergence of competing narratives for orientations, in the Kenyan context, we see continued religious commitment, intense revitalization activities and increasing religious pluralism and competition.

Consequently, I examine the current dynamics of Kenya's secularism and religious discourses and the multifaceted role played by religion in the context of political reconfiguration after the Moi regime. It points to how a hegemonic regime has limited the access of religious actors to the public space, and how the authoritarian enforcement of its assertive secular principle has exacerbated the relations between the government and religious communities. I argue that spiritual actors compete among themselves and with the government in defining political identities, constructing social imaginaries, legitimising moral economies and occupying public spaces, leading to increasing political and inter-religious tensions.

The sacred and the secular: Real and imagined

It is well established that religion has been a strong correlate of Kenya's political orientation for more than five decades. However, the precise analysis of its impact in the society depends on how one defines the public's degree of "religiousness" in Africa and Kenya in particular. According to Sindima, religion is the heartbeat of African ways of life, while to Mudimbe, it is a practice of 'cultural metisse' rather than the sentimental essence of a continent.

In examining the strength of Mudimbe's assertion, one quickly captures its evocative discussion of the politically significant ways in which African intellectuals as well as politicians practice their sacred spaces. Most important is his biographical passages on the narrative of one Rwandese priest and scholar – Alexis Kagame, the author of *Bantu-Rwandan Philosophy of Being* in 1956. Mudimbe shows how Kagame's practice as seminarian and then as an "indigenous clergy of Rwanda" served to challenge racism within the colonial seminary.

Kenya like elsewhere in Africa is no exception to what Lonsdale calls the African rule of energetic Christianity. Almost 70 per cent of its 40 million people claim to be Christians, and of these, 90 per cent do attend church regularly. So that, like other Africans, it is largely through religious ideas that Kenyans think about the world today. Religion and politics are topics that obsess them, whether in hotels, bars or bus queues. Hence, the role of religion as an organizational base for political mobilization does greatly colour and shape the final outcome of an election. Not only do candidates choose to make appearances in churches, synagogues, or mosques, but leaders of

such religious bodies can mobilize their worshippers through various means: encouraging members to register and vote; providing members with transportation to the polls; permitting voting guides to be distributed within the religious setting; and, publicly addressing political issues in the religious setting.

Does this confirm therefore, that Kenyans as well as politicians like many Africans are notoriously religious? While this may be true, how come a country so avowedly religious in culture be so badly governed? What happened that these people who Tshishiku Tshibangu calls 'incurably religious' could turn against each other and fight so bitterly in an electoral conflict, that almost tore the country apart? Was this an act that John Mbiti calls of 'religious concubinage'? Where people abandon religious spaces and seek the secular to solve their difference? Or does Christianity in itself seem to solve the fundamental problems that affect people?

In an address to the Annual General Meeting of the Kenya Church Association in London, Njonjo Mue admonished those wishing to understand the crisis of religious leadership in Kenya, to investigate the historical role that religion had played before the 2007 violence. He said:

In order to understand the role, the Kenyan Church played in the lead up to the 2007 General Election and what role it can play in the healing and reconstruction of the country after the widespread violence that followed the announcement of the presidential election results, it is necessary to briefly go back in time and examine the way the church has faced the challenges of each new political era. This will in turn help us in determining the way forward for the Church in post-election Kenya.

I take up this challenge in order to frame up a basis upon which we shall understand why the religious spaces unexpectedly played the role it did in the 2007 post-election violence. As discourses of Kenyan nationhood, it is generally agreed that religion is intricately woven into the fabric of politics and provides the compelling touchstone of legitimacy or the love of the ruler by the ruled. In such contexts, the structure of governance has tremendous impact on the modes of religious expression and religion cannot be conjured out of politics.

The sacred and the profane: The Moi era, 1978-2002

Despite the oppressive nature of the Kenyan state during the reign of Daniel Moi - precisely between 1978 and 2002 - religious leaders continued to advocate against the high level monopolization of political power by the ruling party, Kenya African National Union (KANU). This era seems to have created a class of radical clergy who sought to democratize the political space. These were for example, Catholic Bishop Ndingi Mwana-a Nzeki, Anglican Bishops Henry Okullu and Alexander Kipsang Muge, and Presbyterian Timothy Njoya, among others. Under the banner of the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK), the church was at the forefront in condemning the 1988 oppressive queue voting not only as unbiblical but also a travesty to political justice. These leading theologians viewed their mission of fighting Moi's dictatorial regime as part of the exercise of 'the prophetic ministry of judgment'. They took it as the obligation of the church to 'constantly remind people of the standard of righteousness and justice which alone

exalts a nation', as well as its duty to morally and practically support the state when 'it upholds that standard' while responsibly criticizing it or those in authority 'when they depart from it'. As such, the church acted as a conscience of the society and time and again, questioned the one party rule excesses from the pulpit.

For instance, when president Moi and his party KANU emerged victorious in the 1992 elections, which were fraught with serious electoral malpractices and preceded by ethnic cleansing of communities perceived sympathetic to the then opposition parties, the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK), Catholic and the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) clergy agreed not to congratulate the President and his party on their victory, instead they openly condemned him and prayed for peace. They promised to continue to fight for freedom, justice, peace and human dignity which they claimed were at stake. Inasmuch as the mainstream churches were united in condemning the excesses of the Moi regime, this was translated into a united political force by the parties of the moment. Thus by providing such attacks, the sacred seems to have renegotiated their identity when they found themselves in the dilemma to distinguish between the sacred and the secular. They had to forge their personal pragmatic strategies to test how such spaces felt, embodied, sensed and articulated within the Kenyan society.

The critical question is how did the church succeed in offering a sustained opposition to the oppressive Moi regime? Galia Sabar-Friedman attributes this ability to the stability of the foundation of the church as its source of power. He argues that, first, the church derived much of its power from the dense network of structures, bodies and organizations it had in virtually every social and economic sphere, that ensured its on-going physical presence among the people in their everyday lives through its religious services thus giving it an organizational distinctiveness. Its organizational web of contacts with peoples of all ages, classes, professions, ethnic backgrounds and localities gave it an unparalleled insight into the needs and mood of the people. Secondly, this same organizational web afforded it the means for the broad dissemination of its moral doctrines and social and political views. At times this two-way channel also served as a means of communication, via the church, between the people and the political elite, and vice versa. Besides, the church had at its disposal radio broadcasting, weekly newsletters and monthly newspapers and magazines that gave it considerable reach to the people. Finally, the church had the benefit of financial independence from government.

Such strength gave the religious a voice of the even when the country was a *de jure* single party state, to the extent that Moi exit from power had a great deal to do with the strengthened religious and civil society front.

Religious spaces and the Kibaki regime, 2002-2007

Mwai Kibaki became the third Kenyan president between 2002 and 2007. This period ushered in a new era in the realm of thin lines that separated religion and political spaces in Kenya in many fundamental ways. First, when Kenyans went to the polls on 27 December 2002, there was much at stake than the fate of the regime of KANU under Moi. For many Kenyans, it was an

issue of whether or not they could break KANU's 40-year hold onto power and to determine who would lead their country out of the crippling economic and political crises in which civil liberties such as free speech had been severely circumscribed. For the rest of Africa, it was a test case for lessons on whether and how a smooth and peaceful political transition could be made from decades of misrule under the hegemony of one political party towards democracy.

Indeed, as Kibaki's inaugural speech echoed, it was a historic moment for democracy in Kenya. These sanguine expectations of change crystallized in the political parties and individual compositions of the new ruling party called National Rainbow Coalition (NARC). When church leaders urged the new president to fulfil his elections campaign pledges – specifically to improve the economy, root out corruption and provide free primary education and affordable health care – Kibaki responded by saying: “You have asked me to lead this nation out of the present wilderness and malaise into the Promised Land. I shall do so.” With this promise the religious leaders in Kenya seemed to have relaxed their stance to Kibaki's regime, some say even compromised. Consequently, three years on, NARC party had fragmented, scattering with it the NARC dream of a more united, prosperous and less divisive Kenya. What happened to the Kibaki and the NARC vision? Three prepositions emerge.

Firstly, in the 2005 referendum on the new constitution, Pentecostals pushed for the rejection of a draft constitution proposed by President Kibaki because it permitted abortion under certain conditions and provided for special Islamic courts known as Kadhi. In alliance with Catholics and mainline Protestants, Pentecostals formed a new body called the Kenya Church to oppose the establishment of the Kadhi courts as envisaged in the proposed constitution. While most Pentecostals argued that the constitution should be secular, the Pentecostal Assemblies of God responded to the Kadhi courts provision by supporting a proposal for Christian courts in the constitution. Indeed, in June 2005, a coalition of Christian churches unveiled an alternative draft constitution, supported by most Pentecostal leaders, which excluded Kadhi courts.

Secondly, in 2003, the interfaith religious grouping identified as Ufungamano Initiative was launched an independent constitutional drafting process. The Christians in the initiative opposed the Kadhi courts provision in the new constitution. This was roundly condemned by Muslims who left in protest. In May 2004, 34 Protestant churches threatened to take legal action to expunge the Kadhi courts provision. The opposition of the entrenchment of the Kadhi courts in the constitution was as far as the unity of the Christians went. When it came to the decision of advising their adherents on how to vote on the constitution, both the mainstream Catholic Church and ACK asked their adherents to vote with their conscience. This came after the realization that their congregation was likely to consider ethnicity and the advice of the political class in voting. This is indeed what happened.

The public eventually voted against the draft constitution through a November 2005 referendum. Following this constitutional defeat, opposition leaders held a breakfast meeting with the Kenya Church bishops to celebrate. At an opposition rally in Nairobi, Pentecostal pastors lead the crowd in prayer. In August 2006, top representatives of KANU and the Liberal Democrat Party (LDP) officially registered a new political party-Orange Democratic Movement (ODM)-

which was composed of those who opposed the Kadhi courts, as a new political party to compete in the 2007 general elections.

Towards the end of 2006, the NCK (National Council for Churches of Kenya) comprising thirty-seven mainstream churches in Kenya, formerly a worthy, neutral and credible public watchdog, was accused of continued political partiality, soft stance and cooperation with the Kibaki government. Joining the bandwagon, the Kenya Catholic Episcopal Conference was also consistently accused of direct political support to the incumbent president Mwai Kibaki. In a report, one Obongo had commented:

NCK's recent omissions and commissions clearly suggest that the faith group's leadership has failed to exercise wisdom and restraint when commenting on issues relevant to the 2007 campaigns, thereby alienating sections of their members with different political preferences.

In conclusion as shown above, the active role of the sacred in public sphere was greatly reduced under Kibaki leadership. Compared to the Moi period, the Church-state relations in the Kibaki era were more complex. This complexity arises, not merely because since the post-cold war, liberal political structure had been more open and allowed the participation of a larger number of players from the religious field, but also because those involved legitimise their actions from a vastly expanded range of ideologies and knowledge systems: Christian theologies, often combined with ingredients of traditional religious and political repertoires. The second proposition is that as religious and political elites increasingly sought legitimation from each other, the religious and political fields become sites of shifting coalitions, where rival parties compete for ideological and material resources.

Tales of the two Gods and presidential campaigns in 2007

By mid-2007, it had become quite clear that religious forces would be a key factor in the 2007 Kenyan election. For one, the country was awash with crusades and other similar religious functions that are usually well attended. Parliamentary aspirants were seen all over the country attending church functions while conducting fund raising activities for religious causes. Recent scholarship has shown that struggles for political power in Africa have in fact entailed the manipulation of religious symbols and beliefs of both Islam and Christianity. Actors seeking political influence have used religion to gain popular legitimacy.

The relevance of this point for contemporary African states is important, especially when "elites believe that their positions are threatened they fall back on the religious element, emphasizing religious differences in an attempt to draw sympathy from those of their original faith. For example, Raila Odinga, a leader of the opposition party entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with National Muslim Leaders Forum (NAMLEF), which remained one of the contentious and prominent political issues during the 2007 election campaigns.

This MOU did not only raise concerns among the general public but also created unnecessary tensions as it played on old suspicions and stereotypes between Christianity and Islam. As revealed by this understanding, there were rumours and fears of a well-organized, orchestrated plan of transforming Kenya into an Islamic state, ruled by Sharia Law. Raila Odinga later clarified that the document was in fact, harmless. The MOU had pledged to set up deliberate policies and programmes to redress historical, current and structural marginalisation of Muslims in Kenya, once he was elected into the presidency. However, this MOU was denounced by the Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims (SUPKEM) as well as a section of Christian groups.

This association of the opposition with Islam had been used in the political front to divide the country along religious lines. For instance, Pentecostals and Evangelicals agreed to oppose this Islamic pact and six days later, on Nov 29 2007, a group of church leaders under the aegis of the Nyanza Religious Leaders, responded with a strongly worded two-page press statement saying:

As Kenyans head towards the general election, we as Nyanza leaders note with great concern the partisan involvement of a section of Kenya's religious leaders in the country's political issues. It is on this note that we express our disgust with our Nairobi based Evangelical brothers' attacks and unnecessary criticisms of the agreement made between NAMLEF and Odinga.

This issue threatened to further divide the country into various religious organizations and unfortunately, assumed ethnic and denominational dimensions. The catholic bishops from Maseno for example and Nyanza supported Raila Odinga and ODM, while those from central Kenya its environs supported Kibaki and his PNU party.

Frequently, church leaders often used civic education, prayer meetings and other occasions to openly campaign for their preferred parties and candidates. Against this backdrop, it is unsurprising that when the political crisis erupted leading to widespread violence in the wake of the disputed presidential election results, the Church struggled to find its voice. Church leaders could not rise above their partisanship to give the country a clear moral direction reducing the church to a helpless spectator in the emerging tragic drama.

Some analysts read this perception as a failure in moral leadership. Musambayi Katumanga holds that:

The churches were silent when we really needed them...we are harsher with our church leaders because they are the ones who are supposed to stick their necks out on questions of justice and honesty. That is their mission, and they have failed us.

In Summary, religion, ethnicity and economic issues, were among the factors that may have influenced voting patterns in Kenya's 2007 elections. In fact, religion appeared to be a swing or determinant factor, especially as many Pentecostal clerics caused a stampede in physically contesting for political positions in several constituencies.

Partisan politics and tapping of religious blessings

Between November and December 2007, not only did the number of prophecies about imminent catastrophes increase, but also the significant attention they received from the upper economic classes and the media, which traditionally scoffed at them. These prophecies included predictions of the tremors experienced by the country in July 2007, which were interpreted as God's judgment on the nation. There were also conflicting "prophecies" by prominent Christian leaders which predicted victory for various candidates. This was followed by special prayer and anointing of these people by the religious leaders, as God's choice for Presidency. For instance, the famous televangelist, Thomas Manton's prophecy became a reference book or political gospel and often read in Churches mainly in Central Kenya and part of the Rift valley. The prophecy read in part:

President Mwai Kibaki will be re-elected as Kenya's President on December 27, 2007. My Hand is upon him to produce continued development and reformation in Kenya over the next five years, says the Lord! Crime will be dealt with severely; and it will decrease greatly and even be eradicated in certain sectors in the coming season! I saw three Visions of clashes; the first conflict I saw was involving the Mungiki militia. I saw men in military uniforms going in against these criminals to foil them.

The famous prophecy in favour of the ODM party came from a renowned Kenyan preacher Theodhore Aluoch:

the Lord spoke very clearly that the ODM was endorsed by him, mandated by him to lead this Nation he did not say that they were to share it with a coalition - this coalition is man's plan. The Lord had already declared Mr. Odinga as his choice to lead this Nation, therefore there is no deals to divert the word of the Lord...Odinga will win and become the president fulfilling his prophecy, his word over this Nation, he watches over his word.

A decisive and most devastating prophesy that divided religious groups and voters among the Kalenjin was the (popular presidential aspirant) William Samoei Ruto's prophecy linking him with historical legendary known as Koitelesh Samoei and the future of the Kalenjin community in Kenya. It was rumoured that Ruto was a direct descendant of the great Nandi military strategist and leader. This myth was instrumental in understanding how Ruto was able to emerge as the foremost Kalenjin leader.

Here we can see how traditional African religion invoking prophesy and politics are interconnected—social classifiers, social mediators, social critics and thinkers step in to contest power and direct action and change. Often, the very centre of authority is challenged, resulting in cognitive-socio-political adjustments that force some shift in old cosmological hierarchies, or old paradigms, and the incorporation of new inventions and narratives. Myth-inspired diviners, prophetesses, prophets, and spirit mediums play these roles. Pluralism, diversity, and opposition are certainly contested and are present in traditional African philosophies and oppositional discourses.

Another enduring memory of the 2007 general elections was the widespread stories of prominent Kenyans visiting witchdoctors in Tanzania, Nigeria and Zanzibar. Witchcraft and other spiritual exercises are usually a symptom of two things: desperation to get something at any cost, even at the cost of flirting with evil and profound disempowerment in the face of injustice that has infiltrated the psyche and intimate relations. If this is the case, the reports about an increase in consultations with witchdoctors indicate that the Kenyan population is instinctively aware that its country is profoundly flawed, but feels powerless to identify the cause of the problem or feels that they are too intimately intertwined with the problem to obtain the distance necessary to examine or resolve it. According to Florence Bernault:

At the twentieth century's end, religion and magic constituted one of the most powerful rhetoric of political culture in Equatorial Africa. Public rumours depict sorcery as the most common way to achieve personal success, wealth, and prestige in times of economic shortage and declining social opportunities. Political leaders are widely believed to perform ritual murder to ensure electoral success and power, and many skilfully use these perceptions to build visibility and deference. In the domestic arena, familial and social conflicts repeatedly crystallize around accusations of sorcery, especially during times of sudden deaths or personal disasters. Permeating the entire social and cultural spectrum, magic stands today as an ambivalent force that helps promote individual and collective accumulation as well as control social differentiation.

Invocation of witchcraft clearly shows, as John Njenga Karugia has explained in a piece, that Christianity does not sufficiently tackle the fundamental problems affecting Kenya. Moreover, the problem emanates from Christianity's theological, cultural and historical roots. As Karugia points out, Christianity has no geographical affiliations with Kenya. He is impressively diplomatic about this when he says: "The problem is not Jesus Christ. No he is a nice guy, who lived in another time in another place and we have confirmed he is not suitable for our Kenyan politics and for our time." It therefore emerges that Christianity, like ethnicity, and even like witchcraft, are the proposed antidotes which the observer who diagnoses Kenya's problems must be willing to confront, at the risk of alienation by believers, career ethicists and the not-so-noble religious practitioners.

The use of prophecies as well as witchcraft demonstrates how political parties mobilized strategies, regional arguments and historical justifications to court particular regional votes as well as promises of succession, power-sharing and regional devolution of authority and resources to create a broad-based, multi-ethnic coalition. While many scholars have assumed that modernization and urbanization would diminish the role of beliefs in witchcraft, occult attacks and traditional healing. Contrary, people at all levels of postcolonial African societies not only use the language of sorcery to discuss public and private events, especially those involving the unjust, excessive, or destructive use of power, they practice it in both the sacred and even the profane.

Conclusion

Religious spaces can be a coveted space for political ambitions and or even manipulation. As have been shown above, use of sacred spaces for secular purposes in Kenya has been increasingly widening in the history of Kenya. Politicians use religious discourses in advocating and justifying violence. Ideally, in the face of structural violence, religious traditions ought to help a community to overcome the lust for power, control, and possession of material goods, which are the driving impulses of violence and violent systems. However, in this paper, we have identified several ways in which religion fuelled electoral violence. This shows how the religious space impinges on the political space in Kenya. By being silent in the face of the post-election violence, the religious leaders were seen to have compromised their role as moral vanguards in the country. However, there are many premises for such silence, namely, concern for the survival of their own communities. It could also be seen as helping their adherents feel satisfied in the status quo and also in their own material prosperity without a concern for the marginalized. Therefore, frequent participation in religious activities, however, thickens social networks that can be used for rapid and intensive political mobilization. Accordingly, Religious groups can be understood as institutions that shape their members' behaviour. Specifically, different types of churches provide their members with varying behavioural incentives for participation in religious activity, which in turn have systematic implications for participation in political activity.

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Making Sacred Places:

The Case of the Holy Meeting at the Junction of the Two Seas

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Abstract

This paper is about making sacred places in an Islamic context. With the assistance of modern sciences and technology, attempts have been made by Islamic scholars to locate certain places where important events have happened based on the narratives given in the Quran. The paper adopts the story of Moses, the messenger of God, meeting Alkhadir¹, the servant of God, at the junction of the two seas. It employs a comparative approach, to locate the meeting; the first location is in Sudan and the second in Egypt. The main purpose is to explain how and why sacred places are made. General results state that: sacred places are not a result of the manifestation of the Divine to the place, but a result of human agencies to sacralise places, driven by various social, economic and political factors.

Keywords: Sacred Places, Sacred History, The scientific miracles in the holy Quran, Islamisation of Knowledge, Islamic Tourism, Sudan, Egypt

Introduction

“Tuti the Junction of the Two Seas” is a title of a colloquy presented by Professor Jaffer Mirghani² at Tuti Island.³ The theme of the colloquy was to explain how Tuti is the junction of the two seas, where Moses met Alkhadir, a wise man God sent to Moses to reveal the secrets of the unknown. This theme was always mentioned in the discussions I had with different inhabitants on the island, during my fieldtrip, when I was conducting my doctoral research. The scoop was everywhere on the island, to the extent that I began to be curious about the significance of this issue to the local population. I wondered why people were so interested in finding the place where Moses met Alkhadir.

Subsequently, I started to conduct some research on the subject. After some time, I realised that locating the events of the meeting of Moses and Alkhadir is one of the huge debates among Islamic scholars. Different talk shows, newspapers, colloquies are devoted to this debate. There-

¹Alkhadir is known in Islam as a holy figure who received wisdom from God, and he appears to only the Muslim saints in their dreams and visions.

² The Director of: The Sudan Civilization Institute.

³ Tuti is a landlocked island, located at the junction of the Blue Nile and the White Nile to form the River Nile. It is also located at the centre of Greater Khartoum the Capital region of the Sudan.

fore, I decided to pick two cases and compare them, in order to gain a deep understanding of the issue. The first case is located in Khartoum, the capital state of Sudan and the second case is located in Sinai in Egypt. Beside my observation, that brought my attention to the topic in the first place, I used some archival material (e.g. old newspapers, recorded seminars, TV talk shows and radio material) to support my argument. I employed 'sacred place' as an analytical concept to understand how and why Islamic scholars are debating on locating an event that occurred in the past.

What is a sacred place?

Sacred is generally considered an adjective connected with a god or as a god on its own. It also refers to an object that is to be considered as holy, very important, and treated with great respect. In his book, *The Sacred and The Profane*, Eliade argued that the sacred always manifests itself as something completely different than our worldly order. Subsequently, the sacred is strictly limited to a supernatural act that is beyond the epidermal capacity, to display it.⁴ Therefore, a place will only be sacred if it manifests its sacredness to the orderly world. Eliade's definition does not accommodate the human agency, in making sacred places. It eliminates the human experience in sacralising places. Louis Nelson⁵ argued that a place can become sacred through the inscription of beliefs and practices, attached to socio-political identity, and subject to instability. He denoted the role of human agency in the making of sacred places. Therefore, I argue that: a sacred place is a space where different actors are involved in the construction of the intrinsic elements, which demarcate its sacredness. I will discuss how and why scholars use narratives to construct sacred places, focusing on human agency, and the social, economic and political drives, behind sacralising places.

How narratives make sacred places

Narratives can be sacred, if they are associated with strong beliefs. According to Martyn Smith,⁶ texts in different forms (e.g. oral tales, written histories), reflect perceptions and world views of different cultures, regardless of diversity, they all share the process of making 'meaningful places' through associating locations with culturally significant texts. Hence, to create a sacred place, is the effort of religious groups, making sense of places, by attaching meanings, drawn from a common sacred narrative.⁷ If these narratives preserve an unquestionable past, events that people believe happened, the past becomes a *sacred history*. Eliade asserts that: "The sacred history is preserved in the great myth."⁸ Myth can be seen as the early history of mankind. Early anthro-

⁴ Mircea Eliade, *The sacred and the profane: the nature of religion*, (New York, Harcourt, Barce and World, Inc. 1958) pp 10-11.

⁵ Louis Nelson, *American Sanctuary Understanding Sacred Spaces*, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 2006)

⁶ Martyn Smith, *Religion, Culture, and sacred spaces*, (New York, Palgrave Macmillan), (2008) p. 2.

⁷ Martyn Smith, 2008, p. 4.

⁸ Mircea Eliade, *Cosmogonic Myth and 'Sacred History'*, (Religion Studies, vol.2. No2 pp. 171-182, 1967) pp. 174 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20004652>

pologists and philosophers focused on the functional aspect of myth, which is providing explanations to the “primitive mind” about natural phenomena.⁹ And it is also seen as a justification for different social practices.¹⁰ However, as Eliade stated, myth always implies fiction¹¹; it is manmade corrupted by the worldly mind, a sacred history states more “facts”, although history can be subject to interest and subjectivism. But in general, or at least in the Islamic/Arabic contexts, the term myth contradicts the sacred history of Islam, and this is stated in the Quran, when Mohammed started to recite Qur’anic verses to the people of Mecca, they accused him of reciting the myth and tales of the ancients.¹² Therefore, in such context, where it is problematic to interlink the sacred history and myth, one might argue that the sacred history is preserved in the *great narrative*.

The most appropriate examples are the narratives of prophets and messengers, in the Quran. These stories are known as *Al-Qaṣaṣ*, and they play a huge role, in shaping Islamic teachings.

*We narrate unto thee the most beautiful of narrations by revealing to thee this Quran though thou was, before this, of those not possessed of requisite Knowledge (Yusuf 12:3)*¹³

This verse from the Quran is about God speaking to Mohammed, revealing the narratives, not only limited to, aesthetics of the narrations, represented by the miraculous composition, nor the morals and sermons they carry but also the fact that they revealed to Mohammed the unknown, exalting him from heedlessness to attentiveness. Hence, these narratives preserve the sacred history of Muslims’ cosmos, exciting from ignorance to enlightenment. Accordingly, the places, where these narratives happened are sacred, in the eyes of the Muslims, and can be detected and identified this day and age, via “modern sciences”.

The scientific and linguistic miracles in the Holy Quran

The usage of “modern science” to confirm what Qur’anic verses are loaded with, from knowledge, wisdom and sermons is known in Islamic doctrine as ‘the Scientific and Linguistic Miracles in the Holy Quran’ (*Ali’jaz Al’lmy wa Al-laghawy fi Al Qur’ān*). Many believe in it as a methodology that traces secular sciences and worldly knowledge to their “origins”, in the Holy Quran. Therefore, many scholars whether in Theology, Natural Sciences, Humanities, and Social Sciences devoted their time and effort to counter Qur’anic verses with all the scientific discoveries and inventions in the world. Many Muslim scholars strongly argue that the Quran is timeless and not limited to a particular place and it contains everything humans need in order to be on

⁹ Roger Silverstone, *Ernst Cassirer and Claude Lévi-Strauss: Two Approaches to the Study of Myth*, (*Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 21e Année, No. 41 (Jan. - Jun., 1976), pp 25. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30124111> (accessed 10.06. 2015).

¹⁰ Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion and other Essays*, (Beacon press, Boston), 1948, pp. 72-119.

¹¹ Mircea Eliade, (1967) pp. 171

¹² Maulawi Sher Ali, the Holy Qur’an, (Islamabad: Islam International Publication Ltd. 2004).

¹³ Maulawi Sher Ali, the Holy Qur’an, (Islamabad: Islam International Publication Ltd. 2004).

the straight path¹⁴. For instance, the French scholar, Maurice Bucaille, a medical doctor who introduced the idea of *the Quran and Modern Sciences* to many non-Muslim readers, made very controversial statements, on the accuracy of the Quran in depicting and predicting "Modern Sciences."¹⁵

With regard to making sacred places, different Muslim scholars belonging to different schools of thought, are constantly suggesting present-day places, where narratives in the Quran can be located. Depending on the description of landscape and landmarks provided in the Quran, they propose places to be considered as potential sacred places. These suggestions can be expanded by different scientists, who believe in the methodology of *the scientific and linguistic miracles in the Quran*, to use their field of expertise and prove the validity of theories, in relation to the demarcation of sacred places. For instance, geography, topography, history and archaeology are the most engaged sciences, in consideration of locating sacred places.

To elaborate more on my arguments in this paper, I will discuss the making of sacred places, through providing two different proposed places to locate where Moses and the wise man of God Alkhadir met, as narrated in the Quran. I will discuss the two cases separately and reflect on how and why these two places are of significance to the narrative and the relationship between them.

The narrative of Moses and Alkhadir in the Quran¹⁶

In this paper, the narrative of Moses meeting Alkhadir, the wise servant of God, will serve as an example of the sacred history. The next coming paragraphs are devoted to the narration of the story accompanied by the Arabic verses, the English translation and the exegesis.

Moses and Alkhadir's meeting is in Chapter 18 (*Suraht Al-Kahf*): Verse 60-82. The context of the story, according to the exegesis of ibn Katheer started when Moses delivered an impressive sermon, which deeply moved all the people who listened to it. Someone in the congregation asked: "O' Messenger of God, is there another man on earth more learned than you?" Moses replied: "No!" believing so since God had given him the power of miracles and honoured him with the Torah.

However, God revealed to Moses that no man could know all there is to be known, nor would one messenger alone be the keeper of all knowledge. There would always be another who knew what others did not. Moses asked God: "O' God, where is this man? I would like to meet him and learn from him." He also asked for a sign of this person's identity and this is how the journey of

¹⁴ Zakri Naik, *the Qu'rann and Modern Science: Compatible or Incompatible?* AHYA Multi-Media, <http://sunnahonline.com/ilm/quran/qms.pdf> (accessed 3.06. 2015). 2000. Also see, John Esposito, *Islam the Straight Path*, (Oxford University Press) 2005, pp. 27.

¹⁵ Maurice Bucaille, *The Quran and Modern Science*, (Dubai: Islamic Information Centre Dubai) 1995.

¹⁶This part is built upon the Narration of (Imam Ahmad Al-Hassan) (Al-Hassan Rajab 1430 Hijri) and from the correct Hadith by the companion Ubay ibn Ka'ab , and Al-Bukhary, and Al-Tafseer of Al-Hafiz ibn Katheer Al-Allama Al-S'ady ibn Abbas, and ibn Jareeh.

Moses to meet Alkahdir started. The following verses taken from the Quran are from the English translation of Maulawi Sher Ali.¹⁷ These selected verses contain the description of the place.

