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GOEMAI/ANKWEI RELIGIOSITY:  
UNDERSTANDING INDIGENOUS DIVINITY IN RELATION TO CHRISTIANITY

A Dissertation

Submitted to McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Edward Tsenmen Muge

May 2023

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Edward Tsenmen Muge

2023

GOEMAI/ANKWEI RELIGIOSITY:  
UNDERSTANDING INDIGENOUS DIVINITY IN RELATION TO CHRISTIANITY

By

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Approved March 7, 2023

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## ABSTRACT

### GOEMAI/ANKWEI RELIGIOSITY: UNDERSTANDING INDIGENOUS RELIGIOSITY IN RELATION TO CHRISTIANITY

By

Edward Tsenmen Muge

May 2023

Dissertation supervised by Gerald Boodoo

Postcolonial/decolonial thinking developed in response to modernity's colonial logic that glorified and universalized the Western *locus of enunciation*, subjectivity, and history. The prioritization of Western epistemology, hierarchization of being based on race, gender, and religion, and the universalization of Western Christian religion relegated all other modes of being, knowing, and accessing the Divine to the periphery. For a long time, indigenous people have accepted the Western linear worldview that makes them the exemplars of the whites (Euro-Americans) in their primordial state of Western history and development. The goal of the Western colonial matrix of power is the subsumption of indigenous cosmology into its universalized cosmogony, aligning every reality into a single mode of understanding and interpretation. It is that "point zero," viz., the particular perspective that refuses to acknowledge that fact but assumes the "god's-eye view" concerning everything.

The desire for self-apprehension, retrieval, relinking, and reconnection to the indigenous worldview necessitated the rejection of Western temporality for indigenous spatiality. Spatiality prioritizes experience and context over the progressive idea of time in history. While rationality defines the Western universe, relationality characterizes the indigenous world. This work takes for its context the Goemai space and experience to argue for a deconstruction of Western epistemology, mode of being, and Christianity. It argues that theology is not an armchair enterprise but a “God-talk” that can best be achieved through the African “palaver” method, where people converge to arrive at a common understanding through mutual exchange. It posits that the search for a genuine Goemai Christianity that is fully Catholic is at the base of retrieving ancestral wisdom and experience to construct a future from the present by looking backward.

## DEDICATION

*This word is dedicated to my late dad, Tsenmen Thomas Muge; my mom, Rose Pam-Thomas Muge; my siblings, the late Na'anzem (Felicia), the late Abubakar Umaru Usman (Matthias), Na'anpoe (Nereus) and his family, Na'antuam (Paul), and Na'anshep (Mercy) and her family; and my cousin, Shepsuk (Emmanuella)—for all the prayers, love, and encouragement. May God continue to strengthen our bond.*

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## Introduction

The Goemai (pl. Moemai), agrarian by nature, relate profoundly with their land, the symbol of their ancestral patrimony. As a people shaped by their cultural geography, Moemai are an experiential people for whom ancestral wisdom is essential in constructing cultural identity. The cyclically constructed, harmonious universe of the Goemai is under the fatherhood of the Supreme Deity, *Na'an*, who controls both the spiritual and physical realms and all that exists in them. Goemai cultural life was interrupted by the colonial wound in conjunction with Christianity. It is characterized by the missionary thrust of saving the souls of the “pagan” Goemai people through conversion to Christianity,<sup>1</sup> resulting in Moemai abandoning their way of life and becoming delinked from the Goemai space. The consequence is a gradual waning of culture.

My aim in the project is to invite the Goemai people into an in-depth exploration of their worldview in a way that contributes to raising Goemai awareness of the value of their culture and customs. As a project in contextual study, it employs the anthropological investigation model. It emphasizes the significance of Goemai cultural identity and its relevance in decolonizing the sacred space in understanding Christian Divinity. Consequently, I propose a methodological shift from the logic of justification to the logic of discovery. Also, the study represents my modest contribution to the sparse literature available on the Goemai and my way of spurring research interests in other areas of Goemai culture.

I apply the precepts of the qualitative research approach in the investigation primarily to understand the *what*, *how*, and *why* of the Goemai tradition and culture following the narrative

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<sup>1</sup> Jarlath Walsh, *The Growth of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Jos 1907-1978: Contribution of the Society of African Missions to Its Development* (1993), 24-61.

discourse analysis methodology and procedures. Other approaches within the qualitative research methodology that I hope will improve the research's quality include an ethnographic approach, which entails a descriptive study of society and the social relations within it; a phenomenological approach, where the emphasis lies in comprehending reality through the perspectives of those who have experienced it; focus group discussions comprising six to twelve participants;<sup>2</sup> and individual interviews of elders in Goemailand and Goemai Christians in the city of Jos. These will aid in gaining an understanding of the relationship between the Goemai experience of their ancestors and their present experience. The research intends to demonstrate how Christian Divinity can be understood in a much more located manner since context or location shapes the experience of how Divinity is fully understood, and relationship enhanced.

Interpreting the information from my fieldwork began with organizing the collected materials into patterns, concepts, and themes for the data analysis and employing open coding, which helped categorize the data collected into blocks of common ideas concerning specific aspects of the culture.<sup>3</sup> The data analysis process is not my independent work but a collaborative effort with the persons involved in collecting the data whose contributions add value to the comprehension of the meaning and significance of the findings. It follows the overarching *Ubuntu*-informed methodology of harmony and collaboration, where the outcome will result from checking and cross-checking information.<sup>4</sup>

This project encourages remembering differently by unlearning what I have learned or delinking from colonizing Western epistemological perspectives. Here, unlearning or delinking is understood as dislocating Cartesianism and its epistemological foundation—*I think, therefore,*

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<sup>2</sup> Selection of participants was based on the fulfillment of a set of criteria, inclusive of being a knowledgeable elder in Goemai tradition and a willingness to engage in respectful conversation.

<sup>3</sup> Bagele Chilisa, *Indigenous Research Methodologies*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publication, 2020), 257.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

*I am*—so that the starting point of my reconnection becomes the decolonial principle, *I am where I think*,<sup>5</sup> succinctly captured in the African existential cogito, *I relate where I am*. The research is a collaborative effort between my people and myself, in a process referred to by Santos as “the cocreation of Knowledge.”<sup>6</sup> Bagele Chilisa<sup>7</sup> refers to the researcher as a transformative healer who introspects and reflects within the context of the relationships that hold the community in place, leading to a return to harmonious relations as healing wounded cultural memory.<sup>8</sup> Relationships define the Goemai locality and worldview, and the web of relationship aid in how the people articulate divinity in their space. Chilisa calls it *Ubuntu*-informed research.

As a project in postcolonial<sup>9</sup> or decolonial theology, my research deconstructs Cartesianism which, according to Merleau-Ponty, denies the senses’ philosophical dignity that was lost when Descartes attributed sight to the mind instead of the eyes.<sup>10</sup> Of critical importance in the decolonial turn is decolonizing the mind. Allowing the mind to reflect critically on

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<sup>5</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), xvi.

<sup>6</sup> Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming Age of Epistemologies of the South* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), 156.

<sup>7</sup> Bagele Chilisa is a renowned Botswanan postcolonial scholar, researcher, author, and educator. She is specialized in the areas of context and culturally responsive research and evaluation methodologies, indigenous knowledge systems and the design and evaluation of context and culturally responsive interventions in low and middle-income countries.

<sup>8</sup> Chilisa, *Indigenous Research Methodologies*, 236-37.

<sup>9</sup> Postcolonialism as a resistance discourse is not a theory like post-structuralism or post-modernism. It is a methodological category that follows a critical reflection that has praxis as its goal. It is a means by which the colonized articulate their identity, knowledge, and worldview. It is a paradigm for contextual and cultural re-envisioning of the reality of heterogeneity in the constructed hegemonic Western cosmogony meant to subjugate the non-white. It ensures the development of an attitude governed by the hermeneutic of suspicion of everything learned, especially within a colonial context. According to R. S. Sugirtharajah, “in postcolonial discursive practice, several critics contend and recognize that, when it is used with a hyphen, ‘post-colonial’, the term is seen as indicating the historical period aftermath of colonialism, and without the hyphen, ‘postcolonial’, as signifying a reactive resistance discourse of the colonized who critically interrogate dominant knowledge systems in order to recover the past from Western slander and misinformation of the colonial period, and who also continue to interrogate neo-colonizing tendencies after the declaration of independence . . . . Postcolonialism is essentially a style of enquiry, an insight or perspectives, a catalyst, a new way of life. As an enquiry, it instigates and creates possibilities, and provides a platform for the widest possible convergence of critical forces, of multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multicultural voices, to assert their denied rights and rattle the centre.” See, R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 12-13.

<sup>10</sup> Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, 167.

experience helps create structures that facilitate an experiential alternative that recognizes diversity and interculturality. The Goemai worldview is embedded within ritualistic and traditional contexts. Spirituality revolves around a cyclical series of special divine revelations on problems and issues confronting individuals and groups in a given community. In the words of Bolaji Idowu, “*the very essence of the African religion is found in the practice of it and not in theological exegesis; it is in the form of liturgy ... that its theology is systematised [sic].*”<sup>11</sup>

The policy implication of the research is to bring the community into conversation concerning its understanding of Goemai religiosity to the extent that the traditional Goemai structures will be the foundation of a Goemai Christian theology to valorize the people’s indigenous experience. It also intends to demonstrate how Goemai culture can enrich Christian theology and how an enriched Goemai Christian theology can contribute to promoting Goemai tradition and culture in accordance with the desire of the Church to reject “nothing of what is true and holy”<sup>12</sup> in Goemai spirituality. I hope it will facilitate a better understanding of the Goemai worldview among the people and observers by retelling Goemai history inspired by sacred geography so that indigenous practices are understood in context. The reimagined Goemai-centered worldview becomes the perspective through which Goemai Christian religiosity is lived anew.

In Chapter One, I argue for decolonizing the Goemai Divine space. I begin by situating the Goemai within the context of land, ancestral experience, and the colonial wound. The land for the Goemai is a place of remembering, incorporation into ancestral wisdom, and identity

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<sup>11</sup> Marie De Paul Neiers, *The People of the Jos Plateau, Nigeria*, Ethnology/Cultural Anthropology B-Cultural and Social Anthropology (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 1979), 83. Sr. Marie is quoting Bolaji Idowu.

<sup>12</sup> *Nostra Aetate* # 2 affirms the value in all cultures and sets out an important aspect of the mission of the Church, which is to promote what is good and valuable in other cultures. It is a recognition by the Church of the inherent good found in all cultures. The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions.



formation. The Goemai locality is understood as the ritual theatre that “establishes the spatial medium not merely as a physical area ... but as a manageable contraction of the cosmic envelop within which man [sic]—no matter how deeply buried such a consciousness has latterly become—fearfully exists”<sup>13</sup> is the situated place of an experiential encounter and relationship with the Divine. The Goemai five-tier hierarchy of forces in the cosmos will be explained. For the Goemai, performance flows from situatedness inspired by space and sacred geography since land determines how people relate with their constructed universe in the search for authenticity. Location connotes a relation with the people’s lifeworld, which constitutes the people’s experience and relationships within their space and universe. It is understood within the cultural discourse that emphasizes the dynamism of the experiential and historical person(s). The concept of authenticity is not about originality—a frozen state of culture but a continuous process of remaking and expressive dynamism. The sacralizing effect of space inspires identity formation, which is the internalization of traditional values by which the Moemai do illustrate who they are *where* they are.

In Chapter Two, I argue for revalorizing, recapturing, reinvention, reimagination, and reappropriating Goemai heritage, rites, rituals, ceremonies, and sacred spaces. I contend that Christian liturgy in Goemai space must reflect the spiritual reality of the people. It entails a reenactment of the past in the present—*anamnesis*. I believe an intercultural perspective that recognizes hybridity thrives on cultural engagement. Reimagination consists of reconstructing the people’s collective memory. I hold that in a contextual construction of Goemai stories, landscapes, and universe—where language as the essential medium of cultural identity is revived—cultural and social memory combine with geography to reimagine indigenous

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<sup>13</sup> Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 41.

situatedness. They shape their location by continuous reconstruction of cultural practices and space. I hold that sacred features transform the space into a location of hierophany, where the Divine gives God-self free from the perceiver's intention.<sup>14</sup> I follow Sebastian Madathummuril's phenomenological and Pneumatological approach grounded on the experience of the Spirit. I employ the concept of a saturated phenomenon to refer to the surplus or excess in symbolic representation. I propose reimagining the Goemai deities as energies of *Na'an* rather than as rivals of the Supreme Deity following Elochukwu E. Uzukwu's creative application of Hebrew poetic literature's transition of the three minor deities of *'emet*, *sedeq*, and *hesed* into virtues of faithfulness, righteousness, and love to the Igbo context.<sup>15</sup>

In Chapter Three, I make the case that the revalorized Goemai Divine space can inspire traditional spiritual values that, when integrated, allow for a renewed relationship with the Christian Divinity. My view is that cultural conversation is vital for the integration of traditional spiritual values. I privilege an incarnational model wherein Christ assumes everything Goemai in his manifestation in Goemai locality reflecting the hermeneutical character of the Goemai. The reimagined virtues stimulate a spiritual lifestyle expressed in social, economic, moral, and spiritual values inspired by the landscape, which aids cultural and social memory. It bolsters the significance of place-based knowledge. I propose arguments for a modular spirituality framework that is authentically Goemai and thoroughly Christian in Goemailand.

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<sup>14</sup> Sebastian Madathummuriyil, *Sacrament as Gift: A Pneumatological and Phenomenological Approach* (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 2.

<sup>15</sup> Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness: Appropriating Faith and Culture in West African Style* (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 116-18. See also, Distance-Nearness, Absence-Presence: Reevaluation the Relational Triune God through the Lens of Igbo (And West Africa) Health-Focused Religion, in, *Interface Between Igbo Theology and Christianity*, edited by Akuma-Kalu Njoku and E. Elochukwu Uzukwu (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishers, 2014), 97-98. For more, see Freedman and O'Connor, "Yahweh," 500-521.

## Chapter 1

### Talking and Relating with the Divine where the Goemai Is

“Strangely enough, I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. You can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be.” – Martin Luther King, Jr., 1961

Whether or not the African should recognize that her experience is understood within the framework of imperialism will be one thing with which Africans will continue to grapple. During conversations with friends, I realized that some blame colonialism for Africa’s woes. Others oppose the continuous blaming of colonialism. They aver that Africans are responsible for their woes because they are stuck in their colonial past. While it remains a fact that colonialism has formally ended, the ghost of colonialism (coloniality) still haunts the African psyche, and it cannot be wished away with a wave of the hand. At the same time, Africans must resist the temptation of being trapped within the invisible structures of Western power and control. Apart from the Western intrusion into the Goemai indigenous space, its disruption is not only on the literary level but in every aspect of indigenous life. Linda Tuhiwai Smith demonstrates how colonial experience has influenced indigenous history, knowledge, stories, entertainment, conversation, and how indigenous people understand and relate with themselves.<sup>16</sup> For the Goemai, their relationship with themselves has to be situated in their *yil* (land) and *kwap da* (ancestral lineage) because they are a people of the land whose history and ancestral memory shape their experience. This is captured in the Goemai expression, *mu shin a bi kwap da* (we are doing what we learned from our forefathers) or *dok goe yil daskoom* (as perceived by our elders in the past). It is not only a typical response often provided by the

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<sup>16</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd ed. (London: Zed Books, 2012), 20.

Goemai person in reply to an inquiry about any significant traditional rituals or ceremonies undertaken in a given community through time; it is also an affirmation of connection with the Goemai locality, a place for reminiscing and re-membering into the community. Within the collective cultural experience of the Goemai people, “doing the things of the ancestors” is not a mere repetition of acts of the ancestral past, but constitutes acts of reflective remembrance of past ancestral deeds as a way of making present the memory of the past in a renewed and dynamic way. It is the awareness of the connection and interpenetration of the secular and sacred realms. The close bond that the Moemai have consciously maintained with their space over time has resulted in the development of a heightened level of cultural self-understanding, which is, in turn, a valuable index of present-day cultural identity, epistemology, and religiosity. As articulated by Professor Wole Soyinka—a Nigerian playwright, poet, and Nobel laureate—space is more than a physical area but is also a spatial medium for conscious awareness of being.<sup>17</sup> Put differently, it is where people construct meaning for themselves from their experience and understand who they are in relation to their kith and kin, that is, it is a place for self-apprehension. Disconnection from one’s space creates a certain imbalance in the individual because it creates a barrier between the individual and the milieu in order to derive meaning or make sense of reality.

Thus, Goemai land cannot be viewed as a mere physical expanse of land as a commodity but as a cultural asset bequeathed to the forebears of the Moemai and their eventual descendants by *Na’an*—the Supreme Deity of the Goemai. Their traditional rites, rituals, modes of living, and spirituality are inseparably linked to the *yil* (land), the gift of *Na’an*. The Goemai cultural

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<sup>17</sup> Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, 41.

experiences developed over time have cumulatively shaped their communal identity, cosmology, epistemology, and religiosity.

### **1.1. Goemai: Historical Perspective of a People and a Language**

The term “Goemai,” by which the people refer to themselves, means “*human*.” The people understand their humanness to connote the “civilized ones.” This in no way connotes the denial of the humanity of other people but is a way of acknowledging their unique connection with *Na’an* as descendants of *jap Na’an* (Children of *Na’an* as the deities are also known). The ethnocultural people are generally referred to as *Goemai* in this study (synonymous terms also used to reference them include *Ankwei*, *Ankoué*, *Ankwe*, *Gamai*, and *Kemai*).

The primary historical foundation of the Goemai people, as for most African communal societies, is intrinsically connected to orally rendered stories of their ancestors’ mythical exploits, which capture their shared ancestral history, communal self-consciousness, and ritual worship. These myths are symbolic and are not always historically verifiable, but they are the traditionally acceptable drama of moral and spiritual significance. Myths, in the opinion of Uzukwu, have considerable aesthetic value for community members in outlining their pre-historical universe of experience. Its metaphysical-mystical dimension projects the ancestral deities or founding ancestors above ordinary human life. They also have a cosmogonic character as they explain the origin of the cosmos, provide exemplars, and justification for activities within the context. They are also reminders of a people’s consciousness or unconsciousness of ancestral tradition.<sup>18</sup> Though myths and rituals are distinct, they are not unrelated, as many indigenous rituals are reenactments of myths. According to Uzukwu, “at the most intensive narration by any community of its sacred history, which gives it identity in the universe, the recitation takes place

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<sup>18</sup> Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *Worship as Body Language: Introduction to Christian Worship: An African Orientation* (Liturgical Press, 1997), 84-89.

in ritual assembly; sometimes, there is a ritual execution (reenactment) of the foundation story.”<sup>19</sup> As a storied people, the dynamic reconstruction of their mythical beginnings safeguards the lessons received from its progenitors to maintain connection and harmony with their origins and divinities. Some others encapsulate the mores of the people, while some mythologies and rituals are for the purpose of entertainment. Interestingly, the Goemai have no cosmogonic myths like the Yorubas and many other indigenous people.

Goemalnd, the physical locale for the proposed study, lies within the expansive lowland plains of the Jos Plateau sub-region of North Central Nigeria. The land in question can also be considered as falling within the topographical catchment area of the upper Benue River basin. The Goemai are primarily domiciled in Shendam, Qu’an Pan Local Government Areas of Plateau State. They are also found in sparse farming and fishing settlements within Awe Local Government Area of neighboring Nasarawa State. The speech varieties found in these diverse communities are also referred to collectively by the same appellation, *Goemai*, often used for the ethnolinguistic grouping under the current study. The people’s language has been linguistically studied and genetically classified as belonging to the *Chadic* branch of the larger *Afro-Asiatic* language family grouping (or *phylum*) within contemporary African comparative-linguistic classification.

Territorially, Goemalnd shares land boundaries to the North with the lands of the *Montol*, the *Piapung*, and *Ngas* peoples. To the immediate south lie the lands of the *Jukun* people of Wukari; to the immediate west lie the lands of the *Kwalla* people and the *Alago* people; and finally, to the immediate east lie the lands of the *Youm* people. Through historical oral traditions, the Goemai/Ankwei people are believed to be related to the *Jukun* and the *Ngas* because of

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 90.

shared cultural heritage, customs, and rituals. The *Dorok* and *Kwo* of the southern Goemai land claim affinity with the *Jukun*, while the *Du'ut* of the northern part claim kinship with the *Ngas* people. They identify Lekni and Matduan as their progenitors.<sup>20</sup> Various oral traditions try to explain the origin of the Goemai. Diverse as these traditions may seem, they all hold and share much in common a central authority—the *Long Goemai* (Goemai Chief)—as the people's traditional father.<sup>21</sup> According to Danfulani, the title “*Long*” means “sacred,” “his majesty,” and “*miskhom*” (*miskoom* in Goemai) means “bravest among all men.”<sup>22</sup> The Goemai people have been famous for farming, fishing, and hunting for daily livelihood throughout history.

## 1.2. Goemai Experience of Relationality

Boethius defines the social human person as *naturae rationalis individua substantia*<sup>23</sup> (an individual substance of rational nature). This definition emphasizes the dichotomized person as composed of matter and form and the autonomous and self-subsistent dimension of the human person. Unfortunately, this restrictive perception of the person's nature has continued to characterize much of medieval and modern European scientific thinking. Boethius' understanding of the human person diametrically opposes another viewpoint well captured by Uzukwu, who writes, “the African social definition of person displays the human person as a subsistent relationship—in other words, the person as fundamentally ‘being-with,’ ‘living-with,’

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<sup>20</sup> See, Appendix 1:259-260.

<sup>21</sup> Vincent Danlami Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture* (Jos: Vincent Dalam Parlong, 2005). In this book, Parlong looks closely at the life of the Goemai and offers the reader a broad introduction to the people, their culture, and their spirituality. As a researcher who did not live to accomplish his study of the Goemai, Parlong has laid a solid foundation that may motivate those interested in knowing the Goemai perspective of themselves. I see myself as privileged to build on what was started by this worthy Goemai son. Though I draw inspiration from Parlong regarding studying the Goemai, this project has value in itself because of the postcolonial/decolonial trajectory it employs in the study of the Goemai and their cosmology from the standpoint of their epistemic location.

<sup>22</sup> Umar Habila Dadem Danfulani, *Pebbles and Deities: Pa Divination among the Ngas, Mupun and Mwaghavul in Nigeria* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1995), 32.

<sup>23</sup> Boethius, "The Theological Tractates," Leob Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1978 [1918]).

‘belonging-to’—Western philosophy lays emphasis on the absolute originality and concreteness of the human person, a ‘being-for-itself.’”<sup>24</sup> The Western individual is held in autonomy and subsistence and not liberated to enter the relationship that phenomenology and existentialism illustrate.<sup>25</sup> It is the individualism of the Enlightenment that Western Christianity prioritized in its evangelization of Africa over connectedness, which defines the African worldview.

African logic does not define the person ontologically by means of self-actualization but by means of ‘relations.’<sup>26</sup> As Bujo would suggest, anthropology is the starting point of African epistemology, ethics, cosmology, and religiosity. Relationship as the person’s defining characteristics is the foundation of understanding the cosmos and society. On this basis, the social existence within most African communities is defined and conditioned mainly by social ‘relatedness.’ For example, among the Igbo, as is the case in many African societies, a person is known in relation to their parents and the ancestors manifesting in them.<sup>27</sup> This explains the rationale behind the fundamental African principle, *I am because we are, and because we are, I am too*. There is the temptation to conclude that the individual is lost in the group. But that is far from being the case. Rather, a person stands and is recognized in society by connectedness and not alone. According to Uzuoku, “relationality is not a way in which the subject may realize itself. It is the essential element of ‘personhood.’ The quality of a person is dependent on the intensity of maintaining these relationships.”<sup>28</sup> A cosmology that is characterized by relationships understands being as belonging. For the Goemai, as is true for many Africans, existence transcends an individual living.

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<sup>24</sup> Elochukwu E. Uzuoku, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 42-43.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>26</sup> Benezet Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic: Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality*, trans. Brian McNeil (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 88.

<sup>27</sup> Uzuoku, *A Listening Church*, 36.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.



Thus, being is not affirming one's existence as a thinking being expressed by the Cartesian cogito; it is more of the decolonial principle, *I am where I think*. The *locus of enunciation*, which is the space of relationship and encounter with the totality of reality, is the place of reflection. The principle can positively link the subject's overall cosmo vision and self-identity. I believe it is possible to envision a reformulation of both the decolonial principle and the African communitarian principle into an African principle of spatial connectedness, built upon the value of togetherness, *I am where I relate*. Relationships encompass thoughts, intuitions, prayers, dances, rites, rituals, harmony and wholeness, and connection for the Africans. The question of "being human" or existence for indigenous people of Africa is founded on "a set of cultural and biological constructs" in opposition to "indigeneity," where existence is understood as "an inherent quality of being human."<sup>29</sup> African self-apprehension is founded on shared divinities, ancestors, cosmology, spirituality, history, and epistemology, not on the colonial construction of the West, where the African subject is delegitimized.

In this light, the proponents of Negritude overlooked the significance of African values in articulating a philosophy or indigenous spirituality. While they genuinely sought to present African reality to the world, which is commendable, they allowed the Manichean European thought to dictate their path to seeking an anti-Manichean African solution.<sup>30</sup> Soyinka sees the problem with Negritude as a contrivable creative ideology with a false social vision founded on disconnection from African values; it seeks an African solution in a European context. In Soyinka's opinion, Negritude is built on the false premise that a highly developed Europe and a

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<sup>29</sup> Morgan Ndlovu, *Performing Indigeneity: Spectacles of Culture and Identity in Coloniality* (London: Pluto Press, 2019), 4.

<sup>30</sup> Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, 127.

less developed irrational Africa provided the basis for the enslavement and colonization of Africans.<sup>31</sup>

In righting the misstep of the proponents of Negritude, post-colonial African philosophers reject the grounding of Africa's social vision in European intellectual tradition but rather in a retrieved and reimagined African epistemology, cosmology, and being. Consequently, *I feel therefore I am*, gives way to *I relate where I am*. Africa resists the continued simplification of its space and identity. It realized its initial misstep of trying to prove that it was capable of the same feat as the colonists. Frantz Fanon makes a valuable contribution to decolonial thinking when he advocates that "the Third World must not be content to define itself in relation to the values which preceded it" but must "focus on their very own values as well as the methods and style specific to them."<sup>32</sup> I agree with Fanon because Africa must articulate its self-apprehension within its experience to refuse to remain an appendage of Europe. For him, the liberation struggle is inseparably linked with the decolonial option of relinking with culture and space to reconstruct Africa's consciousness and identity.<sup>33</sup> Tejumola Olaniyan<sup>34</sup> readily agrees with Fanon's viewpoint on Negritude by demonstrating how Afrocentric counter-hegemonic ideals

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 127-29.

<sup>32</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 55. Frantz Fanon is a French Tunisian philosopher acclaimed as one of the post-colonial/decolonial thinkers whose resistance to colonization and the colonial matrix of power is grounded on the experience of creation of the Western binary of Whites and indigenous people whose space is simplified. The simplification of the space of the non-whites was necessary, according to Fanon, and led to the construction of the world of the indigenous people as a way to justify colonialization and the universalization of Western values. The colonial binary privileges the whites—a "Privilegization" had no clear criteria but for the soothing of the superior ego of Europeans as a race with special "God-given" authority over other peoples and races whose only privilege is the duty to remain subject to "God's Chosen People." Decolonization as the quest for dignity, according to Fanon, must take the route of self-discovery and definition as the path to liberation for indigenous peoples. As a hard-headed truth-teller, Fanon, after diagnosing the circumstances of colonization, advocated for violence as the key to the emancipation of the colonized. Deconstruction of the Western ideology and the binary of modernism is necessary for a new humanity to emerge as Homi K. Bhabha observed. Bhabha's reading of Fanon's use of violence as a "struggle for psycho-affective survival and a search human agency in the midst of the agony of oppression"—a struggle to keep alive.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 168-70.

<sup>34</sup> He was a Louis Durham Mead professor of English and Wole Soyinka professor of Humanities at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. He was interested in African, American, and Caribbean literature. His research interest was in post-colonial studies and popular culture studies.

represented viable invasions of European epistemological dominance. And this is reflected in what he calls Negritude's canonical nostrum as expressed by Senghor: "emotion is completely Negro as reason is Greek."<sup>35</sup> The contribution of the proponents of Negritude can be attributed to the first stage in the ongoing process of African resistance to European dominance.

In the indigenous cosmology of the Goemai, everything is connected. The harmony of the universe is maintained through rites and rituals mediated by *Paa* divination,<sup>36</sup> the facilitator of communication between the two worlds of the people. As a means of unraveling divine wisdom and secrets, divination can only be situated within the connectedness that characterizes the African worldview.<sup>37</sup> I shall return to this a little later in the chapter. The inseparability of the physical and the spiritual worlds is evidenced in the efficacy of the rites and rituals.

Characterized by relationality and mutuality, the Goemai worldview seeks commonality over competition. The space represents the place of relationship and the *locus of enunciation* because the epistemology of the indigenous people is the consequence of collective action within the context of African *palaver*. While the Western mindset sees independent entities and things, the indigenous mindset sees relations and connections.<sup>38</sup>

### 1.2.1. Transcendence as Ground for Relationality

*Yil* Goemai (Goemaliland) revolves around a worldview structured on the belief in *Na'an*. *Na'an*, for the Goemai, is not only experienced as the Creator and Supreme Deity; *Na'an* is Father. It is common among the Goemai to hear the expression *Nda Na'an* (Father God) in

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<sup>35</sup> Tejumola Olaniyan, *Scars of Conquest/Masks of Resistance: The Invention of Cultural Identities in African, African-American, and Caribbean Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 22.

<sup>36</sup> It entails the corpus of Goemai wisdom and divine secrets that unravel the force being every action or inaction that creates an imbalance in the community. Like the Ifa divination of the Yoruba, Pa divination diagnoses a situation and, in some instances, offers a prognosis. In the case of the Goemai, the Pa diviner works in conjunction with the Dien and Mualak (medicine and magic).

<sup>37</sup> Danfulani, *Pebbles and Deities*, 67.

<sup>38</sup> Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 148.

situations of joy, surprise, or sorrow.<sup>39</sup> Due to the holiness of *Na'an*, which elicits reverence and awe, the Goemai, like many indigenous people, do not have a cult for *Na'an*. Though a remote Divinity, *Na'an* is at the same immanent in and through the other divinities, the spirits, and ancestors. The transcendence of *Na'an*, far from being a withdrawal from the life of the people, can be explained as his investing in humans with greater autonomy for responsible stewardship.<sup>40</sup> Following this particular line of thought, it is clear that the basic principle of relationality in the lives of Goemai people helps define and regulate their cultural outlook. This relationality assures the “operational autonomy” of the African universe and the context of the deities, spirits, ancestors, and humans, as proposed by Urukwu in reference to many indigenous communities in West Africa.<sup>41</sup> It is the opinion of Urukwu that the West African cosmic reality of multiplicity fosters relationships. In the Goemai context, the people’s experience of connectedness in a cosmos governed by *Na'an* is the foundation for the web and hierarchy of relationships (the Goemai weave). In contraposition to the indigenous mode of knowledge production, however, is the Western knowledge production patterns that reject relationality as it is experienced in the indigenous universe to the extent that it confines the subject to its space. The differentiated individual, the indigenous subject, exists in a web of relationships and not in isolation.<sup>42</sup>

An indigenous spirituality of relationality offers a point of convergence with the Christian understanding of the Trinity as communion and interpenetrating relationship of the three Divine Persons that should mirror the Christian lifestyle. Deity, Spirit, and relationality provide the

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<sup>39</sup> Danfulani, *Pebbles and Deities*, 39-40.

<sup>40</sup> Urukwu, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness*, 123.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>42</sup> Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," in *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, ed. Walter D. Mignolo and Arturo Escobar (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 27.

ground for engagement between Christianity and Goemai indigenous spirituality. Uzukwu outlines this in his book, *God, Spirit and Human Wholeness: Appropriating Faith in West African Style*. Uzukwu's hunch is that relational tension mediates being in the world.<sup>43</sup>

Relationality aids in accessing and understanding reality. The African American thinker Victor Anderson is quoted by Uzukwu as holding this view. The instrumentality of relationality necessary for accessing reality in indigenous cosmology supersedes the "abstract universality, hierarchy, domination, and dichotomies that characterize classical Western metaphysics."<sup>44</sup>

Knowing and being known come from entering communion with indigenous divinity and transcendence. Transcendence offers the means by which people are called into communion by overcoming egoism. Altruism, for the Goemai, is recognizing that existence is grounded in *Na'an*, who gives meaning to reality. *Na'an* is not a remote Deity who is far removed from his creatures, as Western writers and missionaries insinuate. Jarlath Walsh, an Irish SMA priest who worked in the diocese of Jos, acknowledges the Goemai belief in *Na'an* as the Supreme Deity. Agreeing with the view of Western thinkers about indigenous peoples and religiosity, he held that "*Na'an* was relatively remote from the immediate affairs of the people as he had no special dwelling place and did not demand any offerings."<sup>45</sup> While Walsh correctly observes that there is no cult of *Na'an* among the Goemai, as is the case with the Yoruba deity, Olodumare, he misconstrued the transcendence of *Na'an* as removal from the affairs of the people. *Na'an* is mediately responsible for everything for the Goemai, and all the other divinities are answerable to *Na'an*. *Na'an* becomes more accessible in a dynamic relational manner where the presence of *Na'an* is experienced or even "displayed in *discreet withdrawal, distance, and transcendence or*

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<sup>43</sup> Uzukwu, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness*, 6.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13. Cf. Creative Exchange, 51.

<sup>45</sup> Walsh, *The Growth of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Jos 1907-1978*, 33.

*silence.*"<sup>46</sup> The presence of *Na'an* is experienced in his absence in the same way as his presence is more sensed in his absence. The bond of relationship induces the awareness of a presence in absence.<sup>47</sup> (I will return to this in chapter two). The consciousness of otherness in the African mindset always makes the person a subject-for-others. Thus, the African worldview celebrates the connectedness of the universe and the Supreme Deity. It is from this consciousness that the sacredness of the universe is derived.<sup>48</sup> As subjects relate to other subjects and subject-reality connections, the Subject-*Na'an*-Reality is dynamic. In the Western worldview, transformation is rooted in rationality, while in indigenous cosmology, relationality ensures transformation.

### 1.2.2. Goemai Symbolic Universe

The universe's interconnectedness in indigenous cultures conjures communication in a language the cosmos understands, viz., rituals. Uzuoku captures this succinctly when he asserts,

[a]n anthropocentric African universe displays humans as a complexity of interacting components intending wholeness. The community and the individual, related to a living past tradition and grounded in the sacred, dynamically connect to an unpredictable world to realise [sic] their destiny. Permeated by its belief, the social body, an ethnic group, ensures insertion within an environment through adequate ritual gestures. Illustrations are drawn from life increased or diminished, life threatened or celebrated, making peace or engaging in warfare, attracting blessing or expelling evil, and initiating experts that preside over the repetition of ritual gestures that ensure wholeness.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Uzuoku, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness*, 221.

<sup>47</sup> While Louis Marie Chauvet explains sacraments in his book, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Re-interpretation of Christian Existence*, his phenomenological perspective privileges understanding sacraments within a mediated context. This opposes the Western mechanical or technical language in explaining the Christian God and reality. It is unable to represent to itself the relations between subjects other than in a language of cause and effect. Even as he reinterprets sacramental theology by deconstructing the language of instrumentality, and adopting the language of symbolic mediation, Chauvet is not completely free from his Western context. He only uses different words in expressing the same reality. The debate of situating post-modernity with either modernity or postcolonial thinking is beyond the scope of this work. My usage of the presence-in-absence is completely within the cultural context of indigenous people for whom mediation and relation open the world of the unknown to human perception. The principle of relationality which establishes the web of connection between subjects, and between subjects and the deity makes the technical language of the classical Western thought inapplicable in a universe where connectedness is the people's experience.

<sup>48</sup> Potter Latir Dabup, *The Roots and Origins of the Lowland People of Plateau State* (Kaduna: Conscience Triumph Media Ltd., 2015), 289.

<sup>49</sup> Elochukwu Uzuoku, "Body and Belief: Exploration in African Ritology: The Magic of Body Language," *Jaarboek Voor Liturgie-Onderzoek* 24 (2008): 199.

Rituals, as outlined here, are a human response to, and an acknowledgment of, the gift of self by the divinities as a way of worship. Rituals ensure the people's assimilation into the community's cosmic reality. The celebration of connectedness in the language of rituals opens the person to integral flourishing that is inseparable from the flourishing of the entire cosmos. Indigenous Goemai rituals and worship are performed in the name of *Na'an* through the mediation of the deities, spirits, and ancestors. A significant feature of *buol Na'an* (worship) is the requirement for *seer* (penitential prayer) and *lap dor* (confession) since *buol Na'an* (worship) must be performed in the purity of heart.<sup>50</sup>

Goemai rituals are not performed haphazardly because deity veneration must begin with a libation. It entails pouring *mues* (the local drink) on the ground to remember the ancestors and appease them. In the Goemai culture, libation starts from the east (*dirteng*), then the west (*puanka*), followed by the south (*mu qua'an*), ending at the north (*watapang*), the point at which libation is poured. The Goemai ritualistic meal takes place in the *mai* (shrine); chicken, goat, cow, or horse, among many other animals, may be used for the sacrifice.<sup>51</sup> Rituals help the Goemai respond to the blessings of *Na'an*, while the ritual meals are symbols of communion where the initiate shares in the meals of the deities. Just as for the Jukuns, *mues* (local beer) is the food of the gods, especially within the course of rituals and rites in the sacred space (shrine), and may be understood as analogous to the wine in the Dionysian rites, which was a solemn sacrament where the "communicant" received the spirit of the gods or like drinking *haoma* in the Zoroastrian religion or drinking *soma* in the Indian Vedic ritual.<sup>52</sup> In Goemai cosmology, libations assure the deities they are not forgotten and that the ancestors are recognized as integral

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<sup>50</sup> Appendix 1:262, 272-273, 276.

<sup>51</sup> Appendix 1:262, 264, 272-277, 298-297.

<sup>52</sup> See, C. K. Meek, *A Sudanese Kingdom: An Ethnographical Study of the Jukun-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria* (New York: The Humanities Press, 1950), 153.

members of the community. In the Goemai context, libation depicts a people with an elastic memory and for whom forgetfulness is an offense to being Goemai.

Feasts, festivals, ceremonies, rites, and rituals are integral to the Goemai universe. The ritualization of life, customs, and worship is beyond mere performance for spectacle for an audience, but is a reenactment of ancestral traditions as a means of making present the wisdom of the fathers (*mu shin a bi kwap da*). The fathers are signifiers of Goemai land with the locations of their settlements like Jalbang mountain, Poe Muduut, Kwapmu'utla, Karbang village, and Pang-bel, which are burial places of the Goemai chiefs. The ancestors are avenues through whom tradition is preserved and transmitted in a living and dynamic way from generation to generation. This is a creative and imaginative way of conceptualizing reality. As a manner of presenting and representing culture and tradition, it can only be understood with the mindset of the people and the space within which it was constructed. Within the Goemai cosmology, feasts, festivals, and ceremonies are always celebrated in the context of religious symbolism.<sup>53</sup> The Goemai past is understood and recalled in their significant *shini*—today—through the instrumentality of ritual symbolism, as the avenue by which recalling the past happens.<sup>54</sup> The dynamism with which the recalling takes place gives a certain newness within the circumstances in which it is enacted. Life is symbolized in birth, initiation, marriage, death, etc. These stages of life are significant in the process of transition, which attests to the processes of insertion into the land's secrets. Every aspect of life is celebrated as a deeper union with the people's cosmology.

A caricature of the symbolized universe of indigenous people comes in staging indigenous customs and traditions for entertainment. However, in a “ritually theatrical space,” the idea of passivity gives way to active participation at specific moments. Soyinka explains,

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<sup>53</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 37.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.



[t]he so-called audience is itself an integral part of the arena of conflict; it contributes spiritual strength to the protagonist through its choric reality which must first be conjured up and established, defining and investing the arena through offerings and incantations. The drama would be non-existent except within and against this symbolic representation of earth and cosmos, except within this communal compact whose choric essence supplies the collective energy for the chthonic realms. Overt participation when it comes is channelled [sic] through a formalised [sic] repertoire of gestures and liturgical responses.<sup>55</sup>

Riddles, proverbs referred to as *kwo*, and idiomatic expressions in Goemiland are associated with the wisdom and intelligence of elders. They are kinds of coded language that challenge the listeners to think in a way that invites immersion into the symbolic space. Riddles are centered on shared cultural experiences and thus serve as means of maintenance or continuity of culture.<sup>56</sup> The masks are symbols of the ancestral spirits who come to visit the living. According to Danfulani, masks/masquerades “serve as the cross-roads between the living and the dead.”<sup>57</sup> As with the *Egungun* found in the Yoruba worldview, the ancestors in Goemiland manifest through ceremonial ritual performances either as an assurance of their care and protection or even to warn their descendants. In riddles and proverbs, the Goemai come across as a people for whom meaning is contextual and flexible rather than static. And the masks depict the people as bridge-builders between what is known and not known and people who have room for everything, even what may seem rationally incomprehensible.

The Goemai space is where Goemai divinities, spiritual realities, the ancestors, the living, the unborn, and all of the creation converge in a single community. This informs the perception of mutual harmony between the physical and spiritual among the people. Thus, both the sacred and the secular spheres of the Goemai people’s experiences are not rigidly separated. Although specially designated sacred spaces in the community often conjure feelings of the profound

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<sup>55</sup> Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, 39.

<sup>56</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 95-103.

<sup>57</sup> Danfulani, *Pebbles and Deities*, 49.

divine presence of traditional spiritual deities, there is no strict exclusivity between the secular/sacred realms of human experience among many African indigenous people, including the Goemai people, since “the secular is sacred.” The space where the past, present, and future converge in a single reality curbs the temptation for greed as it assures intergenerational justice.

For example, among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria, the marketplace is not just a space for any transaction but is also for socialization, the coming together of the community made up of the dead, the living, the unborn, the spirits, ancestors, and deities. In Yoruba cosmology, the pantheon of deities, the ancestors, the living, and the unborn are all conceived in one continuous flow of life—there is no disconnect. Everything is connected.<sup>58</sup> This is contrary to the Manichaean compartmentalized reality in a binary manner criticized by Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*. For the Goemai, the forest is one of the dwellings of the deities, and as a sacred space, it is a place where spiritual and medicinal herbs grow for the collective healing of the people and the land. Ceremonies of purification and healing depend on the availability of the leaves or herbs.

Like their immediate Chadic-speaking neighbors, the Goemai ascribe symbolism to the major categories of colors, particularly the various shades of white, black, and red, all of which carry dual symbolism. In this sense, the symbolic significance of colors is not static in the sense of one particular color having one unchanging significance. It is the affirmation of the fluid duality in many indigenous cosmologies. I shall be returning to this in the next section. The color white symbolizes purity, fertility, absence of ritual dirt and pollution, lack of guilt, and innocence though it may, in other circumstances, represent misfortune and even bad luck. As much as black is always associated with darkness, night, and evil, like the white color, it is not always evil, as

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<sup>58</sup> Stephen Prothero, *God Is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run the World—and Why Their Differences Matter* (New York: Harper One, 2010), 207-08.

the black topsoil is regarded as fertile. Red most often signifies danger and menstrual flow. It also stands for social status and rank, such as the red cap.<sup>59</sup> The *Long Goemai* always has his red hat whenever he is not wearing the *zung*.

### 1.2.3. The Colonial Wound

The colonial wound inflicted on Africans found traction in the discovery of America, the idea of Americanity, and its four concepts of race, ethnicity, coloniality, and “newness.”<sup>60</sup> For most indigenous African communities, including the Moemai, socio-cultural and spiritual realities often come wrapped up in distinctive communal colorations. This explains why Wole Soyinka, the renowned Nigerian playwright, confidently affirmed the communal nature of human existence in most traditional African communities before the advent of European colonial rule. Happily, such a cooperative mode of existence has not been totally eroded by the experience of colonialism in many parts of Africa today. The durable after-effects of the collective mode of existence have continued to be felt long after the end of Western colonial rule, thus remaining an integral part of the cosmic totality of the African reality.<sup>61</sup> This is very true of the Goemai, as significant aspects of the culture and tradition have survived in the interior of Goemaliland.<sup>62</sup> Soyinka continues that the natural world of the Africans is the inner world of the individual and the community from which Africans make sense of their stories, customs, and rituals as the basis for a harmonious relationship.<sup>63</sup> John and Jean Comaroff, in their work titled, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonization, and Consciousness in South Africa*, concur with Soyinka’s position on African cosmology. According to them, the African world is

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<sup>59</sup> Danfulani, *Pebbles and Deities*, 199-203.

<sup>60</sup> See, Anibal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein, "Americanity as a Concept, or the Americas in the Modern World-System," *International Journal of Social Sciences* 134 (1992).

<sup>61</sup> Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, 43.

<sup>62</sup> See Appendix 1:292.

<sup>63</sup> Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, 34.

culturally organized according to age, rites, marital status, family affinity, and prosperity (farm, cattle, wives, children). The holistic nature of the African universe is such that the “cultural order, political economy, symbolic forms, and material life, composed an indivisible totality.”<sup>64</sup>

The community is central to the African worldview—the space where individuals are intimately linked. Benezet Bujo sees the community as a place to humanize the person.<sup>65</sup> Humanization entails rejecting a life of isolation from the community or subjection by another to accept a “forced context.”<sup>66</sup> The rejection of a “forced context” entails the process of humanization, as liberation comes from the making and remaking of the individual within the web of relationships of one’s spatial location. The individual only becomes a person through active participation in the life of the community. Thus, identity comes not just from belonging but from everyday actions in community life for Africans.<sup>67</sup> The African universe, as anthropocentric, is characterized by a weave of numerous human components that interdepend for the good of humanity. Uzukwu articulates it thus: “[a]n anthropocentric African universe displays humans as a complexity of interacting components intending wholeness. The community and individual, related to living past tradition and grounded in the sacred, dynamically connect to an unpredictable world to realise [sic] their destiny.”<sup>68</sup> Communal living,

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<sup>64</sup> Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 2 vols. (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London, 1991), 1:151.

<sup>65</sup> Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic*, 59.

<sup>66</sup> The concept was coined by Gerald Boodoo and for elaboration, see, Gerald Boodoo, "Many Faces, One Church: Cultural Diversity and the American Catholic Experience," in *Understanding Church and Theology in the Caribbean Today*, ed. Peter C. Phan and Diana L. Hayes (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 117-36. In analyzing the situation of the Church in the Caribbean, Boodoo affirms how the imposed structures for thinking about reality do not offer the freedom of seeking new and alternative structures within the life of the Church and theology. Instead, the Caribbean people are compelled to act due to the exigency of the present condition. As an enforced context created by the exploitative structures of Western-Christian colonization, it brings various people into one administrative unit. The colonized are forced people who live in a context, not of their own creation with the desperation for freedom. See also, "De Schrijver's Wager Theology and Dehumanization: The Meaning of Liberation in a Forced Theological Context," *Mediations in Theological Georges De Schrijver's Wager and Liberation Theologies* (2003).

<sup>67</sup> Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic*, 87.

<sup>68</sup> Uzukwu, "Body and Belief," 199.

fundamental to the Africans, is expressed by the indigenous principle, *I am because we are, and because we are, I am too*. Relationship or relationality defines the African concept of life. The African indigenous principle reminds Africans that living in isolation is not a life-giving experience as it negates the abundant life of togetherness. The fulcrum of being is relationship as full humanization is not only spatially or contextually determined;<sup>69</sup> it is experiential and relational. The relationship is built from the immediate nuclear family to the extended family, the clan, and society. While the cosmo vision of indigenous people is communal, relational, and interdependent, which holistically depicts the connectedness of reality, Western cosmo vision is individualistic and independent, characterized by the separation and lack of connection of the constituent elements of reality.

The Cartesian *cogito, I think, therefore I am*, affirms the existence of the thinking subject and remains oblivious to the reality of the *other* subject who becomes objectified. The Cartesian *cogito* is rooted in Western rationality and immersed in the logic of modernity and enlightenment. In an article titled “On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept,” Nelson Maldonado-Torres looks critically at the foundation of the Cartesian *cogito*. According to Maldonado-Torres, the *ego cogito* and the contemptuous doubt for humankind cannot be understood without the underpinning *ego conquiro*. It serves to deny indigenous peoples their humanity, the ability to reason, and to simplify their spaces. He posits that the *ego cogito* has two unacknowledged presupposed dimensions—the rationality of the thinking subject and denial of the thinking faculty in others, as well as the existence of the

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<sup>69</sup> In his book on Ethics and African Religion, Laurenti Magesa avers that life is central to Africans and everything has to be at the service of life. He posits that life is encompassed in interaction and existence. Living life is all about fullness. However, in the African experience of corruption and greed among African leaders, life is hindered from attaining fullness (wholeness). Magesa holds that it is the very core of morality to promote life such that when it is threatened, prayer comes to the rescue. Thus, everything is geared towards the fullness of life.

thinking subject and non-existence of those denied the thinking faculty. Here is Maldonado-Torres in his own words:

[i]f the ego cogito was built upon the foundations of the ego conquiro, the “I think, therefore I am” presupposes two unacknowledged dimensions. Beneath the “I think” we can read “others do not think,” and behind the “I am” it is possible to locate the philosophical justification for the idea that “others are not” or do not have being. In this way we are led to uncover the complexity of the Cartesian formulation.<sup>70</sup>

Continuing, he offers what he refers to as “both philosophical and historical accurate expressions” of the *ego cogito* thus: *I think* (others do not think, or do not think properly), *therefore I am* (others are not, lack being, should not exist or are dispensable).<sup>71</sup> The expressions mentioned above put into perspective the logic of enlightenment and modernity, which constructed a linear history culminating in progress, civilization, democracy, development, and salvation for the damned, the colonized indigenous people as the Other. Levy-Bruhl’s invention of the Other as primitive by his law of participation underlies the Western epistemology constructed on the basis of a dichotomy between the center and the periphery and from its binary of static opposites.<sup>72</sup> The periphery is the place of the non-whites who are constructed to “perform indigeneity,”<sup>73</sup> reinforcing the Western constructed categories of indigenous people. Coloniality is the inner mechanism of colonization in which the global imperial capitalist system of the Euro-American empire tries to impose on the colored a new world order. Coloniality,

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<sup>70</sup> Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept," in *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, ed. D. Walter D. Mignolo and Arturo Escobar (New York: Routledge, 2010), 106.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Aime Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 69-70.

<sup>73</sup> Ndlovu, *Performing Indigeneity: Spectacles of Culture and Identity in Coloniality*. In this book, Ndlovu distinguishes between the “being human” of the indigenous people which is culturally and biologically constructed, and indigeneity which is taken as an inherent quality of being human. Ndlovu demonstrates how the colonialists forced the colonized to perform being savage, uncivilized, and irrational with no humanity as a means for justifying colonization. Thus, indigenous locality became a stage for performance, not a space where life originates, is lived, and sustained. Chapter four of this work will be dedicated to looking more at indigeneity.

which emerged from colonialism, is a pattern of control where the physical presence of the colonizers gives way to the influence and dominance of the new empire of the colonized.

Africans were made to perform on a live stage to reinforce the stereotypes invented in the minds of the Europeans, justifying the necessity for colonization of the “irrational,” “primitive,” and “savage.”<sup>74</sup> The construction of indigeneity, Africans’ identity, and the Western epistemological universalization calls for a “decolonial turn.”<sup>75</sup>

A decolonial turn requires decolonial thinking, which necessitates the shift from Cartesian logic to a decolonial principle: *I am where I think* is a way of resistance to the imposition of the Eurocentric worldview as a global design for the domination of non-whites. It is the acknowledgment of the spatiality of all subjectivity such that the provincial epistemologies of all localities, including Western epistemology, are local. With the acknowledgment of other spaces, epistemologies, and *loci of enunciation*, a decolonial turn avails indigenous peoples of the avenue to reinvent their identity, re-imagine their distinctness, and valorize their difference from Western provincial culture. In providing a decolonial option, indigenous people engage “in epistemic disobedience and delinking from the colonial matrix.”<sup>76</sup> In the words of Nelson Maldonado-Torres,

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>75</sup> Nelson Maldonado-Torres traces the historical trajectory of the concept. According to him, in his article titled “Thinking through the Decolonial Turn: Trans/Post Continental Interventions in Philosophy, Theory, and Critique” held that decolonial thinking had existed from the times of modern colonization, around the late fifteenth to the early sixteenth centuries. Maldonado-Torres credited W.E.B Du Bois for the profound shift from modernization to decoloniality in the twentieth century. He posits that the concept entered the western academy after the decolonization of colonized African and Asian territories, the civil rights movement, and the end of formal segregation in schools in the United States. According to Maldonado-Torres, the concept first appeared in 2005 with the conference organized at the University of California, Berkeley, of which he was the main organizer. The conference, according to Maldonado-Torres, took place one year after the first annual conference of the Caribbean Philosophical Association in Barbados, one year after Arturo Escobar and Walter D. Mignolo organized a meeting of the modernity/coloniality network at Duke University and the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. See, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Thinking through the Decolonial Turn: Post-Continental Interventions in Theory, Philosophy, and Critique—an Introduction,” *Transmodernity* (2011).

<sup>76</sup> Raimundo Barreto and Roberto Sirvent, eds., *Decolonial Christianities: Latinx and Latin American Perspectives*, New Approaches to Religion and Power (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 5.

The Decolonial Turn is about making visible the invisible and about analyzing the mechanisms that produce such invisibility or distorted visibility in light of a large stock of ideas that must necessarily include the critical reflections of the 'invisible' people themselves. Indeed, one must recognize their intellectual production as thinking—not only as culture or ideology.<sup>77</sup>

Walter D. Mignolo, whose methodological approach is to look at the past and underneath European philosophy to unearth the underlying assumptions,<sup>78</sup> surmises that decolonization must begin with questioning the foundation of Western ontology.<sup>79</sup> This is because the colonial matrix of power, as the constructed structures of power, control, and hegemony, and the colonial racial matrix based on European identity construction discourses,<sup>80</sup> bestow an unexplained superiority on Europeans. At the same time, the subjectivity of indigenous peoples is doubted or even outrightly rejected. For Mignolo, the decolonial option is epistemic disobedience. He writes,

The de-colonial option is epistemic, that is, it de-links from the very foundations of Western concepts and accumulation of knowledge. By epistemic de-linking I do not mean abandoning or ignoring what has been institutionalized all over the planet (e.g., look what is going on now in Chinese Universities and the institutionalization of knowledge). I mean to shift the geo- and body-politics of knowledge from its foundation in Western imperial history of the past five centuries, to the geo- and body-politics of people, languages, religions, political and economic conceptions, subjectivities, etc., that have been racialized (that is, denied their plain humanity). Thus, by "Western" I do not mean geography per se, but the geo-politics of knowledge. Consequently, the de-colonial option means among other things, *learning to unlearn* (as it has been clearly articulated in the Amawtay Wasi high learning project, I will come back to it), since our (a vast number of people around the planet) brains have been programmed by the imperial/colonial reason.<sup>81</sup>

In other words, the decolonial option rejects Western categories and premises as the foundation of indigenous religiosity and epistemology. Indoctrination as a form of controlling the mind has been the weapon of colonization. And nothing short of decolonizing the mind can liberate it from

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<sup>77</sup> Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being," 116.

<sup>78</sup> "Thinking through the Decolonial Turn," 8.

<sup>79</sup> Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, 136.

<sup>80</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience: The De-Colonial Option and the Meaning of Identity in Politics," *Niteroi*, no. 22 (2007): 13.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.



the grip of Western epistemology. *Learning to unlearn*, as decolonizing the mind, rather than being a way of rejecting or forgetting, is all about remembering differently.<sup>82</sup> It entails a local “turn” that envisages privileging indigenous religiosity, epistemology, and cosmology, as well as their history.

The universalization of a context over others is hinged on stereotyping promoted by the logic of what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie calls “a single story,” which she correctly acknowledged as dangerous in her TED Talk of October 7, 2009. A single story, according to Chimamanda, is “a one-dimensional perspective of something that is actually quite complex. A single story exemplifies reductionism at best. It is a misinterpretation of reality.” More than a misrepresentation of reality, Western universalization of its epistemology is founded on false narratives created to justify their ideological classification of persons, cultures, races, ethnicities, etc. Decolonization is then understood as rejecting a single story and its pretense of centrality in a universal cosmology. Rather than a single story, decolonial thinking advocates for multiple/diverse stories within a pluriversal cosmology. The rejection of any form of a single story means the acceptance of alternative epistemological thought patterns wherein a decolonial turn that encourages openness to the reality of a pluriversal logic is acknowledged. Soyinka considers it intellectual bondage and self-betrayal, from which liberation is needed. Europe’s colonial culture has been a reference point for African cultures and epistemology.<sup>83</sup> Europeans, in the views of Soyinka, reduced Africa and its epistemology to an appendage of Europe.

The invisible structures will require a continuous process of delinking and relinking to decolonize the mind imbued with the ideological constructions of the Euro-American global design. Dewesternization, as epistemic disobedience to the globalized Western *locus of*

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<sup>82</sup> Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, 154.

<sup>83</sup> Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, viii.

*enunciation* and its locally produced epistemology, ensures the indigenization of knowledge, history, and culture by retrieval, reimagination, and reinterpretation of what has been imposed in the light of indigenous ancestral experience and wisdom. It is about “contesting the content of the conversation.”<sup>84</sup> What all these mean in relation to the Goemai is not of the colonial difference as an expression of objective reality but the realization that restructuring the foundations of indigenous cosmology is necessary for reconstructing its identity, history, cosmology, epistemology, etc., all of which were destroyed by colonialism. Goemai indigenous institutions were outrightly transformed to meet colonial designs or were modified, viz, the colonial reorganization of the people into provinces and the institution of administration. For example, in pre-colonial times until the colonial administration, the *Long Goemai* was referred to as the *Long Du’ut*, *Du’ut* being one of the three Goemai people districts of the Goemai people, including *Dorok* and *Kwo*. Each district had its autonomous chief with its council. The centralization of administrative powers in the *Long Goemai*, also known as *Long Du’ut*, was in defiance of the decentralized administration structure of the Goemai society.<sup>85</sup> Parlong affirms that “the colonialists introduced a political system that gave the *Long Du’ut* much political power and gradually rendered irrelevant the palace officials who were instrumental in the execution of political as well as religious duties.”<sup>86</sup> The *Long Du’ut* becoming the *Long Goemai* changed the dynamic of political organization, which brought the *Kwo* and *Dorok* chiefs under the authority of the *Long Du’ut*. The implication is the intrusion of civil administration into traditional matters.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, "On Pluriversity and Multipolar World Order: Decoloniality after Decolonization; Dewesternization after the Cold War," in *Constructing the Pluriverse: The Geopolitics of Knowledge*, ed. Bernd Reiter (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), 99.

<sup>85</sup> See Appendix 1:286.

<sup>86</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 138.

<sup>87</sup> See Appendix 1:286.

#### 1.2.4. African *Palaver*—A Conversational Inclusiveness

The exercise of authority in many indigenous African societies is collegial rather than centralized autocracy. Power is shared such that no one person has the monopoly of control. Chiefs are always assisted by the council of chiefs, which must be consulted before decisions are reached. This is not forgetting priests and diviners who mediate between the people and their divinities. In the final analysis, consultations occur with the families, clans, and the larger community in what is known as the African “palaver.” This is not a chaotic, endless conversation but a broad consultation in which society’s wholistic character is considered. The community’s verbal and non-verbal healing conversation is aimed at reestablishing broken interpersonal relationships.<sup>88</sup> It recognizes the connectedness of society and the dignity of every reality within the people’s cosmo vision. The conversation brings the spiritual world of the divinities, ancestors, the unborn, the dead, the physical world of the living, and the intricate relationships in the universe, an engagement rooted in connectedness that defines the universe.<sup>89</sup> The sapiential character of *palaver* is such that it flows from the living wisdom of the people. Bujo distinguishes between family *palaver* and suprafamilial *palaver*. The engagement of family members is meant to restore and maintain a family bond, reestablish a harmonious communion with ancestors, and build a new vitality.<sup>90</sup> The *anamnetic* dimension within the dynamic of African *palaver* is a recollection of the ancestral wisdom in a renewed manner where the past serves as the ground for hearing ancestral voices in the context of the present life-giving experience and hope for the future. A significant *palaver* according to Bujo is the “suprafamilial”

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<sup>88</sup> Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic*, 46.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-49.

and administrative palaver. It involves larger groups when family issues are unsatisfactorily resolved. As counselors, the village or regional council of elders assist the chief or king in administering justice, where messages are communicated in symbolic languages, like proverbs, adages, parables, etc. These are experiential and contextual ways of communication that necessitate reflection. Their validity is based on their fitting in the proper context. If not, they are corrected or supplemented by other proverbs, adages, or parables.<sup>91</sup> The conclusion of the palaver process is marked by reconciliation and healing of broken relationships, leading to the restoration of harmony.

#### **1.2.5. The Indigenous Principle of Fluid Duality**

Goemai indigenous space is constructed and subscribed to fluid duality rather than Western static duality in human observance of reality. As pointed out earlier in relation to differences in perception and symbolism of colors, indigenous cosmo vision does not end in contraries as in night and day, black and white, male and female, good and evil, rational and irrational, civilized and uncivilized, saved and damned, superior and inferior, among others. The underlying logic of a binary is that of either/or. In relative contrast, the ideas underlying indigenous duality recognize the complementary aspects of the same reality where none of the poles invalidates the other, but, as Sylvia Marcos<sup>92</sup> has it, “both are in constant mutual interaction, flowing into each other. Mutually exclusive categories are not part of the epistemic background of this worldview.”<sup>93</sup> Marcos holds that “duality is the linking and ordering force that creates a coherent reference for indigenous peoples, the knitting thread that weaves together

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>92</sup> Sylvia Marcos is a senior researcher of the Seminario Permanente de Antropología y Género at the Institute for Anthropological Research (IIA). She has been engaged with the indigenous women’s movement in Mexico and Latin America.

<sup>93</sup> Sylvia Marcos, "Mesoamerican Women's Indigenous Spirituality: Decolonizing Religious Belief," in *Decolonial Christianities: Latinx and Latin American Perspectives*, ed. Raimundo Barreto and Roberto Sirvent (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 76.

all apparent disparities.”<sup>94</sup> Apparent opposites form a synchronized whole where reality does not stand independently but mirrors each component part. The dichotomy of contraries is absorbed in the harmony-in-difference where balance is sought. That is why it is not a contradiction among the Goemai for a man to be a woman (Goemai *Goemat*). While the Luu Niyuu *Mang-gap* is female, that of Demshin is male, and the Ndak *Mang-gap* is both male and female.<sup>95</sup> All non-initiates are regarded as women. This fluid duality must be understood within the context of the integral nature of the Goemai universe, where any irreconcilable contraries negate the communal and holistic view of reality. Stratification, as defining Western cosmo vision, is reduced to the elasticity and flexibility found in the fluid duality of the indigenous universe. The interpenetration of the sacred and secular makes the immanence of spiritual realities within the human domain a regular occurrence. In such a context, the most sacred event occurs in the most human circumstance. Marcos surmises that “in the fluid, dual universe of indigenous spiritualities, the sacred domain is pervasive. Strong continuities exist between the natural and the supernatural worlds, whose sacred beings are interconnected closely with humans, who in turn propitiate this interdependence in all their activities.”<sup>96</sup> The West and its binary mode of apprehension struggled to understand the African cosmos in which the spiritual and the profane are one and the same thing.

### **1.3. Goemai Pantheon of Divinity**

Plurality or duality is the hallmark of the African spiritual realm. The spiritual reality is made of the Supreme Deity, the lesser divinities, spirits, and ancestors. It is a hierarchical sphere not characterized by rivalry but by mutuality, relationality, and multiplicity. The supremacy of

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>95</sup> See Appendix 1:265.