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَى لِقَتْلِهِ لَا أَبْرَحُ حَتَّىٰ أَتِلْعَ
مَجْمَعِ الْبَحْرَيْنِ أَوْ أَمُوتِي حُفْبًا ﴿٧﴾

And when Moses said to his lad, "I will not give up until I reach the Junction of the two seas or I spend years and years in search of it. (Al-Kahf 18:60).

In this verse, Moses already started his journey to find the place where he will meet the servant of God. He was accompanied by a young man who was not named in the verse but according to *Al-Hadith*¹⁸ the young man is called Joshua ibn Nun, who was believed to be the successor of Moses. He told Joshua that he will never get tired of searching for the junction of the two seas even if he will spend ages in searching for the servant of God. When they started the journey, they carried a cooked fish in a vessel.

فَلَمَّا بَلَغَا مَجْمَعَ بَيْنِهِمَا نَسِيَا حُوتَهُمَا
فَاتَّخَذَ سَبِيلَهُ فِي الْبَحْرِ سَرَبًا ﴿٨﴾

So when they reached the Junction where the two met, they forgot their fish, so it took its course through the sea and left. (Al-Kahf 18:61)

At this point, Moses and his companion Joshua reached a big rock where the two seas met and where they rested for a while. Moses slept, but Joshua was awake and saw the fish coming back to life, skipping into the water and going on its way. Joshua intended to tell Moses but when he found him asleep, he decided not to disturb and ultimately forgot to tell him. When Moses woke up, he didn't realise that the fish was gone, and they continued their journey forgetting the fish.

فَلَمَّا جَاوَزَا قَالَ لِقَتْلِهِ إِتَيْنَا غَدَاءًا تَار
لَقَدْ لَقِينَا مِنْ سَفَرِنَا هَذَا نَصَبًا ﴿٩﴾

So when they had passed [a distance], Moses said to his lad, "Bring us our lunch, we verily have found fatigue from this journey of ours. (18:62)

Moses and Joshua walked for a while before reaching a place where they were so tired and hungry. He asked Joshua to bring the cooked fish in the vessel to have a meal while they were resting.

¹⁷ Maulawi Sher Ali, *the Holy Qur'an*, (Islamabad: Islam International Publication Ltd. 2004).

¹⁸ Here I want to point out that the first hand narrator of the correct Hadith about the story of Moses and Al-Khidr was the Prophet's companion Ubay ibn Ka'ab, who is thought to be the ancestor of the Mahas people in Sudan who migrated to the central part of Sudan and most of them settled in what is known today as Khartoum.

قَالَ أَرَأَيْتَ إِذْ أَوَيْتَ إِلَى الصَّخْرَةِ قَائِلًا
تَسِيئْتُ الْهَوْتَ زَوْماً أَنَسِيئُهُ إِلَّا
الشَّيْطَانُ أَنْ أذْكَرَهُ ۖ وَاتَّخَذَ سَمِيئَهُ
فِي الْبَحْرِ ۖ عَجَبًا ۗ ﴿٣٦﴾

He [his lad] said, "Did you see when we took shelter at the rock? I forgot the fish, and none but Satan made me forget to remember it. And it took its course through the sea in a strange way. (18:63)

Joshua remembered what happened to the fish and he told Moses that he forgot to tell him, when they stopped at the rock, next to the junction of the two seas, the fish came back to life and jumped into the water, and he explained that this must be a deliberate act instigated by Satan.

قَالَ ذَلِكَ مَا كُنَّا نَبْغُ ۗ فَازْتَدَا عَلَى
أَقْرَاهِمَا قَصَصًا ۗ ﴿٣٧﴾

He [Moses] said, "That was what we were seeking." So they went back tracing their footsteps (18:64)

Moses told Joshua, that this is the sign from God that shows exactly where the servant of God is, therefore, they retraced their steps to the rock at the junction of the two seas.

فَوَجَدَا عَبْدًا مِّنْ عِبَادِنَا آتَيْنَاهُ رَحْمَةً مِّنْ
عِنْدِنَا وَعَلَّمْنَاهُ مِمَّا لَدُنَّا عِلْمًا ۗ ﴿٣٨﴾

So they found a servant of Ours, on whom We had bestowed Mercy from Us and whom We had taught knowledge from Our own Presence. (18:65)

When they reached the rock, they found a man who was described in the verse as the servant of God whose name was not mentioned in the Quran but the Hadith said that this is Khadir, and Moses asked to accompany him and they sailed off on a journey of knowledge attainment.

The narrative of the holy meeting is viewed as a supernatural and historical event and mentioned in a text that is in itself perceived as sacred. Therefore, locating this supernatural event geographically means that this site is a sacred place with mystic-religious characteristics. Islamic scholars and modern scientists, endlessly, want to find the location, where Moses and the servant of God met. Several sites around the world have been suggested, including locations in Turkey, Iraq, Morocco, etc. I will focus on the two most contentious sites, which are the junction of

the Blue Nile and the White Nile in Khartoum, the capital region of the Sudan and the Junction of Al-A'qba gulf and Suez gulf at Ras Muhammed in Sinai¹⁹ in Egypt.

The two locations



3 An aerial image of Tuti Island 2012²⁰

Between 1958 and 1969, there was a programme titled *The Holy Quran Studies*, broadcasted on *Radio Omdurman*²¹ by Professor *Abdallah Altayeb*, one of the most famous professors of the Arabic Language in Sudan and abroad. He gave a full exegesis of the Holy Quran. On one of the episodes, he expounded the journey of Moses to meet the servant of God. Precisely, he mentioned that the place where Moses met the servant of God is contested among the Ulama of Islam. Some said it is the junction of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic Ocean while others said it is the junction of the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. However, there is no evident agreement on where the place is, hence, it is all subject to speculation²². *Altayeb* made no mention of either Khartoum or even Sinai in this regard. Nevertheless, he is the one that initiated this discussion in the academia in Sudan.

¹⁹ An arid mountainous peninsula in northeastern Egypt that extends into the Red Sea between the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqaba. It was occupied by Israel between 1967 and 1982. In the south is Mount Sinai, where, according to the Bible, Moses received the Ten Commandments (Exod. 19–34).

²⁰ Faculty of Architecture, University of Khartoum, archives.

²¹ The national radio station of the Republic of the Sudan.

²² Abdallah Al-Tayyeb, *Suraht Al-Kahf*, Sudan Radio, 2009

The Sudanese scholar, *Jaffar Mirghani*²³ also published three articles on this topic titled, *Tuti the junction of the two seas*²⁴. Additionally, he gave a colloquy at Tuti Island in the year 2004, attributing it as a sacred place, where Moses met Alkhadir²⁵. In addition, Another Sudanese scholar, *Al-Nayyal Abdul Qadir Abu Qroon*²⁶, published a controversial book titled, *A Prophet from the land of Sudan*, giving a different interpretation of the story of Moses in the Quran.²⁷ He argued that, Moses was from the current northern part of Sudan, therefore, he is likely to have met Alkhadir at the junction of the River Nile with Atbara River in Northern Sudan. Although, he suggested a different location of the meeting, yet he wrote a controversial book that challenged the construction of history in Egypt, as I will explain later.



4 Sinai Peninsula²⁸

The second narrative about the place of the holy meeting points to *Ras Muhammed* in *Sinai*, Egypt. A recent archaeological and geographical study supported by satellite images (Photogrammetry), concluded that there are many landmarks in the topography of Ras Muhammed that is compatible with the description of the Quran²⁹. The five notable landmarks in the narrative are identified as follows: The first is the junction of Al-A'qba gulf and Suez gulf. The second is the first rock, where the fish jumped into the water. Then the second rock, where Joshua informed Moses about losing the fish. The fourth landmark is the strait - the path the fish took to swim into the deep waters. Finally, the pier where the ship was anchored to sail-off with Moses

²³ The Director of: The Sudan Civilization Institute.

²⁴ Al-Ray Al-Am newspaper 2000.

²⁵ Qais Ibrahim Tuti 2013.

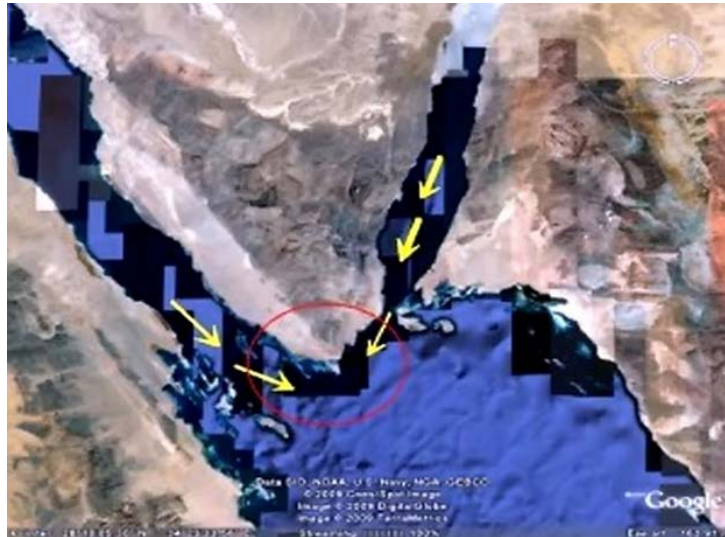
²⁶ A Sudanese Islam scholar and a jurist. He is also a former minister of legal affairs (1985).

²⁷ Al Nayyel Abu Qroon, *A Prophet from the land of the Sudan* (Beirut: The Arabic Institution for Research and Publication).

²⁸ https://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/otesources/02-exodus/coursematerials/exodus-maps/mapcolored-egypt-sinai.htm (accessed 05.06. 2015).

²⁹ Al-Youm Al-Sabay 2013 <http://www.youm7.com/story/2013/11/10/> (accessed 10.06. 2015).

and Alkhadir. The researcher *Imad Mahadi*,³⁰ who conducted the above research, confirmed that Ras Muhammed in Sinai is the place of the holy meeting.



5 An aerial view of Sinai Peninsula³¹

Islamic scholars and the Islamisation of knowledge

In both proposed places, Islamic scholars played an important role in locating the sacred history. According to them, the Quran is an encompassing source of knowledge. Subsequently, making sacred places can be seen, in this respect, as part of a big project to *Islamise knowledge*. The term Islamisation of knowledge can be defined as an intellectual movement that calls to implant Islam in the production of knowledge, and direct it towards providing an intellectual, cognitive and cultural alternative to the hegemony of the western civilization on the production of knowledge.³²

The International Commission on Scientific Signs in the Quran and Sunnah, one of the biggest Islamic institutions in the world, is strongly promoting their visions of connecting science with beliefs. They are targeting to incorporate approved researches in the curricula of different educational institutions and at different levels. They also believe that scientific signs of the Quran and Sunnah are the means to spread Islamic missionary to the far corners of the world³³. The first General Secretary was Sheikh Abdul Majeed Alzindani, one of the main pillars of the Muslim Brotherhood Movement in the world. The Islamisation of knowledge is at the core of their vision, as well being the means of consolidating their position in the Islamic world. The commission

³⁰ An archaeologist and member of the Arab Archaeological Association

³¹ <http://quran-m.com/quran/article/2858/> (accessed 13.06.2015).

³² Mahmoud Hamid Al Migdadi, Issues in Islamization of Knowledge, Man and Education, Revue Académique des sciences humaines et sociales, n° 7(2011) p-4.

³³ http://www.eajaz.org/eajaz/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=46&Itemid=70&lang=en (accessed 5.06. 2015).

organises endless events around the world, for example, conferences, seminars, talk shows among others and they coordinate with different research institutes and universities. Moreover, they provide grants and scholarships for different research projects as well as for students and individual researchers. They also support publication including books, journals, newsletters, documentaries among others. They get funding from different sources such as donations, *Awqaf* income and revenue generated from selling their products. However, the most significant financial support comes from the mother organisation, the Islamic World Association.

The commission has different offices around the world, including Sudan and Egypt. As a matter of fact, they mentioned in their evaluation reports that both Sudan and Egypt offices are very present and active in spreading their vision. The vibrant engagement on both Sudan and Egypt in the activities of the commission worldwide, displays the knowledge production patterns, which reflect the interpenetration of Islam in knowledge systems. Thus, the case of the first suggested location of the holy meeting in Sudan is a production of Muslim intellectuals in the frame of the scientific miracles of the Quran and how different doctrines argue and counter argue about it. They go on talk shows, public lectures or newspapers publications, scientific journals and books. Media is a very important factor. An informant, who lives on Tuti Island said, "the theory of the holy meeting exceeded the local context, when different Muslim scholars from Pakistan came to visit Tuti, in accordance with the place being mentioned by Sheikh *Abul Ala Maududi*"³⁴. Moreover, Sheikh *Abdul Majeed Alzindani*³⁵ visited Sudan and preached to the attendance in the mosque of the University of Khartoum, to disclose the ambitions of the Jews in the world, telling the audience that Khartoum is a target of the Zionists in view of the fact that it is mentioned in their manuscripts³⁶. *Amr Khalid*³⁷ had a television programme where he also mentioned that Khartoum is where the holy meeting took place. He visited Sudan and took a boat trip up to the junction of the Blue and the White Niles to experience the place. The researcher *Alfatih Osman Mahjub Ata Almannan* who wrote his doctoral thesis on, *The Jewish Crisis: The root causes and prospects for solutions*, conducted research, stating that Tuti Island is the rock where Moses met Alkhadir according to the Geological and Topographical studies, describing Tuti as a rock covered by silt.³⁸

Finally, another factor why Tuti Island is suggested is the local perception of the island. Tuti is associated with many popular Sheikhs of Islam in central Sudan (e.g. Sheikh *Khojaly Abo Aljaz*, Sheikh *Arbab Al'qaed*, Sheikh *Hamad Wad Maryoum*...etc.).³⁹ This history put Tuti Island in a central position in the spread of Islam in Sudan.⁴⁰ Therefore, people attributed meanings of sa-

³⁴ A well-known Muslim Scholar from Pakistan, who had several remarkable contributions to the Islamic world.

³⁵ One of the most famous Muslim scholars and politicians in the Islamic world, and one of the founders of the International Commission on Scientific signs in the Quran and Sunnah.

³⁶ Interviews, July 7th, 2013.

³⁷ One of the most popular Islamic preachers from Egypt

³⁸ Interviews, February 3rd, 2012

³⁹ Richard Lobban, *A Genealogical and Historical Study of the Mahas of the "Three Towns,"* Sudan, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (1983), pp. 231-262, *Boston University African Studies Centre*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/217787>, (Accessed: 24.04.2015)

⁴⁰ Richard Lobban, (1983).

credness to it predating the notion of this place as the site for the holy meeting. For centuries the successors of these sheikhs were engaged in researching the Quran and trying to understand the relation between its meaning and the surrounding world. Accordingly, many of the people believed that Tuti is a special place. People on the island say that their ancestors told them to take care of it, since it is a blessed place.

In conclusion, making Tuti Island a sacred place is associated with the political Islam in Sudan, especially, after the Muslim brotherhood took over power in 1989 and started to maintain their version of Islam in the Sudanese society. Furthermore, educational and research bodies in the country are vaccinated by Islamic epistemology and ideology. Therefore, making sacred places is a reflection of Ideological movements to empower Islamists, by controlling the production of knowledge and reshaping Muslim societies.

Religious tourism and sacralising places

Egyptian Muslim scholars are highly ranked in the Muslim/Arab world. They have a long history of engagement to the scientific miracles of the Quran approach. Besides, their research and publications in that domain are vast. However, I am interested in the ones related to the holy meeting, and the methods they used to locate the junction of the two seas.

*Abdul Rahim Rihan*⁴¹ prominently announced in the media that the archaeological location of the holy meeting was discovered. Although, I could not find any published scientific research or papers on the issue, it was in the headlines of the Egyptian news. Media provided coverage of the discovery, including several satellite images, published on different websites. Rihan highlighted that the linguistic characteristics of the word junction, do not apply to any other place in the world besides Sinai, since it is the only place where two seas blend into one (i.e. the Red Sea). He underlined that the noun 'junction' (*majma'*) differs from 'convergence' (*iltiqaa*), since it only means two water bodies meeting, but don't create another one, which reflects the linguistic miracles of the Quran and its accurate descriptions. In addition, he showed that the satellite images pointed out the location of the rock, where the fish was revitalised, and it is the only rock located in the centre of the route that leads to Ras Muhammed. Furthermore, the photogrammetry method used in the research, produced different images that project the five landmarks mentioned in Qur'anic verses.

For the Egyptians, Sinai has always been a sacred place because of several landmarks that represent the three heavenly religions.⁴² One of the most important landmarks is Mount Sinai or Moses's Mountain where it is believed that Moses received his commandments from God. The second landmark is the Sacred Monastery of the God Trodden, which is now registered by the UNESCO as a landmark in world cultural heritage. The third place is a collection of springs known as Moses' springs located in that area where Moses threw the branch to make the water sweet. All these places are considered as sacred with socio-cultural and economic values.

⁴¹ The general director of Archaeological Studies, research and scientific publication of Sinai.

⁴² The three heavenly religions are Islam, Christianity and Judaism.

The economic value of this case is related to the economics of tourism. Tourism is one of the most fruitful sectors in many countries in the world. In some countries, it represents the main source of income to the national economy. The case of Egypt is a good example where the economy depends heavily on tourism. However, the tourism industry in Egypt was seriously affected by the Arab spring.⁴³ Due to the insecurity, the number of tourists, from America and Europe dropped drastically due, in part, to violent demonstrations in addition to terrorist attacks committed against these tourists. As a response to the decline in the tourism sector, the alternative was to create a new market for the industry. The new proposal was to adopt the 'Islamic tourism' policy. The concept of Islamic tourism is explained by Abdulsahib Alshakry, which can be summarised as follows: to spread the Islamic culture and values, ensuring that the profits and benefits are in favour of Muslim societies and to enhance the Muslim identity to counter the negative image of Islam globally.⁴⁴ The most important aspect is to ensure the sustainability of the tourism sector, since, it is a huge source of income for Egyptian economy and without it the economy will decline. Nonetheless, Islamic tourism also has its challenges. As a matter of fact, European and American tourists are not interested in it and thus, intra-Arab/Muslim tourists are the prime targets of this policy.⁴⁵ Intra-Arab/Muslim tourism is a programme that mainly focuses on conservative societies, for example, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE, Turkey and others.⁴⁶

Islamic tourism can also be seen in the holistic sector of religious tourism which is not limited to Islam but covers different beliefs. In Egypt, religious tourism expresses the diversity of beliefs in time and space; including mosques, churches, cathedrals, shrines, tombs, pyramids, temples and castles. They are all sacred places with historical and religious meanings⁴⁷. These places carry different meanings for different beliefs. Hence, churches are important to Christians, as well as, the Egyptian state that sees them as a way of representing religious tolerance. Islamic shrines have different meanings to Shiites and Sunnis that can range from esteem to demonization.⁴⁸ Accordingly, all the landmarks related to the biography of Moses are important to both Jews and Muslims, since the Torah and the Quran narrate the biography of Moses, which has a strong impact in shaping the worldviews of their believers.

The case of Egypt is a clear example of applying Islamic knowledge in the economic sector. Generally, Muslim scholars contemplate that the appropriate knowledge to design policies is the knowledge that acknowledges the particularities of Muslim societies (*Ali'lm Alnaf*). The best methodology is to introduce Islamisation of knowledge approaches. They relate all the problems

⁴³ Al-Idary electronic Magazine <http://www.alidarimagazine.com/article.php?categoryID=43&articleID=1137> (accessed 13.06.2015).

⁴⁴ A. Al-Hamarneh & C. Steiner, *Islamic Tourism, Rethinking the Strategies of Tourism Development in the Arab World after September 11, 2001*. Comparative Studies of South Asia, African and the Middle East 2004,

⁴⁵ A. Al-Hamarneh & C. Steiner 2004

⁴⁶ *ibid*

⁴⁷ George H. Forsyth, *The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Church and Fortress of Justinian*, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 22 (1968), pp. 1-19.

⁴⁸ Mohamed Mostafa Amin Ali, *Religious Tourism in Egypt: A case study analysis*, The American University in Cairo School of Global Affairs and Public Policy 2013 (unpublished thesis).

of the Muslim to the fact that they are living in a predominantly western culture. Hence the knowledge system is controlled by western views and Muslims blindly follow. The western education system imposed on them is doing no good but enslaving them. Therefore, Islamisation of Knowledge is a means to liberate Muslim societies, henceforward, upgrading them from the darkness of ignorance to the brightness of awareness.

The relation between the two narratives

Ostensibly, the question that arises is whether there is any relationship between the two suggested locations? Did they just accidentally happen to be suggested, or is there any connection between the two of them. I argue for a connection between them. The obvious one is the contested relation between the two locations. Sudan and Egypt are always perceived as sharing the same Islamic doctrine and ideology. It has been reported on *Akhbar Misr* webpage that the Sudanese Minister of Awqaf,⁴⁹ *Muhammed Alyaquty* visited Cairo and met with the Sheikh of *Alazhar Alimam Alakbar Ahmed Alaayyb* to discuss the scientific, cultural and religious relations between the two countries. Both sides acknowledged the role of Alazhar in Islamic education in Sudan, pointing out that the majority of the Islamic schools of thought in Sudan have strong roots in the Islamic doctrine of Alazhar.⁵⁰

The historical background of the religious relation, between Sudan and Egypt dates back from the colonial era and the introduction to a controlled version of Islam. According to Shamil Jeppie,⁵¹ the colonial governors wanted to control the Islamic message sent by the Islamic teachers to the public. Consequently, they sent a considerable number of Islamic teachers to Alazhar. Due to many logistical and political matters⁵², *Alma'ahad Alilmy* (the Scientific Institute) was found in 1912 to modernise Islamic education in Sudan, henceforth, reducing the number of students going to Egypt for Islamic education. However, there was very strong influence and support from Alazhar regarding finance, curriculum and books creating what Jeppie calls "the Sudanese Alazhar."⁵³

Alazhar doctrine has continued to dominate Islamic education up to now, even after the transformation of *Alma'ahad Alilmy* to Omdurman Islamic University. There is still a strong influence of Alazhar as almost all Islamic doctrines are related to what is currently taking place in Alazhar. In this regard, Sudan is always conforming to Egypt. According to *Albaqir Alafif Mukhtar*⁵⁴, Egypt is considered as the gate of Sudan to the Arab world but at the same time there is a heated competition between these two countries on the history of the old civilisations in the region. The

⁴⁹ Awqaf, single Wagf, an Islamic practise to donate property via a legal institution for the public interest.

⁵⁰ Egypt News 2015

⁵¹ Shamil Jeppie (2011) "Educating Sudanese Ulama for colonial Sharia" in *Colonial and Post-Colonial Governance of Islam: Continuities and Ruptures*, ed. Marcel Maussen, Veit Bader and Annelies Moors, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press): 51-67.

⁵² financing the scholarships, and student coming back with controversial ideas against the British government

⁵³ Jeppie Educating Sudanese Ulama for colonial Sharia, 56.

⁵⁴ Albaqir Alafif Mukhtar, *The crisis of identity in Northern Sudan: A Dilemma of Black people with White Culture*, CODSRIA 2005.

Egyptians always claim that the Nile Valley Civilization was founded north of the valley, but recently many archaeologists are deconstructing this theory and bringing an alternative that says the Nile Valley Civilization was founded south of the valley.⁵⁵ Of course, this theory has been vigorously rejected, since the entire history is constructed on the premise of a Northern cradle of Egyptian civilisation, consequently, deconstructing it means deconstructing a nation. From this point, any suggestion challenging conventional history is debated and even prohibited. To claim that the junction of the two seas is in Khartoum, challenges the whole idea of where the events of Moses' life took place and by implication, contesting the very nature and genesis of Egyptian civilization. Moreover, it also challenges their socio-economic identity as being the country of the Pharaohs, which is one of the main pillars on which the tourism industry in Egypt is built.

Therefore, there is a constant battle on the media front, academic platforms and religious discourse to refute contrary opinions. The general director of Archaeological Studies, research and scientific publication in Sinai, is requesting officials from the Ministry of Tourism to organise sightseeing trips to visit the location at Ras Mohammed. This request can be seen as an attempt to establish the discovery of the place, and to make it an inevitable fact. Accordingly, the process of making Ras Mohammed a sacred place will not be limited to making the place - it extends to experiencing it, which gives the location in Egypt more credibility than the location in Sudan.

Conclusion

In summary, the main argument of this paper is that the human agency plays a huge role in making sacred places. Different social, economic, and political motives stand behind sacralising places. The main actors in this paper are the Islamic scholars. They use the narratives in the Quran as a fundamental reference to demarcate sacred places. These narratives are events Muslims all over the world believe they happened in the past, hence, they are the sacred history of Islam. The making of sacred places in both the case of Sudan and Egypt can be understood in the framework of the Islamisation of Knowledge. The Islamic scholars use the methodology of the Scientific Miracles in the Quran and Sunnah, since they believe it is the most authentic way to produce knowledge that acknowledges the particularities of Muslim societies. However, different interests are, obviously, main drivers behind making sacred places. Controlling the production of knowledge by implementing the Islamisation of Knowledge approach is a way to "liberate" Muslim societies from the hegemony of the western civilization. Moreover, Islamisation of knowledge is also a way to ensure the spread of Islamic teachings worldwide. In addition, the Islamic tourism is one of the applications of Islamising knowledge, in order to act as an alternative to the mainstream tourism, which includes many practices not acceptable by Islamic teachings. Finally, these two cases demonstrate the main argument about the role of human agencies in making sacred places.

⁵⁵ David Edwards, *The Nubian Past, Archaeology of the Sudan*. (London, Routledge) 2004.

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The Spatial and the Social Organization of Qur'anic Schools in Jebel Marra, Sudan

Bakheit M. Nur Mohammed

Abstract

The question of how students learn in the social context of Qur'anic schools has not yet been properly researched in the field of the anthropology of Islam. This article intends to investigate the spatial and the social organization of the Qur'anic schools among the Fur in the Jebel Marra area in Sudan. I argue that the general socio-cultural setting within which the Qur'anic school is situated defines the personality of the Qur'anic school graduates (*fuqarâ*, sing. *fakî*). The wider socio-cultural context is more crucial than the content of the learning i.e. the Qur'an, in shaping the attitudes and mind-sets of the learners. To substantiate this argument, I provide a thick ethnography of the spatial and social arrangement of the Qur'anic schools among the Fur.

Keywords: Qur'anic Schools, Sacred Space, Learning, Social Organisation

Introduction

The current global hegemonic discourse on terrorism has influenced not only publics' but also scholars' perception of the space of Qur'anic schools¹. Departing from this hegemonic representation, which only brings images of fanatic Jihadists and militant Islamists, this article introduces a different style of Islamic education in which the Qur'anic memorization is not only considered as religious activity but also as socio-cultural practice. As Muslim societies are diverse, the organization, the methods and the content of teaching and learning vary to a certain extent from one society to another.² I argue that the general socio-cultural setting within which the Qur'anic school is situated defines the personality of the Qur'anic school graduates (the *fuqarâ*, sing. *fakî*). The wider socio-cultural context is more crucial than the content of learning i.e. the Qur'an, in shaping the attitudes and mind-sets of the learners. This article intends to investigate the spatial and the social organization of the Qur'anic schools among the Fur³ in the Jebel Marra area⁴ of

¹ Clyde Ahmad Winter, "Koranic Education and militant Islam in Nigeria," *Revue Internationale de l'Education*, 33 no. 2 (1987).

² Rüdiger Seesemann, "Where East Meets West: the development of Qur'anic Education in Darfur," *Islam et société au sud du Sahara*, Band no. 13 (1999).

³ The Fur live in many places in the Darfur Region but Jebel Marra is considered as their traditional homeland. They are basically farmers subsisting on agriculture but they also practice other activities such as cattle herding, trade and orchards. The Fur speak their own language which is also called "Fur". Most of them communicate with their

Sudan. The Qur'anic schools in this particular Muslim society are local educational institutions for Qur'anic memorization and for acquiring Islamic principles, which are considered essential for the membership in this society. The paper examines how the Qur'anic schools start and gradually develop as learning milieu. These schools occupy prominent religious and social roles in the Fur society because religious knowledge disseminated to the society through them. In Jebel Marra there are two types of Qur'anic schools in which students learn the Qur'an. These schools are the *sôm* and the *masîk* which together equip students with Islamic knowledge. The later school is attended by both girls and boys while the former one is exclusive to boys. In this article I will ethnographically describe the learning sessions that are held in both schools explaining how students memorize the Qur'an. In addition, I will discuss the social relations and organization of the process of learning and other daily activities among students on one hand and students' relationship with the schoolteacher.

It is important to note that the Qur'anic schools in Jebel Marra are independent from the state educational system and policy. In this regard, I will descriptively discuss how these schools function as learning institutions without having connections with the government educational system. Furthermore, I will discuss how students afford their living expenses highlighting some activities and handcrafts that students learn and pursue in the Qur'anic schools for support.

The *sôm*

Sôm is the Fur word for the Qur'anic school but recently some people use it broadly to refer to any form of schooling including the secular one. For the period of apprenticeship in the *sôm* the Qur'anic student is called *majir* or emigrant (the term derives from the Arabic word *hijra* which means migration). This is because students leave their home villages and migrate in a quest for Qur'anic knowledge.

The *sôm* is initiated and established by the *fakî* (the teacher) who has memorized the entire Qur'an and learned other associated knowledge such as mnemonic techniques. These techniques guide students to memorize the Qur'an easily. This Qur'anic school is constructed in a space where natural resources such as water, firewood, and fertile land for agriculture are abundant and easily accessible to students. Thus, the rich quality of space attracts people to transform it into the secure and stable place of learning. It is built in the outskirts of a village or separately in a distance of about two to four kilometres. Before the establishment of the *sôm* the *fakî* takes permission from the *omda* (the native administration leader) who governs a certain territory. He gives the *fakî* a piece of land under his administration on which the *sôm* is constructed. For the *omda* it is a great pride to have the Qur'anic school in his territory. It is regarded as something

neighbors in the Arabic language but many in Jebel Marra do not speak Arabic at all. Religiously, they are homogeneously Muslim.

⁴ This article is based on ethnographic data that I collected in Jebel Marra in 2013 and 2014 as part of my PhD project. The methods of data collection were interviews and group discussions with students, teachers, parents and primary education authorities. I also used participant observation to cover areas that cannot be handled by interviews and group discussions.

that gives him more power and prestige. Because of his religious knowledge, the *omda* will consult the *fakî* on some judicial issues such as marriage, divorce and division of inheritance. These issues are settled in accordance with Islamic law, which is part of the *fakî's* religious knowledge. Moreover, the *fakî* and his students might be expected to offer spiritual protection through performance of Islamic rituals against the *omda's* potential enemies when there is need to do so. Consequently, the *omda* usually expedites action on the *fakî's* proposal by granting him a piece of land for the school. The school is then built in a form of a village although huts built in the school compound are smaller than the ones in the villages.

The inhabitants of the surrounding villages help the *fakî* construct the mosque and the guesthouse, which are considered the most important parts of the school. The mosque and the guesthouse are common properties and used by the public. These buildings are constructed from local materials such as stones, millet or *borong* (native plant) straw and wood. The roofs are sometimes covered with corrugated iron instead of straw. The guesthouse is for those who frequently come to visit either the *fakî* or their sons who study in the school. The villagers also assist the *fakî* to build his own private compound where he lives permanently with his family members and sometimes even with some of his close relatives. His homestead is large; it includes huts for his wife/wives, children and relatives. The married relatives construct their own private houses close to the *fakî's* one. Their grown daughters as well as the *fakî's* get married to students who finished their study and stay in the school. However, the sons marry either from the neighbouring villages or from their original homeland if they want to marry a member of their relatives. Therefore, the Qur'anic school develops both as a learning milieu and as a village (social community) simultaneously. As reward for his teaching, the schoolteacher receives no payment; however, students help him do his various activities. Using Tuan's concepts of "space" and "place", the mundane space now has been transformed into a religious space, since people constructed on it the buildings that endow the place with value of Qur'anic education⁵. As abstract space became learning place, students get to know and are attracted into it through its spatial and learning values.

The *fakî* starts the school with a few students and then the number increases based on his reputation and on the availability of the resources needed for students to be accommodated. A place with permanent running streams and forest attracts a large number of students because of easy access to water and wood for constructions. The average number of students range from 20-100 learners or even more. They come from different places within the Fur region. However, the number of students in any school is unstable because of continuous movement of students from one school to another. The big school, which has about hundred students or more, is divided between 4-5 administrative units. Each of these units is managed by an advanced student who is entrusted by the *fakî* to run the unit on his behalf. The administrators are nominated by their younger fellows for the position according to their qualifications, and wisdom in dealing with others as well as good social reputation. The main responsibilities of the unit administrator are to closely supervise younger learners who are under him by dictating to them Qur'anic texts, by

⁵ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1977).

revising as well as correcting those texts. He also resolves some social problems on an ad hoc basis within his unit and reports the difficult ones to the *fakî*. For example, a minor quarrel between students is normally settled by the unit administrator. The issues that concern with morality such as adultery, however, are reported to the *fakî* for settlement. The unit administrator also has the responsibility of informing students about any communal work they are expected to do in the school. In this school, students' ages vary from 6-40 years approximately. Some of them are married and living with their families permanently in the school.

This Qur'anic school is exclusively attended by boys who are allowed to migrate to seek knowledge from remote places leaving their families behind. The purpose of the migration is to devote more time to learning away from families and in a quiet atmosphere. In his study about Qur'anic schools in Darfur, Abdul-Jalil states that there is a strong belief among inhabitants that a student will not succeed in acquiring knowledge unless he travels away from his family. This thought can be analysed in connection with the fact that children in a rural family work as part of the family's labour force. They participate in all agricultural activities, animal husbandry as well as house work⁶. All these activities are believed to distract children from fully concentrating on their studies as a result of which, families urge them to migrate so as to focus more on learning. This is why a Qur'anic student is called *majir* (emigrant) as he migrates to seek knowledge from faraway places. The idea of migration, however, goes far beyond the seeking of religious knowledge; it includes general knowledge and life experience. For example, in each place students usually learn something new concerning cultivation, new crops, crafts and so on. In addition, students learn how to deal with different circumstances of life as each place has its own difficulties and simplicities. This general knowledge about life in various areas makes students relate about the difficulties of the learning environment in a school, negotiate with each other and decide where to spend each of the four seasons of a year. This decision is made in accordance with the information they collect in the course of migrations, or received from colleagues. In this regard, there is a proverb, which is frequently uttered by students emphasizing this idea. It reads "*shaq al-diyâr 'alim*" which literally translates to "the penetration of homes is knowledge". This simply means visiting different places is learning in itself as students usually learn new skills as they travel around.

When a pupil newly arrives at a school he informs the *fakî* about his arrival and interest to learn from him. Then the *fakî* shows him where to construct his hut. The students build their huts from local materials. The wall is built using stones and mortar while the roof is built by wood, *borong* straw or millet stalk. Sometimes the rich students cover their buildings with iron sheet. Usually brothers, relatives and those who come from the same area live together in one hut or house depending on their number. Generally, 2-4 students live in one hut. However, the advanced student who supervises the younger pupils, lives alone in his own hut but they eat together and share everything they receive from their relatives back home. Thus, the whole group functions as a household in doing various activities of daily life. The structure of a *sôm* is comparable to the village one that is composed of a number of houses in which 2-4 huts are construct-

⁶ Musa Adam Abdul-Jalil, "Khalâwî Dârfûr: Dirâsah fî Wathâyifiâ wa Khalfiyatô al-Ajtimâ'yya," *Annual Journal of African Studies Center*, 34 no. 4 (1996): 70-71.

ed in each compound. Therefore, some people call it *majirang ellî* (the village of the Qur'anic students). Each compound is made up of roughly 2-4 huts and it functions as a learning place. This place is managed and supervised by an advanced student. Therefore, all students of the school do not congregate in one place as a group to memorize as they do in other parts of the Sudan but they gather in a number of small groups instead. In other words, each household has its own fireplace inside the yard where members of a group gather to memorize the Qur'an every night. Therefore, the household serves as a learning place within the wider learning community of the school.

On arrival at the school, the fakî orients students about conducts and instructions such as good behaviour and morality to follow during their stay in the school. Smoking cigarettes and taking snuff is not allowed in the school and is also seen as one of the bad habits students should not indulge. For instance, tobacco plant from which cigarette and snuff are made is looked upon as devilish and hence *harâm* (forbidden religiously). Drinking local beer made from millet flour is not allowed too. Nevertheless, when they draw comparison between smoking, snuffing and drinking beer, they look upon cigarette and snuff as more sinful than drinking beer although there is no verse in the Qur'an prohibiting the items. But the prohibition of drinking beer is clearly stated in the Qur'an and therefore is sinful. Students justify the underestimation of the millet beer's prohibition by saying that the prohibited beer which was mentioned in the Qur'an is the one which is produced from date and not the beer made from millet flour. Therefore, prohibiting millet beer comes from its comparable features with the beer that is mentioned in the Qur'an. In contrast, it is perceived that the tobacco plant was originally grown from the devil's urine. Therefore, it is religiously polluted, sinful and prohibited in the school since it was grown from the urine of the most evil creature—the devil as it is perceived by students. As the state of impurity is believed to cause danger,⁷ the fakî tries to keep his school *tâhir* (pure). Unlike the Qur'anic school, the village as a secular place tolerates the consumption of beer, cigarette and snuff. The Qur'anic school, therefore, strictly ban these prohibited substances because they are perceived to desecrate the sacredness of the Qur'anic learning milieu. The purity and reputation of the school is maintained through the ban of religiously prohibited substances.

The school does not exist in every village, instead a number of about five to ten villages share one school located at the midway between the villages. It is not attended by students from these surrounding villages but by students coming from faraway places. The students who live in nearby villages attend other schools which are located far from their parents to avoid distraction. The school has no bureaucratic administrative procedures for the enrolment of the students. The students freely join the *sôm* any time they want to and they are free to leave the school to another one or to end their study as well. In a similar stand, Eickelman elaborates that students become known as such through their comportment and acceptance by persons in the community of learning, not through any formal procedures. Each student is free to discern those persons and ideas that are relevant in the community of learning and also decide to create a con-

⁷ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: an Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London & New York: Routledge, 1966).

stellation of effective social ties with which to function⁸. Occasionally, some fathers may accompany their sons in their first journey to school. In this case, if the father asks the *fakî* to take responsibility of his sons by teaching and supervising them closely then the students will consider this *fakî's* school as their base and hence spend at least one season in it each year. When there is need for travel they have to give a reason for which they get permission from the *fakî* before leaving. Once they come back to the school they have to report to the *fakî* about what they have learned in other places throughout their journey. It is very rare to find a student who permanently stays in one school to memorize the whole Qur'an.

Students usually do not live permanently in one place but they move from a school to another for a variety of purposes and motivations. In this regard Abdul-Jalil⁹ states that, the students move from one school to another for many different reasons. For instance, some students escape from certain challenges specific to a school. If there is insufficient food for subsistence or if they quarrel with one of the inhabitants who live in proximity, they decide to move to a different area. Other students leave a school to another when they feel that they have learned enough from the *fakî* and they need to continue their study with another *fakî* who may be more sophisticated in another field of Qur'anic learning. Sometimes a student is forced to leave the school if he committed a wrong such as adultery or stealing; therefore, the *fakî* expels him from the school to keep its good reputation¹⁰. Alternatively, the student who is convicted of a wrong may voluntarily leave the school for another one in order to avoid harassment from victim's relatives or his colleagues. Usually, most of the petty immorality and disputes between students in a school are settled by the *fakî* in collaboration with his assistants who run administrative units within the school. But if students commit a fault in the surrounding villages, the issue is settled by the village *sheikh's* or *omda's* court that is located in the village where the fault was committed. However, a crime like homicide is brought to the public court and settled there. During my fieldwork, however, I never heard about any case of murder committed by a student in the Qur'anic school in recent years.

As I stated before the major reason behind migration among students is knowledge seeking from various *fuqarâ*. Habitually, before making a decision to move to another school, a student makes inquiry about the quality of life and the *fakî* in the proposed destination. Thus, the migration decision is informed by the spatial features of a place having abundant resources for subsistence as well as the *fakî's* merit of being sophisticated knowledgably. These are the experiences that make a particular Qur'anic school a meaningful place and, in turn, influence students to choose it as their learning destination. When he decides to move, he gives his hut to someone else who may need it during his absence. If he comes back to the same place again he then renovates his hut and lives in it. Some students have huts in more than one school; therefore, they spend, for example, autumn in one school and summer in another one. This movement gives students an

⁸ Dale F. Eickelman, "The Art of Memory: Islamic Education and its Social Reproduction," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 20 no. 4 (1978): 499.

⁹ Abdul-Jalil, Musa Adam. „*Khalâwî Dârfûr: Dirâsah fî Wathâyifiâ wa Khalfiyatoâ al-Ajtimâ'yya*, 70.

¹⁰ Musa Adam Abdul-Jalil, "Khalâwî Dârfûr: Dirâsah fî Wathâyifiâ wa Khalfiyatoâ al-Ajtimâ'yya," *Annual Journal of African Studies Center*, 34 no. 4 (1996): 72.

opportunity to do social networking all over the Jebel Marra area or even beyond it. Thus, they know many people from different villages and areas, which they encounter during their journeys. Sometimes, it happens during the migration that a student falls in love with and marries a girl in one of the villages and finally remains there. Apart from learning, migration shapes and reshapes social relationships between people accordingly.

Learning sessions in the *sôm*

The Qur'anic memorization, the mnemonic techniques and esoteric science jointly form the curriculum in the Qur'anic school. These three forms of knowledge set up the foundational base on which the Qur'anic schools stand in the Fur society. Students learn these simultaneously. Any activity related to Qur'anic learning whether recitation or taking dictation, must be preceded by performing Islamic purification ritual of cleaning genital organs and anus with water. When a person urinates and defecates, cleaning oneself with a material object alone is perceived not enough to remove the polluted substance from the body unless he washes off. The purpose of this purification is to repel the devil from the surroundings and ensure successful memorization. It is believed that those who are polluted, unless cleaned, are accompanied by the devil. The devil is perceived as a main enemy who prevents students from learning and encourages them to actions intended to divert their attention from learning. When someone feels lazy or sleepy during recitation periods, the devil is accused of preventing him from studying. In this sense, the devil is treated as an entity of which students should always be careful. Therefore, the recitation at all times starts with the prayer "I seek refuge in God from the cursed Satan" followed by a second phrase "in the name of God the most gracious the most merciful." The later phrase is also written at the beginning of each text inscribed on the wooden tablet as well as at the beginning of each Qur'anic chapter but one. This is the repentance chapter and because of not having the phrase in its beginning, the chapter is perceived as dangerous and students must sacrifice a pigeon before start memorizing it. The most important tool used in the Qur'anic memorization is a wooden board called *lôh* and it is made by a professional carpenter. Each student has *lôh* on which he writes the Qur'an using a sharpened pen made from *tôs* (plant). For writing purpose, students use *dawâi* which is an ink made of a paste of soot and gum mixed with water.

In this Qur'anic school three sessions are held daily with the exception of the Thursday which is a Qur'anic school holiday. The sessions are divided as before dawn, after mid-day prayer in the afternoon and in the evening after sunset. The later session is regarded as the most important one and every student must attend it. Since there are no sessions on Thursday,¹¹ students regard

¹¹ Thursday has been nicknamed by students as "mother's child", and it is contextually used to mean brothers who share one mother and have strong emotional bonds as they grow up together in one house. The nickname connotes the whole day happiness that the students enjoy on the Thursday. Friday is nicknamed as "father's child" and it means, in this sense, brothers who share one father and grow up in different places, therefore, emotional connections between them is not strong. Thus, the nickname denotes the half-day happiness of Friday. When we look deep into the Fur cultural context, the relatives from matrilineal line are more closely related to each other than the relatives from patrilineal line. The mother is always close and connected to her children than the father. Thus, the happiness and excitement from matrilineal line is higher than happiness from patrilineal line. This is why Thursday, on which the

it as the happiest day on which colleagues and friends habitually get together to chat, hang around outside the school and exchange news as well. The holiday ends after the Friday prayer by which students resume memorization of the Qur'an.

A normal school day starts before dawn with every student reciting the Qur'an as the first session of learning. In this session, students congregate around an open fire in the compound of their residence. This session stops when the call for the Morning Prayer is made because the students have to start preparation. They start by performing ablution and then go to the mosque to perform their prayers which are led by the *fakî* of the school. After the prayers students eat breakfast. When breakfast is over, students carry their wooden slates and scatter under trees outside the school to resume the morning session, which on average continues until 10 am. During the morning session, those who memorized their assignment wash off one side of the slate to take new dictation from either the *fakî* or the advanced student depending on their levels of memorization. The *fakî* dictates verses to about ten students who are in different stages and chapters at the same time. The advanced student on the other hand, does the same but with the less numbers. For the purpose of dictation, students sit down on the ground or on a mat facing the *fakî* or the advanced student who tells each one of them different verses to write on their wooden tablets. While a student writes the verse that he has been told, the *fakî* tells another student a different verse to write down on his slate and this continues until each student gets a verse to write. Therefore, he works with all students simultaneously. At the end of the dictation, the *fakî* revises each text on the tablet to make sure that every single word in the text is written correctly. Following this, some students then go to a nearby valley or well to fetch water.

By noon, students normally eat porridge with sauce and drink tea prepared by them. At mid-day, some students engage in some activities such as making hats, saddles, twisting ropes, trading and many other activities. Students are also involved in poultry, breeding pigeons and chicken for sacrificial purposes and for their own consumption. Some students also raise some domestic animals such as goats and sheep for income generation. Furthermore, they keep donkeys and horses for transporting their belonging during journeys. The students take a siesta at mid-day before they continue recitation for the afternoon session. In the afternoon session, they again sit under the shade of trees and on the hills nearby the school. This session starts around 4 pm and continues for about an hour and then students stop for a while to go and collect firewood, especially those who do not have electricity in their school. The last and most important session is the evening meeting which starts after sunset. All students attend this session and it lasts until about 10 pm. After that students will prepare the supper and eat before going to bed and this mark the end of the day. The students congregate in small groups to recite only in the evening session because they have to gather around the light or open fire. During the daytime, they recite separately outside the school under trees except beginners who need close supervision. However, recitation and learning generally does not take place only in these three sessions. These are

students enjoy themselves the whole day, is nicknamed as "mother's child" while Friday on which students enjoy themselves only half day is nicknamed as "father's child". Wednesday, which is an eve of holiday, is nicknamed as "aunt's child", which connotes that the weekend is approaching. The aunt here is the mother's sister who is always expected to be close to a mother and her children.

only the formal sessions which are hugely attended by almost all students in the school. The students who are highly motivated study in different periods at mid-night, early morning and during noon or any other time.

It is observable from ethnographical description of the learning sessions that the fireplace and tree-shades are important places in which sessions are held. Thus, the activity of learning consecrate these places with the quality of sacredness¹². For example, the fireplace is given the attribute of purity and students must remove their shoes before sitting around it. The fire which is employed in learning is locally referred to as *tuqqâba* (literally, translates to the fire of the Qur'an). Sometimes villagers proverbially say "the village which has no *tuqqâba* is haunted by the devil". In this sense, the fire of Qur'an is not just normal fire but it is perceived to have protective power against the devil. Further, the trees, outside the school under which students sit to memorize the Qur'an, are treated with respect as students do not urinate in their vicinities so as to keep their learning places clean ritually. The places of learning sessions, therefore, become meaningful by the learning process which occurs in them.

Some students spend about 10 years in Qur'anic schools to memorize the whole Qur'an and become *fuqarâ* who then work as Qur'anic teachers or lead communal rituals in villages or copy the Qur'an from memory in form of books. Nevertheless, some students spend only few years to memorize part of the Qur'an and then work as Islamic techniques' experts who make amulets, *kotoba* (holy water) and so on.

Social relationship between students

The students who live in one hut or house are considered as member of a household. Therefore, the labour is divided between them according to their age and their educational level. They categorize themselves into three broad divisions. The first is *majiring kauî* (younger pupil) who has started learning recently and whose age varies from 6-14 years. Those from ten years and above fetch water and collect firewood and those who are less than ten are excused from these duties. Sometimes these youngsters are sent to do less important things like buying small stuff in shops within the vicinity of the school. The young pupils frequently go out together with their elder students to collect firewood that would be sufficient for one week or more. The juniors learn from their seniors the good places for firewood and type of trees from which firewood should be collected. The good firewood is referred to as *ara dakuringa* (durable firewood), which is not easily burned and produces bright flame at the same time. Firewood is the main source of energy used for cooking and as a source of light at night.

The second category is *majiring korîmî* (junior student) whose age ranges from 15-20 and are responsible for preparing food, helping their younger ones in fetching water and collecting firewood. The middle students are classified as being trouble-makers as they often quarrel with their elders and younger ones. As a result, if a problem occurred in the school they are generally

¹² David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, "Introduction," In *American Sacred Space*, ed. David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995): 1-42.

accused of being responsible for that problem. As adolescents, they may physically challenge their seniors but in terms of learning, they are not mature enough to be entrusted with certain privileges and responsibilities as is the case with the seniors.

The third category is *magirang bain* (senior student) who are above twenty. They are more experienced in learning as well as other activities that students usually do as part of the learning process in the school. They put emphasis on the learning environment by which experiences are accumulated as a source of maturity and knowledge rather than age. In addition to pursuing his own study, the senior student's duty is to supervise the young and middle pupils. They are also responsible for providing food and any other essential needs such as learning materials and facilities. During the rainy season they prepare seeds and look for suitable land from the surrounding villages for cultivation. Normally students do not possess permanent plots of land as they move from one place to another. Most of the time villagers provide them with a piece of land to cultivate for one season. Those who want huge pieces of land either rent or buy it from people who live in the villages close to the school.

The provision of food in the school is not the responsibility of the *fakî* but that of the students. It is expected that the students feed themselves from what they cultivate during the rainy season. However, the *fakî* helps them voluntarily in some cases particularly if a student runs out of his grains. In this case, a student can get aid from the *fakî* until he gets another means from his relatives or from the work he is engaged in. The students cultivate crops such as millet and sorghum for subsistence. They also farm beans, groundnuts, tomatoes and sugar cane for cash. Sometimes they work as daily labourers working on the surrounding farms and constructing houses. They also generate income by selling firewood, water, attending cattle and so on. Their earnings are used to cater for some needs like sugar, meat, tea and so on. Furthermore, from time to time they receive support from their families in kind or cash. In the past, students used to beg villagers for food twice a day that was in the morning and in the evening. The food they were getting was usually enough for them to survive. As Abdul-Jalil explained, the cultural values of the society make the feeding of the Qur'anic students obligatory as a religious duty in which every family should provide food to students when they come to ask for it. Accordingly, it was regarded as a disgrace if a student left a homestead without getting food he asked for. Therefore, women were very keen to keep some food or leftovers aside to give the first student who comes knocking on their door¹³. This seems to be changing now as students are involved in various activities of income generation to support themselves.

The *masîk*

The *masîk* is a village mosque which is built and owned communally by the inhabitants of a village. It is located at the centre of the village and consist of a spacious compound containing houses for the communal prayers, one or two huts for guests and *râkôba* (grass thatched shel-

¹³ Musa Adam Abdul-Jalil, "Khalâwî Dârfûr: Dirâsah fî Wathâyifiâ wa Khalfiyatoâ al-Ajtimâ'yya," *Annual Journal of African Studies Center*, 34 no. 4 (1996): 74.

ter) for public meetings. The huts serve as guest houses to strangers who pass by or religious men who come to visit the village from time to time. On their journey, the guests usually spend one night or some days in the guesthouse and the village's residents provide them with foods and drinks. Not everybody in the village brings food to the guesthouse but some, especially those who live in the mosque's neighbourhood as well as those who perform regular daily prayers at the mosque. The *masîk* also serves as a village council or a hall in which secular activities, such as discussing collective village affairs and chatting take place. The village mosque provides an arena for activities of public nature like undertaking religious rituals, making communal sacrifices as well as an ideal venue for public meetings¹⁴.

Moreover, the *masîk* also serves as the Qur'anic school where students gather at night to learn the Qur'an and almost every village in Jebel Marra has this type of Qur'anic schools. The *fakî* who teaches students in this type of school is also a memorizer but it is not necessary for him to be sophisticated in the mnemonic techniques which are essential conditions for teaching in the first type of the Qur'anic school. Even some of them do not know the whole Qur'an by heart but most of it. The village's children from both sexes gather every night after sunset prayer to memorize the Qur'an. Sometimes women also visit it to learn basic knowledge of Islamic principles such as performance of five daily prayers, paying alms, performing pilgrimage for those who can afford and the fasting during Ramadan. In addition, they also memorize some short passages and chapters from the Qur'an.

The *masîk*, as place for the Qur'anic memorization, started to appear recently after the introduction of the public schools in the area. Therefore, the students who enrol in the public school attend the *masîk* in the evening after sunset for about 2-3 hours to memorize the Qur'an. These students attend it due to the fact that they cannot migrate to join the *sôm* because they are attending the public school. In the learning process, students attend a single session every evening with the exception of Thursdays while living with their parents. Students generally gather for learning in an open-air within the mosque's compound. It is obligatory that each learner must bring firewood for provision of light in the evening. In some places, solar energy and small generators provide light instead of firewood. The students sit down on mats or on the floor at the fireplace forming a full circle. Girls and boys set together in the same circle. If the number of students is high, to the extent that they cannot group in one circle, then they form two or more circles depending on their number. This circle is called *dara* and it does not only relate to learning but also to other social matters. For instance, when people are having their meal in a group they normally place a dish on a mat and then sit around the dish forming a circle. This circle also referred to as *dara* is similar to the learning one. Students voluntarily attend and add firewood into the fire any time they feel it is fading off. The *fakî* sits close to the circle/circles listening to and correcting the students while they recite their text out loudly and in a rhythm. In the recitation, students sway back and forth to the rhythm. Each student recites his or her own text individually. In case of having more than one circle, the *fakî* frequently walks around the circles to make sure that every learner recites his or her text correctly. During such sessions, the *fakî* al-

¹⁴ Abdullahi Osman El-Tom, *Religious Men and Literacy in Berti Society*, PhD Thesis (St. Andrew: University of St. Andrews, 1983): 25-26.

ways holds a cane in his hand and swings it slowly. He may use it to cane those who play or intend to distract others by whispering in their ears. The *fakî* stops the session around 9 pm when muezzin or one of the students makes the prayer call. Younger pupils who may feel sleepy leave for their houses while others perform ablution and say their prayer before they leave. In the evening, those who memorized their assignment visit the *fakî* to take new dictation.

As people articulate, the most important advantage of the *masîk* is that it created an opportunity for girls to engage actively in memorization and compete jointly in the Qur'anic learning with boys. Berkey explains that traditionally and in accordance with the Islamic teaching, the primary responsibility for a woman's education rests on her husband. Therefore, once a woman left her parental home, it is a husband's responsibility to educate his wife in basic Islamic knowledge¹⁵. However, recently as seen in this particular case, women can learn this basic knowledge in the mosque before they get married. Before the establishment of the *masîk*, girls used to help their mothers in the evening in preparing food or doing some other housework. In the past, people were evaluating women not by learning but by how tirelessly they are able to work at home, that is, by keeping the house tidy and organized and most importantly how hard they work in the fields during the rainy seasons. These were the criteria for the good wife. Currently parents see as it is a religious duty to enrol their children to school. As a result, both girls and boys are sent to the *masîk* without discrimination. This enables them have the minimum religious knowledge so that they will perform their roles properly. As a result, many girls manage to memorize even half of the Qur'an and in rare cases the entire Qur'an before getting married. Moreover, some children learn the Qur'an in their homesteads supervised by their fathers, particularly at the early stage of learning because they need a lot of attention and as a preparation for sending them either to the Qur'anic or to the public school.

The prayers and the Qur'anic learning imbue the *masîk* with religiousness, purity and sacredness. Because of having such quality, the *masîk* is perceived to be the house of God. As a result, people always treat it with respect and sanctity during various activities that take place in its compound. For example, before entering into the *masîk* people must clean themselves ritually, perform ablution and take off their shoes. Such sanctity and the performance of various religious activities consecrate the *masîk* as a sacred space.

The Qur'anic schools and socialisation

The students enrol in Qur'anic schools from their early childhood living in dormitories far from their parents for many years. The school does not only teach the Qur'an but also provides a socialization that nurtures desirable social values making them ready for integration within the wider society. In accordance with this, the issue of morality and discipline can be raised here as one of the objectives of the Qur'anic school in the Jebel Marra area. The schoolteacher (the *fakî*) is responsible for not only Qur'anic teaching but also children's spiritual and social teachings.

¹⁵ Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in the Medieval Cairo: a Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1992): 170.

This instruction includes importantly the performance of Islamic rituals, prayers and respect which collectively shape the character of a person in the society.

Equipping students with these socio-religious values occur through preaching or guidance that takes place in a public assembly organised frequently by the *fakî* in collaboration with some of his assistants who are often his advanced students. Sometimes the *fakî* simply talks briefly after the prayers if he received any complaint from the surrounding villages about a student's wrongdoing. The most effective means for social control, as teachers say, is the physical punishment in which the *fakî* canes students who misbehave and seem not interested in the memorization. This corporal punishment is accepted culturally and even recommended by parents of the students. In this regard, some scholars indicate to the famous proverb which is used widely throughout the Sudan to illustrate parents' opinion about punishment of their children in Qur'anic schools. It is articulated as "to us belong the bone, to you the flesh"¹⁶, which means the *fakî* should cane a student whenever he sees it right. The parents give the *fakî* the right to punish students who misbehave or are lazy without injuring them. Parents trust the *fakî* as well as elder brothers in teaching and disciplining their children, therefore, there are limited options for students to complain about mistreatment or unjust punishment. Generally, the Qur'anic schooling is pedagogically a societal activity in which students' families, relatives, peers and teachers are integrally involved in the learning process. Those who successfully memorized the Qur'an they probably have been helped by their parents and other close relatives in their education, asking them to recite regularly and disciplining them in case of inattention or error.¹⁷

The Qur'anic schools also prepare students for their future jobs by providing them with skills and vocational training. Such training is highly useful for those who end their study earlier before they memorize the whole Qur'an. Therefore, vocational trainings are alternatives for work to the school-leavers who are not eligible for some religious professions that require memorization of the entire Qur'an. The various handcrafts and skills they adopt are brought to Qur'anic schools by students who come from different areas with a variety of experiences. As I mentioned earlier, the most important crafts students learn in Qur'anic schools are, for instance, manufacturing of saddle, textile, sewing hats and clothes, poultry and goats, building huts, trade and many other activities. There is no official training on such activities; however, students learn them from one another by asking questions, practicing and socially engaging with those who are skilful. I would argue that those who attend the Qur'anic school would easily integrate into the local society because they have skills that are necessary for the typical rural life. The school socializes students in a way that other members of the society think is suitable. Therefore, the Qur'anic school accommodates itself in social and cultural context of the society by providing skills that people need to survive in villages.

¹⁶ Musa Adam Abdul-Jalil, "Khalâwî Dârfûr: Dirâsah fi Wathâyifiâ wa Khalfiyatoâ al-Ajtimâ'yya," *Annual Journal of African Studies Center*, 34 no. 4 (1996): 78; Abdullahi Osman El-Tom, *Religious Men and Literacy in Berti Society*, PhD Thesis (St. Andrews: University of St. Andrews, 1983): 48.

¹⁷ Dale F. Eickelman, "The Art of Memory: Islamic Education and its Social Reproduction," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 20 no. 4 (1978).

Sometimes when people compare between the secular and the Qur'anic school graduates, they accuse graduates of the secular school of being proud and detesting any form of manual labour such as agriculture and constructions as well as being very keen on neatness, from their clothes to their bodies. Such characters are believed to be produced by the kind of education they received. Usually the public school trains its students not to necessarily engage in manual labour but to serve in offices in the public institutions. These institutions, however, rarely exist in the countryside. In consequence, graduates from the public school migrate to cities and towns where public institutions offer employment and where they usually stay for the rest of their life. This is why some people look onto the secular school with disdain and accuse the secular school graduates of being alien to the rural way of life in comparison to their peers who graduate from the Qur'anic school because they actively engage in various types of relevant activities. But in my view the problem does not lie on the public school graduates but on the educational system and the state development policy toward the countryside.

Conclusion

It was clear from the discussion that the *fakî* establishes the Qur'anic school which then grows gradually depending on how knowledgeable he is. Therefore, the fame of any Qur'anic school rests on the character of the *fakî* who runs it. The relations between the *fakî* and his students are then characterized by respect in which students strictly follow the *fakî's* instructions. The social relationships among students take the same form particularly between advanced students and young pupils who possess little knowledge. Accordingly, the main source for power in these relations is the Qur'anic knowledge by which students widen their participation space in the learning communities and therefore elevate their social status and imbibe others' instructions. Spatially, a Qur'anic school's fame is rested on the character of a *fakî* who runs it and abundance of the resources in its vicinity. Furthermore, the Qur'anic school becomes a meaningful religious space through appropriation and various learning activities that consecrate it with the value of sacredness.