<sup>96</sup> Marcos, "Mesoamerican Women's Indigenous Spirituality," 82.

the Creator-Deity does not impede the operational autonomy of the other divinities and spirits. There is room for all to operate within the hierarchical harmony of the spiritual communion/community. There is a certain independence within interdependence. The other deities are not denied what Uzukwu refers to as “autonomy of action.”<sup>97</sup> Here, each divinity has a specific function to act freely though the ultimate power is attributed to the Supreme Deity. *Olodumare*, for the Yoruba, created the universe through the action of the *Orisa-nla*; in the same manner, *Chukwu*, for the Igbo people, allows a free hand to *Amadiogha*. The Hellenistic view of being as one is oblivious to the African worldview’s relationality. Multiplicity is captured in the Igbo adage, “when something stands, something else stands beside it.”<sup>98</sup> That which stands by it is not opposed to it; it complements it. The overarching question that will guide the next section is, “who is *Na’an*, and how does understanding this Supreme Deity help in the creation of the Goemai worldview?” The Goemai identify a five-tier hierarchy of forces in their cosmos: *Na’an* (the Supreme Deity), *Mu’ut* (lesser deities), *Mukwarkum* (free spirits), *Kwap da/Rinsek/Poekwap* (ancestors), and *Dien* and *Mualak* (medicine and magic respectively) according to the classification of Parlong.<sup>99</sup> Without the pantheon, there is no Goemai land, no rituals, and no spirituality. *Na’an* created the context in which *Na’an* is experienced, articulated, and revered.

### 1.3.1. *Na’an* as Foundation of Goemai Religiosity

Goemai self-apprehension is meaningless without *Na’an* as the father of the people and the land given to them as patrimony through the ancestors. This people’s situatedness in their

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<sup>97</sup> Uzukwu, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness*, 83.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 2. See also, E. Elochukwu Uzukwu, "Multiplicity of Deities in Indigenous Religions of West Africa: Celebration of Hospitality and End to Religious Violence in Nigeria (Africa)," in *Religion, Human Dignity and Liberation*, ed. Gerald M. Boodoo (Rua Parana: Editora Oikos Ltda, 2016). Therein, Uzukwu, based on the inspiration from Chinua Achebe, discusses the reality of multiplicity in the African pantheon of divinity based on the Igbo foundational philosophy of the Igbo adage *ife kwulu ife akwudebe ya*. According to Uzukwu, “the guiding ethos of Indigenous spirituality is one of hospitality, accommodation, and addition.”

<sup>99</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 7.

particular worldview shapes their lives, culture, rituals, and religiosity. The cosmology that results from their space forms their consciousness such that a rejection of the people's cosmology denies their right to self-identity.<sup>100</sup> The Goemai cosmology has the Supreme Deity at the apex of everything as the Creator and Sustainer of all. *Na'an* lives in the sky and cares for humans from the spiritual world. Next to *Na'an* are the lesser deities, the free spirits, and the ancestors.<sup>101</sup>

The origin of the name *Na'an* remains a mystery as it is unknown, with no clear etymological explanation. However, *Na'an*, as a reference to the Supreme Deity, is common among the Chadic of the lower Plateau State. Among them are the Mwaghavul, Mupun, Doemak, Bwall, Mernyang, Kwagalak (Kwalla), Mushere, Jepal, etc. The *Ngas*-speaking people use *Nen*, a slight variation of *Na'an*, to designate the Supreme Deity. Fidelis Longban, in an unpublished manuscript, expressed the view that the *Ngas*'s peculiar use of the label, *Nen*, is a corruption of the original label, *Na'an*, favored by the Goemai and Chadic people. There is little or no research evidence, however, to support this particular assertion of Longban on the exact historical etymology of *Na'an/Nen*. For most of the Chadic people within the immediate geographical vicinity of the Goemai, every natural phenomenon, such as rain, drought, disaster, blessing, bountiful harvest, life, and death, is believed to be caused by the divine action of *Na'an*. Thanksgivings and supplications are directed to *Na'an* through rituals, and rites are performed through the mediation of the other divinities who manifest the immanence of *Na'an*. Thus, the Supreme Deity is sometimes understood and spoken of positively as the kind, loving,

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<sup>100</sup> Dabup, *The Roots and Origins of the Lowland People of Plateau State*, 289.

<sup>101</sup> Danfulani, *Pebbles and Deities*, 39-48.

caring, and beneficent Deity.<sup>102</sup> The Goemai recognize *Na'an* as the creator, provider, and sustainer. Nonetheless, the Deity, also treated as an object of fear and reverence, is often identified with a gun (*Naan*) and even thunder, which may refer to the power of *Na'an*.<sup>103</sup>

While the Goemai conceive *Na'an* as male, the Mwaghavul and Mupun, on the other hand, understand *Na'an* as female, a Goddess. The Mwaghavul conceive *Na'an* as the great Mother of life and is sometimes referred to as *Na Naan*, viz., Mother Goddess or Mother of all mothers from whose breast milk (symbol of life and fertility) creation, her dependent child, is sustained.<sup>104</sup> *Na'an* occupies the sky like the Berom deity, *Dagwi* (Father of the sky), and the Yoruba *Olorun* (Owner of the sky). The association of the Supreme Divinity with the sky and among many groups with the sun may symbolize for the people, especially the Berom, Challa, Ganawauri, Jarawa, etc., in a certain way, the Supreme Deity in all splendors.<sup>105</sup> *Na'an* is powerful; a deity who, like the mother, gives her child a drink. Rainfall is associated with *Na'an*, who lives in the sky and is mistaken by non-Africans as *deus remotus*, *deus absconditus*, and *deus otioisus* (remote, withdrawn God). However, proverbs, riddles, titles, aphorisms, and attributes bear witness to the immanence of *Na'an*.<sup>106</sup>

Names are used to describe the attributes and immanence of *Na'an*. For example, *Na'an shep* is often given to a child in reference to *Na'an* as a judge; *Na'an long* is given to a child in reference to *Na'an* as chief or king; *Na'an miap* is given to a child in reference to *Na'an* as divine maker; *Na'an Nda luka* is given to a child in reference to *Na'an* as Father of the orphan.

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<sup>102</sup> "Kum: Mwaghavul Traditional Religion," in *Towards a Mwaghavul History: An Exploration*, ed. Sale Akila Lohor, et al. (Bloomington, Indiana: Xlibris Corporation, 2011), 85-86. Fidelis Longban, "Elements of Our Culture," in *The Gamai Culture*, 12.

<sup>103</sup> See Appendix 1:263.

<sup>104</sup> Danfulani, "Kum," 86-87. Cf. "A Historico-Missiological Analysis of Fifty Years of the Church of Christ in Nigeria in Mupun Land" (University of Jos, 1986), 17.

<sup>105</sup> Neiers, *The People of the Jos Plateau, Nigeria*, 34.

<sup>106</sup> Danfulani, "Kum," 86.



The typical resignation of the people to the power of *Na'an* is captured in the expressions such as *Na'an lap le muk* (in the case of death, *Na'an* takes what is his) and *bi goe la shin Na'an* (what *Na'an* does). In the case of unexplainable or helpless circumstances, it is taken as the doing of *Na'an*—*Na'an shin toe*. Names express the aspects of divine attributes: *Na'anma* (the one who is above all) and *Na'anzem* (the one who loves). The Goemai are encouraged to always have their thought in *Na'an*; that is what the name *Rangna'an* elicits (always and in all things, think about *Na'an*). *Na'an* for the Goemai occupies a prominent place in their consciousness as the meaning of life or existence.

With no cult of *Na'an*, the closest semblance of creating a cult for the worship of *Na'an* lies in the evolution of special practices linked to the unique “rain-making” rites where special rituals for the invocation of rains are required to be performed by a rain-maker. This may not be unconnected with the belief that the sky is the abode of *Na'an*. “Rain-making” happens after the experience of drought, which makes it impossible for planting to occur. It is regarded as a bad omen, requiring divination to unravel the cause, not to have rain since Goemai rites and rituals take place with planting, harvesting, etc. Unraveling the cause is a role reserved for *Paa divination*. Other occasions that *Na'an* is invoked directly involve calamities that defy the immediate solution by the lesser deities and ancestors.<sup>107</sup> The attributes of *Na'an* are expressed in circumstances connected with birth. The newborn is named in relation to prayers answered, praise, gratitude, and blessing.

### 1.3.2. *Mu'ut/Kum (Jap Na'an)*

*Mu'ut* in Goemai signifies the dead. The dynamic hierarchy of the Goemai founded on mediation has the *Mu'ut*, referred to as *Jap Na'an* (children of *Na'an*), as the link between *Na'an*

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 90.

and humans. Through them, *Na'an* is worshipped. As the guardians/protectors of culture, customs, life, property, and morality, they give the community a sense of belonging.<sup>108</sup> *Mu'ut* provide the spiritual pillars upon which the Goemai nation is founded, and it is understood to encompass two separate yet related dimensions (or senses). Regarded as the spiritual agents responsible for bringing about the occurrences of both sickness and healing within Goemai communities, the *Mu'ut* are generally believed to embody benevolent and malevolent powers. They also represent the visible aspect of Goemai spirituality with shrines, rituals, ceremonies, offerings, and prayers made through them to *Na'an*. Apart from maintaining peace, justice, and harmony, the *Mu'ut* are concerned with the harmonious functioning of the people's daily activities. They are the symbolic manifestation of the spiritual powers of the Supreme Deity. Deity worship is known as *tok mu'ut* in the *luu mu'ut* (sacred shrine), usually round huts with thatched roofs, anthills, or even upturned pots placed in the forest grove.<sup>109</sup> The *tok mu'ut* is a ritualized form of communication involving living with the deities. For the Chadic speakers, the lesser deities, ancestors, and *Paa* divination constitute the three dimensions of human communication with the Divine.<sup>110</sup>

In the spiritual pantheon, it is believed that *Na'an* has assigned each deity a special responsibility, depending on whether such responsibility is private, personal, communal, family, clan, or even national. Private deities may become family and even clan deities as the family grows. As such, they are shared deities for veneration by the heads of the different families within the clan after the founder's demise.<sup>111</sup> Their carved images are symbols of the spiritual powers they represent. They regulate human affairs directly in the socio-economic, political,

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<sup>108</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 12. See Appendix 1:261-263.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>110</sup> Danfulani, *Pebbles and Deities*, 126.

<sup>111</sup> "Kum," 93-94.

moral, cultural, and religious realms of human existence. The deities essentially perform their assigned roles of protecting, defending, and even punishing any infractions of the norms and taboos associated with their areas of responsibility. Like the Yoruba *Orisas*, Mwaghavul *Kum*, the *Mu'ut* are kept under the custody of the heads of families and priests in designated sacred places like the unique places in the house such as erected altars or shrines built in the family compound (*luu das*) or in the bush. For example, *Koeroem-Neap*, a powerful deity with spiritual powers to protect the land from grave danger, is kept in the *Luu das* of the *Shinkwan* and the *Kampiring*.<sup>112</sup>

*Luu das* is a family shrine under the custody of the family head, who serves as the family's priest. It is exclusively for the head of the family and male children, and it serves as a place for discussing secrets and instilling discipline in errant male children. The shrine has two compartments, the inner and outer chambers for the elders and younger ones.<sup>113</sup> Traditional Goemai households are constructed with an outdoor hut built exclusively for the male elders and initiated.

Each *Mu'ut* has specific rites and rituals which may be performed only by initiated males who have learned them. The most common elements for sacrificial worship include the *mues* (local beer made from corn or millet), chickens, goats, sheep, dogs, and in major rituals, cows or horses. The sacrificial animal's blood is poured onto the shrine and sprinkled on the symbol of the deity. The choice parts of the sacrifice (the animal's fat, bowel, and inner parts) are boiled, mixed in oil, and placed in the shrine or some sacred spot like rocks for the deity. Usually, the meal is prepared without pepper. Libation with *mues* (local drink) is made in a designated

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<sup>112</sup> Fidelis M Longban and Stephen H. Lawan, *History of the Moefe Shinkwan Clan of Shendam* (Jos: Festus Quality Production, 2014), 15.

<sup>113</sup> A Capro Research Work, "Goemai (Ankwai)," in *A Harvest of Peace: A Survey on the Peoples of Plateau State* (Jos: Capro Media Services, 2009), 135.

location. The initiated male participants consume what is left of the sacrificial meal and drink.<sup>114</sup> As pointed out above, participation in ritual meals establishes a divine union with the deities.

The deities can get angry, punish, forgive, and protect. They are associated with both good and bad qualities. Children are named in relation to attributes of the *Mu'ut* or blessings received or not. As custodians of justice, the *Mu'ut* do not only inhabit the *Luu das*; they also have shrines in the forest, grove, or mountainous areas that are awe-inspiring. These serve as sacred grounds for initiation or ceremonial rituals.<sup>115</sup> These forests, groves, rivers, and mountains are protected from encroachment. Danfulani, in "The Spirit World of Some Chadid-speakers of the Jos Plateau," gives a taxonomy of *Mu'ut* deities, which Parlong confirms corresponds with the Goemai *Mu'ut* world.<sup>116</sup> The *Kwamteng* (initiation rites), *Mang-gap* festival centered around the *Mang-gap* shrine (*Ka-Arap*), *Kampiring* festival, *hess ham* (daily libations) at the *Luu das Shinkwan* and that of the *Kampiring*, *Mues ma'ar yil* (harvest festivals) at the foot of Jalbang mountain, and the coronation of elected chiefs are some festivals associated with various deities in Goemalnd at Goemai sacred spaces of Poe Muduut, Jalbang, Pang-bel, and Kwaptmu'utla.<sup>117</sup>

### 1.3.3. *Mukwarkum*

*Mukwarkum*, as spiritual beings, have much power, which can be exercised for good or to harm an individual. Parlong has three categories, while Danfulani classifies the *Mukwarkum* into two categories: the free spirits said to be created by *Na'an*. Like the *Mu'ut* (*Kum*) and humans,

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<sup>114</sup> Danfulani, "Kum," 103-04.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 106-10.

<sup>116</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 12. Cf. Umar Habila Dadem Danfulani, "The Spirit World of Some Chadid-Speakers of the Jos Plateau," in *Triple Religious Heritage of Nigeria*, ed. Christopher Steed and David Westerlund (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1995), 26. See also, "Kum," 100-02. Danfulani has a table of Deities and their functions.

<sup>117</sup> See, Fidelis M. Longban and H. Lawan Stephen, *History of the Moefe Shinkwan Clan of Shendam* (Jos: Festus Quality Production, 2014).

they are *jap Na'an*. According to Parlong, the term *Mukwarkum* suggests a corruption of *moe goe war kum*: those on the path of the deity. It indicates some connection with the deities.

For Parlong, Goemai spirituality also recognizes the second category of spirits, namely, the “spirits of the recently dead” (*tamsun*), who have been banished from the ancestral world for not living a life of dignity and integrity. Being outcasts from the realm of the ancestors, these spirits return in frustration to haunt the living, roaming aimlessly in the bush. The spirits of those killed in battles, accidents, or sorcery whose death has been communicated to the community also belong to this broad category of spirits. These often wander between the worlds of the living and the dead, occasionally visiting their members in dreams, other animals, or human forms. Closely related to the *tamsun* are the spirits of the ancestors whose memories are forgotten for lack of family ties among the living. As a result, the forgotten free spirits do not receive veneration due to the living dead. This illustrates the fact that connection and relationship are an integral part of the cosmo vision, without which there is no recognition or a sense of belonging. Also, there is the reincarnation of a family member returning with the traits of the deceased family member.<sup>118</sup> The malevolent spirits reincarnate in the second child of the twins, which is considered evil and should be killed.<sup>119</sup> All such spirits, especially the malevolent ones, are kept at bay with prepared protection by the living.

### **1.3.3.1. *Mukwarkum Goe Pia* (White or Fair-Complexioned Spirits)**

The white or fair spirits known as *Mukwarkum goe pia* are benevolent and harmless; *Pia* or whiteness symbolizes purity and goodness. They are sources of blessings and good fortune to those they encounter. According to Danfulani, they are believed to impact a special knowledge on medicine men and diviners. Human encounter with the white spirit occurs at *Ngong-*

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<sup>118</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 8-9.

<sup>119</sup> Danfulani, "Kum," 111.

*Goezanwor* (midnight) or at *Arap pus* (noon). For any service rendered, they demand sacrifices as the spirit instructs them. However, it is believed in traditional spiritual circles that caution must be exercised when visiting rivers, lonely roads, and locations where these spirits are known to make their dwelling places. This is in order to avoid unintentionally incurring their wrath for stepping on what belongs to them. Even though they are considered benevolent in disposition, the white spirits can also mete out punishment for neglect or disobedience to their instructions.<sup>120</sup>

### **1.3.3.2. *Mukwarkum Goe Tep* (Black or Dark-Complexioned Spirits)**

In contrast to the white spirits, the black spirits are evil and malignant. They are dreaded and avoided as much as possible because the consequence of an encounter with them is death or perilous ailments like insanity, epilepsy, paralysis, etc. The Goemai do not respond to calls at night unless the caller is seen because it is widely held that *Mukwarkum goe tep* would usually call at night, and once the person responds, s/he comes under the spell of the spirit. The person the black spirit attacks is forbidden to narrate the incident at the risk of death. Only a diviner can diagnose the cause of illness and recommend to the medicine man how to liberate the attacked person. The Goemai identify two kinds of black spirits: *Mukwarkum goeteng*, the spirits living in on dry land, and *Mukwarkum kong*, those that live in rivers.<sup>121</sup>

### **1.3.4. *Kwap Da/Rinsek/Poekwap***

The practice of ancestor veneration is common in Africa. As a form of African conversation and engagement, the *palaver* brings together everyone, living, unborn, and the living-dead (ancestors). No one is excluded. Since secular life is not separate from the spiritual aspect, it is impossible to conceive of the palaver process without the Supreme Deity, the lesser divinities, and community of the ancestors. Bujo, drawing from the first rule of the *palaver*

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<sup>120</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 9-10.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

process among the Ashanti, shows how they recognize the power of the deities and ancestors over the whole of creation. In understanding the indigenous people, the world is only understood within the context of invisible spiritual powers that give meaning to it.<sup>122</sup> For the Goemai, inclusion, participation, and accommodation of every voice in promoting the good of society are essential to communal living. They have a sense of justice as every member in the highly organized community is accorded their rightful place and expected to carry out their responsibilities diligently. The Chadic-speaking communities within the Jos Plateau sub-region of Nigeria, including the Goemai, generally consider the reality of physical death as a transition into a spiritual existence.

The *gurum goe mu'ut* (a dead person) is qualified to become an ancestor after meeting five conditions: only the one who has lived a good, moral, and exemplary life and has gone through the rigors of *Kwamteng* (initiation rites) can be recognized as an ancestor; secondly, the individual must have died a good death, that is, death caused by *Na'an (mu'ut Na'an)*, not from some taboo or as punishment from a deity, or struck by thunder, which is considered as bad death; a person who has met the first two criteria but is without children to bury him, inherit his property, and continue the lineage cannot attain the state of an ancestor. The significance of these criteria is such that among the *tallensi*, a person may be evil or immoral, but having a son qualifies him to be an ancestor.<sup>123</sup> No one becomes an ancestor without the funeral rites performed at his death. It is the rite of sending the dead to the realm of the ancestors known as *mues kwap*, where the deceased's belongings are distributed after the joyful celebration of sending forth is performed. Food is always served to the living dead in the family shrines or placed on rocks outside by the children as a way of responsible care. Children, symbolizing

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<sup>122</sup> Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic*, 55.

<sup>123</sup> Danfulani, "Kum," 118. Cf. Ford Meyer, ed. *African System of Thought* (Oxford: OUP, 1965), 127.

ancestral fertility and continuity, are responsible for sending their dead to the realm of the ancestors with elaborate ceremonies as rites of passage through which the living dead transit to the world of the ancestors so that the deceased may later reincarnate into the family. This is referred to as *ta wong*. Ancestors, however, may return temporarily in the form of masquerades like the Yoruba *Egungun*; this is known as *wong*. Their brief visits may vary with the occasion, such as in times of crisis or during harvest. They also visit during important festivals like initiation, burial rites, and installation of title holders. Most masquerades are not to be seen by women and non-initiates. Thus, they come out at night. Before such an outing, a curfew is imposed. Any woman who secretly looks is identified through *Paa* divination, and punishment in the form of fines of livestock is imposed.<sup>124</sup>

Parlong posits two categories of ancestors, the royal and family ancestors. Most Goemai landscapes bear witness to the royal ancestors. In the Goemai worldview, kings are revered as embodying both physical and spiritual aspects of life through rituals, rites of dying, and coming back to life before their installation. At death, the *kwap munlong* (the chief's remains) are treated with reverence since the chief, while still alive, is also revered as the community's chief priest and a vital link between the surviving members of the community and the world of the ancestors. The king assumes a divine state by virtue of his selection, ritual installation, and sanctioned privilege of wearing the *zung* (hair tuft). The chief is a symbol of the unity of the people and a visible link between the people and their ancestors. He serves as the embodiment of what it means to be Goemai.

Consequently, the circumstances surrounding a king's death are often considered inconsequential as long as proper traditional procedures were observed during his initial

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<sup>124</sup> Danfulani, "Kum," 121-24. See Appendix 1:264-265.



installation. The family ancestor must meet the criteria for ancestorhood enumerated above and cares for their immediate family or the clan when the family grows into a clan. The royal ancestor cares for his immediate family and the entire community.<sup>125</sup>

#### **1.3.4.1. *Wap Kwapda* (Ancestor Veneration)<sup>126</sup>**

Ancestors as intercessors, defenders, and protectors of the living are revered as a way of showing respect. The relationship between the ancestors and the living can be termed transactional. The people need to appease the living dead with sacrifices and libations, and in return, the living dead watch over the people as their guardians. Goemai ancestral veneration is known as *wap*, which literally means to “bow down.” It is the kind of reverence that the divining priest-chief receives. As people who have experienced both the physical and spiritual worlds, the *Kwap da* are even more respected than the elders. Special seats are reserved for them in the family shrines or on stones outside where they are fed. As the invisible police of families and communities, they preserve traditions, morality, and security.

The family shrine in which the ancestors are venerated is called the *mei (mai)*. Once an ancestor has been confirmed, the *mei (mai)* is constructed. The confirmation happens within days, weeks, or months after an elder has passed on and the skull has been examined by special diviners (skull readers). The Goemai and other Chadic speakers of Jos Plateau, strongly believe that the nature of an individual’s skull at death reveals critical hidden information about the personality traits he possessed while still living. Once the verdict is reached that the person was bad, the skull is thrown away and disparaged by all, while the skull of the person determined to be good is washed and kept in the shrine to be revered. This explains why graves are revered as sacred locations because they preserve the remains of persons later declared ancestors. The skulls

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<sup>125</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 14.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

are arranged according to age at death, not birth. Goemai ancestors possess both benevolent and malevolent powers to reward and punish the actions of living family members. This practice ensures that people strive for a worthy lifestyle to remain part of the memory of the living. Moral rectitude is cherished as a community virtue.

#### **1.3.4.2. Ancestors and Their Functions**

It is ancestral responsibility to guarantee the welfare of the relatives, though this imposes duties on the living. Signs of ancestral blessings include bumper harvests, individual and community wellness, and peace from external invasion. They maintain harmony as intermediaries between the living and *Na'an*, *Mu'ut*, and *Mukwarkum*. Relatives in a good relationship with their ancestors have no fear of evil or enemies. Parlong captures it when he writes, “the Goemai says, ‘*hen la a rep/la mupe la kwaram, sot goe ton ya har hembra*’ translated as ‘if I am the son/daughter of *Mupe la kwaram* clan ancestors, your witchcraft will not consume me.’”<sup>127</sup> Uzukwu furthers the underlying applicability of the sentiment expressed above by pointing to the African understanding of such traditional practices as witchcraft, sorcery, and evil. While Africans, according to Uzukwu, “consider witchcraft, sorcery, and the negative development of occult forces as opposed to human life and destiny. They define evil as that which attacks and distorts relationality.”<sup>128</sup> I will return to the concept of evil later. As the law enforcers, the ancestors, in collaboration with the *Mu'ut* and priest chiefs, ensure that lawbreakers are punished.<sup>129</sup> Following the above, security, harmony, and stability are firmly guaranteed. The people trust their ancestors for protection, and evil is overcome in solidarity. It demonstrates the belief of the people in the power of unity.

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>128</sup> Uzukwu, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness*, 43.

<sup>129</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 15-16.

### 1.3.5. *Dien and Mualak*

Belief in supernatural forces in the Goemai cosmos is rampant among indigenous Africans and their Chadic-speaking neighbors. These mystical forces are both good and evil, like the good and bad spirits, ghosts, etc. Wellbeing is the result of harmony due to protection by the spiritual world. According to Danfulani, “the etiology of affliction assumes that ultimately all conflict, misfortune, and affliction are due to the withdrawal of protection by supernatural beings who become angry over *shik bish* (wrong-doing), evil intention or evil thoughts.”<sup>130</sup> The mystical forces behind disharmony in society are overcome only by medicine and magic. Through *dien* and *mualak*, the medicine men assert control over the forces of instability. *Na’an* gives knowledge of medicine, inborn/innate from birth, learned/acquired through training, or even bestowed on a person by the spirits. Medicine men are respected and revered for their knowledge of *sen teng* (herbs) for healing different diseases. Though some may perceive *Paa diviners* as magicians, their primary duty is to help unravel the cause of sickness, death, and disaster and to help provide the *Goe Paa* (diviner) with potent remedies.<sup>131</sup> Remedy is attained by linking past, present, and future experiences and social memory. The Mwaghavul affirm three categories of medicine/magic: productive, protective, and destructive types.<sup>132</sup> The harmful medicine is evil because it is against life and harmony. According to Danfulani, *Kes Paa* is “the vehicle for recovering the past, linking it with the present and using both to provide a clear picture of the future and what humans should do to obtain results.”<sup>133</sup>

A significant aspect of healing and restoration of harmony after diagnosing some evil is the confession of guilt, a way of assuming responsibility known among the Goemai as *lap dor*.

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<sup>130</sup> Danfulani, *Pebbles and Deities*, 131.

<sup>131</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 16-17.

<sup>132</sup> Danfulani, "Kum," 125.

<sup>133</sup> *Pebbles and Deities*, 135.

Evil is usually associated with bad spirits and even humans who misuse their gift of medicine and healing to promote wholeness as sickness, for the Goemai, has multi-dimensional aspects and is believed to be caused by either *gurum* (man), *Mukwarkum* (spirits), or *Mu'ut* (the deity). *Gurum goe dak* are healers of illnesses resulting from human causes though they can also use their powers for evil and make them *moe so'ot* (witches). Witchcraft and sorcery are prevalent among the Goemai. Victims are attacked by enemies through mystical power, causing sickness or death. The *gurum goe dak gok mu'ut*, the chief priest of the deity or family ancestor, takes care of diseases caused by a deity or ancestor. *Na'an*, who is benevolent, is believed to cause misfortune when angered. Thus, when a diviner does not unravel the cause of sickness, it is ascribed to *Na'an* as *gok Na'an*. *Gok mu'ut/kum* is inflicted on a person by the deities. Cultural infractions include but are not limited to incest, adultery, entering the shrine after having an affair with a woman during her menstrual flow, eating taboo food, incurring debt from a deity, and refusing to pay. Appropriate sacrifices and spiritual amends must be made to an offended deity. This can result in the offender being compulsorily initiated into the deity's cult after being made ill, which has repercussions. *Gok mu'ut/kum* is only uncovered by *Paa* divination, and the chief priest of the deity, with sacrifices and rituals, carries out the healing. Other disease-causing agents are the ancestors (*kwap da*) who punish for offenses like greed and quarrels. As the gatekeepers to the family house, once angry, the ancestors can allow evil to befall the family. In such a case, the Goemai would say the house gate is damaged (*poe lu'u dam*, meaning the ancestors are angry). Sacrifices and rituals of purification need to be performed at the family shrine. Should the disease be caused by both the deity and the ancestors (such as an epidemic,

drought, low production yield, low or infertility in humans), the ritual of healing and purification is performed on the same day at each of the shrines.<sup>134</sup>

Preparing herbs for healing involves a mixture of elements in the Goemai universe—man, animal, plant, sand, air, sun, and water, including forces seen and unseen with the pot as the melting point.<sup>135</sup> Medicine results from the harmony of natural and supernatural elements in the pot, symbolizing a mother's womb carrying a baby and giving and nurturing life. Sickness affects the diseased and all the weave of relationships that make the person, the community, life, and livelihood all use the powers given to them by the Divine to harm innocent people or enemies.<sup>136</sup>

The Goemai categorize medicine men into two categories. First, there are the *moedak gok mu'ut* (those who treat the inflictions of the deities), who is usually the chief priest of the deity. The sick person offers the sacrifices the deity demands at the shrine, where s/he stays for a night or two, after which recovery continues at home. Second, there are the *moedak* (healers), who treat diseases unrelated to the deities (*gok mu'ut*), like physical ailments, barrenness, and spirit diseases. Treatment is not in any shrine but in the home of the patient. Chickens and beer are used for sacrifices. The ritual of swirling the chicken three times or seven times over the head of the patient before slitting its throat and spilling the blood,<sup>137</sup> usually at a crossroad, is a practice the Tiv employ as part of the *Okombo* cleansing/healing process. The Tiv language belongs to the group known as the “Semi-Bantu” or “Classifying Sudanic.” Part of their circumcision rite involves incantations and the rapid swirling of the chicken around the head of the child.<sup>138</sup> The

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<sup>134</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 115-16.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>136</sup> Benezet Bujo, *The Ethical Dimension of Community: The African Model and the Dialogue between North and South*, trans. Cecilia Namulondo Nganda (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1997), 17.

<sup>137</sup> See Appendix 1:274.

<sup>138</sup> Akiga, *Akiga's Story: The Tiv as Seen by One of Its Members* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 30.

practice around the head of the sick, as in the Goemai culture, or around the boy about to be initiated into the ancients' wisdom symbolizes the transference of the evil or sickness from the individual into the chicken in the manner of the biblical scapegoat of the Old Testament. For the Goemai, even the medicine pot is the melting point of all forces, a symbol of a mother who holds the child in her womb for nine months feeding and handling it with care (bringing in a different kind of food into the same system). At the end of which is the birth of a healthy child. Thus, the medicine pot is considered the house of life.<sup>139</sup>

Every healing process begins with *Paa* divination to ascertain the cause. The *goe dak* (healer) performs the *shap pue* (invocation) by calling on his father, from whom he learned the practice, the ancestors, the spirits, and *Na'an* to heal the sick person. The ill person then confesses (*pue ser*) at the forked road while kneeling or sitting down. The sacrifice of *ke* (chicken) is performed after the *goe dak* swirls the chicken three or seven times over the patient. The ritual is repeated until the ill person confesses recovery at the forked road.<sup>140</sup> As the item of sacrifice, the chicken serves as the connection between the physical and spiritual realms. The imbalance of personal or communal misdeeds can ruin the entire community, and healing helps restore order.

Illness as a personal experience cannot be separated from the communal cultural experiences of the people since healing involves the different indigenous means of restoring wholeness. It cannot be doubted that the experience of sickness has been integrated into the ocean of indigenous experiences over the decades.<sup>141</sup> “While not all illnesses lead to

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<sup>139</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 118.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 117. See, Danfulani, *Pebbles and Deities*, 130.

<sup>141</sup> See, Linda Garro. Narrative representations of Chronic illness experience: cultural models of illness, mind, and body in stories concerning the temporomandibular joint (TMJ). *Social Science and Medicine* 38:775-88. Quoted in, Linda C. Garro and Cheryl Mattingly, "Narrative as Construct and Construction," in *Narrative and the Cultural Construction of Illness and Healing*, ed. Cheryl Mattingly and Linda C. Garro (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 28.

retrospective assessments, remembering the past often accompanies the search for meaning, explanation, and treatment occasioned by illness.”<sup>142</sup> Thus, in the healing process, the past, the present, and the future come together to understand identity and restore harmony.

#### **1.4. Dynamic Hierarchy in Divinity**

A character of the African universe is its anthropocentric nature; that is, its focus on realizing full humanity in the web of relationships that regulates it. Relationality as the character of the universe is hinged on the flexibility and mediation within its hierarchical nature. As I have shown above, the cosmos and the wellbeing of all within it is maintained by the hierarchy of spiritual forces comprised of the Supreme Deity, lesser divinities, spirits, ancestors, priest chiefs, diviners, and medicine men. The spiritual and the physical realms are not dichotomized but viewed as one and the same reality.

Uzukwu has identified at least five basic models of the West African universe and the four main attitudinal elements that regulate human relationships with the divinities within this universe. He summarizes these four elements as follows: first, the goodness of the created world; second, authentic human life as lived in relationship; third, the world as ordered in a dynamic or relational hierarchy; fourth, empowered spiritual beings to maintain harmony and ensure human wellbeing.<sup>143</sup> The four models of “African worldview,” as summarized by Uzukwu from *Emefie Ikenga-Metuh’s Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, include the *pyramidal, ecological, cosmic, and social* models; to this, he added a fifth, the *oval* model.<sup>144</sup> My interest here is the third element, viz, dynamic or relational hierarchy as the rule of life in the Goemai

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<sup>142</sup> Linda C. Garro, "Cultural Knowledge as Resource in Illness Narratives," *ibid.*, 70.

<sup>143</sup> Uzukwu, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness*, 61.

<sup>144</sup> See, *ibid.*, 60-65.

world. The African hierarchical universe is not fixed and inflexible but rather dynamic and open-ended. I present a brief outline of the models presented by Uzukwu.

Edwin Smith's proposed *pyramidal* or *triangular* model, with the Supreme Deity occupying the pyramid's apex followed by the lesser divinities, spirits, ancestors, and humans, allows for the interpenetration of the spiritual and physical worlds. This type of hierarchy that may be identifiable with the West African hierarchy is flexible, complex, and relational, as reflected in the outline of the other models.

The *ecological* model is essentially based on the belief systems of the peoples of Asante in Ghana and the Kalabari of the Niger Delta, Nigeria. For example, the Asante hold that all divine and physical beings flow like a river from *Onyame* (the Supreme Deity). The deities are emissaries of *Onyame* to care for and bless humans. They manifest in natural forces like rivers, lakes, and sea—*Tano* and *Bea* rivers, *Bosamtwe* lake, and *Opo* (sea). The spiritual forces connected to these physical entities are believed to spring up from the immanent manifestations of the deities. These spiritual forces interact with the living and the ancestral spirits to establish and maintain harmony through the mediation of medicine men and other categories of spiritual experts.

The understanding of the universe among the Igbos of Eastern Nigeria is one identified with a *cosmic* order governed by *Chukwu* (the Supreme Deity), the sky Deity, who is surrounded by an array of other divinities, *Anyanwu* (the Sun deity), *Amadioha* (Thunder deity), *Igwe* (Sky deity), among others. *Chukwu*'s wife, *Ala*, and Ancestors, *Ndi-ichie* (Elders) or *Nna-a-ha* (the Fathers), ensure morality as *Ala* presides over innumerable deities, among whom are *Agwu* (deity of divination, knowledge, and health), *Njoku-ji* (Yam deity overseeing agriculture), *Idemili* (Pillar of Water, daughter of *Chukwu* and *Ala*, the divinity of peace), *Ekwensu* (deity of war,



associated with violence, *Agbara* (deity of coercion), and many others. Within Igbo spirituality, the most visible and influential deities are *Ala* (ancestors) and *chi* (the equivalent of Asante *kra* or *okra*).

The other model highlighted by Uzuoku is the *social* model. A typical example of this model is found among the Yorubas of Nigeria. It is focused on *Orisa* practice and its associated pattern of social organization. In this model, *Olodumare* or *Olorun* (the Supreme Deity among the Yoruba) is removed from the mundane activities of living through the intermediary roles performed by the *orisas* (deities) as *Olodumare*'s deputies, with the *ebora* as subordinates to the *Orisas*. Among the significant deities is *Obatala*, the deity entrusted with creation, also known as *Orisanla*. *Oduduwa* is the progenitor of the Yoruba race, founder of Ile-Ife (center of the universe) and kingship; *Onile* (Earth Mother); *Orunmila* or *Ifa* (deity of divination, wisdom, and health); *Ogun* (deity of iron and war); *Sango* (deity of thunder); *Eshu* (the trickster deity who is the mediator between *Olodumare* and the *Orisas*, known as *Elégbà* or *Légbà* in the diaspora). *Eshu* is the facilitator of all communication and the helper of humans in uncertain situations associated with the crossroads. Unfortunately, early Christian missionaries maligned him as being evil and the personification of deviousness. The traditional mythologies surrounding the *Orisas* hold that they can choose a specific human for their service. In such a situation, the *Orisa* mounts the *ori* (head) of such a person. Variants of the *Orisa* devotions include the vodhun spirituality practiced in Benin Republic, Togo, Ghana, Brazil, Haiti, and Cuba. Uzuoku concludes that putting humans at the bottom of the hierarchical ladder reflects the relational and flexible nature of the cosmos.

The *oval* (ovum-egg) model highlighted by Uzuoku derives from the Dogon of Mali, whose creation myth emphasizes the universe's seminal, oval or verbal generation with human

creation beginning from a tiny primordial egg synonymous with *Amma* (the Deity). Within the original egg is the *fonio*, a tiny grain from which the primordial speck of life is created. Amma is believed to try to mix the dynamic elements of creation within the grain and then “speaks” his creation from the grain, turning it into wind or word. *Amma*’s carefully mixed elements are designed to ensure happy interrelationships or twinness rather than chaos. The Dogon creation myth speaks of a first creation abandoned due to an error that led to the escape of critical relational energy, water. The second creation was successful. *Amma* then united with his consort, the Earth, to bring forth in pairs (male and female) *Nommo Anagono*, the four primordial deities. After a while, the four pairs of primordial human ancestors (*Anagono Bile*) were created one after the other. According to Uzukwu, this basic mythical narrative provides the spiritual framework for understanding the *Amma* story of creation from the egg, seed, or word.

Of the outlined models above, the *social* model associated with the Yoruba cosmology comes closest to matching the Goemai spiritual worldview, with *Na’an* as the Deity, who seems distant, and the hierarchy of lesser deities associated with him. Within the spiritual framework, *Na’an*, as the head of the spiritual realities in the flexible and dynamic hierarchical structure, does not constitute himself as the sole administrator of the universe. He operates in and through the lesser divinities who have the power to act, though not as rivals but as his helpers. In this sense, the relational mediation system between *Na’an* and his helpers defines operations in the spiritual realm of the Goemai. Within this framework, the ancestors have a role as the ones closest to the living and, at the same time, belonging to the spiritual realm. The symbiotic relationship between the spiritual and physical realms is such that interdependency inseparably binds them. The health and wellbeing of the community depend on blessings and protection from

the spiritual realm. At the same time, the harmony and ritualistic lives of the people are expressive of the reality and efficacy of their divinities.

### **1.5. Goemai Indigenous Identity**

History encapsulated in story forms the African imagination; viz., African identity is sustained in the shared story of the people, like the experience of ancestral wisdom lived in a renewed way in the present within their space, an integral part of their experience. The story serves as the vehicle for articulating, sustaining, and reinforcing society's consciousness. The sense of belonging is renewed and lived in rituals, rites, ceremonies, and traditions that link the people with their roots in the Goemai theatre of life—space and context. For the Goemai, identity comes from doing the things of the fathers (ancestors), which explains the expressions “*mu shin a bi kwap da*” (we are doing what we learned from our forefathers) and “*dok goe yil daskoom*” (as perceived by our elders in the past). Like other indigenous people, every cultural ritual is a performance of identity for the Goemai.<sup>145</sup> The recalling and retelling of ancestral stories aid not only reconnection but reappropriation and reconstruction of indigenous self-understanding. The social organization of the Goemai society depicts how the Goemai are highly organized people, conservationists, and inclusive people who value the division of labor.

The different accounts of the festivals only demonstrate how the cultural context of the people and the land provide the basis for understanding *Na'an*. The land (context) gives the people their Goemai identity while the people embody their land everywhere they are, and both the land and people bear witness to *Na'an*. Like many indigenous spiritualities, the sacred features and landscape of the Goemai constitute landscapes with personalities. As the Tibetan Buddhist Scholar Lama Anagarika Govinda opined, sacred landscapes like mountains and, by

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<sup>145</sup> Rachel Corr, "Ritual, Knowledge, and the Politics of Identity in Andean Festivities (1)," *Ethnology* 42, no. 1 (2003): 39-40.

extension, rivers, caves, groves, and forests have personalities that flow from their ability to inspire and influence traditional ecological, moral, social, and spiritual values in people as vessels of cosmic power.<sup>146</sup> In this regard, they become places of divine manifestation that can manifest the divine and bestow authenticity.

### **1.5.1. Goemai Indigenous Ceremonies and Celebrations**

For the Goemai, rituals, ceremonies, and many celebrations are not just entertainment but ways of reenacting the past in the present to construct the future. Every ceremony celebrates the Moemai as a people under the supreme authority of *Na'an*, fulfilling certain objectives, ensuring security and stability, healing, and fostering communal bonds. They also serve to teach wisdom and morality. Rites, rituals, and festivals/ceremonies constitute the lifeline and the activities that give meaning to the people and ensure the sustenance and wellbeing of society. Rituals are integral to ceremonies as the symbolic and sacred language of communicating human experiences expressed in actions with few explanatory words. Danfulani's understanding of the concept of ritual has the following elements—symbolic behavior, repeatability, and communication of human experiences.<sup>147</sup> Celebrating the significant stages of human life is marked by the rites of passage. The individual is helped to be co-opted into a new state of life associated with the land and community seamlessly. Festivals celebrate the culture that may serve as means of interaction with neighbors, mainly after harvest when there is ample time for leisure. Most Goemai ceremonies revolve around farming, cultivation, and harvesting. It is imperative that the land not be polluted or spoiled. The consequences of damaged land spiral into

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<sup>146</sup> Quoted in, Jace Weaver, "Revelation and Epistemology—We Know the Land, the Land Knows Us Places of Revelation, Place as Revelation," in *Coming Full Circle*, ed. Steven Charleston and Elaine A. Robinson, Constructing Native Christian Theology (1517 Media, 2015), 39-40.

<sup>147</sup> Danfulani, *Pebbles and Deities*, 151.

every dimension of the Goemai universe in a negative manner and are experienced in disharmony.

#### 1.5.1.1. Concept of Time, Rites of Passage<sup>148</sup>

For the Chadic speakers, “time is not determined by a series of successive moments, but it is related to observable natural phenomena which determine and express objective time.”<sup>149</sup> Every Goemai celebration has a specific time within the indigenous calendar. The Goemai cyclical concept of time is dictated by the natural course of events marked by the planting season and the beginning of *Pas* (the rainy season). Other seasons that determine festivals are *goe wap* (the time of heavy dew) and *lu'un* (the dry season). The moon (*Ta'ar*), cloud (*Lo'on*), and the bird, known as *yar*, are other time indicators. *Fuan pall* (the first rain) indicates the beginning of the rainy season and, by implication, the farming time. *Fuan pall* also connotes millet, the ingredient for brewing beer. This may suggest the link between the rain and an essential element for sacrifices, such that rain implies an abundance of beer—the food for the deities.<sup>150</sup>

Farming season is between April and October. *Goe wap* (harvest time) is characterized by *si'ir* (heavy dew) necessary for ripening rice and guinea corn. The sighting of the *long villip*, the male red and black colored rice-eating bird, and its female partner, *mat long villip*, yellow and brown in color, marks a change in season. After feasting on the rice, they are said to return to the forest. *Lu'un* follows *goe wap*. It is a time of heavy wind and cold weather conducive to getting the ripening guinea corn and rice to dry. *Lu'un* is the period for harvest, hunting, and fishing. Young Goemai boys are circumcised and initiated into the land's secrets at this time. The *mang-gap* and *Dabit* festivals take place during *lu'un*. The appearance of *Dabit* is associated with the

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<sup>148</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 37-41.

<sup>149</sup> Danfulani, *Pebbles and Deities*, 134.

<sup>150</sup> See Appendix 1:266.

harvest of the chief's millet, known as *muos ma'ar long*. Only after the chief has harvested his millet can other people gather theirs. *Dabit* must then pray over the harvest before anyone can consume the crop.<sup>151</sup> This demonstrates the people's sense of gratitude.

*Ta'ar* is only seen at night. As an indicator of time, the new moon is associated with a specific food crop, a deity, or festivals. *Ta'ar ma'ar* is the month of millet, *Ta'ar mualam* is the month of *mualam*, *vut*, *kwam*, and others. About the deities and festivals, there is *Ta'ar Mang-gap*, *Ta'ar Dabit*, *Ta'ar kampiring*, *Ta'ar kwamteng*, and *Ta'ar matlua*. The *semshar* (star), meaning friend's name, appears at the end of the rainy season, while the *Jarap mukun*, the three ladies, appear during the dry season. The Goemai believe that the stars that appear during moonlight differ from those that appear when there is no moonlight. *Lo'on* (the cloud) indicates the dry and rainy seasons. The advent of the *Lo'on goe tep*, black clouds (*cumulonimbus*), during the dry season announce the beginning of the rains; hence preparations for farming commence. The more distant white clouds known as *Lo'on goe pia* (*cirrus*) signal the commencement of *goe wap* and *lu'un*. *Kus di yil* is what the Goemai call the cloud during the rainy season. They are the low and dark clouds (*nimbostratus*).

The Goemai concept of time is inseparable from the experience of the *kwap da* (ancestors) from whom every ritual, rite, and festival are traced and with whom they are re-enacted in the present context in the hope of their sustaining the future expressed in their relationship with the land. Like their Chadic relations, the Goemai attach much importance to their understanding of the concept of time because it relates directly to their ritual processes.<sup>152</sup> Danfulani states, "Chadic-speakers view the world, life, and space very much in terms of a fluid

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<sup>151</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 38-39.

<sup>152</sup> Danfulani, *Pebbles and Deities*, 133.

cyclical process. The past can be repeatedly re-enacted in the present and future.”<sup>153</sup> The memory of the living dead holds the society together, as is evident in the expressions “*mu shin a bi kwap da*” and “*dok goe yil daskoom*.” It is the same memory that shapes the future as *anamnesis*. The Goemai past informs the present, and today will determine tomorrow. The present is expressed in *shini* (today), and *ndasoe noe* (now), while the future in the Goemai mind is the immediate, not distant, future that is not in any mortal’s hands. *A wuro man goe dar toe?* (Who knows tomorrow?)—it is the Goemai way of recognizing the Supreme Authority of *Na’an*; it only demonstrates *Na’an* as the wise one who knows everything. The immediate future is conceptualized in *goe dar* (tomorrow) and *petbitnoe* (a day after tomorrow). Goemai cosmology recognizes the immediate past *gien* (yesterday) and *ndok dok* (the day before yesterday). Yesterday and tomorrow are only understood in the context of today.<sup>154</sup>

*Kwamteng* (tree leaves), an exclusively male initiation ceremony in Goemaland, among many other rites of passage, is an indigenous form of schooling in ancestral wisdom and virtues. The term is associated with the locust bean leaves tied around the head of the initiates as they come out from the place of initiation. The *Kwamteng* Goemai education transforms boys into men and leaders in society and people who can stand and defend the community in every facet of life. An initiation ceremony is a form of society’s role in accompanying the uninitiated from childhood to adulthood (manhood/maturity). *Kwamteng* is coordinated by the *wow* or *shiwow*, also known as *Nda Wang* (father of the pot) or *Long Kong* (chief of the river).<sup>155</sup> The neophytes/uninitiated, known as *jap kool*, undergo rigorous training in traditional skills. This spans from days to about four months at the grove (*kool*), which is by the river (*kong koen*), the

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>154</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 39.

<sup>155</sup> See Appendix 1:267-268.

place where evil spirits are expelled through rituals (primarily with the sacrifice of chickens, goats, etc.) for ritual cleansing and purification. Once initiated, they become known as “*rap moe yil kwamteng*.”<sup>156</sup> Disturbingly, with the depletion of the forests through human activities and population expansion, the *kool* and the *mai* are rapidly being exposed to the prying eyes of the uninitiated, a manifestation of a “dying culture.” Also, the youths see cultural practices such as *Kwamteng* and eating in the *Luu das* as archaic. The prevailing situation does not mean that nothing of the culture is continuing in the interior villages.

### 1.5.2. The Individual and Community

An individual is known only in relation to parents, uncles, aunts, siblings, and other family and clan members, that is, within the context of relationships. Thus, to be is to be-in-relation. There is no community without individuals; it takes a collection of individuals to make up a viable community. The individual can be a man or woman, a child or an elder, whose space and role are defined in society’s social, political, economic, and religious life. “In indigenous cosmologies, the *ego* is disseminated in the communal.”<sup>157</sup> Communal relation is a cherished value of most indigenous people for whom the existential cogito of Descartes is replaced with the principle of community living; *I am because we are, and because we are, I am too*. *Ubuntu*, the Zulu word for humanness, entails that humanization is not a solitary endeavor but achievable only through relationships and connectedness with a shared locality. Rituals aid the insertion of the individual into the space. “As necessary supplements to one another, writing, ritual, and the landscape itself together constitute a memory in words, acts, and places by which to moor the quotidian experiences of future generations in a tangible past.”<sup>158</sup> For the Goemai, rituals, space,

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<sup>156</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 43-47.

<sup>157</sup> Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, 164.

<sup>158</sup> Thomas Alan Abercrombie, *Pathways of Memory and Power: Ethnography and History among an Andean People*, Acls Humanities E-Book (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 10.



and ancestral experiences constitute identity formation as ritual performance entails familiarity with indigenous geography.<sup>159</sup> The emphasis on friendship, solidarity, connectedness, and togetherness does not imply the loss of the individual recognizable by the name she bears, which is most times expressive of some significant event in the life of the family in particular and the community in general.<sup>160</sup> The community has spiritual, cultural, and ethical dimensions understood within the intersubjective character of the indigenous subject, who is constantly in solidarity with the past, present, and future.

### 1.5.2.1. Gender Relations

The major preoccupation in this section is not to argue whether gender relations in Goemalnd were colonial constructs resulting in the *invention of women* as a social category. Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, in her epic work *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, demonstrates how the Western gender discourse revolves around biologically constructed concepts that have led to the subordination of women in colonized territories. Oyěwùmí tries to make sense of the essentialization of man and woman in Western society. This, for her, is foreign to the Yoruba context and space. For Oyěwùmí, the imposition of Western gender categories on Yoruba discourse calls for an epistemological shift from a Western ideology of biological determinism, which has made the body the basis of social roles, and inclusions, or exclusion, the foundation of social thought and identity. She finds a problem with the universalization of the Western body-based categories for interpreting Yoruba society historically and in the contemporary period. Yoruba cosmology is understood in terms of social relations and not biology. Social status is not defined by anatomy, and social organization is by

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<sup>159</sup> Corr, "Ritual, Knowledge, and the Politics of Identity in Andean Festivities (1)," 43.

<sup>160</sup> Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic*, 4-6.

the chronology of age.<sup>161</sup> In the ritual of *Tok Mu 'ut*, males and females collaborate in their different roles. While the women brew *mues* (the local beer), the men make the ritual sacrifice. Also, in farming, males do the hard work while females do the planting, threshing, milling, and transporting to the barns.

Walter Mignolo agrees with Oyěwùmí in the work he co-authored with Catherine Walsh when he opines that the rhetoric of coloniality thrived on the binary of Christian/non-Christian, man/woman, civilized/uncivilized, developed/underdeveloped. Modernity/coloniality ensured the invention of the prototypical human (white) that eventually led to the categorization of the non-white as black or brown leading to the understanding of the prototypical human in relation to other men/humans (racism) and women/humans (sexism).<sup>162</sup> The white became normative of what it means to be human. Relying on the Daoist's *Qi*, *Yin*, and *Yang* concepts, Mignolo demonstrates how Western logic is diametrically opposed to the indigenous logic of harmony and complementarity. In Daoism, *Qi* is the energy of the living in a living universe ruled by the different but complementary male and female yin-yang principles, a concept of non-dualism. In other words, reality in the universe is not to be solely viewed in terms of irreconcilable opposites, as oftentimes conceived and expressed by Western binary articulation. It means that the universe is not made of irreconcilable opposites as conceived by the West but contrary to principles that constantly search for harmony and equilibrium. For instance, Marcos holds that gender is constructed around duality in many indigenous societies, and duality is the root metaphor of the whole cosmos. Reality, according to Sylvia, is perceived as a "duality of complementary opposites."<sup>163</sup> In such a universe, what is sought after concerning men and women is not the

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<sup>161</sup> Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 40-43.

<sup>162</sup> Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, 155-63.

<sup>163</sup> Marcos, "Mesoamerican Women's Indigenous Spirituality," 77-80.

feminist notion of equality but harmony and equilibrium. It signifies the oneness of reality with two equal sides, without any of which the other is incomplete. A binary understanding of that reality deforms it. Marcos's articulation of the concept of equilibrium is significant at this point.

Hear her:

Equilibrium, as conceived in indigenous spirituality, is not the static repose of two equal weights or masses. Rather, it is a force that constantly modifies the relation between dual or opposite pairs. Like duality itself, equilibrium, or balance, permeates not only relations between men and women but also relations among deities, between deities and humans, and among elements of nature. The constant search for this balance was vital to the preservation of order in every area, from life to the activity of the cosmos. Equilibrium is as fundamental as duality itself.<sup>164</sup>

Duality ceases to be a binary ordering of "static poles" but a fluid state of affairs. For Marcos, balance is the inner dynamic of equilibrium that continuously moves toward self-balance. The logic of equilibrium contradicts the static stratification of society.<sup>165</sup>

Patriarchy, among the Goemai, defines the worldview today. The logic of patriarchy accords men an advantage over women. Taking a cursory look at how society functioned in the past and to some extent today, one notices some evidence of the fluid duality even in the deities *Koeroem/Matkoeroem*. For instance, among the Chadic speakers, even with the later reduction of sexuality to the binary of male and female, there are, according to Danfulani, situations in which men assume the status of women and women take the status of men.<sup>166</sup> This evidences the social construction of sexuality. Among the Goemai, and within the context of the two women cults of *kyeji* and *bori*, the *kyeji* women are men with regard to the *bori* cult women.

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Danfulani, *Pebbles and Deities*, 186-87.

Similarly, the uninitiated male members of the community are women in relation to the initiated members. Most Goemai names are also sexless since they relate to some aspects of *Na'an* or significant events in the family and community. Oyëwù mí rightly captures how sexuality in indigenous society is understood in terms of social relationships and not biological determinism; for example, a non-initiate Goemai is referred to as *Goemai Goemat* (a Goemai woman). He is said not to be a man for not accomplishing the critical rite of passage. There are situations when a person in the service of the deities assumes a temporary or permanent sexless state. For example, according to Danfulani, a mediator or diviner may be asexual in order to facilitate their capacity to mediate between the physical and spiritual realms.<sup>167</sup> Thus, sexuality transcends biology that recognizes only two opposites of male and female.

Goemai men and women work together in unity for the good of society. The social organization of the palace women: *mugajiya* (women leader), *nuwang mugajiya* (assistant), *mama*, *kumbwo*, and *tukura*. Like the *Long* and his council, the *mugajiya* works as a leader with her council. She works in organizing women to complement the male members of society.<sup>168</sup> Women have roles in every meaningful ceremony and ritual by preparing the drinks and, in some cases, the meals, singing, and dancing. In Goemai culture, elderly women who have reached the state of menopause are allowed to get closer to the *mai*. Men build and thatch the huts, while women are household keepers. They are responsible for preparing food for the family and the men working on the farms. Concerning farming, men till and farm the land, and the women do the planting. At harvest, the men harvest and thresh crops, and it is the responsibility of the women to get the produce home. Their economic support to the house includes weaving baskets

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>168</sup> See, Appendix 1:281-282.

and bags and making pots, and they brew *mues* for sale.<sup>169</sup> The Goemai society is one built around complementarity.

### 1.5.2.2. Goemai Indigenous Festivals and Locations

Among the festivals to be looked at in this section are the *Kyeji*, *Kampiring*, *Mang-gap*, *Bori*, and *Mues Yil Goeteer* festivals. They constitute significant occasions for celebration, among many, when the work of cultivating the land is over and it is time for relaxation, entertainment, gratitude, and appeasement of the deities. Among the Mwaghavul, festivals are celebrated during leisure, after harvest. They also entail means of interaction with the neighbors.<sup>170</sup> The festivals, ceremonies, and rituals of the Goemai are situated in sacred locations which bear witness to the cultural history and experiences of the people. Outside the Goemai space, the rituals, festivals, and ceremonies are senseless and insignificant. The location gives the rituals their relevance. The rituals sacralize the land, a symbol of the mother, the totality of who the people are, and their relationships since every means of livelihood is connected to the land.

#### 1.5.2.2.1. *Kyeji* Festival<sup>171</sup>

Parlong's presentation of the *Kyeji* festival, which originated among the *Dorok* people and was observed by the *Kwo* and *Du'ut* Goemai, is what I will review here. This is the festival of the river queen, who is said to transverse the river at the peak of the *Pas* (rainy season), on her way to the sea, during the month of August each year. This river queen is one of the many *Mukwarkum* in *Dorok* land near river Shimankar, with Kalong as the center. According to a legend originating from the Kwararrafa kingdom, including the Wukari and Goemai areas, a

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<sup>169</sup> Mary Haggai, "Socio-Political Organization," in *Towards a Mwaghvul History: An Exploration*, ed. Sale Akila Lohor, et al. (Bloomington, Indiana: Xlibris Corporation, 2011), 37-38.

<sup>170</sup> Umar Habila Dadem Danfulani and Mary Haggai, "Rites of Passages," in *Towards Amwaghavul History: An Exploration*, ed. Sale Akila Lohor, et al. (Bloomington, Indiana: Xlibris Corporation, 2011), 44.

<sup>171</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 39-41.

certain Goemai man saw a python (*Mir*) and decided to kill it. The python escaped and turned into a woman at the seashore. This woman passes through the land annually on her way to the sea. Scared, the man sought ways of protecting himself. Through divination, he offered sacrifices annually and was directed to lead the women who make up the *kyeji* cult. The male head is the *Kanter*, and the *Wanu* is the female leader.

The worship of the river queen is announced with the beating of the divining drum, which calls the members together to the point of meeting. The members are initially sick women brought for healing. At the shrine of this *Mukwarkum*, the male priest places the millet outside and waits for the *Fuan pall* (the first rain) to fall on it. The women prepare *mues* (beer) and other meals during the festival's commencement. Libation and sacrifices are offered. In the end, the priest and cult members (all women) run around the shrine seven times to the drumbeat. The drumbeat conjures the spirit which takes possession of the members. Drunk with the spirit, they fall to the ground and remain there until the male assistant expels the spirit by touching the ears and slapping their backs. It is then that they rise for further treatment in the shrine.<sup>172</sup>

In the session of the spirit possession, once completed, the cult members move to the village square for a public dance. Covered only from the waist down in wrappers, they continuously dance until they become exhausted. Members are mandatorily initiated into this cult after being healed from *kyeji* disease. The healing process begins with the patient's confession (*lap dor*) as to the cause of her ailment. A chicken is sacrificed after being waved three times over the patient. The patient remains with the *Wanu* (female leader) for three days while millet (*maar*), two chickens (*ke vyel*), *mwalam*, beniseed (*shen*), salt (*keon*), locust beans (*bwas*), sheep (*gaam*) are provided for preparation of the meal. The festival's first day is at the

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<sup>172</sup> See Appendix 1:273-274.

riverbank, where the *Kanter* (male leader) sacrifices the sheep and the chicken, followed by supplication. The patient is then taken back home to eat and rest. Members bring new calabashes with them to bring back some sand from the river and *yim mas* (locust bean leaves). The elements from the river conjure the connection and continuity of the river experience at the shrine since the river queen cannot be separated from the earth and water of the river. Elements from the sacred space continue the power of that space in a different location within the Goemai universe (it is bringing the river to the shrine). The women carry the calabash with its content inside on their shoulders, never on their heads to the shrine. They pour the sand at the entrance of the shrine. The *Kanter* blesses the leaves and uses them to sprinkle water on the cult members indicating the *kool* experience (the place of initiation) in the state of *goezoem* (sprinkling). They usually dress in white clothes.

On the day when the *mues* (beer) is ready, the *Kanter* leads the members to the river, where he watches as they take their ritual bath after sacrifices have been offered. It signifies purification and cleansing, indicating successful healing, after which they return home. The third day is the day they depart to their various homes.

#### **1.5.2.2.2. *Bori* Cult**

The order of seniority as an expression of respect placed the *Kwamteng* men at the apex of the hierarchical structure of the cult groups, followed by the *Kyeji* women and the *Bori* cult women. Initiation into the cult is by healing after sickness. Once a woman is sick, and all curative measures are ineffective, the husband takes his wife to the cult members. The ill woman brings along some materials for sacrifice, which include chicken, millet, etc., and she remains with the healer until she is cured. Once it is ascertained that the sickness is not associated with the spirits, she is allowed to leave. A sick woman who goes through the healing process and

comes out well immediately becomes a member. Those who refuse membership may end up dying.

Aware of the spirit-filled nature of its universe, the Hausa devised means of relating with their space and interacting with the spiritual forces in their cosmos. Interdependence became the avenue through which people relate with spirits. The *Bori* cult is founded on the basis of controlling their cosmic spirits. The adherents believe in Jangare, a mythical city, as the abode of the spirits. Membership in the cult offers the people a means of maintaining a sense of identity in the face of the Islamic oppressors.<sup>173</sup> For the Hausa, there is no concrete reality without a spirit. Thus, there is elasticity in the pantheon of the spirits as every new reality adds a new spirit. However, Islam considers *Bori* an evil and pagan practice, though the cult members have incorporated many Islamic religious teachings and practices into its cult. Like the possession of the adept by the *Orisa* in Yoruba culture, the spirits in *Bori* cult mount any of the chosen cult members as a horse rider mounts a horse. The possessed medium becomes the spirit.<sup>174</sup> At the moment of possession and performance, reversal of roles occurs such that dominant colonial ideologies consider it “synonymous with deviance and abnormality since every performance is seen as a challenge to the dominant Islamic and Christian ideologies of Northern Nigeria.”<sup>175</sup> *Bori* is a form of resistance to the colonial powers who attempt to wipe out anything culturally different from the foreign culture or religion. The sacred space for the *Bori* cult members is the *zaure*.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Osita Okagbue, "Deviant and Outcasts: Power and Politics in Hausa *Bori* Performances," *New Theatre Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (2008): 270.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>176</sup> See Appendix 1:276.



### 1.5.2.2.3. *Ta'ar Kampiring*<sup>177</sup>

Parlong's description of this Goemai festival is based on accounts provided by an informant during his research. According to the account rendered by Parlong, the *Kampiring* festival as a cleansing, renewal, restoration of vital life energy of the land, and the potent aspects of healing herbs, peculiar to the *Du'ut* Goemai, takes place during *Goe wap* (time of heavy dew) which is the time immediately after *Pas* (rainy season). This period is usually characterized by *si'ir* (heavy dewy weather conditions), which occurs between October and November. It takes place at the moment when corn has matured and sprouted. *Kampiring* festival is held to have socio-economic benefits within Goemai community. Like many festivals, *kampiring* is superintended by the priest chief (also known as *Kampiring*), who is the custodian of the deities, though only the most powerful deities—the *Dabit* and *Matlua*<sup>178</sup> are housed by him. His person is shrouded in mysteries because of the priest's reputed ability to disappear in times of trouble. The *Kampiring* resides about two kilometers from the *Long Du'ut*, and his residence is known as the *Kwansan*, denoting the act of libation made to the ancestors. A well-fenced sacred grove (space) is situated behind his residence, where the ancestors and spirits are appeased.