Students memorize the Qur'an to cultivate themselves spiritually, morally and socially. It is through Qur'anic memorization that people realize their individuality and achieve their social status in the society. The memorized text, which the men of learning possess, is not only employed in the worship but also projected on the social occasions such as marriage. The Qur'anic memorization goes beyond the spirituality to include the socio-cultural aspects of life as people derive their self-worth from the Qur'anic education. Therefore, people realize their humanness by acquiring the Qur'anic knowledge. More importantly, the Qur'an knowledge is perceived to be comprehensive and everlastingly advantageous since it is perceived to be dealing with both this world and the hereafter. The acquisition of such knowledge transforms individuals by developing their spirituality, mental maturity, morality, humbleness and sensibility of differentiating good deeds from the bad ones. Such a transformation directs the socio-religious activities that people perform in their daily life. The performance of those activities is not only for the sake of better living in this life but also for the sake of better life to come. Thus, the two worlds are teleo-

logically connected to each other and the quality of life in them is negotiated through the Qur'anic learning which is believed to ignite the path to both worlds. So far, I explained how the local community of Jebel Marra defines the philosophy and objectives that guides the apprenticeship in its Qur'anic school. The article showed that the *fakî* is more of a product of socio-cultural engagement with the Qur'anic school than the content he learned.

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An Experience of Sacred Space in Zakes Mda's *The Whale Caller* (2005)

Imagining Cross-species Sacred Space and Trans-species Ritual between Humans and Whales in South Africa

Weeraya Donsomsakulkij

Abstract

Looking into the contexts of space and time, all animal behaviour is inconspicuous, except for only the young and diseased specimens of species exhibit less than perfect adaptation to their physical environments. Yet, as nowadays our awareness of complex spatial relationships among species raises our perception of these relationships, we are able to analyse and explore the roles they play in our lives. This paper, unlike other empirical researches, analyses the subjective views of one single author, Zakes Mda and how he imagines a South African sacred space with respect to the entanglement between humans and whales in his novel, *The Whale Caller*. It investigates how Mda identifies religious behaviour in whales and transforms a human religious behaviour into a "trans-species" religious behaviour. Consequently, the article attempts to establish a possibility of a religious relativity between multispecies, sharing the same sacred space in South Africa.

Keywords: *Sacred Space, Zakes Mda, The Whale Caller, Posthumanism, Agential Realism*

Introduction

Throughout the history of South Africa, South African people have had conceptions of environments and their relations to them, which they have expressed in various ways. One way in which these visions have been manifested is through South African literature that is considered as a "window" to see the cultural dynamics through which South African people make and remake the world and their society. Due to this reason, South African literature with its narratives has become a category of experience and reflection that encourages scholars to explore how it contributes to the production of environmental knowledge in relation to cultures and their diversity in South Africa.

In this article, one representative of South African literature, Zakes Mda's novel *The Whale Caller*¹, is chosen to illustrate how South African literature creates "space" to describe and establish,

¹ Zakes Mda, *The Whale Caller*, (New York: Picador, 2005).

what I call, a “sacred geography”. This novel is selected by consideration of the fact that it depicts the interconnected narratives between human and non-human species, living in the same geographical space, by indicating the voices and agencies of both human and non-human characters. *The Whale Caller* represents a love relationship between a human and a southern right whale in the Western Cape. Yet, unlike other nature narratives in which nature is merely portrayed as a place of retreat and return or an element of recreation, this novel neither presents nature as an active healing force nor a place to conquer. Rather, the natural elements in the novel are portrayed as important characters, who have their own agencies, partially driving the narratives. Moreover, the protagonist, the Whale Caller is not a heroic character, who conquers over “evil” with his own courage, but a socially marginalized black man, who lives in the white-privileged seaside village Hermanus. In addition, his identity is defined by his love for Sharisha the whale. Due to this, even though the focalization of the novel is undoubtedly limited to the Whale Caller, the power of narrativity has been extended to whale characters, Sharisha the whale in particular, who generates an interrelationship and an interconnectedness with the Whale Caller within a space that becomes sacred for both parties regardless of species.

In this article, I study the ways in which the sacred geography of the species-interconnected space in *The Whale Caller* is formed and how it transforms the space into a sacred space. By employing postcolonial-material ecocriticism² as the research approach, this study demonstrates how this South African sacred space is delimited, especially when it is related to the entanglement between the Whale Caller, the human and Sharisha, the whale. This article, moreover, investigates how Mda identifies sacred rituals between humans and whales and transforms a human sacred ritual into a “trans-species” one. Consequently, it attempts to point out a possibility of a cross-species devoted relativity, sharing the same sacred space and how this cross-species relation helps break down binarisms, particularly between humans and whales.

Positioning a sacred geography and a sacred space

What do I mean by “sacred geography”? Some scholars refer to sacred geography as a reconstructed nature-culture nexus in which the spiritually attached natural landscape and its natural elements are combined with the cultural landscape that is constructed by cultural performances in order to deliver and communicate the sacredness with the sense of devotion. Among scholars of religious studies, George Spencer analyses Tamil devotionalism of Indian people and abstracts its “sacred geography” from the Saivism hymns as “the landscape of myth”³. Andrew Fleming argues for rethinking of the treatment of the field data with regard to the intentional relationships between placing of Welsh megalithic tombs and natural features of the landscape by also

² It approaches literary texts with an intention of looking into functions of their aesthetics with relation to ethical advocacy against the exploitation of both human and non-human beings. The approach also explores the intertwining narratives of all kinds of earthen beings and material matter and investigates the ways in which non-human agencies and their narrative power of creating configurations of meanings and substances are described and represented in the texts.

³ George Spencer, “The Sacred Geography of the Tamil Shaivite Hymns,” *Numan* 17, no. 3 (1970): 240-241.

considering landscape as a cultural code⁴. Both of them indicate that sacred geography is socially constructed by merging cultural ideas with the presence of the natural environments in specific regions. Hence, a sacred geography of one region is different from those of other regions.

Likewise, in this article, the sacred geography is referred to as a consolidation of the natural and cultural elements that are considered as soul-dedication, and establish the sense of devotion. Yet, unlike the mentioned others, the sacred geography in this paper does not solely depend upon any human institutions of religions. Rather, it relies on the flow of nature that constitutes an interconnectedness between different species that reflects their shared devotion. When these sacred geographical elements contribute to shape the space while being shaped in return by it, then the space becomes a “sacred space”.

The meanings and notions of sacred space, however, have been variously defined based upon disciplines, its usefulness and contexts. According to Richard Jackson and Roger Henrie, sacred space is a category of space that is a “portion of the earth’s surface which is recognized by individuals or groups as worthy of devotion, loyalty or esteem”⁵. Unlike some other types of space, they argue, sacred space does not exist naturally, but has its existence through human cultures, experiences and goals with the recognition of John Wright’s term “geopieté”⁶. Drawing from this, the sacred space is a matter of human realm, as it is made present by humans and for humans, particularly for those who accept its origins and its characteristics.⁷

Louis Nelson supports this notion that “the sacred cannot be manifest in the material [...] without human agents who are burdened with culturally dependent beliefs and rituals that allow places and objects to be so interpreted.”⁸ Nevertheless, as he further declares, “actors participating in the construction of meaning include not just the clerical hierarchy and the religious laity but also the professional architect, someone who in recent centuries is not usually a participant in the religious community”⁹. In other words, external actors also influence the construction of sacred space and in Nelson’s case, the external actor is the professional architect, who is not a religious figure and does not belong within any religious contexts, yet contributes to create the sacred space by designing and building the material forms of religious sacred space.

This delimits the notions of sacred space and expands its ideas beyond the frame of religious devotion to God or to other religious deities. With this expansion, sacred space and the sense of sacredness also exist in non-religious contexts. As Maria Khayutina argues, “monuments to war

⁴ Andrew Fleming, “Phenomenology and the Megaliths of Wales: A Dreaming too Far?,” *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 18, no. 2 (1999): 119-125.

⁵ Richard Jackson and Roger Henrie. “Perception of Sacred Space.” *Journal of Cultural Geography* 3, no. 2 (1983): 94.

⁶ It refers to the recognition of certain areas as sacred and defined it as “emotional, or thoughtful, or thoughtfully emotional piety aroused by awareness of terrestrial diversity.” (Jackson and Henrie 1983: 95)

⁷ Jackson and Henrie, “Perception of Sacred Space”, 95.

⁸ Louis Nelson, *American Sanctuary. Understanding Sacred Spaces*, (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2006), 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

or genocide victims are respected as sacred in modern humanistic representations.”¹⁰ Her argument is corroborated by the religious philosopher Mircea Eliade that sacred places of one’s private universe include one’s homeland and the place of one’s first love. Yi Fu Tuan also contributes to this notion when he brings the notion of sacred space into the dimension of experience. As he argues, the meaning of sacredness goes beyond stereotype images of temple and shrines, because “at the level of experience, sacred phenomena are those that stand out from the commonplace.”¹¹ This is to say, to be sacred, space or things need to have qualities such as apartness, otherworldliness, orderliness and wholeness.

In the case of Mda’s *The Whale Caller*, the sacred space is the space of shared human-whale devotion, which is Hermanus, the main setting of the novel. The actors of Hermanus are a human and a southern right whale that transform the once profane Hermanus into the sacred Hermanus with their interconnectedness and their love devotion.

Hermanus as a cross-species sacred space

In *The Whale Caller*, Hermanus as the sacred space is influenced by the non-human world as much as by the human world through their cross-species interconnected encounters. Hermanus in the novel is a counterpart of the real Hermanus, the seaside village in the Western Cape of South Africa. Like the real Hermanus, this Hermanus is inhabited by human communities on land and seasonally in its sea by southern right whales that migrate to Hermanus annually to mate and give birth as well as to nurture their young to be strong enough to survive in the southern seas. This Hermanus is depicted as the home to the novel’s protagonist, the Whale Caller as well as the home to the community of southern right whales in which a whale main character, named Sharisha, belongs.

Therefore, Hermanus is the homeland, which the Whale Caller the human and Sharisha the whale feels emotionally connected, both to the space itself and to each other. This can be seen in the beginning of the narratives in which Mda applies an external analepsis to narrate the Whale Caller’s upbringing in this village and when he left for Namibia in his teenager years in order to develop his kelp horn performance. After thirty-five years away from Hermanus, he returned to Hermanus, having learned the ability to produce the songs of whales with kelp horns.¹² The main reason of his return is because Hermanus is the location where he has met whales for the first time, indulging his passion for southern right whales, especially for Sharisha, and it has become the usual meeting spot between Sharisha and him. At the same time, Sharisha’s emotional attachment to Hermanus and the Whale Caller is narrated through the depiction that only Shari-

¹⁰ Maria Khayutina, “The Sacred Space of an Aristocratic Clan in Zhou China (11th-3rd Centuries BC) under Transformation: An Attempt at Interpretation,” in *Creating and Representing Sacred Spaces*, ed. Tatyana Gardner and Daniela Moritz, (Goettingen: Peust and Gutschmidt, 2003), 113.

¹¹ Yi Fu Tuan, “Sacred Space: Exploration of an Idea,” in *Dimensions of Human Geography. Essays on Some Familiar and Neglected Themes*, ed. Karl Butzer, (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1978), 84.

¹² Zakes Mda, *The Whale Caller*, 12.

sha migrates to Hermanus every year¹³ and sometimes stays around the Hermanus coast for the whole year without migrating back to the southern seas.¹⁴ This is a contradiction to the nature of other female southern right whales that will migrate to the warm waters of Hermanus once in every three years and will return to the colder feeding grounds in the southern seas in Summer time in order to highlight the love devotion on Sharisha's part that fights against her whale common norms. For Sharisha, her memories and time with the Whale Caller in Hermanus are more significant than her practical convention of survival. As a result, Hermanus is formed as the sacred space through the memories and individual liberation of the Whale Caller and Sharisha. This formulation of the sacred space also parallels Nelson's construction of sacred space that sacred space can also be constituted through memories evinced by words or forms.¹⁵

Even if the Whale Caller and Sharisha both find Hermanus to be the sacred space of their memories and love devotion, Hermanus would have never become their dedicatedly sacred space if there had not been sacred geographical elements that spiritually connect them together. The two sacred elements are the special kelp horn of the Whale Caller, which produces the song of Sharisha and Mr. Yodd's grotto that the Whale Caller often visits. This kelp horn plays an important role in the novel as a sacred geographical element, since it is a significant equipment from nature that the Whale Caller uses to communicate to Sharisha the whale and he obviously cares for it more than his own knee, as seen in the narratives when he slips and falls on his knee after visiting Mr. Yodd's grotto, resulting in his knee becoming wet with warm blood, and then he confesses that he is happy that "he was able to save his [kelp] horn"¹⁶. This is because without this kelp horn, the Whale Caller believes that he will lose Sharisha's love, as this is the only kelp horn that can reach Sharisha through the song it produces. It is the "Sharisha's special kelp horn."¹⁷ This kelp horn produces the song of Sharisha that acts as a hymn to call Sharisha, communicating with her and signalling to her the presence of the Whale Caller. After hearing the song, Sharisha comes close to the shore and replies to the Whale Caller through her whale "dance". As seen in this passage:

The Whale Caller walks to his peninsular. He stands on the highest boulder and blows his horn. The whales suddenly become alert. They expel the air through their blowholes with greater vigour. He blows his horn even harder, and finds himself playing Sharisha's special song. A gigantic southern right erupts from the water, about a hundred metres from him. It rockets up in the air, and then comes crashing down with a very loud splash. As its head rises from the water again the Whale Caller's heart beats like a mad drum in his chest, for he sees the well-shaped bonnet that he knows so well, sitting gracefully on the whale's snout. [...] He blows his horn even harder, and the whale opens its mouth, displaying white baleen that hangs from the roof of its mouth. [...] It is a smile that the Whale Caller knows so well. Sharisha's surf white smile! Once more she launches herself up in the air and falls in a massive splash. She performs these breaching dis-

¹³ Ibid., 6.

¹⁴ Ibid., 140-142.

¹⁵ Louis Nelson, *American Sanctuary. Understanding Sacred Spaces*, 8.

¹⁶ Zakes Mda, *The Whale Caller*, 7.

¹⁷ Ibid., 39.

plays in time with her special song that the Whale Caller blows relentlessly. The Whale Caller changes the tune and Sharisha stops the aerial displays. She moves gently in a circle [...] Then she lies parallel to the water, and performs the tail-slapping dance that is part of the mating ritual. She lobtails repeatedly, making loud smacking sounds that leave the Whale Caller breathing more and more heavily. He blows the horn and screams as if in agony. He is drenched in sweat as his horn ejaculates sounds that rise from deep staccatos to high-pitched wails. Sharisha emits a very deep hollow sound. A prolonged, pained bellow. Then she uses her flippers to steer herself away from the Whale Caller. Breathlessly he watches her wave her flippers as she sails away.¹⁸

Drawing from this passage, this kind of songs can draw attention from southern right whales in general, but this specific song is only reserved for Sharisha and only she responds to it through her whale dance. The song and the whale dance serve as sets of messages to bridge the gap between species and makes the cross-species communication between the Whale Caller the human and Sharisha the whale possible. The love relationship between the Whale Caller and Sharisha and their devotion have been matured through the exchange between this song performance and the whale dance. Due to this reason, the song of Sharisha and the whale dance evidently connect the soul of the Whale Caller and that of Sharisha to each other, making their love transgress physical species differences. Consequently, it is not exaggerated to say that the kelp horn, which produces this song, helps create the sacred space for the Whale Caller and Sharisha.

Another sacred geographical element of Hermanus in *The Whale Caller* that is as important as the kelp horn is Mr. Yodd's grotto. Mr. Yodd's grotto is the most explicitly spiritual site in the novel where the Whale Caller often comes to visit a mysterious entity, he calls Mr. Yodd, in order to express his thoughts, his hopes and confess his sins, seeking for advice and solutions from Mr. Yodd. Wendy Woodward suggests that Mr. Yodd is probably a rock rabbit,¹⁹ since there is a community of rock rabbits living in the grotto and there is one time when the Whale Caller visits Mr. Yodd in his grotto and does not find him nor the rock rabbits. While the identity of Mr. Yodd is questionable and is never answered in the novel, his grotto is the place that keeps the Whale Caller sensible and reasonable. Either after he has fought with Saluni, the village drunk, or when he misses Sharisha the whale, he always comes to the grotto to calm himself down and sometimes achieves life solutions from Mr. Yodd.

Even though Mda represents Hermanus as an interconnected lived space, an area providing food and shelter and, for the Whale Caller the human and Sharisha the whale, the space of love devotion, it is also a space of danger in the sense that their love relationship brings sorrow and madness in the end. This is because on the one hand, there are communication obstacles between species. The Whale Caller can only communicate with Sharisha through the song of Sharisha. No words are exchanged between those two and because of this reason, Mda depicts that sometimes the Whale Caller's intention does not reach Sharisha the whale. In the end, their communication results in Sharisha breaching herself on land in an attempt to come closer to comfort the

¹⁸ Ibid., 41.

¹⁹ Wendy Woodward, "A Cautionary Tale: *The Whale Caller* by Zakes Mda," *Society and Animals*. 15 (2007): 300.

Whale Caller. As the aftermath, scientists kill Sharisha in order to end her suffering from stranding.

This leads to another complication of their relationship that is the physical living arrangement, which always keeps them apart. It is an ultimate fact that whales cannot live on land and humans cannot migrate to live in the salt water. For this reason, when their love relationship proceeds beyond the limited physical boundaries, both sides are exposed to the dangers of life. This warning is also conveyed in Mda's opening sentence, "the sea is bleeding from the wounds of Sharisha,"²⁰ that hints towards the novel's ending in which Sharisha loses her life after being dynamited. Sharisha's death along with the losing of Mr. Yodd and his grotto, as an outcome of the big waves that hit the Hermanus coast, results in the change of the Whale Caller's life and his personality. He is no longer the man who calls whales to himself and exchanges joyful moments with them.²¹ Rather, he becomes "the Hermanus penitent [who] wave[s] goodbye to the sea [and] will walk from town to town flogging himself with shame and wearing a sandwich board that announces to everyone: *I am the Hermanus Penitent.*"²² In the end, without the Whale Caller and Sharisha as the actors, Hermanus is no longer the sacred space of devotion. Mda then uses this chance to insert an environmental ethic into the novel, implying that this situation is worsened because of the lack of the forgotten local ecological traditions²³ that could sustain relationships between earthen entities and help advocate their survival. Instead, as Mda illustrates, the majority of inhabitants of Hermanus misplace their faith into scientism, mistakenly relying on experts whose only solution is to end life of beings that have crossed their lines.

Trans-species sacred ritual²⁴ in *The Whale Caller*

The mentioned local ecological traditions are represented in forms of a sacred ritual of the Khoikhoi community, participated by both human and whale characters in *The Whale Caller*. The interconnected relations between humans and whales in the ritual, originated by Khoikhoi's awareness of their locally environmental surroundings, are conveyed by using flashback focalization of the Whale Caller in order to portray that this ritual is long forgotten in Hermanus. At the beginning of the novel, when the Whale Caller is waiting for the arrival of Sharisha the whale, he looks at the Indian Ocean that reminds him of the Khoikhoi's old dance around a breached whale that has happened in this place even before it has been named as Hermanus. This ritual was performed by Khoikhoi people to express their gratitude to Tsiqua, "He Who Tell His Stories

²⁰ Zakes Mda, *The Whale Caller*, 3.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

²² *Ibid.*, 230.

²³ As a criticism of the impact of colonization, Mda portrays that these local ecological traditions have been forgotten and replaced by some Western scientific discourses, which mistake environments and their elements around the globe as static, resulting in disregarding the lives of many earthen beings.

²⁴ In this article, ritual is treated as a performance in the narratives, which constructs a world of its own and embeds values. Even if the values are confined to the selection of the perspectives of human narrators, they are also partially shaped by non-human agency that participates in establishing the values.

In Heaven,”²⁵ for the food he sometimes provides for them by allowing whales to strand themselves. Yet, this ritual would suddenly turn into a sorrowful ritual when more than one whale becomes stranded and dies at one time, as Mda narrates, “the dance freezes and the laughter in the eyes of the dancers melts into tears that leave stains on the white sands.”²⁶ Drawing from this passage, this ritual represents the sense of sufficiency within Khoikhoi community and their sympathy towards their neighbour species. Even if this ritual also points to the human hegemony over whales in which whales are assumed to be mere given objects with no voice and no agency, when mass stranding occurs, as Mda portrays, the position of whales has been uplifted in the sense that Khoikhoi’s sympathy is not given to objects, but rather living subjects, who have lost their lives. This is to say, while the hegemony of humans over non-humans with respect to their collective and individual survival is unavoidable, what is more important is the consideration of humans towards non-humans, realizing that the existence and presence of non-human beings also matter.

The position of whales in Hermanus has been raised further through an adapted Christian ritual that the Whale Caller has participated when he was young. This ritual is the adapted Christian ritual of the Church of the Sacred Kelp Horn in which the music is not played by drum, harp and tambourine, but by a kelp horn, which is blown to accompany the hymns, as the “kelp horn [...] was a natural musical instrument that took the congregation back to its roots. It was an instrument that celebrated the essence of creation. God would lend a sharper ear to the prayers of those who praised Him to the accompaniment of an instrument that was shaped by his own hand through the agency of seas”²⁷. This performance was conducted every Sunday in the sea of Hermanus and occasionally, a whale surfaced and swam closer to the group to participate in their ritual, and then as Mda narrates, “the sea [become] a baptistery.”²⁸

This passage implies that the colonial-determined opposites, nature and culture, can performatively become one. To do so, however, culture has to accept its natural components, going beyond its realm. As in the case of the Church of the Sacred Kelp Horn, it used the sea and the white sands as the ground of the ritual instead of any human-built churches. It used a kelp horn to replace Western musical instruments as the ritual instrument. The sounds, produced by the kelp horn, created songs that were so natural, attracting whales sailing nearby. Then, some of the whales joined the ritual, participating in this joyful event, as Mda narrates, “it submerged and waved its tail above the water. It began to lobtail—slapping the water repeatedly with its tail. [...] The Chief Horn Player blew the horn to the rhythm of the splashing water.”²⁹

Like humans, whales are social creatures. They communicate and socialize with each other by using variety of sounds and noises. As Christopher Clerk argues in his experiment on the acoustic behaviour of southern right whales that the sounds of the southern right can be described by

²⁵ Zakes Mda, *The Whale Caller*, 4.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

ten acoustic variables and each sound indicates whale activities.³⁰ Mda tends to use this fact to convince the reader that it is possible for whales to participate in human rituals as long as there is a means to connect them to each other. In this novel, the acoustic sounds of the kelp horn communicate and encourage whale nonverbal action and link it to the human ritual, opening up a way for them to share joy and enrichment of souls. With this interconnectedness, Mda successfully imagines a trans-species ritual that ties humans and whales together, sharing identity and mutual agency. Mda has further developed this trans-species ritual in the novel, allowing the Whale Caller to adapt it into his song of Sharisha as well as for Sharisha, the whale dance in order to strengthen their cross-species love relationship.

Conclusion

With *The Whale Caller*, it is indeed possible that sacred space is not confined only within the human realm. Sacred space can also be extended to the whole ecosphere if non-human agents are included into human consideration as actors who contribute to make the same space. Although the species differences are grand obstacles that block the flow of species interconnectedness, these obstacles could be overcome through the combination of the natural and cultural means in the surrounding environments. As in this novel, the sacred space is constructed through the use of the kelp horn, the song of Sharisha and Mr. Yodd's grotto. These elements play roles as the sacred geography and without them, constituting any sacred spaces between humans and whales is unlikely possible.

However, it is also undeniable that the notions of sacred space and sacredness is foremost a human issue, as Mda admits in the narratives by limiting the focalization to the Whale Caller and paying more attention to his devotion and action in Hermanus. Yet, at the same time, Mda employs the behaviour patterns of real southern right whales, achieved from scientific research studies in Cape Town, to imagine the dance of whales, narrating them as the ritual dance of whales and Sharisha's whale dance. Through the whale dances, he gives whale characters agency, allowing them to also devotedly enact in Hermanus. As some whale behaviours are under-researched and are still considered as unknown myths, Mda applies these myths to provide an alternative fictional reality in South Africa that helps promote ecological friendly perceptions towards whales, our neighbour earthen species.

Through the consideration for non-human agencies, therefore, the sacred space in *The Whale Caller* is for both the Whale Caller the human and Sharisha the whale. Mda transforms the shared space of their love devotion into the cross-species sacred space. With this transformation, Mda breaks down binary oppositions between humans and whales, presenting their similarities as having personhood and sharing the sense of sacredness. As a result, an environmental knowledge for sustainability is produced as a suggestion to perform in the real world.

³⁰ Christopher Clark, "The Acoustic Repertoire of the Southern Right Whale, A Quantitative Analysis," *Animal Behavior* 30, (1982): 1060-1071.

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From the New Testament times to the present: Afro-centric perspectives of non/sacral space.

Eliot Tofa

Abstract

In this article, I demonstrate ways in which the understanding of sacred/non-sacred spaces in the New Testament world resonates with selected African indigenous thought forms. The point made is that notions of sacred and non-sacred space are noticeable in most, if not all religious traditions. On the basis of a reading of the Old/New Testament writings and selected African - Nguni and Shona - communities' understanding, interpretation and response to their environment, I assert that people make meaning of their world; expressing their pious religious reflections through shared beliefs and performances. To support this view, I explore cultural constructions revolving around water - a panacea for spiritual healing or life, the tumult taken as a remedy for evil spirits¹; and selected in/animate objects believed to be habitats of good/evil spirits. I therefore illustrate religious imaginations surrounding the moon - one of the celestial bodies imbued with meanings; believed to be a life-invigorating body under which the Reed Dance, Passover and First Fruits festivals are celebrated. I then proceed to look at religious constructions pertaining to certain flora and fauna demonstrating how religion impinges on space - or, space on religion. This is because religious beliefs are manufactured and negotiated in space, the much contested terrain in all religious traditions.

Keywords: Sacred space, Judeo-Christian thought, African Religious Traditions, Intercultural Theology, Religion in Southern Africa

Introduction

I begin this article by looking at religious beliefs on how the universe came into being in selected religious traditions. These religious constructions about space are just a fraction of many other creation stories that have survived to this day. In Judeo-Christian religious traditions, for example, it is believed that the world was created by God, the first cause of all creation.² This belief is also true in other religions of the world including African Religious Traditions (ART). In the Karanga peoples' understanding, for example, the first human being - *Musikavanhu* - is believed to have fallen from the sky when "God (Mwari) put Musikavanhu into deep sleep and then let him

¹ Acts 19:13; Matthew 9:23//

² Gen. 1:1, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31; Ps. 8; Isa. 42:5;45:12;18; 2 Pet. 3:5; Eph. 3:9; Rev. 4:11

drop from the sky.”³ As the first man descended, he “saw a white stone which was dropping from the sky with great speed” and when God commanded him to point a finger at the stone, it came to a standstill.⁴

Through the process of demythologisation, the stone is symbolic of the vast world we live which, from a far distance, ‘meets’ the sky as we cannot tell where it begins and ends. The point made is that, in this myth, when Musikavanhu “began to fly towards the stone, and the closer he got to it, the bigger the stone became, and finally he could not see where it finished on either side.”⁵ This is one of the many communal truths about how space, the empty universe came into being. For this reason, the Genesis story is one of many religious imaginations about how the world was created. Closely related to this, there are many more symbolic expressions that explain how the universe was subsequently filled with living and non-living things. In Judeo-Christian traditions as well as ARTs, we read that God created the flora and fauna as well as celestial bodies by word⁶ and out of nothing – *creatio ex nihilo*.⁷ In brief, this is how space, sacred and non-sacred was created by God from the beginning.

The primary focus of this article is on sacred and non-sacred spaces in selected religious traditions: Judeo-Christian as well as ARTs. The argument put forward is that, inasmuch as religious traditions have their own inherent value – are autonomous, the concept of sacred and non-sacred spaces is noticeable in most, if not all religious traditions.⁸ The article, using the above traditions, illustrates religious constructions surrounding space. This means that, for example, by building a Temple/church or kraal (sibaya) in Swazi Religious Traditions or defining certain trees – baobab, plum hissing tree, etc. – as manifestations of God/ancestors among the Shona peoples, these spaces and the immediate environs are consecrated. They are separated from other spaces and are no longer ordinary but are symbolically transformed into sacred spaces. As such, any believer “becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane.”⁹ The understanding is that “the history of religions – from the most primitive to the most developed – is constituted by a greater number of hierophanies, by manifestation of sacred realities.”¹⁰ The article therefore looks at the concept of sacred space - water, animals, plants, and celestial bodies in Judeo-Christian tradition as well as ARTs demonstrating how religion impinges on space – or, space on religion. The thrust of my argument is that although religions are *sui generis* certain African religious thought forms about space - in the physical and/or abstract senses - resonate with those in Judeo-Christian traditions.

³ Herbert Aschwanden, *Karanga mythology*. (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1989), 31

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Herbert Aschwanden, *Karanga mythology*, 31

⁶ Gen. 1:1-31 cf. Acts 17: 24, etc.

⁷ Emezie Ikenga-Metuh, *God and man in African Religion* (Enugu: Snapp Press Ltd), 17. See also J. Mbiti, *African religion and philosophy* (Botswana: Hienemann Publishers), 39-40

⁸ See Genesis 3:3,11, 24, the Shaptapatha Brahmana VII,1,1, 1-4; Mircea Eliade, *The sacred and the profane* (USA: Harcourt Publishers), 30

⁹ Mircea Eliade, *The sacred and profane*, (USA: Harcourt Publishers), 11

¹⁰ Ibid

Theoretical framework and empirical background

The article is informed by Eliade's¹¹ view that the sacred reveals itself through hierophanies - a bird, a stone, a tree, an animal or celestial body - in the said religious traditions. The point emphasised is that these things are not in themselves venerated but "are worshipped precisely because they are hierophanies, because they show something that is no longer stone or tree but the sacred, the *ganz andere* - wholly other."¹² In other words, the object "becomes something else, yet it continues to remain itself, for it continues to participate in its surrounding cosmic milieu."¹³ This means that this space is, from the non-believer's point of view, not sacred and no different from other similar spaces: "A *sacred* stone remains a *stone*; apparently (or, more precisely, from the profane point of view), nothing distinguishes it from all other stones."¹⁴ On the other hand, the same space is, in the believer's point of view, not an ordinary space as it "reveals itself as sacred, its immediate reality is transmuted into a supernatural reality."¹⁵ What this means is that "for those who have a religious experience, all nature is capable of revealing itself as cosmic sacrality. The cosmos in its entirety can become a hierophany."¹⁶

To this end, this paper exploits the social constructivist model which posits that people make meaning of the world they live by "develop[ing] subjective meanings to their experiences - meanings directed towards certain objects and things."¹⁷ This explains why some spaces within or among religious traditions are regarded as [more] sacred and not sacred at all. I further advance the view that devotees who frequently participate in religious events associated with sacred spaces "may lead to reduced exposure to stressful events or conditions such as family or marital conflicts, economic or legal problems and others."¹⁸ The thinking is that, frequent contacts with the sacred or non-sacred may strengthen or diminish religious beliefs as devotees seek to develop "a personal relationship with the divine other."¹⁹ In other words, devotees construct certain meanings about sacred/profane spaces that directly impinges on their psychological as well as social well-being and "may derive a sense of meaning and purpose in life, and may experience self-transcendence."²⁰

Research methodology

The article is about multiple and varied conceptions about space in selected religions looking at how meanings are socially and historically constructed. To achieve this, I adopted an ethno-

¹¹ Mircea Eliade, *The sacred and profane*, 11-12

¹² Ibid

¹³ Mircea Eliade, *The sacred and profane*, 12

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ John W. Creswell, *Research design* (London: Sage Publications), 32

¹⁸ Christopher G. Ellison and Amy Burdette, *Religion and the sense of self control among US adults*, 73(1), 12

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid, see also Jonathan Levin, Prayer, love and transcendence: An epidemiological perspective, in Warner K Schaie, Neal Krause, & Alan Booth. *Religious Influences on Health and Well-Being in the Elderly*, New York: Springer, 1989.

graphical approach in that I lived among the peoples frequently referred to, collecting primary data for a period spanning over eight years. Data were collected through personal interviews with informants as well as observation during key ceremonies in the case of religious traditions related with said ceremonies. In addition, some documents such as local newspapers were consulted to understand these people's religious constructions surrounding space. In the case of Judeo-Christian traditions, document analysis was used as the principal method of inquiry. Biblical texts – Old through the New Testament - were used as primary sources in exploring Judeo-Christian worldviews about non/sacral space.