As the day of the festival approaches, preparations for *mues* (beer) begin at his instructions. The beer is brewed for three different days of the festival. On the *bon she* day, the first day of the appearance, the *Kampiring* awaits the arrival of the deities under a tree at *Kwansan*. On their arrival, the deities move around the chief priest three times before bowing in homage to their priest. The royal women (*Jarap Long*) take the priest and the deities into his room. The women wait outside the *Kwansan*. He will later emerge escorted by the deities who will lead him to *Dabit*, considered the most important deity in the land. The deities lead *Dabit* to

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<sup>177</sup> See, Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 47-48, 134. The term means “try and exchange.”

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

the shrine. The *Kampiring* performs libation before offering the blessed beer to the women, the deities' followers, elders, and others present.

The deities who had been on a journey are welcomed at the shrine with the offering of beer and sacrifices of goat and chicken. After feasting, the *Gya swa'al* commences.<sup>179</sup> The deities *Matlua* and *Dabit* will perform the *puoe be das* (as men do their things) dance seven times before other deities follow. The dance goes on until they are exhausted, after which they retire. The *Kampiring* performs daily rituals (*hess ham*), one of which is *puoe-de-men*, the ritual for cleansing where chickens are offered to assure the deities that are not forgotten.

On the second day (*she Daskoom*), the *Kampiring* visits the *Long Du'ut* to give him an account of all the sacrifices offered in his time in seclusion and on the *Bon she* (first day of appearance). The *Long Du'ut* informs the *Kampiring* how he had been expecting him because he saw the new moon. He directs the *Kampiring* into the *Luu das*, where the *nkeon* will provide him with two chickens and beer for sacrifice in the *Luu das*. Accomplishing his task, the *Kampiring* is escorted home by the elders of the community, some royal members, and royal women dancers headed by the *mugajiya*. The deities are also in the company. On getting home, he will be under the sacred tree while the deities go around him three times and enquire if everything went well at the chief's palace. Once assured that all went well, *Dabit*, *Matlua*, and the chief's entourage escort him into the *Luu das*, where the chief's entourage is given a white chicken to take back as a symbol that all is well. The day continues with a procession to the dancing ground where the whole community of the people, priests, and deities would engage in *gya swa'al* dance.

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<sup>179</sup> See Appendix 1:279.

On the third day (*she jap swa 'al*), garbed in his royal robe by the *Kanter* (male leader of the *Kyeji* cult) with his hair tuft,<sup>180</sup> the *Kampiring* shows up at the dancing ground, where there is feasting and dancing till everyone is exhausted. Upon completion of all rites, rituals, and sacrifices necessary for cleansing the land, departure is on the fourth day after the *Kampiring* offers a sacrifice of chicken and beer for the safe return of all who attended the festival. Two days after the festival, the *Kampiring* goes to the *Long Du 'ut* to report all that took place. Any matter coming from the festival is discussed and settled. Finally, medicine men may go into the forest to collect herbs that have now acquired renewed potency for healing with the land cleansed.

#### 1.5.2.2.4. *Mues Yil Goeteer*<sup>181</sup>

This annual ritual's sacred location is the Jalbang mountain's foot.<sup>182</sup> The ritual ceremony relates to disasters like drought, famine, or any natural event. The *Shinkwan* (meaning perform and discard) is the chief priest responsible for rituals. He is responsible for ensuring the land's fertility, the installation and burial of the *Long*, and the burial of the *Kampiring*.<sup>183</sup> He lives in the village of Shinkwan on the outskirts of Shendam. Once a problem is reported to the *Long*, he sends for the *Shinkwan*, who employs the *Goe Paa* (diviner) to ascertain the cause. Once that is known, the *Long* provides the items needed for the sacrifice. He attends the rituals or is represented by a palace official. The appropriate date for the ritual is determined through *Paa* divination, and preparations begin with the brewing of *mues* (local beer), which takes six days.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> The hair tuft of the *Kampiring* differs from that of the *Long Du 'ut*. The *Kampiring's* is completely white while the *Long Du 'ut* puts on one made of white and black at the base.

<sup>181</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 41-43.

<sup>182</sup> Longban and Stephen, *History of the Moeje Shinkwan Clan of Shendam*, 4.

<sup>183</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 135.

<sup>184</sup> See Appendix 1:289.

The chief priest and aids adorned in *nbane* (animal skin) with sacred knives tied around the waist carry out the ritual of killing the animals and boiling the meat with salt. The part for the ancestors and deities—the liver and blood—is given to them, and libation is poured. Moving to the *poe lu'u koeroem* (shrine for protection and guidance), the party confers with the deities and supplicates on behalf of the people. In the end, the people who have followed the proceedings from a distance are sprinkled with the holy water (*wat goezoem*). They return to the village to announce the ritual's success and await the deities' blessings. The party is welcomed back and heads into the *Luu das* for a period of peace before the celebrations start with eating, drinking, and dancing. Finally, the chief priest retreats into the *Luu das* inviting the royal delegates and sending back to the palace a chicken or two to report to the *Long*. After two days, the chief priest goes to the palace to enquire about the delegates' safe arrival. The ceremony is performed yearly as a way of appeasing the spirits with or without any disaster.

#### 1.5.2.2.5. *Mang-gap Festival*<sup>185</sup>

*Mang-gap* in Goemai means “take and share” (*mang* means “take,” “carry,” and *gap* denotes “share”). In my view, it may reflect the communal character of living where nothing is celebrated other than the shared virtues and values to overcome selfishness by cultivating shared love. Though peculiar to the *Kwo* and *Dorok* communities, the festival is observed mainly among all people in Goemailand. Parlong concludes from the term's meaning that it may entail sharing and worshipping the deity by all the people. It may connote, in my opinion, a Goemai moral lesson on avoidance of altruism since a successful life is characterized by the “turn toward the other” The festival originates in a myth that may throw light on how the deity came to settle in Goemailand.

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<sup>185</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 53-59.

It is said to have all begun in Turniang village. A daughter of the *Mupe Kumkat* clan from Turniang married a man from *Mupe la Kwaram* clan from *Luu Niyuu* village. The myth continues that once when this woman went to visit her parents, she went in search of firewood alone though she usually went in the company of other women. She discovered that the river had overflowed its bank with a high tide on her way back. While contemplating what to do, she saw a piece of wood (*arap-shep*) floating near the riverbank. A force pushed her to take hold of the wood, which she used to cross safely. She took the wood home to show her parents and kept it. She placed the piece of wood in her mother's kitchen (*kilip*). The following day, the woman's mother discovered that the wood ate her millet and corn meant for brewing the three-day beer. Angry at the situation, the mother ordered her daughter to take the piece of wood back to her husband's house as the mother accused her of witchcraft. The mother said to her daughter, "*ton yi two men goe sok ken? A shep bimo toe, yi mang yi wa ni, de goe ton har jam noe? Mang arap — shep noe kwa yi wa ni lu mis yo dat.*" "What kind of wood is this that you brought home to eat my corn and millet? Take this piece of wood away quickly and return to your husband's house."

As she headed home to her husband's house in *Luu Niyuu*, she grew weary when reaching the outskirts of the village. She became unable to move her feet. With every step she took, the wood became heavier. She finally left it there and went home. She reported the incident to her husband, who concluded that such a strange occurrence manifests the appearance of a powerful deity or spirit. He took some beer (*mues*) in an earthen jar (*dalang*) and a chicken and, together with his wife, went to the spot and offered sacrifice to the piece of wood. The spot is known as *Ka-Arap* ("on wood," "top of the wood," or "head of the wood"), today the *Mang-gap* shrine. Another shrine is set in the chief priest's (*Long Mualak*) house in a bid to ensure libations

are performed regularly. The manifestation of the deity in the form of wood shows the deity's power to assume any form to be with the people—panentheism.

The festival takes place after every two farming seasons, preferably on the eve of *Pas* (rainy season) when the clearing of the farm is at its peak around March and April. *Piu*, the messenger and son of *Mang-gap*, announces the festival's commencement after receiving the permission of the chief of *Luu Niyuu*. Dressed as a masquerade, *Piu* goes to (*goeteng lu*—beyond the house or village) the villages under the chief's jurisdiction to disseminate the information for four days. It allows for the surrounding villages to send their representatives and contributions. *Piu* informs the chief priest and village chief, who approve of the festival, on his return. The women begin brewing the beer (*sek muos*) and the food, supervised by *Piu*, while the men prepare for the day. *Piu* reports daily work progress to the chief priest and the village chief. The chief priest ensures that the house shrine and the traditional shrine at *Ka-Arap* (the locations of the rituals) are clean after the diviner ascertains the state of the shrines. If defiled, the diviner prescribes solutions. He also divines the state of the land and the people. Based on the prescriptions of the diviner, sacrifices are offered for the cleansings of the shrines. The purification of the land and the people ensues only on the day of *Mang-gap* at the *Ka-Arap* shrine. The location (*Ka-Arap*) and the symbol of the deity (*Arap Shep*—the log of wood) give the ritual its significance.

The epiphany of *Mang-gap* is preceded by the precursor masquerade *Dangshang*<sup>186</sup> dressed in *tel* (a local hand-woven rope), *shang* (a locally sown handbag) covering its head, and a white loincloth worn underneath. *Dangshang* portrays an old man who saunters, and his heavy feet necessitate slow movement in order not to sink the ground beneath his feet. As a result of its

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<sup>186</sup> *Dangshang* being does not participate in the festivals. It appears to herald the coming of *mang-gap* and disappears at the shrine.

slow nature, *Dangshang* commences its journey at dawn, arriving at its destination at noon. The *piu* (*mang-gap*'s messenger) monitors events to alert the chief priest and *mang-gap* at the house shrine. The festival lasts three days.

Aware that *Dangshang* has arrived *Ka-Arap*, marking the festival's first day, *Mang-gap*, garbed in spear grass (a product of the land), appearing big, makes its way to the shrine. *Mang-gap* is a fierce war deity holding a stick (*kam*) and wielding it in every direction without minding. *Mang-gap* strikes anyone who is not a cult member coming close to it. A faster masquerade than the *Dangshang*, the size of *Mang-gap* makes its movement slower than its messenger and son *Piu*, which is younger, more agile, and slimmer. With its arrival at *Ka-Arap*, libation with beer (*dalang mues*) is performed. Sacrifices are offered with a he-goat (*fum*) and a chicken (*ke*) by the chief priest in the presence of the father, son, and grandson, viz., *Dangshang*, *Mang-gap*, and *Piu* (a trinity of Goemai Divinity) united in a single purpose of cleansing, preserving, and protecting of the land and the people. Present at the shrine are elders from the community and representatives of the surrounding villages. After about three hours at the shrine, the sacrifice ends with the chief priest praying for the fertility of the land and people, rain, and guidance from the deities.

With the completion of the rituals and sacrifices, *Mang-gap*, in a joyful mood, leads a procession of dance (*muop lap goezuem*—they have become *kool*) of all those in the village square. This time, the anger and viciousness of *Mang-gap* have subsided and are now replaced with joy and happiness. The festivities continue until *Mang-gap* retires at dusk with only men and women who have undergone manhood and womanhood puberty rites. They only cover themselves from the waist down. The second day is a continuation of the rituals, dances, and star

identification and counting (*semshar gun kun*).<sup>187</sup> *Mang-gap* stays three days before returning to the land of the deities. During this time, no one is expected to go to the farm. On the third and final day, the narration of the royal genealogy takes place. *Mang-gap* recalls the names of its chief priests from the beginning of time until the present. The same is done with the names of the *Kwo* and *Luu Niyuu* chiefs. The exercise occurs with *Mang-gap* sitting in the chief's palace or on the street (*ka pin Lu*) with all the initiates gathering to learn the community's history. *Mang-gap* sits only on an upturned mortar.

After three days, *Mang-gap*, who came to identify with the people, teach them the sacred history and wisdom, and assure them of the continuous protection of the deities, returns to its shrine only to return after two farming seasons except in such emergency circumstances like the death of *Long Kwo* (the paramount chief of the *Kwo* people). *Mang-gap* can appear for two-day *maap* (burial ceremonies) on such a special occasion. This is because it involves a long journey of the chief back to the ancestors. The ceremony is for only one day in the event of the death of *Long Luu Niyuu*, the paramount chief of the traditional home of *Mang-gap*. *Mang-gap* is never expected to stay three days anywhere except during its ritual manifestation at its festival. Its messenger and son (*Piu*) remain behind to settle controversies and misunderstandings among family or community members. In the end, it also retires to appear in the community's essential social or religious functions.

The *Dorok* also have the cult of *Mang-gap*, though with different mythology. It is believed that a flood has washed the deity to an island found by a woman who immediately went and informed her husband. The couple rescued the masquerade to their home. With the help of

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<sup>187</sup> Star as we have seen above are identifiers of time and season and thus are associated with special occasions. Goemai people believe that stars forecast approaching events. On this night, mang-gap educates the community by counting the stars by name.



*Paa* divination, they ascertained the deity's origin, with *Paa* declaring what the name of the masquerade must be (*Mang-gap*) and what needed to be done (worshipped). It became central to the spiritual life of the *Dorok* community, living in Ngo'otlong village, and appearing every two years.

Celebrating the festival of *Dorok Mang-gap* is similar to that of *Kwo*. The appearance of *Piu* heralds its manifestation and forerunner, though not before the *Dorok* chief is informed along with the custodian of the *Luu Niyuu Mang-gap*. Members of the community, especially the initiates, are notified beforehand by *Piu* in order to facilitate the eventual success of the cultural outing. He also alerts the people of *Luu Niyuu*. The *Dorok Manga-gap* makes its appearance for only two days. Before the eventual appearance of the festival masquerade and the beginning of festivities associated with it, there was the occurrence of the *Mang-gap wal* (daily announcements made in the morning and evening), which served to provide notices in the community of the approaching festival. The first day is usually devoted to public enlightenment on the relevance of remembering *kum senn* (community genealogy) as a way of reiterating connection. The second day is reserved for performing libations and sacrifices of a he-goat and chicken. During two days of festival activities, *Mang-gap* does not participate in the dances and other festivities of the community after the sacrifice at *Ka-Arap* but sits on a mortar in the *Luu das* and its shrine. The issue with the festival is tension between those who desire the sacralization of the space and those who have commercialized the festival. The question arises, how can the sense of mystery dethrone the love for money of the custodians of the *Mang-gap*? The commercialization demonstrates how greed and capitalism erode the indigenous elements that hold the fabric of the Goemai society, where the sacramental nature of everything within the ritualized space is communion with the sacred.

#### 1.5.2.2.6. Farming and Hunting Ceremonies

Farming, hunting, and fishing are primarily Goemai means of livelihood. Apart from the economic dimension of these activities, they have social and spiritual significance to the people and their deities and establish relationships with the land. As the people's main economic activity, agriculture is communal, involving the family and clan members. A man and his children work the land, which explains why children signify wealth—it implies more hands for farming. Farming and other economic activities like hunting are organized according to sex and age. The men carry out the strenuous work of farming, and the women are involved in planting, weeding, and winnowing. Young children care for the livestock.<sup>188</sup> Festivals like *Mang-gap*, *Ta'ar Kampiring*, and others precede farming as means of cleansing the land and people and calling on rain for a bumper harvest. The farming season begins with *pas* (rainy season) and ends with *Goe wap* (dew time). For the indigenous people of the Plateau lowlands, to work is not only to eat but to survive as a people through rituals of making the gods happy by feeding them.<sup>189</sup> The Goemai and other Chadic people have a form of cooperative farming known as *ma'ar muos*. This form of organization for farming constitutes a group of youths meant to help a person to get extensive work done and know their various farmlands and the boundary. It is voluntary, but food and *muos* are provided.<sup>190</sup> At the headship of the farmers is the *Fier sha'ar*—chief farmer/*fier sha'ar long* or *Long ma'ar* with *Kana fier sha'ar* as his deputy. The *lebu* is the bodyguard and disciplinary controller of the group. Another council of farmers called *daskoom ma'ar* constituted elders selected to oversee certain group offices. The *Long ma'ar* organizes farming

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<sup>188</sup> Mangut Dakur, "Economic Structure," in *Towards a Mwaghavul History: An Exploration*, ed. Sale Akila Lohor, et al. (Bloomington, Indiana: Xlibris Corporation, 2011), 138-39.

<sup>189</sup> Robert McC Netting, *Hill Farmers of Nigeria: Cultural Ecology of the Kofyar of the Jos Plateau* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968), 182.

<sup>190</sup> Dakur, "Economic Structure," 139.

activities, planting, and storage for the *Long* and other prominent farmers.<sup>191</sup> Preparations for farming begin with the first rain when clearing the farmland takes seedlings arranged, broken implements repaired, and every other necessity. The *long ma'ar* informs the town crier to announce that all farmers are ready to go to the *Long's* farm after the second or third rain. Nobody must farm their lands before the *Long*. After the farm of the *Long*, then those of the elders are farmed before those of other individuals. The *Long* appoints all farm officials.<sup>192</sup>

In the family, the father is the head of farming activities. He may assign responsibility to the first son. Women prepare food for the men and prepare the crops to be taken to the barns after harvest. The implements for farming include the *sha'an* (big hoe), *tyang* (small hoe), *je'ep* (sickle), and *shik* (cutlass).<sup>193</sup>

The *Long shang*, *kwa'at*, or *Long se'et* coordinates the hunting expeditions in Goemiland. The *Long* also appoints him. He announces the date for hunting which is a communal activity like most Goemai activities. All the games from the hunting are collected in one place after the expedition. The *long shang* selects what is to be taken to the *Long*, the elders, and himself. What is left is shared among the hunters.<sup>194</sup>

#### **1.5.2.2.7. *Pensa*: Marriage Festival<sup>195</sup>**

The bond of harmony and interdependence is fostered by the coming together of families in the union of persons, clans, and communities together. *Dik* (marriage) is an institution of culture for the continuation of ancestral lineage. Since life is celebrated, the institution that enhances the continuity of ancestral lineage calls for festivities. Thus, *pensa* (translated as

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<sup>191</sup> See Appendix 1:287.

<sup>192</sup> See Appendix 1:287.

<sup>193</sup> See Appendix 1:287.

<sup>194</sup> See Appendix 1:287.

<sup>195</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 63-73.

“removal of hands”) is a marriage festival among the Goemai that takes place after all requisite marriage procedures have been completed and a bride-to-be is ready to be sent off to meet her husband-to-be and his family to whom the symbolic shift of responsibility and care is passed.

*Pensa* completes all the rites with a celebration when the woman is taken to her husband’s home. Though the newlywed is in the husband’s home, she stays with an elderly woman, waking very early to accomplish the house chores in a demonstration of hard work. The early morning chores are the only activities she performs while in seclusion. On the day of the marriage festival, the *shat pensa*, a variety of meals, and *mues* are prepared. The bride is invited to use the *kam yor* (cooking stick) and mix the pot’s content.<sup>196</sup>

The period of seclusion is also an educative time where the bride learns about being a good wife and mother. She is taught the virtue necessary for her new home and family. *Ka’ar* is education in the form of advice on home-keeping and management and prepared for some issues she may face in her new home. The new bride receives gifts like mats, calabashes, pots, food materials, and even farming implements during the festival. After the festival, the bride is led to her husband’s room. Once in the husband’s room, the festival comes to an end.

### **1.5.3. Marriage and Family**

*Dik* (marriage) is an institution that brings a man and a woman, their families, clans, and even villages together in a bond of love, establishing family ties and fostering unity and peace. Procreation ensures family lineage, community history, tradition, and the continuation of customs. In many African communities, marriage entails responsibility as a social institution by which maturity, adulthood, and social status are measured. The Goemai concept of *dik* means “to build.” Thus, one can infer that marriage is meant to build people in love, build a household, and

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 67.

bridge warring communities.<sup>197</sup> Danfulani enumerates three means of a man marrying a woman: childhood betrothal, elopement, and widow inheritance.

Childhood betrothal, the first principal means of contracting marriage among the Goemai, is a relatively common type of marriage contracted by two families on behalf of their under-aged children. The girl is given to the boy at a tender age, and they grow up as husband and wife. The covenant is maintained by regular visits of the boy's father to the girl's family. As the girl attains puberty, she gets *khim* (a metal bangle gift) or for the Goemai *boi* (cowries tied around her girl's hand). Her acceptance of this gift signifies her willingness to get married to her childhood betrothed. The girl may begin to adorn herself with the bangle, a sign of her parent's consent to the formal request made through intermediaries. The bride's wealth of salt (*girik*), grain (millet), and livestock—sheep or goat (preferably a female as a reminder of the daughter). The giving of a horse marks the completion of the bride's wealth. Goemai use *su rep* to describe the marriage of a young unmarried lady. *Bigya* (the bride's wealth) also oftentimes involves requiring a prospective groom to build a round hut for his in-laws or even being asked to work on the farm (*ma'ar gya*) with his friends for a token. And if the spouse's grandmother is alive, the young man invites his friends to go and get firewood of the same size for her to keep herself warm.<sup>198</sup> The prospective groom is expected to owe his in-laws part of the bride's wealth as a sign of continuing relationship and allegiance between the families. Full payment is considered an insult because it means saying the family is poor and the lady is sold out.<sup>199</sup> *Mues* (local beer) is brewed from millet and given to the bride's relations. Some of the beer is used for libation in the

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>198</sup> See Appendix 1:298-299.

<sup>199</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 68.

family *mei/mai* (shrine). Sacrifices are offered to the ancestors for the bride's fertility and protection.

*Dik mat ka* is marriage as widow inheritance. This entails the brother of a deceased man taking the widow as his wife. The rationale behind this is for the continued care of the widow and her children and to keep the woman in the family. It is pertinent to note that the widow is not compelled to be married within the family. She is at liberty to choose to be married outside of the family. Since polygamy is not frowned upon, the inherited widow could be an addition to the wives of the one inheriting her. The household is such that each woman has an apartment built for herself and her children. Children guarantee the stability of the family, as childlessness or not having a male child could lead to divorce. Divorce happens when the bride's wealth is returned to the woman's family, who then becomes free to marry again.<sup>200</sup> The Goemai describes marrying a widow, a divorcee, or someone else's wife as *lap mat* (take a woman).<sup>201</sup> The place of each wife and her children is assured, depending on her position in the hierarchy of marriage. The sanctity of marriage is upheld by forbidding adultery, considered an offense against the spirits of the ancestors, atoned for by the offering of sacrifice prescribed by the priest. The man and the woman must perform the sacrifice to avert calamity.

Marriage by elopement is the third form of marriage, a cultural practice common to the Goemai and their Chadic-speaking neighbors. As part of the practice, young men and ladies to be married sometimes choose to get engaged to each other without obtaining their parents' consent. Under such a situation, the young man may secretly arrange with his friends to abduct the lady with her consent. Where there is no resistance from the lady in question, she may be secretly

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<sup>200</sup> Danfulani and Haggai, "Rites of Passages," 72. See, Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 64.

<sup>201</sup> See Appendix 1:299.

taken to the home of the man's relative at a distant location. A few days later, the man and his relatives would go to the family of the "missing" girl, stating that the daughter is in their custody. After a few days, the groom and representatives of his family make their way to the bride's father's house at cockcrow, sitting at the gate to the house while incessantly pouring sand over their left and right shoulders in an act the Goemai refer to as *baryil*, interpreted as a sign of submission and contrition performed before a person who has been offended. The deeper the hole made from finding more sand to perform *baryil*, the more contrite a person is assumed to be. The household member who comes out to witness what is happening reports it to the father/guardian of the bride, who may allow them in immediately or allow them to continue *baryil*.<sup>202</sup>

Preparations for paying the bride's wealth are made, and the girl moves to the man's house. This form of marriage sometimes results in conflicts, especially if the lady in question has already been betrothed to another person, in which case the bride's wealth has to be returned. The lady's friends or family may resist her being taken away.<sup>203</sup>

Marriage for the Goemai is usually preceded by courtship (*kwa'am mat*). The term *diel gya*, or *dye gya*, denotes the dating of the *la swa'al* (boy) and the *la-rep* (girl). *Diel gya* means dance or festival. The Goemai may see the many suitors coming to woo a lady as dancers trying to get her attention. Thus, the best dancer wins the prize—her admiration and love. There is no specific length of time for courtship. Once it begins, the lady unofficially tells her mother. The latter advises her to ascertain whether there is any family link between the two families and for the lady to hear her mother's opinion. Likewise, the young man informs his father. This begins a relationship of would-be in-laws as the younger brother or sister of the boy establishes a joking

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<sup>202</sup> See Appendix 1:297.

<sup>203</sup> Danfulani and Haggai, "Rites of Passages," 71.

relationship with the lady and vice versa.<sup>204</sup> The lady is constantly showered with gifts and love. The bride respects her new family but only speaks with her husband, his younger siblings, and relations. She only responds to the groom's parents, uncles, aunties, and older siblings and relations when given *pis* (a gift) to merit her response. With such gifts as chicken, goat, foodstuff, clothing, jewelry, etc., an attempt is made to woo the new bride and, figuratively, "her mouth is opened" to speak. As a mark of respect, she is not supposed to look directly into the eyes of her in-laws while conversing with them.

Engagement (*lap karam*) follows courtship. *Lap karam* involves the bride-to-be accepting the gift of a mat from a suitor. The mat is received on behalf of the lady in question by her friends or some older women. A lady may receive many mats from her suitors; however, such acts of acceptance do not necessarily indicate positive consent for any particular proposal. The act of final consent is only given when the mat (or mats) collected is (are) presented eventually to the father (or guardian) of the lady. He, in turn, may decide when to notify his close relations, who are invited to witness the decision of the bride-to-be to accept the mat(s) from her chosen suitor. She indicates her stance by pushing the mat with the hand or foot, representing the one she loves as the mats are initially kept upright. The girl's paternal uncles are notified. The remaining mats are returned to the persons who presented them secretly. The engagement mat is usually tied at both ends, with the gifts given to the lady placed inside, and must be kept safely.<sup>205</sup>

Marriage establishes relationships between families, which are well-defined so that sexual taboos may not occur, leading to the desacralization of the land. It is difficult, though not

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<sup>204</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 65.

<sup>205</sup> See Appendix 1:298.



impossible, for persons with the new extended family unit to get married.<sup>206</sup> Distant kin can only be married after appropriate sacrifices are performed for the ancestors. Family members join through marriage and become in-laws (*sirr*). The head of the household or father is referred to as *nda*, and his children use the same term for their uncles while they call their aunty *mal-nda*. It reveals a connection with the father. In a marriage context, the husband's older siblings (*mis*) are *miska/matka* (husband/head wife), understood as “my husband” to the bride. This is because a married woman (*mat*) is married to her husband, the family, and the clan. The husband's parents become her *nak*—grandparents. She is usually free and playful with her husband's younger siblings. The bride's siblings are either *moeken* (uncles) or *mailin* (aunts) to her children. Goemai are patrilineal. Children ensure not only continuity of the lineage; they are an additional workforce on the farm. Siblings from the same parents are known as *yamnin*. Thus, the more wives and children a man has, the wealthier he is considered. In the case of polygamy, the children belong to all the women who see themselves not as sisters but as rivals. The first wife is known as *Mat goe poep luu*, the second wife is known as *Mat goe tep ni*, and the third is known as *Mat muwan*. All the other wives accord the first wife respect. The children from the same mother are *Jap Niin*, while those from the same father are *Jap Nda*.<sup>207</sup> Each wife has her separate and demarcated compound with her children though they are expected to live as sisters and care for the family. Goemai kinship is the connection of persons through the mother or father. The connection by descent or affinity is known as *mi*.<sup>208</sup> What is noteworthy about the Goemai is that every Goemai relationship is built on love and respect.

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<sup>206</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 69.

<sup>207</sup> See Appendix 1:300.

<sup>208</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 84-90.

Respect is expressed in the posture assumed in greeting older persons. The Goemai *Bar-yil* is a respectful greeting where a younger person stoops and removes his cap when he meets an elder or a title holder on the road. The younger person removes his shoes and squats if it is at home. Before the *Long Goemai*, men sit on the ground, gently hitting their legs with their palms in acceptance of his position while saying *Bagga miskoom*. This is referred to as *Wap*. Women kneel before the chief as they clasp their hands together and click their thumbs.<sup>209</sup> The Goemai word for greeting is *tal* which also means question. Parlong reasons that the other word *ka'at* may have been the initial Goemai word until they decided to coin another word due to the many questions asked as greetings elicited answers. *Ka'at* would be the greeting similar to saying “hello” as one passes another. *Tal* entails settling down and doing obeisance. Since it involves settling down, it serves as a means of cementing unity among community members.<sup>210</sup>

#### **1.5.4. Moral Codes and Taboos**

*Yil hok dam* (the land is spoiled or desecrated) is the Goemai expression for when the divinities and ancestors allow drought, pestilence, disease, and death to reign in the land due to an abomination committed by an individual, family, clan, or even the community. Prevalence of unusual phenomena calls for divination to unravel the cause and remedy as the consequence of such is disharmony, disconnection, and chaos. Traditional moral codes and taboos are put in place to protect sacred places, objects, customs, and traditions. For example, non-initiates are prohibited from entering or even trying to watch certain masquerades when they appear or step over articles of the spirit. Sexual immorality is frowned upon, especially when it involves another person's wife; murder is considered a grave heinousness. Offenders are punished. Sacrifices and rituals are performed to sanctify the land and avert the wrath of the deities and

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<sup>209</sup> See Appendix 1:297.

<sup>210</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 75.

ancestors. Moral codes and taboos are not meant to constrain people but to ensure respect and harmony and regulate community life by promoting wellbeing and wholeness. Goemai taboos seek to encourage the purity of the land and the people, especially the leaders responsible for specific rituals and ceremonies like the chief priests. These taboos may range from avoiding contact with menstruating women to not eating particular foods or wandering into sacred spaces.

#### **1.5.5. Settlement Patterns and Organization**

A family is a basic unit of the community in its social organization. Goemai *mi* (kinship) is recognized by blood affinity and marriage affiliation. Following the patrilineal descent as a form of identity, the father (*nda*) is the one through whom ancestral lineage is traced. As seen above, polygamy signifies wealth. For instance, as commonly practiced among the Mwaghavul of Jos Plateau and the Yoruba of the southwest of Nigeria, the man lives with his wives, children, unmarried siblings, and other members of the extended family families.

Social organization is based on the conglomeration of families, extended families, and other families forming a village that traces its lineage to an ancestor with clan members under the leadership of the most elderly men who are the chief priests of the family shrines (*lu'u das*) and the village under the *Long* (chief). The village chief usually is from one of the dominant lineages, and he performs rites and rituals to the family gods and the earth (*vil*).<sup>211</sup> The hierarchical nature of society begins in the household with the man as the head and owners of the house with the responsibility of protecting and fending for the family by working hard on the farm. The man builds the house and is responsible for harvesting, thrashing crops, and hunting.<sup>212</sup> The woman's place is in the house, doing the chores, cooking the meals, bearing, and rearing children. The woman has to grind the corn or millet for food and fetch firewood from the bush.

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<sup>211</sup> Netting, *Hill Farmers of Nigeria*, 153-56.

<sup>212</sup> Haggai, "Socio-Political Organization," 37-38.

### 1.5.6. Land and Its Symbolism

Goemai people understand themselves in relation to the *yil* (land). Thus, *yil* is not a commodity but a patrimony of their ancestors who witness and uphold the observance of their descendants' culture and customs. Apart from its usage for farming and husbandry, the land and the adorning cultural landscapes are reminders of the people's long history and association with *Na'an* as his children, which depicts the people's religious persuasions and spiritual worldview and elicits graciousness to *Na'an* in the form of rituals. Paul Cloke and Andrew Williams describe the relations between landscapes and rituals when they surmise, "one interesting dynamic of these spiritual landscapes is the capacity to affect people and communities with a directed performative force."<sup>213</sup> The African understanding of connectedness and relationality of everything to everything else makes land a symbol of identity.<sup>214</sup> In other words, most land activities are preceded by religious observances. Even the *dien* (medicine man) brings the products of the land into the pot to prepare a potent concoction for healing, the pot serving as the womb that brings forth life, as earlier mentioned. It is safe to infer that the land's health reflects the people's health and vice versa. If the *yil* (land) is *dam* (spoiled or polluted), the people experience problems and disharmony unless purification rituals are performed to restore balance. Land, among the people of the lowland of the Plateau, as with many indigenous peoples, is the preserve of the men, and it is not a commodity for sale. It can only be leased out for a period.<sup>215</sup> It symbolizes the mother of the people, the totality of who the people are, and their relationships. This space elicits the people's relationship with their deities and, ultimately, the Divine. A

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<sup>213</sup> Paul Cloke and Andrew Williams, "Geographical Landscapes of Religion," in *Re-Imagining Religion and Belief*, ed. Christopher Baker, Beth R. Crisp, and Adam Dinham, 21st Century Policy and Practice (Bristol University Press, 2018), 41.

<sup>214</sup> Netting, *Hill Farmers of Nigeria*, 93-95.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 162-63.

relationship leads the people to realize how making sense of their existence is impossible without their land, ancestors, unborn, and deity.<sup>216</sup> The experience of connectedness is such that even “[h]uman sickness is a sign that something is wrong with the universal system, only the coming together of universal forces seen and unseen could restore such harmony.”<sup>217</sup> The Goemai space inspires Moemai to an awareness of their being in the sacred space *Na’an* has chosen to relate with them. And the medium of their relationship with *Na’an* includes traditional rituals and ceremonies. As such, the land (space) mediates the presence of the divine.

Land among the Goemai is communally owned. However, individual male adults may hold land in trust for the clan. Among the Ngas and Mwaghavul, the land belongs to the chief. The Ngas chief is commonly addressed as *Ngolong Yil*, while the Mwaghavul refers to the chief as *Mishkagham Yil*, signifying the “chief landowner.”<sup>218</sup> The right to such a claim is by virtue of first occupying the land or by conquest. Instead of selling it, “it may, however, be leased out for a period of time to friends, neighbours [sic], kin or strangers for farming purposes, renewable yearly or some period determined by the owner(s). Where land was given out for residential purposes to strangers or non-kin, it was given freely and only redeemed if the person migrated from the place or died without any male sibling.”<sup>219</sup> The agreement is entered into in the presence of witnesses. Among the Chadic speakers, land is never owned by women though they can be allotted a portion for farming.

### **1.5.7. Goemai Wisdom Tradition and Cosmo vision**

African wisdom tradition and cosmo vision are described by philosophers like Henry Odera Oruka, who conceived sage philosophy as the African way of thinking in response to the

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<sup>216</sup> Theological Method paper, 17.

<sup>217</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 118.

<sup>218</sup> Dakur, "Economic Structure," 138.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

colonial misconception of Africans as incapable of systematic reflection. The European reduction of their inability to translate specific African ideas, expressions, or concepts into Western language was interpreted as proof of African unintelligibility. It is the same attitude associated with the Western gaze of indigenous rituals, signs, and symbols where the West reached conclusions without entering into the universe in which the symbols were constructed but were taken out of context and referred to as works of art. The concepts of ritual and ritualization will be examined in-depth in chapter two. The limitation of Western universalization of its knowledge production is reducing knowledge and knowing to only logic (rationality). According to H. Odera Oruka,<sup>220</sup> the idea of knowing connotes at least five different modes of understanding; first, logical reasoning as systematic reasoning using interconnected ideas; second, scientific induction; third, religious revelation and mythology; fourth, common sense reasoning and intuition; fifth, inductive conclusions from experience without following a set pattern.<sup>221</sup> Different cultures and contexts prioritize various means of knowing according to their experiences and relations with their space.

Though indigenous ways of articulating reality are not Western logical reasoning and scientific induction, it does not make their knowledge and knowledge production any less valid—Oruka’s modes of knowing highlight the particularity of the Goemai context and, by extension, the African context. Mythology, common sense, and experience come into play in Goemai knowledge production. The context is the medium of knowing, evidenced in the stories, myths, rituals, wisdom sayings, and connection with the Goemai universe.

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<sup>220</sup> He was a Kenyan who spearheaded the separation of Philosophy from Religion at the University of Nairobi. He is renowned for “Sage Philosophy.”

<sup>221</sup> H. Odera Oruka, "Cultural Fundamentals in Philosophy," *Philosophy and Theology* 5, no. 1 (1990): 26.

## 1.6. The Crisis of Indigenous Consciousness

The silencing of the ancestors in indigenous communities that resulted in the destruction of the Goemai cosmos by the agents of colonialism—missionaries, military, and traders—made the people strangers to their space. The disruption of the indigenous space continued with the colonial administration merging and putting independent chiefdoms under the control of the *Long Du'ut* for tax collection. In the same vein, schools became instruments for colonizing people's minds and socialization antithetical to cultural values. The alien intrusion disrupted indigenous socialization features, including togetherness, interdependence, harmony, equilibrium, and recognition of the dignity and value of the other as a person. For example, polygamy, the mode of life for the Goemai until the advent of Western Christianity, was discouraged. To be genuinely Christian, the convert must become more Western and less Goemai by rejecting the culturally acceptable norm of polygamy by which the lineage is expanded, food security ensured, and ancestorship is guaranteed.

### 1.6.1. A Life of Double Consciousness

W. E. B. Du Bois, the African American freedom fighter against slavery and racism in Africa, is credited with highlighting the idea of “double consciousness” resulting from the traumatic experiences of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade of the people of African descent. It is often used as a metaphor for the two-ness of personality resulting from the constant tension between cultural identity as the outcome of indigenous socialization, and an alien consciousness. Double Consciousness encapsulates the understanding of oneself from the perspective of the dominant other.<sup>222</sup> In the words of Du Bois, it is “the sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in

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<sup>222</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2018), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/duquesne-ebooks/detail.action?docID=5447862>. 3.

amused contempt and pity.”<sup>223</sup> The state of confusion that ensues from double identity leaves the constructed individual in a painful condition of fatalism and desperation, requiring self-definition or articulation of her trapped personality to liberate herself from mental coloniality.<sup>224</sup> F.

Eboussei Boulaga, a Cameroonian philosopher, posits that the African colonized subject is torn between her Africanness that has to do with her language, awareness of the connection with the ancestors, some still practiced traditions, among others, and imitating the colonizer as her perfect aspiration.<sup>225</sup>

Any attempt at authentically defining the African must be carried out within the African experience of her space and ancestors. The Goemai indigenous structure serves as the cultural framework that helps the people understand the nature and scope of the true Goemai worldview. In other words, structure and culture are distinct but inseparable, as neither can be conceptualized independently of the other. Double consciousness plunges people into a lost or forgotten identity

### **1.7. Christian Colonization Versus Goemai Cosmology of Accommodation/Addition**

In Goemaliland, Christianity made a successful entry in 1907 only after the Moemai fell to the British around 1906 through Lt. Eckersley and Ross<sup>226</sup> when the then *Long Goemai*, Miskoom Dongkwap, welcomed the missionaries and provided them with land and helpers to farm for them and teach them the language. The people received and accommodated the priests and followed with interest all they taught. Danfulani corroborates the above viewpoint when he

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 194-95.

<sup>225</sup> Quoted in, Enrique Dussel, "Epistemological Decolonization of Theology," in *Decolonial Christianities: Latinx and Latin American Perspectives*, ed. Raimundo Barreto and Roberto Sirvent, New Approaches to Religion and Power (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 40. See also, Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, *La Crise Du Muntu: Authenticite Africaine Et Philosophie* (Paris: Presence Africaine 1977).

<sup>226</sup> A Capro Research Work, "Goemai (Ankwai)," 133. This demonstrates the link between colonization and Christianity where missionaries followed the path of their kinsmen who were the colonial authorities in the colonized lands. Missionaries were working for the recruitment of Africans into the western empire that is synonymous with the kingdom of God. See, Walsh, *The Growth of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Jos 1907-1978*, 17-61.



shows how the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries marked the beginning of the intrusion of external forces into the North Central region of Nigeria; Danfulani unambiguously stressed how the intrusions affected the people's socio-economic and religio-political life. In his words, "these encounters caused political, socio-economic and religious changes in the life of the people."<sup>227</sup> In the socio-political realm, the indigenous institution of kingship that served to promote tradition and religiosity was reduced to ineffective roles, and their sacredness was profaned.<sup>228</sup> Religiously, the African subject was alienated and needed to be re-integrated to remedy her supposedly inherent savagery, irrationality, and eternal perdition.<sup>229</sup> This explains why Fanon views evangelization and conversion as identical to Westernization.<sup>230</sup>

Comaroff and Comaroff hold that Christianity played a role in the reconstruction of Africa as the missionaries were the most active agents of the empire whose objective was to colonize the consciousness of the "natives" using the Christian God and European civilization.<sup>231</sup> Quoting Norman Etherington, Comaroff and Comaroff agree that the settlers and miners "merely wanted the Africans' land and labor. Missionaries wanted their souls."<sup>232</sup> The empire must spread its influence to the ends of the "dark continent." Hence, Christianity and colonialization worked hand in hand to colonize the mind and soul of the supposed descendants of Ham, the cursed son of Noah (cf. Gen 9:20-27).

The indigenous people's goodwill in accommodating the West's cultural and religious intrusions into their ancestral ways of living was often justified on simplistic grounds that the African lifestyle is not only archaic but also spiritually repulsive. However, the open arms of the

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<sup>227</sup> Danfulani, *Pebbles and Deities*, 28.

<sup>228</sup> Ndlovu, *Performing Indigeneity*, 75.

<sup>229</sup> Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 1, 15.

<sup>230</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 7.

<sup>231</sup> Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 1, 6-15.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

indigenous people (the Goemai) to the missionaries were reciprocated with an iconoclastic attitude by breaking the center of gravity of the people—their culture—that held the community and gave it its distinctive identity. All that made the Goemai different were the same things that made them inferior and had to be obliterated and replaced with those of the “superior” culture, morality, and faith. Comaroff and Comaroff call it the rhetoric of contrast.<sup>233</sup>

For the Goemai, however, like many indigenous people, “[t]he traditional religion of their forefathers satisfied them and so they saw no need to abandon it and follow a god whom they did not know”<sup>234</sup> Remarkably, the similarities in some beliefs and practices between the Christian faith and Goemai spirituality can be seen in rituals like the Christian celebration of the Eucharist and the Goemai *tok mu’ut*, sprinkling of holy water and *wat goe zoem*, Christian initiation rites and *Kwamteng*, and the faith in a Supreme Deity – God and Goemai *Na’an* made the Goemai susceptible to the Christian religion over time. Though some tenets of Christianity, like God having a unique son, a man marrying only one wife (monogamy), and the idea of priests not marrying made the Goemai resistant to Western Christianity. Also, the new status attained by those who had acquired Western education, which was not distinct from the religion, convinced the people of the power of the new faith. It gave the Goemai people a reason to overlook the differences between Western Christianity and Goemai spirituality to the point of embracing the faith, which adopted the name of their Goemai Supreme Deity for its own God.

With the Western ideological construction of Africa, its religiosity, cosmology, and African identity were destroyed through the structures of the empire, many Africans still maintained a firm grip on their cultural heritage. Uzukwu cites the sharply contrasting differences in the cultural response of the Yoruba of southwest Nigeria and the Bamileke of

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>234</sup> Walsh, *The Growth of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Jos 1907-1978*, 32-33.

Cameroon as representing the receptive perspective and the extreme rejection of colonial culture by the Maasai of Kenya.<sup>235</sup> From an objective point of view, extreme isolationism is hardly a desirable option for promoting interaction, especially in a pluralistic world characterized by cross-border encounters, since culture only maintains its dynamic and relevant character when it is open to other cultures.

### 1.7.1. Authenticity of Culturality

As a quality of being genuine or original, authenticity is a heuristic and contested concept whose definition is determined by the subjective context rather than objectivity, which does not consider the dynamic nature of culture and the human person. Within cultural discourse, reference to authenticity is made from the materialist approach, which is a more static understanding of culture, and constructivist perspectives, which focus on the sociocultural context.<sup>236</sup> Siân Jones broadens the scope of understanding authenticity by offering a view of the concept based on experience and negotiation that reflects indigenous relationships with the past, present, and future, spaces, landscapes, and people.<sup>237</sup> Anna Karlström's performative view adds another dimension to the articulation of authenticity. It emphasizes the dynamism that is inherent in the practice of reimagination and retrieval. For her, cultural authenticity is attained through the "performed and embodied practice represented by destruction and construction."<sup>238</sup> The implication is that authenticity flows from the spiritual values that emanate from the recaptured (renewed) cultural heritage consecrated to inspire the people. However, one understands or

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<sup>235</sup> Uzuoku, *A Listening Church*, 3-4.

<sup>236</sup> Anna Karlström, "Authenticity Rhetorics of Preservation and the Experience of the Original," in *Heritage Keywords*, ed. Kathryn Lafrenz Samuels and Trinidad Rico, Rhetoric and Redescription in Cultural Heritage (University Press of Colorado, 2015), 29-30.

<sup>237</sup> Referenced in, *ibid.*, 30.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

articulates the concept, the primary objective remains “to maintain authenticity and the feeling of originality.”<sup>239</sup>

The consecrating effect of the space emanates in the space such that whatever object is used in the space or whoever is in the location is sacralized. The Moemai recognize the sacredness of the location by taking off their footwear and caps. To enter the *mai* (shrine) within the sacred space indicates the transition from the profane to the sacred, where the person is transfigured. The transformation reminds the people of the need to turn toward their cultural context, the authentic place where identity is formed. Indigenous spaces constantly communicate with the people as the location of identity construction, love, forgiveness, and reconciliation make meaning. Goemai people’s attachment to their land resonates in their consciousness as people of the land. Authenticity is referenced in the people’s narratives of involvement in and with their universe.<sup>240</sup> It is not about the transmission of inherited legacy down the ages as if carved in stone since culture is continually undergoing creation and recreation to reflect the desired aspiration of the people; authenticity connotes a cultural invention that responds to the lived experiences of the people.<sup>241</sup>

Cultural authenticity goes beyond being genuine, as in the exactness of how it was constructed, to its creative retrieval within the context of guaranteeing why it was constructed in the present circumstances. The process of change does not reduce the authenticity of culture; rather, it allows it to maintain cultural identity.<sup>242</sup> Conceiving authenticity as originality or

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>240</sup> Garro and Mattingly, "Narrative as Construct and Construction," 3.

<sup>241</sup> Jocelyn Linnekin, "Cultural Invention and the Dilemma of Authenticity," *American Anthropologist* 93, no. 2 (1991): 446-47.

<sup>242</sup> Heike C. Alberts and Helen D. Hazen, "Maintaining Authenticity and Integrity at Cultural World Heritage Sites," *Geographical Review* 100, no. 1 (2010): 60. For more, see, the World Heritage Program’s the Nara Conference on Authenticity of 1994 which produced the Nara Document on Authenticity which accepts various cultural articulations and interpretations of the concept. Authenticity, therefore, is a culturally determined concept.

genuineness depicts a frozen understanding of culture. Cultural identity guarantees individualization. An individual not rooted in culture is lost and cannot build affinity with a space and a people. The subaltern rejection of coloniality portends the desire for self-apprehension as a counter to the constructed identity of the Euro-American Empire, in other words, a search for authenticity by indigenous people, which begins with recognizing the historical reality in the encounter between Africa and Europe. As a result, the hegemonic, colonialist, and Eurocentric discourse with its Manichean assumptions is countered by Afrocentric counter-discourse as a way of provincializing Western hegemony by registering cultural autonomy as the rejection of coloniality.<sup>243</sup>

No person is born outside a particular cultural context. The first experience of any individual of the universe is mediated through the cultural structures within which she is situated. The spatial location is what determines what people perceive as authentic. For the Goemai, the experience of the social, historical, and local contexts generates the culture that gives the people their identity.<sup>244</sup> Culture as the prism through which people experience the authenticity of reality, and their identity can only generate authenticity if it is authentic. And cultural authenticity, according to John J. Stuhr, has nothing to do with cultural uniqueness. However, the authenticity of culture is evidence of uniqueness. For Stuhr, a culture may be different and not authentic. The space enables people to envision a truly human culture enacted in the context.<sup>245</sup> Thus, only the

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UNESCO—World Heritage Convention (WHC), [https://www.google.com/search?q=https+%2F%2Fwhc.unesco.org+%E2%80%BA+document&rlz=1C1CHBF\\_enUS980US980&oq=https+%2F%2Fwhc.unesco.org+%E2%80%BA+document&aqs=chrome..69i57.1598j0j9&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.com/search?q=https+%2F%2Fwhc.unesco.org+%E2%80%BA+document&rlz=1C1CHBF_enUS980US980&oq=https+%2F%2Fwhc.unesco.org+%E2%80%BA+document&aqs=chrome..69i57.1598j0j9&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8) (Accessed 11/30/2022).

<sup>243</sup> Olaniyan, *Scars of Conquest/Masks of Resistance*, 4.

<sup>244</sup> Chengzhi Yin and Xingyu Qian, "The Spatial Production of Simulacrascape in Urban China: Economic Function, Local Identity and Cultural Authenticity," *Cities* 104 (2020): 6.

<sup>245</sup> John J. Stuhr, "Cultural Identity, Cultural Authenticity," *Social Alternatives* 10, no. 2 (1991): 2-3.

Goemai space stirs the Goemai to construct an authentic culture. Authenticity is articulated in the connection that the culture deepens people's sense of belonging to space and the universe.

Culture derives its authenticity from the land when it fosters a lifestyle that reflects and aids the remembrance of mythical characters and ancestors. One that the people continue to recreate to relive their ancestral experience and wisdom. It does not depend on the gaze or view of another but the reality as constructed by the people from their experience and interaction with the space. It is preserved in the land's cultural heritage and cannot be repeated elsewhere.<sup>246</sup> The authenticity of culture cannot be separated from the culture of authenticity. They are interrelated. The people's culture of authenticity is experienced and lived in the authenticity of the culture. The authenticity of culture fosters a culture of authenticity where the people within the web of relationships recognize the context in which their ancestors lived and reflect ancestral identity. The continuous adherence to the practices and the conscious effort to embody the reality of their context demonstrates their willingness to continue on the path of their self-understanding. The Goemai cannot be Goemai without the structures of culture in which localization is realized. Only a genuinely Goemai identity bears the mark of an authentic culture. Authenticity is not exterior to the person since people embody their context.

Cultural authenticity in the face of urbanization and interculturality transcends mere return to the original since it is impossible to achieve absolute cultural authenticity. Therefore, the Goemai must work for a reconstructed authenticity since culture is dynamic and in constant remaking for it to remain relevant rather than a mere preserver of the old.<sup>247</sup> The land promotes an indigenous construction within which life is nurtured, peace guaranteed, relations enhanced,

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<sup>246</sup> Yin and Qian, "The Spatial Production of Simulacrascape in Urban China," 11.

<sup>247</sup> Paul Kendall, "The Location of Cultural Authenticity: Identifying the Real and the Fake in Urban Guizhou," *China Journal* 77, no. 1 (2017): 97-98.

symbols created, and Divinity acknowledged as the source of everything meant to safeguard Goemai cultural heritage. As a construct of the people, it provides a way of understanding, identifying, and establishing a code of morality and structures of meaning legitimizing the people and their universe. Culture is the mark of distinctness as a determinant of values, social responsibilities, and obligations. Since authenticity depends on the functional structures and construction of the people, culture enhances the process of integration within the structures of society and valorizes all that underlies its construction. It is only within a culture that character and personality are formed, and spirituality lived.<sup>248</sup> For Moemai, therefore, culture ensures the people's connection with their "goemai-ness" since it signifies a relationship with the land. Location, space, or land determines the authenticity of the culture. Only in the people's roots in their space can they construct their identity—the lack of rootedness in the land results in disconnection from the language and customs.

The Goemai search for authenticity may require asking specific questions, including, who are the Moemai? How can the Moemai reimagine themselves today? How can the Moemai be true to their identity and still be fully Christian? The search for authenticity should not end in rejecting cultural engagement or hybridity. It entails a new identity that results from the non-abandonment of one's consciousness. With firm roots in its culture and history, the Goemai take their destiny of self-apprehension into their hands to construct a cultural identity founded on indigenous consciousness that emanates from spatiality.

### **1.7.2. Christianity and the Disturbance of the Peace of the Spirits**

When the Christian missionaries arrived in Shendam in 1907, none but the missionaries could imagine the influence that would accompany what today may be described as the invasion

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<sup>248</sup> See, Nina Sylvanus, "The Fabric of Africanity," *Anthropological Theory* 7, no. 2 (2007): 201-16.

of the Goemai space by a foreign religion. It was not just a religion that the missionaries brought but a culture, morality, history, epistemology, cosmology, symbols, and rituals. Western Christianity, with its iconoclastic posture, desecrated and denigrated so many customs and traditions. Its ultimate goal in the colonized lands was to dislodge indigenous spirituality from the people's consciousness. In the eyes of the missionaries, indigenous spiritualities were devilish and could not guarantee the people's redemption. The missionaries erroneously conceived indigenous spiritualities as this-worldly while seeing Christianity as other-worldly. This perspective is represented in the views of Walsh when he held that the goal of Christianity is in life afterward, while the Goemai religiosity is based on the people's desire for protection and welfare. Hear him: "Goemai religion was founded on the desire to protect the lives and welfare of the people. They believed it was only from the cults of *Karem* [sic] and *Matkarem* [sic] that this protection and necessary prosperity could be granted. Although Christianity had a similar belief in a supreme deity, it offered rewards for this belief not here on earth but in a life afterwards [sic]."<sup>249</sup> The Goemai universe testifies to the holistic nature of spirituality.

*Na'an*, though he appears remote, is simultaneously immanent in a sacramental way through the other deities. All prayers, rituals, and rites are ultimately directed to *Na'an*. Protection and blessing are from *Na'an* through the intermediary subordinates. Also, regarding the cosmology of the Goemai, as with many African societies, the belief in the physical and spiritual worlds is incontestable. In fact, among the *Du'ut* Goemai, there is the supplication ritual of restoring harmony between the spiritual and the physical worlds known as the *mues yil goete'er*.<sup>250</sup> The sacrifice requires blood and beer, and the items are carried on the shoulder.

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<sup>249</sup> Walsh, *The Growth of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Jos 1907-1978*, 33.

<sup>250</sup> Parlong, *Studies in Goemai Religion and Culture*, 41.



Western Christianity's intrusion into Goemaliland led to the severance of the persons through conversion from the Deity, land, culture, community, and the web of relationships that characterize Goemal identity. Dislocated from their space, the individuals take on an invented identity, a foreign religion, and a colonial epistemology. As a result, the cult of the ancestors is neglected; religious rituals and rites are considered antithetical to the new-found religion. Even initiation rituals, which serve as the vehicle for continuous ritualization of the various stages of life in Goemal society, are gradually becoming obsolete. And eventually, what becomes the experience of the people is an end to the indigenous flow of life hinged on the connection among the pantheon of deities, ancestors, the living, the dead, and the unborn. The colonial logic of dislocation or disconnection ensures the colonial consciousness of the colonized was promoted through the basic structures of the colonial education system. The traditional community values of togetherness and relationality eventually came to be replaced with Western individualism and rationality.

### **1.8. Colonial Structure, Structuration, and Necessity of Indigenous Self-Apprehension**

Ali Mazrui argues (in his intellectual debate with Wole Soyinka on the question of identity) that African identity in the colonial past has largely been constructed and determined for the Africans by others; in his words, "we are what we are because of what we (are made to) think we are."<sup>251</sup> Invariably, the point made by Mazrui in the above quote is that the colonial machinery has bastardized and distorted African identity so severely that it has become necessary to re-construct an authentic African subjectivity. According to its criteria, classification, and categorization, the colonial structure invented superior humanity for itself

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<sup>251</sup> Quoted in Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Ali a Mazrui on the Invention of Africa and Postcolonial Predicaments: 'My Life Is One Long Debate'," *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (2015): 209.

with respect to non-Europeans.<sup>252</sup> The loss of her indigenous identity leaves her vulnerable to an estranged structure created outside her space, one that saw the lack of any form of central authority and a defined structure of control as evidence of savagery, irrationality, and lack of civilization.<sup>253</sup> Space, understood as the location where people live and formulate their vision of life is also identified by the Goemai with the land and their cosmo vision. Mudimbe clearly articulates the underlying motive of European colonization in Africa in the hypotheses he propounded as the process of colonization. Mudimbe's three hypotheses include the domination of physical space, the reformation of natives' minds, and the integration of local economic histories into the Western perspectives (the colonizing structure).<sup>254</sup> The invisible colonizing structure entails ideological constructions that reduce indigenous epistemology to mere fairy tales and irrational documentation of the people's primitiveness. Santos describes the collective impact of the colonial structure using the term "epistemicide," by which he meant the non-validation of non-white.

Mignolo, in his article titled "Epistemic Disobedience: The Decolonial Option and the meaning of Identity in Politics," objected to the Cartesian claim of the epistemic subject as the only germane or even existing subject by calling for a rejection of the Cartesian foundation of Western epistemology. It entails adopting the de-colonial option, which is epistemic, and de-linking from the geo-politics<sup>255</sup> of the Western imperial epistemology to geo-politics of racialized people.

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<sup>252</sup> Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, 154.

<sup>253</sup> Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 149.

<sup>254</sup> Valentin Yves Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 2.

<sup>255</sup> The term was originally coined by the Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellén at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It became widespread in Europe between the two world wars and later gained worldwide usage. It situates international politics in time and space, that is, in particular geographical settings and environments. It portends that power and politics are effected and affected by the geographic and political landscape.

### 1.8.1. Nature, Natural, and Naturalization

When the West describes Africa in derogatory terms, such as the Dark Continent,<sup>256</sup> the *Heart of Darkness*,<sup>257</sup> and “The Hopeless Continent,”<sup>258</sup> this correlates with the Hobbesian state of nature. Mudimbe, for his part, traces three stages in the invention of primitive Africa: the exotic text of savages due to the reports of travelers (seventeenth century), philosophical interpretation of the hierarchy of civilization (enlightenment eighteenth century), and the anthropological search for primitiveness (all thanks to European consciousness).<sup>259</sup> Western perception of Africans is captured in the example of the sixteenth-century assertion of John Locke when he described Africans as “people of beastly living, without a God, law, religion.”<sup>260</sup> The obvious consequences of such statements are the invention of Africa and the objectification of Africa following the scientific method of investigation. Experience, however, has led to a rejection of colonial indoctrination as the historical perspective of the Goemai shows the people's rich cultural and historical past as well as a civilization of control over some forces of nature to be integrated into its space and traditional values.

The stereotypical reference to Africans as “savages,” “irrational” beings, those in the Hobbesian state of nature where people lived wild as bushmen depicted in the movie *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, and all that is drawn from the film apply to the Goemai. The concepts of ethnicity and culture were the two dominant motifs that ran through the movie's storyline. The African (played by the actor Xi) is portrayed stereotypically as “culturally backward” and “living

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<sup>256</sup> Henry M Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent*, vol. 1 (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company, Ltd, 1878). It has been used as a metaphor for Africa as the Other as a negative reference to Sub-Saharan Africa to further Western dominance. See also, Lucy Jarosz, “Constructing the Dark Continent: Metaphor as Geographic Representation in Africa, in, *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography*, Vol 74, No. 2 (1992), pp. 105-115.

<sup>257</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (United Kingdom: Blackwood's Magazine, 1902).

<sup>258</sup> *The Economist* on May 13, 2000.

<sup>259</sup> Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, 69.

<sup>260</sup> Quoted in, *ibid.*, 71.

in innocence.”<sup>261</sup> This is expressed in the lack of all that the whites identify with civilization and development, lack of clothing, and rationality, among many other deficiencies. Xi is sent to jail for his irrational way of shooting at a goat with a tranquilizer arrow. He was then employed as a prisoner to be the tracker for M’pudi and Steyn. It depicts how the indigenous person become visible and valuable only when he is put at the service of the white. According to Ndlovu, the stereotyping of Africans was such that “what was abundant in Africa ... was not civilization, but nature.”<sup>262</sup> The association of Africans with nature reinforces the colonial rhetoric of primitivism and barbarism. Nature elicits a notion of backwardness as in living in the wild in the linear construction of time.

The construction of Africans as violent cannibals was also portrayed in the television series *Shake Zulu* in the late 1980s (ten episodes of about 50 minutes each) created by Ed Harper with Henry Cele, Robert Powell, Edward Fox, etc., as the cast.<sup>263</sup> Reacting to the characterization of the Zulu, Mazisi, the Zulu poet, is known to have described the series as rotten. He continued, “It should not have been shown again, as it was mainly based on lies and was a propaganda tool aimed at projecting the Zulu people and their king as bloodthirsty savages and whites as their saviours [sic].”<sup>264</sup> The consequence of the different constructions of the indigenous persons as savage, damned, and irrational colonial Others easily became naturalized.

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<sup>261</sup> Jamie Uys, "The Gods Must Be Crazy," ed. Jamie Uys (1980). In this one hour, forty-nine minutes 1980 comedy, written and directed by Jamie Uys and produced in South Africa by C.A.T and Mimosa films, N!xau, who featured as Xi, a Sho in Kalahari acts the bushman who encountered civilization in the form of a Coca-Cola bottle. As the bottle was going to cause a problem in the community, he sent it back to the gods, from where he believed it came. Actors Marius Weyers, starring as Andrew Steyn, and Sandra Prinsloo, starring as Kate Thompson, were two of the central characters in the movie. Part two of the movie was made in 1989.

<sup>262</sup> Ndlovu, *Performing Indigeneity*, 53.

<sup>263</sup> [https://www.yidio.com/movie/shaka-zulu/148672?utm\\_source=Bing&utm\\_medium=search&utm\\_source=64&utm\\_campaign=1994&msclkid=b64cafab7e1411443274cecf0dbb8738](https://www.yidio.com/movie/shaka-zulu/148672?utm_source=Bing&utm_medium=search&utm_source=64&utm_campaign=1994&msclkid=b64cafab7e1411443274cecf0dbb8738) (accessed 11/26/2021).

<sup>264</sup> Quoted in Ndlovu, *Performing Indigeneity*, 82.

### 1.8.2. Colonial Organization of Goemai Society

Many indigenous societies have no specific day set aside for religious services, like the Sunday of the Christians. And some African societies observe a typical week marked by market days when the people come together not only for the transaction of goods and services but also to engage in interpersonal interactions (socialization) with other persons. The Meta people of Cameroon had an eight-day week, and the Egyptians had a ten-day week, to mention two examples. These and many other typical weeks of indigenous peoples were destroyed by Western colonization. Colonization saw the imposition of the seven-day week of the Gregorian calendar.<sup>265</sup>

The Yoruba people of southwest Nigeria recognize and operate on a five-day week. Apart from day markets, night markets are believed to be meeting points of the ancestors, spirits, and deities. As a result, markets are recognized as sacred spaces.<sup>266</sup> The seven-day week of the West made it difficult for many indigenous people to observe the spirit of market experience that cements the bond of togetherness. With colonialism, the market symbolism as the interactive space became the place of transaction. The understanding of the week was transformed to follow the Western-Christian binary of sacred and profane with the one sacred day—Sunday—dedicated to worship. Indigenous relations with their space, with Western intrusion, no longer followed ancestral ways. It negatively impacted the functioning of indigenous institutions leading to the loss of the relevance of the market square.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Ambe I. Njoh, *Tradition, Culture and Development in Africa: Historical Lessons for Modern Development Planning* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), 33-34.

<sup>266</sup> Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 67.

<sup>267</sup> Njoh, *Tradition, Culture and Development in Africa*, 44.

The seven-day week of the Goemai is connected with preparing the local beer (*mues*), the food of the gods. The millet is soaked in water for three days before grinding, and preparations take another three days. Consumption is on the seventh day, known as *she mues*. *She mues goemeh* is one week, and *she mues fer* is four weeks.<sup>268</sup> The disturbed Goemai field of vision has resulted in the disfigurement of the traditional structures of administration (centralization of the Goemai society under the paramount headship of the *Long Du'ut* as the *Long Goemai*), the waning of the powers and influences of the *Shinkwan*, and *Kampiring*, the disappearance of the *luu das* (the meeting place of the elders and the initiated men), the indifference of the youths toward Goemai spiritual rituals and rites, and the near extinction of the practice of *kes paa* (divination) due to the dearth of the Goemai *Moe Paa* (diviners), is in dire need of reconstitution by way of upholding the sacredness of Goemai heritage.<sup>269</sup>

### **1.9. Rethinking Goemai Identity: Learning in Noncolonial Terms**

The dislocation suffered by the indigenous person necessitates the reimagination and reconstruction of their worldview to overcome being the victim of western civilization. There is a need for the indigenous person, viz., the Goemai, to break free from the shackles of the colonial matrix of power that imprisons her in a fixed state of being that makes full humanization of the indigenous persons a mirage and, consequently, as leaves them as slaves or objects of the western subject. However, according to Santos, the Goemai, like the indigenous people, must exercise a hermeneutic of suspicion in relation to euro-centric cosmo vision as keeping a distance from Eurocentric critical tradition “means exercising a hermeneutic of suspicion regarding its ‘foundational truths’ by uncovering what lies below their ‘face value.’ It means giving attention

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<sup>268</sup> See Appendix 1:289.

<sup>269</sup> See Appendix 1:300-301.

to the suppressed or marginalized smaller traditions within the big Western tradition.”<sup>270</sup> In this vein, reconstructing an authentic Goemai identity necessitates the realization that only the hybrid Goemai indigenous knowledge provides for any valid claim of identity.

The significance of the *locus of enunciation* (the space) cannot be overemphasized in the re-linking process. Herein lies the notion of re-appropriating society’s values within the present reality to hope for a better future. Just like the formation of the Jewish community, the memory of the foundational myth and fathers enhanced the identity construction of the people of God; Goemai continue to flourish through their recollection of ancestral myths and associated rituals.<sup>271</sup> The contextuality of identity indicates the correlation between spatiality and existence (being). The implication is that being is impossible without the space from which it generates meaning from the relationship experience. A Goemai identity generated from the Goemai context will be influenced by the connectedness that defines indigenous community living—relationships among people and between people and the cosmos, *Kwap nda*, *Mukwarkum*, *Mu’ut*, and *Na’an*. Cultural influence also due to hybridization must be taken into consideration.

As Uzukwu has aptly pointed out, the Jews privileged their experiences of Yahweh, but they were not closed to the experiences of their neighbors.<sup>272</sup> Any genuine articulation of Goemai identity must reflect all the constituent aspects of the Goemai world, bolstering the importance of indigenous harmony without which there is no life. On his part, Orobator captures the significance of life for the African when he writes, “[I]ife is the guarantee of wholeness and universal harmony within and between the material and the spiritual.”<sup>273</sup> Disconnection from the

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<sup>270</sup> Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 44.

<sup>271</sup> See, Uzukwu, *Worship as Body Language*. He articulates so well the motif of remembering in the formation of the Jewish community and its continued understanding as a chosen and liberated people.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>273</sup> Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, *Religion and Faith in Africa: Confessions of an Animist* (New York: Orbis Books, 2018), 116.

community is interpreted as a loss of humanity since flourishing is a decision to attain a Goemai-ness that is only realized in not just *being* alone but from the unity of *being with and being for*. And that what the Goemai context is all about.

In his book, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, Magesa sees religion<sup>274</sup> as a “way of life” and “life itself.” He articulates the idea of abundant life by which life is transmitted in fullness from generation to generation for the good of the individuals and the community at large. Though Magesa portrays African culture as one with the primary aim of promoting life in its fullness, he also reflects on the enemies of life whose activities necessitate restoring balance for peace and prosperity. African culture as life-enhancing is not to mean that there are no practices or aspects of the culture which may constitute a hindrance to life, like the aspect of the exclusions of women from participation in some significant rites, rituals, and even governance of society, which Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor highlighted in his book, *Morality: Truly Christian, Truly African: Foundational, Methodological and Theological Considerations*. Odozor points out situations where the tradition is life-negating and even oppressive to men and women.<sup>275</sup> Despite that, it is evident that the overarching character in African culture is life-enhancement, which is evident in the rites and rituals accompanying the various stages of human growth, development, and maturity, like the rites of birth, initiation, marriage, death, and burial. The Goemai culture promotes its ritualization of life for the person’s overall wellbeing. Only persons immersed in the community’s ritualized cycle of life carry the full identity of Goemai.

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<sup>274</sup> Religion and culture are inseparable in African tradition. The holistic view of reality in Africa constitutes the understanding that the living, the dead, and the unborn form a community. The spiritualization of culture and the contextualization of spirituality in culture entails that the individual cannot be culturally one thing and spiritually another. The western binary of the religious-profane dichotomy of reality does not make sense to the African in her worldview. For the African mind, spirituality is formalized in culture while culture is expressed in spirituality.

<sup>275</sup> Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor, *Morality Truly Christian Truly African* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), 84. Paulinus is a Spiritan priest from Nigeria. His interests are in Foundational issues in Christian Ethics, the History of Catholic Moral Theology, and African Christian Theology.



Edwin Etieyibo, in his article titled, “The Question of Cultural Imperialism in African Philosophy,” provides a good account of the positions of African Philosophers categorized into two schools: the universalists and particularists. The categorization is based on the methodology of the two schools as to whether the discipline of philosophy is universal or particular in nature and character. The universalist school of thought is represented by philosophers like Peter O. Bodunrin, Kwasi Wiredu, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Paulin Hountondji, among many others. They believe that African Philosophy cannot be extricated from universal philosophy. The universal relevance of knowledge is behind the universalists’ idea. On the other hand, the particularists represented by A. A. Ayoade, Campbell S. Momoh, K. C. Anyanwu, Kwame Gyekye, J. Olubi Sodipo, and Richard C. Onwuanibe, among others, defend the idea that experience and space influence the way people understand the cosmos.<sup>276</sup> As far as this particular group of philosophers is concerned, knowledge is a product of its *locus of enunciation*; all knowledge is spatially contextual and, therefore, localized and valid in its right.

Etieyibo surmises how Bodunrin would be willing to subject African Philosophy, understood here as indigenous epistemology, as inferior to the “superior” Western Philosophy. For Bodunrin, the quality of philosophies is determined by the kind of societies they produce. As a result, African philosophy as a product of African societies is inferior to Western Philosophy, typified by the Western worldview it produced.<sup>277</sup> Though Bodunrin, in alluding to the superiority of the Western worldview due to its philosophy, may have chosen to be oblivious of the deliberate effort of the West to undermine Africa and its worldview. This, in my view,

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<sup>276</sup> Edwin Etieyibo, "The Question of Cultural Imperialism in African Philosophy," ed. Jonathan O. Chimakonam, *Atuolu Omalu: Contemporary Questions in Contemporary African Philosophy* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2015), Proquest Ebook Central. 166-70. Etieyibo is a Nigerian-Canadian African philosophy. He is a professor of philosophy at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. He is an advocate of Ethnophilosophy.

<sup>277</sup> See, *ibid.*, 174.

further challenges the need for African institutions of learning to revise their curricula to reflect Africa's cultural values and experiences.

Interestingly, Innocent Onyewuenyi sharply disagrees with Bodunrin. He is of the view that every knowledge is culturally and contextually determined. Thereby making the ideological neutrality of a contextually constructed knowledge constantly subjected on the altar of the hermeneutics of suspicion.

The conceptualization of indigenous knowledge produced within their localities gives a reinterpretation or alternative thinking to the global design approach.<sup>278</sup> In the words of Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí,<sup>279</sup> “all concepts come with their own cultural and philosophical baggage, much of which becomes alien distortion when applied to cultures other than those from which they derive.”<sup>280</sup> Since language is not conceptually and ideologically neutral, it behooves Africans to reconceptualize the “forced language” of colonialism in a way that expresses their experiences and relates to their worldview. Learning must be re-contextualized from Eurocentric ideological foundations to the African context, that is, the re-Africanization of the de-Africanized

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<sup>278</sup> Ramon Grosfoguel, "Geopolitics of Knowledge and Coloniality of Power: Thinking Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans from the Colonial Difference," in *Culture, Power, and History: Studies in Critical Sociology*, ed. Stephen Pfohl, et al., Studies in Critical Social Sciences (Boston: Brill, 2006), 479.

<sup>279</sup> Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí is a Nigerian decolonial feminist sociologist whose work, *The Invention of Women; Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, demonstrates how colonialism and its discourse of categorization are problematic. Oyěwùmí tries to make sense of the essentialization of man and woman in Western society. This for her is foreign to the Yoruba context and space. For Oyěwùmí, the imposition of Western gender categories on Yoruba discourse calls for an epistemological shift from a Western ideology of biological determinism which has made the body the basis of social roles, inclusions, or exclusion, the basis of social thought and identity. She finds a problem with the universalization of the Western body-based categories for interpreting Yoruba society historically and in the contemporary period. For the decolonial sociologist, Eurocentric biological-reasoning only constructs gender differentiation to make gender visible. She holds that the gender imposition of English on the Yoruba language meant the masculinization of universal authority categories and ascribing to women the residual attribute of deprivation. For her, Western feminist discourses have categorized women as a homogenous, bio-anatomical group constituted as powerless and victimized. This is in spite of the fact that gender relations are social relations that are historically grounded and culturally bound. It must be stated in unequivocal terms that Oyěwùmí does not make any form of generalization based on her unique study. Her contribution to decolonial thought is invaluable because she demonstrated how Western constructs distort and deform indigenous societies and structures. For more, see, Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women*.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., xi.

subject; in other words, African gnosis has to claim its independence from Western traditions. Ndlovu-Gatsheni calls it “epistemic freedom,” viz., developing means of understanding their universe from their *locus of enunciation*. Claude Ake calls for a reflection on Africa’s problem to proffer contextual solutions that reflect Africa’s experience.<sup>281</sup> The fear of letting go of what Africans have learned is linked to the shame of becoming an empty vessel. Freedom is when the indigenous person crosses the constructed line, that is, the epistemic line of Ndlovu-Gatsheni which is the “cosmological line” that delineates those in bondage (indigenous persons) from the free (Europeans), the damned from the saved, the civilized from the primitive. For the Goemai to think and learn in non-colonial terms she has to construct an alternative way of thinking, or as Ndlovu refers to it, “rethinking thinking” within her location.

#### **1.10. The Colonial Rhetoric of Development as Salvation**

Ndlovu-Gatsheni holds that the concept of development is so heuristic that it escapes definition, and it is considered to have arisen from what Arturo Escobar referred to as the “colonization of reality,” which saw the construction of the colonial/Third world subject. The development discourse, according to Escobar, relies on the one knowledge system—the modern Western. It results from a modernist perspective of reality that does not allow for alternatives.<sup>282</sup>

Mignolo explains how, in the initial stage of coloniality, salvation is aimed at saving the souls of the non-European—the damned by way of conversion, viz., abandoning indigenous spirituality for Western-Christian faith. The second stage transitions from the rhetoric of salvation to the logic of control of the soul of the non-white. Here, the Europeans, through their civilizing mission, equated Christendom with the European empire and conversion as accepting

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<sup>281</sup> Quoted in, Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization*, Rethinking Development (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 16. See Claude Ake

<sup>282</sup> *Empire, Coloniality and African Subjectivity* (New York: Berghahn, 2013), 75-78.

the control of the colonial matrix of power where the politics of God (Theo-politics) became the politics of the self (ego-politics). The third stage is that of the politics of life itself. This was basically implemented in developed countries into the dominance of big tech corporations as modernity connotes development where citizens become health consumers. For the rest of the world, the metamorphosis was from civilization to development, where the *damned of the earth* must accept salvation by conversion to Western Christianity and civilization, with prosperity in economic development. And secondly, coloniality is rooted in the theo-politics of knowledge, where God is the source of knowledge. Though later displaced by secularism, in the sense that Reason (ego-politics) replaced God (theo-politics), there was a marriage of convenience as the issue of maintaining the epistemic and political control of the West.<sup>283</sup>

#### **1.10.1. Saving the Damned**

Metaphorically portrayed as the “Dark Continent” (possibly as a result of the false perception of the absence of the “true God” characterized by what is believed to be superstitious beliefs and practices), Africa and its “cosmological religiosity” needs to be brought into the belief system of the West.<sup>284</sup> It required a superior faith to get the lost indigenous people into the realm of the light of the “Christian God.” Belonging to the Empire became a prerequisite for belonging to Christendom. According to Comaroff and Comaroff, the Church played a significant role in the subjugation of the continent because it helped mask the colonial project by way of being its “special agent, scribe, and moral alibi.”<sup>285</sup>

The motif of salvation led the missionaries to abominable atrocities on the people and their culture. This irony of salvation led to the enslavement of those meant to be set free.

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<sup>283</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011), 13-15.

<sup>284</sup> Njoh, *Tradition, Culture and Development in Africa*, 41.

<sup>285</sup> Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 1, 88.

According to Orobator, without the indigenous spiritual background of the people who are said to be notoriously religious, perhaps the conversion of the Africans may have been vehemently resisted, and today's Christian dominance of Africa would not have been possible. Mignolo surmises that the Christian root of the construction of the continents followed the "tripartite Christian division of the world in Asia/Shem, Africa/Ham, and Europe/Japheth,"<sup>286</sup> the three sons of the biblical Noah. And Ham/Africa was the cursed son of Noah who needed to be redeemed from the curse.

### **1.11. Conclusion**

The extensive exploration of the Goemai and their locality is not just for the sake of surveying the history and learning the geography of the Goemai people. In this chapter, I situated the Goemai within their local context. The purpose is to present a people, their lifestyle, traditions, rites and rituals, ancestral wisdom and memory, and a presentation of the Goemai land and features. The presentation shows how the social memory of the Goemai is inseparable from the identity of the people. The history and wisdom of the Goemai are not only couched in the wise sayings, legends, myths, rituals, and ceremonies of the Goemai but the features also embody the ancestral memory. For the Goemai, life is understood in the relationship that binds the people to their space and the space inscribed in the people. While the people carry their land, the land bears witness to the people's authenticity, constructing the memory of an ancestral way of life—culture. The ritual performance is a form of communication that shapes the identity of the people as a communal activity for socialization. It also helps the Goemai enter into the

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<sup>286</sup> Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 24.

culture with oral tradition as its mode of transmission of history, ancestral wisdom, and experiences.<sup>287</sup>

In the next chapter, I will interpret the Goemai experience and spatial features that give the Goemai their specificity. Just as the land, geography, and history aid the memory to reminisce the past in the present. I believe that the retrieval and revalorization of the past, as well as its interpretation in the context of today's experience, which includes that which has made the Goemai who she is in her relationship with her universe, inclusive of the colonial wound, can help the reconstruction of a Goemai-ness that can serve the reappropriation of a Goemai Christian spirituality. The purpose of the revalorized Goemai religiosity is to help this reappropriation where the Goemai Christian may find a way of being Goemai the way that Jesus could have been Goemai. It provides a new trajectory for evangelization; that is, it must seek to "transform the practice and experience of being Goemai so that Goemai identity becomes a mode of realizing Christian meaning."<sup>288</sup> It is about how the faith expression in Goemai land with its Goemai identity will embody the Christian meaning. In this sense, incarnation entails that the Goemai identity provides a specific context for understanding the Christian message. The revalorized past is, in fact, the authentic mode of Goemai's existence. The intention is to renegotiate the meaning of Goemai land, history, rituals, rites, and ceremonies for a reconstruction that considers the experience of the Goemai space and worldview today.

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<sup>287</sup> James A. Maxey, *From Orality to Orality: A New Paradigm for Contextual Translation of the Bible*, ed. David Rhoads, Biblical Performance Criticism (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2009), 2.

<sup>288</sup> Andrew Orta, "Converting Difference: Metaculture, Missionaries, and the Politics of Locality," *Ethnology* 37, no. 2 (1998): 171.

## Chapter 2

### **Christian Liturgy and Challenge for a Re-appropriation of Goemai Rituals and Symbols**

“A people without memory are in danger of losing their soul” – Ngugi wa Thiong’o

Biblical accounts show how in the early days of Christianity, the Jews wanted to impose their cultural practices on the Gentiles (Acts 15). The issue of the Jewish-Gentile relationship was settled in favor of the evolution of indigenous-Christian identity where Gentile converts were only required by the Council of Jerusalem to keep the bare essentials of the faith in the Messiah and not the non-essential elements of Jewish culture. The implication of such a profound theological decision is the general acceptance into the new Christian faith of some characteristics of the non-Jewish and Gentile world. In other words, the Gentile space was recognized as a fertile ground for the incarnation of the Gospel. It was a way of valorizing the Gentile space. The Ghanaian theologian Kwame Bediako has noted that some African theologians have rejected the demonization of African religiosity and deduced from this the importance of valorizing indigenous spirituality. He agrees with certain African theologians who reject the demonization of Africans and their religiosity that the acceptance of Christianity by the Africans cannot be simply equated with a wholesale endorsement of the introduction of a new Divinity that was totally alien to their cultural heritage and spiritual values. It may be legitimately argued that the intensely spiritual orientation of the Africans provided the fertile ground for welcoming the missionaries.<sup>289</sup> For the indigenous African, daily living is intrinsically tied to maintaining harmony with her ancestors and other spiritual realities, rites,

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<sup>289</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in the African Culture (a Ghanaian Perspective)* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1990), 6.

and rituals. This strong desire to retain and consolidate the close ties between the physical and spiritual defines the character of African spirituality.

Christian ritualization of the worship of the divine is understood as liturgy. The term comes from the Greek *leitourgia*, understood as the public duty of the people to praise, thank, and worship God through rites and rituals. Liturgy is essentially understood in connection with the bestowal of grace from God. Grace, as God's unmerited gift, draws the people to the acknowledgment of divine love, which goes beyond just an affirmation of the existence of God but calls the people to divine reverence in the form of worship. The manifestation of the love of God in Christ challenges the Christian to love and adore the Triune God. Liturgy, thus, commences in the Father's gratuitous self-giving in Christ through the Spirit. Worship is a response to the activity of the Triune God in awe, praise, and adoration.<sup>290</sup> In Christian liturgy, the participants are not enacting something that was not. They are only entering into an already established divine logic in which the Trinitarian God gives the God-self as love.<sup>291</sup> Liturgy follows the two trajectories of "reception" and "oblation," where the received gift elicits a sacrifice of thanksgiving. It is for this reason that Mbiti opines that worship is an act of linking the spiritual and the physical worlds.<sup>292</sup> This union gives rise to the ritualization of symbols as a liturgical language of communication with the Divine. While the Western Christian worldview keeps these realms separate, indigenous spirituality comprehends both as one single reality.

The Letter to the Hebrews provides the medium for indigenous people to appropriate the universal significance of the salvific work of Jesus Christ as the High Priest. Following how Bediako relates the Akan people of Ghana to Jesus Christ, Africans can apply it to themselves to

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<sup>290</sup> See, CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA: Liturgy, <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09306a.htm> (Accessed 11/12/2022).

<sup>291</sup> Madathummuriyil, *Sacrament as Gift*, 273.

<sup>292</sup> John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 2nd ed. (Waveland: Waveland Press, Inc, 2015), 61.



recognize Christ, the Eternal Word, as the world's Savior. The Letter to the Hebrews explains the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in terms of the biblical tradition of sacrifice and the mediating role of the high priest.<sup>293</sup> Africans relate to the tradition of sacrifice, high priestly mediation, and ancestral function. According to Bediako, these features in African indigenous cosmogony correlate with the context that the Letter to the Hebrews was written to help their understanding of Christ's relevance to their lives. Sacrifices in most indigenous societies are avenues for purification and atonement. Jesus Christ as the Lamb of atonement fulfills the significance of the restorative function of sacrifices (cf. Hebrews 9:12). As the High Priest, Jesus' mediative role as the Incarnate Word transcends any particularity. As the Eternal Word, Christ entered the heavenly shrine to offer the perfect sacrifice of redemption in the presence of God (Hebrews 9:24).<sup>294</sup>

In my opinion, and this agrees with the views I collated from my interviews, ethnic sacrifices are not as obsolete as Bediako would want to believe but are to be incorporated by way of new understanding into the sacrifice of Christ. An important question to reflect on is this: if the memory of the ancestors in the indigenous context is not obsolete for Christianity to thrive on, how would ethnic sacrifices be obsolete for the sacrifice of Christ to perfect? Not doing that, we would fail to adhere to the Lord's command to "do this in memory of me," as sacrifice would be taken from the context of the ritualistic meal from which the Eucharist was instituted. True indigenization of the Eucharist is to have a Christic understanding of ethnic sacrifices as Passover meals in which Christ is the Passover lamb. This draws attention to some of the critical

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<sup>293</sup> Bediako, *Jesus in the African Culture (a Ghanaian Perspective)*, 34.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, 35-37.

issues often raised in the debate among theologians concerning the use of cultural elements in Eucharistic celebration.<sup>295</sup>

This also relates to issues of reinterpreting the divine personality of Jesus to adequately fit into the pre-existing family and ancestral functions of the Africans. For example, how can Jesus be reinterpreted to fit the role of ancestor since he does not share the same earthly patrimony with the Africans? The understanding of the Church as the family of God in John Paul II's Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* (EA) articulates the views of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar of the African church as the family of God.<sup>296</sup> African "family fraternity" underlies the deliberations and decisions of the Bishops. Family engagement is to define the exchanges leading to an African liturgy.<sup>297</sup> The church as a family helps situate Jesus as an ancestor within the African worldview since we share much in common as family members. Bediako would prefer to have Jesus fulfill the ancestral functions within the sphere of identification, as ancestral functions are part of "the myth-making imagination of the community."<sup>298</sup>

The subsequent sections of this Chapter analyze the necessity of an intercultural engagement of contexts, their symbolisms, and rituals to explain the iconic representation of the ritualized cosmology of the Goemai. The sections look closely at Goemai rites and rituals carried

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<sup>295</sup> Uzukwu has made valuable contributions to this debate. See, E. Elochukwu Uzukwu, "Food and Drink in Africa and the Christian Eucharist: An Inquiry into the Use of African Symbols in the Eucharistic Celebration," *Bulletin de Théologie Africaine* 2, no. 4 (1980). Uzukwu argues for the incarnation of Christ in Africa. He explores the African offering of what they eat to their deities in the same manner the Jews offered their first fruits from the produce of their land to Yahweh and celebrated harvest festivals as what became their experience after the exile. For Uzukwu, since millet and palm wine are widespread in most African societies and have the possibility of acceptance by the rest of the world, they could be used as elements for the Eucharistic rituals having the possibility of being comparable to the elements used by Jesus. He advocates for Africa to be an Ecclesiastical region to develop its own liturgical rite.

<sup>296</sup> EA #63.

<sup>297</sup> EA #64.

<sup>298</sup> Bediako, *Jesus in the African Culture (a Ghanaian Perspective)*, 39.

out in a spirit of ceremonial worship of *Na'an* accompanied by sacrifices, libations, cleansing, and purification. Among the many rites of the Goemai are sowing and reaping, birth, initiation or rite of passage, marriage, and funeral. The systematization of the Indigenous religiosities of Africa, in general, and Goemai religiosity, in particular, is not an outlined discourse but carefully choreographed ritual symbolism used to enter into communion with *Na'an*. The traditional and ritualistic African worldview is a medium of special and particular divine revelation. In the words of Bolaji Idowu, “*the very essence of the African religion is found in the practice of it and not in theological exegesis; it is in the form of liturgy [...] that its theology is systematised [sic].*”<sup>299</sup>

The chapter also seeks to achieve a “deep seeing” or perception of the sacramental reality in Goemai space. It attempts what Sebastian Madathummuril articulates as “the freeing of the object from the subjective perception of the perceiver so that the object could give itself as it is.”<sup>300</sup> In other words, it seeks to train the Western mind/eye to view the Goemai-symbolized universe from the position of the Goemai. This will, hopefully, facilitate the appreciation of the mediated presence of the Divine and its re-appropriation as a means of Goemai encounter with God in Christian liturgy. Here, the decolonial concepts of interculturality, hybridity, and indigenization would be privileged over inculturation, which as a Western concept, would not fit the post-colonial context of this work. In my judgment, the widespread use of the term inculturation is somehow presumptive in its connotations, viz., the superiority of the Western Christian culture over indigenous cultures; the fact that indigenous culture must accept the foreign culture and be transformed by it. This logic does not fit the incarnational dynamics of the

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<sup>299</sup> Neiers, *The People of the Jos Plateau, Nigeria*, 83. Sr. Marie is quoting Bolaji Idowu.

<sup>300</sup> Madathummuriyil, *Sacrament as Gift*, 2.

Word becoming human (self-emptying). Inculturation, in my opinion, is not open to recognizing the equality of all cultures and the validity of the indigenous experience of the divine.

Interculturality is a concept that is closely related to hybridity, which has to do with the marriage of the Christian experience and indigenous cultural heritage. With its iconoclastic logic, the negative stereotype of indigenous people by Western Christians gives the impression of the impossibility of a cross-cultural engagement. It acknowledges the spatiality of being and knowledge expressed in the decolonial principle, *I am where I think*.

Consequently, this chapter focuses on the diversities of spaces as places of meaningful experience of God. Therefore, it is presumptive to read meaning in a foreign context without inserting oneself into the context to perceive and understand the meaning constructed within. Otherwise, the outcome is a “forced meaning,” constructed in a different context but imposed in another worldview. It achieves this through re-appropriation to prioritize vital aspects of the Goemai culture that aid the preservation and renewal of the fading identity of the people by restoring the aesthetic, moral, and spiritual values that enhance the Goemai socio-historical relationships and maintain the cultural roots of accessing the Divine.<sup>301</sup>

Intercultural theology presupposes intercultural hermeneutics, which involves the various modes of interpretation and understanding within and between cultures. According to Wrogemann, the emphasis of intercultural theology is “to help people progress beyond binary interpretative models and to come to a better understand.”<sup>302</sup> In other words, there is a plurality of meanings as there are numerous cultures. Therefore, it is imperative to recognize and

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<sup>301</sup> Graham Duncan and Ogbu U. Kalu, "Bakuzufu: Revival Movements and Indigenous Appropriation in African Christianity," in *African Christianity: An African Story*, ed. Ogbu U. Kalu (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 2007), 246.

<sup>302</sup> Henning Wrogemann, *Intercultural Theology: Intercultural Hermeneutics*, trans. Karl E. Bohmer, English ed., 2 vols. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016), 1:xvi.

acknowledge the validity of every cultural expression. It holds that every meaning is contextually defined, and every spiritual encounter has cultural coloration. Therefore, in intercultural engagement, intercultural theology takes its significance, cultural specificity is celebrated, and the hierarchization of culture is rejected. A fruitful cultural engagement results in a hybrid culture which Bhabha refers to as the third space.<sup>303</sup> Therefore, hybridity is the birth of a new culture from multicultural engagement/encounter where the new culture is neither/nor.

The logic of the incarnation must inspire the need for a localized Goemai form of Christianity. If there is only one God, as professed by Christianity, then this God must be the basis for diversity and differences. All people must worship God within their quotidian experience to express their authenticity and culture.

### **2.1. Goemai Cosmological Reality and Ritualization**

For the Nobel laureate Soyinka, space is more than a physical area but a conscious awareness of being. It is the locality where people make sense of themselves and their world. The cultural shock of displacement from the space of reason to the space of relationship where the people understand themselves within the multiple webs of relationships that define their cosmology can only be understood by the adjectives employed in describing the space by the West.

The Goemai experienced a displacement from their awe-inspiring space of mystery with the desacralizing attitude of modern man. Since the gaze differentiates between the profane and the sacred, the transforming ideological construct of the Western spatial experience distorts the indigenous context. The Goemai is not to find the presence of the Divine since their space led

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<sup>303</sup> The Third Space is the invisible space of convergence/engagement of two different *loci of enunciation*. As an intermediary space of meaning production, it is neither/nor of the two cultural spaces. It is the space of intercultural hybridity that allows for the renewal of translation, appropriation, historicization, and reading. As a space of engagement, it is not completely disconnected from the cultural space to allow identity construction in a process of rejuvenation so that people are not caught in the trap of the past and its colonial wound but that which allows for newness. See, Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 36-39, 101.

them to construct a pantheon that recognizes the Divine presence *where they are*. As such, rituals must have developed from practices that have given people a sense of cohesion, identity, and mystery. The inseparable link between space and rituals (the *Matkoeroem, mai*, connect the people with the sacred place) can be explained in the sense that space generates rituals when people respond to their environment, and rituals sacralize locations for Divine experience (experience of mystery). Julius O. Adekunle highlights the connection between space, time, and rituals to the extent that the repetitive performance of rituals sacralizes space, time, and the people who participate in ritualizing.<sup>304</sup> Rituals link the past to the present and future, and every reality is connected with the Divinity, *Na'an*, in the case of the Goemai.

Performance comes with awe/inspiration from space. Rituals as performative actions by which indigenous people concretize their theological reflections in a mode of worship that demonstrates the link between the *seen* and *unseen* worlds. They influence happenings on the spiritual level as every action in the material world is always played out in the spiritual realm before it happens in the physical realm.<sup>305</sup> Malidoma Patrice Somé puts it in the following words,

[i]ndigenous (African) people see the physical world as a reflection of a more complex, subtler, and more lasting yet invisible entity called energy. It is as if we are the shadows of a vibrant and endlessly resourceful intelligence dynamically involved in a process of continuous self-creation. Nothing happens here that did not begin in that unseen world. If something in the physical world is experiencing instability, it is because its energetic correspondent has been experiencing instability. The indigenous understanding is that the material and physical problems that a person encounters are important only because they are an energetic message sent to the visible world. Therefore, people go to that unseen energetic place to try and repair whatever damage or disturbances are being done

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<sup>304</sup> Julius O. Adekunle, "History and the Sacred: The Royal Tombs of Ibgoho," in *African Sacred Spaces: Culture, History, and Change*, ed. 'BioDun J. Ogundayo and Julius O. Adekunle (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019), 31.

<sup>305</sup> Emmanuel Yartekwei Amugi Lartey, "Postcolonial African Practical Theology: Rituals of Remembrance, Cleansing, Healing and Re-Connection," *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 21, no. 2 (2011): 1-10.

there, knowing that if things are healed there, things will be healed here. Ritual is the principal tool used to approach that unseen world in a way that will rearrange the structure of the physical world and bring about material transformation.<sup>306</sup>

Rituals, as a response to the landscape (mountains, forests, rivers, and groves), are inseparably linked with the community because they are media for articulating the beliefs and *mores* of people responsible for cementing their sense of identity and belonging. They are developed as a means of insertion into the people's sacred space to overcome the incomprehensible mystery of life.<sup>307</sup> Within the context of the indigenous people, and the Goemai in particular, every ritual has a religious significance and "provides not only healing but also recovery of memory and the reaffirmation of an individual's life purpose."<sup>308</sup> Rituals help make present ancestral wisdom and actions associated with the space. Somé also adds that rituals awaken the people's imagination to recollect the community's stories and experiences that aid the construction of identity. The effects of modernization on Goemai space are visible in the changing landscape where the once-sacred forests are depleting, modern constructions have replaced indigenous huts, and *Luu das* are disappearing. Apart from being the meeting places of the *Kwamteng* members and ancestral shrines, they are places where *kwamteng* musical instruments and ritual items are kept.<sup>309</sup> The sacred locations are as revered by many as in the past and stimulate ritualization with the sense of the sacred. It is simplistic to blame modernization, but it must be recognized that people have chosen to abandon their sense of the sacred for the secularized gaze of individualism, a rejection of the web of relationships that defines the universe.

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<sup>306</sup> Malidoma Patrice Somé, *The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding Life Purpose through Nature, Ritual, and Community* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1998), 23. He is a writer, especially in the field of spirituality from Burkina Faso.

<sup>307</sup> Uzukwu, *Worship as Body Language*, 41-43.

<sup>308</sup> Somé, *The Healing Wisdom of Africa*, 32.

<sup>309</sup> John P. Nkwap, "Kwamteng Deity: A Culture-Historic Perspective in Demshin, Shendam Local Government Area Plateau State," *Anthropological Open Journal* 5, no. 2 (2022): 26.

With the breakdown of connection—familial, communal, and spiritual—the Goemai gradually alienates herself from her indigenous space. This does not entail the end of rituals; with modernization, the rituals have evolved into different spheres of relationships and locality. Just as society evolves, rituals remain relevant if they are reimagined within the context of reflection and experience. Reimagination connotes the recollection of cultural memories and established relationships.<sup>310</sup> For the Goemai, this would be ritualizing decolonizing practices of initiation, farming, hunting, protecting sacred rivers and natural features, and deifying symbols to instill reverence and mystery. This can be done by bringing people together at certain times of the year for some creative, contextually constructed rituals. Rituals of resacralization constructed from the inspiration of the space become means of a reconnection to and the reimagination, retrieval, and revalorizing of the indigenous universe. The resacralizing effect of rituals extends to the bond between and among persons.

The sacred forests, rivers, hills, mountains, and shrines are the Goemai places of sacred socialization with the Divine, viz., locations of the convergence of humans and spirits and members among themselves; they are preservers of culture, history, and identity. They help people to recollect and relive their cultural heritage. This way, they possess and reconstruct the initial force behind the action of their ancestors to motivate their lifestyle today creatively. While the land provides nourishment and wealth, it sustains life and enhances interaction; the rivers are, for the people, symbols of purification and cleansing (spiritual revival) as moving water conveys the people's offerings to where it is believed life started, the dwelling of the deities. The *mai* (shrines) are not only places of sacrifice and deity worship; they are recruitment grounds for the *jap kool* (candidates for initiation), usually a vast expanse of land covered with trees and

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<sup>310</sup> Sandra Pannell, "Mabo and Museums: 'The Indigenous (Re) Appropriation of Indigenous Things!'," *Oceania* 65, no. 1 (1994): 20.



grasses.<sup>311</sup> They symbolize sanctuaries of justice and redress for wrongdoings.<sup>312</sup> That is evidenced by the *lap dor* (confession) and *pue ser* (penitential prayer).<sup>313</sup> These certainly provide avenues for revalorizing the spirit of purity, social justice, harmony, selflessness, and reverence for the spiritual and physical realities. These geographical features need to be protected from the intrusion of people so that their sacred significance is not lost. It behooves the chiefs, elders, people, and the Church to prioritize the designation and conservation of these cultural heritage places as historical sites for the spiritual renewal of the people. The benefit for the Church is that the people naturally attune themselves to Christian values that inspire the love of God and neighbors from ancestral heritage.

If rituals sacralize place, time, and bonds, disconnection experienced from the colonial wound can only be healed through reconnection with the space from which time is generated. It also becomes the medium of insertion into the context where identity is re-constructed, and relationships are restored. An enduring relationship is not only with the living within the space but with those who once lived within the locality and even the unborn. It helps understand the link that rituals establish with those who performed them. Inspired by the landscape, rituals offer the opportunity to return to the past, where the performer undertakes a journey into the distant past to experience what the ancestors practiced, which has been ritualized over the years. In returning to the past, the entry into the in-between space Bhabha refers to as the third space comes with it. It is the third space in which the performer is neither in the space of the ancestors nor that of the living. It is an experience of an overabundance of being and meaning.<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> Nkwap, "Kwamtemg Deity," 26.

<sup>312</sup> See Appendix 1:274, 279-280.

<sup>313</sup> See Appendix 1:273, 274, 277.

<sup>314</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 36-39, 101.

As evidence of the relationship with *Na'an*, the Goemai the tilling and cultivating of the land to ensure productivity is a sacred act; thus, farming is not aimed at feeding the family and community but entering into collaboration with the land to produce grains for preparing ritualistic meals for the deities. This explains why the Goemai nation becomes desperate when the rains do not come due to drought. Among the *Kwo* and *Dorok*, the *Mang-gap* festival, where the procession of *Dangshang* and the procession of *Mang-gap* from their abode through the village to the shrine within the community, signifies the sacralization of the community where every profane activity is stopped, and ancestral experience is relived. During the festival, noise is prohibited at night, and movements are restricted because the deities do not like noise, and they wish to avoid the desacralization of the ritual process. Only rituals of cleansing, the ritualization of history, and the prescribed celebrations are permitted. Cultural history is ritualized by *Mang-gap* recounting the names of all the chiefs from the first to the present. It is the occasion when people are reminded of their past and the time during which significant events are recognized and remembered.<sup>315</sup>

With the festivities over, *Mang-gap* returns to its abode in the forest, rain is expected to fall to cover its trail, and farming begins with the land cleansed. The same spirit is involved in the ritual of *Mues yil goeteer*, where the land and the people are cleansed before farming at the foot of Jalbang. It is part of the spiritual duty of caring for the deities. Therefore, the traditional Goemai farming spirit can motivate Christians to follow the Divine mandate in Genesis 2:15 for humans to work the land by caring for it so that it can flourish and provide for the people's needs and offering to God. It raises the argument for using indigenous elements to celebrate the Eucharist, for which Uzukwu made a valuable contribution. I will return to this later.

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<sup>315</sup> See Appendix 1:266.

The Goemai worldview described in the first chapter of this work has the Goemai Supreme Deity, *Na'an*, as the creator and sustainer of all that exists. *Na'an*, as the unseen spirit, is aided by *Mu'ut*, *Mukwarkum*, and the *Kwap da* from the spiritual realm and by the Chief, chief priests, and others in the physical realm. One fact is that the presence of *Na'an* is a mediated one. As a sacramental presence, *Na'an* gives Himself through means that are perceived, interpreted, understood, and articulated within the spatial reality of the people who constructed the meanings. The Goemai cultural context, as a semiotic system, continuously produces meanings. Judith Gruber says, “there is no meaning outside, beyond, or apart from these semiotic systems; there is no outside the text, no outside language.”<sup>316</sup> This implies that “forced meaning” is incomprehensible outside the “foreign context” it was constructed. Meanings are understood within the dynamic interpretation of ancestral experiences, particularly in indigenous societies.

The sense of the sacred pervades the perception of many indigenous societies who see the Divine in every creation. The Goemai are no exception concerning the sacredness in and of the universe. *Na'an* permeates everything, not in the sense of pantheism but in a sacramental manner such that all created things reflect the creator’s image. In the indigenous hierarchical ordering of being, that which exists above mediates divine presence to the one below. Ultimately, the spiritual realm mediates the divine to the physical realm in a continuous exchange of life, a

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<sup>316</sup> Judith Gruber, "Interculturality: Space of Difference, Space of Absence: Thinking Universality after the Cultural Turn," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 21, no. 1 (2011): 36. For Gruber, knowledge is culturally conditioned and all cultural contexts function as semiotic systems. She distinguishes between hermeneutics and semiotics. Hermeneutics deals with the interpretation of written texts while semiotics concerns how signs are understood—as an index—representing causation, an icon—representing sensory information, or a symbol—representing sapience (Tary Rankin – [www.quora.com/what-is-the-difference-between-semiotics-and-hermeneutics](http://www.quora.com/what-is-the-difference-between-semiotics-and-hermeneutics)). “Culture, for Gruber, are symbolic spheres in which meaning is produced”(37). They are not also isolated constructs due to the mobility of persons who embody their cultural identity and meanings. She explains how the *locus of enunciation* produces cultural signification limited to it. As such, it is not exhaustive of meaning and cannot claim any form of fullness over against other cultures.

divine gift.<sup>317</sup> The Divine is adored, praised, and worshipped in the remembrance and veneration of the ancestors who inspire a communal sense of a “memorial dynamic,” viz., making present the life, words, and wisdom of the ancestors in the same vein as Christian worship shapes and re-shapes the community in its self-understanding and its aspiration for union and participation in the perfect heavenly liturgy as depicted in the book of the Apocalypse.<sup>318</sup> The re-enactment of ancestral gestures in the community’s creative ritual performance entails the power of the memory to ensure that the past is not left in oblivion but remembered in a dynamic way to give force and meaning to life in the present and future.<sup>319</sup> Rituals, as media for divine worship, are lifelines for any community. For the early Christians, ritual meals helped them unite with the memory of the Lord Jesus. This is like the ritual meal of the Goemai celebrated in memory of the ancestors.

In the article “Jesus Christ as Ancestor: An African Christian Understanding,” Jaco Beyers and Dora N. Mphahlele bolster the significance of the Ancestors in the African cultural worldview, where they are revered as mediators between the people and the spiritual world. As those nearest to the people, they serve as the moral compass of the community, upholders of traditional values, guardians of the people, and guarantors of harmony. Though not humans, they are not the same divine beings and thus cannot be equated with the deities or the Supreme Deity. Their mediative role in indigenous society is similar to that of Christ as the mediator in Christianity; thus, knowing that no single culture exhausts the experiential understanding of Jesus Christ is pertinent. His Christic nature is more than the nomenclature attributed to him. Thus, the African experience of the ancestors and the ritual meal expressed in symbolic actions

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<sup>317</sup> Bénédet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, trans. John O'Donohue, English ed., Faith and Culture Series (Orbis Books, 1992), 18-20.

<sup>318</sup> Uzukwu, *Worship as Body Language*, 70-71.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

help its self-assertion and communal harmony. In this regard, the Mohlakeng experience of Beyers and Mphahlele's research typifies the African experience shaping their understanding of Jesus as the Great Ancestor within the culturally contextual milieu.<sup>320</sup>

Jesus Christ fulfills all the criteria necessary for consideration as an ancestor and is the ancestor *par excellence*. This is because even if he may have died a disgraceful death (Gal 3:13), his is understood as a sacrificial offering of self for restoring harmony and reconnection of humanity with God. The idea of connection, harmony, and ancestors is not foreign to Jewish biblical culture, where both Matthew and Luke trace the ancestry of Jesus following different trajectories (Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38). Matthew started with Abraham, while Luke began with Adam. Jesus, as the Great Ancestor, helps the understanding of the incarnation as the presence of the Divine among humans. His mediatory function makes sense to Africans, who are familiar with the ancestors as mediators between the divinities and humans. The title of Jesus as the Great Ancestor does not diminish his divine nature as Son of God and God through whom and by whom all things came to be (cf. John 1:1-14, John 14:6, John 3:16, Phil 2:5-6, Heb 2:14-18, Luke 19:10, etc.). The notion of Jesus as an ancestor is not acceptable to all.

John Pobee and Benezet Bujo agree with the argument that the title is a way of introducing Christology to the African mind and, as a way, the incarnation may become an African experience. I am drawn to their opinion. The incarnation allows Christ to be Goemai and to enable Goemai to enter into the mystery of his salvific work. That cosmic experience bestows on Christ the qualities of an ancestor—one whose life is to model the Goemai specificity of being Christian. K. Nürnberger, however, disagrees. He sees the ancestors rivaling the power and authority of Christ. For him, the death and resurrection of Christ cannot be compared to the death

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<sup>320</sup> Jaco Beyers and Dora N. Mphahlele, "Jesus Christ as Ancestor: An African Christian Understanding," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 65, no. 1 (2009): 3.

of those whose passage from the world opens to them the opportunity to become ancestors. It would be making a one-to-one correlation between Jesus Christ and the ancestors. D. Stinton is undecided on whether the title of an ancestor can be attributed to Jesus Christ. His reason is that Jesus as an Ancestor has not been well-researched.<sup>321</sup> For me, the Jesus experience and cosmic relevance make him an ancestor.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o speaks about the dismemberment of Africans in his book, *Re-membering Africa*. Dismemberment, for him, is the disruption of the indigenous people's collective memory, leading to their disconnection from their socio-historical space. Disrupting the African worldview distorts the people from their divinity and everything that gives them their peculiar cultural identity. The goal is to subsume the African to distant memory.<sup>322</sup>

Linguicide,<sup>323</sup> like epistemicide, destroys and blurs indigenous stories, meanings, and memories by speaking for the indigenous people and not allowing them to speak for themselves.<sup>324</sup>

Language must be understood broadly as spoken and written and conveyed through art, signs, and symbols. In the words of Wa Thiong'o, "language is a communication system and carrier of culture by virtue of being simultaneously the means and carrier of memory."<sup>325</sup> Wa Thiong'o further adds that language conveys a people's collective memory and culture.

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>322</sup> Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Re-Membering Africa* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd., 2009), 3-4.

<sup>323</sup> This concept is used to show how the logic of modernity deliberately worked to destroy and cause the non-remembrance of the medium of communication and identity of the colonized subject. It entails the liquidation or starving of the language all that is necessary for survival. Linguicide pursues the conquering and domination of the colonized persons. It is in contrast to language disappearance or death from lack of use due to non-usage. Ngugi wa Thiong'o ascribes the concept to Tove Skunabb-Kanga and his work, *Linguistic Genocide in Education* (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000).

<sup>324</sup> Stephen Legg, "Violent Memories: South Asian Spaces of Postcolonial Anamnesis," in *Cultural Memories: The Geographical Point of View*, ed. Peter Meusbürger, Michael Heffernan, and Edgar Wunder, Knowledge and Space (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 290. See, G. C. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Postcolonialism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. D. Brydon (London: Routledge, 2000). (Original Work published 1988).

<sup>325</sup> Wa Thiong'o, *Re-Membering Africa*, 15.

Constructed within the people's experience, language authentically expresses the reality of the people in a way a foreign language cannot. It seeks the recovery of the past in its original context and makes it perceptible to the mind and senses. As a means of indigenous memory and invariably of identity, there is a need for indigenous languages to extricate themselves from the shadows of the foreign.<sup>326</sup>

Liberating the captive memory of the indigenous people must entail a reconfiguring and re-linking to the *locus of enunciation* to recollect the indigenous space's lost language and meanings. Only with a resurgence of indigenous language can ancestral wisdom regain its prominent status in the community's life, as there is an inseparable link between language and culture. There is no gainsaying that linguistic death implies the end of the culture since language is the vehicle that conveys the significance of constructed realities. Language is essential in constructing cultural identity as an embodiment of memory and culture. Wa Thiong'o articulates it thus, "[m]emory resides in language and is clarified by language."<sup>327</sup> Put differently, memory is only interpreted by employing language, which brings to life signs and symbols. Language as culture mediates identity and self-consciousness.<sup>328</sup> Reconstructing an African identity is pertinent as long as the recovery of African memory and ancestral wisdom is given due consideration. For the Goemai, the importance of teaching language cannot be overemphasized as many young Goemai in the cities are hardly able to speak Goemai. Promoting Christian liturgy in Goemai will familiarly communicate God's wisdom.

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>328</sup> Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1986), 15.

### 2.1.1. The Principle of Sacramentality in Goemai Ritualized Universe

An incontestable fact of life is that reality is culturally mediated. Mediation occurs when the spiritual is experienced in and through the material, especially within a symbolically constructed cosmos. Rites and rituals relate to the belief systems and form part of the people's inherent understanding of the universe. They are part of the people's consciousness and lived experience.<sup>329</sup> In a ritually symbolic worldview, the communication between the divine and the people is performed symbolically. The community accompanies all aspects of indigenous life. African cosmological reality accompanies every stage of integral human development with rites of passage and rituals. The Goemai ritualizing universe, comprising both the spiritual and physical realms, has defining elements of some unpredictability connected with the spiritual realm and the unknown future of human life. This is sacredness as mediation of divine presence experienced in symbols. And both unpredictability and sacredness are immersed in the recollection of ancestral wisdom.<sup>330</sup> Indigenous construction of meanings helps people to bridge the gap between the unknown of the spiritual realm and the capacity to face the unpredictability of what lies ahead. Uzuoku holds that rituals are inseparable from the narratives of the origin of a people and are continuously re-enacted as means of transmitting life, such as rituals of naming, initiation, and even therapeutic rituals.<sup>331</sup> I glean from the above that rituals celebrate indigenous communities' communal and individual connections and Divine encounters as the locality of experience. This informs the continuous performance of rituals. Performing rituals is not the repetition of actions of spiritual significance but a creative re-enactment of the past as Divine worship for social harmony and human wellness. Rituals, therefore, have a fundamental role in

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<sup>329</sup> Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeleine Beaumont (Minnesota: A Pueblo Book, 1995), 139.

<sup>330</sup> Uzuoku, "Body and Belief," 199.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, 217-18.



society to guarantee the individual's place in the community with her rights and responsibilities toward the community.

Rites and rituals connote a religious consciousness of union with the divine concerning all the spheres of human life, from hunting, fishing, planting, harvesting, birth, marriage, acquiring new social status, installation, healing, and cleansing to death and funeral. They are also identifiers of times and seasons. The length of time an individual has lived is calculated by the number of significant community rituals one has experienced. The veneration of divine symbols like *Matkoeroem* (sacred tree) and *taddi* (graven human-like images) led Christian missionaries to refer to the people as idol worshippers—a significant obstacle to the youth's appreciation of Goemai culture.<sup>332</sup> Unfortunately, the elders are not forthcoming in explaining the meaning of indigenous symbols and ritual practices to make them attractive to the youth. As a result, many youths have bought into Western civilization's denigration of the culture leading to, for example, the *Luu das* (house of men) virtually disappearing.

The three paramount Goemai chiefdoms have peculiar rites and rituals, and there are common rites and rituals for all Goemai. Most of the rituals are characterized by dances accompanied by indigenous instruments. For example, the ritual festival of *Mang-gap* observed in Kwo chiefdom, particularly in *Luu Niyuu*, is connected with the ritual cleansing of the people and their land with sacrificial offerings of animals like sheep, goats, chicken, *mues*, etc. The *Mudu'ut* have the *Ta'ar Kampiring*. All the Goemai chiefdoms share the ritual ceremony of *Kwamteng* (initiation) and the *Tok mu'ut* (the ritual sacrificial meal). I focus more on *Kwamteng* and *Tok mu'ut* for their significant roles in constructing the Goemai identity and worship of *Na'an*. While *Kwamteng* incorporates one into the community's social, political, and spiritual

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<sup>332</sup> See Appendix 1:261-263, 294.

life, *Tok mu'ut* ensures that *Na'an*, through the mediation of the *Kwap da*, *Mu'ut*, and *Mukwarkum*, is appeased by constant sacrifices. Initiation opens the door into the mysteries of the community without which one is not considered fully Goemai and is thus excluded from the life-transmitting sacred rites and rituals. It bestows on the head of the house, family, clan, and community the sacred office of the chief priest to ensure communion with the ancestors, spirits, deities, and, ultimately, *Na'an*. *Kwamteng* and *Tok mu'ut* offer this work the connection with the Christian sacraments of baptism and the eucharist. The similarities of *Kwamteng* and *Tok mu'ut* with the Christian sacraments of baptism and eucharist are so striking that I agree with Orobator when he affirmed that Christianity flourishes on the ground saturated by the values and principles of African religiosity.<sup>333</sup> The close connection must have played a role in the people's acceptance of the Christian faith, as they must have experienced minimal differences in some of the ritual practices of both faiths. The indigenous peoples' spiritual consciousness became Christianity's solid foundation in Goemailand.

African religiosity's sacramentality is captured in its symbolic universe full of spiritual significance. In my opinion, the African worldview is a theatre of symbolism where every act is played and understood in ritualistic form. Somé has it that "symbols are the doorway to rituals."<sup>334</sup> By this, he means that rituals are not possible without a symbolic representation of meaning to them. Among the Goemai, for example, every ritual is preceded with a *pue ser* or *lap dor* (the ritual confession) so that one may stand ritually clean and upright in the presence of the Divine. Purity and wholeness cannot be overlooked in Goemai ritualization.<sup>335</sup> The purpose of every act is to ensure the harmony of the spiritual and physical, the constituent components of

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<sup>333</sup> Orobator, *Religion and Faith in Africa*, 53.

<sup>334</sup> Somé, *The Healing Wisdom of Africa*, 146.

<sup>335</sup> See Appendix 1:277.

the individual, and between and among members of the community. The result of a lack of harmony in the Goemai universe is the futility of any rite and ritual, which is experienced in the form of disasters like death, pestilence, or sickness as punishment from the deities for the desecration of the land. Every component of the Goemai universe must work together for all good. The sacredness of the land, as the medium of remembrance, must be maintained by virtuous living, and ritualization helps sacralize the land. Communion is a cultural virtue that must be cultivated. Through ritual symbolization, the Goemai manifest their initial and continuous acceptance of ancestral patrimony for safe keeping along with their recognition of the responsibility that accompanies the acceptance, that is, to respect, preserve and carry on the tradition as enshrined in the laws, rituals, rites, ceremonies of the community. This continuation of the ancestors' legacy as gratitude to *Na'an* guarantees the protection and blessings of *Na'an* on the land, its people, crops, and animals through ancestral mediation. It means that the ritual sacrifices are a means of thanksgiving for the graciousness of *Na'an*, for the land is a sacred gift given in trust to people as stewards in remembrance of the bountiful blessings of *Na'an*.

The sacramental nature of the Goemai context nurtures indigenous consciousness to perceive with understanding the created symbols of the Goemai space where “the ordinary is the vehicle of the transcendent.”<sup>336</sup> In order to understand the sacramental reality, the Goemai must continuously immerse herself in indigenous experience, thus realizing that constructed meanings outside of her context are difficult, if not impossible, to grasp. In other words, practices, rituals, rites, etc., make sense for those who live in and are nurtured by their context since context and experience are the prisms of human perception and understanding of reality.<sup>337</sup> Life is weird and incomprehensible outside of one's context and indigenous experience. That was the experience

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<sup>336</sup> Uzukwu, *Worship as Body Language*, 49.

<sup>337</sup> See Appendix 1:282-283.

of the early missionaries who saw African religious symbols only as works of art, depriving them of their spiritual significance.

The Cameroonian philosopher, historian, political theorist, and public intellectual Achille Mbembe puts into perspective the significance of African masks, carvings, etc., that were improperly referred to as works of art by the West. According to Mbembe, African masks and carvings represent reality where the invisible and the visible are inseparable but are the same thing, such that the invisible is in the visible.<sup>338</sup> In other words, what is visible does not lead to itself but a transcendent reality distinct from but not unrelated to it in a sense. Mudimbe had earlier expressed the same views. He opined that symbols were not viewed as arts in the “native context” but were stripped of religious and mystical significance and given aesthetic character.<sup>339</sup> In a symbol, therefore, there is always a presence in an absence or, better still, an absence in a presence such that the visible is an invitation to more than the physical eye can perceive. I will return to this in the section on the saturated phenomenon later in this chapter.

In response to Western colonialism, the anti-colonial attitude in Africans shifted toward a cultural turn<sup>340</sup> as “a redirection of attention to the processes of constructing social reality from culture and society”<sup>341</sup> to revalorize and re-appropriate the mystical heritage of the ancestors through the construction of theologies arising from the landscape. This is brought to life in the people’s symbolic ritualization of existence. Emmanuel Larrey believes that rituals are not only performed during significant life circumstances; they are potent means for effecting change in

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<sup>338</sup> Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 145.

<sup>339</sup> Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, 10.

<sup>340</sup> Gruberg speaks of the cultural turn as pointing to a plurality of Christianities and identities as well due to the cultural influences of contexts. In her view, the inscription of so many culturally determined signs and symbols into the Christian faith has produced different “third spaces”—an interculturally Christian identity.

<sup>341</sup> Christina West, “Memory - Recollection - Culture - Identity - Space: Social Context, Identity Formation and Self-Construction of the Cale,” in *Cultural Memories: The Geographical Point of View*, ed. Peter Meusburger, Michael Heffernan, and Edgar Wunder, Knowledge and Space (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 101.

both the spiritual and physical realms.<sup>342</sup> In the light of the preceding, therefore, rituals can be attributed to languages in both communication and transformation due to their communicative and transformative character. Mbembe asserts that in precolonial times, communication was by oral means, songs, proverbs, poetry, rituals, masks, and carvings.<sup>343</sup> Thus, what is experienced is only experienced because it is simultaneously the localized reality of nearness and distance. A non-localized reality cannot be experienced symbolically. At this point, the concept of sacramentality needs some introduction. Sacramentality is the symbolic expression of the connect and disconnect in the visible and invisible reality as divine mediation in the life of the people. Wholeness is the realization of the sacred in all things.

### 2.1.2. Goemai Concept of Time

In indigenous space, time is not about disconnecting the past from the present and future. It is understood in the continuous flow of ancestral life into the ocean of the community's present experience to understand better how to manage reality to invent a better future. In other words, time is the reconciliation of distance (past) and the immediate (present). As such, the present is only meaningful against the background of the past, while the past allows the present to be understood to reimagine the future. The Goemai conception of time as repeating relates to their working of the land. An implication of this is that people without a *past* have no chance of a *present* since both their past and present aid the construction of their *future*.<sup>344</sup> Without a past, a present, and a future, people will find it almost impossible to conceive of time.

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<sup>342</sup> Emmanuel Lartey, *Postcolonializing God: An African Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2013), 42-43.

<sup>343</sup> Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 144.

<sup>344</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred: African Spirituality* (New York: Orbis Books, 2013), 19.

Indigenous spiritualities do not assign universal value to time because the people understand that only “space generates time though time has little relationship to space.”<sup>345</sup> Deloria Jr. explains that while spatially conceived spiritualities can construct sacred times from their experiences and rituals, temporally constructed religion cannot integrate sacred places into its dogmas or canons. This means that time as a social construct results from the sacred events of a space that can be traced back to the past as it connects with significant moments in the people’s experience.

Consequently, “spatial thinking,” in the words of Deloria, “requires that ethical systems be related directly to the physical world and real human situations, and not abstract principles, are believed to be valid at all times and under all circumstances.”<sup>346</sup> Space, therefore, is not only a place of human situatedness but also the locus from which principles and meaning derive relevance in relation to people, viz., the *locus of enunciation*.

For the Goemai, as is true of the Chadic people, the sacredness of time is intricately connected with the sacred rites and rituals that are symbolically observed. Activities like farming, hunting, harvesting, and other natural phenomena like the *goewap goewap*, a dry period characterized by *si’ir* (heavy dew) and *pas* (rain) begin the time of planting until the time the crops are fully matured. The cyclical worldview guarantees a creative return to the *past* from the *present* with an orientation towards the *future*; renewing the past and re-creating the future at the moment is a continuous process in the conception of time. It entails creating the desired end by looking back.

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<sup>345</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion*, 30th Anniversary ed. (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 2003), 70.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

Orobator says that African “beliefs and practices, rituals and rites are a matter of cultic practices embodied in symbolic re-enactments and are subject to ongoing interpretation, reconstruction, and transformation.”<sup>347</sup> Every event, rite, and ritual is not a mere repetition of what had taken place but its renewal in the spatial context of the people. Space, the generator of indigenous practices and rituals, is the creator of time and the medium within which time is understood and calculated. In the Goemai context, time is not an abstract concept but a designator of the land, events, and relationships. Goemai sacred places like the Jalbang mountain, Pang-bel at the foot of the mountain, Poe Muduut, Kwapmu’utla, and Karbang village are burial places of past Goemai chiefs. These sacred spaces, in addition to being indicators of historical moments, inspire the memory of Moemai, which facilitates reconnection with the values represented by the royal living dead and progenitors.<sup>348</sup>

Some festivals like the *Mang-gap*, among other purposes, aid the recollection of the past chiefs. Every time the masquerade appears, it is time to recount the chiefs’ names from the first to the present. The remembrance of past events is such that history can be understood in connection with the reign of a chief. It affirms that time chiefly exists in relation to people’s daily and historical experiences. The festival transforms the whole land into a sacred space where the people and deities converge to ensure the cleansing of the people and the land for an increase in births, marriages, initiations, and bumper harvests to ensure the continuation of rituals. Every indigenous event is remembered and articulated within integrated cycles of historical interpretations, linking the activities of the living to those of the ancestors and the communal deities. This mode of perception and expression of time and events sharply contrasts

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<sup>347</sup> Orobator, *Religion and Faith in Africa*, 56.

<sup>348</sup> See Longban and Stephen, *History of the Moefe Shinkwan Clan of Shendam*, 7, 16, and 19.

with that of Western Christianity, which tends to segment the perception of time, events, and space in the interpretation of daily human experiences.

### 2.1.3. Goemai Cultural and Social Memory

Cultural memory combines geography and stories to reconnect and recover cultural situatedness. Participation in indigenous dances, rites, and rituals allows for a spiritual entry or experience in the ancestral past and, with a futuristic gaze, overcomes the experience of disruption. With the past alive in the people's hearts and minds, it is not forgotten; it lives on. Ancestral stories are not necessarily about accounts that document real characters. In most cases, imaginary characters are invented to relate historical accounts.<sup>349</sup> The power of imagination is not separated from where the people live as the space of experience, memory, history, reconnection, and identity renewal. Cultural memory becomes the medium for recovering traditional values so that historical-legendary events become real in the people's experiences.<sup>350</sup>

"The reenvisioning of the space as a museum of the past"<sup>351</sup> contradicts the dynamic and creative past relived in the people's cultural memory. Cultural memory opens up the social dimension of recollecting connectedness, viz., the social memory. In their relationship with the land, ecology, geography, and society, indigenous people can engage with their space as they reaffirm their identity. The collective memory of the people guarantees their survival. The reinvention of Goemai identity makes a return to ancestral times essential so that the people's

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<sup>349</sup> Silvia Del Pilar Castro Borrego, "Truly Confronting the Past: The Recovery of History and Identity in Afro-Caribbean Literature," in *Evolving Origins, Transplanting Cultures: Literary Legacies of the New Americans*, ed. Laura P. Alonso Gallo and Antonia Dominguez Miguela (Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 2002), 107. See Appendix 1:2-3.

<sup>350</sup> Nathan Porath, "The Re-Appropriation of Sakai Land: the Case of a Shrine in Riau (Indonesia)," in *Land, Law and Environment*, ed. Allen Abramson and Dimitrios Theodossopoulos, Mythical Land, Legal Boundaries (Pluto Press, 2000), 187.

<sup>351</sup> Mark Rifkin, "Feeling, Memory, and Peoplehood in Contemporary Native Women's Poetry," in *Gender in American Literature and Culture*, ed. Jean M. Lutes and Jennifer Travis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 335.



disrupted history can be reconstructed and reintegrated for an authentic construction of contemporary Goemai identity. This may involve the construction of imaginary locations, like the *Kong* (river), *Mai* (shrine), Grove (forest), etc., that allow for a reconnection with the living and dynamic past by integrating history and myth.<sup>352</sup> The constructed spaces and features link what is seen with their spiritual overabundance since every physical reality leads to more behind it. Bringing the spaces and geographical landscape back to life involves a recovery of the spiritual values that motivated the ancestors in today's cultural context.

Through their narratives, the Goemai try to recognize the meaning of the experience; these narratives can be interpreted and re-interpreted based on the people's circumstances. Embellished in the myths are true meanings that stir authenticity in people's self-apprehension,<sup>353</sup> depicting the crucial link to tradition.

Reimagining results in reframing the past narrative so that the present circumstances make sense to the people directed toward the future. Even as the people construct narratives, the narratives simultaneously construct the people. They aid the Goemai "to think through their past, make sense of circumstances, and guide them for their future action."<sup>354</sup> The Goemai narratives shape identity and make the ancestral experience concrete and real. Memory is enhanced with the construction and reconstruction of rites, rituals, and monuments, as history cannot be recounted independently of places: "the memory for events is intertwined with the memory for places, a connection that largely explains why most mnemonic devices are related to places, spaces, or spatial signifiers."<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> Borrego, "Truly Confronting the Past," 101-03.

<sup>353</sup> Garro and Mattingly, "Narrative as Construct and Construction," 1.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>355</sup> Peter Meusbürger, Michael Heffernan, and Edgar Wunder, "Cultural Memories: An Introduction," in *Cultural Memories: The Geographical Point of View*, ed. Meusbürger Peter, Michael Heffernan, and Edgar Wunder, Knowledge and Space (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 7.

How can the Goemai bring their landscape to life so that, with ritualization, they can help foster identity and symbols that recall the historical past where ancestral spirits and deities are venerated and retain mystical powers that inspire spiritual experiences? The mnemonic devices are carefully reinvented to stimulate people's collective memory. The monuments, rites, rituals, and symbols bear testimony to the authenticity of the stories, and the stories and location recount and bear testimony to the events that give the monuments, rites, rituals, and symbols their significance.<sup>356</sup> Rituals refresh the memory of the historical events and locations that gave rise to the memorial so that the events and locations are not forgotten. A community is formed by shared memory, memory preserves and cements the bond in a community, and belonging means remembering. Goemai cultural and social memory help build an inalienable connection with Goemai space and universe such that once memory fades, the social structure of the universe collapses.<sup>357</sup>

#### **2.1.4. Revalorizing Goemai Space, Rituals, and Ceremonies**

Revalorization necessitates the construction of social spaces to reproduce/recreate the people's social, historical, and religious experiences in the new context of today's Goemai reality. Ancestral wisdom remains the pivotal avenue for maintaining social and cultural memory stored in natural and social ecology adorned with sacred features (forests, rivers, mountains, etc.)<sup>358</sup> and shrines captured in stories, rituals, songs, and dances. The inseparability of ecology and spirituality is such that indigenous spirituality is immersed in geography, human relations, and cultural practices. And ecology is preserved through religious rites and rituals. The crises of faith and

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<sup>356</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>357</sup> Pannell, "Mabo and Museums," 34.