On space as a contentious terrain in religious traditions

Space is the most contentious terrain in most religions because all religious beliefs are manufactured and negotiated in space. For example, frosty relationships fomenting in the Middle East today are partly rooted in the sanctity of the Promised Land. Israeli – Arab territorial claims partly rests on the covenant made to Abraham and his descendants.²¹ Without Jerusalem, Israeli and Arab communities believe that they cannot serve their God in truth and spirit, they are forced into spiritual bankruptcy. This is one of the driving factors creating unceasing hostilities in the Middle East that continues to attract huge international debates and interventions. This is not only true for the Israeli-Arab conflict but present-day land claims in Africa as well. In Zimbabwe, for example, religious beliefs about space have significantly influenced the indigenous people's claim to ancestral land. This is because, the land (*ivhu*) is understood as an inheritance, a gift from ancestors - *nhaka madzitateguru* - connecting the living with their ancestors.²² This belief in the sanctity of land is reinforced through rituals such as burying deceased relatives²³ or the umbilical cord (*rukuvhute*) - a common practice among the Shona peoples - on family land as well as the performance of certain rituals in spaces considered sacred. For example, in Swazi Religious Tradition, some important rituals associated with birth, marriage and death begin or are consummated in the grandmother's hut (*indlu kagogo*) or the kraal (*sibaya*), one of the most sacred spaces.²⁴ The point made is that sacred spaces are at the heart of every religious tradition.

On space and performances in religious traditions

I have pointed earlier on that space is the most contentious terrain in religious traditions because it connects devotees with the divine other, the mundane with the spiritual. Mount Gerizim in Palestine, for example, is sacred space: the "axis mundi" in Judeo-Christian traditions because it was or is believed to be the "the navel of the earth" connecting the earth with the heaven.²⁵ This is one of the factors explaining the romanticisation of the Temple and idolisation of Jerusalem

²¹ Gen. 15:18-21; 28: 13; Ex. 6:8, 23:31; Deut. 1:18

²² Sebastin Bakare, *My right to land* (Harare: Zimbabwe Council of Churches, 1993), 22

²³ Jos. 24:23; Ex. 13:19; Gen. 50:25 cf. Num. 32:18-19

²⁴ Sithembiso Zwane, *Rituals in Swazi Religious Tradition*, (Matsapha: University of Swaziland), 32

²⁵ Mircea Eliade, *The sacred and profane*, 38

as the city of God.²⁶ This explains why, as sacred spaces, Isaiah believed that Jerusalem will never fall²⁷ and, on the other hand, Zechariah believed that all people will worship God in Jerusalem.²⁸ To this end, the message of Isaiah that the enemy set to attack the city will be defeated symbolises the triumphant victory of God over the evil forces – chaos. The subsequent destruction of the city certainly presented serious cognitive dissonance that prompted communal performances²⁹ expressing grief over the fall of the beloved city:

All the splendor has departed
 from Daughter Zion.
 Her princes are like deer
 that find no pasture;
 in weakness they have fled
 before the pursuer.
 In the days of her affliction and wandering
 Jerusalem remembers all the treasures
 that were hers in days of old.
 When her people fell into enemy hands,
 there was no one to help her.
 Her enemies looked at her
 and laughed at her destruction.
 Jerusalem has sinned greatly
 and so has become unclean.
 All who honored her despise her,
 for they have all seen her naked;
 she herself groans and turns away.³⁰

The elevation of certain spaces also plays out in Swazi Religious Tradition when the nation celebrates key religious events. The Swazi peoples, for example, gather annually at the main royal residence described in the local language as *linhitiyo lelive* – “the heart of the nation” to celebrate

²⁶ 2 Kings 2: 7; 2 Chr. 6:6; Zech. 1: 14; 2 Thes. 2: 3, 6-7; Ps. 132: 13

²⁷ Is. 6: 4 -28; cf. Zech. 14:2, 11, 16

²⁸ Zech.14: 6

²⁹ Lamentations 1:1-5:22

³⁰ Lamentations 1: 6-8 NIV

very critical national ceremonies such as *Incwala* and the Reed Dance. The main religious sanctuary where these are performed is qualitatively different from other spaces as it is taken as the heart of the nation, the place of national repentance, renewal and rebirth.³¹ In this regard, such an understanding of space resonates with other religious thought forms. For example, in Judeo-Christian tradition, the rock on which the sacred Temple of Jerusalem is built was or is believed to be the “navel of the earth,”³² the centre of the world. This explains why pilgrims from all over Palestine visit the City of Jerusalem annually to celebrate the birth of a nation at Passover and other related festivals such as the Yom Kippur, Tabernacles, etc. Fortifications around such sacred places were or are “designed rather to repel invasions by demons and the souls of dead than attack by human beings.”³³ By so doing, devotees “may derive a sense of meaning and purpose in life, and may experience self-transcendence”³⁴ in visiting sacred spaces.

Sacred spaces in religious traditions: mountains – *Mudzimba* in Swazi Religious Tradition, *Matopos* among the Shona peoples, Zion, Gerizim, Olivet, etc. in Judeo-Christian traditions – or domains: villages, sanctuaries and so on are taken as ‘high places,’ holy spaces connecting the mundane with the spiritual. The sanctity of these spaces is manufactured through rituals, myths and taboos. There is, for example, the myth that colonial settlers who camped under the *Chibvumani* mountain in Zimbabwe were blown away by the wind and disappeared without trace. In the creation myth mentioned above, it is said that “... the first spot his [Musikavanhu] feet touched softened and emitted water” and that he heard God’s voice coming from it.”³⁵ Owing to this belief, Matopos is, today, a sacred shrine for the local people in which they communicate with the spiritual world.

A reading of the “Old” Testament through the New Testament reveals that sacred spaces were elevated over other places by commanding the covenant community to “Destroy completely all the places on the *high mountains*, on the *hills* and under *every spreading tree*, where the nations you are dispossessing *worship their gods*.”³⁶ This is because, “You must not worship your God in that way. But you seek *the place* the Lord your God *will choose among all your tribes to put his name there for his dwelling*.”³⁷ The sanctity of space is therefore defined by deep-seated religious beliefs about “high” and “low” places. In the “Old” Testament, we read that sacrifices to the gods and/or goddesses were performed on “high” places.³⁸ These high places, in the prophets’ message, were non-sacred spaces leading the covenant community into apostasy.³⁹ Ontologically, the Holy Land and selected “high” places such as the Western Wall of the Temple of Jerusalem,

³¹ Nokwanda Masuku, “Incwala ceremony Incwala Ceremony: ‘Tis the season”. 2015. [Http://www.observer.org.sz/news/68613-incwala-ceremony-%E2%80%93-%E2%80%99tis-the-season.html](http://www.observer.org.sz/news/68613-incwala-ceremony-%E2%80%93-%E2%80%99tis-the-season.html) (accessed 2. 06. 2015)

³² Mircea Eliade, *The sacred and the profane*, 40

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Christopher G. Ellison, *Ibid*, 210

³⁵ Herbert Adchwanden, *Karanga mythology*, 31

³⁶ Deut. 12: 2,4-5

³⁷ Deut. 16: 2-12

³⁸ Num. 33: 52; Lev. 26: 30; Is. 66: 12; Jer. 32: 35; Jos. 4: 20, 1 Sam. 7:16, etc.

³⁹ Num. 33: 52; Lev. 26: 30; Is. 66: 12; Jer. 32: 35; Jos. 4: 20, 1 Sam. 7:16, etc.

river Jordan, the Dead Sea, wells, cities, mountains, etc. are the navel of the earth connecting devotees with the spiritual world. For this reason, these places attract thousands of pilgrimages from all over the world who, among other performances, walk in the footsteps of Jesus dramatising his ministry and final days. The belief is that, by observing this religious performance, devotees walk, live and experience the painful death of Christ at Easter. This, in other words, indicates how space impinges on religion, that is, how religion is manufactured in space.

Space, religiosity and spirituality: The sabbatical and tomb visits practices

Space plays an important role in renewing commitment to any religious tradition. This explains why Jews observe the sabbatical (*shmita*) as a spiritual reminder of their covenant with God, a practice of great spiritual significance.⁴⁰ In this respect, Jewish farmers are coerced to devise smart ways of providing food to their perennial customers as well as remaining faithful to their religion in the face of food deficit. Whereas a minority of Israeli population strictly observes the Sabbath, the majority partially observes this directive by “selling” their land to the government which, in turn, sells it to an agent.⁴¹ This practice is also present in ARTs as people lay their land fallow after a certain period of time. This tradition, is, however, waning given the commercialisation of tribal lands because of increased urbanisation. The religious practice is meant to remind the people that they are tenants and should take care of the precious gift from God.

The grave is one of the most sacred spaces connecting the living with the dead in nearly all religious traditions. For that reason, the wish of any religious person is to visit the tomb of founding figures such as Jesus, Muhammad, mother, father or any other relative. This is true for these religious traditions as family members or followers visit tombs to connect themselves with the deceased. In Shona Religious Tradition, for example, any relative who did not attend the funeral of the deceased puts a pebble besides the grave - *kukanda chibwe* - at first visit. And, from time-to-time, family members clear the graveyard and perform certain rituals bent to appease the living dead so that they can continue protecting the family from any adversities.⁴²

In this respect, the visit of those women - Mary Mag'dalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome - at Jesus' tomb on Sunday morning⁴³ is understood as part of those rituals associated with decent burials. It is evident that permeating religious constructions surrounding improper burials influenced the visit. They wanted to embalm the body, which, unknown to them, Joseph of Arimathe'a and Nicode'mus had “... bound in linen cloths with spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. In *Karanga* Religious Tradition, for example, immediate family members visit the deceased's graves in the wee hours of the following morning for two important reasons: to inspect if the grave was not tampered with and to “wake up” the deceased's spirit - *Kumutsa mudzimu*. For this reason, ancestors are addressed as “those in the ground”- *vari pasi* among the Shona

⁴⁰ Lev. 25: 1-7

⁴¹Daniel Estrin. Israeli farmers observe Sabbatical with a wink 2014. <http://www.kwwl.com/story/27017385/israeli-farmers-observe-sabbatical-with-a-wink> (accessed 30.11. 2014)

⁴² Michael Bourdillon. *The Shona peoples*. (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1987), 43

⁴³ Mk. 16: 1//

peoples or *Labaphansi* in Swazi Religious Tradition. Tombs, as spaces, are imbued with religious constructions and this certainly explains why the defacing of Palestinian graves in Jaffa fomented violence⁴⁴ in the Muslim – Christian world.

Space and theophanies: On the understanding of the cloud and voice from the rock(s)

Do rocks speak in religious traditions? Do deities communicate with the people through clouds? The reply is yes in these religious traditions. In Judeo-Christian traditions, God communicates with the covenant community through, among other things, natural phenomena such as rocks, clouds, etc.⁴⁵ This belief is also true in Swazi Religious Tradition conceptions about God locally known as *Mlentengamunye*. In traditional societies, it was believed that *Mlentengamunye* - the one-legged one – is seen by the ‘righteous’ one on certain cloudy days. In the case of the Karanga peoples, the belief is that clouds touch the earth when Mwari (God) has a message to deliver to the people. These beliefs are, to some extent, parallel to Judeo-Christian beliefs about the manifestations of God in and through natural phenomena.⁴⁶ I assent that such beliefs resonate with African indigenous thought forms. These spaces are taken not only as vehicles of communication between the mundane and supra-terrestrial world⁴⁷ but “ever since the creation of the world *his* invisible nature, namely *his* eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.”⁴⁸ This confirms the thinking that one can draw parallels in the conception of space in these three autonomous religious traditions.

Space and religious im/purity

In the preceding discussion, I looked at sacred spaces and now, I turn to religious beliefs associated with non-sacral spaces. The common belief in the said religious traditions is that profane spaces render an individual religiously unclean. Once one is defiled, certain rituals are observed to cleanse the person of all uncleanness. To avoid contamination, tombs were white washed during the Passover, lest pilgrims would unknowingly render themselves unclean.⁴⁹ This is also true for the Karanga peoples as they believe that the grave/yard is profane - a habitat of evil spirits.⁵⁰ In addition, certain spaces - living bodies - were considered unclean: sinners, tax collectors, lepers, Samaritans, hemorrhaging or unwashed bodies, etc.⁵¹ These spaces were contentious ter-

⁴⁴ Barack Ravid, Avi Issacharoff & Chaim Levinson. *Muslim, Christian Graves in Jaffa Defaced with Racist Slogans in Suspected 'Price Tag' Attack*. 2011. Accessed October 24, 2014 <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/muslim-christian-graves-in-jaffa-defaced-with-racist-slogans-in-suspected-price-tag-attack-1.388822>

⁴⁵ 2 Sam. 23:13, clouds (Ex. 3:20; 13:17-22)

⁴⁶ Exodus 13: 21-22

⁴⁷ Mircea Eliade, *The sacred and the profane*, 44

⁴⁸ Ro. 1:20.

⁴⁹ Mt. 23: 25, 27

⁵⁰ Cf the story of Legion in Mt. 8:28-34; Mk. 5:1-20; Lk. 8: 27-34).

⁵¹ Mk. 1: 40-45; Lk. 17: 11-19; Mt. 8: 1-4; Lk. 7: 11-17; Mk 5: 21-43)

rains in Jesus' time as he was accused of not only eating with defiled hands but being a friend of tax-collectors, sinners and not observing the Jewish tradition.⁵² The charges were that he deliberately violated the commandment that "...you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, lest they die of their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst."⁵³

The belief that 'defiled' bodies are not only unclean but contaminate immediate spaces is characteristic of most, if not all religious traditions. This understanding of space is evident in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The Levite and the priest could not attend to the man who fell among robbers on grounds that touching the dead or bleeding bodies would make the individual unclean, making him unfit to perform any duties in the Temple.⁵⁴ To illustrate this point further, I make reference to the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman and the Parable of the Prodigal Son. In the first story, Jesus requests water from a Samaritan, an 'unclean' woman from a Jewish religious point of view. From the beginning, Jesus had rendered himself unclean by traversing through Samaritan lands. In addition, drinking from the Samaritan woman's hand, well, bucket and meeting an 'unclean' race would, from the Jewish perspective, render him religiously unclean as "the daughters of the Samaritans were [taken as] menstruants [note how language is used to condemn *defiled* spaces] from their cradle."⁵⁵ Jesus, in conservative Jews' belief, deliberately rendered himself unclean. In the second story, the Prodigal Son is virtually dead. This is because he decided to go to a country far away from home, an unclean land. Remember, the farther one moves away from the centre – Jerusalem, the more profane the space becomes.

We also read in the example story that the son, after a careful consideration, decided to look after swine, fed unclean animals and – at worst - ate from the same trough with pigs. The son was, in the hearers' religious worldview, irredeemably unclean.⁵⁶ This is because strict Jews would cleanse their feet of even dust on their feet lest they defile the Holy Land.⁵⁷

The divide between sacred and profane spaces created serious dissensions in early Christian communities as well.⁵⁸ This was one of the main reasons why Jewish Christians resisted the admission of Gentiles in Pauline communities. The argument was that Gentiles were supposed to submit to Mosaic laws concerning space. The thrust of this discussion is that religiosity and, to a greater extent spirituality, are directly connected with space. This was also one of the reasons why Jews remonstrated against Pontius Pilate at the killing of rebellious Galileans during the Passover.⁵⁹ What this means is that certain times are considered sacred as well. Remember, the

⁵² Lk. 7: 34; Mt. 9:11, 18-20; Mk 2:13-17, Jn 11: 19(b)

⁵³ Lev. 15:31

⁵⁴ Lev 11:24-40; Numbers 19:11

⁵⁵ Daube (1950) cf. Mishnah Viddah 14:1

⁵⁶ Lev. 11: 7-8; 19: 5-8

⁵⁷ Mt 10: 14; Mk 6: 11; Lk. 9: 5

⁵⁸ Ro. 1: 16; Gal. 2:4-21)

⁵⁹ Lk. 13:1

Passover clemency⁶⁰ for criminals sentenced to death indicates the sanctity of this time in the New Testament world.

Such interpretation of the body were/are common in Nguni and Shona communities as it is prohibited to interact certain persons - lepers, the bereaved, the mentally challenged, etc. The beliefs are that such persons are unclean and purveyors of misfortunes. This explains why these disadvantaged persons were subsequently cast out of their communities on the belief that they are cursed; could carry the misfortunes into their communities. The prohibition of bereaved and mourning women from going outside the house with their heads uncovered and/or unaccompanied, drinking water for a certain period of time and boarding public transport before anyone else⁶¹ in Swazi Religious Tradition are concrete examples. Mourning women, according to tradition, are only permitted to board public transport after everyone else is on board and have to take the back seat lest they pass the misfortune to other people.⁶² In Nguni – Zulu and Swazi - as well as Shona peoples, mourning women also put on a black gown to inform those they meet that they are bereaved and unclean.⁶³

Bleeding bodies are also untouchable in Nguni and Shona religious traditions. This is because blood is regarded as the most sacred of all body fluids. For that reason, sexual union with bleeding bodies is prohibited, the woman is unclean!⁶⁴ This is also true in Judeo-Christian traditions: “Also you shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness during her menstrual impurity”.⁶⁵ To this end, menstruating women were also not allowed to perform or participate in some religious ceremonies in the said religious traditions. However, rituals associated with blood are at the core of religious performances. On the one hand, during the Passover, Jews kill lambs and put blood on door posts to remind them of their deliverance from Egypt. On the other hand, Christians, from the first century to the present, take the cup of [red] wine symbolising Jesus’ blood when celebrating the Eucharist. Certainly, from “Old” Testament times to this day, the body is imbued with symbolic meanings. This is because, even the Shona peoples take raw or cooked blood at those rituals observed to invoke the ancestral world. In addition, the taking of blood was a common feature in mystery religions such as Cybele.

In the above discussion, I explored the understanding of the body in these religious traditions. Now I turn to religious constructions surrounding animals in religions. To begin with, over hundred animals are mentioned in the “Old” and New Testament - from the smallest: ant, badger, locust and spider⁶⁶ to the biggest: the “Behemoth?”⁶⁷ However, references to these animals could only be understood if readers are informed of concerned communities’ constructions

⁶⁰ Mt. 27:26//

⁶¹ Sonke Dzingindzawo. *The Place of Mourning Women in Swazi Religious Tradition*. A Project submitted to the Department of Religious Studies, University of Swaziland, 2014

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ In-depth-interviews carried among the Nguni and Shona peoples reveal that the gown symbolises bad luck - unemnyama.

⁶⁴ This belief is applicable to the Swazi and Shona peoples interviewed.

⁶⁵ Leviticus 18:19

⁶⁶ Pr. 30: 24-28

⁶⁷ Job 40: 15-24

about wildlife in space. To illustrate this point, I shall make reference to the incident in which Jesus described King Herod as a fox.⁶⁸ In Jesus' community, a fox was understood as the most cunning animal. The point I make here is that there are religious constructions surrounding animals. This is also true for the Nguni and Shona speaking peoples. In the Marikana massacre, for example, the South African inquest established that the striking miners believed that the "muti" would insulate them against live fire. The subsequent death of victims was attributed to a violation of a taboo – killing a hare: "We discovered later that someone killed a hare despite the instruction not to kill any kind of animal."⁶⁹ As small as it is, the hare, in these ATRs, is understood as the serpent of Genesis, the cleverest and most intelligent animal.

There are many other animals mentioned in the Bible: the antelope,⁷⁰ bear, lion,⁷¹ and so on. Animals are believed to have the same potency as that of human beings – they can talk,⁷² foretell the future and above all, carry away transgressions of the people. This explains why they are sacrificed in specific places. In Jewish tradition, for example, on the Day of Atonement, a scapegoat was taken into the Temple. In this sanctuary, the priest imputes the sins of the nation to a goat and drives it into the wilderness, a religious performance symbolising the expiation of the nation's sins. Almost a similar practice is common in some African societies: for example, the practice of "*kurasidzira*" (casting away evil) among the Shona peoples. This is a practice in which a murderer consults a traditional healer who, in turn, performs certain rituals to "ward off" an avenging spirit. This is done by asking the deceased to take the given animal as his or her host. This animal is believed to take away the guilt from the concerned individual.

On the other hand, some bulls are named after deceased relatives (*nzombe yemusha gono*⁷³); are taken as manifestations of the ancestors. The bull is only killed on special traditional ceremonies (*kupira vadzimu kana kugadzira vadzimu*⁷⁴) meant to appease the spiritual world in Shona Religion. Lastly, these religious traditions share [although minor varied interpretations] almost same religious constructions about these animals: the lion or elephant is understood as an embodiment of power; the snake as representative of chaos (cf. wisdom/cunning in Old/New Testament); the owl as a harbinger for misfortune such as illnesses and deaths. We can see striking similarities among these religious traditions. In fact, early Christian communities believed that King Herod Agrippa died after an owl perched over his head.⁷⁵ In short, in ARTs as well as Judeo-Christian traditions, animals are human beings; they manifest themselves in such a way that certain religious ideas are generated about them.

⁶⁸ Luk. 13: 32

⁶⁹ Muti Works, Witness Tells Commission. 2014. <http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/gauteng/muti-works-witness-tells-commission-1.1712409> (accessed 24. 10., 2014)

⁷⁰ Deut. 14: 5, 12:15; Is. 15: 20; ass (Mt. 18: 6; Mk 9: 4; Lk. 17: 2

⁷¹ Am 5: 19

⁷² Num. 22: 28-30

⁷³ A practice common among the Shona peoples

⁷⁴ Ibid

⁷⁵ Josephus, Antiquities 19.8.2 343-361

Space in spiritual healing and well-being

Physical or abstract spaces are critical in healing. This is because devotees often visit Temples, churches, mountains, rivers, etc. in search of spiritual healing and well-being. In this section, I briefly look at selected spatial entities to illustrate this point. Firstly, water is a critical concept in healing space in most, if not all, religious traditions. In ARTs, certain water bodies are believed to have a healing potency. This is because these water bodies are associated with deities, water spirits (*nyami-nyami*⁷⁶ - a seven-headed snake) or creatures such as the mermaid (*nzuzu*⁷⁷). In one of the local newspaper articles, it was reported that a Jericho Church in Zion member was taken by a mermaid in the Mbuluzi river: "He is under strict supervision of the king of the underworld and water (*silo semanti*) which we refer to as *inzuzu*. He is alive, we are certain of that. This ritual is to plead with the king of the underworld and water to release him back to us."⁷⁸ This was the explanation given by church members after his mysterious disappearance following a cleansing ceremony. The subsequent ritual of throwing coins into the rivers⁷⁹ argues that these beliefs are alive as the performance was observed to expedite his release.

In addition, water collected from rock pockets, tree pockets (*mhango*), seas, falls, confluences or spilling rivers is believed to enhance health and well-being. In the ethnographic studies, I established the Nguni and Shona peoples use water from falls and oceans to keep away evil spirits. In "Old" through New Testament times, water was also of great spiritual significance. Moses, the liberator was saved by the waters of the river Nile,⁸⁰ it is life. Water was also used by priests in ritual cleansing,⁸¹ making covenants⁸² and healing in general.⁸³ A reading of the New Testament reveals that, water was imbued with religious meanings associated with health and well-being. The lame man at Bethsaida in John⁸⁴ regretted that there was no one to take him into the pool. The belief was that the first person to wash in the pool after an angel from heaven troubles the water would be healed of any disease. To the present, beliefs in the healing potency of water have permeated Pentecostal Christian Churches in southern Africa. The so-named anointed water, bottled water released in many brands: for the "fruit of the womb", "for employment", "for prosperity", etc. has sent believers 'wild' in their search for health and well-being. The absence of water would certainly inflict a huge spiritual impact on the health and well-being of adherents of these religious traditions.

⁷⁶ Shona ethnic groups living around the Kariba dam believe that the present dwindling water levels are caused by an angered snake living in the water.

⁷⁷ In my interviewees, I found out that the Nguni and Shona peoples believe in this imaginary creature. They believe to be half human, from torso to waist, half fish from waist to the tail.

⁷⁸ Sabelo Masimula, "Jerichos Attempt to Resurrect Drowned Man". 2013. <http://www.times.co.sz/News/83729.html> (accessed 3. 6.2013)

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ex. 2:3

⁸¹ Lev. 13: 15

⁸² Ez. 16: 9; Acts 8: 26-40

⁸³ 2 Kings 5: 1-14; Mk. 8: 22-25; Jn 9: 1-8

⁸⁴ John 5: 4-5

Today, certain spaces – trees, shrubs, grasses, etc. - are imbued with meanings and interpretations in the search of health and well-being. A most recent development in some charismatic churches today when adherents unbelievably eat grass on the strong conviction that they would be healed supports this view.⁸⁵ The underlying factor is that people attach subjective meanings to space in their spiritual healing and well-being. This is also true in Judeo-Christian traditions. In the “Old” Testament we read that Moses put a piece of wood in contaminated water and it was safe for drinking.⁸⁶ We also read that Jesus “spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes and he said “Go wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.”⁸⁷ To this end, in these religious traditions, space is imbued with religious constructions in the sphere of spiritual healing.

Celestial bodies and well-being

Celestial bodies – the sun, moon, stars, comets, among others- are understood as living objects in these religious traditions. This is because in the “Old” and New Testament times, stars sing,⁸⁸ there were prohibitions associated with the full moon and certain celestial entities,⁸⁹ and some celestial bodies were worshipped as deities.⁹⁰ In competing Roman religion, the sun – *sol invictus* - was worshipped as the unconquerable. Besides, Christmas as sacred space, is a ramification of Mithraism, a rival religion that was celebrated on December 25 in honour of Mithra.⁹¹ This understanding of celestial bodies as living bodies is also true in African religious tradition. The moon and the sun, for example, are taken as God’s right and left eye in some West African traditions such as the Akan.⁹² On the one hand, the Shona peoples believe that a hare sits on the moon. On the other hand, the Swazi people believe that, on the moon, stands a woman carrying a baby on her back. For this reason, the moon, especially the full-moon, is associated with key ritual celebrations such as the *Incwala* and the Reed Dance in Nguni religious traditions. This is because young men cut acacia branches used at *Incwala* under the full moon in Swazi Religious Tradition. On a full-moon, young maidens cut the reed as they celebrate Umhlanga, a local religious practice observed to promote virginity in maidens as well as inculcating traditional values in them. In Judeo-Christian traditions, as in the said religious traditions, important celebrations such as the Passover, first fruits, etc. are commemorated under the full-moon. These striking religious observances point to the fact that the moon is imbued with interpretations in religions.

⁸⁵Sibongile Sukati. SD *Miracle Pastor Visits SA Grass-eating Church*. 2014. <http://www.times.co.sz/news/96469-sd-miracle-pastor-visits-sa-grass-eating-church.html> (accessed 24. 10. 2014)

⁸⁶ Exodus 15: 25

⁸⁷John 9: 6-7

⁸⁸ Job 38: 7

⁸⁹ Col. 8: 16; Amos 8: 5

⁹⁰ Galatians 4: 3; Colossian 2: 8

⁹¹ Craig. G. Bloomberg. *Jesus and the Gospels: New Testament Introduction and Survey, 2nd ed.* (London: Inter-varsity Press, 2009), 36

⁹² John S. Mbiti, *African religions and philosophy*, 49

On the contrary, these life-giving celestial bodies could herald chaos or fortunes when they 'fall' from the sky. To avert this, a Swazi expresses a wish when he or she sees a shooting star.⁹³ In the case of the Shona peoples, the belief is that the individual would marry in the direction the comet disappears - or a very important person has died or will die in that direction. It is arguable that these religious constructions cultivate desirable psychological outcomes in stressful events and conditions - the perceived threat posed by falling celestial bodies. This belief certainly helps to absorb the pains associated with deaths. The perceived relationship between the celestial and the mundane world becomes conspicuous in religions. The birth or death of several prominent religious figures - Jesus, Abraham or traditional leaders⁹⁴ etc. - was, in religious imagination, heralded by a star!

From these traditions, it is evident that celestial bodies in space are viewed as having life or determine the lives of the people. However, the moon, from scientific discoveries, is a lifeless expansive space that reflects light from the sun and the amount of light reaching the earth depends on the moon's position. The supposed rabbit/man or woman on the moon is basically a dark lunar basin formed by not an asteroid impact as earlier believed, but erupting volcanic magma several million years ago.⁹⁵ It is mostly likely that these religious constructions about celestial bodies were primarily influenced by the fact the moon and stars were chief sources of light at night. This is because darkness is associated with those practices that disrupt harmony in the community, e.g. marauding carnivores operating under the cover of darkness.

Conclusion

In this article, the centrality of space in religions becomes visible as religious ideas are manufactured in and negotiated through space. Profane spaces are understood as portentous, heralding chaos - death, illnesses and misfortunes - negating the essence of life. In response, sacred spaces are consecrated and elevated over other spaces as they do not only connect the mundane and the supra-terrestrial but are expressive of the yearning desire to return to the original created order.⁹⁶

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⁹³ In my interviews I established that, traditional societies, believed that the wish would be realised.

⁹⁴ This belief is common among the Shona peoples in Zimbabwe

⁹⁵ Jenna Lacurci. Mysterious 'Man in the Moon' Born from Magma. 2014. <http://www.natureworldnews.com/articles/9290/20141001/mysterious-man-in-the-moon-born-from-magma.htm> (Accessed 27.10. 2014).

⁹⁶ Mircea Eliade. *The sacred and the profane*, 65

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The Market Space as a Religious Space:

A Comparative Study of Urban Vegetable Markets in Jos, Nigeria.

Lohna Bonkat

Abstract

The market has always been known as a space for economic exchange or interaction of people from diverse backgrounds. However, drawing from research in Jos, Nigeria with small scale entrepreneurial women, I argue that the activities that take place within the market space go beyond economic exchanges because as much as the market is a space for commerce, it is also a space of social, political and religious interactions. The interaction is not just limited to people, but rather involves the supernatural through the invocation of God or Allah. Thus, the market's function is extended to an arena of expressing religious beliefs. Reliance on God is perceived by market women especially during times of violent conflict as a source of security and protection. This paper sets out to examine the role religion is playing in the lives of market women as a source of security in dangerous times and situations. I will examine and show how religious spaces are created within the market, through the 'routinisation' of specific discourses, and practices. The paper is based on a comparative study of two vegetable markets in Jos, Nigeria. I have relied on semi structured interviews, FGDs and observations to collect data.

Keywords: Marketplace, Religious Space, Routinisation, Market Women, Economic Activities, Social Capital

Introduction

Market space has existed for a long time and has traditionally been known as a space where commercial activities like buying and selling, fixing of prices and money is exchanged. The market is the centre of economics, implying that it occupies a peculiar position in the main stream economic thought.¹ This means that the focus on market space is mainly on commercial relations. The market space is seldom discussed as a space where meaningful social action and interactions occurs.² In this paper, the market space is seen as a space where other activities take place apart from economics. Swedberg sees the market as a specific type of social structure,

¹ Storr, Virgil. Henry. *The Market as a Social Space: On the Meaningful Extra-Economic Conversations that Can Occur in markets* in *Rev Austrian Econ* (2008) 21:135-150

² Ibid.

comprising a network of buyers and sellers who are engaged in competition and exchange.³ Some scholars saw it as an abstract space where profit-maximization exchange dominates the interest of traders in it.⁴ The arguments of these scholars inform us that the market is perceived as an abstract space where only economic activity takes place while neglecting other activities that equally take place as people go about their daily activities. I therefore contend that the market space goes beyond economic exchanges; it is a multifaceted space where commerce, social, political and religious interactions takes place. The arguments above, tells us that the market space transcends the profane/sacred space binary and illustrates the complexity of space.

The interaction as I got to know during my research is not just limited to people, but rather involves the supernatural through the invocation of God or Allah, thereby extending the market's function to an arena of expressing religious beliefs. Reliance on God is perceived by women traders especially during times of violent conflict as a source of security and protection. This paper, therefore, sets out to examine the extent to which religion is played out in the marketplace and its importance in market women's lives. I will examine and show how religious spaces are created within the market, through the 'routinisation' of specific discourses, and practices. Routinisation here also means routine. The paper begins with a brief examination of the literature on the market space as a social space. I argue that new spaces have been created or activated by the people (traders) in the market space through their daily interactions, for the purpose of meeting a particular need and because of the new security challenges. Secondly, I employ Henri Lefebvre's theory of space in order to explore how space is produced, its potentials and for what purpose. This theory is particularly, instructive in this article because, it shows how spaces are not static, but can be reproduced, and to fit a particular purpose or need. Unlike Lefebvre, Creswell associated the notion of place to people's everyday life by unfolding the ways in which people are networked with different places at physical multiple geographical sites. Furthermore, he sees space as a place that people make meaningful through their activities.⁵ While Lefebvre's theory focused on the meaning as well as use of space, by reproducing it through their actions to fulfil a particular demand, Creswell however, focused on the meaning people give to space as they go about their everyday life, in his conceptualisation of place. Next, I will examine who created the space, reasons for its construction, activities that take place and the role that space play in the lives of women traders. I conclude by giving theoretical reflections using the Henri's Lefebvre theory of space.

³ Swedberg, R. *Markets as Social Structures*. In N. Smelser, & R. Swedberg (Eds.). *The handbook of economic sociology*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

⁴ De la Pradelle, M. 1995. *Market Exchange and the Social Construction of a Public Space*. (*French Cultural Studies* 6: 1995) 359; Shepherd, R. J. 2009. *When Culture goes to Market: Space, Place, and Identity in an Urban Marketplace*. (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

⁵ Tim Creswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden, Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

Market as a social space

A considerable amount of literature exists on market spaces, but most of the literature on markets sees markets as only economic spaces. A few scholars, however, have considered markets as social spaces where other activities beyond economic activities takes place.⁶ Porter et al in their study of Nigerian markets, argued that the market space has served as a space for mediation, negotiation and reconciliation. The interactions and relations among diverse groups of traders, especially during conflict situations facilitate reconciliation because of the need to work together to secure their livelihoods. As such, the relations go beyond economic activities, to include cooperative social relations like marriages, funerals, etc., home visits and intermarriage in Nigerian markets.⁷ Cohen in his study of Hausa migrants in Yoruba towns found that the relationship between landlords and clients is buttressed with informal moral relationships over time. These relations went beyond economic relations as personal relations were built. This happened by landlord helping their clients marry, fostering friendship which they believed can help in business.⁸ The relationship that occurred between traders went beyond economic relations in the social sphere which made the relationship thrive and as a result trust was built which fostered friendship.

Meagher⁹ also in her study of networks in the Aba market in south-eastern Nigeria similarly stated that one way traders bonded, formed solidarity and built trust was through the personal networks created in the market under the auspices of community or religious groupings. Traders belonged to either same ethnic association or religious groups beyond economic ties which helped in fostering, bonding, building trust and solidarity among traders as they go about their economic lives of buying and selling. Social clubs play a significant role in networking strategies among traders, beyond economics relations, which strengthens links among traders in business.¹⁰ The interesting thing about the relations that occurred in this study is its reliance on religion, which my study also focuses on as a form of social capital that binds traders despite diverse identities. Networks as it is argued, build personal relationships to foster relations among traders which serves as a social capital that binds them. Bourdieu asserted that social capital is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term.¹¹ I argue that, through different groups and associations traders have created time and invested in the networks, by contributing their resources and time which have in turn built a strong social capital among them. Clark's study of market women in Kumasi central market in

⁶ Porter Gina, Lyon Ferguson, Adamu Fatima, and Obafemi Lanre. *Trade and Markets in Conflict Development and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria (2005)*

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Cohen, Abner. *Custom and Politics in Urban Africa. A study of Hausa Migrants in Yoruba Towns.* (Published by Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1974).

⁹ Meagher, Kate. *Identity Economics: Social Networks and the Informal Economy in Nigeria.* Africa issues. (Woodbridge (England), Rochester, NY: James Currey, 2010).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹² Bourdieu, Pierre, *The forms of capital.* In J. Richardson (Ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York, Greenwood, 1986), 241-258.

Ghana argued in line with Meagher where she found out that familial bonds developed between and among market women, who sell side by side or who always meet at the point of buying and selling. This familial bond, she argued, builds informal sets of colleagues defined by commodity or by location, constituting the dominant structure of the marketplace system in Kumasi central and throughout southern Ghana. This is because most of the traders are self-employed and as such colleagues or customer relations encourages the formation of cohesive groups.¹² This relation builds a strong economic relation; however, it also has a social function. Neighbours chat, gossip, and often engage in discussions of a personal nature. They also assist in raising each other's children and share both food and sympathy with one another, which helps in developing tight bonds and forms true friendship. These relationships are certainly a form of social capital that positively impacts economic activity, they are nonetheless deep relationships which also have noneconomic significance although they are developed within a market context.¹³

The review of the literature above shows how other spaces have been produced beyond the economic space by actors for the purpose of building solidarity, bonds and friendships which enhances economic relations which. Arguing in line with Storr, where he pointed out that each of the relationships described above is distinct from market relations and might not be possible if not for markets. The argument might be made that most commercial relationships are not what would be characterized as deep friendships. However, many are primarily instrumental as a way of building or gaining access to social capital. Most are to some degree fake, arbitrary, or forced and none of these relations are on par with relationships built and fostered outside of a market context.¹⁴ Despite this fact, the market space has been instrumental for these other relations built by actors. Actors have not just been passive by accepting to use the space for only economic purposes, but they have gone ahead to create other spaces to meet other needs beyond business, since a greater part of their lives is lived inside the market space. Furthermore, the review of literature above, has shown how the market space has been used for other purposes other than economic purposes. This paper brings out another angle to the study on markets, and contributes to the literature by showing how the market space has equally been used as a religious space. I argue that, women traders, through their actions have created social (religious) space in the market in Jos through their activities, which I seek to unravel. I argue further that, women have used their agency through their actions to reproduce the market space to fulfil their religious obligation.

Theory of the production of space

This theory was propounded by Henri Lefebvre a French social theorist and philosopher in 1974, where he argued that social space "is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced and encompasses their interrelationships in

¹² Clark, Garcia. *Onions are my Husband. Survival and Accumulation by West African Market Women*. (Published by the University of Chicago Press, 1994).

¹³ Storr, *The Market as a Social Space*, 416.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 146.

their coexistence and simultaneity". To put it another way, space is not a "pre-existing, empty or neutral space or a space determined solely by geography, climate, [or] anthropology."¹⁵ Lefebvre claims that it is simplistic and misleading to conceive of space as only an abstract mental category or a lump of matter. Rather, space is a complex socially produced phenomenon, where artefacts, practices and mental categories all play a role. Social space is both material and imagined. Lefebvre's understanding of space is holistic and inclusive¹⁶. It's a site where interactions of social relations go on which results in the production of other spaces. It should be seen as something that is produced. It is a social product, which reveals social relations¹⁷. A space is an ongoing production of relations between diverse objects, both natural and social, including the networks that facilitate the exchange of such objects¹⁸. Space production is a process that does not stop which subsequently leads to the emergence of new spaces for the purpose of meeting a social need (religious or political) by a group of people or an individual.

Lefebvre more specifically, sees the process of the production of space in terms of a 'conceptual triad', comprised of three 'spatial moments' that affect each other simultaneously: (i) 'spatial practices', refers to space in its real, physical form, as it is perceived and generated; (ii) 'representations of space', refers to space in its imagined, mental form, as it is conceived and imagined; (iii) 'representational spaces', refers to space as it is lived and modified over time through its use. This form of space is both real-and- imagined.¹⁹ This means that there is an interaction by the three triads (spatial movements) which affects the other and subsequently leads to the creation of a space. Lefebvre contends that these three spatial moments constantly relate to each other in an open-ended process through which space is produced. Social space, then, is not a rigid and static object, but is a set of relations between objects that is constantly in a state of flux.²⁰ Lefebvre's theory of space production is important for this paper because, it provides a theoretical framework for analysing and explaining how women have actively participated in the creation of a new social (religious) space within a space that is originally created for economic purposes. Space is dynamic and as a result changes can occur by the production of new spaces through people's action, which becomes institutionalised because of its constant use. Constant use or routine/routinization of the space through the actions of women, with no intention of creating a new space, however, a new space is formed. As part of my analysis, I will also try to understand why this space was created and what kind of activities takes place within the new social space and its importance to the people that created it.

Semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation were used to collect data for triangulation. Doing this allowed me to understand how the market space has

¹⁵ Lefebvre, Henri. *The production of space*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991, 1974). 73-77

¹⁶ Lehtovuori, P. *Experience and Conflict: The dialectics of the production of public urban space in the light of new event venues in Helsinki 1993–2003*. (2005, PhD Thesis)

¹⁷ Kipfer, S, Goonewardena, K, Schmid, C, Milgrom, R. *Space, Difference, and Everyday Life in On the Production of Henri Lefebvre*. (Published by Routledge 270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016, 2008).

¹⁸ Dhaliwal, P, *Public squares and resistance: The politics of space in the Indignados movement* in a journal for and about social movements Article Volume 4 (1), 2012, 251 – 273.

¹⁹ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 33-38

²⁰ Ibid. 83.

been used for other purposes other than economic purposes. My paper was limited to women traders who are Christians and because they are 70% in the market space especially, in vegetable marketing in two markets. This is for the need of a homogenous population (same belief system), and as it is only women that pray in this space. My sample consists of 16 women from the markets under study. The analysis focuses on two vegetable markets namely: Tomato market and Farin-gada markets. The 1st market is a homogenous market of mainly Christian with about 90% women traders, while the 2nd market is heterogeneous with both men and women from different religions. The educational level of my informants varied from no education to junior school level. Informants were recruited with the assistance of market women leaders. The Hausa language was used for interviews and audio recorders were used with the permission of the informants which was transcribed. I used Atlas.ti software as a tool of analysis which helped in deriving the themes. I participated actively in four sessions of the religious meeting, with the consent of the women. I also observed what was happening in the market which helped in strengthening data collection.

‘Church Space’: Religion in the market space

The market is an economic space, therefore, expectations are that only economic activities takes place. However, from observation it was clear that other activities take apart from commercial pursuits. This is the reason why, I was curious to find out what goes on there beyond buying and selling. The questions that came to my mind was, how is it possible to carry out trading activities and at the same time create time to perform other activities like prayers? It was this curiosity that pushed me into finding out why, religious activities take place in such an environment. I therefore call that space a ‘church space.’²¹ Most of the people involved in that space are women traders from diverse backgrounds who come together to interact and through these interactions carved a niche for themselves. The next question was who created that space? The idea that spaces once created remains static I argue does not apply here because new spaces are being reproduced by actions of people through their daily activities for the purpose of meeting a particular need. A space therefore, can be defined in spatial terms as a geographical, physical dimension or the ‘distance, interval, or area between or within things; extent; room; as “leave a wide space between rows”²². The definition of space given here tells us that a space is something physical and static which cannot be changed. However, the space for me is dynamic because it can be activated by the actions of people, which in my study are women. What the women did was to further reproduce the market space into a social (religious) space through religious activities, so that they can continue to commune with God because they don’t have time to go to their churches for fellowship and also to commune with others. Most of the women I interviewed told me that they are Christians and it is expected of them to go to church for weekly activities and since they are not able, the fellowship they have in the market three times fulfils that part of their spiritual obligation.

²¹ A church space here means a place where people carry out certain religious activity which reflects what happens in the main church because of their inability to go to their churches as such they created a space to fulfil that purpose.

²² Peuquet, D, *Representations of Space and Time*. (New York: Guilford. 2002).

On an average, I go to church 3 times a week for Bible studies, prayer meeting and women fellowship, but since I started this business I cannot leave to go. As a result, this serves as a substitute for me. Interview with Mama Ayuba/Farin-gada Market/19.03.2013.

I infer from the actions of these women, because of the time spent in the market, that they are not able to fulfil their spiritual obligations. It is as a result of this that, they decided to find a way out of this. They came together using their connections and networks to create a space within the market space and convert it to fulfil their spiritual obligations. It was this action of women that lead to the creation of the religious space within an economic space (marketplace). Women's action here shows their agency because through their actions they gave another meaning to the market space and recreated to meet a particular need. The next thing I was curious to find out was the time they meet for fellowship and the kind of activities that takes place there?

“Religious worship”: A description

I will call the activity that takes place within the market space as ‘religious worship’. This is a short worship session that women traders engage in. This activity from observation and group discussion starts at 12 noon, which has become a routine and part of women trader's lives. I then had to inquire why they particularly start at 12 noon and not any other time. Some women told me that it is the convenient time to pray because, after the early morning sales, it is the middle of the day and so it is of great importance to ask God to protect and bless their day. They pray individually before starting their day, but they also believed there is more power in collective prayers.

When we pray in the market as a congregation we believe it is better. Because it is even written in the bible that when two or more people are gathered I am always in their midst, so the place we pray doesn't matter. FGDs with women at Tomato Market/18.08.2012.

It is good to pray together as Christians because when two or three are gathered we know he is with us and because we are supposed to pray and seek the face of the creator since we didn't create ourselves. FGDs with women at Farin-gada Market/06.04.2013.

The inference from the discussions above is that, religion has become part and parcel of women's lives. As a result, they make use every available opportunity, believing that God hears them anywhere even in the places of making a living. This therefore, does not stop them from seeking God at any point of their lives.

Fellowship starts at 12.00 noon with an opening prayer, normally by any of the leaders of the group, but there are times a member is asked to pray. After the prayers, they sing songs of praise and worship using locally made instruments like, drums and tambourines. Immediately after the praise and worship the next programme is to invite the preacher to share the word of God. The preacher most of the time comes from outside, that is, not part of the women traders, however, other women from within the fellowship also preach. Most of the preaching I heard was focusing on God's protection and provision. The preaching normally goes on for about 10-15mins, after

which the preacher closes with a word of prayer. After the preaching, women are given the opportunity to give testimonies, then offering is collected and announcements are made. Examples of testimonies and prayer request are; prayers for the sick, naming ceremony, wedding ceremony or thanking God for provision and protection of either their relatives or immediate family members of the women in question. Finally, they close with a word of prayer and everyone disperses. The fellowship normally goes on for about 35-45mins on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. The activities that take place in the fellowship described above, replicates what happens in a normal church even though shorter. The actions of women here show the importance and centrality of religious activities to their lives. This is why, they mobilised themselves through their networks or connections by using the market space for other benefits, apart from business alone. I argue that, belonging to this network and using its connections has inured to the benefit of women because it has enabled them to meet other needs they are were otherwise unable to meet as a consequence of the nature of their businesses.

Similarly, this is pointed out by Bourdieu that “profits which accrue from membership in a group are the basis of the solidarity which makes them possible”²³. This means that, belonging to a group has some benefits, “which are deliberately organised in order to concentrate social capital and so to derive full benefits from the multiplier implied in concentration and to secure profits of membership-material profits, such as all types of services accruing from useful relationships, and symbolic profits, such as those derived from associations with a rare, prestigious group”²⁴. The arguments above, shows how women have benefitted by belonging to a group. This is because through their efforts they have been able to meet a need they see very important to their lives. Being unable to go to church regularly because their businesses do not allow them the opportunity for it, they have utilised this opportunity to meet at the market for religious services to their advantage. They re-produced a religious space in the market space for the purpose of meeting this need of fellowship, which they believe is their fundamental Christian duty. They do not use this space for any other purpose like politics or negotiations. Their interest is to please God who they believe on the other hand, will bless them unlike ‘women in Kenya who transformed the church space from a place of prayers to a public space where social structural discrepancies like political tribalism and land grabbing that has led to displacement, are debated upon. This gets them involved in representing their issues, which is seen as women’s involvement in ‘politics from below,’²⁵ a completely different scenario from women traders in Jos. I also observed that offering was collected and this led to the next question of why they collect offering and its use since they were all there to make profit.

Offering is collected anytime we have fellowship and we use the offerings to help those bereaved, in need and in the middle of the year and end of the year, we buy soap and share for

²³ Bourdieu, Pierre, *The forms of capital*, 10.

²⁴ Ibid., 10

²⁵ Achieng Roseline. M, *‘Home away from Home?’ Internally Displaced Women and their Translocal Ethnic and Gender Co-operation in Reconstructing the Meaning of Places (Burnt Forest and Langas- Uasin Ngishu Kenya)*. (Unpublished PhD Thesis, 2004).

women and we buy musical instruments too. Interview with Mama John/women leader//Tomato Market/19.03.2013.

Within the religious space created, women further expanded it by using the money they collected to help each other in the form of loan and for community service. In an interview one of the women leaders who told me that the bridge connecting two sides of the market broke down, consequently, they had to use the offering collected to build it, since the government did not make any efforts to help them. Meagher similarly pointed out how religion has, historically and in contemporary times, also been a critical factor in the organisation of reliable economic networks outside the framework of the state.²⁶ The assertion above tells how religion has been used by women as a form of an organisation, and also for community service when government is absent. They also used the money to buy other materials like musical instruments to enhance worship, as well as help their members in times of need like marriage, naming ceremony or death etc. They use the offerings for other welfare purposes by meeting other personal needs like buying soap etc. Religious activity within the market space has become part and parcel of their lives, stressing my argument that, the market space is been used for other purpose other than economic purpose, which shows its dynamism. Religious space therefore, is not static because apart from the main purpose of prayers, they now have evolved into a network, for other purposes like supporting one another through daily contributions. This also means that, there is a further expansion of this space to other uses, which Lefebvre argued that a space is not static, instead, it continues to be produced or is re-produced by people's action. This is the typical situation of the religious space created by women in markets in Jos.

Belonging: A reason

Religion defines people, gives them identity and direction in what they do. Religion is perceived by many as something that is cultural, because it is believed it contains commandments for human behaviour and the society²⁷. Religion and culture in Nigeria cannot be easily separated, consequently, whenever individuals of the same religious persuasions meet they easily identify with each other, which gives them a sense of belonging. Meagher explored the centrality of religion to the formation of a cohesive ethnic identity among participating producers. The Yoruba weaving cluster, which developed about a century before colonialism, included weavers of a variety of ethnic origins, including Yoruba, Fulani, Nupe, Hausa and Igbirra. These different groups were welded together under a Yoruba Muslim identity based on use of the Yoruba language, the practice of Islam, and submission to the authority of the Emir of Ilorin. Also, the Igbo traders who were knitted together because of their belief in the Aro oracle.²⁸ Religion therefore, is part of human life which influences, binds and creates solidarity among people with similar beliefs. This is why, it was easy for women to identify with other women traders. Apart from the reasons

²⁶ Meagher, Kate (2009). *Trading on Faith: Religious Movements and Informal Economic Governance in Nigeria*. Journal of modern African studies, 47 (3), (2009) pp. 397-423.

²⁷ Engelenhoven, *Faith and fortune*.

²¹⁰ Meagher, *Trading on faith*

given above, it is also believed that belonging to a group will make God protect and bless the persons involved, as such they cannot do without him. I tried to find out from the market women reasons for their involvement in this group, since these activities could be done in church or at home and not in a place traditionally meant for buying and selling. These were some of their reasons for joining:

For some of them belonging to this group builds trust and solidarity. This is because they come from different places and ethnicities in the country and therefore, religion becomes a common ground to associate with other people of similar beliefs. It creates an opportunity for them to have fellowship and to fill in the gap of not being able to attend church services, which they consider as their Christian duty. Reasons for women belonging to this group are illustrated below:

I barely pray at home because of the nature of my business, so I think it is good to have fellowship and pray with others because the presence of God is everywhere. Interview with Mama Chomo/Farin-gada Market/19.03.2013.

Most of us here barely have time to participate in church activities, so we pray to compliment that. This is so because we spent almost all our day in the market and don't mostly go for weekly church activities. FGDs with women Farin-gada market/18.08.2012

Most of the women I interviewed told me that it gives them the opportunity to pray and ask God to bless their business, protect and guide especially because of the conflict that has been going on in Jos for some time now. This provides a sense of security, blessings and protection. We can see from the responses above that, religion is an important part of women's lives, because they believe apart from building trust and solidarity it's a platform for them to have fellowship and communion with God which is their Christian obligation that cannot be removed from their lives. Therefore, the market space cannot stop or deter them from creating time to be with God and thank him for blessing and protecting them.

Role and benefits of religion in women traders' lives

Belonging or becoming part of this network or prayer group impacts women traders positively according to most of the interviews and FGDs carried out. This is illustrated below:

The interviewees asserted that they get encouraged and also encourage others in difficult times through the messages they hear. Encouragement comes through the message they hear during the prayer meetings, and are told not be discouraged because of the conflict, and that God will watch over them. This I argue, has a psychological effect on the women, which helps them to continue and endure despite difficulty they face because of low patronage of their goods, loss of customer base, destruction of goods and loss of loved ones.

Additionally, quite a number of the women told me that they were favoured because the demand for their goods increased. This is illustrated in the interviews below:

This prayer to me is very important because God always help and answer my prayers. Sometimes patronage is poor but after the prayers customers start coming and you could feel the miracle yourself. Interview with Mrs Grace Ayuba/Farin gada market/25.06.2012.

Sometimes when I come to the market nobody patronises me, but after prayers I don't know what will happen the next thing I see is that I will start having plenty customers coming around to buy from me. Interview with Madam Esther Biturs/Tomato market/06.04.2013.

What I infer from the interviews above is that, most of these women believe in the supernatural. Therefore, if they get patronage, they feel that it is God that has blessed them because of their efforts in serving him, despite the situation they have found themselves in. This also has a psychological effect on the women.

Source of support: Women normally collect offering at the end of their prayers which they use in supporting one another in times of bereavement or celebrations like marriage, naming ceremony etc. The monies are also used in buying items like Soap, food seasoning like Maggi, Salt etc. in the middle and end of the year shared among the women. Women also access soft loan from the money contributed to help in their business.

We use the offerings to help those bereaved, in need and in the middle of the year and end of the year we buy soap and share for women and we buy musical instruments. FGDs with women at Tomato market/25.03.2014.

We use the offertory to assist members in need, for example during occasions, death or a need in the market. FGD with women at Farin gada market/20.03.2014.

The interviews above, tell us how collections made during prayers is of help to women. Most of them mentioned that the money is used to assist other member when the need arises. In an informal discussion with some of the women they told me that, the offerings collected is sometimes given to them in the form of soft loans. This loan is normally paid back with some interest, which further builds the capital base of the group and is of advantage to the group. This is a way of sharing one another's problems because of the commonality of belonging. Apart from the feelings of belonging, it also builds a strong social capital "which brings together, in a seemingly fortuitous way, individuals as homogeneous as possible in all pertinent respects in terms of the existence and persistence of the group"²⁹. The religious group created by women, I argue in line with Bourdieu has brought together a homogeneous group and build solidarity among the members of the group (women), which has led to a long lasting relationship.

Conflict creates a situation of insecurity and uncertainty as a result people always try to find ways to ensure their safety, this is the situation of Jos. Jos has experienced constant eruption of violent conflicts in the last decade which has affected markets especially women traders. Most of the women traders I interviewed and discussed with, told me that God has protected them because of their prayers. Illustrated in the interviews below:

²⁹ Bourdieu, Forms of Capital. 11.

Whenever conflict erupts we find a way of escape and as you can see peace is returning to Jos. We believe that it is God that has been hearing our prayers because we always pray with a clean mind. FGDs with Market women in Farin gada market/21.03.2013.

It is our fervent prayers that have given us protection because in this market, there has never been any casualty as a result of the crisis in Jos. We always find a way of escape. Apart from that most of our goods were not destroyed, even though some women suffered but God helped them to start again. So I believe that the prayers we have here has helped us. FGDs with Market women in Tomato market/09.04.2013.

Belonging to this group from the interviews above, shows women traders' belief in a supernatural being who protects and keeps them secured because of their prayers as such for them, it is a legitimate and secured place to be.³⁰ This is why they have appropriated and created part of the market space for religious purposes which they find very good because of the benefits derived. Religious activities have played a central role in the lives of women traders by giving them a sense of security, protection, favour, help, and encouragement to enable them continue their daily lives which has enhanced their livelihoods. Markets are therefore used in a more practical way for more than economic purposes but as a space where network is built by relating and interacting in a religious space which builds solidarity, trust and binds people.

Emergence of new social (religious) space by routine

I have demonstrated in the empirical part of this paper of how women traders through their practices led to the emergence of a new social (religious) space. In applying Henri Lefebvre's theory of production of space to my study we see a situation where women traders through their practices have created a social (religious) space within a space originally known for economic activities. Routine here to me can be defined as, doing something constantly which is normalised and later becomes part and parcel of one's life. The dynamics at play here is that of women continuously or on a daily basis creating time to fellowship with one another. This action over time becomes part of the everyday life of women traders, which has been institutionalized as a 'church space' accepted by other traders in the marketplace. It is this routinized actions of women traders, I argue that led to the emergence of other spaces. The routine of women traders through a mini-church service shows a dominant representation of that space. This shows how a social (religious) space is being reproduced within the market space, to fulfil spiritual obligations through women traders' actions.

From Lefebvre's perspective, women traders' practices have definitely led to the emergence of a new socio-religious space, because the market is perceived as an economic space by people in Jos which is the dominant representation of a market space as Lefebvre argued. Routines of social space, spatial practices can be understood as the glue that holds a social group together, ensuring some degree of cohesion and continuity. In terms of social space, and an individual's relationship to that space, this implies a certain level of 'competence' and 'performance' from that

³⁰ Achieng, Home away from Home.

individual in terms of maintaining such cohesion.³¹ Continuing with the case of market space in Jos, spatial practices can be clearly seen in the constant practices of women traders through fellowship. He further contends that a social space is not a rigid and static object, but is a set of relations between objects that is constantly in a state of flux.³²

As much as new spaces emerge because of peoples practices it doesn't go unchallenged. Therefore, this means that there are limitations to this theory because, some spaces either go extinct or are destroyed because of some circumstances or situations. A practical case is the Farin-gada market where, most of the women traders told me that they can no longer pray in the market because the space used for praying is no longer available. This was caused by the conflict in Jos. However, they argued that before the conflict in Jos, they were praying in a shop but the conflict led to the relocation of more traders to this market, as a result, there are no free spaces for them to pray. We can see from the example above that, changes that occur in the market space can also be negative, obviously seen in the illustration above.

Conclusion

The market space is seen by other scholars as a social space where other interactions beyond economic relations takes place. This paper showed that, the interactions in the market is not merely focused on business relations, therefore, the relations in the marketplace should not be reduced to only negotiations of exchange, as other relations take place which builds trust and enhances economic relations. This is seen in the creation of a religious space within an economic space through the actions, interactions and constant practices of women traders. Women's agency can be said to have been mobilised here, through their actions which has led to the creation of another space (religious) for other activities.

Lefebvre's work on production of space, I believe have shown that a space is not static but it is also dynamic, because it can be created or reproduced through people's actions. Therefore, a space should not be understood to have one meaning as noted by Lefebvre because other activities takes place there. I argue that the market space in Jos is more than a space for economic interaction, but it is also a social space that has used in a more practical way where network, solidarity and trust is built, friendships are formed and binds people of different and diverse backgrounds.

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³¹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 38.

³² Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 83.

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Creating Communitas: Muslim Voices, Gender Norms and Mediated Sacred Spaces in Ghana

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Abstract

This paper analyses sacred space as a theoretical concept by looking at the production of sacred space through mediation among Muslims in the media. The setting of the research is Ghana. It shows, through the method of discourse analysis that, mediation can produce sacred space and maintain it though contested. Although the production of sacred space takes place, it is at the same time contested by the secularity of the context understudy. Thus the paper explores the production of sacred space as it happens in different angles. It also highlights that sacred spaces have varied meanings.