<sup>358</sup> Jon Vos, Reimagining Community-Centered Sites for History and Healing, 1 <https://about.historypin.org/2018/01/30/reimagining-community-centered-sites-history-healing/> (accessed 10/23/2022).

identity must be at the foundation of indigenous peoples' revalorization, reappropriation, and, ultimately, renewal of spirituality. As a result, the context is created to establish a link with the past within available structures.<sup>359</sup> The space and sacred features as the location of hierophany are not only media of Divine encounters but, in many ways, inspire a culture of conservation of Goemai spiritual heritage.<sup>360</sup> Traditional core values are maintained within the socio-cultural and historical context, and reimagination and integration are possible.

In the opinion of Jean-Marc Ela, the search for African identity should not be reduced to the search for an African mythological past<sup>361</sup> in which the African is stuck in a glorified past with no effort at its renewal. Cultural authenticity must entail a process of making and remaking through a cultural reimagination that seeks the reappropriation of ancestral values. Katongole captures it succinctly when he asserts that reimagination "does not need experts but storytellers who offer better narratives by way of stories than the current narratives."<sup>362</sup> It involves casting a look back and constructing a future that responds to people's everyday experiences. Storytelling allows for valorizing the community's collective thought, reflection, and experience encapsulated in the cultural context toward a search for genuine humanness. For the Goemai, contextually generated rituals are not only media of connection but renewal where things are seen differently, and remembering as authenticity is assured.

Reimagination recognizes the power of space to foster relationships that lead to wholeness, viz., spiritual and physical wellness.<sup>363</sup> How can the Catholic liturgy and theology become a means of preserving and promoting the Goemai culture and tradition? How can the new context become

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<sup>359</sup> Corr, "Ritual, Knowledge, and the Politics of Identity in Andean Festivities (1)," 50.

<sup>360</sup> Adekunle, "History and the Sacred," 48.

<sup>361</sup> Jean-Marc Ela, *African Cry*, trans. Robert J. Barr, Limited ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 126. He is a Cameroonian professor of sociology and theology. He is also a diocesan priest.

<sup>362</sup> Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa*, Eerdmans Ekklesia Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 61.

<sup>363</sup> Jon Vos, *Reimagining Community-Centered Sites for History and Healing*, 13.

a means of reappropriating Goemai indigenous experiences? A new context is required to valorize and validate Goemai confessional rituals, initiation rituals, ritualistic meals, a sense of the sacred, connectedness, reverence, and recovery of sacred spaces that can ensure the conservation of the environment and recognition of the emanating powers of *Na'an* represented in the indigenous deities. With the church's construction and appropriation of sacred places, the value of pilgrimage and prayer at holy grounds is revived. Fashioning a cycle of rites within the context of sacramental celebration would involve a creative way of reliving the Goemai cultural heritage and remaining fully catholic.<sup>364</sup> In this light, I concur with Andrew Orta that in the context of the retrieved and reappropriated Goemai identity, "conversion becomes an act of historical remembering, and revelation consists in revalorizing an ethnically constituted past."<sup>365</sup> In this sense, the Goemai must continually reminisce about the valued past to renew the present and construct an authentic Goemai Christian identity. How can the Goemai idea of complementarity enrich the Western Christian view of perceiving indigenous religiosity as idolatry and, therefore, overcome the stereotype?

In indigenous society, "the relationship between religion and ecology is extensive, and ecology could be geographical, human and cultural."<sup>366</sup> The Jalbang mountain, about 15km outside the town of Shendam, signifies much more than a geographical mountain formation. It is the resting place of the Goemai progenitors and the past chiefs, especially Bigun, the father of all the chiefs,<sup>367</sup> suggesting a place of spiritual existence for those who embody a tradition that must be revered. No one strolls to its top like the many tourists do to features in modern cities. It is the point of connection for the Goemai to *Lekni* and *Matduan* founders of the Goemai nation whose

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<sup>364</sup> Afe Adogame and Lazio Jafta, "Zionists, Aladura and Roho: African," in *African Christianity: An African Story*, ed. Ogbu U. Kalu (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 2007), 283.

<sup>365</sup> Orta, "Converting Difference," 172.

<sup>366</sup> Duncan and Kalu, "*Bakuzufu*," 6.

<sup>367</sup> The Installation Programme of the 25<sup>th</sup> *Long Goemai*, Miskoom Shaldas Donkwap II, the grandson of Adamu who is said to be the first *Long Goemai* to have left Jalbang hills to find the town of Shendam, in 1972 on Thursday, 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 1972 and Frida, 24<sup>th</sup> of March, 1972, pg. 28.

descendants, according to the *Du'ut* tradition, settled at the foot of the mountain, which has now assumed cultural significance as a location of Goemai civilization.<sup>368</sup> Visits are limited to ritual occasions like the installation of the *Long Goemai*, whose installation involves his joining his ancestors by ritual dying and rising to life, thereby embodying the mystical traits of the ancestors. The Goemai ancestors, as intermediaries between the people and the divinities, help the people to contemplate and *bol Na'an* (worship) whenever they are remembered. It symbolizes the space of recreating the Goemai culture represented in the *Long Goemai*. The role of reminiscence of the past in the present draws the people to a spiritual connection with the ancestors, divinities, and *Na'an*. The ancestors become the point of contact with the Divine. Since the criteria for ancestor hood include virtuous and exemplary living, the Church's reimagination of the cult of the ancestors as local saints can be established to give the people that connection to the traditional foundation of accessing God. The bond of kinship provides the cultural identity that allows people to imbibe values that contribute to spiritual growth, purity, and communal harmony. Undoubtedly, the familiar inspires more than the unfamiliar since the latter offers no memory to facilitate its imagination. Recovery as a means of renewing the memory is attained within the dying and still vibrant places of recollection.

The Goemai *tamtis* (stories) convey the community's history, wisdom, and aspirations. They communicate the relationships that have sustained the Goemai universe and life's journey emanating from the land. In the context of storytelling, the Goemai can journey back by moving forward. It entails reconciling their stories with the place where meaning and spirituality are resignified.<sup>369</sup> Kaitlin B. Curtice, in her book *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering*

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<sup>368</sup> Longban and Stephen, *History of the Moeje Shinkwan Clan of Shendam*, 5.

<sup>369</sup> Rohadi Nagassar, *When We Belong: Reclaiming Christianity on the Margins* (Harrisonburg, Virginia: Herald Press, 2022), 120.

*God*, says that “identity does not come to us without the journey, because to learn who we are means we face difficult truths in our own lives and imagine what life might look like as those truths work themselves out inside us.”<sup>370</sup> The truths from stories for the Goemai are attained only in dialogue with and within the space where the journey can be achieved. In the Goemai search for truth, only the land holds evidence of all that has occurred generation after generation. It reflects the people’s stories of life, joy, woundedness, suffering, and death. The essence of the narratives is for people to embody the things that gave the Goemai their peculiarity, sustained their ancestors and enhanced rootedness. The stories of their origins and about their deities like *Dabit*, and *Mang-gap*, through retelling within the context of present experience, may be reenacted to make the past present for the people to immerse themselves in. It allows the people to enter into their ancestral experience to absorb those values that will promote spiritual development as Goemai Christians. Goemai stories buttress what is essential in defining who they are and their socio-historical life where they are. Meanings within events and locations are made explicit about connecting “motive, act, and consequence.”<sup>371</sup>

All rituals and ceremonies allow the Goemai people to have their locality inscribed on them to impart authenticity. According to Appadurai, “one of the most remarkable general features of the ritual process is its highly specific way of localizing duration and extension, of giving these categories names and properties, values and meanings, symptoms and legibility.”<sup>372</sup> The authenticity of the locality is inscribed in the body of the people so that they can continue to construct spaces, knowledge, and rituals of authenticity. The dynamic relationship between land and the people is symbiotic in nature.

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<sup>370</sup> Kaitlin B. Curtice, *Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2020), 14.

<sup>371</sup> Garro and Mattingly, "Narrative as Construct and Construction," 10.

<sup>372</sup> Arjun Appadurai, "The Production of Locality," in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Public Worlds: V. 1 (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 180.

The Goemai Christian leaders must engage indigenous elders as a means of making present the memory of the ancestors (reminisce) so that “culture which essentially portrayed the ancestors, and was almost destroyed by colonialism and missionary efforts need to be salvaged, rescued, repackaged, and taught to people who have ‘lost it.’”<sup>373</sup> The Christian rituals of initiations and the sacrificial meal of the Eucharist offer a means to retrieve the mystery of the past for a renewal of the present and reassurance of a future.<sup>374</sup>

It is vital to recognize that “cultural knowledge is multivocal, fluid, and comes in from a variety of sources and experiences.”<sup>375</sup> Enhanced cultural knowledge stirs up traditional practices. The recreation requires the different experiences embodied by the people of the space. The Goemai have been able to construct their identity on the basis of their social memory, libation process, history, and ceremonies and thus create structures of meaning on the genealogy of deities and men. The significant events in the life of the people are couched in stories linked to places. The sacredness of the spaces inspires divine connection through offerings and libations. And the performance of these is the basis on which the Goemai consciousness is formed from the memory of sacred spaces and time that takes the people on a journey back into the past and paradoxically into the future.<sup>376</sup>

The sequence of libation encompasses everything in the known universe of the Goemai, the four corners of the universe, the coordinates of the Goemai context. In the act of libation, the universe and everything that defines the context, both past, and present, is conjured and appeased. As a ritual for appeasing the deities and ancestors, consecrating the space and the people, libation, may help restore the Goemai sense of communion and Divine reverence through ancestral

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<sup>373</sup> Corr, "Ritual, Knowledge, and the Politics of Identity in Andean Festivities (1)," 51.

<sup>374</sup> Abercrombie, *Pathways of Memory and Power*, 115.

<sup>375</sup> Corr, "Ritual, Knowledge, and the Politics of Identity in Andean Festivities (1)," 52.

<sup>376</sup> Abercrombie, *Pathways of Memory and Power*, 113-14.

eneration. It is about the totality of the universe brought to appease the deities with the pouring of *mues* to the four corners of the universe (North, South, East, and West).<sup>377</sup>

The cycles of Goemai rites begin with the rains and end with the harvest; rites and rituals impact the relationships that define the context. As a space of harmony, it resolves opposites in complementarity. The equilibrium of the indigenous world represents a fluid universe where complementarity brings together the social dimension of the universe where everything comes together for the promotion of life. The Igbo proverb, “where one stands, another stands beside it,” can be applied to explain the fluid gender relations of the indigenous people. Men and women are created to come together at the service of life for the good of the deities. And according to Abercrombie, “men and women, as husband and wife, are mutually necessary in order to bring the mutually inclusive realms towards which they are oriented to bear on human affairs.”<sup>378</sup> Equilibrium allows for the harmonious relationships that characterize indigenous societies since re-appropriation concerns complementing what is already there with what is lacking to enhance wholeness. For example, when traditional rituals, like the planting rituals of *Mues Goeteer* and cleansing rituals of *Ta’ar Kampiring*, are constructed within a Goemai Christian context, the increase in physical and spiritual wellness facilitates food production as a spiritual responsibility of all to sustain worship and gratitude. It recovers the spirituality of understanding every activity in relation to God.

According to Njoh, the change of names from indigenous to Western names was not only a requirement for Christian conversion, “it was ... an objective of all European or Western institutions in their dealings with people of African origin.”<sup>379</sup> To bolster his argument, he uses

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<sup>377</sup> See Appendix 1:274.

<sup>378</sup> Abercrombie, *Pathways of Memory and Power*, 334-35.

<sup>379</sup> Njoh, *Tradition, Culture and Development in Africa*, 44.



Alex Haley's 1976 classic, which was made into a television series, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*, in which the African slave Kunta Kinte was humiliated and forced to change his name to Toby.

It is common among Africans to give gender-neutral names, like the Banyangi of Manyu in Cameroon, who may refer to a male or female child with names like Bessem, Tabot, Orock, and Bessong, and the androgynous name, such as Kizza among the Baganda of Uganda call those born after twins. Only recently has the Church begun to accept native names for baptism. Many Goemai, who are Christians, have dropped their native names for Western names. As the person becomes disoriented and destabilized, she abandons all indigenous institutions.<sup>380</sup> Njoh captures the influence of adopting Western names when he surmises that it signifies the severance of the link with the ancestors and the rejection of indigenous spirituality. The adoption of meaningful and spiritual names during baptism will allow for the renewal of family links and history, and more so the names demonstrate the relation of God with the people.

## **2.2. Iconic Vision as Seeing Relations Not Entities**

The urge to control and manipulate reality by the perceiving subject reflects the desire of the subject to determine the way reality appears, which only results in the distortion of reality due to the distorted perception of the one perceiving. Unless the given reality is liberated from the perceiver's subjective grip, it remains a prisoner of the subject's perception. In other words, reality must not be subordinated to the perceiver as it presents or gives itself. For a while, the subject has always determined how reality is known. Madathummuriyil's deconstructionist approach, following the critique of the Western metaphysical conception of the Christian God, offers the opportunity to break the subject's grip on the phenomenon. This ensures that the

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<sup>380</sup> Ibid., 45.

phenomenon ceases to be subordinated to the perceiving subject and instead subordinates the subject to the givenness of the phenomenon by itself, from itself.<sup>381</sup> In other words, reality gives itself to the perceiving subject; the subject does not bring reality into existence. Since the phenomenon obviously transcends the subjective perception of the subject, the perceiver is not able to fully apprehend it, implying that every object, rite, and ritual, in a particular context appears with a superabundance of meaning that is beyond the imposed interpretation of a person from outside the context that produced the reality. This introduces the notion of sacramentality. Sacramentality combines the physical and spiritual aspects of the universe, where symbols and signs produce meaning beyond the perceptible. The phenomenological channels open the understanding of the person's lived experience as an embodied spirit or an inspirited body such that the person becomes the medium of narrative construction through her ability to transcend the phenomenon consciously.<sup>382</sup>

Catholic tradition on sacraments, for a while, has been greatly influenced by Cartesian and Kantian philosophies with their underlying logic of a "turn to the subject." This needed deconstruction that shifts perspective to the "cultural and decolonial turns." A distorted vision is formed with the non-recognition of the phenomenon's relationship with its space. It is as an effort to reconnect the phenomenon with space that the significance of Madathummuriyil's project is understood. Madathummuriyil's approach of refocusing on pneumatology in a sacramental outlook on reality parallels the spirit-filled universe of indigenous people. The parallel is observed in his expressed view that God's self-communication is mediated through

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<sup>381</sup> Madathummuriyil, *Sacrament as Gift*, 3.

<sup>382</sup> Raphael Chijioke Njoku, "Memory and Masquerade Narratives: The Art of Remembering," in *West African Masking Traditions and Diaspora Masquerade Carnivals*, History, Memory, and Transnationalism (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2020), 195.

symbols in a symbolic approach.<sup>383</sup> By this, Madathummuriyil is arguing that symbolic ritualization brings the spiritual and physical realms together. The implication is that the notion of sacramentality must be grounded on the phenomenon of the experience of the Spirit. This experience must relate to God's self-communication since divine self-communication is impossible without the Spirit.<sup>384</sup>

In the spiritualized indigenous world of the Goemai, as is true of many indigenous societies, the spirits play vital roles in accessing and relating with the divine. For the Goemai, it is in and through the spirits that people can commune with the Divine. Divine mediation as the defining characteristic of the worldview helps the understanding of sacramentality. Sacramentality is encountering the Divine as an experience of withdrawal, absence, transcendence, or silence, as Uzukwu helped us understand in chapter one above. The "presence-absence" dynamics explain the indigenous spiritualities' illustration of the absolute transcendence of the divine as well as the divine presence in the cultural symbols of worship. Fanon explains further the idea of iconic vision, which is helpful in the understanding of sacramentality. Iconic vision is not about contracting meaning for others but apprehending the meaning within the contextually determined reality. Hear Fanon in his words: "it is not I who make a meaning for myself, but it is the meaning that was already there, pre-existing, waiting for me."<sup>385</sup> In a sacramental universe, therefore, the invisible is waiting to be accessed with the piercing look that refuses to end at the visible but is drawn to the invisible. The iconic symbolization's dynamic is the icon's power to conceal and simultaneously reveal the divine in the material. Therefore, the icon is the power to reveal resemblance in non-resemblance. An

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<sup>383</sup> Madathummuriyil, *Sacrament as Gift*, 93-94.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>385</sup> Quoted in Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, 134.

iconic symbolization constitutes the submergence of the perceiving subject to the presence of the “giving” of the reality. In other words, the icon’s connection to reality is one of differentiation where there is a relationship and disconnect between the icon and reality. Reality only invites the subject to go beyond the visible to the invisible. Thus, the significance of the spatiality of rituals and symbols is further given credence by the above understanding of iconic symbolization.

In the words of Madathummuriyil, “[t]he power of the icon in constructing the reality does not lie in resemblance, but rather, non-resemblance.”<sup>386</sup> Madathummuriyil has also distinguished between an idolatrous approach and an iconic approach to explaining the Christian sacraments. I find this distinction helpful in explaining the sacramental nature of the spiritual experiences of many African indigenous people, including those of the Goemai. Symbols, rituals, and rites, among others, mediate the transcendence of the Divine within the context of a spiritualized universe. Elements necessary for the iconicity of a presence include spirit/spirits, the principle of unity (mediation), and distance (differentiation). Among indigenous people, the whole visible society is an icon of the invisible community of the ancestors, spirits, and deities.

As propounded by Santos, the concept of “deep seeing” also helps shed additional light on the nature of sacramentality as it applies to African indigenous communities. In a symbolized world, “deep seeing” involves the perception of the unavailable through the available. I find it useful to adopt and apply this concept to my discussion of sacramentality as it relates to traditional Goemai spirituality, where the average Goemai may be seen as seeking to understand what is concealed from that which is observed through “sacramental seeing.” It would involve developing the capacity to allow the invisible reality to be experienced in the visible, viz, the invisible in the visible, such that the absence is perceived in the presence of the symbol, and the

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<sup>386</sup> Madathummuriyil, *Sacrament as Gift*, 254.

presence mediates the absence of the reality to the perceiver.<sup>387</sup> In symbolic ritualization, the manifestation of the absent is made possible when it transcends difference to reveal itself to the perceiving subject. This characteristic of African cosmology is the sacramental relations that determine the connection of everything within the universe.

### **2.3. The Realm of Human Action as the Scene of Divine Activity**

Ritual symbolization is the encounter of the Divine by the human in the most profane within which the people derive fundamental meanings and experience the activity of the Supreme Deity. Western rationality, however, reduced the religious character of the rituals to the level of Western drama.<sup>388</sup> Morufu Bukola Omigbule, in the article “Rethinking African Indigenous Ritual Festivals, Interrogating the Concept of African Ritual Drama,” interrogates the colonial perception of African rituals as the same as Western drama; and their contemporary conception that tends to reduce their essence as the context of divine gift reception and the means of expressing gratitude for the gift received. His goal is the re-appraisal of the rituals and the understanding of them within the cultural context of their original construction. Rituals, for Bukola, are symbolized within the dynamics of the religious and secular, intertwined in the African cosmogony. Therefore, the integral fusion of spirituality and secularity gives African rituals their distinctness from Western drama. They carry the essential component of being in a community, viz., identity. As such, rituals must be approached with curiosity in connection with

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<sup>387</sup> Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, 172. Santos, in explaining the “Deep Seeing” advocates for the decolonization of sight after the Cartesian modern understanding which entails seeing everything without being seen. Santos follows the idea of Merleau-Ponty where the subject looks but does not submerge what is looked at to its subjective bias. Santos, however, breaks with the homogenous and universalizing character implicit in Merleau-Ponty’s articulation. Santos uses the concept in an analogous way to depth in optical sciences though he gives it a distinct meaning. In his usage, Santos relates deep seeing with the visual perception of artists depicting a creative deepness that maximizes either proximity or distance. He opined that deep seeing is performed in different modes: visible and invisible, seeing the unimagined, seeing with subaltern eyes, and asymmetrical seeing. For more, see, *ibid.*, 172-75. Also, Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*, 160-63.

<sup>388</sup> Morufu Bukola Omigbule, “Rethinking African Indigenous Ritual Festivals, Interrogating the Concept of African Ritual Drama,” *African Studies Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (2017): 72-73.

the iconic gaze to envision the communal solidarity embedded in them. Emmanuel Lartey's description of ritual elucidated the preceding when he held that "[r]itual is essentially an experience and practice that seeks to foster a deep sense of *belonging* and *participation* in the life of the community and to maintain connectivity with the invisible, mystical realm of existence."<sup>389</sup> This implies that without spatial connection and full participation in ritualization, an outsider cannot apprehend the significance of rituals in cultural self-apprehension of the participants and integration. The Goemai constructed rituals of initiation (*Kwamteng*) as the rite of incorporation into the structure of the society. Symbols were created with meanings for which recovery is essential for cultural survival.

The community's constructed rituals enhance the mystical interaction of the divine and the human in the indigenous space. For the African, "human agency is a channel of divine agency."<sup>390</sup> Humans are not adversaries of the divine; instead, they serve as means by which the divine plan is achieved. Thus, in the symbiotic relationship of the divine and the human in the visible sphere, the invisible is embodied for the good of the community; the rhythmic movements and dance steps also mediate the space of convergence of the visible and invisible.<sup>391</sup> Consequently, the most religious (or spiritual) happen in the most human (or profane). In the human and the divine encounter, self-awareness is born as ritual celebrations forge harmonious bonds by which a people's consciousness is shaped. As the sacred heritage from the ancestors, the indigenous living wisdom of the people has sacramental nature as it aids the transmission of life and the reception of the divine gift.

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<sup>389</sup> Emmanuel Y. Lartey, "The Ancestors Are Everywhere: Black Church Studies and the African Context," in *The Black Church Studies Reader*, ed. Alton B. Pollard III and Carol B. Duncan (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 211.

<sup>390</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 2nd edition: revised and expanded ed. (New York: Orbis Books, 2009), 199.

<sup>391</sup> Lartey, "The Ancestors Are Everywhere," 211.

In African spirituality, things familiar, after some consecration rituals, become the embodiment of the divine. These may be objects like trees, carvings, statues, etc. Ordinary objects are transformed into sacraments of the Divine or even the Divine itself by designated persons. This ritual act goes way back to biblical times. Clement Kanu's reference to the ritual anointing of pillars of stones into Yahweh by Jacob in Gen. 28:18 is no different from the pouring of oil on some symbols, after which they immediately assume the divine status that indigenous people perform. And within the Christian context, that would be more or less the same as the consecration of ordinary bread into Christ.<sup>392</sup>

According to Madathummuriyil, the participatory dimension of the symbolic world allows that the person is not separated from the universe as the symbol and the perceiver enter into a conversation mediated by the world that is pregnant with meanings. In the indigenous symbolic world, the perceiving subject continuously inserts herself into the space to discover its divine secrets and meaning. This is in recognition that she is not the one bringing reality into existence, but the phenomenon is giving itself—this way, the symbol gives of itself in excess without the limiting intentionality of the gazing subject.<sup>393</sup> Aristotelian metaphysics (the foundation of onto-theology) was favored in understanding the relationship between the divine and the universe. This eventually led to the disappearance of the phenomenon.<sup>394</sup> The abstract language of onto-theology only allowed for a subject-object relationship such that the dominant subject determines whatever he sees. Madathummuriyil explains Marion's contribution to theology concerning his understanding of phenomenality in the context of givenness. Marion

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<sup>392</sup> Clement Kanu, *Decolonizing God-Talk: Divine Fluidity and a Spatial Ecclesiology for West Africa* (Chisinau: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2021), 314-15.

<sup>393</sup> Madathummuriyil, *Sacrament as Gift*, 279.

<sup>394</sup> Sebastian Madathummuriyil "Creation as Gift: A Paradigm for a Discourse on Creation," *Indian Theological Studies* 47 (2010): 124.

transcends onto-theology by bringing God-talk into conversation with phenomenology.

According to Marion, the phenomenon is a giver of itself, the appearing reality that imposes itself on the receiving subject without allowing the receiver to distort it.<sup>395</sup> By focusing on the excess of the phenomenon, Marion could free the phenomenon from the limiting intention of the perceiver. In relation to the divine, God gives of Godself, by Godself, as Godself such that no human intention can manipulate. It means that divine communication is the gracious giftedness of the divine of himself to the open receiver.

### **2.3.1. Saturated Phenomenon**

From the perspective of phenomenology, there is much more in everything around than the eye can see. That “more,” “excess,” or the overabundance beyond every imagination helps elicit the respect people must cultivate in relating to the environment. The overabundance lies beyond a phenomenon that Marion refers to as “saturated phenomenon.” A “saturated phenomenon” calls for recognition by the perceiving subject of the surplus in what is given. In the words of Madathummuriyil, “‘Saturated phenomenon,’ or the notion of ‘excess,’ can lead us toward an ecologically responsible attitude. Things or beings are not as they appear to be; they are ‘saturated’ with givenness.”<sup>396</sup> This describes the kind of view indigenous people have within their locality.

The reverence the Goemai have for what constitutes their worldview as mirroring the Divine is always in recognition of excess beyond the visible. For the Goemai, the universe represents the gift of *Na'an*, and everything within the universe is related, thereby giving a deep sense of a beyond in the visible. Sacramentality is part of the Goemai experience. Gleaned from

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<sup>395</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., 137.



the work of Madathummuriyil is the idea of the saturated phenomenon.<sup>397</sup> It has to do with the appearance of a phenomenon without the subjective limitation of the perceiver, such that the phenomenon always appears in excess of what the subject can intend or think. The sacramental nature of the Goemai people is founded on their constructed universe saturated with meanings. Rather than imposing the separated subject-object dynamic, the notion of saturated phenomenon establishes a relational subject-subject dynamic. Within the context of relationality, therefore, the phenomenon gives of itself by itself with an overabundance of intuition against the intention of the perceiving subject.

Madathummuriyil avers that rather than the phenomenon subjecting itself to the intention of the subject, it is the subject that succumbs to the gaze of the phenomenon.<sup>398</sup> In other words, the phenomenon is the one that forms and informs the gaze of the subject. Consequently, a phenomenon or a symbol is much more than the person outside the constructed space can fathom. The phenomenon is so much more than what the subject's intention can attribute to it. This, therefore, calls for caution in a stranger outside his context. The danger of slipping into false assumptions or conceited conjectures cannot be overlooked. Thus, the question arises whether that was not the missionaries' attitude in most indigenous spaces. So, how can the denigration of indigenous rituals and symbols be explained if not? With respect to the saturated

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<sup>397</sup> Within the context of articulating the idea of sacramentality, Madathummuriyil navigates the trajectories of the concept of sacrament and how its understanding has morphed through the centuries. From its classical patristic understanding, which was anchored on a metaphysical conception of God as Being, what is known as onto-theology in its scholastic articulation is represented by one of the influential theologians of the era, Thomas Aquinas, whose contribution is in the concept of symbolic causality. Sacrament gradually overcame its mechanical understanding with a more symbolic understanding of sacrament that came with the "symbolic turn" in terms of rituals and symbols. Looking at the contributions of Chauvet, Marion, and Husserl among others, Madathummuriyil's Pneumatological and Christological approach contributes to clarifying an articulation that elucidates the understanding of sacrament as gift. It is within the context of the gift dynamic that one understands Marion's key idea of the saturated phenomenon within the context of the Husserlian notion of surplus. Incorporating the idea of the saturated phenomenon in this work follows the deconstructionist methodology that Madathummuriyil applied to his work. The work does not go into an in-depth understanding of Chauvet, Marion, or even Husserl. It only acknowledges their contributions to Madathummuriyil's thoughts.

<sup>398</sup> Madathummuriyil, *Sacrament as Gift*, 173-75.

phenomenon, it does not escape knowability; however, its comprehensibility is beyond the capacity of the human faculty.

In the same vein, the subject must be in an anticipatory mode of receiving more than the visible reality because the visible symbol is the embodiment of the nearness and distance associated with the Divine, who is immanent and, at the same time, transcendent. Among the Goemai, *Na'an*, a pure spirit, is understood as both transcendent and mediately immanent in the other divinities and spiritual powers. The powers of *Na'an* are felt through the mediation of the divinities. These divinities can be seen as symbolic representations of the Supreme Deity. In turn, the constructed Goemai symbols of *Koeroem*, *Matkoeroem*, masquerades, and many other symbols mediate the presence of the divinities among the people through whom *Na'an* operates. As epiphanies of the deities, they each present a presence that is experienced and visualized in invisibility. Every symbol is, at the same time, revealing a reality that is in it as well as concealing the reality because it surpasses the visible reality.

As such, the context plays an essential role in the epiphany of symbolic reality and rituals. Taken out of their cultural milieu, they cease to embody the religiously significant representation they inspire in the people. This explains how the indigenous sense of mystery regulates indigenous interaction with the universe. The sense of mystery provides the reason the land is not a commodity to be used but a patrimony to be cared for; it is considered a “mother” that must be revered because she nurtures life.<sup>399</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> Pope Francis, “Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home”, *The Holy See*, May 24, 2015 [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html) ## 1-3. Cultural appropriation results from the retrieval of values from the people’s social memory in the search for authenticity.

### 2.3.2. Symbolic Order and Mediation

The articulation and understanding of sacraments and their efficacy have morphed through the ages from the basic knowledge in patristic theology to scholastic theology (epitomized in Thomas Aquinas with the theory of causation). The incorporation of instrumental or physical causality by Aquinas meant that the rites' administration only causes the sacramental grace by the minister through whom Christ acts. Madathummuriyil surmises how in Aquinas, sacramental efficacy is the combination of the instrumental power and the instrument's power acting as one cause. As such, the sacramental signs have symbolic efficacy built on the three elements of the physical sign, the symbolic reality, and the effect on the recipient. Madathummuriyil critiques Aquinas' mechanical and productionist understanding of instrumental causality since Aristotelian metaphysics provided the framework of his reflection.<sup>400</sup> To establish the symbolic order, where symbols present and represent the invisible reality, the instrumental efficacy of the Scholastic period had to be deconstructed with the rejection of modernism necessitating the "symbolic turn" that established the symbolic order characterized by the "turn to the subject." Thus, subjectivity became crucial in perceiving the different other as a human with the ability for knowledge, signifying the rejection of her objectification.

The African cosmos' anthropocentric character enables the person's insertion into the indigenous symbolic universe where the sacred, spiritual, physical, and profane intersect. Within the communion of everything, the divine manifests to the people. The appreciation for rituals and symbols, according to Madathummuriyil, replaced the classical understanding of sacraments.<sup>401</sup> Rituals and symbols manifest the character of the African indigenous cosmology as the

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<sup>400</sup> See, *ibid.*, 17-29.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

traditional worldview is sacramental because “it moves from what is known to what is unknown.”<sup>402</sup> It is within this anthropo-cosmological horizon, according to Uzukwu, that iconic symbolization happens. Uzukwu surmises that ritual is a communication language where humans encounter the divine. The people immerse themselves into the spiritual world within the context of their ancestors’ living and sacred memory.<sup>403</sup> This has, as its purpose, the reconnection of the individual with everything in the universe and ultimately with the Supreme Deity. Rituals, as means by which people interact with their space, embody the religious, educative, and esthetical significance of the people as they, in the view of Uzukwu, imitate certain observable actions or movements of certain animals.<sup>404</sup> In the circumstance that evil people or spirits pollute a section of the land, rituals are performed as a way of restoring equilibrium. In a world created for harmony and communion, the notion of evil is not embodied in an entity like the Western idea of the devil but in persons or spirits who work to disrupt societal harmony and communion since binary is not characteristic of the indigenous African worldview.<sup>405</sup> Symbols, as human constructs, are, at the same time, hiding and revealing the mysteries hidden in the universe of meanings and embedded in people’s experiences; in other words, every human experience or, better still, the whole of reality is culturally mediated.

Consequently, societies codify their experience and received wisdom. The codified repetitive actions of a people to communicate their actions and interactions as experienced within their universe are considered ritual symbolization.<sup>406</sup> Put differently, symbols, as means of communication, are constituted as language codes for spiritual communication. Thus, ritual

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<sup>402</sup> Toyin Falola, *Culture and Customs of Nigeria* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2000), 31.

<sup>403</sup> Uzukwu, "Body and Belief," 199.

<sup>404</sup> Uzukwu, *Worship as Body Language*, 1.

<sup>405</sup> E. Elochukwu Uzukwu, "Igbo World and Ultimate Reality and Meaning," *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 5, no. 3 (1982): 200. See also, "African Personality and the Christian Liturgy," *African Christian Studies* 3, no. 2 (1987).

<sup>406</sup> Elochukwu Uzukwu, "African Symbols and Liturgical Celebration," *Worship* 65, no. 2 (1991): 99.

ceremonies are not mere entertainment but the symbolization of meaning in ritual performance by encoding and decoding.

Like the Igbo of the Southeast of Nigeria, the Yoruba of the Southwest, and their Chadic neighbors of the Middle belt region of Nigeria, the Goemai have masks and masquerades that symbolize the spirits' manifestation. These masked figures are designated "humans" covered in sacred indigenous regalia and must be fully initiated into the cult group. In most Igbo cultures, according to Christiana Ejizu,

the process of initiation into the masquerade club entails elaborate ritual processes. There are different categories of masked figures and masquerade properly called, including the night-time and day-light types (*Mmanwu abali* and *Mmanwu ehihie*), serious/prestigious masquerades and ordinary/common types, seasonal and titular masquerades, *Okonko*, *Ekpo* and *Odo* types, and masks that typify animals and wild beasts.<sup>407</sup>

Categorizing Goemai *Dabit* and other masquerades depends on the chiefdom and the occasion. The ritual outing of each designated masquerade carries along with it considerable spiritual significance. The masquerades serve as a means by which the presence of *Na'an* is mediated through the *Mu'ut*, *Mukwarkum*, and *Kwap da*. Masked figures are described as ancestral spirits similar to the Yoruba *Egungun*. In the words of Ejizu,

[t]hey evoke and make present the power of ancestral beings. Virtually all categories of masquerades, from the ordinary to the most prestigious share this singular attribute. Both those utilized mainly for entertainment as well as the serious and occasional masquerades are generally regarded as some form of incarnation of supra-natural beings. People use their imagination a lot in creating and decorating their masquerade in the bid to give the impression that such masquerades are extra-terrestrial figures, guests from the spiritual world.<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> Christiana Ejizu, "Ofo Na-Ogu and Mmanwu: Ritual Symbolism in the Interface of Igbo Indigenous Religion and Christianity," ed. Akuma-Kalu Njoku and E. Elochukwu Uzukwu, *Interface Between Igbo Theology and Christianity* (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishers, 2014), 35.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

In these ritually consecrated masked figures or masquerades is the sacramental presence of the unseen or the deities. This is because the masquerades are the union of the material and the immaterial such that absence is made visible in presence or accessed in absence. Kalu U. Ogbu has also commented positively on masquerades' religious functionality and significance as the epiphany of ancestral spirits.<sup>409</sup>

Similarly, Madathummuriyil has offered useful viewpoints on sacraments and sacramentality. His perspective on filling the Pneumatological shortfall enriches this understanding with the symbolic exchange where God's giving and human receiving are expressed in the form of ritual symbolization and the roles of Christ and the Spirit are understood in a complimentary manner in the gift-exchange dynamic. The notion of "mediated immediacy" (as adopted by Madathummuriyil from Edward J. Kilmartin) can be profitably used to draw attention to the importance of the Spirit as mediating the presence of the Father and the Son as breaking the scholastic (mechanical) view of the sacrament. The Spirit's role is that of mediation of the gift and giver.<sup>410</sup>

Applying this to the Goemai context, the Goemai cosmological reality must be taken up by the spirit/spirits into the realm where perception of the sacred is possible, and the fusion of the material and the spiritual in the symbolic representation of the Divine is achieved. The immediacy of Divine presence in the mediating symbol can be explained in the idea of the Yoruba *Orisa* mounting the chosen, who becomes an *Orisa* at that point. In a manner of concealing and revealing, the iconic symbolization involves association in dissociation.

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<sup>409</sup> Ogbu U. Kalu, "Gods as Policemen: Religion and Social Control in Igboland," in *Religious Plurality in Africa: Essays in Honour of John S. Mbiti*, ed. Jacob Obafemi Kehinde Olupona and Sulayman S. Nyang, Religion and Society (Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1993), 115. Kalu was a Nigerian professor at the Religious Studies Department of the University of Nigeria. His interest is in African Christianity.

<sup>410</sup> Sebastian Madathummuriyil, "The "Dative Subject" of the Sacrament: An "East-West" Perspective," *Studia Liturgica* 43 (2013): 116.

According to Madathummuriyil, the iconic perspective breaks the grip of the perceiving subject on the symbol as the gift-metaphor takes precedence in the Christian understanding of sacrament and sacramentality.

#### **2.4. Goemai Christian Transition of deities into Spiritual Energies of God**

Uzukwu, in his article, "Distance-Nearness, Absence-Presence: Reevaluating the Relational Triune God through the Lens of Igbo (And West African) Health-Focused Religion," shows how the missionaries misconceived the deities in Igboland as a multiplicity of divinities who rival *Chukwu* (the Igbo Supreme Deity). Uzukwu rejects that notion and instead applies the process by which the Hebrew poetic literature transited from the idea of three minor deities of *'emet*, *sedeq*, and *hesed* into virtues of love, faithfulness, and righteousness. Uzukwu applied the same biblical notion to the Igbo context in relation to the deities. He interpreted the qualities of the deities as energies of *Chukwu*, who is experienced as a distant present.

Borrowing from the creative application of Uzukwu, I suggest that the various Goemai deities can as well be understood within the Goemai Christian context as energies of *Na'an*. The continuous experience of influence or powers of these deities in the lives of the people testify to the distant-nearness, presence-absence of the Supreme Deity, that is, *Na'an*, in this case.<sup>411</sup> The veracity of this process is seen in the fact that the deities are not rivals of the Supreme Deity and their operations are in conjunction with the permeating presence of *Na'an* in the universe. From this, results a Goemai re-imagination of the deities and spirits as emanations of Divine powers.

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<sup>411</sup> Elochukwu Uzukwu, "Distance-Nearness, Absence-Presence: Reevaluating the Relational Triune God through the Lens of Igbo (and West African) Health-Focused Religion," ed. Akuma-Kalu Njoku and E. Elochukwu Uzukwu, *Interface Between Igbo Theology and Christianity* (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishers, 2014). 97-99. See also, D. N. Freedman and M. P. O'Connor, "Yahweh," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* 5, (1985). Freedman and O'Connor showed how the three minor deities (the sons of god) were transformed into virtue *'emet*, *ṣēdeq*, *ḥesed* truth, justice, and loyalty in Gen 6:1. 520.

This would involve retelling the Goemai story in the context of present experience, and the rendition must avoid misrepresenting ancestral experience and wisdom. In recapturing the past today to construct a future, authenticity must be preserved by faithfulness to tradition and openness to the dynamism of culture.

## **2.5. Christian Liturgical Hermeneutics: The Gift-Metaphor—Receptivity and Response**

For indigenous Christians, ritual participation in constructed symbols outside their space makes no meaning. A meaningful ritual or symbol must be a construct of the people themselves to make sense of their faith in Christ. To be a Christian as an indigenous person does not require abandoning the indigenous space. The Goemai space and, by extension, the African space and its people are reputed for accommodating foreigners and foreign religions; indigenous rituals and symbols have to be the fertile ground for the true incarnation of the message of Christ. Uzukwu puts it well when he says, “[a] Christian community arising from a native context should move towards integrating contextually appropriate gestures as an expression of the new faith in Christ.”<sup>412</sup> Uzukwu calls for reimagination, appropriation, and reintegration of cultural richness into the Christian faith.

Christ gives Christian liturgy its significance because, in the liturgy, Christians reenact the mystery of the sacrifice of calvary as God’s graciousness to humanity. Humanity’s reception of God’s gift in Christ elicits Eucharistic praise, viz., the celebration of the ritual meal as making present Christ’s sacrifice. As the Incarnate Word, Christ is truly the Word made flesh when he takes the peculiarities of every context, particularly the Goemai context. Only by assuming the identity of the Goemai is Christ relevant as the one who saves the people and their culture. Only

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<sup>412</sup> Uzukwu, "African Symbols and Liturgical Celebration," 104.



within the preceding context can an appropriate response be made to God by the people receiving God's gift.

The logic of accommodation and reevaluation of ancestral wisdom in today's context needs to guide the Incarnation of Christ to enrich the Christian faith in contextually defined experience. The mystery of Christ transcends any historical context and cannot be held captive by a self-arrogating "superior" and "universalizing" *locus of enunciation*. According to Uzukwu, rituals are means by which a people constituted as a Christian community can respond to the message of Christ. Uzukwu, paraphrasing Engelbert Mveng, reemphasized the African notion of the human body as a primal symbol by which action and reaction give form as a response to a gratuitous giving,<sup>413</sup> which at most times is directed toward the Divine through the ritualization of the ordinary as mediation of the spiritual is transformed into the sacred.

### **2.5.1. Goemai Rites of Passage as Celebration of Life**

No aspect of anthropological life happens haphazardly in the symbolically ritualized universe of the Goemai and Africans.<sup>414</sup> Daily experiences show how rituals accompany the significant transitions in the life of an individual or members of an age group as well as cult members. Prominent among the Goemai are birth, initiation, installation, marriage, and death and burial rituals, among many others. All the many rituals performed are carried out within the cultural dynamic of the sense of the sacred. For the Goemai, *Na'an* regulates the universe and all that is contained in it. The ritualization of the various experiences of the Goemai life signifies not only the awareness of the graciousness of *Na'an* but the people's response in gratitude for the plenitude or abundance of life. Ritualization alludes to the process of incorporating into and

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<sup>413</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>414</sup> See Appendix 1:274. Every move in the ritual of libation is choreographed in an aesthetic manner as a responsive gesture.

harmonizing with the more profound mysteries of ancestral wisdom to attain wholesomeness. Initiation rites, therefore, are life-giving and sustaining within the locality. Bujo points out the significant consecratory power of the rites of initiation (quoting M. Ntetem) by which the initiates become especially linked to the land, ancestors, and the Supreme Deity in a communion of life.<sup>415</sup>

Initiation encompasses certain dimensions of human life like social, moral, educative, religious, and leadership. With initiation, one acquires a social status within the community associated with the transition from childhood to adulthood, which comes with rights and responsibilities. Spiritually, the initiate is incorporated into the inner and exclusive life of the society with an acquired identity and a privileged place among the adult males of the community with a certain form of authority from the wisdom of the people. Kalu puts it well when he writes that the initiation ceremonies combine several functions as “rites of passage into adolescence or early manhood, educative experiences, inculcation of surviving values, symbolic rebirths, and means of communal cohesion and identity.”<sup>416</sup>

Thus, a rite of initiation known to the Goemai as *Kwamteng* is an informal school for the all-around formation of young boys in leadership, bravery, wisdom, practical skill, virtues, hunting, farming, spirituality, history, the art of sacred songs and dance to mention a few. The rites help to foster a cultural consciousness and situatedness of the initiates in the spatial experience of the people.<sup>417</sup> Behind the necessity of cultural initiation among the Goemai and other African societies is the awareness of the multi-layered nature of the indigenous cosmogony and the creative or imaginative response of the people to interact with the spiritual that

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<sup>415</sup> Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, 26.

<sup>416</sup> Kalu, "Gods as Policemen," 117.

<sup>417</sup> See Appendix 1:277-278.

interpenetrates the temporal. It also symbolizes the engagement of the created with its creator, whose purview is the fullness of life.<sup>418</sup>

The destiny of the indigenous person in African cultural society is enhanced not in a vacuum but within the spatially created practices that give the community its specificity. Initiation is an essential element in indigenous self-apprehension as it affirms and sustains the cultural identity and heritage of the community. Through the rites of passage, such as childbirth and even initiation, the community acknowledges and accepts the gift of life from the ancestors. According to Imasogie,<sup>419</sup> for the indigenous people, the birth rite is the ritualization of the act of separation from the ancestral world. This transition process is marked in naming the child, mainly giving a grandparent or great-grandparent's name after some ritual consultation to determine which of the lineage members' features are identified in the child. Naming incorporates the child into the human family, which is intrinsically connected with the spiritual realm. Thus, it ends in re-incorporating the child into the two dimensions of family—biological and ancestral. The handing over of the child to the elder (considered the link between the living and the “living dead”) marks the transition period within the more extensive process of identity construction. That which follows is what Imasogie refers to as the three-fold pattern that characterizes the African ritual pattern of separation, transition, and re-incorporation. A second characteristic is that the rites of passage have the nature of rebirth where the initiates are taken to the grove known as *kool*. There, they undergo a symbolic process of death and rebirth

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<sup>418</sup> Osadolor Imasogie, "The Nature of Rites of Passage in African Traditional Religion," *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* 7 (1992).

<sup>419</sup> Imasogie outlines four characteristics of rites of passage. He describes the nature of the rites in indigenous spirituality. His objective is to demonstrate how the rites are essential for the indigenous peoples. He holds that rites of passage have three-fold inherent characteristics of separation, transition, and re-incorporation. I find the three-fold characteristics a helpful means of understanding the symbolic nature of the indigenous rites as the Christian rites of initiation, viz baptism, can also be understood in relation to the three-fold characteristic as a rite of passage that bestows identity as well as incorporates the initiand into the community of believers bonded by faith in Jesus Christ.

characterized by the transformation and acquisition of a new status signifying new life by dying to childhood and rebirth into adulthood. The same logic follows the installation of a chief. The third characteristic is the continuous reminder of the intricate link between the sacred and the profane. The fourth element is that rites of passage serve as vehicles for conveying ancestral memory and consciousness that aid the constitution of the link of initiates with the past giving cultural character.<sup>420</sup>

Rites of passage as symbolic acts are a means by which life is transmitted to community members essentially and symbolically. They are transmitters of history, cultural values, and communal aspirations.<sup>421</sup> The vital role of community in human wellness links the indigenous and Christian perspectives of rituals. Rituals of initiation guarantee the preservation of memory and the ancestors' history. As the ritualization of history or the historicization of rituals, the symbolic means of communication encapsulate the totality of the ritualizing community's cultural norms, values, and identity. The rituals in the rites of passage serve as means of internalizing the life-giving cultural knowledge of a people. The more immersed one is in indigenous culture, the more identity consciousness develops. Culturality and identity construction are intertwined such that culture without identity is inconceivable, and an identity that is not culturally mediated is an illusion. This shows the significance of the locality as the place not only of insertion but of self-apprehension.

Therefore, identity is constructed in the context of a person's web of relationships. Uzukwu surmises from the cultural perspectives of some African societies how the conception of the human is understood within the plethora of relationships she shares with family members, ancestors, deities, and the Supreme Deity. Self-realization is achieved in the community of

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<sup>420</sup> Imasogie, "The Nature of Rites of Passage in African Traditional Religion," 14-16.

<sup>421</sup> B. Uche Enyioha, "The Pastoral Significance of Traditional African Concept of Rites of Passage," 18.

persons where the rites of passage constitute the processes of defining the individual.<sup>422</sup> It is evident that the person in her individuality is nothing outside the web of relationships that define her existence. This reaffirms the existential principle articulated by Mbiti, *I am because we are, and because we are therefore I am.*

### **2.5.2. Anamnesis: Memorial Dynamic - Ritualized Present as Remembered Past and Hope-For Future**

Many Africans have felt the misconstruing of Africa and its cultural richness. In an expression of nostalgia, they have called for a return to the past in which the mind is helped to erase the evil of colonialism. This reactionary attitude to the project of colonialism is itself a failure to return to the past creatively shaped by today's experience. The meaning-giving nature of rituals is captured in how the past, present, and future are woven dynamically and creatively and celebrated as a means of living in the here and now. For Africans, the future is attained by returning to the past while remaining rooted in the present experiences. Embodiment becomes the awareness of the person's connection with every reality—past, present, and future.

Dynamically, the past is linked to the present for a re-envisioned future. The memory of the ancestors is re-appropriated in a way that makes them (ancestors) active participants in the quotidian experiences of the community. The Goemai captured it in the *mu shin a bi kwap da* (we are doing what we learned from our forefathers). That is the hallmark of authenticity. And it is the landscape that keeps the memory of ancestral action that must inspire present living and help shape the future.

The repetitive nature of the African worldview of reliving the wisdom of the ancestors is no different from the Christian understanding of *anamnesis* by which the celebration of the

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<sup>422</sup> Uzukwu, "African Personality and the Christian Liturgy," 61-63.

Eucharist is the making present of the sacrifice of Christ, his words, and action in a remembering that is not just a mere recollection of the past event of calvary but the re-enactment of the memorial such that what happened two thousand years ago, continues to happen today and leads to the future. The present experience informs the understanding of what happened and what will happen. For Christians, the Easter event is taken as the interpretative key to all Scripture in the manner that the Goemai and many indigenous communities see the living wisdom or memory of the ancestors as giving meaning to the reality of today and tomorrow. Christian liturgy today is the re-imagination of the Jewish Passover within the context of the Christ experience.

Fellowship, the defining characteristic of the African worldview, is reinforced by the participation of the initiates in the ritual meal prepared in the grove to signify the bond between the people and their deities. As a sacred meal, it is eaten as a symbol of love, union, and reconciliation. It is the same way Christians participate in the Eucharist as sharing in the life of Christ and communion with the body of Christ. The Eucharist, as the summit of Christian *koinonia*, is the sacred meal of life<sup>423</sup> that is the basis for the community of believers, the Church.

Bujo compares the return to the past in understanding today and constructing a better tomorrow with the Old Testament's "Exodus Theology."<sup>424</sup> Indigenous people's recalling and

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<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>424</sup> This is the experience of Israel as a people enslaved in Egypt for years and how Yahweh intervened to liberate them from the house of bondage to the freedom of the land of Canaan. The ritualization of the liberation process from the Passover meal and the codification of the ritual law at Sinai facilitated the formation of the community. The cultic worship of the Lord in sanctuaries which was later rejected by the prophets and the Deuteronomic preachers who called for the reform of the worship said to be tainted with abomination (pagan practices) after settling in the Promised Land. The ritual remembrance of the Exodus helped the construction of the Jewish identity and religious sensibilities by the establishment of a bond of relationship with Yahweh as the liberator. The flight from Egypt and the Sinai covenant constitutes the significant experiences that led to the constitution of Israel as a people. The dynamic memorial of the Exodus event continues creating and re-creating Israel. The religious rituals of the people became the historical recollection of the role of Yahweh in the liberation of the people and how to respond to Yahweh's love. See, Uzukwu, *Worship as Body Language*, 41-83.

retelling of ancestral stories parallel the exodus experience by which the Jews re-made the past in the present in a kind of circular thinking. Likewise, Africans made the past a living experience of the people by which a future full of life is imagined and pursued.<sup>425</sup> This is possible because the indigenous space allows a return to the past.

The rejection of the cult of the ancestors, the pouring of libation, and the practice of polygamy, among others, denied the people crucial links with their meaningful and inspiring past.<sup>426</sup> Without the cult of the ancestors, indigenous people have nothing to hold to, no events and persons to give significance to the sacred rite of naming because names are not only given in acknowledgment of an aspect of the essence of the Divine but taken from those of the ancestors in the case of the observance of some recognized marks, connecting the newborn to an ancestor. The child is given the ancestor's name when such a connection is established. With the ancestors as guardians of tradition, the loss of their memory means the end of the pouring of libation to recognize their continuous protection of the people.

Polygamy, for the people, is a way of assuring that there are progenitors to ensure the continuity of ancestral traditions. Bujo affirms the inseparable link between polygamy and indigenous religiosity and the bond of relationships that develops from the union of many marriages. As Bujo puts it, "Africans want to bring the world of their ancestors to new life in their world, for only thus can they find true life for themselves and their children."<sup>427</sup> In other words, the African search for authenticity concerns immersion into the ocean of ancestral wisdom in the desire for a renewing self-constructed future, not a return to a glorious static past within a dead tradition. In this context, remembrance becomes the avenue for what Bujo called

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<sup>425</sup> Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, 29-30.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

“a memorial-narrative,”<sup>428</sup> a restatement of the past as a reflective re-reading that stimulates a desire for a new future. Locality gave rise to the practice of polygamy as a means of sustaining ancestral tradition that is reimagined today in relation to the reality of the people.

## 2.6. Conclusion

As Miguel De La Torre puts it, Goemai Christianity is a “celebration of belief through whichever cultural symbols best connect people with their Deity.”<sup>429</sup> Only symbols emanating from the people’s constructed space can mediate the Divine to those in that location. The people’s sense of the sacred is only disrupted and not aided when an alien worldview is imposed on them as the only valid means of accessing the Divine. The Goemai Church must articulate its Christianity authentically, bearing in mind that it is not about closing in on itself and refraining from interaction with other cultures. It must remain open to other worldviews without losing sight of what distinguishes it from alien cultures. As the Goemai creatively reinvents herself, she reaffirms her authenticity as a bearer of traditional virtues who must continuously assert and reassert herself as a voice among other voices that need to be heard in the construction of her ecclesiology. Our diversified, multi-peripheral universe has no single center to which every other perspective looks. Goemai Christianity must resist every imperial construct of a progressive outlook and a mission of civilization<sup>430</sup> with a local theological articulation that combines ancestral wisdom emanating from the inspiration of the landscapes (cultural geography) and the people’s experiences of the faith in Christ. The example of the Ethiopian Church, which made a

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<sup>428</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>429</sup> Miguel A. De La Torre, *Decolonizing Christianity: Becoming Badass Believers* (GrandRapid: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021), 193. He is a professor of Social Ethics and Latinx Studies at Iliff School of Theology, Denver

<sup>430</sup> Fernando F. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins* (New York: Orbis Books, 2000), 123.



local church by incarnating the Christian faith and adapting the practices of Christianity to its worldview, is an excellent example to guide the Goemai.

Re-imagination as an experience of locality inspires cultural practices and lifestyles where the construction of stories, sacred spaces, rituals, and ceremonies take cognizance of the people's experience and contextual reality. The land mediates a new understanding that gives the people a new lease on life where the cultural memory recollects the past in the present for a better future. In the next chapter, I will creatively integrate the reimagined Goemai stories, landscapes, and rituals into the Goemai Christian experience for an ecclesiology that is genuinely Christian and fully Goemai.

## Chapter 3

### Indigenous Locality: Goemai Christian Theology

However far the stream flows, it never forgets its source. — Nigerian proverb.

The overarching concern of this chapter is to demonstrate the possibility of being genuinely Goemai and fully Christian. Here is where the idea of cultural borrowing, which has characterized relations between different cultures long ago, will be revisited. It is crucial right from the onset to remind ourselves of the non-European foundation of Christianity. One characteristic of Christianity's long history is cultural borrowing, which has defined intercultural encounters. According to Keita, "[c]ultural borrowing is acceptable when such borrowing enhances the adoptive culture and is affected under conditions of freedom and noncoercion."<sup>431</sup> However, this cannot be the case with the Goemai culture as with many indigenous societies, particularly in Africa. The disconnect from the Christic experience within the Goemai context necessitates the incarnation of the gospel among the Moemai so that Christ may permeate the people's cultural experience. Goemai Christianity must thrive on the logic of incarnation, as only an incarnational Christ in the Goemai space will guarantee an authentic Goemai belonging within the universal Church.

Christianity has gone through many cultural transformations from its initial contextual origin. The spatial and linguistic translatability that Christianity possesses has resulted in diverse ecclesial landscapes, from its Jewish origin to the Greco-Roman context, to the Germanic and Celtic, among other landscapes. It means that every new culture, language, and custom meant a

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<sup>431</sup> L. D. Keita, "On the Question of Africanity—a Discussion," *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 20, no. 3 (1996): 170.

distinctive identity of Christianity.<sup>432</sup> In its encounter with the Hellenistic culture, the space and worldview define its assumed character. The spatial character of Christianity is evident in the contextual, cultural diversity of Christianities.<sup>433</sup> Any cultural expression of the faith is distinct and the only way a truly local church is established since cultural experience provides the fertile ground for the incarnation of the gospel. Apart from the African Indigenous (Independent) Churches, most mainline churches are transpositions of the dominant Western Christianity to African contexts. Superficial forms of localization are understood as inculturation, where superior Western culture is grafted onto the sour grapevines of pagan African spirituality. The onus is on African theologians to present African culture and spirituality as sacred realms for divine manifestation in Jesus Christ.

The initial encounter between the faith in Christ and the Roman empire was characterized by denigration and persecution based on stereotyping. The Roman religion considered other expressions of faith in the divine superstitious. The Christian faith was considered irrational (blind faith) and superstition.<sup>434</sup> It was so regarded until the politically expedient conversion of Constantine in 312 C.E. Subsequent Christianity, with its Roman trappings, assumed the Roman paraphernalia and referred to the different others as irrational, superstitious, and pagan. It manifests how the position of power and privilege intoxicates, leading to arrogance. Western Christianity's superior stance over indigenous spiritualities shows how Christianity took on the garb of the empire and continued the persecution of the different Other. How can the Goemai express her faith in Christ in a manner that is culturally contextual?

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<sup>432</sup> Sebastian Madathummuriyil, "Liturgical 'Reform' in the Syro-Malar Church: Observations Context, Culture, and Text," *Studia Liturgica* 44 (2014): 98.

<sup>433</sup> T.S. Maluleke, "African Culture, African Intellectuals and the White Academy in South Africa—Some Implications for Christian Theology in Africa," *Religion and Theology* 3, no. 1 (1996): 37.

<sup>434</sup> Uzuoku, *Worship as Body Language*, 177-81.

### 3.1. Enrique Dussel's Creative Transformation of *Messianic* Christianity: Goemai Subjectivity and Revitalization of Indigenous Culture

It was Catherine Keller who averred that there has never been precolonial Christianity. Her reason is that Christianity has always been connected with empire, from its Jewish origins in Palestine to the present Euro-American empire and its structures of power and control. In the same vein, Mugambi outlines how Christianity gradually lost its identity as it assumed the trappings of European culture and spiritual life before arriving in Africa if Christianity's entry into Ethiopia in biblical times is not considered. The Western missionary Christianity that entered Africa in the nineteenth century was at variance with what Dussel refers to as the *messianic* Christianity of early Palestine.<sup>435</sup> P'Bitek agrees with Dussel's reference to early Christianity as *messianic* Christianity because it was a Christianity that was "deeply entangled in Messianism."<sup>436</sup> The *messianics* (read as Christians) grew from a minority to a dominant group in parts of the Roman Empire following their openness to non-Jews. As their influence grew, and following the support they gave to Constantine in becoming emperor, they "went from being persecuted to being accepted, tolerated, and soon after became the hegemony of the empire."<sup>437</sup> The empire became defined by the Christian character it assumed in its synthesis with the Hellenistic way of life to become the predominant culture. During this time, Christ became the name of God and Christendom replaced the Hellenistic-Roman culture. Dussel refers to it as *messianic* Christianity's *first inversion*, through which "a complex hybrid Greco-Roman and Semite-Christian culture was produced. The earlier *messianism* turned into the religion that

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<sup>435</sup> Paraphrased from, Ukachukwu Chris Manus, *Intercultural Hermeneutics in Africa: Methods and Approaches* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2003), 7-8. See, Jesse N. K. Mugambi, "Foundations for an African Approach to Biblical Hermeneutics," in *Interpreting the New Testament in Africa*, ed. Mary N. Getui, Samuel Tinyiko Maluleke, and Justin S. Ukpong (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2001), 21.

<sup>436</sup> Okot p'Bitek, *Decolonizing African Religions: A Short of African Religions in Western Scholarship* (New York: Diasporic Africa Press, 2011), 40.

<sup>437</sup> Dussel, "Epistemological Decolonization of Theology," 27.

structurally gave birth to the *new culture*, which was the fruit of the transformation of *ancient* Greco-Roman and Christian culture.”<sup>438</sup> The point here is that the openness of *messianic* Christianity to the Hellenists resulted in hybridization or cross-cultural encounter from which Christendom emerged, where *messianic* Christianity took the structures of the Roman Empire and was influenced by its religion and philosophy.

The process of hybridization continued with the incorporation of *messianic* Christian rites and rituals into the cult of Christendom, where the understanding of the empire was transferred into the realm of the messiah. With the expansion of the Roman-Germanic Empire and the coronation of French Charlemagne as Emperor, the beginning of a state founded on the sacredness of the Christian Church, *Christendom*, was constructed as an inversion. The Holy Roman Empire, according to Dussel, as a sacralized state, was the outcome of the confusion of the “*messianic* principle” with the principle of religion.<sup>439</sup> Christendom became synonymous with the City of God in the Middle Ages; what comes clearly from the preceding concerns the reality of Christendom not being the expression *par excellence* of Christianity due to inversions that occurred when the marriage of *messianic* Christianity and the Hellenistic Roman Empire resulted in a new culture. I propose this form of engagement between Goemai religiosity and *messianic* Christianity. Western Christianity is already an indigenization of messianic Christianity and thus cannot be universalized as the only form of Christian expression for every space. Christendom has to be understood in its Western origin and structure for a genuinely Goemai expression of the Christian faith. In other words, Christendom is Western Christianity after the inversion of *messianic* Christianity. Its provincialization allows for a spatial expression of Christianity characterized by hybridization and indigenization (incarnation). This involves the

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<sup>438</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

reappropriation of *messianism* from Western Christianity within the reappropriated and revalorized Goemai spatial experience.

The *second* inversion is marked by a Christendom that morphed into a colonial force.<sup>440</sup> The forced conversion of the colonized, which Dussel refers to as imperial Christendom (the Latino-Germanic Empire), merely undertook a mission of propagating and implanting itself (culture, structure, worldview, philosophy, and theology) in colonized lands and among colonized peoples. The outcome is a *colonial* Christendom with indoctrinated Christians as converts who have either been forced or persuaded through western education or the fear of hell to accept the colonial matrix of power. Dussel calls the colonial Christians the “*second-class children of God*.”<sup>441</sup>

Imperial Christendom assumed the “point zero” articulated by Ramon Grosfoguel as “the point of view that hides and conceals itself as being beyond a particular point of view, that is, the point of view that represents itself as being without a point of view. It is this ‘god-eye view’ that always hides its local and particular perspective under an abstract universalism.”<sup>442</sup> Constructed on the pretension of non-spatiality, Dussel refers to Western Christianity’s false assumption as a “developmental fallacy,” which he delineates as the linear construction of history by Europe that has itself as the goal.<sup>443</sup> The Goemai reimagination of its mythologies, rituals, and celebrations is an attempt to express “Goemaity,” viz., the way of living authentic Goemai social memory in the Goemai space.

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<sup>440</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>442</sup> The Eurocentric perspective of Western thought pattern is what the Columbian philosopher, Santiago Castro-Gómez refers to as the “hubris of point zero.” Without Eurocentrism, the invented time and knowledge can only make sense to the Western mind as a particular locus of enunciation among other loci of enunciation. See Ramon Grosfoguel, “Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality,” *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1 (2011).

<sup>443</sup> Dussel, “Epistemological Decolonization of Theology,” 37.

The search for a Goemai Church challenges the Goemai theologian to cultivate an attitude that would facilitate a critical reflection of the community's experience by the people to create an indigenous theology. The resultant indigenous theology must express the attempt to reflect from within its spatial location and quotidian experience in affirming its particularity.<sup>444</sup> To this end, Goemai Christian theology must not only draw from the Goemai ancestral communitarian experience to be authentic, but indigenous theologians must have the courage to critique alien theology that is not brewed in a Goemai pot. The search for authenticity impels the Goemai to carry out an "inversion of Christendom in order to reclaim an entirely renewed *messianic* Christendom"<sup>445</sup> that will marry Goemai religiosity. This necessitates a reimagination and appropriation hinged on constructing an authentic identity in the Goemai prevailing context.<sup>446</sup> The Goemai locality must determine the Christian experience of the people.