Keywords: Space, Sacred, Media, Mediation, Mediatisation, and Gender

Introduction

“The emergence of new classes through education and through new economic relations has made a significant impact on the production of Islamic trends”.¹ With specific reference to Northern Nigeria, part of the West African sub-region in which Ghana² is located, Umar³ has stated that the form of education Muslims receive has contributed to the various Islamic trends that have sprung up in the region. In West Africa, Islamic trends are closely connected to the moral renewal movement, which has a long-standing history in the entire sub-region. Moral renewal is a movement linked to Sufi order and their opponents who call for the eradication of some practices of their opponents as innovation.⁴

¹ Abdulkader Tayob, “Making Sense of Modern Muslim Intellectual History,” *Die Welt des Islams* 47, no. 3/4 (2007): 257.

² The country Ghana is a West African country that gained its independence on the 6th of March 1957. It is predominantly Christian with a Muslim representation of 17% according to the report of the 2010 population and housing census.

³ Mahammad S Umar, “Education and Islamic Trends in Northern Nigeria: 1970-1990s”. *Africa Today* 48. no. 2 (2001).

⁴ Roman Loimeier, *Islamic Reform and Political Change in Northern Nigeria*. Evanston (Illinois: Northwestern University Press: 1997).

Sacred space mediation is one of the arenas of moral renewal. In this paper, I use the idea of sacred space to show the particular rhetoric Muslim voices⁵ in the media adopt to construct *comunitas* within a secular community, Ghana. I rely greatly on the idea of making sacred space shown by Mittermaier⁶ in relation to dreams and saint shrines in Egypt. Mittermaier defines space as “not only produced through visible social and material relations but [as] a broader realm that is socially and metaphysically imbued with meaning and power. Dreams can be thought of as space because dreamers move in and through dreams.”⁷ In other words, she shows that dreams can be seen as space particularly with reference to the ways dreams move dreamers. She says that dreams move dreamers through some instructions received in the dreams to be executed in a social space, a shrine, in her work. A dreamer can, for example, be instructed by one of her interlocutors to give some form of gifts with the expectation of a counter gift, a blessing. Thus dreams moving dreamers means “imaginary interactions are not divorced from the material but rather expand its space.”⁸ The link of Mittermaier’s work to this paper is in the ways that belief is directly linked to believers’ practices. The manners in which “dreams move dreamers” are similar to the ways that the ambition of Muslim voices to mediate sacred space move Muslims towards a particular kind of direction with regards to gender⁹ norms. The use of dream in this paper is symbolic although in Mittermaier’s work it is used in its real sense. Here the symbolic use is to illustrate the mediation of Muslim voices through the media, which constantly engages the Muslim mind by moving towards moral renewal or reform. Thus sacred space, in this sense is the ways that space is expanded through mediation. Mediatisation takes place through the ways Muslim consumers rethink and even embody gender normativity espoused by mediated Muslim voices.

Media messages sent to consumers help re-establish, reorder or sometimes change some existing norms. Some work has been done on the interconnectedness of the media and religious practices. Scholars have shown in both Hindu revivalism¹⁰ and Protestant Christianity¹¹ that the

⁵ I use the term Muslim voices to denote Muslims who appear in the media, both the visual and the audio to propagate one brand or the other of Islam. Largely their notions and perspectives are almost with one objective. To set the Islamic moral standards per their understanding of Islam.

⁶Amira Mittermeier, “(Re)Imagining Space: Dreams and Saint Shrines in Egypt,” In *Dimensions of Locality: Muslim Saints, their Place and Space*, ed. Georg Stauth and Samuli Schielke (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2008):47-66.

⁷ Ibid. 50

⁸ Ibid. 57

⁹ The definition for gender is drawn from Lövheim. She states that a simple working definition of gender would be as a social construct defining the attributes, behavior and roles that are generally associated with men or women.” She continues to elaborate on it that, “gender is thus derived from but different than biological sex. However, as the later history of feminist theory has shown, gender can hardly be defined once and for all but is rather constructed in the relation between biological genitalia and hormones defining male and female bodies, the socially and culturally constructed values and norms attached to these physical markers and the individual and social identities enacted out of these.

¹⁰ Refer to the following: John Little, “Video Vacana: Swadhyaya and Sacred Tapes,” In *Media and Transformation of Religion in South Asia*, ed. Lawrence Babb and Susan Wadley 254-284. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995): 254-284. Philip Lutgendorf, “All in the (Radhu) Family: A Video Epic in Cultural Context”. In *Media and Transformation of Religion in South Asia*, ed. Lawrence Babb and Susan Wadley (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995): 217-253. Purnima Mankekar, *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics: An Ethnography of*

media impacts believers' understanding of actual religiosity. Research on Islam¹² has indicated that the production of higher ethical values—in terms of fashion and style, for example—link Muslims globally through transnational media. Hoover¹³ has opined that religion and the media cannot be divorced from each other due to the ways in which the media and religion intersect in the construction of meaning and identity. He explains that “plausible narratives of the self” provide important interpretive purchase on the questions of the making of meaning and identity in contemporary life. Religion, or practices, symbols and meanings in the realm we used to think of as ‘religion’, comes into play in certain of these constructions, and the media sphere is both an important context and a provider of voluble symbols”. Mowlana’s¹⁴ chapter studies “social systems and value systems” within an Islamic framework argues that the theoretical foundation of Islamic societies are inimical to the full appreciation of communication in those societies. To this end, he states, “throughout Islamic societies not only did religion encompass a person wholly, but also the conduct of individuals in general was shaped by Islamic socio-religious ethics. In short, whereas modern ethics in the West became predominantly social in nature, in Islamic societies that power remained religious as well as social. As the Qur’an says: ‘The noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the best of you in conduct’ (49:13).” For him therefore, mediation and mediatisation in Muslim settings must be understood within an Islamic framework of Islamic ethics. Piela¹⁵ has argued that the idea of Muslim women appearing in the media is a challenge to formal religious authority. Thus challenging the media’s stereotype of Muslim women and move towards power and gender relations in Islam. As my data will show later, Muslim voices are not exclusively men. Alongside men like Shaikh Armeyao Shaibu and Shaikh Ishak Nuamah, female personalities in the media like Hajia Fatimatu Bint Habib and Hajia Aida Jibril have become household names in the Muslim community.

Through the use of the media Schulz has indicated that “over the past 20 years, Muslims in Africa, similar to their brethren throughout the Muslim world, have witnessed the rise to prominence of a new type of religious leaders who promote Islam as a mission geared toward social and individual moral reform.”¹⁶ Schulz¹⁷ has shown again in her work that the use of the media

Television, Womanhood, and Nation in Postcolonial India. Duke University Press: Durham DC, 1999. Rajagopal, Arvind. *Politics after Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹¹ Colleen McDonnell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1995) Colleen McDonnell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900* (Indiana: Bloomington University Press, 1986).

¹² Yael Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

¹³ Stewart M Hoover, “Religion, Media and Identity: Theory and Method in the Research on Religion and Media,” In *Mediating Religion: Conversations in Media, Religion and Culture*, ed. Jolyon Mitchel and Sophia Marriage (New York, London: T&T Clark, 2003): 9-20.

¹⁴ Hamid Mowlana, “Foundation of Communication in Islamic Societies”, In *Mediating Religion: Conversations in Media, Religion and Culture*, ed. Jolyon Mitchel and Sophia Marriage 305-316. (New York, London: T&T Clark, 2003):305-316.

¹⁵ Anna Piela, “Claiming Religious Authority: Muslim Women and New Media.” In *Media, Religion and Gender: Key Issues and New Challenges*, ed. Mia Lövhelm 125-140. (New York: Routledge, 2013): 125-140.

¹⁶ Dorothea Schulz, “Promise of (Im)mediate Salvation: Islam, Broadcast Media and the Remaking of Religious Experience in Mali,” *American Ethnologist* 43, no.2 (2006): 220.

has an enormous impact on the production of individual values that lead to the creation of a community with high moral standing expected of Muslims. In her “Remaking society from within: Extraversion and the social forms of Female Muslim Activism in Urban Mali”¹⁸ she showed the ways in which the moral standing of an entire society starts from the individual self. In this work she indicates Muslim women’s activism as a tool to transform the Malian society from ill ridden to a pious and god-like one. Thus the activities of women activists with the goal of reforming the entire Muslim community start with a focus on the individual. The individual’s reform is crucial for the collective good of society. The women’s practice of veiling and modesty is the beginning of moral transformation. Moral renewal is therefore the understanding that Muslims should go back to the fundamental teachings and practices of Islam. Schulz’s apt analysis gives an example from Mali of the moral renewal movement that is sweeping through the West African sub-region. She¹⁹ argues further that moral renewal from the narratives of Malian women aims to “effect moral renewal of society and self, a renewal based on what they understand to be the authentic, unmitigated teachings of Islam.” The production of Islamic trends specifically with regards to *adab* (manners) through mediatisation flourished in Ghana from the early 1990s. This trend is closely connected to the liberalization of the media in Ghana from the early 1990s to date.²⁰ With this development, Muslims with access to the media became the spokespersons of the Muslim community with different perspectives and orientations on what stands for the conventional or proper form of Islam. Among other things they speak concerning ways in which Islam has carved the natural order of society concerning men and women’s relationships in both private and public life.

This paper will show that the media is a significant tool used by Muslim voices to mediate sacred space relative to gender norms within a broader secular country, Ghana. Through the mediation by Muslim voices the attempt to remake societal gender norms is emphasized. In the end however, I will show that it is contested by the values of the broader society thereby producing two sides of believers: those who conform to the teachings of the Muslim voices (conformists), and those who do not (non-conformists). The general understanding however is that both conformist and non-conformist Muslims concur that Muslim voices seem to map spaces, reorder spaces, colonize spaces and compartmentalize space but some values of the broader secular country hinders the mediation of Muslim voices. I will further show the manner in which Muslim voices mediate sacred space concerning gender in the Muslim’s imagination through the extensive use

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Dorothea Schulz, “Remaking society from within: Extraversion and the social forms of Female Muslim Activism in Urban Mali,” In *Development and Politics from below, Exploring Religious Spaces in the African State*, ed. Bompani, Barbara, Frahm-Arp M., (London: Palgrave-McMillan, 2010):74-96.

¹⁹ Dorothea Schulz, “(Re)Turning to Proper Muslim Practice: Islamic Moral Renewal and Women’s Conflicting Assertions of Sunni Identity in Urban Mali,” *Africa Today* 54, no.4 (2008): 22.

²⁰ Owusu has shown in part of his work concerning the liberalization that, the historical trajectories of the media, journalism took a long period of time to arrive at its current state. He states that it was until 1992 when a provision was made in the constitution on freedom and independence of the media. This feat consequently led to the repeal of the almost a century old criminal libel law in the year 2001. Today, “Ghana has a diverse media sector with about two hundred authorized FM stations, twelve private television stations and hundreds of newspapers” (Owusu, 2011/2012: 40).

of the media thereby showing that sacred space in Africa is not one entity. It is diverse and pregnant with different forms of meanings. In particular, the nature of sacred space envisioned by Muslim voices has some peculiar features linked to the entire transnational Islamic renewal movement across Muslim West Africa.

My research on gender in Muslim thought, belief, actions and expectations drew my attention to the conversation surrounding gender in the Ghanaian media with regard to their mediation of sacred spaces. The method for both data collection and analysis is discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is of utmost importance because when people communicate it goes beyond just the transfer of information. This method shows how meaning is constructed as well as how power functions in society.²¹ I paid particular attention to the conversations in both the airwaves and the visual media, especially on Friday mornings and later after the *Jumua*²² prayers. The programs feature all kinds of personalities with different topics on the prescriptive ways of living Islam. I paid extensive attention to several programs on Fridays. Fridays are the days set aside for Islamic programs. On TV3's Islamic hour, the host, Bagnya spoke with various women and men on several topics including gender; he specifically hosted veiled career women, who were competent English speakers. The use of English language and the calibre of the guests he hosts give a sense of elitism. The Metropolitan Television network (Metro TV), owned by Muslims, gives free airtime to host Muslim programs spanning from 9am to about half past 11am. Metro TV enjoys a large viewership because of the language variety it offers. People of different educational and ethnic backgrounds are attracted to the conversations about Islam because of the multiplicity of languages. Apart from English, it uses dominant Ghanaian languages including Hausa, Ga and Twi. Ghana Television and Radio *Marhaba* are my other sources of data for this paper. Radio *Marhaba* in particular only airs in Hausa, the lingua franca of the Muslim quarters (Zongos) of southern Ghana. For Ghana Television, the only program that is aired on Fridays is in English. In the next empirical section of the chapter I show the ways through which Muslim voices mediate sacred spaces through gender norms. Through their extensive use of the media, they mediate sacred spaces within the broader Ghanaian secular community.

Creating *communitas* through mediated sacred spaces

Muslims in Ghana form a sizeable minority with a specific set of gender norms which, from the perspective of the Muslim voices who I describe as dreamers, does not conform to the standard Islamic gendered social norms. Per their discussions, gendered normativity is not only a visible social practice; it is also a religious duty incumbent on all Muslims as Islam is a religion that does not demarcate between the physical and the mundane. All human actions are related to the

²¹ Derek Edwards, *Discourse and Cognition*. SAGE publications: London and Thousand Oaks, 1997. Gee, James P. *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999). Margaret Wetherel., Stephanie Taylor, Simeon J Yates, *Discourse as Data: A Guide for Analysis*, (London: SAGE publications). Margaret Wetherel., Stephanie Taylor, Simeon J. Yates, *Discourse as Data: A Guide for Analysis*, (London: SAGE publications). Carla Willig, *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology: Adventures in Theory and Method.*, (New York, McGraw Hill).

²² Fridays are days set aside for a special Muslim afternoon prayer in place of the early afternoon prayer.

mundane. For this reason, the physical cannot be dissociated from the mundane, hence the need to reform the Muslim community with regards to gendered norms. Thus the moral reform is geared towards the creation of a sacred space with respect to gender. Muslim voices conversant with the stereotypes surrounding Muslim women and gender norms²³ attempt to answer the questions surrounding gender norms in a defensive way. Their arguments usually concern ideas of equity and equality. Muslim voices claim that in all spheres of human endeavours there is a sense of equality emanating from the broader Islamic notion of *Khalifa*: human beings as the representatives of God on earth. The only reserved sphere of human endeavour in which there is no equality is the social realm that is largely determined by biological differences; hence the Islamic position in the social domain is equity, not equality. Per their discussions, the sense of equity emanates from the fact that nature has given more physical strength to men to work and support women financially while women engage mainly in human reproduction and domesticity, men as public individuals and women as private individuals. The attempt of Muslim voices to mediate sacred space in Ghana through gender normativity takes them back to the historically constructed definitions of gender and its norms in Muslim communities of pre-modern times. At the same time, they relate it to contemporary notions and norms of gender. As an example of common Muslim definitions of gender and its practices, one renowned Muslim voice has remarked concerning the social demarcation of men and women:

Segregation is mainly to maintain moral sanity in society; so as long as a woman is well covered it's not disallowed for her to move freely and participate fully in all spheres of national development. The aim of Islamic prescriptions on segregation of the sexes is to limit free mixing of unrelated males and females so as to prevent social ills (Ameer Wahab Adam, Ghana Television).

This is a common comment and position made and taken by Muslim voices in order to show the Islamic position on gender demarcation. It indicates a particular kind of Muslim praxis that defines gender through the use of the veil worn by women. The veil however, is not only Muslim women's dress code but also has a deeper meaning underpinning its use. Muslim women are individuals and thus their decisions to don the veil give way to a type of individual moral reform that puts a demarcation between men and women. The comment quoted above is not uncommon among Muslim voices; Hajia Fatima repeated it in another way and connected the demarcation of the Muslim social order, saying:

the veil is not a barrier to a woman's social contribution. Why is a Muslim woman's veiling an entrapment while that of the Catholic nun is not? Those who think it is must ask and we will tell them how we feel about it. Women must do favour to themselves, put on the veils, go out there and be themselves.

As it stands, Fatima's argument reveals a type of agency for Muslim women in that their understanding and acceptability of the veil should not be a barrier to their participation in public life—an idea that is against the common notion that the veil is a sign of male oppression. This is shown in the above comment through comparing two scenarios, Catholic nuns' veiling and Mus-

²³ For more on such discussions on gender norms in an Islamic framework see Farhi, 2001.

lim women's. To the extent that there is a comparison between two religions means there is an identification of a problem. The realization of this seeming social problem culminated in finding a solution. This kind of realization by Muslim voices gave birth to the dream of remaking a society from within. One approach to this mediation of sacred space is the comparisons of the Ghanaian Muslim gender norms to those that existed in Medina, the first Muslim community founded and established during the lifetime of Muhammad, the founder of Islam. The comments of the Muslim voices show that there is a kind of nostalgia when they think and reflect on the kind of *communitas* they envisage for the Ghanaian Muslim. Medina is therefore the model Muslim community. Muslim voices compare and contrast the Ghanaian Muslim gender norms to the Medina or the Caliphate era (the early centuries immediately after the demise of Muhammad).

Within the dream of making the sacred community is embedded a sacred structure. Within the dream, the envisaged *communitas* starts from the individual woman through the code of dressing then the unit of the community, the family, is next in line. The nature of the society is deeply influenced by the ways each individual family in the community organizes itself through segregation of the sexes of the household inhabitants. Women are on one side of the household, while men are supposed to be on another. This system of segregation is embodied in the use of the veil by women whenever an unrelated blood relation enters. All women of such households must conform to the proper standard of veiling to avoid social ills. As an element of the dream, women's domesticity and procreativity is largely acknowledged and encouraged by Muslim voices. In their comments the natural place of a woman is the home environment, childbirth and upbringing on the one hand. The position of a man, on the other hand, is mainly outside the home environment; a man has been endowed with physical strength to work and support his household financially. This notion extends to public participation of Muslim women, to the point where careers are gendered and bordered by the veil. A woman donning the veil thus is the first marker of moral reform. Muslim voices have encouraged careers such as teaching, nursing, and some aspect of medical practice like gynaecology for women. For them to materialize this dream such professions are for women only if a situation demands that they work or engage themselves in financially rewarding work. In the case of female gynaecologist, for example, Muslim voices hold the view that "it is better to have a woman, especially a Muslim woman to attend to her fellow Muslim woman in all female related medical attentions". Nursing and teaching, too, are professions with a feminine touch. One needs female qualities like patience, love and care—hence the natural suitability of these professions for women.

There is usually some expression of fear and perceived difficulty by Muslim voices regarding the realization of the dreamed sacred *communitas*. Ghana is secular and is not isolated from economic and other changes sweeping around the globe, which have resulted in women's massive engagement in public life. It is a complex society made up of men and women facing different contemporary situations of secularization, modernity, and globalization with various local expressions. This for Muslim voices is a challenge to their mediation of sacred spaces. For this reason, Muslim voices emphasize that "we do not speak for ourselves but for Allah, Allah created mankind and ordered us [mankind] to live in a manner that He [Allah] has ordained. Flouting these rules is punishable by Allah because Allah detests disobedient servants" (Aida Jibril, Ani-

sa'a, Metro TV). On one level, one might understand this statement as saying that the dream of mediating sacred space is not invented by human beings. Muslim voices in this case are speaking for Allah. On another level, the manner in which some Muslim voices present their notion of gender norms is either inclusive or exclusive. One can quickly recognize the distance taken by such voices with the twin idea of inclusion and exclusion. Those who believe are those who obey Allah, and vice versa. This notion of Muslims having to make individual decisions to either conform or not is in itself one of the challenges confronting Muslim voices in their mediation of sacred space. As the country is made up of different religious, educational, professional and economic backgrounds, they envisage some difficulties and sometimes problematize them. Given that the country is secular and Muslims form the minority, some Muslim voices have argued that, although there is a problem—an overturn of Muslim gender norms—finding a way to materialize the dream of a sacred community must take a gradual process. Zagoon Haruna cites an example; “the good schools” in Ghana (Islam and Life, GTV) were founded by Christian missionary organizations, and these schools have rules pertaining to the founding organizations. Another example was cited by Abban regarding the veiling of female Muslim professionals: female nurses are not allowed to don the veil and they work largely with unrelated males. For Muslim voices, these examples pose a difficulty that must be handled tactically. “The good schools,” for instance, prepare children to have access to competitive higher education for a better livelihood. If a Muslim is financially deprived, he/she is in turn likely not to live the ways of Islam. One noted Muslim voice said that, “Islam is a religion which hates poverty and deprivation, which is why Muslims pray for the good of this world and the hereafter” (Malam Mohammed, Metropolitan Television).

The challenge does not, however, end here. A section of some Muslim voices make comments to exclude Muslims who do not conform to the perceived Islamic gender norms. Among such challenges is the implicit exclusion of some Muslims from the mediated sacred space. Prophetic sayings like “angels do not get near unveiled women” (Hajia Fatima on Metro TV) exclude unveiled women from the *communitas*. In this case, there is no recognition of the fact that the circumstances are diverse and complicated. Such a voice perceives the dream of a sacred space, posing a possible solution without first looking into the challenges at hand. This position was challenged by one highly recognized Muslim voice. She emphasizes the need to recognize the reality as well as taking a gradual and realistic approach to realizing the mediated sacred space. She states the challenge clearly:

the challenge in a secular country as a journalist for example is the broader Muslim perception that a woman's voice must not be heard in public. But the family one comes from gives a great support for one to establish oneself in such communities, because the Quran encourages all believers to participate fully and actively in society. The society is made up of men and women as well as diverse aspects which include politics, economics etc. So any person, be it male or female is expected to participate in any chosen sphere to contribute their quota to the development and wellbeing of mankind. For Muslim women in the media who are not veiled it is due to the nature of the society, as media houses even with Muslim management would not permit women to cover for commercial reasons (Salima on GTV).

The common theological position that the feminine voice is private and so must not be heard in public illustrates, in a way, that some professions like journalism are abhorred by Islam. She argues per Muslim perception that since the female voice is one of the very discrete regions of the human anatomy its appearance in public is abhorred. If the female voice is heard in the public domain then the female modesty rule encouraged by Islam is violated. At the same time however, Salima critically engages in a personalized textual interpretation and argues that per the Qur'anic teachings all of mankind has the chance to choose their own ways in which to contribute to national development. By contextualizing her exegesis, she presents her point in a way that evades the position of some Muslim voices' utterances on the public participation of women. Again, there is the recognition of a challenge facing the Muslim community because of the secularity of the context. She throws a challenge to Muslim business persons in good economic standing to establish media houses guided by Islamic rules in order to ameliorate what she feels is the challenge of the Muslim populace. She states, "the challenge is now on Muslims with financial standing to establish media houses guided by Islamic principles. Until this is done we Muslims cannot put all Islamic rules into our daily lives."

For Muslim voices, women's education is critical for human development in order for the mediated sacred *communitas* to be remade from within the larger secular multi-faith nation. It is through women's education, both secular and Islamic, that the divinely ordained demarcation of gender norms can be visible. In terms of the ways that Muslims should learn from the past, Aisha, for instance, the Prophet's wife, is usually the reference point between the past and the present. Since it is both a shared experience and concern among Muslim voices to mediate sacred space, the solution to the apparent problem confronting the Muslim populace is through what they refer to as "holistic education". Holistic education for children is critical for the mediatization of the mediated sacred space, and it starts from the home environment. Mothers are seen to be the first educators of future leaders, children. Therefore, Muslim voices use the media extensively to engage in some form of Islamic education as the Prophetic saying goes "the mother's lap is the first school of the child" (Shaikh Odoi, *Islamic Insight in Ga language*, Metro TV) and so if a mother is not educated, the shared experience of living Islam will not be attained. In this particular case, the mediation of sacred space will be fruitless.

Conversant with the current situation of the lack of Islamic education of Muslim women, Madrasas/Islamic schools have sprung up to enhance Muslim women's Islamic knowledge so that mediatization can be visible. Again, the solidarity they have in their objective of mediating sacred space has paved ways for some of the Madrasas to collaborate with the Islamic Education Unit of the Ghana Education Service to establish English/Islamic schools. Though a few of such schools are solely for girls, the objective of such schools is the same—to train the child in both secular education for this world and "Islamic education" the hereafter and this world as well. All the female pupils of such schools must veil, as the understanding is that morals and behaviours are difficult to abandon once acquired from childhood. (Armiyao Shaibu, Metro TV, Adam Yunus, GTV).

Conclusion

In this paper, I have shown the liberalization of the media in Ghana from the 1990s, which has given birth to what I call Muslim voices. I particularly showed the ways in which these voices attempt to mediate sacred spaces in terms of gender norms by way of education, veiling, segregation and female modesty. Having a shared concern about mediating sacred space in relation to gender, there is some form of solidarity among them. Both men and women who have access to the media platform show some concern about the intrusion of non-Islamic practices in the Muslim domain. I employed the media as an instrument of social reform and showed that the liberalization of the Ghanaian media gave rise to Muslim spokespersons whom I described as Muslim voices. I showed that individual moral reform is the first objective of the community's reform without which the bigger dream of reform would not be possible. Through veiling of Muslim women, the demarcation is made clear. Then follows the ways the family organizes itself per the Islamic rules of segregation and veiling. In this paper, sacred space appears in the discourse of the broadcast media through Muslims who aim to create a moral self and society in relation to gender normativity. The rhetoric of Muslim voices that are authorities in the broadcast media sets the agenda for both mediation and mediatisation. Through this process, sacred space is maintained. Through the style of female Muslim voices, for example, a message of female religiosity is sent as a salient feature of the gender norms. Their mode of mediation is sometimes in piecemeal fashion (such as Shaikh Nuamah's thoughts on women and marriage in Islam, for example). Additionally, debates on national issues that centre within an Islamic framework contribute to the ways that the sacred space is mediated and maintained. Moreover, the dress code for women encouraged by the media adds to the manner of constituting sacred space. All these form consumption practices and engage Muslims through mediation.

The manner in which Muslim voices move in and through their dream relates to a broader understanding of space. The ways in which the data relate to the theory illustrate that space as a theoretical lens has diverse meaning. According to Mittermaier, for example, the significance of space in dreams has to do with its expansion from the world of dream to a real space of individuals' relationships with saint shrines. This is similar to the engagement of Muslims in that Muslims must embody gender norms espoused by the discourses of Muslim voices. Conversations in the Ghanaian media reflect an expansion of space from media outfits to material spaces, individuals and families. The sort of sacred community mediated by Muslim voices is contextualized within the Ghanaian Muslim world and thus gives birth to another understanding of space while at the same time remaining connected to the moral renewal movement in the region of West Africa. Familiar with the secular context in which they find themselves, Muslim voices who attempt to carve *communitas* do not aim to push against the realities of their being. They have a dream of mediating sacred *communitas* concerning gender norms. In their dream, the material is not divorced from the spiritual; rather, it expands space. Within the dream exists a structure of the sacred *communitas* inspired by the model of the earliest Muslim community. However, the materialization of the dream is met by challenges of the country. It is secular, multi faith and at the same time confronted with current global economic and other challenges. To ameliorate the problem, Muslim voices have proposed a gradual approach to face the challenge. This notwith-

standing, the ways in which they map, reorder and compartmentalize the sacred *communitas* illuminates a kind of imagined sense of difference from the larger Ghanaian population. This mapping, reordering and compartmentalization seems to exclude some non-conforming Muslims. One idea that evades Muslim voices is the notion of gender as a social category that has changed significantly throughout time. Muslim voices want to apply past notions of gender to today's communities, and this becomes contextually difficult to achieve as gendered norms have always been dynamic in human societies. This inevitably shows that the dream of Muslim voices to mediate a sacred *communitas* is a source of contestation. The manner in which Muslim voices present their dream divides the Muslims into two categories, conformists and non-conformists. Furthermore, though Muslim voices mediate a sacred space, the mediation is at the same time contested by the very nature of the secular context. Muslim voices' mediation and mediatisation, as the data shows, have the potential to define and inspire a specific kind of identity. Despite the contestations the mediation of sacred space through gender norms has had an impact on the society's and individual moral conduct relative to gender normativity. This is evident in, for example, the close collaboration between the Islamic Education Unit and Islamic schools/Madrasas to offer "holistic education."

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From 'Egypt' to 'Ahenfie':

The sacralisation of space in a Ghanaian Charismatic Church

Justice Anquandah Arthur

Abstract

Pentecostal-Charismatic churches in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa are noted for using various spaces including hotel lobbies, classrooms, football fields and warehouses as church halls. This known flexibility contributes to the rapidly spreading charismatic sector on the Ghanaian religious scene. This paper focuses specifically on the revealed and constructed nature of sacred spaces by focusing on the activities of the Royalhouse Chapel International in Ghana. It shows the practices that turn ordinary spaces into sacred ones in Charismatic Christianity. It argues however, that the nature of sacred spaces in this movement could be better understood by employing a theoretical framework that incorporates both human and transcendental agencies.

Keywords: Sacred space, Sacred place, African Pentecostalism, Charismatic spirituality, Sacred and profane

Introduction

Since its emergence on the Ghanaian religious landscape in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Charismatic movement¹ has seen a significant increase both in the number of adherents and also in terms of the number of churches established. Although mostly an urban concept, Charismatic churches have a great visibility across the nation mainly through the conspicuous media space they occupy and their competitiveness in the real estate sector in Ghana. These churches can be found on every major street corner, residential areas, slums and even industrial hubs across the nation, literally occupying any available physical space for religious services, including school classrooms, backyards, cinema halls, bars, cafes, warehouses and parks.² Accordingly, space is of

¹ Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy*, (London: Hurst and Company, 2004): 23. I use Charismatic Churches here in the same sense as Paul Gifford to refer to independent Pentecostal churches that evolved in the Ghanaian religious landscape in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In Ghana, they are also called neo-Pentecostal churches or Charismatic Ministries. The most recent population and housing census revealed that, of the 71.2% Christian population in Ghana, 28.3% belong to the Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches strand.

² This development sometimes comes at the disapproval of political authorities. For instance, it was recently reported that all the mayors of the Greater Accra Region expressed great displeasure about the high use of public school

the essence to these churches, primarily because of their inclination to expand their territories by building extensive networks of churches. While the practice of using unusual spaces as church halls is not a recent development, it was hitherto not a regular practice among churches in the Ghana.³

One such Charismatic church is the Royalhouse Chapel International (hereafter, the RCI), which like many mega churches in Ghana, has gone through a cycle of using diverse types of spaces for religious rituals. Thus, this paper shows how RCI has gone about constructing and sacralising spaces since its establishment in 1992. Drawing from field research in Ghana, the key questions this paper addresses are: 1) How do Charismatic churches transform normative spaces into sacred spaces? and 2) What practices turn spaces or buildings into sacred spaces in Charismatic Christianity. It will be useful, at this point, to define the theoretical parameters within which space is analysed.

Theoretical considerations

A considerable amount of theorizing on space has been done in various disciplines including Religious Studies, Philosophy, Geography, Architecture and Anthropology. Henri Lefebvre identified two basic types of space namely, 'ideal' and 'real' spaces. 'Ideal' spaces, relate to mathematical categories while 'real' spaces are concerned with the setting in which people live and perform their everyday activities.⁴ Other conceptions of space have come from the French Geographer, Maximilien Sorre, who was engaged with such spaces as political, linguistic, religious, economic and ethnic spaces.⁵ Sociologist Chombart de Lauwe also noted other forms of space referring to them as familial, neighbourhood and the urban regional spaces.⁶ Therefore, the idea of space or place is not only a geographical matter but it also connects with socio-cultural expectations.

However, the focus of this essay is the religious or sacred space. Essentially, there are two different types of spaces predominantly considered in the History of Religions, namely, sacred and profane (secular) spaces. Firstly, it is paramount that there is an understanding of the sacred, in order to comprehend its association with space. In his book, *The Idea of the Holy*,⁷ Rudolf Otto put forward the notion of the sacred as an irrational experience and argued for the non-rational

facilities outside school hours for the purposes of holding religious worship services, mainly by Charismatic churches.; Lawrence Markwei, "Halt use of classrooms as worship centres – Assemblies," *Ghanaian Times*, Sep 11, 2014, 16.

³ Some African Indigenous/Initiated/Independent Churches (AICs) used to and still meet under trees/shades and meeting houses made from palm fronds.

⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991): 33-34.

⁵ Anne Buttimer, *Social Space in Interdisciplinary Perspective*, *Geographical Review*, 59 (1969): 418-419.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 420-421.

⁷ '*Das Heilige*' in the original German version. It is important to note that the German '*Heilig*' translates into either *holy* or *sacred*. The translator had to make a choice and he preferred to use, *holy* instead.

aspects of religion to be accorded the due significance and importance in the study of religions.⁸ Otto maintained that the sacred is the heart of religion and that experience of it cannot be explained in terms of other rational experiences – it is a completely new order (*ganz andere*). Those who experience the sacred, he affirmed, experience a sense of dependency on something that is *real, greater than and external to the self*. Nevertheless, the experience of the sacred culminates in a sense of worthlessness of the entire ordinary existence. This therefore brings out clearly two different types of experiences, the sacred and the secular everyday experiences. These ordinary everyday encounters, an unavoidable association with the experience of the sacred, he referred to as ‘the feeling of absolute profaness.’⁹ This implies that Rudolf Otto believed that the idea of the sacred is associated with transcendental beings and that exposure to it is the most important element in all genuinely experienced religious emotions. Hence, Otto’s definition of the sacred as an experience out of this world, takes away intentionality and any connection of the sacred with human agency.

Emile Durkheim is the foremost scholar to use the terminologies ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ to engender a dichotomy between the two spaces.¹⁰ On sacred spaces, Durkheim states that ‘religious and profane life cannot co-exist in the same space.’¹¹ For Durkheim, the fundamental feature of religion is the division of the world into profane and sacred spaces. He contended that the two domains are fundamentally at variance with each other, to the extent that they are seen as distinct worlds. Nevertheless, unlike Otto, in Durkheimian thought, the sacred is not the same as divine, because although gods and spirits can be sacred, anything else can also be sacred including rocks, pieces of wood, trees *et cetera*. Thus, what makes something sacred is not its association with the divine, rather it is the subject of a religious prohibition that sets it aside from something else, which is itself, profane.¹² Accordingly, the sacred is a socio-cultural construct devoid of any transcendental revelations. In other words, sacred spaces or places are created by people. It is a concept that human beings apply to certain things, places or persons.

Finally, Mircea Eliade drawing from Rudolf Otto’s concept of the sacred, explained that the sacred is anything in nature that is the subject of religious experience for the ‘religious man.’¹³ The religious man, he claimed, tried to constantly live in the presence of the sacred and therefore led a completely different life from the non-religious man, who lives in a desacralised world. Although non-religious modern man is considered to live in a desacralised world, Eliade contends that his world is not even completely desacralised, because he can have degraded religious experiences resulting from a personal association with some specific special locations, namely his birthplace, the first foreign city he visited as a youth and so forth. On sacred spaces, Mircea Eli-

⁸ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the Divine and its relation to the rational*, Translated by John W. Harvey, (London: Oxford University Press, 1936): 12-13.

⁹ *Ibid.* 51

¹⁰ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Life*. Translated by Joseph Ward Swain, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964): 84.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 312.

¹² *Ibid.*, 84.

¹³ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, translated by W.R. Trask, (Harvest/HBJ Publishers, 1957). Mircea Eliade defines the religious man as the ‘*man of all pre-modern societies.*’

ade theorised that while non-religious man sees and experiences the world as primarily neutral, the religious man considers the world as a heterogeneous space - partly sacred and partly profane. The religious man, Eliade asserted, thought of and experienced the world as having a sacred centre, in which he sought to live because to him, that was 'the only real and really existing space.'¹⁴ Eliade identified two ways through which sacred spaces come into being. Firstly, sacred spaces could be revealed to the religious man as in the case of hierophanies¹⁵ like the Temple Mount in Jerusalem or Ayodha, the place recognised in Hinduism as the birth site of Vishnu's *avatar*. This sacred space, he asserted is normally linked to the existential needs of the religious man. Secondly, Eliade proposed that sacred spaces could also be constructed by the religious man, based on a revelation or signs from divine sources, howbeit he is not free to choose the site. For example, a church typically brings out the dichotomy between sacred and profane spaces. But, unlike Emile Durkheim, Eliade basically considered sacred spaces as natural and revealed, which takes away human agency, because for him, like Otto, the idea of the sacred is intertwined with transcendental beings. As a result, the intentionality involved in building sacred places such as the pyramids of ancient Egypt is out of the equation for Eliade. Accordingly, he states regarding the construction of sacred spaces that 'we must not suppose that human work is in question here, that it is through his own efforts that man can consecrate a space.'¹⁶

In this paper, a combination of Otto's, Eliade's and Durkheim's thoughts have been used as the framework of analysis. It is important, however, to note that Otto and Eliade's approaches have come in for some criticisms such as being too Eurocentric, Judeo-Christian and contextually poor. Nevertheless, they are still very relevant in the context of Ghanaian Charismatic churches.¹⁷ Otto and Eliade signify the *substantial* line of definition of the sacred, from which perspective the sacred is seen as 'an awesome, powerful manifestation of reality, full of ultimate significance.' Durkheim's ideas represent the *situational* understanding of the sacred that analyses the practical, relational and frequently contested dynamics of production and reproduction of the sacred. This is because the contrast between the substantial and the situational notions of the sacred are in principle very much prevalent in the analysis of sacred spaces and places.¹⁸ Before proceeding to examine how sacred spaces are constructed we shall have a brief overview of the RCI and its founder, Samuel Korankye-Ankrah.

Sacred spaces and sacred specialists: RCI and Korankye-Ankrah

RCI is one of the churches that make up what Paul Gifford described as the 'premier league' group of churches in Ghana's new Christianity. Having been established in 1992, it could be des-

¹⁴ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 20.

¹⁵ Eliade defines Hierophanies as "the manifestation of something of a wholly different order" in a profane world (11). This is similar to Otto's wholly other or 'ganz andere.'

¹⁶ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 29.

¹⁷ Paul Post, Philip Nel, Walter Van Beek, *Sacred Spaces and Contested Identities: Space and Ritual Dynamics in Europe and Africa*, (Trenton, New Jersey: African World Press, 2014): 1.

¹⁸ David Chidester, The Poetics and politics of Sacred Space: Towards a Critical Phenomenology of Religion in *Analecta Husserliana XLIII*, A.T. Tymienicka (Ed.), (Amsterdam: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 211.

ignated as a late entrant among Accra's Charismatic mega churches. Nevertheless, within two decades of its existence, the church has expanded into a network of 120 local branches in all the regional as well as many district capitals of Ghana. Besides these local endeavours, they also have 18 international missions network in the UK, USA and the Republic of Togo.¹⁹ In spite of the fact that RCI started with only 24 people (12 adults and 12 children), the headquarters now has an average membership of 8000 and runs three adults church sessions, one youth service and one children's session on Sundays.

It has 26 different ministries or groups and other distinct organs incorporated under the umbrella name *Ahenfie*, the central church. Significant among the ministries are the Christian Leadership College and the Department of Social Services. The Department of Social Services has a wide range of sub-ministries including the Basic Trust Scholarship Project; Feed the Hungry; Rural Missions and Evangelism; Rescue to the Needy; the Compassion Ministry; the Pre-Marital and Marriage Counselling Departments; the Children, Teens, Men's, Women's and Aged Ministries; as well as the Anglo-Francophone Ministry. The membership of *Ahenfie* is mainly composed of youth and individuals in their midlife. Unlike other mega churches like the Christ Temple of the International Central Gospel Church (ICGC) and the Qodesh of Lighthouse Chapel International (LCI), the church does not have the same level of educated professionals.²⁰ However, there is a sizable number of Ghanaian politicians and business people among the congregation.²¹

The stories of RCI and its founder are linked together and cannot be told in isolation. Of the 60 church members who responded to questionnaires administered for this purpose of this present research, 49 of them came to the church through the founders' media efforts. Sam Korankye-Ankrah founded the church *in absentia*, as his wife was in reality the one who organised the members for church services in the first year of its formation, while her husband remained in the Netherlands. The pastor asserts that he had asked his wife to start church services with members of a Christian fellowship he had initiated while at the University of Ghana, following a dramatic call to the pastorate. In summarising his experience, he stated thus:

After my university education, I left Ghana for Holland to seek greener pastures and to further my education. My desire was to study law, political science or business administration. But on June 19, 1991 I had an encounter with the Lord, which completely changed the course of my life. I was sleeping soundly in my room when suddenly I felt a hand touching and waking me up. Intuitively, I looked at the time and it was 2:00am. Immediately, I heard a voice calling me by name and instructing me to pray. I obeyed

¹⁹ The Royalhouse Chapel History, accessed Sep 2, 2014, <http://royalhousechapel.org/about-us/our-history/>

²⁰ Emmanuel Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity*. (Accra: Centre for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies, 2001). Larbi states that many of these neo-Pentecostal churches are composed of professionals especially ICGC and LCI. Firstly, out the 60 respondents in a survey conducted in March, 2012 survey by the writer, only 52 were between 25-45, 7 were between 46-60 and 1 was over 60. Secondly, 22 of the 60 respondents while 9 were civil servants and 31 were self-employed. Thirdly, 22 of the 60 respondents had a tertiary degree whereas 38 had up to secondary level of education.

²¹ Samuel Korankye-Ankrah, *The rising of the sun: Shining from obscurity*. (Accra: Combert Impressions, 2010): 116.

knowing it was the voice of God and for the next three hours, I prayed while I cried simultaneously. At about 5:00 in the morning, God asked me to take my Bible. When I did, for reasons one cannot fathom, it fell open at 1Timothy 3:1 which says: *'This is a true saying, if a man desires the office of a bishop, he desires a good work'*. Having been in Christian leadership for a long time, you would naturally expect me to be well acquainted with this Scriptural text. But when I read it on that day, it spoke to me in a very personal way. The text came alive all of a sudden. I felt the Holy Spirit arrest my spirit as I read that verse and I immediately knew that God was calling me into full-time ministry.²²

After this initial incident, Korankye-Ankrah affirmed that there were other series of similar signs and occurrences, which confirmed that God wanted his services back home in Ghana and not in the Netherlands. He revealed that through further encounters, God ordered him audibly to go back to Ghana with a three-fold mandate: 1. To bring people into God's presence through prayer, praise and worship. 2. To preach salvation, healing and deliverance as well as messages of hope with relevance to the needs of people and 3. To bring comfort to people, offering them a place and an atmosphere of love, care, sharing and fellowship. To date this 'divine' mandate has served as the mission of RCI and thus the driving force of his ministry. As a result, all church functions and programmes are geared towards this 'divine' authority to carry out the work of ministry.

This kind of dramatic experience narrated by Korankye-Ankrah is comparable to many other accounts given by mostly Pentecostal and Charismatic leaders in Ghana with regard to their call into full-time pastorate.²³ Mostly enveloping their call and life changing decisions in mystery is a common way some pastors use to legitimize their call and spiritual status among their congregation and the entire Charismatic movement. Some even go to the extent of re-enacting earlier events in their lives and realigning them with their present profession and calling. Others also change their stories completely and make them sound more dramatic and believable in order to gain acceptance and win adherents.²⁴

Korankye-Ankrah is however, quite different from most of the first generation Charismatic church leaders in his use and promotion of objects and rituals he refers to as 'tokens.' These are physical objects like handkerchiefs, anointing oil, water, mantle, prayer shawl as well as activities such as foot washing that he believes attract the power and presence of God. These sacred objects he argues: 'are things the mainline Churches used so much in the past but when the era of Charismatism arrived, it became a no-go area. Why? – Because it had been abused by what we call *spiritual churches*.'²⁵ He continued, "Tokens simply mean things people normally consider unimportant and insignificant but for which God gives the preacher a direction to use. Their use connects a person with the power of the Holy Ghost and subsequently miracles happen"²⁶ The application of these items and rituals, he insists has contributed immensely to the spiritual and

²² Sam Korankye-Ankrah, Interview by author. Tape Recording. Accra. January 16, 2012.

²³ Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity*, 390.

²⁴ A story is told of a Charismatic pastor who claimed God referred to him in conversation as: "Apreko, my daughter," even though he was obviously a man.

²⁵ Spiritual churches refer to African Initiated/Indigenous/Independent Churches (AICs).

²⁶ Sam Korankye-Ankrah, *Interview by author*. January 16, 2012.

numerical growth of the church. It is obvious that for Korankye-Ankrah, the sacred power is a completely different experience that is separate from normal everyday encounters and way beyond human understanding.²⁷ As a result, it can be understood by the human mind through the medium of concrete objects and events, namely the 'tokens' - the sacralisation of ordinary objects.

From 'Egypt' to 'Ahenfie': Constructed and revealed sacred spaces

What is now called RCI has undergone several name changes since its inception in March 1991. Initially, it was called Showers of Blessing International until Korankye-Ankrah returned from the Netherlands and took over the leadership of the church in November 1992. This first name was then changed into Abundant Life Missions International and it remained so until July 1993 when there was a subsequent name change to Bible Worship Centre (BWC). Along with the name changes came the use of secular spaces as places of worship. In its infancy, the church adopted the Ghana Education Service (GES) Model Nursery School in Accra as its meeting place. The decision to use this classroom was mainly informed by the limited financial resources available to them at the time and not by revelation. This is a 30 by 20 metre square single storey building with children's tables and chairs, situated on a 14000 square metre land area. The fact that this was a school compelled them to meet as a community only after school was over and also on weekends when the children were off school. For the church to meet they always had to pack out the furniture used by the children and replace it with 'sacred objects' like a pulpit, sets of musical instruments, collection stands, background curtains as well as mundane items like adult wooden chairs and carpets, among others.

The sacred objects are distinguished from the profane objects by reason of the fact that the sacred is passed on by physical contact through consecration, specifically with the anointing oil by Korankye-Ankrah. Durkheim refers to this transfer as the *contagiousness of the sacred*, where things are made sacred by being touched with other things that are already sacred as in anointings with sacred liquids. Korankye-Ankrah affirmed that they always transformed the classrooms completely into "holy grounds" where people encountered God and "received incredible forms of healing from the Lord."²⁸ The sacred objects used here, although similar to the 'token' related sacred objects mentioned earlier, in terms of the way they are consecrated, they are different because these ones tend to be community based while the latter is sacred specialist (Korankye-Ankrah) specific, which attracts and mediate sacred power. Again, whereas the 'token' related objects become permanently sacralised, pulpits, musical instruments, collection stands and background curtains only become sacred in ritual periods or during church services. The impact of the sacralisation of these objects is seen in the way church members and pastors handle them with awe during ritual times. Therefore, the attitude towards these objects in sacred times is completely different from ordinary times even within a sacred space.²⁹ The transfor-

²⁷ Otto, *The idea of the Holy*, 6-7.

²⁸ Sam Korankye-Ankrah, *Interview by author*. January 16, 2012.

²⁹ For further reading on ritual times cf. Durkheim, *The Elementary forms of life*, p. 313.

mation of a classroom into a church, which is a sacred space in its own right according to Mircea Eliade, indicates that sacred spaces can be situational and fleeting too.

After a period of two years, the church relocated from its GES School base to the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) Canteen on the Ring Road Central in Accra, due to lack of space as a result of increase in membership.³⁰ Presented with a number of options after a search period, the leadership of the church settled on this site primarily because of it being in a strategic central location, proximity to public transportation hubs in Accra and most importantly, the affordability of the space. Clearly, the search for the new meeting place was a human undertaking not informed by any revelation but by necessity. Since this canteen belonged to a corporate organisation, the church could only use the place after office hours and on weekends. While the canteen had 20 tables and a seating capacity of 80, replacing the dining tables with chairs doubled the figure. As was the case in the GES School, this place was always converted into a church for their meetings and then reverted to the restaurant thereafter. The fluidity of the space inhered in shifting between being sacred and temporal and also meant that the transformation was not a permanent one. The flexibility therefore is an indication that sacred spaces can be constructed, dismantled and reconstructed by human agency. Derek Amanor, the resident pastor of the headquarters church described the cafeteria as a place where “phenomenal healings and spectacular miracles” enhanced the growth of the church.³¹ It is important to note that although classrooms and cafeteria are naturally or normatively used for teaching and dining, to the members of the RCI it became a place of worship, an awe-inspiring space – a church. It is an indication that a particular space or place can be made sacred through the conscious actions of the people, the congregation and their pastor.

After a few years at the ADB Cafeteria, the RCI subsequently moved to the Blackmore and Sons building, an unused warehouse with 3,140 square metre area on the Ring Road Central less than a mile from the canteen between November 1994 and November 2000. Once again, the leaders attributed the move to numerical growth and the inability of the ADB canteen to accommodate them especially on Sundays. However, the subject of proximity, ease of access and the leadership’s desire to find a more permanent location were crucial factors that inspired the move to this third site. Since they had a ten-year lease on this property, they converted it to a near-permanent place of worship, by creating windows, decorating the interior, tiling the floors, building a car park in front of the structure and having the landscape done for aesthetic appeal. Korankye-Ankrah said of this warehouse-turned-church: ‘it became a place of solace for thousands of people with all kinds of spiritual, intellectual, psychological, emotional and social needs.’ He asserted that within the six years the church was housed in this location, membership of the church grew from 250 to 5000, due in part to his ability to prove the power of God through signs, wonders and miracles.³² It is during this period that the church underwent another name change from International Bible Worship Centre (IBWC) to Royalhouse Chapel International (RCI).

³⁰ Sam Korankye-Ankrah, *The rising of the sun: Shining from obscurity*, 113.

³¹ Derek Amanor, *Telephone Conversation by author*, October 10, 2014.

³² Sam Korankye-Ankrah, *The rising of the sun*, 114.

Furthermore, on the 4th of November 2000, the RCI finally moved to 'Ahenfie'³³ the present location of the headquarters branch of the church after about a decade of its inception. Interestingly, the movement from the Blackmore and Sons premises to Ahenfie was dramatised as the pastor led the church to re-enact the biblical story of the Jewish exodus from Egypt to the land promised by God.³⁴ To begin with, he declared an 'all-night' prayer vigil on Friday 3rd November at the Blackmore and Sons site, which he said was well attended by hundreds of people, to the extent that many more participated via closed-circuit television (CCTV) from outside the main building. At exactly 4:00 am, he led the entire congregation in what he called a 'prayer-march' for the two-kilometre journey to the new church site, akin to Moses leading the Israelites to freedom. Korankye-Ankrah, therefore, perceived his role in this re-enactment episode as a God appointed liberator similar to Moses. He had the following to say:

Symbolically, it was a significant move, a crossing over from 'Egypt' to the 'Promised Land'. This is because in 1997, three years before this time, Archbishop Nicholas Duncan-Williams³⁵ had prophesied to us that God was going to bless Royalhouse Chapel with a property on which we will put up our own church building. Unknown to the Archbishop, we were almost completing negotiations for the purchase of another property in an entirely different location, at the time of the prophecy. This prophecy restrained the leadership from pursuing that property. Ahenfie is thus considered by all members of Royalhouse Chapel as a land of prophecy and promise.³⁶

Besides the prophecy by Duncan-Williams, the pastor indicated that there were three other prophecies that confirmed that God was going to give them 'a property of our own and it was going to be on the Ring Road West, exactly where we are.' Therefore, Ahenfie is considered by everyone related to the church as a holy land. The analogy playing out here is that all the initial changes in location were seen as 'a time of wandering and bondage, similar to what the Jews experienced in the period before they settled in the Promised Land and the final settlement at Ahenfie as a place of rest.'³⁷

³³ Ahenfie is an Akan word meaning the palace or the house of royals. According Rev. Korankye-Ankrah, Ahenfie was derived from Revelation 1:5b-6: *Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, 6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.* (KJV)

³⁴ Exodus 13 and 14 covers the Jews' departure from Egypt to the Promised Land led by Moses.

³⁵ Nicholas Duncan-Williams is widely credited with establishing the first Charismatic church in Ghana in 1979 and is a very respected churchman in Ghana.

³⁶ Sam Korankye-Ankrah, Interview by author. January 16, 2012.

³⁷ Ibid.



6 Members of RCI praying in the compound of Ahenfie during the Week of the Altar. At the far end of the photo is the Ahenfie Church hall. Photo: Author

Prior to being converted into a church settlement, Ahenfie was a collection of six warehouses owned by a real estate company used mainly to store building equipment. It has since been transformed into a 30,000 square metre property with a 2500 capacity church auditorium (temple), offices for the pastors and staff of the church, youth and children's churches, a Christian leadership college, several warehouses, food vending space, a bookshop, media centre and a large compound with brick flooring and mounted canopies with about a thousand seats to complement the capacity of the main hall. All this is walled and the front part of the wall is a big three-storey office space. The forepart of these offices is a huge private car park also owned by the church. The patrons of these corporate offices do not have access to the main yard of Ahenfie as only the rear of the building forms part of the complex. Next, we shall consider some of the activities associated with Ahenfie as a sacred place and particularly its altar.

Ahenfie and its Altar: The lived experience of space



7 Congregation praying (beseaching the altar) and 'sowing seeds' at the Ahenfie Altar. Photo: Author

Ahenfie is seen as a sacred space where the members of the church encounter God and their spiritual and existential needs are met. Korankye-Ankrah and all the 60 congregants interviewed considered it as a sacred site revealed by prophecy and it is a 'depository' of God's presence. However, particular reference was made to the altar in Ahenfie as a key place where members' prayer requests were answered speedily. A summary of some of the selected testimonies is offered. First, Jemimah said a few years ago, she was in abject poverty and highly indebted, thus she could not afford to pay her children's school fees. Nevertheless, four months after attending church services at Ahenfie, her situation changed and she was able to pay off her debts. She avers, 'since I met the God of Royalhouse Chapel and started attending services at Ahenfie, my story has completely changed – my children are doing very well and my business is booming. Ahenfie is a place of wonders, it is where God lives, if you like.' It is unclear whether she received financial support from the church but she would not say so, only attributing her turnaround to the sacredness of Ahenfie.

Secondly, Foriwaa, a mother of three claimed her life had totally been turned around since joining RCI. She stated, 'as a result of the power of the Royalhouse altar, my life and that of my children have completely changed despite having totally lost hope a few years ago.' Thirdly, Regina reports that her daughter had extreme learning disability and had tried several private teachers to help her to no avail. She said, 'I came to Ahenfie, after I had heard the pastor preach on radio.

Once here, I never stopped praying and *sowing seeds at the altar*.³⁸ Now this same daughter is attending a university in Accra." Fourthly, Thomas attributed his selection to represent Ghana on the youth steering committee of the Commonwealth Education Ministers to a series of prayer at the altar, prophetic words from the pastor and *seeds sown at the altar*. Finally, Josephine whose son was extremely sick and at the point of death related the ordeal she went through, 'my son was seriously sick and he needed an immediate surgery, which could only be performed at Ho in the Volta Region.' She continued, 'at the time, I had no option than to call the pastors at Ahenfie to engage the altar and intercede on my behalf. This they did and the surgery was successful. Now my son is healthy again - completely recovered.'

These stories and over fifty other narratives collected strengthen the notion among the congregation that not only is Ahenfie a sacred space but that its altar is also considered a sacred space within the larger space. Thus, creating different layers of sacred spaces: the entire Ahenfie compound being the first layer, then the church hall and finally the altar. It is implicit here that the coagulated nature of the sacredness of the space is inversely proportional to its size. Consequently, the smaller altar is considered a more potent sacred space than the church auditorium, which is also seen as endowed with even more sacredness than the larger Ahenfie compound. Additionally, a more recurring activity by the members as regards activating the sacredness of Ahenfie for existential purposes is the act of *sowing seeds* at the altar. Aside from prayer, fasting and consulting with Pastors for guidance, it is evident that money is almost always deposited on the altar serving as 'points of contact' to access a miracle or another at Ahenfie. Basically, the people offer money which they believe gives them the means of entry to divine provision. This shows how the profane and the sacred are sometimes intertwined in these Charismatic churches.

Furthermore, there is a kind of correlation between sacred objects, sacred space and sacred place. For example, the 'communal' sacred objects are key in turning mundane spaces into sacred ones temporarily for church services as was the case in the use of classrooms and warehouses. While the altar and the church hall in Ahenfie can be described as sacred spaces, the entire compound is seen not only as a sacred expanse or space in an otherwise non-sacred building but a *particular* place. It has become a place with dimensions and its own dynamics. Whereas the sacred objects are now permanently placed in Ahenfie, it is important to state that as a revealed place, its sacredness no longer depends on the sacred objects. It is a coagulated sacred place connected with a special meaning by the members, to strengthen its sacred position. It is a holy place, the centre of orientation of the church members' world, an *axis mundi*, a point of communication between different levels of reality, a reference point for the distinction of cosmos and chaos.³⁹ Lastly, from the lived experiences mentioned above, it is clear that another significant factor that makes Ahenfie relevant to the members of the church is the part played by Korankye-Ankrah, the bishop. Although pastors in RCI are generally considered by the members

³⁸ This literally means putting money on the altar, a practice common among Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians in Ghana. It is usually done as pastors move people through their sermons or when they are believing God for a miracle and they want to step out in faith.

³⁹ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 36.

as storehouses of miracles, Korankye-Ankrah is seen by even the pastors as a complete embodiment of the sacred. He wields such enormous influence within the church to the extent that his absence clearly affects church attendances at Ahenfie. Hence, for these churches, sacredness also inheres in the person of the leader as a result of which they become *sacred specialists*.

Concluding remarks

The foregoing has pointed to two separate periods in the history of RCI. The first phase, a ten-year wandering period, where they consistently sacralised otherwise profane spaces, namely a school building, staff canteen and warehouses for church services. This period is a very familiar story to how several Charismatic churches in Ghana have survived over the years, including such mega churches as Mensa Otabil's International Central Gospel Church and Dag Heward-Mill's Lighthouse Chapel International. This first stage shows the diverse ways in which these Charismatic Christians transform profane spaces into sacred ones, and also brings to the fore the role of human agency in the construction of sacred spaces in general. It affirms Durkheim's view that sacred spaces are social constructions that can be situational and ephemeral. Sacredness, for Durkheim, requires that special places be set aside for religious rituals, which can be anywhere including classrooms and canteens, as long as the people choose to sacralise the place.⁴⁰ Also, the fact that human agency is paramount in the construction of these sacred spaces, is indicative of their non-permanent nature as they can be destroyed and reconstructed too.

The second phase involved the settling at Ahenfie, a more permanent site, which was identified through a revelation from God, as maintained by the members. Ahenfie as a sacred place is therefore a place of power in line with Eliade's view that the utilization of various ritual techniques gives rise to the discovery of a sacred space. Specifically, the place was discovered upon prophetic declarations by sacred specialists, particularly Nicholas Duncan-Williams, the man regarded as the 'father' of the Charismatic movement in Ghana. Ahenfie and its altar in particular are in the opinion of the members of RCI not man-made but a revealed place, where miracles and encounters with God abound - a place of power in line with Eliade's view. Nevertheless, there are two elements that Eliade cannot explain, namely the role of the competitive real estate market in Ghana that might have contributed to the church sacralising other spaces and also the fragility of the sacredness of these functional spaces. Therefore, I argue, that in order to understand how sacred spaces come into being in Charismatic circles, it is imperative to adopt a theoretical framework that encapsulates both human agency and transcendental activity. For example, a combination of Durkheim and Eliade's theories on sacred space. The reason is that with these churches, the adoption of or claims to a particular sacred space, be they churches, landscapes, old cinema halls or cafeteria, are mostly influenced by the Holy Spirit through prophecies, dreams or visions and they are almost always anchored to the economy of real estates. For

⁴⁰ Durkheim, *Elementary forms of life*, 312.

them, both the rational and the non-rational factors in the idea of the divine are significant in constructing sacred spaces.⁴¹

Finally, this paper has deviated from the general belief that Charismatic pastors typically have a strong aversion to placing any significant meaning to physical spaces, choosing rather to concentrate on the presence of God and the activity of the Holy Spirit. The widespread belief among these churches is that they do not credit physical objects with supernatural meanings. Some even argue that their consecrated buildings and halls are simply functional meeting spaces that have no spiritual value. It is commonly understood, therefore, that for this group of churches, sacred spaces are created when there is the presence of God through the working of the Holy Spirit in healings and miracles.⁴² Marlene De Witte captures this notion succinctly, 'Charismatic people see the Spirit of God at work beyond material spaces' and access to the power of the Holy Spirit is 'unmediated by ordained priests and sacralised church buildings.' However, contrary to these rather generalised views from De Witte, it is obvious, from this paper, that for Korankye-Ankrah and his RCI members, inasmuch as the sacredness of the place depends on the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit, it also inheres in the material space of Ahenfie. This is one of the key reasons why many members of RCI around the world come to Ahenfie once every year for either the Week of Altar or Convention of Saints.⁴³ In fact, the role of Korankye-Ankrah, the pastors and Ahenfie as a whole is significant in accessing the power of the Holy Spirit in the RCI.

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⁴¹ Otto, *The idea of the Holy*, 6

⁴² Eric Xexemeku of International Central Gospel Church and Bernard Arde-Acquah of Powerhouse Ministries International believe that for Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians, attaching the sacred to a place is like making an idol out of the place. Since God is everywhere the power of God can be felt everywhere; Marleen de Witte, Accra's sounds and sacred spaces. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 32(2) (2008): 699.

⁴³ *Convention of Saints* is an annual weeklong festival that draws members of the church from as far afield as North America and Europe as well as many prominent Pentecostal-Charismatic preachers as Guest Speakers. *Week of the Altar* is an annual 21 days' prayer and fasting festival held in January of every year.

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