According to p'Bitek, "[t]he catholicization of Christianity led to its becoming Hellenic, because the Greeks thought in metaphysical form. Christianity took a Hellenistic form because the faith was couched in Hellenistic experience and concepts. Thus in the Fourth Gospel, written about a hundred years after Christ, Jesus is identified with the Platonic-Stoic Logos."<sup>447</sup> The Hellenization of *messianic* Christianity lays the groundwork for another catholicization of Christianity to become Goemai. In the same vein that the Greek context necessitated the synthesis of Greek philosophy and the Hebrew scripture, the Goemai context must become the fertile ground for the incarnation of Christ and the synthesis of Goemai ancestral wisdom and the Hebrew Scriptures. One essential fact that must be recognized is that "[t]he synthesis of Greek

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<sup>444</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>446</sup> Katharina Schramm, "Senses of Authenticity: Chieftaincy and the Politics of Heritage in Ghana," *Etnofoor* 17, no. 1/2 (2004): 157-58.

<sup>447</sup> p'Bitek, *Decolonizing African Religions*, 40.

philosophy and Hebrew Scripture was carried out by Christian apologists, who, on the whole, were non-Jewish Christian converts trained to think in Hellenic terms.”<sup>448</sup> If the Greek context could generate its theological concepts, why are the African Christians, in this case, the Moemai, not allowed to be imaginative enough to take it upon themselves to midwife a synthesis of indigenous religiosity and Christianity in their linguistic terms? A genuinely Goemai Christianity must construct indigenous concepts that would convey the realities of the Christian mysteries. p’Bitek realized the importance of indigenous conceptual articulation of theological concepts when he argued for the construction of African Divine concepts that relate to their experience when he held that “African peoples may describe their deities as ‘strong’ but not ‘omnipotent’; ‘wise,’ not ‘omniscient’; ‘old,’ not ‘eternal’; ‘great,’ not ‘omnipresent.’ The Greek metaphysical terms are meaningless in African thinking.”<sup>449</sup> Therefore, if the scholastic philosophy was accepted in the theology of the Church, the fact that Africans still passionately employ metaphysical language in African thought and religiosity is mind-boggling.<sup>450</sup>

My argument promotes the Goemai conceptual articulation of its theological language that relates to the people’s circumstances. It is in line with the preceding that Matthew Kukah, in a paper titled “Religion, Culture and the Politics of Development” at the Center for Black and African Arts and Civilisation [sic] Public Lecture at MUSON Center, Onikan, advocated for the construction of African theological and linguistic concepts that express the Christian faith in understandable indigenous terms.<sup>451</sup> This sentiment captures the situation of many indigenous churches in Africa today; it also serves as a challenge to indigenous theologians of the need to

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<sup>448</sup> Ibid., 41. See also, Jean Danielou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, trans. John Austin Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973).

<sup>449</sup> p’Bitek, *Decolonizing African Religions*, 42.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>451</sup> Matthew Hassan Kukah, "Religion, Culture and the Politics of Development" (Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilisation Public Lecture: Lagos, 2007), 7.



prioritize the localization of the Christian faith in indigenous spaces so that the understanding of scripture in a local context would incorporate cultural reinterpretation and reappropriation of the message so that every aspect of the Christian faith can correlate with the people's daily experiences to make any sense within their space.<sup>452</sup>

Only a culturally constructed theology represents the subjectivity of the Goemai as a people. A Goemai theology testifies to the reality of a people with a constructed worldview, rituals, history, and mythology to preserve meanings, experiences, and practices that have shaped and held the people and their space together. Only a valuable tradition in which people's identity has been shaped is worth preserving and revitalizing for individual and communal reintegration. Without a Goemai indigenous theology and ecclesiology, the risk of cultural negligence and decadence cannot be overemphasized because it demonstrates the lack of confidence in the authenticity of the culture and landscape to inspire traditional values from cultural memory. Ecclesial history has shown that religiosity is contextually determined, and the link between Church and culture is inseparable. The various forms of Christianity morphed in their different cultural contexts. It suffices to say that the acceptance or even promotion of an alien expression of the Christian faith constitutes a rejection of the essential Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. This would reduce the Incarnation to a specific historical event over 2000 years ago without any cosmic dimension. The interrelation of every reality demonstrates the lack of boundaries where Christ sustains the web of relationships.

The relationship between all creation and the Incarnation of Christ reveals the intrinsic bond between Christ and the cosmos. "The cosmic dimension leads to ever greater depths of silence and worship of the divine presence, a silent oneness with the infinite, unimaginable

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<sup>452</sup> Manus, *Intercultural Hermeneutics in Africa*, 38.

mystery, which enfolds all, and from which no one is excluded.”<sup>453</sup> A cosmic experience of Christ helps understand how ‘In God we live and move and have our being’ (Acts 17:28).’ In the Incarnation, Christ has made it poignant that God is present with creation creatively and dynamically. It is within this dynamism of Christ and the cosmos that the Goemai revitalization of its harmonious universe expresses the authentic insertion of Christ within its space. As an ongoing reality, the Incarnation helps people respond appropriately to the salvation of Christ, where the people embody the revalorized spiritual richness that springs from their relationship with their universe.<sup>454</sup> Living Incarnational theology entails living God’s love and mercy in the cultural context of the people. The expression of love and compassion determined by culture allows for a faith experience in Christ that gives distinctiveness to religiosity.<sup>455</sup>

### **3.2. Indigenous Locality and Goemai Christian Identity**

If locality is the place of memory recovery, identity formation, and meaning construction for harmonious relationships, then Goemai ancestral patrimony signifies situatedness apart from which there is no existence. The role of memory in the context of social experience, therefore, is to draw from ancestral wisdom for envisioning a future by interpreting the experience in the light of present circumstances. In this light, cultural memory is understood as the creative recollection of a people’s constructed view of their past ancestral relationship with the land and the Supreme Deity in their myths, stories, songs, rites, rituals, and symbols. It connects people with their past, present, and future. In this space, geography shapes how people relate to their universe because the landscape aids in recollection.

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<sup>453</sup> The Incarnation: A Cosmic Mystery, [https://www.catholicireland.net/the-incarnation-a-cosmic-mystery/#:~:text=The%20cosmic%20dimension%20leads%20to,\(Acts%2017%3A28\)](https://www.catholicireland.net/the-incarnation-a-cosmic-mystery/#:~:text=The%20cosmic%20dimension%20leads%20to,(Acts%2017%3A28)) (Accessed 11/10/2022).

<sup>454</sup> Ibid.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid.

The village square or even the marketplace are not only places where people converge for engagement or buying and selling; village squares are the meeting point of elders, the ancestors, and the divinities. It connotes a sacred place where views are heard and exchanged, ancestors are called to witness and intervene to restore harmony, and divinities are implored to bless the people. For the Yorubas, the market is not just a place of buying and selling but a place of social interaction, bonding, and exchanging ideas. The *ojà* (market) is usually in the central part of the town as the meeting point of people—rich and poor, buyers and sellers, dancers and singers, and a place for all kinds of art and craft. *Oj'oba* (oba's market) is the most significant market in Yorubaland, located beside the palace of the oba. Those responsible for coordinating the activities of the market and ensuring the welfare and safety of traders, their goods, and the buyers are appointed by the *oba* (chief) to get to know his people's feelings from the community's weekly assembly in the market. It is the space of the convergence of the physical and spiritual realms.<sup>456</sup> It serves as the place of communal socialization and cultural construction of identity.

Indigenous peoples' sacred places are locations of encounters and exchanges where every view is respected, and everyone can contribute to public debate and proffer solutions to critical issues. The experience of drowning in the sea of voices is a reassurance that society is alive. In people's experience, a cacophony of opinions does not imply irreconcilable differences but divergent perspectives of understanding the issue or reality. Symphony is not in eliminating disparities but in accommodating everyone and every view in the search for equilibrium. The polyvocal nature of the African universe suggests that the community is formed and re-formed by the different voices engaged in the conversation for a better indigenous world. Voices from the past and present are accommodated and articulated for renewed indigenous consciousness. It

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<sup>456</sup> Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women*, 67.

is true of indigenous societies that different opinions and, at times, contradictory voices are listened to, especially in the conversations at the village square. Harmony is about the cacophony of views that are symphonized through consensus, not in an effort at hegemonization but hybridization.

The analogy of the marketplace applies to the Goemai village experience, for which nothing serves the good of the community other than the bond of oneness. The whole village as an assembly of persons who farm, eat, drink, buy and sell, pour libation, and engage in rites and rituals to express their religiosity. In the different activities in the village, the focal point is *Na'an* through the ancestors, deities, and spirits. As the people adapt culture to the land, they construct spiritual, ecological, social, and cultural means of response to what their environment beckons. As the basis for any Goemai Christian faith, Goemai indigenous spirituality must recognize those aspects of its practices that are not antithetical to the faith in Christ. The marketplace analogy, represented in the Goemai village living, challenges the Church to the spirituality of the marketplace (village living) where everyone is welcome, and no view is disparaged but is adapted in the search for equilibrium. The Goemai Christian need not be Western to be authentically Christian but fully Goemai, whose faith response is culturally determined. In the final analysis, Goemai Christians can integrate the valued elements of Goemai tradition and simultaneously bring about cultural rejuvenation while enriching their Christian identity.

### **3.2.1. Indigeneity and Interculturality**

Intercultural encounter happens at the point of difference where cultural divergence continuously attempts to navigate the obstacle of their opposing and sometimes contradictory worldviews. It is an exercise that depicts respect and tolerance for alterity. *Ad Gentes* 22 and

*Gaudium et Spes* 53-62 emphasize and promote the expression of authenticity. *Ad Gentes* 22 calls on indigenous churches to,

borrow from the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and disciplines, all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator, or enhance the grace of their Savior, or dispose Christian life the way it should be. To achieve this goal, [the document continues,] it is necessary that in each major socio-cultural area, such theological speculation should be encouraged, in the light of the universal Church's tradition, as may submit to a new scrutiny the words and deeds which God has revealed, and which have been set down in Sacred Scripture and explained by the Fathers and by the magisterium. Thus it will be more clearly seen in what ways faith may seek for understanding, with due regard for the philosophy and wisdom of these peoples; it will be seen in what ways their customs, views on life, and social order, can be reconciled with the manner of living taught by divine revelation.

The Church, from the above, demonstrates a recognition of the divine in the cultures it has found itself. *Gaudium et Spes* 53-62 focuses on culture as integral to fully articulating an indigenous faith in Christ. However, aspects of culture may be antithetical to the faith and, thus, the need for constant conversation between the two. The whole document, as seen in the section, is presented with logic, and the rhetoric of modernity still makes some positive remarks about the culture that is helpful to indigenous communities. Culture is recognized, in the section, as the ground for authenticity, where the Christian message is incarnated and given a local expression. It implies that there can never be authenticity outside of culture. Every specific expression of the Christian faith evidences an appreciation for indigenous patrimony. The diversity of culture acknowledged by this section entails that there cannot be a homogenous expression of faith. It consists of cultural expression of the faith in Christ or culture providing the fertile ground for the incarnation of the Word of God. To realize an incarnation of the faith, the Goemai must develop herself culturally and bring her culture into conversation with her Christian faith.

How does the above impact the Goemai today? What is the implication for the Goemai? Will it not be considered a betrayal of Church teaching that Goemai people will value spiritual wisdom and experience not emanating from the local Goemai Church? The challenge for the Goemai consists in recognizing the validity of their space as mediating the sacred and stopping its association with idolatry and fetishism, developing themselves culturally, especially as it concerns youth disinterestedness in tradition through cultural revival, and resisting the destruction and/or disappearance of Goemai ancestral patrimony like the *Luu das* among others. The Goemai must immediately commence the indigenization of the Church and the development of its liturgical language and rituals that emanate from marrying Christian and cultural practices. This is not an uncritical mixture of practices but the result of reflective and imaginative engagement. Reimagination of Goemai cultural rites and rituals will recapture the values of old within today's living context to engage a reconstructed Christian faith to birth a fully Goemai Christianity in which theological, biblical, and liturgical languages and categories are constructed to capture and speak the Goemai worldview while remaining genuinely catholic.

While some persons might privilege the Christian over the indigenous by holding that the authentic mode of indigenization is achieved by couching cultural reality in Christian categories as a means of legitimizing indigenous spirituality,<sup>457</sup> I align with the mode of couching Christian realities in indigenous categories. Kanu traces the trajectory of the ecclesiology development that began under Pope Gregory VII's leadership (1073-85) with the church's universalizing, centralizing, and hierarchical understanding. With the battle between popes and emperors, Boniface VIII's *Unam Sanctam* stipulates and upholds the rights and authority of the Roman primacy in the later part of the fifteenth century, articulating the church in juridical terms with an

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<sup>457</sup> Kanu, *Decolonizing God-Talk*, 112-13.

identity couched in sacramental validity. The Goemai Church of today must seek to construct a Goemai identity for itself. The questions for Goemai Christian theologians are: when will the need for indigenous theology dawn on Goemai theologians? Why is constructing an indigenous Goemai church not a priority among Goemai theologians? What aspects of ancestral wisdom can provide a theological structure essential for a Goemai Christianity? Is plurality antithetical to catholicity? My intention for proposing the above questions as the basis for reflection in the Goemai context is to realize the necessity for a Goemai Christian identity.

### **3.3. Indigenization as *Na'an* Theology**

Prioritizing the local over the foreign expresses the desire for indigenization (incarnation). A Goemai indigenous ecclesiology is contingent upon constructing a local theology founded on indigenous categories in an effort to understand the Divine. The construction of *El* and *YHWH* theologies that grew from their fusion and later assimilation of the understandings of the Canaanite and southern Palestinian divinities into the experience of salvation and deliverance of the Jews from slavery in Egypt is worthy of note. Drawing from the Goemai understanding of divinity in enriching the Christian faith has antecedence in the Jewish appropriation and integration of the divinities of the locals. The incorporation of *YHWH* into the pantheon of the Palestinian deities resulted from the qualities he shared with their local gods and how the adoption of *YHWH* did not result in the obliteration of the indigenous institutions based on the *El*-religion.<sup>458</sup> Kanu demonstrates in his work how the integration of *YHWH* of the Midianites did not entail the adoption of the cultural structures of the Midianites by the Jews. Instead, the deity was appropriated into the *El*-religion and the various cults according to their cultic rites. This offers the Goemai a paradigm for articulating a theology by which the Goemai

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<sup>458</sup> Ibid., 322-29. See chapter one of his work for detailed consideration of the integration of *El* – religion and the god *YHWH* in chapter one of his work.

experience of *Na'an* and ancestral wisdom can be married to Christianity by integrating the revalorized spiritual richness of the Goemai into the Christian faith. The question emanating from the preceding is how Africans, and Goemai in particular, can build their faith in Christ on Goemai indigenous structures and not allow the essence of faith in Christ to be compromised as such Goemai particularity is not sacrificed on the altar of universal claims and uniformity rather than unity and ecclesial communion.

The reconciliation of opposites as the nature of indigenous cosmology and the Goemai worldview, in particular, is a fertile garden for the conversation that would lead to a fusion of *Na'an* religiosity and the Christian God. The Goemai pantheon, similar to many African pantheons of divinity, is as fluid as the Jewish religious universe articulated by Kanu. The fluid character of indigenous peoples is such that the porosity of dualities of reality allows for the interpenetration of opposites rather than unreconciling contradiction that is based on the hierarchy of difference.<sup>459</sup> For the Goemai Church, it means that its local worldview is not defined by static structures but by the fluid-structure that is life-giving and enhances the humanization of the person. The envisaged indigenous Goemai Christian structure promotes collegiality as expressed in the council of elders and consensus building through discussions that give voice to more than just one person who can become authoritarian. Just as obtained in the Goemai worldview, it is hoped that solution-finding to community issues would involve the people engaging in a communal *palaver*. This way, the Goemai local Church would reflect the realities of its universe. The complementary character of the Goemai universe of its fluid duality ensures equilibrium. Since the world of opposites for the Goemai is not one of irreconcilable

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<sup>459</sup> Christopher Tirres, "Decolonizing Religion: Pragmatism and Latina/O Religious Experience," in *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/O Theology and Philosophy*, ed. Maria Isasi-Diaz and Eduardo Mendieta (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 227.



difference, the dynamics of the inner power of opposites to reconcile characterizes the natural universe. In the Goemai indigenous universe, evil entails disharmony, conflict, or irreconcilable opposites.

Without destroying the Goemai cultural structure, the Goemai deities must be reconstructed and integrated into the people as the energies of *Na'an*, whose cosmic presence is experienced in every reality the way Uzukwu alludes to the process by which the Jewish literature transited the deities into virtues and energies of *Yahweh* within the revalorized Goemai context. It challenges Christianity to change its stereotypical gaze of indigenous peoples as pagans and realize how God has worked through their structures to save them. Abandoning their cultural context will be equivalent to rejecting their identity and experience, resulting in a consciousness of alienation.

### **3.3.1. Goemai Christianity**

The ecological, spiritual, relational, aesthetic, and cultural imports of memory are essential in interrogating the shallowness of Goemai indigenous hermeneutics in the people's practice of the Christian faith. In light of the above, human spiritual and cultural transformation make appropriating indigenous spirituality a desire for the survival of a people and their culture through rootedness in their valued past. The re-constructed Goemai indigenous Church would be one where rites, rituals, stories, and theological language reflect the connections and journeys of the Goemai context.

Everything about Goemai revolves around the *yil* (land) and must be understood within that context. The land is essential for farming crops and rearing. Taboos and sacralization ensured its preservation and the conservation of the wilds. The pollution and misuse of land go against the spirituality of reverence for the earth, which comes with social, spiritual, and moral

consequences for the people. Taboos are meant to educate and enhance relationships with other persons, animals, and natural resources of the land while restricting unhealthy interaction.<sup>460</sup> Instead of taboos, the Church can improvise to make the land a focal point of spirituality and connection with God through organized prayers and ceremonies. Identification with the land is how the people become the land, and the land becomes the people as a way of preserving it. It preserves everything that the Goemai people embody such that wherever the Goemai is, her land is with her. It explains why Goemai rituals and Divine worship can only happen within the land.

The sacred spaces of the groves, rivers, and mountains (hills) are the abode of the deities and are thus revered and protected from human intrusion. This experience can inspire a Goemai Christian attitude toward conserving the earth's natural resources where the sense of connection helps the Christian to an ecological, aesthetic, and spiritual mindset toward all that exists. In this regard, the Goemai Christian allows the landscape's features to orient their minds to the wonder and desire for transcendence that the Goemai tradition inherited from the ancestral experiences mirror Divine presence.<sup>461</sup> In this light, the secularization of the Goemai gaze and spaces is transformed into a sacralizing gaze and resacralization of traditional sacred spaces. The onus then lies on the Church, chiefs, elders, traditional institutions, and civil authorities to protect these spaces for generations unborn since they embody the Goemai historical past and the present and assure a future as cultural heritage for the Goemai. And particularly beneficial are these sacred for the spiritual edification of Christians who integrate their renewed spiritual values for a renewed relationship with Goemai space and universe will foster a revitalization of

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<sup>460</sup> Benson O. S. Udezo and N. Nweze Stanley, "Igbo Traditional Religion and Land Preservation," *Journal of Religion and Human Relations* 1, no. 4 (2012): 95.

<sup>461</sup> Enoch Olujide Gbadegesin, "Sacred Spaces: Mountains in Yoruba Spirituality," in *African Sacred Spaces: Culture, History, and Change*, ed. BioDun J. Ogundayo and Julius O. Adekunle (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019), 138.

indigenous practices that will deepen the indigenous expression of spirituality in Goemai Christians.<sup>462</sup>

The Goemai theologians are, thus, challenged to partner with the traditional institution to construct a Christian priestly ordination ceremony patterned after the installation ceremony of the *Long Goemai* on a mountain or hill where constructed Goemai Christian ceremonies are used, and even traditional elders invited to teach ancestral wisdom to those to be ordained. It illustrates the connection between the *Na'an* and the Goemai ancestors, said to have their abode on the sacred mountain. In the end, the group is welcomed by a procession of the Christian community leading them to the venue of ordination. Goemai myth becomes a tool for promoting tradition with everything understood about the origin of the Goemai people, *Nda Teng Na'an*.<sup>463</sup> A place of pilgrimage could be built by the Church in a space away from the ordinary profane life of the people where an encounter with the Divine leads to a transformation of life. It could be on the mountain, in some secluded forest (trees may be planted to have a forest), or by a river. The recreation of sacred spaces is meant to bring people closer to nature and, ultimately, to God. The sense of connection and the holistic view of reality suggests the inseparability of environmental injustice from social injustice.

As the places for the formation and transformation of ancestral memory, the sacred space ascribes identity and the historical, ecological, and spiritual connection with the whole of the Goemai universe. It is only in the bond that sacred spaces confer on the people through rites and rituals that appropriation as ownership of the space and rituals is understood. In the context of

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<sup>462</sup> Vern Morrisette, Brad McKenzie, and Larry Morrisette, "Towards an Aboriginal Model of Social Work Practice: Cultural Knowledge and Traditional Practices," *Canadian Social Work Review / Revue canadienne de service social* 10, no. 1 (1993): 96.

<sup>463</sup> Gbadegesin, "Sacred Spaces," 146. It is from Gbadegesin's paraphrase of Bronislaw Malinowski from the article, *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (Westport, CT: Negro University Press, 1971), 91-92.

today's Goemai experience, the appropriation of sacred meanings in newly constructed rituals and sacralized spaces would inspire the ancestral spirit, wisdom, and understanding of events and actions today. It must be realized that the cultural and spiritual representations of the space and the shared experiences, memory, and identity bestow ownership of the sacred.<sup>464</sup> For the Goemai Christians to own their particular Christian spirituality, its constructed space and spiritual significations must allow it to connect with their ancestral spiritual experiences. In appropriating the valorized rituals of the ancestors, the Goemai reinvented spaces are made to assume original ancestral spaces for an experience that brings the initial experience to reality and establishes a renewed sense of belonging in a different context. The constructed spaces represent the hybrid identities and experiences of the Goemai past, like colonial disruption, modernization, and foreign religious intrusion. The newly constructed spaces of Goemai Christianity have for their purpose the attempt to navigate multicultural engagement and negotiate meanings among the various experiences within the Goemai contemporary space.

Goemai's assent of faith entails the person's transcendence toward attaining a connection and relationship with *Na'an* and various aspects of the universe. In contrast, Western faith demands intellectual assent, and even at that, to be authentic, assent must be with one's reason and not with the reasoning of others.<sup>465</sup> In light of Uzukwu's affirmation of the Holy Spirit as the entry point in exploring the Triune God,<sup>466</sup> the Goemai spiritual universe defined by the *Mukwarkum goe tep* of the Goemai and those of other indigenous peoples, when appropriated and integrated, allows for Goemai articulation of the Holy Spirit for the preservation of ancestral

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<sup>464</sup> Paul Post, Philip Nel, and Walter van Beek, eds., *Sacred Spaces and Contested Identities: Space and Ritual Dynamics in Europe and Africa* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2014), 136.

<sup>465</sup> Uzukwu, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness: Appropriating Faith and Culture in West African Style*, 215.

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

wisdom. Uzukwu agrees with Adolphe Gesché that Catholicism's genius is preserving ancestral wisdom as a Christian heritage for the good of humanity. Uzukwu argues that West African spiritualities' relational and dynamic hierarchy renders Divinity more rather than less from the perspective of exclusive supremacy. Thus, the spirits of African myths enable the people to enter into a relationship with the newness of Jesus Christ.<sup>467</sup> The Goemai can reappropriate the spirits (*Mukwarkum*) in the same manner as the "patient pedagogy of Israel's God and the transformation of the multiple deities into angels (messengers), opponents, or qualities (denominations)."<sup>468</sup>

Christian reappropriation and creative reliving of the Goemai past mean entering into communion with the cosmic Christ offering the Goemai the medium of acknowledging the intricate connection with all of reality. The elements of Goemai rituals come from the land. Ceremonies of cleansing of the land rituals like *Mang-gap*, *Ta'ar Kamipring*, and planting, *Mues yil Goeteer*, and many others, when reinvented, may be integrated into a Christian blessing and purifying ceremonies at the beginning of the rains when the Divine is implored to bless the land and increase productivity for the good of the people.

Every Goemai ritual celebration and rite is carried out in the Goemai language. This is because it functions as the traditional medium of verbal communication. Since language is an

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<sup>467</sup> See, *ibid.*, 222.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid.*, 221. See, Freedman and O'Connor, "Yahweh." Freedman and O'Connor showed Through Poetic incorporation (syncretistic by the way) of the Yahweh of the Southern god with El, a Levantine deity. In later materials, there is evidence of revivals of characteristics of the name in its earlier usage (retrieval) in the synthesis of the eleventh-century El/Yahweh – 514-515. They held that Cultic borrowing must have defined the adoption of the Midianite or Kenite deity introduced to Moses by his Father-in-law Ex 18 – 517. In their opinion, Number 25 could reflect fusion as the identification of Ba'al of Beth-poer and Yahweh of the Midians. Reconstruction of the two cults of Yahweh and Ba'al characterized by cultic borrowing – 518. They avered that early Mosaic monotheism depicts the existence of Yahweh and other deities who, after reimagination, were categorized into angels or Yahweh's subordinates (those serving Yahweh) as the divine council (Ps 89:8 [7], 71:19, 1Kgs 8:23, Deuteronomy 10:17, Ps 136:2, surrounded by a host as the Supreme One – Dt 33:2f, Zec 14:5, Ex 15:11, Ps 89:6-8 [5-7] and those opposed to Yahweh – 519.

essential distinguishing mark of any ethnic nationality, it is an indispensable mark of identity. *Na'an* is Goemai and the deities and ancestors as well. A renewed Goemai culture will focus on employing the Goemai language in theology and liturgical celebrations. The challenge for Christianity in Goemaland concerning Eucharist is the necessity for a Goemai translation of the Mass and the Bible into Goemai. Goemai for the local Church becomes a liturgical language and a sign of a Church inserted into the Goemai locality. The implication is that it facilitates the resurgence of the language by teaching, learning, and reading Goemai; that way, the language's survival is ensured. Critical to any reintegration is the development of concepts and narratives that the people understand to convey the gospel.

### **3.4. Reinterpreting Christianity in Goemai Spiritual Experience**

The search for a Goemai Christian identity has to be tied with the incarnation of Christ within the Goemai space. This way, Christ is no longer foreign to the Goemai space, just as the space is not antithetical to Christ, the Word, Wisdom, and Power of *Na'an*. It makes restoring the Goemai cosmological structures a way of revitalizing the cultural heritage through which the people's experience of *Na'an* inspires a *Na'an* theology where the faith in Christ is not oblivious to and does not disregard indigenous consciousness formed in the locality. Otherwise, any construction of authentic Goemai Christian identity without developing Goemai categories for expressing the Christian faith in the Goemai space may be considered a failure.

Integral to the reimagination and integration of Goemai spiritual richness is the issue of translatability. In translating categories between two contrasting worldviews, the certainty of some categories defying translation is not in doubt. The danger of forcing meaning into a foreign context cannot be ignored. "Forced meaning" is a recipe for distortion or even destruction as decontextualization of meaning or symbol strips the cultural geography of its initial power to

inspire. In this regard, the locus of difference allows for engagement and conversation. It is a kind of conversation that opens up the sphere of boundaries. The example of the interaction between the Jewish culture from which Christianity sprang up and the Hellenistic culture of Greece, resulting in a new identity for the early *messianic* movement, highlights how this is not a recent phenomenon in the growth and spread of the Christian faith. With the marriage of the two cultures, the Hellenistic language became the Christian method of communication. It transformed Christianity's approach of witness to persuasive argumentation due to the influence of Greek philosophy.<sup>469</sup> The adoption of the rhetoric of philosophy as the means of persuading the Greeks was based on the realization that the Greek experience was immersed in rational articulation. The shift in orientation was necessitated by the desire to make the faith comprehensible to the Greek mind. Therefore, philosophy became an essential tool in understanding and articulating Christian divinity. Hermeneutics assumed the place of relevance almost as high as that reserved for love.<sup>470</sup> The imperial nature of Christianity became solidified in metaphysics oriented toward homogeneity. Adopting Goemai as the medium of articulating the Christian faith will foster the bond of relationality, connection, and harmony.

The argument here is for Christianity in Goemai to present and represent the face of a Goemai Christ. It is not to assume everything of the Goemai cosmology but those aspects of the culture that help mediate Divine presence for the people and incorporate them into the faith in Christ, applying the logic of interculturality or intercultural relationship. For the Goemai, tradition, which serves as the vehicle of experience and ancestral wisdom, helps convey stories,

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<sup>469</sup> Catherine Keller, "The Love of Postcolonialism: Theology in the Interstices of Empire," in *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire*, ed. Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, and Mayra Rivera (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2004), 222.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid.

rituals, rites, proverbs, and culture among people situated in their context.<sup>471</sup> As spatial people, they are formed and informed by their experience. Rodriguez affirms that experience's role in forming identity is crucial since cultural memory is rooted and nourished in identity.<sup>472</sup> In summary, cultural memory and identity are inseparably linked; identity is constructed within cultural memory, and cultural memory preserves and enhances identity.

### **3.5. Recovering Ancestral Spirituality as Reindigenization**

The negative impact of Western Christianity on the indigenous worldview includes the dislocation, disgrace, desecration, and destruction of the cult of the ancestors.<sup>473</sup> Ancestors constitute the Goemai nation foundation as the promoters of harmony and enforcers of morality in the community. The destruction and obliteration of ancestral cults are synonymous with relegating indigenous spirituality to the background of community life. The result is a loss of identity and a lack of interest in indigenous matters. Postcolonial theology has set out to halt this denigration and destruction of culture through a conscious re-appropriation and the re-articulation of ancestral wisdom and experience by the people. Like the early apologists, the missionaries read and understood the divine mandate in their defense of the claim of Christianity to universal truth and the elimination of indigenous religious practices.<sup>474</sup> For Jeremy Schott, Christian apologetics is about cultural translation employed to make the faith intelligible to Greeks and Romans. In his opinion, the process of using apologetics for conversion made philosophy an indispensable tool in the explanation and dissemination of Christianity.<sup>475</sup>

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<sup>471</sup> Jeanette Rodriguez, "Sangre Ilama a Sangre: Cultural Memory as a Source of Theological Insight," in *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise*, ed. Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz and Fernando F. Segovia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 119.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>473</sup> Yartekwei Amugi Lartey, "Postcolonial African Practical Theology," 1-11.

<sup>474</sup> Jeremy M. Schott, *Christianity, Empire, and the Making of Religion in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.



The above shows how the intercultural conversation between the Roman and Greek cultures ended with a new form of Christianity. It aligns with Gruber's views, which hold that after the cultural turn, Christian identity must be open to the plurality of contexts within which it must incarnate Christian catholicity and apostolicity.<sup>476</sup> In other words, catholicity and apostolicity do not signify the elimination of differences but the recognition and acceptance of what is different as a valid expression of cultural or contextual peculiarity. Thus, the historicity of Christianity makes the indigenous construction of Christian identity a reflection of the hermeneutical character of the context. Gruber contends that the encounter of two cultures does not entail the absorption of the inferior into the superior cultures, as has been the case between Western culture and African culture (inculturation), but one in which a new culture emerges which is not any of the two but what she refers to as a "third space." Gruber avows that the "third space" is not tangible; in her opinion, it is the space of engagement made possible by cultural differentiation to the extent that the excluded other is absorbed into one's identity. She refers to the emergent space of absence out of differentiation, the space between two different contexts. It is not a space where difference vanishes.<sup>477</sup> In other words, it is the space where differences are resolved in a new identity without reducing cultural plurality into mono-culturality.

Monoculturalism implies a single historical narrative for the entire universe in a hegemonic construction of reality. This narrow perspective of reality characterized the Roman empire, especially since the adoption of Christianity as the state religion. The idea of one empire, one emperor, one religion, and one God was a fertile ground for monoculturalism. But as we highlighted earlier with the views of Uzukwu, myths are also creative ways of articulating and

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<sup>476</sup> Gruber, "Interculturality," 39.

<sup>477</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-45.

preserving the experiences of the founding ancestors among people whose foundation is not based on reason but on relationships and connectedness.

The utilization of pagan philosophical wisdom was a way for Christian apologists to meet the philosophers on their terrain, which only attests to the validity of the cultural medium in communicating the gospel message. Philosophy became a tool employed by Christian apologists to demonstrate how Christian reasoning outpaces the cultural philosophy of the Hellenists since theirs has the authority of scripture and revelation. The encounter between Jewish and Hellenistic cultures led to a synthesis that resulted in mutual influence and enrichment.<sup>478</sup> The recognized similarities within both cultures allowed Jews to adopt Hellenistic tradition and wisdom. It means that the ethnological foundation of every encounter and exchange consists of the search for true universals, as every reality is contextual. However, Greek philosophy has a fundamental presumption; that authentic philosophy must have the attributes of unicity, be constant or unchanging, and be acknowledged by everyone.<sup>479</sup>

### **3.5.1. Revalorizing Indigenous Relationality and Interconnectedness**

For indigenous people, the sense of authentic identity is inseparably linked with the weave of relationships that bind everything together. Only within the web of relationships is an individual acknowledged. The distinctiveness of every space makes the very idea of hegemony a negation of authenticity. The African value placed on tradition and the importance of indigenous cosmology in enhancing relationality must not be disparaged or relegated to the background in any indigenization of the faith in Christ. For the Goemai, the realization that *Na'an* has continually sanctified the Goemai universe and been with his people is evidence that no faith can

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<sup>478</sup> Schott, *Christianity, Empire, and the Making of Religion in Late Antiquity*, 28-31.

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19. See also 39-40.

be more authentic than that which privileges the Goemai experience of the Divine. There is no gainsaying that culture and spirituality are inseparable for indigenous people.

The priority that Christianity gives to content over context is reflective of the space within which it was constructed. Revalorization entails engaging context with content for any meaningful understanding of the message. Goemai religiosity, therefore, must re-articulate its belief systems rather than align itself with the reductionism of rationalization.<sup>480</sup> In integrating the rearticulated belief systems, Christianity becomes more identifiable with the locality, in this sense, the Goemai space. Therefore, indigenization must adopt the trajectory of the hermeneutics of suspicion related to Western Christianity to disrobe the faith of its Western garment. Only after this has been achieved is it possible to authenticate the faith in Goemai culture in particular and African culture in general.

*Ubuntu* connotes togetherness, interdependence, and humility as the African principle of relationality. It is a principle that recognizes the value and dignity of the Other as an equal and thus an acknowledgment and recognition of the existence of that Other. *Ubuntu* is about an all-encompassing relationship that defines the universe. Africans relate with the divine dynamically as there is no defined pattern of accessing the spiritual realm as the circumstance and context determine how and when ceremonies are carried out. Like the Hebrews of the Old Testament, Africans relate with the Divine through their ancestors. Ancestral relationships mirror the connection of everyone and everything and the integration of the land as a place of remembering.<sup>481</sup> In this light, Magesa refers to spirituality in terms of the ethics of love rather than the memorization of dogmas and doctrines. Relationality is the bond that results from the

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<sup>480</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion in the Dialogue Debate: From Intolerance to Coexistence* (Zurich: Lit Verlag GmbH & Co, 2010), 104-07.

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

people's collective wisdom and experience. Only in connectedness and harmony is the person humanized within the living and dynamic tradition that makes and remakes. Ancestral wisdom constitutes the creative and ongoing tradition of interrelation and interaction of a woven whole.<sup>482</sup> Following these, it is evident that ancestral tradition is the *conditio sine qua non* for any authentic African encounter with the faith in Christ.<sup>483</sup> This is because Christ's mediatory role between humanity and God is understood within the perspective that underlies the African mediatory universe. Thus, understanding Jesus as a mediator is not difficult for the African mind to grasp, primarily when Jesus is understood as the Elder par excellence. It is pertinent to realize how African society is built on a hierarchy of solidarity such that any form of disaster or evil is indicative of damage or breakdown of harmony that needs repair through confession and reconciliation to reestablish the connection of everything to every other reality.

### **3.5.2. Cosmic Christ in Cosmic Spirituality**

Kwasi Wiredu posits that for Africans, cosmic creation has to do with the inherent potentiality in the universe for self-emanation as a manifestation of divine power.<sup>484</sup> In this regard, every creation is under the governance of the Almighty. Evidently, for Africans, nothing happens outside the cosmological realm, such that illness, life, death, etc., are connected to the influence of the ancestors. While the Christian God creates *ex nihilo*, the indigenous peoples cannot conceive their Supreme Deity as such. This is because they understand their divinity as a cosmic architect.<sup>485</sup> The biblical idea of the cosmic Christ forms a significant part of the Pauline corpus that is well articulated in the article written by Mathew Thekkekara titled, “‘Christ is All and in All’ (Col 3:11b): Cosmic Christ and the Head of the Church.” He uses texts like Romans

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<sup>482</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>483</sup> Bujo, *The Ethical Dimension of Community*, 19.

<sup>484</sup> p'Bitek, *Decolonizing African Religions*, xxiv.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid., xxx.

8:19-23 (cf. Col 1:15-18) to argue for the relationship between Christ and cosmic totality. It explains the reason Christ is understood as in everything visible and invisible.<sup>486</sup> The redemption that Christ accomplished over the cosmic evil powers could not have been possible unless the salvation was itself cosmic.<sup>487</sup> Thekkekara holds that the cosmic Christ is in all persons, as evidenced in Col 3:11b, as the Lord of all.

The interpenetration/permeation of the divine in the cosmology of the Goemai helps the people understand the salvific influence of Christ in all that exists. For the Goemai, the divine is inseparable from his creation such that everything is a sacrament of the sacred. The permeation of the divine in the universe should not be mistaken for pantheism but should be understood rather as panentheism, which understands that the Great One is so powerful that nothing escapes his presence. However, he is not identical to all that exists. In this light, the indigenous African concept of cosmic spirit can be appropriated in the Christian articulation of creation in Christological terms. The cosmic spirit holds the totality of the universe in a way that underscores the connectedness of everything. It is little wonder that indigenous people do not look at the universe mechanically as an enchanted realm.<sup>488</sup> Thus, for Africans, everything (animate and inanimate objects) has a symbolic nature that aids the people's connection with the invisible Divinity. It explains indigenous people's reverence for trees, stones, rivers, and animals. The African experience teaches that everything mediates the divine realm.<sup>489</sup> The cosmic spirit inspires a cosmic religiosity expressed in the admiration of the environment.

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<sup>486</sup> Mathew Thekkekara, "Christ Is All and in All (Col 3, 11b): Cosmic Christ and Head of the Church," *Bible Bhashyam* 29, no. 1 (2003): 27-30.

<sup>487</sup> Thekkekara read Col. 2:15 in conjunction with Col 1:19 to closely read the cosmic implication of the redemption of Christ. If all things are in Christ and Christ is in all things, his presence must penetrate the cosmic reality to the extent of saving everything. [work on it].

<sup>488</sup> Kuzipa M. B. Nalwamba, "Mupasi as Cosmic S(S)Pirit: The Universe as a Community of Life," *HTS Theologies Studies/Theological Studies* 73, no. 3 (2017): 3.

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

Nalwamba summarizes it in these words, “[i]n incarnational terms, life is being *with* and *in* God. The Christian scriptures use metaphors of water, breath and air to indicate creation’s dependence on God for its growth and flourishing within an interpenetrating and permeating realm of the Spirit.”<sup>490</sup> What this invariably means is that the cosmic reality is not unrelated to the Christic nature of the eternal Word, the second Person of the Trinity. In this regard, Christ becomes the pervading experience of God in cosmic history as the second person of the Trinity, and the constitutive character of the Christ-event is experienced in the universe.<sup>491</sup>

### **3.5.3. Reappropriating Goemai Ancestral Wisdom for an Authentic Goemai Ecclesiology**

Essential to the cultural reimagination and integration of traditional values for the spiritual uplifting of the Goemai in her Christian faith is the recovery and relinking of Goemai cultural practices of harmony and communal living, which expresses the togetherness and oneness of the people linked to their space and universe constructed by their ancestors. The retrieval of ancestral history and memory facilitates a community-oriented approach to healing centered around conversation, purification, and restoration of harmony and wholeness resulting from shared experiences. Positive results necessitate the engagement of Goemai elders as teachers of history and explainers of cultural practices for the youths.<sup>492</sup>

The intergenerational awareness of Goemai cultural and social memory is a value that, once employed in the Christian faith and lived, can help address the ecological crisis and

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<sup>490</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>491</sup> Marinus C. Iwuchukwu, "African Theologians in Diaspora: Drawing on the Theology of Inclusive Religious Pluralism to Construct an African Value-Oriented Interreligious Dialogue," in *Theological Reimagination*, ed. Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 2014), 173-74. Though Iwuchukwu’s view is in relation to Inclusive Religious Pluralism, my application of his view is with regard to the synthesis between Indigenous religiosity and Western Christianity. My application of Iwuchukwu’s view acknowledges the pluralistic nature of the world that he recognizes as well.

<sup>492</sup> Morrissette, McKenzie, and Morrissette, "Towards an Aboriginal Model of Social Work Practice: Cultural Knowledge and Traditional Practices," 103.

promote social justice as the past, present, and future (dead, living, and unborn) form the one community of the offspring of the Goemai ancestors under the guidance, protection, and care of *Na'an*. The value of stewardship replaces the temptation to greed and selfishness concerning the earth's resources. The reimagined Goemai spiritual value of communal life will foster the richness of an understanding of the Trinity as a community of persons serving as a model of Christian living—a community of Goemai faithful witnesses of Christ.

The exercise of power and authority in Goemai society is one of consensus where checks and balances are entrenched within the social, political, and religious structures where power is shared among many people rather than concentrated in one person. The Goemai social organization of community will give people the voice to speak toward the excellent running and functioning of all structures of the Goemai lifeworld. The patriarchy can be addressed by an increase in participation of women in the community's public, social and religious life based on the indigenous idea of equilibrium.

Human spiritual and cultural transformation make the creative re-appropriating of indigenous spirituality important for the survival of a people and their culture through rootedness in their valued past. The re-constructed Goemai indigenous Church would be one where rites, rituals, stories, and theological language reflect the connections and journeys of the Goemai context. Agriculture, as a Goemai means of livelihood and understood as the way food is produced to care for the ancestors and deities, provides the avenue to see the cultivation of the land as a divine injunction to put the land to productive use. A return to the land will ensure food productivity at a time when hunger prevails due to the neglect of farming. A re-imagined Goemai spirituality of farming will inspire a renewed passion for tilling the land as a service to God. With the reintegration of the *Mues Yil Goeteer* (the annual sowing rites), the ritualization of

agriculture with prayer and blessings of the people and their tools before the rains will help a return to the land. A symbol of the *Shian-Ruom*, the large hoe believed to have come from Lekni, is presented in the ritual with prayers formulated to valorize indigenous spirituality.<sup>493</sup> The reconstructed *Shian-Ruom* will bring to the fore the value of farming by the progenitor. It will serve as a sacred reminder of the significance of agriculture as a spiritual duty with economic and social values. This would provide the context for understanding better the annual harvest and thanksgiving celebrated in the churches at harvest time. Lest it is forgotten, the Jewish festivals are mostly connected with agriculture—the feasts of the first fruits, weeks or Pentecost—reaping festival (*Shavuot*), feasts of Tabernacles, Tents or Booths—harvest festivals (*Sukkot*), and the feast of the Unleavened Bread (*Matzot*) connected the people to Yahweh (see, Exodus 23:14-17; 34:18-23; Deuteronomy 16:1, 9-10, 13, 16-17, etc.). The exodus experience is vital in understanding the constitution of the Jews as the people of God. Likewise, the Goemai agricultural and harvest rituals can serve as the context within which the Goemai Christians can experience and connect with God and enhance food security through production. Through these re-imagined rituals and celebrations, the Church can foster communal bonds of caring for one another, especially the less privileged in traditional Goemai society's recaptured communal dimension of hunting.

Taboos and sacralization ensured the preservation and conservation of the wilds. The pollution and misuse of land go against the spirituality of reverence for the earth, which comes with social, spiritual, and moral consequences for the people. Taboos are meant to educate and enhance relationships with other persons, animals, and natural resources of the land while restricting unhealthy interaction.<sup>494</sup> Drawing from the spirit behind the traditional taboos, the

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<sup>493</sup> See, Longban and Stephen, *History of the Moeffe Shinkwan Clan of Shendam*, 23.

<sup>494</sup> Udezo and Stanley, "Igbo Traditional Religion and Land Preservation," 95.



Church can improvise means to make the land a focal point of spirituality and connection with God through organized prayers and ceremonies since the land helps bear memory and narratives. Identification with the land is how the people become the land, and the land becomes the people to preserve it. Wherever the Goemai is, her land is with her in the manner that everything about the Goemai is associated with the land. It explains why Goemai rituals and Divine worship can only happen within the land, stirring gratitude as the patrimony of the ancestors.

The Goemai perceive the sacred spaces (the groves, rivers, mountains, and hills) as the abode of the deities and revered and protected from human intrusion. With the transition of the deities into virtues, Divine presence is recognized and revered in virtues that the landscape stimulates, leading to integrating the spiritual values behind their construction. This experience can inspire a Goemai Christian attitude toward conserving the earth's natural resources where the sense of connection helps the Christian to an ecological, aesthetic, and spiritual mindset toward all that exists. In this regard, the Goemai Christian allows the landscape's features to orient their minds to the wonder and desire for transcendence and the Goemai tradition inherited from the ancestral experiences mirrors Divine presence.<sup>495</sup> In this light, the secularization of the Goemai gaze and spaces is transformed into a sacralizing gaze and resacralization of traditional sacred spaces. It becomes imperative for the Church to mobilize the chiefs, elders, traditional institutions, and civil authorities to protect these spaces for generations unborn since they embody the Goemai historical past and the present and assure a future as cultural heritage for the Goemai. Spiritually reconstructed spaces and landscapes may serve as centers of pilgrimages and promotion of the sense of the sacred. This is achieved by designating the constructed places as having historical significance with created narratives from ancestral memory to facilitate the

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<sup>495</sup> Gbadegesin, "Sacred Spaces," 138.

making and remaking of the Goemai nation's spiritual treasures from which Goemai Christians can draw for their edification.

The sacred places and shrines enhance the restoration of the sense of the sacred and memory retrieval that spurs ecological consciousness since the location for ceremonies inspires teaching on the landscape and the morality that comes from environmental spirituality.<sup>496</sup> The experience of global climate change calls for a collective effort to save the earth. And a Christian recovery and integration of Goemai spirituality can help reverse the earth's destruction, especially with the depletion of forests and the menace of erosion.<sup>497</sup> The holistic nature of African cosmology will inspire a way of life where the totality of the person will relate with the totality of reality to revive the sense of togetherness that the African family exemplifies. It is essential to realize that African connectedness has positive implications for ecology as humanity grapples with the problem of global warming. This is because indigenous people have no identity without the land, the sacred patrimony of the ancestors that stimulates a sense of wonder and reverence.<sup>498</sup> The sacredness of space aids the people in listening to the earth speak as a mother to her children. Thus, land and place-based knowledge are linked with spirituality.<sup>499</sup>

The Goemai theologians can partner with the traditional institution to construct a Christian priestly ordination ceremony patterned after the installation ceremony of the *Long Goemai* on a mountain or hill where created Goemai Christian ceremonies are used, and even traditional elders are invited to teach ancestral wisdom to those to be ordained. In the end, the group is welcomed by a procession of the Christian community leading them to the venue of

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<sup>496</sup> Michael Marker, "Chapter Thirteen: Sacred Mountains and Ivory Towers: Indigenous Pedagogies of Place and Invasions from Modernity," *Counterpoints* 379 (2011): 204.

<sup>497</sup> See, Buba Y. Alfred et al., "The Causality of Deforestation in North-Central Nigeria: Case Study of Shendam Urban Area, Plateau State," *Journal of Environment and Earth Science* 7, no. 7 (2017).

<sup>498</sup> Curtice, *Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God*, 26.

<sup>499</sup> Marker, "Chapter Thirteen: Sacred Mountains and Ivory Towers," 206.

ordination. Goemai myths become tools for promoting tradition with everything understood about the origin of the Goemai people, *Nda Teng Na'an*.<sup>500</sup> A place of pilgrimage could be constructed by Church in a space away from the ordinary profane life of the people where an encounter with the Divine leads to a transformation of life. It could be on the mountain, in some secluded forest (trees may be planted to have a forest), or by a river. The recreation of sacred spaces is meant to bring people closer to nature. The sense of connection and the holistic view of reality suggests the inseparability of environmental injustice from social injustice.

As the places for the formation and transformation of ancestral memory, the sacred space ascribes identity and the historical, ecological, and spiritual connection to the whole of the Goemai universe. It is only in the bond that sacred spaces confer on the people through rites and rituals that appropriation as ownership of the space and rituals is understood. In the context of today's Goemai experience, the appropriation of sacred meanings in newly constructed rituals and sacralized spaces would inspire the ancestral spirit, wisdom, and understanding of events and actions today. It must be realized that the cultural and spiritual representations of the space and the shared experiences, memory, and identity bestow ownership of the sacred.<sup>501</sup> For the Goemai Christians to own their particular Christian spirituality, its constructed space and spiritual significations must allow it to connect with their ancestral spiritual experiences. In appropriating the valorized rituals of the ancestors, the Goemai reinvented spaces are made to assume original ancestral spaces that help bring the initial experience to reality and establish a renewed sense of belonging in a different context. The constructed spaces represent the hybrid identities and experiences of the Goemai past, like colonial disruption, modernization, and foreign religious

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<sup>500</sup> Gbadegesin, "Sacred Spaces: Mountains in Yoruba Spirituality," 146. It is from Gbadegesin's paraphrase of Bronislaw Malinowski from the article, *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (Westport, CT: Negro University Press, 1971), 91-92

<sup>501</sup> Post, Nel, and Beek, *Sacred Spaces and Contested Identities*, 136.

intrusion. The newly constructed space of Goemai Christianity must, for its purpose, attempt to navigate multicultural engagement and negotiate meanings among the various experiences within the Goemai contemporary space.

Re-imagination has always defined religious renewal over the ages. The following elements have always characterized indigenous spiritualities: Deity, progenitor, land, rites and rituals, shared experience, memory, community identity, and sacred places. Christian appropriation of Judaism and its cultural and ritual practices offer a model for Goemai appropriation of Christianity. Scripture records how Christ appropriated the Jewish Passover to his Christian ritual sacrifice of Calvary. The interpretation of the Old Testament in the light of the memory of the death and resurrection of Christ allowed for a re-imagination and reintegration of the spiritual significance of the Passover among Christians as liberation from the slavery of sin. The context of the Passover is a ritualistic meal and “the telling” (*Haggadah*).<sup>502</sup>

Goemai confession, reconciliation, and accommodation can be reinvented and reinterpreted to stress the importance of purity of heart for any spiritual celebration or ritualistic gathering. *Lap dor* and *Pue ser* are Goemai’s recognition of the holiness of *Na’an*, and anyone who approaches *Na’an* must come with a clean heart. They bolster the significance of reconciliation with individuals, the community (living and dead), and the Divine. Ritualizing the sacrament of confession to involve the community may help cement communal harmony and highlight the bond of belonging. And the spirit of accommodation will enable the Goemai Christians to view differences not as avenues for competition but as engagement and enrichment.

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<sup>502</sup> Domenik Ackermann, Memory in Passover and the Words of the Luminaries: Insights for a Christian, *Journal of Interreligious Studies* 37, (2022), 21-24. Haggadah involves the combination of remembering and telling. Ex 12: Ritualistic meal – Ackermann outlines the role of memory in the Passover Celebration i. The role of food in connection to memory, ii. Telling the story to the Children - 21-24. Deuteronomy 26 concerns retelling the story by entering into it- making it one’s experience.

Reconciliation becomes a process for restoring harmony with others, the environment, and the Divine. It offers a holistic approach to the Sacrament of Confession. And the mechanical manner by which absolution is given and penance is done has reduced the sacrament to a ritual with little significance in people's life.

Baptism as the sacrament of Christian initiation has much to incorporate from *Kwamteng*. A way for the Church to be genuinely Goemai and thoroughly Christian is to reappropriate the spirit of incorporation into the life of the society, learning ancestral wisdom and secrets, and undergoing the ritual process of maturity from childhood to adulthood *Kwamteng* instills in the initiates. A reconstruction of the *kool* in a secluded part of the community and protected from disturbance and intrusion by non-initiates will give it the sacred status it enjoys in traditional religiosity. The Christian community's involvement when the candidates are led to the *kool* is essential. The initiates remain in the *kool* for a length of time decided by the community for instruction on the faith. Traditional elders are invited to give instructions on history, culture, and spirituality. Food is prepared by the community and left at a place where no contact is envisaged. The period culminates in the celebration of baptism followed by celebrations by the community of its newly incorporated members.

The baptismal practice of taking Western names of saints further severs the connection with the land, its ancestral past, cultures, history, and spirituality. The sense of connection, history, meaning, and identity that comes with naming ensures rootedness as embodying a people, their culture, values, virtues, and wisdom as the expression of the relationship with and intervention of *Na'an* in the lives of the people would foster a more profound sense of spiritual union with the Goemai universe and the Christian tradition of ancestral veneration (the cult of the saints). The incorporation of Goemai ancestors into the corpus of saints in the Goemai Church would be

evidence of the recognition of God's unlimited and unrestrictive grace in the universe. It would inevitably bring the models of virtuous and godly life close to the people.

Healing, an essential ritual for restoring harmony and good health, brings physical and spiritual realms. The many spirits of the Goemai universe appropriated in the Holy Spirit with the gifts and charisms manifest in the charismatic experience as listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10: words of wisdom, words of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in different tongues (languages), and interpretation of tongues. These express the mystical dimension of God's healing and liberation. The Goemai embody these in the *Paa divination*, *Goe dak* (healer or medicine man) who ensure that the mystical forces controlling the universe are overcome by supernatural means.

The complementary character of the Goemai universe with its fluid duality ensures equilibrium. The world of opposites for the Goemai is not one of irreconcilable difference. The dynamics of the inner power of opposites to reconcile characterizes the natural universe. And the indigenous universe does not allow disharmony, conflict, or irreconcilable opposites. These signify evil.

The Goemai spiritual experience of togetherness, experienced in the ritual meals where eating and drinking and the spirit of celebration through dance and songs are expressive of joyful celebration and participation, is about the active involvement of everyone. African ritualistic meals are means of re-living the story of the past, like the Jewish *Seder* meal and Christian Eucharist. Thus, rituals as vehicles of ancestral "presence" (*anamnesis*) help people understand communion as a way of life.<sup>503</sup> "*Anamnesis* is the ritual that recalls the past event (or story), seeking to restore its original virtue; therefore, it is much more than a mnemonic ceremony; it is re-present-ing, re-

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<sup>503</sup> Themba E. Ngcobo, "The Holy Communion and African Rituals: An Encounter between African Religion and Christianity," *HTS Teologies Studies/Theological Studies* 76, no. 3 (2020): 2.

enacting or re-living the event in commemoration,”<sup>504</sup> which implies making the traditional way of life inspire ancestral living in Goemai Christians today. It is much more than a mere remembrance of the past but a reminiscing. Keeping mythical stories alive is a way for indigenous people to establish a bond, a common union of life, experience, history, and spirituality. Christian reappropriation of this would mean communion with the cosmic Christ as the medium of acknowledging the intricate connection with all of reality. The elements of Goemai rituals come from the land. Ceremonies of cleansing, like *Mang-gap*, *Ta’ar Kamipring*, the sowing rites—*Mues Yil Goeteer*, and many others—may be reinvented at the beginning of the rains when the Divine is implored to bless the land and increase productivity for the good of the people. Farming becomes a divine activity where food for the people and the Divine (Guinea corn, millet, and many others) is cultivated. This is where the arguments of Uzukwu for local elements in the making of the Eucharist can validly be applied. And a thanksgiving ceremony for a bumper harvest is offered at the time of harvest. This will ensure food security and valorize farming among the people. Still, in connection with the Eucharist, translating the Mass and the readings into Goemai will facilitate the youths’ learning and reading of Goemai; that way, the language’s survival is ensured, and joy is restored to the celebration of the Eucharist.

The reappropriated spiritual richness from the space would be a re-imagination of the behavior that the space attests. The eroding of Goemai spirituality from the people’s consciousness and belief system is re-lived in the context of Goemai Christian worship and theology by appropriation. As relevant ancestral values and virtues for promoting wholeness and reinvigorating deep divine connection, their validity is their rootedness in the Goemai universe which, no doubt,

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<sup>504</sup> Ibid., 4. It is Ngcobo’s paraphrase of Von Allmen, J.J., *The Lord’s Supper*, Ecumenical Studies in Worship 19, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969), 24.

will enhance Christian living. Spirits and deities become powerful emanations of the divine presence and nearness to the people.

Goemai's cultural form of organizing society for efficient administration offers the Church opportunity for the inclusion of people in the life of the community. While the hierarchy of the Church is centered around ordained ministers, the societal organization of the Goemai distributes power to different people. For example, the *Long* administers, with the help of his council, made up of the *Goebou*, *Kasun*, *Kanankur*, *Kawap*, *Shinduar*, and *Kawai*; likewise, the *Shinkwan* and *Kampiring* have councils, and the royal women are organized under the *Mugajiya* with council members comprising the *Nuwung Mugajiya*, *Mama*, *Kumbwo*, and *Tukura*. These and other organizations of people for the smooth running of society constitute the hierarchical social model of the Goemai universe. Even as the chief priest of Goemai, the priestly functions are delegated to the *Kampiring* and *Shinkwan*.

### **3.6. Experience as *locus theologicus***

The sapiential character of African *palaver* as a means of engagement is verbal and non-verbal. It is the product of the lived wisdom of the people through which communication and communion are established.<sup>505</sup> Thus, membership in the community is a significant aspect of the universe. Orobator sums it up by stating that “the fundamental aspect of African spirituality consists in the affinity and interpenetration that is expressed in the communion and solidarity of human beings and the rest of creation.”<sup>506</sup> The context's experiential nature makes experience the point of understanding Goemai reality. For the Goemai, nothing makes sense outside the community, for it is the place of experience.

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<sup>505</sup> Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic*, 52.

<sup>506</sup> Orobator, *Religion and Faith in Africa*, 109.



The ancestors, as mediators, serve as the link between their descendants and dependents and the Divine. Bujo refers to them as the sacraments of God. In many African communities, the Divine is accessed through the repository of wisdom of the ancestors whose experience has shaped and informed the understanding of the universe. For the Goemai, the ancestors have kept the people under the constant awareness that “God is Goemai.”<sup>507</sup> As the ones who direct the people to the Divine, the ancestors become the locus of Divine Revelation.<sup>508</sup> Therefore, they are crucial in any reintegration of indigenous spirituality into Christianity. Indigenous experience is the midwife to wisdom because it teaches more than any logic. Wisdom manifests in maintaining communion as reminiscence, where the past is relived in the present with the future in sight. Bujo calls it “anamnestic solidarity.” For Bujo, self-apprehension is formulated once a person is immersed in the ocean of ancestral experience. In the context of ancestral veneration, life is always received in gratitude.<sup>509</sup> And the ancestors, serving as the sacrament of the divine who is the giver of life, stimulate the sense of divine awareness around the community.

Communal experience and wisdom are the bedrock of community life and solidarity for the Goemai. In the Goemai worldview, the *kwap da* left behind the way the people understand the world and how *Na'an* is the center of life as the creator. Through interaction with their space, the Goemai can perceive and articulate the inner workings of the cosmos. It is, therefore, the case that for the Goemai, the anthropocentric universe is the arena of experience in which *Na'an* theology may be undertaken. The Goemai world and identity are products of rational reflection, but they interact with the space where experience is understood as the memory of interaction

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<sup>507</sup> This is inspired by the title of Deloria’s book, *God is Red*. The reason I allude to that is because of the necessity of marrying Goemai ancestral wisdom with the Christian faith. It implies that the Christian God is not different from *Na'an* as the similarities between Goemai indigenous spirituality and Christianity are indeed dazzling, especially with regard to rituals of initiation, the sacramentality of the universe, ritual meals, etc.

<sup>508</sup> Bujo, *The Ethical Dimension of Community*, 19.

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

among people and between people and their spiritual center. Bhabha prioritizes experience in the construction of cultural identity. He says,

[a] form of cultural experience and identity is envisaged in a theoretical description that does not set up a theory-practice polarity, nor does the theory become “prior” to the contingency of social experience. This “beyond theory” is itself a liminal form of signification that creates a space for the contingent, indeterminate articulation of social “experience” that is particularly important for envisaging emergent cultural identities.<sup>510</sup>

It bolsters the indispensability of experience in articulating cultural peculiarities from which spiritual richness can be repossessed to facilitate an authentic Goemai Christian spiritual, social, moral, and cultural rejuvenation.

In the same light, Bujo’s creative Christological interpretation of indigenous wisdom helps in showing how wisdom is not only a virtue or a value in the indigenous African community that the elders enjoy due to their closeness to their ancestors and, by extension, to the Divine; it is the embodiment of the authentic person. No community thrives outside the purview of ancestral wisdom. In Christendom, Christ is the Wisdom of God that permeates the universe and later manifests as a person. St. Paul refers to Christ as “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24). In the letter to the Colossians, Paul writes that Christ embodies the divine mystery. He it is the one “in whom are hidden all the treasures in wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3). Related to the reimagined context, ancestral mysteries must be relived dynamically as inspiration in the Goemai context for authenticity. This implies that Jesus, as the ancestor par excellence, becomes the means through which all ancestral mysteries and wisdom are given concreteness and meaning. According to Bujo, the fact that wisdom in Africa is identified with the elder, means that Christ, for the Africans, is God’s Elder. African Christianity will thus see

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<sup>510</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 179.

Christ as the Proto-Elder from whom all elders derive the fulness of wisdom, inspiring genuine living.<sup>511</sup>

### 3.6.1. Indigenous Historicity and Epistemology

Like most African traditions, the Goemai tradition springs from the ancestors' living wisdom and memory. The people's socio-historical trajectory ensures a **re-member-ing** of the people in their social context by their remembering. In other words, situatedness within a space connotes immersion into the experiential logic of the ancestors so that the ancestors motivate the reflection and action of the community. Historicity, therefore, becomes anamnestic solidarity with a futuristic perspective. Anjali Prabhu surmises that history is not a collection of facts from the past. It is embodied in the subject just as the subject makes history. It means that history is understood through the person, and the person is understood through history being a subject of history.<sup>512</sup> The reconstructed sacred places ensure the creative continuance of ancestral spiritual wisdom in the cultural space, enhancing renewed understanding and living of an authentic Goemai Christian experience.

The search for authenticity is hinged on retrieving the oral wisdom that encapsulates the people's history within its link with the land, the spirits, and every spatial reality.<sup>513</sup> Following the logic in *anamnestic* solidarity that defines indigenous historicity and knowledge, the

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<sup>511</sup> Bujo, *The Ethical Dimension of Community*, 205. Bujo demonstrates how the Christological interpretation of indigenous wisdom helps the understanding of Jesus as the Proto-ancestor is not degrading of him as an old man who has lost the vital energy. Instead, according to him, his analysis helps to show that old people have vital energy. Bujo is clear on the impending catastrophe that awaits a community without wise men and women. It corresponds to a Christian living without the wisdom that comes from God. It would be an aberration. Bujo suggests that priests be referred to as elders from the Greek derivation of *presbyteros*. Seminary formation should aim at making true elders of candidates to priesthood in preparation for assuming the role of elders in the community of believers as embodiments of wisdom. It goes to show how African prioritize experience and wisdom over intellectualism.

<sup>512</sup> Anjali Prabhu, *Hybridity: Limits, Transformation, Prospects*, ed. Emmanuel C. Eze and Arif Dirlik, *Explorations in Postcolonial Studies* (Albany: State University Of New York Press, 2007), 20.

<sup>513</sup> Marie Battiste and James Youngblood Henderson, *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: A Global Challenge* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing Ltd, 2000), 41.

repetition of events happens in a reimagined fashion such that the newness experienced is expressive of the dynamic nature of the context characterized by fluidity. This fluidity allows for the interpretation and re-interpretation of events in the light of the creative present. The validity of indigenous knowledge is based on the personal and communal experience of what constitutes the cosmos and not fixed data that must be memorized and reproduced when required.<sup>514</sup> Thus, indigenous knowledge is not documented in a closed canon but preserved in stories, proverbs, signs, and symbols.

Narration as a means of retrieval of the past for social integration ensures the fortification of personal integrity and identity. Narrative identity results from the people's integration of their reconstructed history and imagined future in the search for the cultural expression of the Christian faith. The purposeful construction of identity is to relink the people to their ancestral roots as embodying cultural authenticity.<sup>515</sup> Stories as bearers of tradition reinforce the characteristic cultural trait, and their dynamic character allows for elaboration and reinvention. As media of communication, they are recounted within the context of the people's experience, signifying "their uniqueness, symbolic meaning, purpose, and embedded lessons, rather than their literal face value."<sup>516</sup>

### **3.7. Goemai Christian Search for Cultural Values**

The Goemai worldview is one in which the renewal of identity is paramount to preserving traditional values that have defined the Goemai space. With culture waning due to

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<sup>514</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>515</sup> Referenced in, Chanee D. Fabius, "Toward an Integration of Narrative Identity, Generativity, and Storytelling in African American Elders," *Journal of Black Studies* 47, no. 5 (2016): 427. For more, see, Dan P. McAdams and Kate C. McLean, "Narrative Identity," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 22, no. 3 (2013). Dan P. McAdams and K. S. Cox, "Self and Identity across the Life Span," in *The Handbook of Life-Span Development*, ed. R. M. Lerner, M. E. Lamb, and A. M. Freunds (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>516</sup> Fabius, "Toward an Integration of Narrative Identity, Generativity, and Storytelling in African American Elders," 429.

neglect by the current generation of Goemai youth, cultural appropriation and integration allow for a creative recovery in which values are recaptured and relived anew. From the cultural memory of the people, inspired by the sacred locations of the royal living dead, the Moemai retrieve values that help in the search for authenticity. Not oblivious to the critique of cultural appropriation, which includes, among others, concern for the genuineness and identities of cultural groups, the impact of appropriation on what is appropriated—the fear of damaging or transforming the rites, rituals, or even practices, the issue of property ownership of cultural practices as some profit from what belongs to others. The validity of the above concern notwithstanding, cultural appropriation has to be understood within the context of interculturality. In the Goemai space, the engagement of Goemai indigenous culture and the alien culture of Europe may signify the practice of cultural borrowing that has defined our pluralistic world and demonstrated in the biblical examples of the Jews incorporating the traditions of their neighbors.

### **3.7.1. Preventing Goemai Cultural Decadence**

The risk of an erroneous representation (depiction) of practices borrowed from another culture calls for vigilance. It entails that the original significance of the practice is preserved so that the outcome of the appropriation enriches, and does not diminish, traditionally distinctive values as in a “forced context.” In the desire to protect and preserve the cultural values of the Goemai space, the Goemai cannot but become stewards of their valued patrimony. According to Bruce Ziff and Pratima V. Rao, “stewardship involves finding the means through which the survival and maintenance of culture can be assured or enhanced.”<sup>517</sup> The Goemai intervention in

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<sup>517</sup> Bruce Ziff and Pratima V. Rao, “Introduction to Cultural Appropriation: A Framework for Analysis,” in *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation*, edited by Bruce Ziff and Pratima V. Rao (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 13.

arresting its cultural decadence is the spiritual integration by the Church of its reimagined social or cultural memory. In this sense, the Church's role consists of promoting the rootedness of the Church in the Goemai space, where Christ assumes the cultural particularity of the people by dwelling among them. The goal of any cultural reimagination is the pure expression of the rites and rituals in a creatively constructed manner. The Goemai context is distinctively made with the social memory of the people to nurture and preserve the reimagined sacred spaces and rituals and validation of Goemai-ness.

As an essential dimension of cultural reimagination, cultural appropriation must consider various dimensions of the people and culture. These include the social, ecological, spiritual, experience, and context as “ecological, spiritual, social, and territorial concerns regulate any understanding of cultural appropriation.” In recovering Goemai's spiritual relationship with their land, customs, and ancestors, storytelling conveys the Goemai weave that connects the people, their space, and the universe. (The Goemai must come to the point where instead of focusing on the scars of colonialism and coloniality but work on consolidating the shared social memory of the Goemai nation).

### **3.7.2. Linguistic Foundation of Goemai Culture**

Human language is one means of communication. Language communicates verbally while rituals communicate symbolically. The mystical bond of verbal language comes from being constructed within a context to express the people's communal experience. The magic of speech is the way it offers connection with the ancestors who constructed and spoke it, a common worldview belonging to a universe of people with the same world of meanings, and authenticity as a person's shared heritage with kith and kin. It allows for imagining shared realities that are the people's.

Songs, proverbs, stories, and all verbal communications in the Goemai culture are mediated by language. As the distinctive character of a people, language is essential in reimagining culture and integrating the spiritual values retrieved from the space. The extinction of any language signifies the disconnection and loss of the people's valued past that conveys and communicates the people's cultural identity through information about sacred spaces. Language for the Goemai is the bearer of who the Goemai are, and its promotion, preservation, and, more importantly, its revalorization is the renewal of the Goemai identity. Minnie Degawan writes, "for indigenous peoples, languages not only identify their origin or membership in a community, they also carry the ethical values of their ancestors—the indigenous knowledge systems that make them one with the land and are crucial to their survival and to the hopes and aspirations of their youth."<sup>518</sup> Degawan opines that the systematic extinction of a people in many countries today results from the promotion of dominant languages as national languages at the expense of smaller ones, often referred to as dialects. The Church can promote the teaching of Goemai by employing Goemai as a liturgical language and elders engaged to teach the youth how to read scripture in Goemai.

Battiste and Henderson distinguish between sacred knowledge and required survival skills. Sacred knowledge has to do with human interaction with the Divine. To survive in their spaces, people must acquire the means to master their environment, not with the motive of dominating it but for the sake of carrying the sacred role of stewards. Interaction is always mediated by language. For indigenous people, language is not only a means of communication but also a form of spiritual identity as "[t]hrough their shared language, Indigenous people create a shared belief in how the world works and what constitutes proper action. Sharing these

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<sup>518</sup> Minnie Degawan, *Indigenous Languages: Knowledge and Hope*, The UNESCO Courier, Many Voices, One World 2019-1 e-ISSN 2220-2293  
<https://en.unesco.org/courier/2019-1/indigenous-languages-knowledge-and-hope> (Accessed 11/24/2022).

common ideals creates the collective cognitive experience of Indigenous societies, which is understood as Indigenous knowledge.”<sup>519</sup> The language connection is significant in a people’s identity such that the extinction of a language is obviously the end of a culture and a people. The sacramental nature of language is that “in human consciousness, it is the finite expressed in infinite mystery.”<sup>520</sup> That is, the person is a becoming that cannot be fully comprehended due to her transcendent nature. In her transcendent dimension, she embodies the totality of her space. In this sense, she is a mystery waiting to be discovered.

The challenge for Christianity concerning the decolonized Goemai *locus of enunciation* entails the localization of school curricula to reflect the cultural wisdom of the people. It involves a reconnection with the land. Only by so doing are the people able to immerse themselves in the ancestral values that guarantee authenticity.<sup>521</sup> It is the values that the Church and all owners of educational institutions in Goemalands need to utilize in revising the school curricula so knowledge will become more local by weaving ancestral insights and values into the revised curricula to stimulate students’ interest in traditional values and lifestyles. This will encourage the youth to relink with the Goemai space and universe—a space-based knowledge and replace the misrepresentation of the Goemai past that disrupted harmonious living.<sup>522</sup> A pedagogy rooted in the place and landscape so that Goemai morality and spirituality are centered in locality since “centering the local and spiritual in a set of educational goals is the basis for Indigenized praxis and a decolonized pedagogy.”<sup>523</sup>

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<sup>519</sup> Battiste and Henderson, *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage*, 49.

<sup>520</sup> Quoted in, *ibid.*, 73.

<sup>521</sup> Cloke and Williams, "Geographical Landscapes of Religion," 613.

<sup>522</sup> Marker, "Chapter Thirteen: Sacred Mountains and Ivory Towers," 198-99.

<sup>523</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.



### 3.7.3. Creating Mythologies

Keeping mythical stories alive is much more than a mere remembrance of the past; reminiscing is a way for indigenous people to establish a bond, a common union of life, experience, history, and spirituality. Stories are embedded with moral lessons and values that allow for a spatial self-understanding. A people's continued existence is assured when it is rooted in their mythologies to construct their social memory from their experience. Soyinka surmises that mythologies are the community's imaginative power to facilitate a self-understanding and relationship with the universe.<sup>524</sup> Mythologies have been used by many to convey a message. Justin Martyr employed it in his first Apology, especially to an audience immersed in their ancestral myths, to strengthen his audience's reasoning with adversaries. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles is also said to employ myths by drawing from their wealth in dynamic interaction with the Christian faith to convey spiritual values.<sup>525</sup> While Justin Martyr may be utilizing the Greek mythologies to bring out Christianity's spiritual richness, he is also said to have used them to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity.<sup>526</sup> My reference to him is not in any way to allude to the superiority of the Western culture over Goemai culture. The Goemai must also learn how to tap into the hermeneutic of ancestral wisdom to enrich their Christian faith following Justin's method of separation and incorporation. The theological language at the time of Justin was the language of myth.<sup>527</sup> Just like the Goemai context, mythology has served the people to relate with the Divine intimately. The plausibility of any Goemai Christian theology and ecclesiology that is disrupted from the mythological language of the context by

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<sup>524</sup> Francis Ugwu, "I Don't Need Religion—Wole Soyinka," Daily Post Newspaper <https://dailypost.ng/2022/11/21/i-dont-need-religion-wole-soyinka/> accessed 11/23/2022.

<sup>525</sup> Noël Wayne Pretila, *Re-Appropriating 'Marvellous Fables': Justin Martyr's Strategic Retrieval of Myth in 'I Apology'*, 1 ed. (The Lutterworth Press, 2014), 1-6.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid., 3-4, 78.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid., 17.

creating mythologies would be an effort in futility. Incorporating mythical allusions into the Goemai Christian construction of its spirituality would be communicating within a cultural context saturated with mythical thinking as a means of understanding reality and the self. Justin employed myths because they “were deeply etched within the memory of readers.”<sup>528</sup> The social memory of the Goemai allows for incorporating traditional narratives to bolster Goemai Christian construction since creating mythical narratives is part of their living experience.

The Moemai construct mythologies to explain Goemai identity, the historical, spiritual, and moral essence of their existence as a people. It calls for the fundamental question, why are we Moemai? What does life as Goemai entail?<sup>529</sup> Their celebrations are means for identity construction; that is, Goemai liturgical celebrations become ways of reinforcing communal identity for rootedness, connection, and self-consciousness in the Goemai moral space.<sup>530</sup> The renewed Christian context of the cultural memory produces new meanings for recovering Goemai traditional spiritual resources that would rejuvenate Goemai Christian living. Mythical narratives can bolster the truth of the Christian faith and serve as an entry point into the cultural context of the Goemai.<sup>531</sup> Erich S. Gruen helps our understanding of appropriation in ancient Mediterranean societies:

While ancient societies certainly acknowledged differences among peoples (indeed occasionally emphasizing them) could also visualize themselves as part of a broader cultural heritage, could discover or invent links with other societies, and could couch their own historical memories in terms of a borrowed or appropriated past. When ancients reconstructed their roots or fashioned their history, they often did so by associating themselves with the legends and traditions of others. That practice affords a perhaps surprising but certainly revealing insight into the

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<sup>528</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>529</sup> Lawrence A. Hoffman, "Principle, Story, and Myth in the Liturgical Search for Identity," *Interpretation* 63, no. 3 (2010), 231.

<sup>530</sup> Ibid., 233-34.

<sup>531</sup> Peter Leithart referenced in, Pretila, *Re-Appropriating 'Marvellous Fables,'* 50.

mentalities of Mediterranean folk in antiquity. It discloses not how they distinguished themselves from others but how they transformed or reimagined them for their own purposes. The “Other” takes on a different shape. This is not rejection, denigration, or distancing—but rather appropriation. It represents a more circuitous and more creative mode of fashioning a collective self-consciousness.<sup>532</sup>

Goemai mythologies are emphasized in the mysterious manifestation of spirits through masks and masquerades. Each Goemai masquerade is a carrier of cultural history since each is associated with a rite, ritual, and ceremony. In the words of Chijioke Njoku, “in the African culture, masquerading is not just a form of entertainment; it is primarily a performative story of collective remembering and an effective affirmative technique of narrative *engagée*.”<sup>533</sup> In other words, masquerading is a way of recollecting ancestral history within the African context.

### **3.8. An Indigenous Theology: Authentically Goemai Fully Christian**

In the article titled “Religious Intersections in African Christianity: The Conversion Dilemma Among Christian Converts,” Joel Mokhoathi begins by summarizing the various opinions regarding the encounter between Christianity and Indigenous African Spirituality. He outlines three perspectives: the conservative Christians, the rigorist African religionists, and the nominalist Christians. Conservative Christians and the rigorists African religionists hold that both spiritualities are opposed and that there is no hope of any form of convergence or intersection. The nominalist Christians see some relationship or compatibility between Christianity and Indigenous African Spiritualities. However, the nominalist Christians’ position is regarded as syncretism by their opponents. And they argue that syncretism defaces the

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<sup>532</sup> Quoted as footnote 74 in *ibid.*, 50-51. See, Erich S. Gruen, *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 3-4.

<sup>533</sup> Njoku, “Memory and Masquerade Narratives,” 186.

authentic identity of the two faiths.<sup>534</sup> The significance of the above to this work is to aid the navigation into constructing a genuine African Christianity in general and Goemai Christianity in particular. The positions summarized above still influence the engagement of Christianity and African Indigenous Spiritualities today. Many Goemai represent the views enumerated as persons on both sides of the divide hold that the two faiths are contradictory to each other as they represent different worldviews. Some others see complementarity in both Christianity and Goemai spirituality. From the preceding, I interrogate the possibility of a Goemai maintaining her authentic Goemai identity and being fully Christian.

The successful penetration of Goemaliland by Christianity happened mainly due to similarities in the two approaches to understanding *Na'an*. For example, Christianity (viz., Catholicism) and Goemai spirituality believe in the reality of a Supreme Divinity accessed through intermediaries between the spiritual and physical realms. Reconciliation is integral to the relationship among people and between people and the Deity since purity is vital in divine worship in both approaches. And purity is not attained without the confession of guilt (*lap dor*). The use of water for sprinkling (*wat goezoem*) expresses the ritual of purification and cleansing in both approaches. The similarities in some practices of both approaches and the fact that alcohol (a vital part of the Goemai life), which represents sustenance and livelihood, was not prohibited by the Church, made acceptance of Christianity not difficult. However, because Christianity denigrates the Goemai indigenous worldview, epistemology, and belief system, many abandon tradition.

The following quote from Bujo puts into perspective the significance of rootedness in the quest for authenticity. Bujo says, “[o]nly if one permeates an ecclesiology based on the African

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<sup>534</sup> Joel Mokhoathi, "Religious Intersections in African Christianity: The Conversion Dilemma among Indigenous Converts," *Scriptura* 119, no. 1 (2020): 1-2.

context can it be expected that the Christian mystery will become genuinely rooted in African culture.”<sup>535</sup> Since stories form part of the many means of transmitting identity and culture and articulating the worldview of indigenous people, they are the purveyors of cultural experience.<sup>536</sup> Goemai Christian authenticity flows from the repackaged past of the people in their present circumstances to reconstruct their desired identity in line with their desired future.<sup>537</sup>

As already affirmed above, a characteristic of temporality-based religions is their universal claim to truth. In contrast to spatiality-based spiritualities, temporality-based religions desire to supplant all forms of accessing God. Spatiality-based spiritualities do not have a missionary outlook since they are cultural.

Every God-talk has to recognize the pluralistic dimension of the universe and realize that language, culture, and interpretation give theology a distinctive character due to diverse histories, experiences, and worldviews. The importance of translation in intercultural engagement hinges on the fact that cultures, languages, and experiences need interpretation. And worthy of note is that every translation is an interpretation because “[i]t is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture.”<sup>538</sup> As a carrier of culture, it embodies the people's values, identity, and worldview.<sup>539</sup> In this regard, translation is understood not as transliteration but as a means of conveying meaning to people considering their language, culture, and worldview.

The centrality of ancestors in the Goemai universe is more than just being the moral police and guardians of society; the ancestors exemplify excellence in human existence.<sup>540</sup>

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<sup>535</sup> Bujo, *The Ethical Dimension of Community*, 207.

<sup>536</sup> Battiste and Henderson, *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage*, 77.

<sup>537</sup> Njoku, "Memory and Masquerade Narratives," 190.

<sup>538</sup> Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, 13.

<sup>539</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>540</sup> Jawanza Eric Clark, *Indigenous Black Theology: Toward an African-Centered Theology of the African American Religious Experience*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 84.  
<https://authenticate.library.duq.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=501023&site=ehost-live>. eBook.

Jwanza Eric Clark's<sup>541</sup> view of the Akan ancestors as the culmination of human experience, which I apply to the Goemai, offers a theological perspective enriching for an authentic Goemai Christianity. Clark affirms that ancestors serve as *locus theologicus*, which provides "... a theological category that affirms plurality, diversity, and fulfillment of human destiny, or salvation."<sup>542</sup> He opined that the ancestors, as principles of social cohesion, ethical living, spiritual and ecological lifestyle, and proper relations, uphold theological and existential truths. It is on the theological and existential truths of the Goemai that an authentically Goemai Christianity can be constructed.<sup>543</sup> Just as black experience molded the formation of black theology, Goemai mythologies and experience must serve as bases for appropriating Jesus within the Goemai space.<sup>544</sup> Ali Mazrui's axiom the "ancestral is authentic,"<sup>545</sup> offered as one of his solutions to overcome westernization, aligns with Clark's position of the ancestors as *locus theologicus*. Rather than a rejection of everything Western, Mazrui advocates religiosity devoid of westernization.<sup>546</sup> Mazrui calls for an encounter that is grounded in African experience and history.<sup>547</sup> L. Keita interrogates that only the ancestral is authentic. The validity of that interrogation rests on the fact that not everything from the African past promotes life. Thus, I hold that only those aspects of cultures that promote life, harmony, and wholeness are authentic.

An authentic Goemai Christianity is only realized when the people appropriate and relate with Jesus from the perspective of their theological construct resulting from their relations

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<sup>541</sup> Jwanza Eric Clark is an Associate Professor of Global Christianity at Manhattan College in Bronx, NY. A native of Atlanta, GA. He has spent time teaching in Ghana, and South Africa where he taught South African Black Theology and Postcolonial African Christianity.

<sup>542</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid., 108-09.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid., 113-15.

<sup>545</sup> Tite Tienou, "Which Way for African Christianity: Westernization or Indigenous Authenticity?," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (1992): 7. See, Ali Mazrui, *The Africans* (Boston: Little Brown & Co, 1986), 211, 295.

<sup>546</sup> Tienou, "Which Way for African Christianity?," 7.

<sup>547</sup> Ibid., 8.

with him as an ancestor who shares their experience and inspires a distinctive way of communing with God. A genuine Goemai Christianity must incorporate Goemai stories, proverbs, and mythologies in constructing Goemai liturgical structure, rites, and theological formulations. I rely on Clark in advocating the centrality of the Goemai category of ancestors in framing a Goemai Christianity.<sup>548</sup>

It envisages the significance of indigenous consciousness in the search for authenticity. Goemai consciousness must define Goemai ecclesial construct to be authentically Goemai. Thus, the reawakened Goemai consciousness and religiosity must find expression in the Goemai mode of articulation to contextualize the Christian faith.<sup>549</sup> Magesa buttressed the above when he held that a genuine indigenous ecclesiology must result from a people drawing their peculiar theological conclusions, which reflect their lived experience and respond to the questions and problems arising from their context. The resultant ecclesiology must be deeply rooted in culture.<sup>550</sup> Sanneh holds the position that Christianity is a translated religion without a revealed language; he averred that Christianity and Christians are only recognized within a translated context. Thus, an authentic form of Christianity is a translated one. His logic follows the hermeneutics of interpretation, where he claims that everything God utters is expressible and understood in every language.<sup>551</sup> The Pentecost experience of Acts of the Apostle 2 comes to mind.

In an article on Bediako's theology and identity, Keith Ferdinando outlines Bediako's thoughts on missionary Christianity's denial of indigenous African values in the African

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<sup>548</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>549</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>550</sup> Laurenti Magesa, "Authentic African Christianity," *AFER* 37, no. 4 (1995): 209-10.

<sup>551</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity?: The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 97-98.

incarnation of Jesus in African contexts by denigrating the people's 'heathen' memory, such that the early African foundation of the Church was devoid of the African value-system.<sup>552</sup> A genuine Goemai Christianity is only realized on the recovery of Goemai ancestral valued past, fostering a genuinely Goemai and wholly Christian consciousness. Bediako appreciates the positive values of African religiosity acknowledged by Mbiti, Idowu, and Mulago. Bediako recognizes the cosmic significance of Christ rooted (incarnated) in the African space.<sup>553</sup> Rather than severing from their roots, Bediako advocates a continuity for Africans, particularly Moemai, between their spirituality and the Christian faith. According to Ferdinando, Bediako affirms that the monotheistic nature of African religiosity (relying on Mbiti's "Concept of God in Africa" and Idowu's "Olodumare: God in Yoruba belief") shows how the missionaries identified the Divinity of Indigenous people with the Christian God.<sup>554</sup>

The goal "... is so to maintain cultural identity that Christian integrity is not compromised."<sup>555</sup> Bediako holds that the Church in Africa is a Church without a theology.<sup>556</sup> This challenges the Goemai to construct a theology since salvation must be realized in Goemai experience and culture rather than only outside. Bolaji Idowu captured the sorry state of the African Church when he held that the Church in Africa is dependent. Authenticity means a Church with its theology, liturgy, and church discipline.<sup>557</sup> Authenticity must include Biblical research and translation in constructing identity.<sup>558</sup>

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<sup>552</sup> Ferdinando Keith, "Christian Identity in the African Context: Reflections on Kwame Bediako's Theology and Identity," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 1 (2007): 122-23.

<sup>553</sup> Ibid., 123-24.

<sup>554</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>555</sup> Keith, "Christian Identity in African Context," 140.

<sup>556</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture Upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa*, Regnum Studies in Mission (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 1999), 237.

<sup>557</sup> Ibid., 268. See, C.G. Baeta (ed), *Christianity in Tropical Africa* (Studies presented and discussed at the seventh International African Seminar, University of Ghana, April 1965), 353. Paraphrase mine.

<sup>558</sup> Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 277.



In the Goemai context, the deeply embedded theological concepts need to have Goemai expressions. One concept that comes to mind is the name “Jesus,” the name of the second person of the Trinity given by the Angel. While the term in Hebrew “Yeshua” means “God Saves,” the Goemai adaptation of the Arabic/Hausa translation “Yesu” does not seem to convey much to the Goemai Christian. For the Goemai to enter into the mystery of the “God who saves,” she must discard the foreign name and find a noun or an expression that brings the people into the redeeming experience of the Incarnate Word, the Wisdom of God. That is the only way the cultural wisdom of the people is brought to bear in theological translations.

The African “coloration” sought by the African Initiated Churches is what I envisage with Western Christianity as manifested in Goemai land. A true indigenous Goemai Church must be rooted in the culture of the people as a form of incarnation, indigenization, and contextualization of the gospel. In this regard, I borrow the words of Deji Ayegboyin to seek, among the Goemai and other indigenous peoples, “authentic, vibrant and bold experiences of Christianity with a strong African imprint.”<sup>559</sup> This must take cognizance of the slippery slide into syncretism, where every aspect of culture is considered good, and all cultures must be married with the faith in Jesus. This attitude negates the fact that no culture is perfect, and there is a need to purge it of those aspects that are contrary to life and the gospel. The flip side is the negative view of anything cultural and, therefore, not worthy of consideration for a marriage with the gospel. There is a need for the people to be aware of the above extreme positions and make an effort to overcome them in the synthesis of culture and the faith in Christ since there is nothing that escapes the interpenetrating power of the “Eternal Word.” In the end, the goal of any missionary proclamation of the Christian faith should be for the hearers to hear the message in

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<sup>559</sup> Deji Ayegboyin, “Aladura Spirituality: Authentic African Initiative in Christian Missions,” *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* 16, no. 1 (2011): 173.

their native tongue, as in the Pentecost experience in Acts 2:6, 8, 11. Any evangelizing project that is heard and imposed in a foreign language is against the plan of God, whose gracious gift of the beauty of diversity and the uniqueness of every culture offers the means of encountering and relating with the “*I Am*” *where they are*.<sup>560</sup>

The Aladura<sup>561</sup> religious movement among the Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria is an indigenized Christianity resulting from the marriage of indigenous culture and deconstructed Western Christianity. The appropriation of Christianity by the Yorubas made the Aladura a true expression of Christianity in indigenous culture. It incorporated the African mode of prayer, healing, vision, and rituals.<sup>562</sup> It is worth noting that the Aladura, as with many African Independent Churches, otherwise referred to as African Indigenous Churches or African Initiated Church, sprang up from the resistance to Western colonization and Western Christianity’s inability to address indigenous cultural matters arising from an Indigenous worldview.<sup>563</sup> Many saw Western Christianity as a way of religious colonization that must be rejected at all costs. The African Independent Churches seek to practice Christianity in an African style. The Aladura spirituality is a synthesis of Christianity with indigenous culture to birth a distinct way of expressing faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>564</sup> Its motive is to establish a relationship with the Divinity linked with the ancestors. It connotes the idea of a Divinity that is Supreme over the universe but

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<sup>560</sup> This is inspired by the title of a paper I wrote for my doctoral course on Theo 602-02: Theological Methods in the Fall of 2018—“Being with and Speaking about “I AM” where I am.” The paper became the stepping stone to embarking on the project.

<sup>561</sup> The Yoruba term means owners of prayer or the praying people. It is applied to them due to their penchant for prayers. The Aladura movements comprise the Cherubim and Seraphim (C & S), The Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), The Celestial Church of Christ (CCC), and the Church of the Lord (Aladura).

<sup>562</sup> Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 219. For more, on the Aladura, see John D. Peel, *Aladura: A Religious Movement among the Yoruba* (London: Oxford University Press for the International African Institute, 1968). Kofi Johnson, "Aladura: The Search for Authenticity: An Impetus for African Christianity," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 14, no. 1 (2011). Mnyalaza T. Masuku, "African Initiated Churches as Interlocutors of African Spirituality of Liberation against Colonial Spirituality of the Empire," *HTS Theologies Studies/Theological Studies* 77, no. 3 (2021).

<sup>563</sup> Ayegboyin, "Aladura Spirituality," 166.

<sup>564</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

known and accessed through ancestral relationships and one that leads to establishing a connection with the cosmos. I see this as providing the other Indigenous peoples an idea of how to go about their efforts to construct and retrieve their spiritual identities from the sources at the disposal of the African Christian: African spirituality and Scripture.<sup>565</sup>

### 3.9. Goemai Culture and Christian Theology

Indigenous theology rejects the systematic extinction of the African mode of being and doing.<sup>566</sup> And doing theology in a postcolonial era entails reflecting on the power dynamics underlying the God-talk in indigenous contexts today. Blohm, Boodoo, and Mugisha, in “Decolonizing Mercy: De-linking Mercy and Justice,” advocate for the carrying out of theology from the *locus of enunciation*, epistemology, and the language of the indigenous people, as well as their methodology. They contend that theological reflection can and must be decolonized.<sup>567</sup> I must acknowledge that reformations of theology and its language and attempts to make culture valuable in theological reflections are not foreign to the Church. Vatican II is one such attempt, though some may argue that some of the reforms advocated for have remained in the documents of the Council while others are not far-reaching enough.

Some salient questions arise from indigenous theology concerning context, language, epistemology, and privileged subjects. Can theology be undertaken outside the location of the theologizing subject? Can a theology delinked from the people and their space impact lives authentically and not be superficial and superfluous? *Nostra Aetate* # 2 recognizes the significance of a truly indigenous faith when it affirms the spiritual values from the knowledge

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<sup>565</sup> Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred*, 109.

<sup>566</sup> Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom in Africa*, 132.

<sup>567</sup> Gerald Boodoo, Michelle Blohm, and Fortunatus Mugisha, "Decolonizing Mercy: De-Linking Mercy and Justice," in *Religion and the Politics of Integral Justice*, ed. Gerald M. Boodoo (Porto Alegre: ediPUCRS, 2020), 192.

of the supreme in indigenous peoples and their culture. *NA 2* exhorts Christians to incarnate the gospel in the rich soil of indigenous worldview following the prompting of the Spirit. This means God has not alienated the Godself from any people before the advent of Christianity. Indigenous peoples knew and related with the divine throughout their existence. John Paul II in *Fides et Ratio* asserts,

This simple statement contains a great truth: faith's encounter with different cultures has created something new. When they are deeply rooted in experience, cultures show forth the human being's characteristic openness to the universal and the transcendent. Therefore they offer different paths to the truth, which assuredly serve men and women well in revealing values which can make their life ever more human. Insofar as cultures appeal to the values of older traditions, they point—implicitly but authentically—to the manifestation of God in nature, as we saw earlier in considering the Wisdom literature and the teaching of Saint Paul.<sup>568</sup>

He continues,

While it demands of all who hear it the adherence of faith, the proclamation of the Gospel in different cultures allows people to preserve their own cultural identity.... This means that no one culture can ever become the criterion of judgment, much less the ultimate criterion of truth with regard to God's Revelation. The Gospel is not opposed to any culture, as if in engaging a culture the Gospel would seek to strip it of its native riches and force it to adopt forms which are alien to it. On the contrary, the message which believers bring to the world and to cultures is a genuine liberation from all the disorders caused by sin and is, at the same time, a call to the fullness of truth. Cultures are not only not diminished by this encounter; rather, they are prompted to open themselves to the newness of the Gospel's truth and to be stirred by this truth to develop in new ways.<sup>569</sup>

A critical reading of the document, as has been identified by Blohm, Boodoo, and Mugisha, reveals the fact that it is couched within a Eurocentric worldview and language. However, the strides made by recognizing cultural values are worth acknowledging. For their part, Blohm,

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<sup>568</sup> *Fides et Ratio* # 70

<sup>569</sup> *Fides et Ratio* # 71

Boodoo, and Mugisha's cross-cultural encounter must respect and preserve every different culture and allow for a true incarnation/indigenization of the faith that valorizes cultural values for authentic cultural identity and Christian expression.<sup>570</sup> The colonial wound can only heal when indigenous people realize their right to express their specific faith as children of a God who is love within their cultural context since "[t]here is no partiality in God."<sup>571</sup> God's acceptability of every culture (authenticity) is experienced in the vision of Peter. In the vision he had before he met Cornelius in the Acts of the Apostles, Peter recognized the impartiality of God with regard to the uprightness of every people and culture. He asserts, "In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him."<sup>572</sup> The virtuous life of Goemai ancestors was inspired by nothing other than the spiritual values of the Goemai worldview given by God. And it is the spiritual values that need to be integrated into the Christian faith for a rejuvenated Goemai Christian spiritual experience.

It is imperative to imagine the face of Goemai Christian faith when indigenous cosmologies interact with the Christian religious experiences, liturgies, and relationships. The hybridization of experiences ultimately leads to a local Christian community where God speaks Goemai. And the people realize and affirm that "God is Goemai" because the people encounter and understand Divinity *where* they are. For a genuinely Goemai Christianity, Christian liturgy needs to be designed to anchor in the communities' experience of spatial temporality as indigenous communities tend to look at reality from the epistemic location of their pre-colonial cosmologies and in encounters mediated by the colonial wound.<sup>573</sup> An indigenous cultural mindset is expressed in openness, interaction, fluidity, appropriation, and resistance; it is not a

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<sup>570</sup> Boodoo, Blohm, and Mugisha, "Decolonizing Mercy," 194-95.

<sup>571</sup> Romans 2:11

<sup>572</sup> Acts of the Apostles 10:34-35.

<sup>573</sup> Boodoo, Blohm, and Mugisha, "Decolonizing Mercy," 197.

static worldview associated with some distant and unrelated past. A Goemai socio-historical worldview fosters Goemai cultural memory.

Moemai and Africans are generally known for the openness and receptiveness epitomized in the Yoruba attitude that in relation to their pantheon of divinity and foreign deities, the more, the merrier. Openness and the spirit of accommodation must characterize any Goemai Christian theology's relationship to other theologies in the search for mutual enrichment. The interface between Goemai indigenous theology and Western Christian theology must birth a truly Goemai Christian faith that effectively responds to Goemai reality through a hermeneutics of language, culture, context, and experience. Secondly, immersed in the spirit of *ubuntu*, African anthropology prioritizes experience over ideology, the interrelatedness and connectedness of each and everything over individualism and egocentrism.<sup>574</sup> Thirdly, indigenous Christian theology needs to make the community a vital context for experiencing the Divine. The social, political, spiritual, and ethical dimensions of community ensure that theology is not about doctrines and dogmas that have no bearing on the life of the people. A people and an experience-oriented theology, not an abstract philosophy, is what the effort for a communal dimension of indigenous Christian theology entails in the Goemai space.

Theology, the articulation of the people's spatial experience of their relationship with the Divine and the cosmos, cannot be the reserve of the trained theologian only. It behooves the theologian to be the catalyst of conversation within and among the community members in search of a local ecclesial vision.<sup>575</sup> In an interaction with the participants in the international conference "Lines of Development of the Global Compact on Education" in a room adjacent to

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<sup>574</sup> Godwin Iornenge Akper, "From Multiculturalism to Interculturalism?: Locating the Ongoing Africa Agency Discourse in the Debate," *Scriptura* 91 (2006): 8.

<sup>575</sup> Jesse N. K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1995), 205.

the Vatican's Paul VI hall on June 1, 2022, Pope Francis asserts, what I term as reflecting indigenous wisdom, that progress should not be antithetical to looking back. Pope Francis critiqued those trapped in a frozen past as guardians of tradition. For the Pope, according to Courteney Mares, the CNA reporter, the Church must always draw from the past in moving forward. He used the analogy of the Aeneas in Virgil's Aeneid, in which Aeneas saved his father (past), himself, and his son (future) when Rome was burning and moved forward. The implication is that a people's past and future cannot be separated from who they are. The Goemai must be rooted in ancestral wisdom and immersed in the experience as a holistic reflection of most indigenous visions of reality, viz, appropriation of the past into the present with a futuristic perspective.<sup>576</sup>

### **3.10. Cyclical Concept of Time: Arriving at the Past Moving Forward**

For Africans, remembering the past ensures a **re-member-ing** of the people within the spatial wisdom of the ancestors. There is no meaning outside of context since time is generated from space. The locations of remembering the actions and experiences of the ancestors as the space of encounter with the Divine are consecrated as the milieu of making present the rich experience of the past through symbolic ritualization.<sup>577</sup> The past is revitalized in a renewed way that provides a perspective on how to relate creatively, not as mere mimicry but in dynamic engagement. Following the Goemai agricultural cycle, time for the people entails a creative repetition of the past for a better future. In the view of Bujo, "it is a past which has meaning for the present and the future. The present is shaped by the past."<sup>578</sup> Context and communal

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<sup>576</sup> [https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2022/06/01/pope-francis-guarding-dead-traditions-is-dangerous-for-the-churchs-life/?fbclid=IwAR11s4CCZ1h6bZbHhc1dJC6u1vDI40\\_xnPe5GMWfletvaeAeQuojysuUTM](https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2022/06/01/pope-francis-guarding-dead-traditions-is-dangerous-for-the-churchs-life/?fbclid=IwAR11s4CCZ1h6bZbHhc1dJC6u1vDI40_xnPe5GMWfletvaeAeQuojysuUTM) (Accessed 6/01/2022)

<sup>577</sup> Deloria, *God Is Red*, 65-66.

<sup>578</sup> Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, 30.

experience are essential in a people's return to the past as going forward. It follows the logic of connectedness or relatedness of the African worldview in which the dead, the living, and the unborn form one dynamic community.

In this context, memory serves as the focal point of reconnection with one's space, experience, and culture.

### **3.10.1. Impact of Indigenous theology on Society and Culture**

Theology, as talk about the Divine, cannot be reduced to a scientific investigation of the Transcendent carried out by academically certified persons. Still, it has to be an all-encompassing experience and conversation centered on the Divine and creation. This conversation must seek to discover or explain the universe to the creator; the differences in worldviews will always bring Western Christianity and African religiosity into conflict. It is only translation that can bring about a rapprochement that is based on respect for differences and particularities.<sup>579</sup> Reconstructed Goemai spaces and landscapes challenge the Goemai to be self-sufficient in food production and the appreciation of the richness of traditional attire (the Goemai *adire*) as expressive of the power of self-apprehension.

### **3.11. Incarnational Theology as Effective Christian Witness in Cultural Contexts**

Christianity is centered around discipleship. It entails emulating the lifestyle and teachings of Christ—a call to discipleship characterized by a relinking to the space and Divinity. For Bolaji E. Idowu, the Church did not initially attempt to reconcile Christianity and Indigenous religiosity; instead, it rejected Africa's spiritual past.<sup>580</sup> The incarnational theology proposed in this work heralds “the Word taking flesh” within and among indigenous Christians who have

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<sup>579</sup> Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 210.

<sup>580</sup> Bolaji E. Idowu, "The Predicament of the Church in Africa," in *Christianity in Tropical Africa*, ed. C. G. Meager (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 423.



been firmly gripped in the catholicization of Christianity to become western rather than indigenous African. Incarnational theology cannot be separated from the cultural context of the people since the historical context becomes the place of insertion, where the Word takes root, embodying the people's cultural experience an effective way. When the logic of incarnation inspires Christian witness, the Christ effect will be realized cosmically as the world's Savior.

Faith is only authentic when it is incarnated as witness to Jesus in the locality. There is a need to enter into the scripture to discover the biblical image of Jesus within his situated context of Palestine. Though it is claimed that a search for the "biblical Jesus" is difficult though a more credible image is not impossible. What may become a more credible image would most likely end in a Jesus into whom the Goemai speak their perspective.<sup>581</sup> For the Goemai, it would necessitate interpretation of the name Jesus—"God Saves" to which they can relate. *Na'anpoen* expresses the idea of God's redemption to the people. This resulted from questioning and reflection that led to seeing it as the Goemai name of Jesus.<sup>582</sup> Rohadi Nagassar will see Incarnational theology inviting the Goemai to a re-appropriation of the Jesus stories within its locality.<sup>583</sup>

Africans must work to rearticulate, revalorize, and reclaim ancestral wisdom upon which to construct an African indigenous ecclesiology. An overarching desire of the work is for the Goemai Christian to self-introspect and hopefully realize the need for self-apprehension that facilitates the revalorization of indigenous culture and customs necessary for a Goemai Christian religiosity that is an expression of its cultural identity and liturgical particularity. Like the Syro-Malabar Christianity of India, the constructed Goemai Christianity must "strive to preserve,

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<sup>581</sup> Nagassar, *When We Belong*, 110.

<sup>582</sup> Appendix 1: 289.

<sup>583</sup> Nagassar, *When We Belong*, 110.

promote and practice its unique liturgical and ecclesial traditions,”<sup>584</sup> inspired by ancestral spiritual richness. Arguably, it is only in its own cultural milieu that an authentic Goemai Christianity can be birthed. The significance of cultural experience and wisdom is that speaking about and relating with the divine is always a spatial experience. That is what gives theology its contextual character. In this light, indigenization as a consequence of intercultural encounters allows for a faith experience in Christ that ensures the incarnation of the Eternal Word. Thus, experience becomes the prism through which the Goemai make sense of the mystery of Christ in relation to ancestral wisdom. Incarnation allows Christ to embody the contextual experience of a particular people in their specificity as one of them. It acknowledges the people and their locality as places of divine in-dwelling. It provides the people a reason not to abandon their culture but to remain faithful to the inherited wisdom of their indigenous spirituality.

Stan Chu Ilo alludes to this as a cultural hermeneutical approach. He suggests the cultural hermeneutical approach as the methodological framework for African theology.<sup>585</sup> The plausibility of Ilo’s approach highlights theology’s experiential and contextual nature. It behooves the theologian to immerse himself/herself into the cultural reality of the people and understand it for a valid interpretation of the gospel. Ilo explains the approach as “concerned with the hermeneutical-phenomenological immersion in religiocultural history and African social context through narration”<sup>586</sup> as means of entering the world of meaning of African metaphorical language, poems, proverbs, as well as the world of signs and symbols. This methodological approach “proceeds by applying a strong, biblical cultural hermeneutic, theological, and

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<sup>584</sup> Madathummuriyil, "Liturgical 'Reform' in the Syro-Malabar Church," 98.

<sup>585</sup> Stan Chu Ilo, "Methods and Models of African Theology," in *Theological Reimagination: Conversations on Church, Religion, and Society in Africa*, ed. Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2014), 122.

<sup>586</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

anthropological analysis to encounter concrete faith experience of the people to interpret, understand, and evaluate Christian practices in Africa.”<sup>587</sup> In other words, engaging the culture and gospel requires a meticulous process, diligent interpretation of scripture, and an in-depth understanding of customs and tradition. The marriage of the two must be authentically faithful to the scriptural revelation and truthful adherence to ancestral wisdom and values.

For Olaniyan, the recovery and focus on the African worldview, in this case, the Goemai worldview, reinforces the need to incarnate Christ and indigenize the Goemai Church as a way “to affirm the foundational premise of an irreversible imbrication of histories, and therefore of cultures and cultural forms.”<sup>588</sup> It entails that an authentic African Christian spirituality thrives only on synthesis, manifesting its desire for maturity in its abhorrence of mimicry of Western Christianity. Ethiopian Christianity is an African example of synthesis in cross-cultural religious engagement. In the ensuing marriage, a church in its cultural uniqueness was born. The cultural rootedness of the Ethiopian Church sustained its firm resistance against external attacks. The implication for the Goemai is to strive for an authentic indigenous Church like Ethiopian Christianity.<sup>589</sup>

### **3.12. Conclusion**

The search for a Goemai Christian faith must be culturally informed to reflect the people and their worldview founded on the Goemai experience of Christianity, and the translation of scripture into the vernacular has not really translated into an “appeal to the local paradigm”<sup>590</sup> as the Geomai church has remained foreign to its space. For this reason, this research has been undertaken to motivate the recovery of ancestral wisdom as the foundation of a truly Goemai

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<sup>587</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>588</sup> Olaniyan, *Scars of Conquest/Masks of Resistance*, 4.

<sup>589</sup> Ela, *African Cry*, 10.

<sup>590</sup> Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 215.

ecclesiology. The directive of Pope Pius XI in the encyclical, *Rerum Ecclesiae*, of February 26, 1926, to create an African clergy did not strike the right cord as many African clergy is yet to be indigenized. The indigenization of the African church is still far from being attained.

She must be ready to confront the underlying assumptions by changing the content and terms of the conversation between Goemai religiosity and deconstructed Western Christianity. This contextual conversation must lead to the incarnation of the gospel in the Goemai context where it is embodied.

Though translation positively impacted indigenous cultures and peoples through making the availability of scripture in local languages and the invention of orthography to many societies, it cannot be separated from the ideological construct of theology that was universalized by colonization.

## Conclusion

### Going Forward by Looking Backward

“Tradition is the guarantee of the future.” – Gustav Mahler

My goal in writing this dissertation was to draw attention to the need for a cultural rejuvenation in Goemaland, one in which dying cultural practices and spirituality will be revalorized, reimagined, and integrated to form the basis of Goemai Christianity. In writing, I ensured that the Goemai context and experience were prioritized in today’s search for cultural authenticity and relevance. My argument is that Goemai search for authenticity is connected with associating with the land harmoniously. In the work, I showed that relationality defines the people dealing with the spiritual universe comprising *Na’an*—the Supreme Deity, *Mu’ut*—the dead and masquerades, *Mukwarkum*—Spirits, and *kwap da*—ancestors. For the Goemai, land is not a commodity, but a patrimony given to their ancestors by *Na’an*. Land is the bearer of ancestral landscape—cultural geography and history. The landscape inspires rituals, rites, celebrations, and festivals to reinforce cultural and social memory. I explained how performance ensues from recollection stimulated by sacred mountains, groves, rivers, and forests. Thus, Goemai locality is a constant reminder of the reality of the living dead whose ways inspire reverence, social cohesion, moral living, conservation, and spirituality. Cultural geography leads to ritualization, and ritualization sacralizes space and landscapes.

My argument in the project is that the Moemai need to reimagine their cultural practices, sacred places, and symbols to recapture spiritual values lost due to colonial wounds, the influence of Christianity, and the effects of modernization. These necessitate decolonization as resistance to the Western structure of power and control. It is an uphill task because it consists of rebelling against a system that will not watch while it is being dismantled. Kaitlin B. Curtice

captures the essence of decolonization when she holds that it “doesn’t [sic] mean we go back to the beginning, but it means we fix what is broken now, for future generations.”<sup>591</sup> I showed that reimagination, reinvention, recapturing, and reconstruction come with revalorizing Goemai traditional practices. In the reimagining process, I stress the sacramental perspective of indigenous perception of symbols, reinforced by the idea of saturated phenomena articulated by Madathummuriyil, where his phenomenological and pneumatological dimensions contribute to help bolster the need to free the object from the intention of the perceiver. The process ends in an *anamnetic* solidarity between the people, their lifeworld, and the dynamic memory of the ancestors made present to shape life today and guide Goemai self-apprehension in the future.

This work is particularly for Goemai people who have been delinked from their space, abandoning culture, worldview, and even language for a Western mode of being, doing, and religion. As a work in postcolonial/decolonial theology, it may interest or benefit other indigenous people seeking authentic ways of expressing themselves and living their faith in Christ. What I did writing was to buttress the point of a people’s inseparability and origin from their experience of various divinities and Supreme Deity. These enhance an authentic sense of belonging, identity, and the sacred, realized in a connection of the people to their spaces. Deloria’s position that “land seems to have an unsuspected spiritual energy or identity that shapes and directs human activities”<sup>592</sup> explains why the Goemai search for spiritual values from their space leads to symbolic ritualization. I argued that an authentic Goemai expression of the Christian faith must involve re-valorizing and reimagining Goemai indigenous spirituality from a decolonized Goemai Divine space. I hope that my Goemai relatives and women and men who lay their hands on this work will find the necessary inspiration for a courageous reflection and

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<sup>591</sup> Curtice, *Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God*, 161.

<sup>592</sup> Deloria, *God Is Red*, 145-46.

questioning of what they have learned that has made them less appreciative of their invaluable culture.

Rather than being solely a project to fulfill the requirements of the Ph.D. in theology, the work was also a journey toward self-discovery and remaking. The research has led me to understand myself in relation to my people, connect with my roots, and engage Goemai elders and representatives of traditional institutions. The study allowed me to learn about my name, “Muge”—the meaning of which has eluded me since I tried to find out how I was given my grandfather’s name, which is not recognized as a Goemai name. I learned it was the corruption of the Goemai name “Mukke,” which means “ours is enough.” It signifies contentment. On a community level, those I encountered recognized the urgency of propagating Goemai culture (especially language) to save it from extinction. Many are now aware and open to the marriage of Goemai culture with Christian faith in constructing a Goemai Christian identity—an identity founded on the recovery of ancestral wisdom and experience.

For the Goemai, it portends the recovery of Goemai ancestral legacy through a re-creation of ancestral-inspired spiritualities within the context of today’s experience, in the hope of a new and enriched tomorrow.<sup>593</sup> I opined that Goemai relinking to space must be “anchored in the present, tied to the past, and oriented to the future.”<sup>594</sup> The future is not a repetition of the past, viewed as the golden past that is long gone. I believe that the objectification of indigenous culture portends that tradition as a “dead” past with no relevance to the people’s lives. I suggest that the Goemai future must be arrived at by recapturing the past within the present experience

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<sup>593</sup> See, Marcos, "Mesoamerican Women's Indigenous Spirituality" 87.

<sup>594</sup> Jennifer Scheper Hughes, "Mapping the Autochthonous Indigenous Church: Toward a Decolonial History of Christianity in Las Americas," in *Decolonial Christianities: Latinx and Latin American Perspectives*, edited by Raimundo Barret and Roberto Sirvent, New Approaches to Religion and Power (Cham, Switzerland), 96.

since the cyclical nature of the Goemai worldview allows for a dynamic repetition of the past when people arrive at the future looking back.

I clarified the oral nature of indigenous African means of communication, which entails the people hearing and expressing their experience of the Divine in prayers, songs, rites, and rituals. Orality ensures the appropriation of the word as a living, dynamic, and transformative word. The performance of the living word nourishes the community's collective memory since tradition, and the collective memory of the people ensures re-creating or renewing the past in the present for a better future by restorying. It entails the dynamism of recapturing the past and bringing it into the present. In summary, memory retrieval is a necessary part of building a future.

Finally, I argued for integrating the spiritual values from the revalorized and reimagined Goemai Divine space, where the Moemai construct a truly indigenous ecclesiology, theological language, and concepts that capture the people's context. This, in my view, is how Christ incarnates in the Goemai context. In reminiscing their past, the Moemai bring to life the ancestral words and actions which have sustained Goemaity through the ages and without which extinction is an inevitable future of the Goemai race and nation.



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## APPENDIX 1

### Result Interpretation

The outcome here is the result of a process that began with gathering raw data and culminated in a single narrative derived from insights drawn from the thematic organization of the data. This outlines an interpretation of the data to make sense of what was collected. The research was conducted between June 5, 2021, and August 5, 2021. The research is designed to incorporate results from focus group conversations with selected Goemai elders. Discussions are conducted in two focus groups (one from *Lu'ukwo*, made up of 10-12 male elders, and a second from *Kalong*, made up of 10-12 older adults) to help the research situate its objectives in the reality of the Goemai experience. From the focus group's recommendations, the investigation will identify individuals considered experts in certain rites, rituals, symbols, ceremonies, etc., like the chiefs, chief priests, and diviners who need to be consulted for in-depth information and explanations. Also, Goemai Christian converts will be interviewed to get their perspectives on the indigenous Goemai worldview. The sampling procedure will be the non-probability sampling technique. The participants are selected based on their knowledge and cultural wisdom following recommendations from my assistants and translators. The outcome of the research will supplement existing relevant literature.

### Historical Background

The term 'Goemai' (pl. Moemai), by which the people refer to themselves, means "human." Their humanness connotes the "civilized ones." For the Goemai, all non-Goemai people (*Goenpang*) are from the hill and are considered not as civilized as Goemai. Historically, according to Catherine Tuammen,<sup>595</sup> an academician and notable historian, the people might

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<sup>595</sup> C. Tuammen, Personal Communication, July 30, 2021.

have forgotten their origins and may not have come far from the Montol area. Tuammen opines that most Goemai stories of their origin are explained in mythologies which vary according to the three chiefdoms of *Kwo*, *Dorok*, and *Du'ut*. The affinity shared by the Kwo and Dorok is based on tracing their roots to the Jukun territory. It is concerning these that the term *Qu'an* is used. Tuammen surmises the *Du'ut* traditions originated as follows:

The first, according to her, is a neglected tradition that is mainly wished away. It is the Bayajida story. Tuammen posits that one Adamu Uthman tries to link the history of the legendary Bayajida, seen as the founder of Hausa land, with the origin of Shendam. Tuammen affirms that the legend is rarely taken seriously as it is merely an effort to establish a Muslim connection with the founding of *Du'ut*.

The people hold that migration from the Chad region of Bornu is the central tradition in tracing their origin. The breakdown of the Bornu empire around the twelfth century due to the drying up of the Chad basin forced many to migrate around the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Legends trace the migration to different centers established by the history of a large migration of farmers, blacksmiths, etc., among whom are the Goemai. They are said to have separated after getting to Pankshin in Plateau State, where the Garram people settled in Garram. Their chief has the same hair tuft (*zung*) as the Goemai chief and carries the same tribal marks. The Goemai are said to have moved from there and separated at Chip.

The Montol tradition portends that the Goemai migrated and settled at Montol, precisely Jalbang, waging war on surrounding areas in search of suitable farmland. The supposed prince who led the migration was called Lekni (a name that connotes a fighter and hunter of elephants). It portrays the Goemai progenitor as a brave hunter. Lekni is said to have married a Montol girl named Matduan, and they gave birth to the Goemai nation. A different version of the narrative



shows that Matduan and Lekni were brother and sister. For lack of companionship, they married and gave birth to twins who became the progenitors of the Goemai nation. This may account for the Labijin/Labishe legend. This tradition is said to be the beginning of the royal and priestly families of the *Long Goemai* and the *Shinkwan*. It is a contested legend that the royal house does not accept. It may not be separated from the struggle to identify with the progenitor for relevance and the politics of power.

The *Du'ut* people take the story of Matduam and Lekni as the founders of the *Du'ut* who moved from the Montol area to *Pangtumu*—their first place of settlement until they finally moved to *Muduut* (Goemai name for Shendam)—and are referred to as the *Du'ut* people. According to the *Long Goemai*, Lekni is said to have vanished as the ground opened and swallowed him at the end of his earthly life,<sup>596</sup> thereby entering into an ancestral spiritual state. The myth follows the trajectory of mystery associated with the birth, death, and disappearance of heroes of indigenous peoples. On the other hand, the *Kwo* and *Dorok* Goemai people are said to have migrated from Kwararrafa (from the Jukun stock) with some other Nigerian tribes. They are found in the southern part of Plateau State and some parts of Nasarawa State.

### ***The Goemai Cosmology***

*Yil Goemai* (Goemai land) revolves around a worldview structured on the belief in *Na'an*. The Goemai cannot be separated from *Matkoeroem* (sacred tree) and other intermediaries as the communication media with *Na'an*. There are various levels of mediation in the Goemai pantheon, with *Na'an* occupying the zenith of the hierarchy. The *Mu'ut* (dead) are next, followed by the *Mukwarkum*, and the *Moe Kwap da* (*moe jap nda shak*—ancestors) are closer to the

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<sup>596</sup> Miskoom Martin M. Shaldas III (Long Goemai), Group Conversation, July 23, 2021, Palace, Shendam. Council members present

living. *Kwap Nda*, according to the *Luu Niyuu* elders,<sup>597</sup> refers to a person's original place of birth—the father's home place. The *Luu Niyuu* elders disagree with the reference made by Parloug of the ancestors as *kwap nda*. In the elders' opinion, the ancestors are known as the *Moe nakoe*. To qualify as *Moe nakoe*, one must be a custodian of the *Mu'ut/Matkoeroem*, live a virtuous life, and die of natural causes. "Land for the Goemai is the dwelling place of the ancestors. It explains why Moemai have as the motto *Shal Ka Yilmen* (Fight for our Land)."<sup>598</sup> Land and language give the Moemai their identity as a people bound by the strength of recollected memory and experience of ancestors and their responses to those.

Despite its patriarchal character, the Goemai people can boast of female deities like the *Matkoeroem*. It is observed that many Goemai people subscribe to *Matkoeroem* than to *Koeroem* because *Koeroem* is more potent than *Matkoeroem* as he is a deadly deity. Anthony Kwapnoe posits that "*Matkoeroem* (sacred tree) is not *Na'an*." He describes it as a symbol of Divine presence that people approach for intercession.<sup>599</sup> *Matkoeroem* has a sacramental relevance in the life of the people. The people are unambiguous that the Goemai nation recognizes only one Supreme Creator and Father, *Na'an*. It alludes to Goemai's phenomenological approach to the reality of their universe. Women do not access the *Luu Mai*, *Matkoeroem*'s shrine. However, they participate in brewing the local beer, cooking, and sometimes singing and dancing.<sup>600</sup> According to the *Luu Niyuu* elders, *Koeroem* is not associated with women, unlike *Matkoeroem*, whose veneration involves women in preparing meals and drinks. The insinuation by some, like Jarlath Walsh, that *Matkoeroem* is the consort of *Koeroem*<sup>601</sup> is contested by the *Luu Niyuu*

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<sup>597</sup> Luu Niyuu Elders, Group Communication, July 10, 2021.

<sup>598</sup> Luu Niyuu Elders, additional communication from WhatsApp messages through my assistant, Fabian Sabo, October 19, 2022.

<sup>599</sup> A. Kwapnoe, Personal Communication, July 9, 2021

<sup>600</sup> L. Nana (Long Kabang), Personal Communication, July 4, 2021

<sup>601</sup> See, Jarlath Walsh, *The Growth of the Catholic Church*, 33.

elders for whom *Matkoeroem* is so referred because of the role played by women in the preparation of the ritual meals and not because it is the wife of *Koeroem*. *Koeroem* is venerated with chicken and goat, while *Matkoeroem* is venerated with Guinea corn and millet, songkwa (maize), soup without oil, pepper, salt, dry okra (*tija*), locust beans (*bwas*) or *koen*.

*Na'an*, according to Alfred Gurumyen, has two designations: a traditional gun; and the Goemai Supreme Deity. Gleaning from the contributions of the *Luu Niyuu* elders, I understand that the Goemai believe in the supernatural governance of “*Nda Teng Na'an*” (the Supreme Deity), the creator of the universe and all that is in it. *Na'an* is regarded with a sense of awe, reverence, and sometimes fear. The Goemai belief in *Na'an* is manifested in the veneration of the ancestors, spirits, deities, magical powers, and divinities. *Na'an*, for the Goemai, is the unseen power in heaven. As a father who loves his people, *Na'an* is the Supreme Deity who listens to the pleas of the people in their daily supplications offered on their behalf by the chief priests—*daskoom luu* (the heads or elders of the households). The *daskoom luu* possess the powers to offer sacrifices and perform libations and incantations through the mediation of the spirits or ancestors who manifest as masquerades or *Koeroem* and *Matkoeroem* (deities).

Interestingly, the goodness and love of *Na'an* for his people do not inhibit *Na'an* from punishing individual or communal transgressions. Tuammen avers that *Na'an* is the Superior power that makes things happen—sends the rain, gives life, ensures the growth of crops, etc. She holds that, for the Goemai, everything that defies explanation by the people is ascribed to the invisible *Na'an*. In this regard, *Na'an* must be revered. While speaking, the *Long Goemai*, in the company of his council, affirms tradition as the means of approaching *Na'an*. The *Long* maintains that, in their characteristic prejudicial manner, the missionaries and colonialists condemned *Tok Mu'ut* (the ritual worship of *Na'an*) as worship of other gods (idols). For the

Europeans, according to the *Long Goemai*, “anything worshipped by the black person is designated as an idol.” During our conversation, the *Long Goemai* and members of his council observe similarities between what happens at Church and the *mai* (shrine).<sup>602</sup>

### ***Mu’ut*—The Dead and Masquerades**

*Mu’ut* in Goemai signifies the dead. The Goemai masqueraders are humans dressed in some ritual regalia who are representatives of the spirits. They are dressed in grasses and sometimes in colorful clothing with magical charms attached. No one but the cult members can identify the one masked (*Dashit*). Masqueraders are believed to be ancestors who live among the living to assist them in maintaining security and ensuring prosperity. They serve as intermediaries between the physical and the spiritual realms and the mouthpiece of the gods and *Na’an* as *jap Na’an* (Children of *Na’an*). It is commonplace for the masqueraders to speak mysterious languages that are incomprehensible to the people but to cult members only. In such circumstances, the need for interpretation by the chief priest or those led by the same spirit becomes pertinent for communication. Even though most of those masked as masqueraders are adult males of the communities, some of them, according to the *Luu Niyuu* elders, are females depending on their designated activities. For the Goemai, therefore, anyone qualified to be masked in a masquerader must possess certain qualities of bravery and have been initiated depending on the specific masquerader. Those consecrated as masqueraders assume the spiritual powers of divinity and are no longer to be toyed with.

While some masqueraders appear at night, others come out during the day. Most day masqueraders mingle with women, while those who appear in the night only associate with the male folk, especially those who have gone through the process of initiation to manhood. Women

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<sup>602</sup> Miskoom M. Shaldas III (*Long Goemai*), Group Conversation, July 23, 2021, Palace, Shendam. Council members present.

are not supposed to touch the spirit and identify who is dressed in a masquerade, as any contravention is liable to a fine (goat/Chicken) to appease the gods. Failure to pay the fine may lead to the woman's inability to conceive and give birth successfully. There is, among the *Kwo* Goemai, a hierarchy among the masqueraders based on function and ranking determined by the level of spirituality and powers of the masqueraders. The ranking determines the masquerader's relationship with the people and other masqueraders.

The power of the masquerader emanates from the spirit world and the ancestors. The nomenclature of the masquerade reveals something about the role and activities performed by it; for example, the *Kwo* masquerade—*Mang-gap*—implies “*take and share*.” What is culturally taken and shared is the information for the people. According to oral history, *Mang-gap* is a war masquerade. It is believed to have led *Kwo* and *Dorok* Goemai during their migration from Kwararrafa. *Mang-gap* is only found in Demshin, Luukwo, and Ndak (a village close to Namu). According to the Luu Niyuu elders, tradition suggests that the Luukwo *Mang-gap* is female, the Demshin one is male, and the Ndak *Mang-gap* is male and female. *Mang-gap* is a highly respected and worshipped masquerade in *Kwo* chiefdom since the one in Demshin no longer exists due to the missionary influence of Christianity or family crisis. In Luukwo (*Bakin Ciyawa*), *Mang-gap* is managed by the Lakwaram clan as custodians of culture. All the male and female children of the clan must be initiated into the *Mang-gap* cult, while other clan members of Nuku, Kaskang, and other Moemai, can be initiated at will. Initiation occurs during the *Mang-gap* festival, which takes place biannually. During this period, any member of the family or interested Moemai presents two chickens and a specified quantity of *mues* or, in the alternative, provides the millet for the preparation of *mues* (local beer). Wealthy members may offer more items and even a goat for the sacrifice. For the festival, *Piu*, the messenger of *Mang-gap*, carries

his master's message to all the kith and kin for whom the message is meant. According to the Long Luu Niyuu, "*Mang-gap* festival is usually in the dry season, and the millet is soaked with river/well water (the *dumukwan*—river)." <sup>603</sup>

The errand takes *Piu* and its entourage (usually male adults) up to a week. Upon their return with various gifts from chiefs and priests of tradition from the villages visited, *Piu* and its entourage head to the shrine to notify the chief priest and elders of its safe return. Diviners (*moe Paa*) and soothsayers must have been consulted to ensure the successful return of *Piu* and the entire festival. *Dangshang*, the grandfather (the chief of the masquerades in Luukwo), whose steps are slow due to old age and may be emulating the slow movement of the chameleon, saunters so as not to sink the community with his heavy steps. During this period of one week of the festival, no noise, music, or celebration is allowed as it is believed that *Mang-gap* has left the wilderness and is near the people. In case of noise, the masquerader will perceive it as a sign of war and come out furiously to fight. Those responsible for the noise are usually punished severely. Also, women, adult males, and children who are members are not permitted to wear clothes during this period. The whole village is expected to be quiet and serene. Only the voice of *Mang-gap* is heard from time to time shouting in its shrine. At the end of the festival, which centers around purification and appeasing the deities, recounting royal history, and many more, *fuan pall* (first rain) falls to cover the traces of *Mang-gap*'s steps as it returns to the forest. <sup>604</sup>

Among the *Du'ut*, *Dabit* occupies the highest place and is responsible for the judgment and settlement of disputes. *Dabit* always appears during the *bit Goemai*—Goemai day celebration. *Mutlua* is taken as the wife of *Dabit* and is associated with feasts/entertainments and dances. *Maya* is second in rank to *Dabit*; *Dabong*—messenger of all masqueraders; *Dashit kian* is a

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<sup>603</sup> Long Luu Niyuu, Personal Communication, June 10, 2021.

<sup>604</sup> Luu Niyuu Elders, Group Conversation, June 4, 2021.

dancing masquerade with beads (*akoyo*) tied on the leg; *Goetengguuk* is a discipline master; *Dangkongkoem* is also a discipline master; *Goenemna* is a somersaulting masquerader; *Mu'ut boun* is a waist dancer and *Mu'utwaap*, the millet masquerade associated with the harvest of millet.

Peculiar to most Goemai masquerades is communication in mysterious languages that is incomprehensible to the people. It necessitates interpretation by the chief priest or those led by the same spirit. Women are prohibited from touching and setting eyes on some of the masquerades that do not associate with women.

### ***Kwamteng***

*Kwamteng* is an exclusively male initiation ceremony in Goemai land. It is an indigenous form of schooling in ancestral wisdom and virtues. The *Kwamteng* Goemai education transforms boys into men and leaders in society and people who can stand and defend the community in every facet of life. In the opinion of the *Luu Niyuu* elders, *Kwamteng* inculcates indigenous virtues into the boys after they have been taken to the *kong koen* (the cleansing stream). A flowing stream is considered a sacred space because it carries the sacrifices to the abode of the deities. The symbolism of water as a cleansing element by which the initiates are purified is similar to the significance of the baptismal font that symbolizes the spiritual purification of the Christian initiate. The *Long kong* (chief of the river), responsible for the initiation of young men into *Kwamteng*, is usually skilled in tradition and training in qualities such as bravery, respect, dance, farming, patience, etc., and everything about life in society.

An initiation ceremony is a form of society's role in accompanying the uninitiated from childhood to adulthood (manhood/maturity). The neophytes/uninitiated, known as *jap kool*, undergo rigorous training in traditional skills. This spans from days to about four months at the

grove (*kool*), which is by the river (*kong koen*), the place where evil spirits are chased away through rituals performed (primarily sacrifice of chickens, goats, etc.) for cleansing. Once initiated, they become known as “*rap moe yil kwamteng*.” Disturbingly, with the depletion of the forests through human activities and population expansion, the *kool* and the *mai* are quickly being exposed to uninitiated persons, a manifestation of a ‘dying culture.’ Also, the youths see cultural practices such as *Kwamteng* and eating in the *Luu das* as archaic. The prevailing situation does not mean that nothing of the culture is continuing in the interior villages.

Culture is the outer garment of what it entails as Goemai humanness. Like the native attire (*adire*), it is a distinctive marker of a people’s tradition. An aspect of Goemai cultural practices essential to participating in public, social, and spiritual spaces is *Kwamteng*. Tuammen opines that Christianity does not go against what she knows about the culture. It is, in a way, the recognition of the possibility of the marriage of Christianity and Goemai spirituality if Christianity recognizes the contextual character of religiosity. She, however, expresses reservations in *Kwamteng*, particularly as a school for maturity, since, according to her, the boys can mature without it. Her reason is that the initiation ceremony (*Kwamteng*) emphasizes male chauvinism—an aspect of a culture where every man is projected as head of the family now or later. Tuammen contends that “initiation is designed to protect the position of the males by turning them into real men.”<sup>605</sup> This way, they maintain control of almost all aspects of society’s life. This view finds traction in Western-educated Goemai women, though not all. The general observation is that many women, especially those in the villages, do not see any problem with excluding women from *Kwamteng*. For them, society is structured around different people with

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<sup>605</sup> C. Tuammen, Personal Conversation, July 30, 2021.



specific roles for the harmony of society. The expressed views of the women allude to the concept of complementarity and equilibrium rather than Western binary.

Goemai culture does not accord recognition to an uninitiated male member of society. He cannot represent his people in another village or even participate in the people's affairs as he is considered *Goemai goemat* (Goemai woman). Thus, according to Tuammen, society has put together an essential ceremony through which a young male attains mature status in the community. As a result, *Kwamteng* has become the medium for growth and development. The *jap kool* (candidates for initiation) go into the grove as young boys and come out as men fortified with ancestral secrets, virtues, history, and spirituality built around harmony and relationship. The Goemai initiation period, which ranges from days to three months, is also meant to teach specific prohibitions like divulging the secrets of the grove to non-initiates, eating, or associating with women during their menstrual period, with the warning that if they do, they will die. The consequences may have been put in place to discourage any temptation of divulging traditional secrets. The secrecy around the activities and lessons of the initiation ground may be to foster awe and reverence for the location and maintain the initiates' special status. It is believed that the menstrual blood will bring evil to the man. While in the *kool* (the *Kwamteng* place), some who cannot stand the strenuous activities die. They are said to have been killed by hyenas (*Tumu*).

Interestingly, parallels may be drawn between some Christian rituals and aspects of Goemai rituals. As a form of incorporation into the life of Goemai society, *Kwamteng* plays the Christian initiation role within Christendom. The story narrated by Kwapnoe helps in understanding the similarity:

A maternal uncle of the late Fr. Maigari was convinced to go to the Church for the ordination ceremony of his nephew. After much hesitation, he finally agreed to attend. During

Mass, after the consecration, the Bishop of the Diocese of Jos (Ganaka) consumed the sacred specie (Body and Blood of Christ). At the point of consumption, the maternal uncle of the priest being ordained exclaimed, *mu'ut lap soe!* (the sacrifice has been accepted!) He wanted to be allowed to receive the holy Communion.

*Kwamteng*, for some converted Goemai Christians, is against the Christian faith because it is idolatry (*tsafi*). Indigenous religious rites performed during the initiation process are not considered Christian for most converted Goemai Christians. Thus, Simon Lu'utnaan counts himself fortunate not to have undergone *Kwamteng*.<sup>606</sup> In the same light, Alfred Gurumyen expresses his apprehensions concerning *Kwamteng*. According to him, his age mates who went to *Kwamteng* were misled as they had no opportunity to learn and follow the dictates of the Almighty (the Christian God). Gurumyen, like some other Goemai Christians interviewed, sees “the way of Christianity as far better than the way of indigenous spirituality.” He said, “I cannot go and subject myself to the full tradition of the *Kwamteng* deities.” The problem, in their estimation, is in the slaughtering of goats/chickens to prepare food for the consumption of the deity members. That, for them, is fetishism since it makes the deity God. Evidently, they have lost the sense of symbolic mediation where the deities are sacramental representations of *Na'an*, as the Goemai indigenous universe upholds. They opine that not going to *Kwamteng* saved them from deviating from God's ways—the way of doing good and avoiding evil. There is the insinuation that what is cultural is evil. The above helps situate the effect of Christian philosophical influence couched in the rhetoric of salvation and modernity on indigenous people.

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<sup>606</sup> S. Lu'utnaan, Personal Communication, July 1, 2021

Another illustration depicting the parallels between Christianity and Goemai spirituality is the story of Gabriel G. Ganaka (the first indigenous Bishop of Jos) as a priest in Kalong, an outstation of Shendam, narrated by Alfred Gurumyen.

On a particular occasion, he went to the church in Kalong; he requested to follow the *kwamteng* people to the *mai* after realizing that not many were coming to church. He was allowed. At the *mai*, he closely followed all that took place there and realized nothing was done without imploring *Na'an*. After appreciating the opportunity given to him and what he witnessed, he invited the same people to come and see how the Christians approach *Na'an* on Sunday. On the faithful Sunday, Ganaka is said to have cut a mango leaf and to have used it to sprinkle the people with holy water. To the amazement of one of the *kwamteng* people, he exclaimed, “*Ni de ton wat goezoom-i?* (They also sprinkle the sacred water, too?).

This person witnessed a ritual act similar to the *Kwamteng* ritual of cleansing. The elder grasps the significance of the objects and actions because they connect them with what happens in the *mai*.

On the other hand, some Goemai Christian converts like Kwapnoe who did not undergo *Kwamteng* due to ardent adherence to their Christian faith see *Kwamteng* not purely as a religious practice but as an integral part of culture since spirituality cannot be divorced from culture (the sacred and profane are inseparable in indigenous consciousness). A closer look at *Kwamteng* in relation to the situation today indicates there is no gainsaying that it is a profound way of instilling discipline in people, a traditional institute for cultural knowledge. *Kwamteng*, according to Kwapnoe, incorporates the people into various aspects of the Goemai worldview. For his part, Yilmiap Shalbuet questions the negative attitude of Christianity towards indigenous spirituality. He surmises that the Church had not allowed itself to comprehend the root of this

practice and reflect on how *Kwamteng* can be married with the Christian faith, especially the sacraments of initiation.<sup>607</sup> In other words, Shalbuét decries the missionaries' physical gaze, which differs from the phenomenological approach, which frees the object from the intention of the perceiving subject. Sadly, however, Christianity frowns on the practice without understanding the context within which the rituals, rites, symbols, etc., were constructed; in my opinion, it provides the ground for establishing a conversational imperative for the Church to reconcile Christian initiation with *Kwamteng*, among other practices, rites, and rituals through a reimagination of the practices in the light of intercultural engagement as the experience of indigenous people.

A disturbing observation is that *Kwamteng*, as a ritual of initiation and a process leading to adulthood, does not accommodate women. Despite excluding women, my research led me to discover an age-old Goemai female practice by which elderly women accompany young ladies at the commencement of their menstrual flow, teaching them womanhood and motherhood. Naomi Buetnaan Longtoe explains that this practice can be referred to as “female *kwamteng*” as the young ladies learn the roles of mature women—the dos and don'ts of married life. It is essential to realize that this is not done in groups as with *Kwamteng*. Even on an individual basis, the practice has the character of teaching values and virtues of responsible womanhood. “The practice has gone extinct, and there is a need to consider its revival.”<sup>608</sup> Today's reconstruction of “female *kwamteng*” will integrate more women's experiences into the predominantly patriarchal Goemai cultural universe.

Worthy of note is that the Goemai have some women cults where membership requires initiation: *Kyeji* and *Nashi (Bori)*. Initiation into these cults follows healing after ailments. Sick

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<sup>607</sup> Y. Shalbuét, Personal Communication, June 16, 2021

<sup>608</sup> N. B. Longtoe, Personal Communication, July 19, 2021

women are usually taken to these cultic groups for healing by their husbands. They must bring food materials and animals like chickens and goats for sacrifice. Upon recovery, the healed women are initiated as members. Most of the ailments are linked to spirit possession. The *Kyeji* cult is more closely connected with the Goemai culture, traced to the Jukun of Kwarrarafa, while *Nashi* is more of a borrowed culture. In both cults, members possessed by the spirit dance and roll on the ground at the start of the group's drumming. Falling to the ground and rolling confirms that the ailment falls within the purview of the cult's healing rituals. The ailments are spiritual.

While *Kyeji* cult members take *mues* (local beer), *bori* cult members are prohibited from drinking *mues*. This may not be unconnected with the Islamic root of *bori* rituals and rootedness in Kwarrarafa. *Kyeji* cult is led by the *Wanu* (woman leader), who cares for the sick and goes in search of incense (*woen dyel*), and the *Kanter* (male leader).<sup>609</sup> The *bori Kus paa* is the traditional doctor/healer who presides over healing and searching for healing herbs from the forest. The male leader, the *Gangami*, performs rituals the *Kus paa* cannot execute for the cult members. Healing is carried out for a month, after which the sick woman is told the sickness is not from the *bori* spirit if there is no improvement. Sacred water is sprinkled (*wat goezoom*) during the healing process to calm the sick woman, and *lap dor* (confession) is made before spiritual cleansing (bathing). On the accusation of being satanic, the women respond, "we did not invite sickness upon ourselves. So, what we do here is not idolatry; we are saving lives through healing."<sup>610</sup> *Bori* cult ritual healing ceases during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan when the spirits are said to have gone to the forest. Three days after the Muslim feast marking the sacrifice of Ishmael by Abraham, the cult members gather for the feast of thanksgiving (*shishiya*)

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<sup>609</sup> Interview with the members of the *Nashi* at Kalong, July 19, 2021.

<sup>610</sup> Interview with *Bori* cult leaders and some members, July 24, 2021.

at their sacred space (*zaure*)—an enclosed building accessed by members only. Both cults have male members who are drum (*kalangu*) players for the *bori* cult and the *kangak kyeji* for the *Kyeji* cult.

### **Rituals**

Indigenous Goemai rituals and worship are performed in the name of *Na'an* through the mediation of the deities, spirits, and ancestors. A significant feature of *buol Na'an* (worship) is the requirement for confession, *seer* (penitential prayer), and *lap dor* (confession) since *buol Na'an* (worship) must be performed in purity of heart. *Lap dor* is usually performed at the *poe gungwaar* (the fork road or the Y-junction).<sup>611</sup> Justice and reconciliation are defining aspects of Goemai rituals since the goal is restoring harmony and healing wounded relationships with sacred *mais* (shrines), groves, forests, and mountains as the sanctuaries of justice.

Rituals are not performed haphazardly because deity veneration must begin with libation. This involves pouring the local drink (*mues*) on the ground to remember the ancestors and appease them. In the Goemai culture, libation starts from the east (*dirteng*), then the west (*puanka*), followed by the south (*mu qua'an*), ending at the north (*watapang*), the point at which libation is poured. The Goemai ritualistic meal takes place in the *mai*; chicken, goat, cow, or horse, among many other animals, may be used for the sacrifice. The priest slaughters the animal, sprinkling the blood on the *Matkoeroem* (the sacred tree). After preparation, some inner parts are taken to the *matkoeroem* and placed there. The priest cuts a part of the inner parts and eats, then pours libation and drinks the brewed beer (*mues*). Only after the priest has consumed the allotted parts are others allowed to partake in the meal since it is taken that the sacrifice has

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<sup>611</sup> Conversation with the Long Goemai and his Council, July 23, 2021.

been accepted (*mu'ut lap soe*). Every other initiated person can participate in the ritual meal after that.

Some of the Goemai Catholics I interviewed are emphatic that they would not participate in any traditional ritual as it would be equivalent to serving two masters. They seem to believe that *Na'an*, the Goemai Supreme Deity whom the Christians also worship, is a lesser deity than the Christian God. This gives the impression that the *Na'an* of the Goemai and the one called upon by the Christians whom they adopted from the indigenous people are different to the extent that the Christian adoption (*Na'an* nomenclature) is more potent than the initial indigenous Divinity. It is important to note that the *Na'an* of the indigenous people adopted by the Christians stripped him of the indigenous splendor of his spiritual aid. As the case may be, the difference between Christianity and Goemai religiosity can be explained not in terms of different Divinities but different approaches to understanding the one Supreme Deity determined by the various experiences of the people and their contexts.

Ritual healing among the *Kyeji* cult group of Goemaliland occurs when the sick woman (*mat la gok*) is taken to the stream by the caregivers (a man and a woman) and pushed into it. She is left rolling in the waters before she is brought home. Once home, people come to see her. She is made to go around the *Luu das* seven times, holding the goat she got. The goat is collected from her and taken to the *Luu das*. In addition to the goat, she is expected to bring two chickens (male and female), forty measures of millet (*maar*), Amora (*mualam*), beniseed (*shen*), salt (*koen*), and *bwas* (locust beans). The chicken is swirled over the head of the sick woman three times, after which drums (*kangak kyeji*) are played, and her dance steps are tested. The ritual swirling of the chicken over the head of the sick woman is a form of cleansing where the illness is transferred to it from the sick woman, like the scapegoat of the Hebrew culture (see Leviticus

16:8-10). After the first day's test, another test is conducted on the following day to observe the outcome. The sickness is not considered associated with the spirits if the drumming does not excite rolling on the floor, interpreted as a sign of spirit possession.

The sacred space for the *Bori* cult members is the *Zaure*. It is the place where they assemble for the rituals. Rituals are performed within the context of healing, and the time for healing (*jenya*) is in September. Healing is the responsibility of the *kus paa*, who is a woman. The *Gangemi*, a male healer, mainly performs the rituals the woman cannot carry out. The *Nashi* women observe an annual feast of *shishiya*. This annual festival of *shishiya*—the feast of happiness (thanksgiving)—occurs after the Muslim feast marking the sacrifice of Ishmael. Three days after the Muslim celebration, the *bori* cult performs the feast showing the Muslim impact on the cult. Thus, *shishiya* is held once a year for two days.

According to Stephen Tsenmen, the installation of the chief is performed at *Poe muduut*—one of the sacred sites of the Goemai—an early settlement where some chiefs were buried. The *Goebou* (*madaki*) goes there until the day chosen to unveil the new *Long*. The *madaki* informs the *Nuangyil* about the decision of the council. The *Goebou*, sitting on the stone of tradition, addresses the princes. He asks the *kanankur* (the one most familiar with the princes) if all the princes are present. He then announces the chosen prince, who immediately takes his seat on the stone of tradition occupied by the *madaki*. He addresses his brothers, imploring them to accept his choice as the will of *Na'an*. They proceed to the grove (*kunkuni*) for rituals. The *Nuang yil* is given a red cap to put on the chosen prince, now *Long*. The red cap with ears is a symbol of authority. The *Nuang yi*—Galadima—Chief priest performs ritual sacrifices (*Tok Mu'ut*) for the wellbeing of the land and good harvest. The Jalbang mountain is where a horse is sacrificed by the grave of one of the Goemai chiefs—Bigun after the new *Long* must have



confessed for purity of heart. In my interaction with the *Long Goemai* and his council, I learned that the traditional rituals are a means of pure spirituality, primarily as the rituals in the coronation of the *Long* represent. Purity of heart is required of the elected *Long* for a successful coronation. This informs the necessity of the *lap dor* before most rituals.

The Shinkwan, the ritual items, lead the ritual for the installation of the *Long Goemai*. No one comes close. The selected chief takes a different way to Jalbang (associated with the Goemai progenitors), the sacred hill where the *Longs* are buried for the installation ritual. Everything is done to protect the prince from being killed by his enemies. At Jalbang, the red cap (*kwamni*) is given to the *Long* by the *Luu Nuwang* people. Ritual installations are preceded by the settlement of any dispute among the princes, with confession defining the avenue for reconciliation (a critical aspect of every ritual). The selected prince is shown where the earlier chiefs were buried at Jalbang—*Nikeer*. At *kwap mu'utla*, a goat and two chickens are sacrificed.

More rituals are carried out in Shinkwan. A goat and three chickens are sacrificed at the *Luu Mai* (Shrine of the Shinkwan). The *Long* and *Shinkwan* sit together. At a point, the *Kawap* (chief of Zomo), in whose care is the *zung*, performs rituals on it to protect the *Long Goemai*. The *Kawap* places the *zung* in the plaited hair (*waar ka muk*) on the head of the chief. The new chief, riding on horseback, heads to Shendam at the end of the installation rites. The following day, the *Shinkwan* goes to ascertain that the chief arrived at the palace safely.<sup>612</sup>

In the case of the lack of rain, the *Long Goemai* asks the chief priests (*Shinkwan and Kampiring*) the reason for the drought. The chief priests assemble their councils to perform divination (*kes paa*). The ritual items for the rituals to call for rain are performed outside with the millet placed in a calabash, with rain expected to fall and soak the millet in the calabash. Other

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<sup>612</sup> T. Stephen, Personal Communication, July 18, 2021.

items for the rituals are horses, goats, chickens, etc. The death of the *Long* is made known to the *Shinkwan* by the Kawap. The *Long* is never buried during the day but at night. And no one is supposed to cry. Once a person cries, that person must provide a chicken for cleansing. For the burial, a big, castrated ram and three chickens are sacrificed in the royal house. The inner parts are used for the sacrifice. The skin, including the head and legs, is used to wrap around the chief—a symbol of him mounting his horse to travel to the ancestral land. He is buried at *kwap mu'utla*.

The Goemai ritual ceremony of *Mues Ta'ar/Bit Kampiring*, also called *Ta'ar Goedeet*, usually takes place in September—*Bit pet muk*. In preparation for *Bit Kampiring*, the *Kampiring* goes into seclusion in October. While in isolation, all rites/rituals cease until he comes out. During the period of seclusion, there is no drumming or flutes. Once the moon is sighted, the masqueraders in the bush cry out, and the ones at home respond to show the moon has been sighted. The *Kampiring* puts his *zung* on the evening of the sighting of the moon. On the following morning, he goes to see the *Long Goemai*, informing him of the coming feast.

The returning *Kampiring* is welcomed on the way by women dancing and masquerades. He then enters his *Luu das* for rituals. The *sual* – the celebration commences for three days with masqueraders dancing and ends on the fourth day. The *Kampiring* performs rituals daily, one of which is *Puoe-de-men*—the ritual for cleansing where chickens are offered. Daily rituals and libation (*hess ham*) are carried out for the deities to know they are remembered.<sup>613</sup> (My observation is that there is a hermeneutic of suspicion among the royal house, the two priests, and their council. The politics of power and influence seem to be playing out.)

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<sup>613</sup> Miskoom K. M. Bibuet, Personal Communication, July 17, 2021.

## Goemai Celebrations and Dances

When there is plenty of food and drink, harmony, and peace, all the Goemai do is celebrate and dance. Among Goemai celebrations and dances are *Maar mues*—an organized farming dance meant to motivate farmers while they communally work the farms of members or elders (April to October). They are usually rewarded with *mues* (local beer). *Gya kian* (*gya-swal*) is a dancing ceremony in times of happiness, bumper harvest, marriage, or memorial where men and masqueraders (*matgoegoeda*) dance. *Matgoegoeda* is a female Kwamteng deity that comes out during *Taar Kampiring*. She appears and disappears at will and is seen only by those who have undergone Kwamteng. Any other person who sets eyes on her will die or be barren. Only confession and purification at the shrine can remedy the situation.<sup>614</sup> At the same time, women participate by responding to the song of the men. Before harvesting new crops, the Goemai must first take some to the shrine and offer them to the deities.<sup>615</sup> *Gya she* takes place only at the time of initiation, sometime around the first week of November once the New Moon of the Goemai New Year is sighted. The *Kwamteng* members come out and welcome the new moon. The *sha*, a beaded calabash, is used. *Hataar* consists of three to four days of dancing. *Kanggakpin* is the royal dance for princes and royal princesses during the installation ceremony of the *Long*. [*Gya kum* (*Mang-gap*) *Noep* is the masquerader that dances on poles. *Gya Na'an*.]

### *Luu Das*

Traditional Goemai households are constructed with a hut built exclusively for the male elders and initiated outside. Gleaning from the conversation with the *Luu Niyuu* elders, the *Luu das* serves as a school for teaching values and virtues, disciplining errant youths, training,

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<sup>614</sup> Miskoom Kampiring, WhatsApp conversation through my assistant, Zemman Tsem diem, December 30, 2022.

<sup>615</sup> Conversation with the *Luu Niyuu* elders, June 10, 2021

dispensing justice, and teaching history and tradition. Men meet at the *Luu das* every evening for meals, social interactions, and teaching the young initiates. This explains why Longtoe Bepsem refers to it as “a school of life and for socialization.”<sup>616</sup> This is corroborated by Shalbuet, who surmises that socialization, discipline, and inculcation of values, e.g., respect, patience, wisdom, courage, truthfulness, etc., as some of the rationales for the *Luu das*. It is a place that is shrouded in secrecy as only the initiated are admitted into it. The secrecy, however, is meant to enhance the mystical dimension of the culture, buttressing its significance in the life of society as young people learn how society works. As a result of what happens in the *Luu das*, it assumes the character of a sacred space such that, according to Kwapnoe, one has to remove one’s cap and shoes while entering.

A fascinating aspect of the waning of indigenous culture is that most of the elders of the *Long Goemai* council had no *Luu das* built, as they are Christians. The home settings today manifest how houses are built in a way that kills the *Luu das*. It shows the effect of “civilization” on the culture of the Goemai. The *Long Goemai* captures the situation succinctly when he holds that “culture and tradition have been polluted.” The question is, how can it be remedied? The exciting revelation by Homkwap captures the significance of the *Luu das* as a symbol of affinity. It is the sacred space of connection and harmony with the spiritual world of the ancestors. He confirms that in Kwarrarafa, there is a *Luu das* for the Goemai as a sign of the long cultural hegemony of the peoples. It shows the affinity the Goemai, especially the *Dorok* and *Kwo*, have with Kwarrarafa.

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<sup>616</sup> L. Bepsem, Personal Communication, June 18, 2021.

## **Symbols and Sacred Materials**

The sacred space of *mai* (shrine) is associated with ancestral and deity veneration. It is always the deity's abode in the grove. In the *mai* are kept ritual items like the *kam-galash* (a staff); *Kalang* is the clay plate used to serve food and drink at the shrine. Among other sacred materials are the *sum*—a horn of a wild animal used for dancing and incantation during *Kwamteng*—and the *shaa*—a beaded calabash used for dancing. *Taddi*, for the Goemai, is a graven image representing the gods. *Dau* an onion-like shrub that serves as a protective symbol or for medical purposes. The above are some of the sacred symbols revered and used in rituals.<sup>617</sup>

## **Patriarchy and Goemai Women**

Like many other African cultures, Goemai society is patriarchal, as its social organization places the male members above their female counterparts on the societal pyramid. One prominent exception, among others, that readily comes to mind is the Ashanti of Ghana, who operate a matrilineal society. The logic of patriarchy accords men an advantage over women to the extent that many women have had their ambition stunted. In the course of this research, I found out that though Goemai women are not fully incorporated into the life of society as the men, they have some form of organization to regulate their lives, the “female *kwamteng*,” where a menstruating girl is accompanied by her contemporaries and elderly women who gather to teach her hygiene and the art of home-keeping until the end of her menstruation. It was a practice for fostering solidarity/togetherness, which is no longer practiced.

Despite their exclusion from the sacred rites and rituals by the men, Goemai women still believe in all that the men do as means of helping maintain balance within the community. Just

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<sup>617</sup> Conversation with the Long Luu Niyuu, June 10, 2021, Luu Niyuu.

as the *Long* has a council comprising the Kawap guardian of the *zung* when the *Long* dies until a new one is elected, he guides the *Long* along the path of tradition, *Nkeon*, *Kasun* guides the *Long* in the way of tradition, *Goebou* steps in when the *Long* is absent, and *Kaan* is the priest, among others, for running the affairs of society, the palace women, who do not become *Long*, have their women's particular organization under the (*mugajiya*) head or leader who also has her council for the regulations of women's affairs. The council headed by the *magajiya* has the *nuwung magajiya*, *mama*, *kumbwo* and *tukura*.

Women like Blessing Fuomsuk and others who spoke out on some aspects of culture were considered activists due to the influence of western education, and some men restrained their wives from interacting with those women. They were seen as not being submissive. Even though culture seems to privilege men over women, subjugation is not a part of the Goemai women's experience. Fuomsuk opines that "the Goemai woman cannot be subjugated even though she obeys the man." It is pertinent, however, to realize that sexuality is more in a complementary sense than in terms of the Western binary. This explains why there is no movement for "equality" among the Goemai women. Most women do not see anything anomalous in the Goemai indigenous structure of organization.

For Fuomsuk, her Catholic faith and Western education impacted her life positively. Christianity influenced her view of life and her relationship with others through education, which taught her the value of her Goemai root. She appreciates tradition and has positive regard for traditionalists; she cherishes the excitement of being locked in to prevent women from seeing the masqueraders.<sup>618</sup> From the positive experience of Western education in her life as a Goemai woman, I glean that the relationship between Goemai religiosity and the faith in Christ has not

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<sup>618</sup> B. Fuomsuk, Personal Communication, July 13, 2021.

been well appropriated enough to birth a fully Goemai Christian spirituality. Christ has not yet incarnated in the Goemai indigenous space. The Christian faith practiced in the “forced context” is entirely Western; there is the need for a genuinely Goemai Christianity. People like Gurumyen consider themselves full-blooded Goemai though Christians. My observation of such affirmations is that many of them distance themselves from many rites, rituals, and traditions of the Goemai because they consider the practices to be idolatrous. The practical constraint of being truly Christian and fully Goemai is the maintenance of the Goemai cosmogony within a forced context since, in the Goemai world, the worship of *Na'an* cannot occur outside the veneration of the ancestors.

An innovative group of women in the city is forming an organization to promote culture. In the view of Tuammen, women were meant to be in the house as the ones working to maintain the peace. They accepted their place in society and would not struggle. The *niejap doe sharap Goemai*—an umbrella association of Goemai women, is championing the promotion of culture, especially among the girl children in Jos, as a way of keeping the culture alive and looking into the challenges and welfare of women and their children. Some other women’s associations in Goemalnd include *Teng du'ut* (Shendam and Surrounding area), *Dorok* women, and *Kwo* women. The *niejap doe sharap Goemai* aims to “make the person better by drawing them near and connecting them with tradition.” Once a year, they celebrate the *bit kwap nda goemai* as a way of retrieving and appropriating the Goemai past. Tuammen opines that the idea is “to promote culture by raising awareness of Goemai identity.” Goemai indigenous food is prepared and shared, and everything about the food is written and explained to those around; whatever proceeds accrue from selling the food is channeled towards establishing clinics, upgrading schools, etc. The *ni jap sharap Goemai* also aims at building women economically and socially.

During our conversation, Fuomsuk got an insight into introducing the traditional women's hierarchy into the *ni jap sharap Goemai*. Hear her: "this has given me an idea, which is to introduce the traditional women's hierarchical nomenclature into the *ni jap sharap Goemai*."

It was fascinating learning that the elders' council in the city is composed of both males and females, contrary to what is obtainable in Goemai nation. This innovation is a departure from the traditional Goemai elders' council though it is still referred to as *daskoom*, depicting male elders. There is resistance to allowing *sharapkoom* to enter the Goemai lexicon. For Tuammen, women are not given any role in the social and religious life of the Goemai as men. The princes and their male children are eligible to become *Long* and have functions assigned to them. The children of the princesses are given lesser roles/positions. This bolsters the patriarchal/patrilineal nature of the Goemai society. However, according to Tuammen, in 1916, Shantoor, a son of a princess, became *Long*. It follows the British sending Rapmen and his people to Montol land to collect taxes. On getting to Montol land and discovering that the Montol people hid their products, the British and their Goemai agents destroyed the crops of the Montol and burned their houses. The Montol, on a revenge mission, went and killed the *Long* and all his brothers. Since the eligible princes were murdered, Niagwan (the first convert to Christianity in Shendam) advised that Shantoor be king. He reigned for over 30 years. Nyelong, his son, reigned for 40 years.

Though Irene Yiljap has not paid much attention to culture, she holds that women participate in societal functions by brewing the local beer (*mues*) and dancing. For her, the superiority of men was not subjugating of women, who have never been sentimental about their less-than-full inclusion in the life of society.<sup>619</sup> For her part, Lucy Penyit disagrees. She claims

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<sup>619</sup> I. Yiljap, Personal Communication, July 15, 2021.



that the practice of not allowing women to voice their minds on rules and regulations concerning the community is a form of subjugation. She also asserts that men make significant decisions and only later explain them to women. Penyit quickly admits that not all women see it as dominating, as many others do not. She rightly observes that women are unequal to men in both Goemai indigenous spirituality and Christianity. She wonders why it is so. In her words, “why are women not treated equally to men in both Goemai indigenous spirituality and Christianity?”<sup>620</sup> This, in my opinion, is a salient question that calls for reflection in an attempt for inclusiveness. Many village women believe they are included in the community’s life in a manner their social status permits. Samuel Sharkdam maintains that the treatment of women is less dignifying, as evidenced when the men go to the *Matkoeroem*; they are not allowed to go near a woman of childbearing age who is barred from cooking for the Deity because she is considered impure in her menstrual flow.<sup>621</sup> I leave the issue of inclusiveness for some other work in the future, as it will demand more than just a simple response.

As an ardent Goemai supporter and lover of culture, Rachel Hoomvel Tuonlong understands culture as part of every person’s life that cannot be extricated from the person’s identity. She alludes to the cultures’ non-inclusion of women, even though she participates in what is allowed for women. Tuonlong and many others have been maligned for their participation in traditional practices by Christians who abhor many cultural practices as evil. She expressed herself in the following words, “since the culture does not allow for the participation of women much, I do all I can in the area that is allowed. I often engage in the *bori* dance with the cult members. This led to my being accused and reported to the Church as someone who assembles masquerades. I have no idea what takes place in the grove (*kunkuni*). I only express

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<sup>620</sup> L. Penyit, Personal Communication, July 20, 2021.

<sup>621</sup> S. Sharkdam, Personal Communication, July 10, 2021.

my love for culture by singing and dancing. I am not concerned with any other thing.” She has never been ill enough to have been taken for healing by the *bori* cult women and thus never initiated, and she never participated in their rituals/rites. Tuonlong joined them in their dance anytime there was any celebration incorporating dance (like *wasan bori*). She would usually sign the cross on herself when sprinkled with their sacred water. Whereas many view it as participation in idolatry, Tuonlong believes it is her culture, and she cannot shy away from her identity.<sup>622</sup>

### **The Centrality of the Position of the *Long Goemai***

Among the Goemai, the *Long* is the spiritual (chief priest) and political father of all Goemai people. He exercises both roles as an intermediary between the people and the deities. As the chief, he occupies, even while alive, the position of an ancestor. In the installation ritual, the *Long* is believed to die and come back to life. He, therefore, belongs to the two realms of the Goemai cosmology. A significant feature of the *Long Goemai* is his *zung* (the hair tuft). Tuammen explains that the *zung* is a white tusk in a traditionally black woven cloth. Like the Jukun, it is held, she continues, that in the *zung* are seeds of crops in his land. It is held that the seeds in the *zung* are meant to be used when a disaster befalls the land and farm produce is destroyed. The seeds from the *zung* are taken and planted. Thus, the *Long* becomes the symbol of preserving tradition and food security since the people’s cultural life revolves around agriculture. Once he has the *zung* fixed on his head, the *Long* is culturally prohibited from certain things. For example, he can neither touch it with his hand nor eat anything. The first *Long Goemai* is said to have reigned in 1879.

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<sup>622</sup> R. Hoomvel, Personal Communication, July 16, 2021.

The structure of indigenous Goemai society operates on the decentralization of power, as seen above with the *Long Goemai*'s council and the organization of the palace women. Farming, fishing, and hunting are organized with their respective councils. *Pwer* (fishing) is under the leadership of the *Long kong*, *kwa'at* (hunting) under the *Long tau/long shang*, *kwa'at* who ensures that the Long and particular elders get choice games from hunting before sharing what remains among the hunters, and farming under the *Long maar/fier sha'ar* who organizes farming for the Long and other prominent elders after the second or third rains. Goemai people use *sha'an* (big hoe), *tyang* (small hoe), *je'ep* (sickle), and *shik* (cutlass) for farming. The responsibilities for farming in the family rests with the father, who may delegate it to the eldest son. Women are assigned the duties for feeding and logistics.<sup>623</sup>

In pre-colonial times until the colonial administration, the *Long Goemai* was referred to as the *Long Du'ut*, *Du'ut* being one of the three Goemai people districts, including *Dorok* and *Kwo*. Each district had its autonomous chief and his council. Gurumyen asserts that the *Long Du'ut* became the *Long Goemai* when the colonial administrators placed the three divisions under his paramount authority. Colonial politics tampered with the structure of the Goemai society, where administration became centralized under the *Long Du'ut* to the detriment of the two other district heads (*Long Dorok* and *Long Kwo*). The *Long* acknowledges that political interest came into the history of the Goemai even though he held that the Goemai nation had always united the leadership under the *Long Goemai*. Historical facts do not support this position. As a convert to Catholicism, and with the exigency of tradition which requires him to put on the *zung* or wear the red cap (*kwamni*—a red cap with ears) all the time, he was permitted

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<sup>623</sup> Luu Niyuu elders, additional conversation through whatsapp chat with my assistant, Fabian Sabo, October 17, 2022.

by the bishop's conference of 2017/2018 to use his *kwamni* in the Church. The question centers on how the *Long* can bring Goemai religiosity and Christianity into a marriage.

Conflict of leadership/kingship is noticeable in the controversial Labijin/Labishe legend, which the Shinkwan people subscribe to, while the palace rejects its credibility. The *Long Goemai* vehemently objects to the legend. For him, it is a way for the *Shinkwan* to gain relevance and political leverage in the scheme of things today.

Tsenmen recognizes the danger of the disappearance of culture and the Goemai language. He attributes it to the elites' lack of support for traditional institutions and practices. According to Tsenmen, the chiefs are responsible for reviving the culture, thereby blaming the supposed custodians of tradition for negligence, as some chiefs are not rooted in culture. This is not helped by the practice where many Goemai chieftaincy positions are more positions of prestige assumed by the highest bidder. Tuammen sums up the changing perspective regarding the *Long* when she asserts that "the situation is no longer one where the *Long* serves as a representative between his people and *Na'an* but as a leader. The idea of divine kingship has gradually lost significance before the people since many chiefs have accepted foreign religions and subjected themselves to the Church's and colonialists' authority.

### **Goemai Traditional Food, Drink, and Attire**

For the Goemai, *soh* is any food. The staple food includes *shat* (guinea corn or millet meal), rice, *toeshoot* (fresh beans), *shat songkwa* (maize food), Dauro, *shim* (yam), *cassava* (demneen), *mualam* (amora) *karnuku* (amala). They go with the following sauces: *toekoop* (karkashi), *tija* (dry okra), *tokla* (fresh okra), *tok goe barak* (fresh karkashi). The different Goemai sauces are prepared using the following ingredients *buas* (locust beans), *koen* (salt), *sharap* (fish), *doenkoor* (boiled and dried beans usually preserved for a journey), *tok shen*

(benniseed). Meals are prepared in clay pots and served on official Goemai plates made from a calabash (*toekwaan*). The elders preserve and store food, especially meat, on a *soor* (a kind of hanger to avoid being tampered with by children, rats, and insects). The indigenous drinks of the Goemai are *muos* brewed from millet or guinea corn and palm wine. However, *mues* is the signature drink of the people believed to be associated with the deities because that is used in libation, a form of appeasing the divinities and critical in assuring the divinities and ancestors that they are remembered. It is prepared over six days and consumed on the seventh day (Goemai week (*she mues goemeh*, one month is *she mues fer*).<sup>624</sup>

Traditional Goemai dressing for men is the *godo*, and *bante* and women use *shatta* made from *godo*. It is tied around the waist and also covers their breasts. The *mbane*, made from animal skin, is the Goemai farming attire. Today, the Goemai are known for the *adire* sewn into *trukudi* (a big wrapper that goes around his neck).

### **Christian Influence and Education**

Evangelization in Goemaliland took a very long time (over 40 years) as only a negligible number of people converted. The Goemai did not initially subscribe to the Catholic faith because of reasons like monogamy. Polygamy has been the mode of life for the Goemai until the influence of Western Christianity. A Goemai man can marry as many wives as he can feed and care for. It demonstrates how Christian conversion was invariably couched in rejecting one's context and culture for a forced Western context that abhors indigenous people and their cosmology. The implication is that a genuinely Christian person must become more Western and less Goemai. While many of those I engaged with believe that it is difficult to be genuinely Christian and fully Goemai, others are more accepting but not forthcoming in articulating the

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<sup>624</sup> Luu Niyuu Elders, additional information from a WhatsApp conversation through my assistant, Fabian Sabo, October 19, 2022.

reason for such. For my part, I perceive the separation of culture and spirituality; a shift from the cosmological harmony of the Goemai to the invented binary of the West is responsible for separating culture and spirituality. However, in the indigenous worldview, spirituality is encompassed in culture, and everything is connected. In the words of the *Long Goemai*, “to be fully Goemai entails marrying a second wife, especially as a chief.” The practice of polygamy and the daily performance of traditional rituals required of him are considered against the Christian faith. According to the *Long*, the white man brought education to make people see their spirituality as bad, a view corroborated by people like Gurumyen. The *Long* asserts that Western education was a tool for psychological, racial, and spiritual warfare against indigenous customs. With the establishment of mission schools, the people were brainwashed into perceiving themselves as inferior to the whites. The missionaries interpreted indigenous sacramental modes of worship as idolatry with several deities

Many Goemai Christians struggle to remain Goemai though disassociated from the Goemai spirituality. According to David Dongnaan, Goemai Christians desire to participate in everything as Goemai, but their acceptance of Christianity does not allow them to practice their culture fully. Though there is an extent to which one can make that assertion, I have met some people who see everything traditional as contrary to the gospel.

While a Christian approach to seeking the protection of *Na'an* differs from the traditional means, Dongnaan believes the two approaches should and can “run side by side” even as Western Christianity arrogates itself a superior status regarding Goemai religiosity. Dongnaan asserts that though education was used to convert the Goemai people, its benefits include allowing the person to widen her horizon and grow in societal status. However, the problem of

the imposition of Western Christianity necessitates that the Goemai stop and take a critical look at their culture and religiosity.<sup>625</sup>

Many interviewed testified to both positive and negative influences of the Christian religion on the Goemai culture. The Church, Kwapnoe posits, has not encouraged him to grow deeply in his cultural identity as a result of the demands of the Church to abandon tradition for Western Christian cosmology. He suggests a marriage of the good aspects of the culture with the Christian faith to foster a cultural blend, viz., conversation through what I understand to be cultural engagement. He questions why what is beneficial in the culture is not employed in the articulation of the Christian faith to make it authentically goemai. For Kwapnoe, Gurumyen, and some of the converted Christians I engaged with, parallels can be drawn between Christian rituals and practices, and those of Goemai spirituality such as *Kwamteng* and the Christian sacrament of initiation, and the significance of water in ritual cleansing and purification. Kwapnoe believes that “a Goemai person does not need to abandon her indigenous spirituality for Christianity to be saved.” However, he recognized some negative traditional practices (for example, the killing of twins) that are inimical to the holistic growth of the person and the community. In his candid opinion, the faith of many converted Christians is superficial, alluding to the impossibility of total abandonment of one’s indigenous religiosity even when conversion meant abandoning one’s culture for the white man’s. The indigenous person must behave like the colonizer. Schools helped improve people’s living standards and train children for modern life. However, *Kwamteng* represented Goemai informal school in traditional virtues and values that fostered interaction and social harmony in the universe. Many Goemai people, following

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<sup>625</sup> D. Dongnaan, Personal Communication, July 9, 2021

conversion and Western education, have abandoned the cultural universe, believing that their worldview is better than the worldview of the traditionalists.

The *Long Goemai* decried the non-teaching of tradition to children by those elders in the city. He says the chiefdom had been one from the very beginning in deference to the opinions of the *kwo* elders of *Luu Niyuu*. A sure impact of Western education is the slowing of the development of tradition. The elders hold that slavery was not brought into Goemailand by the whites as the practice existed where different ethnic clans fought to have slaves (*kwaram*) as well as the killing of twins. In the view of Gabriel G. Henmoor, Western education polluted the Goemai ways with the white man working hard to “purify” what the Goemai peoples do traditionally. Christianity’s close relation to civilization perceives Goemai tradition as ancient. Thus, it is believed that the traditional Goemai remains stuck in his “old” ways. Henmoor also envisages a marriage between the Goemai culture and the Christian faith by bringing the elders, priests, catechists, etc., to help educate the people and to encourage the chiefs to promote culture.<sup>626</sup>

Within the Goemai context, “Western Christianity is superficial.” It seeks the destruction of tradition that has given the people a sense of identity and security. Though it never actually succeeds. Narrating her experience, Longtoe pointed to the coercive manner by which the first missionaries “seized” her father from Goemai cultural practices and made him take his children to school. According to Longtoe, her dad was forcefully taken from practicing as the *Kwamteng* chief by one of his missionary friends. The Church saw that he held the position of the *Kwamteng* chief, the pivoting force for the incorporation of children into ancestral secrets and tradition and picked him out. The goal of making the initiation chief abandon tradition can only

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<sup>626</sup> G. G. Henmoor, Personal Communication, July 16, 2021.



be to destroy the flourishing of indigenous religiosity. According to Longtoe, her father “died as a communicant rather than an idolater.” The impossibility of a total delinking of the Goemai person necessitates the marriage of Goemai culture and faith in Christ. Fuomsuk appreciates the significance of our conversation as “it helps stir profound reflection on the value of Goemai culture.” The cultural engagement between the Catholic faith and Goemai religiosity stems from cultural diversity, a Divine gift for humanity’s good. In this light, Fuomsuk proposes two necessary attitudes the Goemai must have; first, to realize the positive dimensions of culture and imbibe them; and second, to revise those aspects that need revision to bring indigenous spirituality into her faith in Christ. For her, cultural revalorization is antithetical to rejecting ancestral wisdom since it is all about the realization that Goemai culture matters in articulating Goemai Christianity.

Fuomsuk’s view is corroborated by Tuammen, for whom the development of a genuine Goemai Christianity is essential in retrieving the Goemai ancestral experience today. The Goemai attitude, according to her, is “our forefathers did this, and we do the same so that they can mediate between *Na’an* and us. We ask that we act as they did.” For the Moemai, doing what their ancestors did reinforces their relationship with the land and sacred spaces. Though Tuammen acknowledges cultural decadence owing to neglect due to Western influence, she holds that there is still a remnant of culture in the villages that can be drawn.

### **Missionary Invasion of the Goemai Space**

On February 12, 1907, Catholic missionaries of the Society of African Missions (SMA) arrived in Demshin when Akur was the *Long Dorok*.<sup>627</sup> To their consternation, the people did not welcome their foreign religion. It is said that for up to three years in Demshin, they could not

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<sup>627</sup> Conversation with Gabriel Gwammen Henmoor at his residence at Demshin, July 16, 2021.

convert more than thirteen people. This is because the people held their spirituality in high esteem above any foreign religion, until education was used to draw them to Christianity. As a tool for conversion, education served to recruit the indigenous peoples for the European Christian empire. The converts learned to read and write the white man's language and accept the white man's religion. This cultural disentanglement meant the indigenous person gradually became a stranger to herself and her universe.

In their interaction with the people, the missionaries misconstrued the intermediary function of the deities, ancestors, and spirits. The veneration of divine symbols like *Matkoeroem* (sacred tree) and *taddi* (graven human-like images) led Christian missionaries to refer to the people as idol worshippers. He says that *taddi* sometimes behave like human beings as they can move. They represent their ancestors, Homkwap affirms. The missionaries regarded it as worship of these mediators and intercessors even when they preached about the mediation of Mary and the saints and had statues in Churches. It only demonstrated how they understood indigenous rituals through their Western lens. Therefore, their motive was nothing but the replacement of their indigenous worldview with Western cosmology. Lu'utnaan rightly holds that the missionaries imposed their Western worldview through Western education that gave a convert a privileged position in society as a clerk, interpreter, etc., through what I will refer to as an attempt at the Westernization of indigenous cosmology by the West. The need for interpretation cannot be overemphasized. It was during my conversation with Penyit that we spoke on how to translate Jesus into. While many saw no point a proper name, we concluded that Jesus must incarnate in Goemai culture and Na'anpoen captures the meaning "God saves."<sup>628</sup>

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<sup>628</sup> L. Penyit, Personal Communication, July 20, 2021.

One person, whose passion for culture, did not escape notice is Tunlong, to the point where all she desires is to keep encouraging the growth of tradition in any way possible. Despite the challenges she encountered, she refused to be discouraged. Hear her: “I have not been discouraged, and I will never be discouraged because I am guided by conscience.” Tunlong’s words buttress an essential aspect of the Goemai’s conscientiousness concerning her tradition. Allowing another to define her is surrendering her power to self-apprehension. She listens to her inner self in matters relating to her worldview and relation with the Divine. This calls for the rejection of the Western Christian culture’s denigration of most Goemai practices and begins with the deconstruction of Western cosmology and epistemology. Tunlong acknowledges the purity of most Goemai cultural practices. She rightly affirms that abandoning the masquerades, rites/rituals, initiation ceremonies, and indigenous experiences while keeping only the language, dances, etc., implies the destruction of the Goemai due to the inseparability of space to the identity of the individual in the locality.

The impression I get from many of the converted interviewees is what Simon Lu’utnaan articulates as the “privilege not to have been indoctrinated in tradition.” Although they recognized the purity of intention of those performing the rituals (*Mu’ut Goen Tok*), there is this initial apprehension, I observe, of seeing many cultural practices being antithetical to the Christian faith and therefore condemned as idolatry. With time, I noticed how this apprehension gradually opened up to the recognition of the beauty of the Goemai culture, especially when looking at the similarities of many practices, rites, and rituals of Goemai religiosity with Christian practices, rites, and rituals.

The later penetration of Goemalands by Christianity happened mainly due to similarities in the two approaches to understanding *Na’an*. For example, Christianity (viz., Catholicism) and

Goemai spirituality believe in the reality of a Supreme divinity accessed through intermediaries between the spiritual and physical realms. Reconciliation is integral to the relationship among people and between people and the Deity since purity is vital in divine worship in both approaches. And purity is not attained without the confession of guilt (*lap dor*). The use of water for sprinkling (*wat goezoem*) expresses the ritual of purification and cleansing in both approaches. The similarities in some practices of both approaches and the fact that alcohol (a vital part of the Goemai life), which represents sustenance and livelihood, was not prohibited by the Church made acceptance of Christianity not difficult. However, the idea of marrying just one wife remained a stumbling block, as noted by Lu'utnaan, because Christianity denigrates Goemai indigenous worldview, epistemology, and belief system. According to Sharkdam, the Goemai must become aware of the value of culture and realize the need to build her faith in Christ from the experience of her space.

Longtoe held that without Western education, she would not have thought as she is now— questioning some aspects of culture which exclude women. According to her, “we made a big mistake by neglecting our culture though it has similar aspects with Western Christianity, largely due to our lack of understanding.” She continued, “we made a mistake, but it is not too late to make amends.” This summarizes the people’s reaction to the reality of the Westernization of their minds. The realization, therefore, is essential in any effort at deconstructing Eurocentrism and retrieving and reappropriating Goemai ancestral wisdom and worldview. Christianity had made the people disdain tradition. As a result, Christianity and western culture took over the people’s consciousness such that conforming to Western culture is civilization, enlightenment, and a rejection of idolatry while adhering to indigenous spirituality is tantamount to living in darkness.

A significant obstacle to youth appreciation of Goemai culture lies in its denigration by Western “civilization.” Unfortunately, the elders are not forthcoming in explaining the meaning of indigenous symbols and ritual practices to make them attractive to the youth. As a result, many young people have bought into Western “civilization’s” denigration of the culture. An effect of western “civilization” is experienced in the waning of tradition. For example, the *Luu das* (house of men) have virtually disappeared.

### **Goemai Greetings (*Tal*) and Respect**

Respect is an essential aspect of many African societies. Respect and greetings go hand in hand. In the morning, Goemai greet, *toh goe pet kiop ah? Puus la ah?*—in the afternoon, Evening, *Puus soen ah?*—in the evening and at night, *Sai goedar*. Traditionally, respect is also a salient defining characteristic of seniority among the people since it is required of the younger person to greet the elder. *Kwamteng* age groups are determinants for the according of or receiving of respect. Those who have not undergone *Kwamteng* are considered *Goemai Goemat* (a Goemai woman) and thus are not regarded with much respect. There also exists a hierarchical structure among the significant cults in Goemalands where *Kwamteng* comes before *Kyeji* while *Nashi* (*bori* cult) comes at the bottom of the pyramid. When food is served, the *Kwamteng* men eat first, and what remains is given to the *kyeji* woman, and what remains after the *kyeji* women have eaten is given to *nashi* women. The *kyeji* group of Kalong in Dorok district explains that while they are females before the *Kwamteng* men, regarding the *nashi* women, they are males. In this light, gender is understood more in terms of functions and roles, not genitalia.

Respect is expressed in the posture assumed in greeting older persons. The Goemai *Bar-yil* is a respectful greeting where a younger person stoops and removes his cap when he meets an elder or a title holder on the road. The younger person removes his shoes and squats if it is at

home. Before the *Long Goemai*, men sit on the ground, gently hitting their legs with their palms in acceptance of their position while saying *Bagga miskoom*. It is referred to as *Wap*. Women kneel before the chief as they clasp their hands together and click their thumbs.

### **Goemai Marriage (*Dik*) and Wedding Ceremony (*Pensa*)**

According to Longtoe Bepsem,<sup>629</sup> marriage for the Goemai is an institution promoting life and harmony since marriage brings families and clans together. Goemai culture does not frown on polygamy. It is the assurance of children who would continue ancestral culture, rituals, and ceremonies. Marriage happens through an arranged wedding, courtship, or elopement.

1. An arranged wedding—parents arrange for the children to be husband and wife. The parents of the boy tie cowries (*boi*) in the hand of his proposed girl (wife-to-be). The young man works *margya* (farming for marriage) for the in-laws, e.g., arranged farm work and building round huts for them. If the grandmother of the spouse is alive, the young man invites his friends to go and collect firewood of the same size for her to use to keep herself warm.
2. Courtship—begins through friendship. When a young man falls in love with a lady, and she accepts his advances, she points the way to her father for greetings. He is required by tradition to make three salutation visits to the lady's family (this is to get acquainted with the girl's family and establish a relationship); the first trip is to greet his would-be in-laws verbally. He informs the lady's family of his intention during his first visit. Once he is accepted, he plans for a second visit. This second visit is to greet the brothers, sisters, uncles, and aunts of the lady's father. His third greeting visit is to present the lady with a

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<sup>629</sup> Conversation with Longtoe Bepsem, Kalong, June 18, 2021.

mat. The lady's friend collects the mat, which is taken to the father's brother, who has a say in the marriage. Wrapped in the mat is what the Goemai refer to as *dik la rep*, and other materials are wrapped in the mat. The friend of the lady ascertains everything enclosed in the mat. A lady may collect mats from many suitors. Other prospective suitors manifest their interest by presenting her with *karam* (a mat) before selection. All collected mats are kept until the girl picks the mat belonging to the man she loves. On the selection day, all received mats are placed in an upright position. The lady pushes the *karam* of the man she loves with her arm. The others are returned to the rejected suitors. The young man farms for the lady's parents (*margya*) and may even build a round hut for them (*dik pin gargoek hen*). *Sol dik muk* (bride wealth) and two chickens are presented to the lady's family. Once everything is completed, the groom's closest friend is told that the groom has been given a wife, and he then announces it to the people in the village. Plans are then made for the opportunity to take the wife away (*mang*). On the wedding day, *mues* is prepared with millet (*maar*) *bit goe toen poe roep mues mu'ut*.

Mat Lu-mis is the wife of another person.

3. Elopement (*Suu mat*)—a young man agrees with a young lady to elope. After two to three days, the young man and his relatives trace the young lady's family to let them know he has their daughter. In the case of elopement, the lady is closely followed and forcefully taken away. Other times, it is done with the consent of the lady. She is kept for two to three days, after which the man informs the parents what he did and pleads for pardon. The lady is after that returned, and preparations begin for marriage. The man must then provide two chickens, a goat, and forty measures of millet for *mues* (*mues Kapion*) for *Matkoeroem* so that the girl may have a peaceful marriage. The significance is to ask for

the wellbeing of the couple. After everything has been completed, the man's parents are invited to hand over the girl to them after presenting a young goat. The young man's close friend exclaims happily that the friend has been given a wife. The friends now start hunting for the girl to seize her to her husband's home.

In the case of polygamy – the children belong to all the women who see themselves not as rivals but as sisters. The first wife is known as *mat goe poep luu*, the second wife is known as *mat goe tep ni*, and the third is known as *mat muwan*. All the others give the first wife respect. The children from the same mother are *Jap Niin*, and those from the same father are *Jap Nda*.

### **Death and Burial Ritual**

According to *Luu Niyuu* elders, if a Goemai dies, the elders are informed. At the gathering, the elders will inquire about the reason for death. The family announces it to the people. The reason usually given as the cause of death is *piip* (catarrh). The Goemai dead are buried on the same day except at night. The young men dig the grave while the eldest son performs the burial rites.

The death of the chief is not announced immediately. The council must sit first. The Goemai use the proverb *shep lien tap* (the iroko has fallen) to communicate the *Long*'s death. Culturally, it is taboo for anyone to cry at the chief's passing. *Mang-gap* appears and continuously cries, signifying a severe or tragic occurrence. Burial only takes place in the night after *Mang-gap* goes around the corpse several times and performs rituals before it is buried without the knowledge of the women until the local drink is brewed in six days; on the seventh day, *Mang-gap* goes to the shrine and comes dancing round the grave asking, "Where is *Nda*?" meaning father (the *Long*), and the elders will respond that the *Long* is no more (*Nda wan*). At this moment, the community learns of the *Long*'s death.



## Revival

Cultural revival is built on the recovery, recapturing, or reimagination of ancestral stories, rites, rituals, and ceremonies. Blessing Fuomsuk succinctly captures cultural reimagination when she calls for Moemai to realize the goodness of culture and have faith in it to sustain authentic living through reimagination. In her words, “Moemai culture must recognize and believe the good in culture, revise and integrate traditional values into our Christian faith.”<sup>630</sup> In an effort toward spearheading a cultural revival in Goemaland, a cultural organization for the enhancement of Goemai cultural heritage is in place. The Goemai Unity and Development Organization (GUDO) has as its leaders the *Long Goemai* as chairman, the *Long Dorok* as a vice, and *Long Kwo* as another vice. The *Bit Goemai* (Goemai Cultural Day) must be prioritized as a means of rerooting the people in their space and universe. Carnivalizations of the celebration include the Calabar carnival, Vodun Festival of Benin Republic, Timkat Festival of Ethiopia, Rio carnival of Brazil, Barranquilla Carnival of Colombia, Carnival Oruro of Bolivia, El Callao Carnival of Venezuela, Trinidad and Tobago Carnival, etc. These cultures promote cultural heritage through celebration that spans several days and puts the people on the world map of culture.

Cultural renewal must start with language revival. The Goemai language is becoming extinct, with the present generation of parents only speaking English to their children. The importance of teaching youths and children Goemai cannot be overemphasized since it is the medium of cultural transmission. The celebration of *bit kwap nda Goemai* by the *Niejap doe sharap Goemai*, which serves to promote culture and self-awareness through preparing and sharing food to champion a return to the Goemai cultural past among women in the city, is

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<sup>630</sup> Conversation with Blessing Fuomsuk on 13<sup>th</sup> of July 2021.

commendable. Explaining in the Goemai language how the food is prepared contributes to teaching Goemai. This novel concept of promoting Goemai culture can be expanded and celebrated in a way that brings prominent Goemai sons and daughters to participate.

An important aspect of tradition that needs revival is the *Kes paa* (divination), as it is fading in Goemaland because the inheritors of the *paa* divination are not plying the art of divining again. According to Tsenmen, the Montol have taken over the divining skill, that which reveals life's secrets and deeper meanings. He suggests the need for enhancing the explanation of indigenous rites/rituals by the elders.

## APPENDIX 2

### Sources: Individual Interviews

Dongnaan, David. July 9, 2021. Interviewee, Rayfield Residence, Jos. Senior Government Official.

Dongtoe, Dongkwap. July 17, 2021, Zomo Residence, Shendam.

Fuomsuk, Blessing. July 13, 2021, Tudun Wada Residence, Jos.

Gurumyen, Alfred. July 12, 2021. Interviewee, Zaria Road Residence, Jos.

Henmoor, Gabriel Gwammen. July 16, 2021, Demshin Residence, Shendam.

Hoomkwap, Shitnaan. July 4, 2021, Janyaro Residence, (Long Moekat - Long Kabong)

Kwapnoe, Anthony. July 9, 2021. Interviewee, Hwolshe Residence, Jos.

Kyeji Group Dorok, June 19 2021, Kalong, Shendam.

Longtoe, Naomi Buetnaan. July 19, 2021, Church Street Residence, Jos.

Long Luu Niyuu, Conversation with the Niyuu, June 10, 2021, Luu Niyuu.

Lu'utnaan, Simon. July 1, 2021, Legislators Quarters Residence, Jos.

Penyit, Lucy. July 20, 2021, Rukuba Residence, Jos. Translator

Shalbuet, Yilmiap. June 16, 2021, Bukuru Low Cost, Jos.

Sharkdam, Samuel. July 10, 2021, Eto Baba Residence, Jos.

Tsenmen, Stephen. date, Residence opposite the Long Goemai's palace, Shendam.

Tuammen, Catherine. June 30, 2021, Tina Junction, Jos. A former professor of history, UniJos.

Tunlong, Rachel Hoomvel. July 16, 2021, Mambial Residence, Jos. Gwat Goemai

Yiljap, Irene. July 15, 2021, Dadin Kowa Residence, Jos.

### Sources – Group Interviews

Bori women (Menka'at), July 24, 2021, Kurgwi, Qu'an Pan Local Government Area.

Luu Niyuu Elders, June 4, and June 10, 2021, Luu Niyuu.

Miskoom Kampiring Miapdong-Bibuet, July 17, 2021, Residence/Palace, Kwansan, Shendam.

Ruenmen Nda Kam Kwamteng, June 18, 2021, Kalong, Shendam. – (Longtoe Bepsem)

Shinkwan people July 2, 2021, Shinkwan.

The Long Goemai (Martin M Shaldas III) and his council, July 23, 2021, Long Goemai Palace, Shendam.

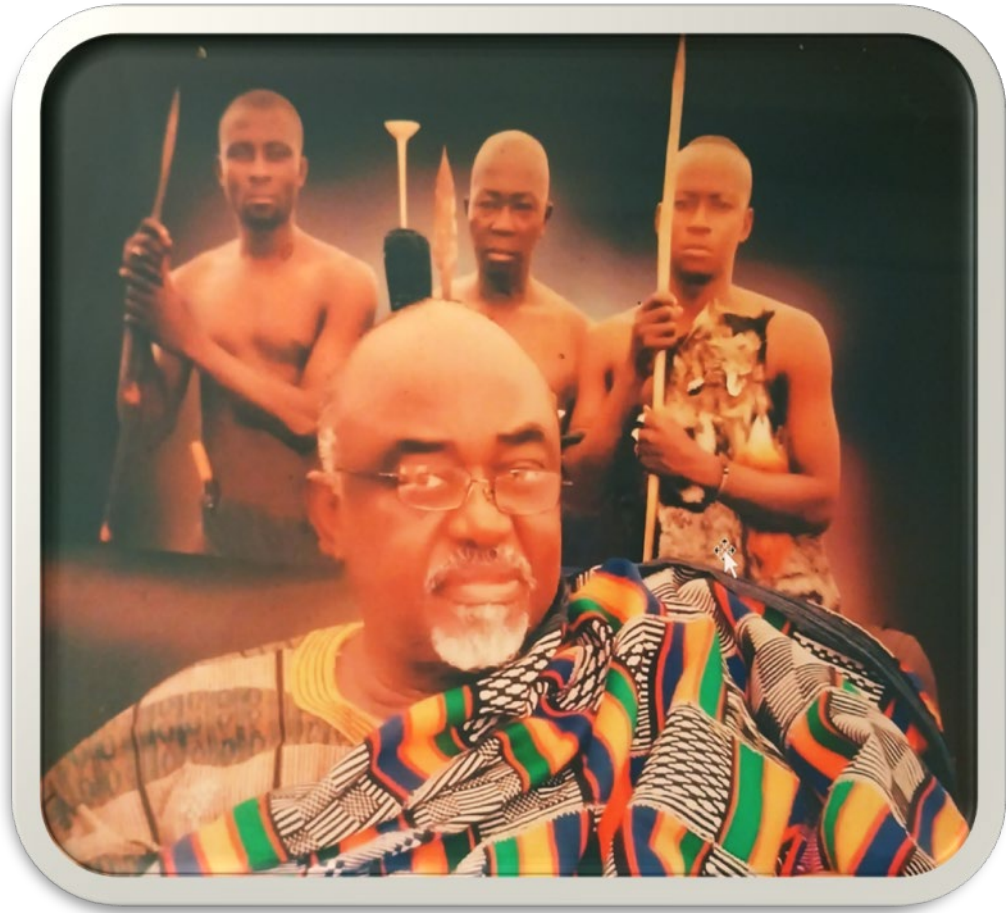
### APPENDIX 3



Mang-gap

Edward Tsenmen Muge, Manggap Photo during Festival, Digital Photo,  
The Village of Luu Niyuu, 2021

APPENDIX 4



Long Goemai - Miskoom Martin M. Shaldas III with the hair tuft (Zung)  
From the wall of the Long Goemai's meeting hall (with permission of the Long)

## APPENDIX 5



Long Goemai and myself after my interview with him in his Palace, June, 2021.

## APPENDIX 6

**Attachments:**

• Exemption Notification - IRB ID: 2023/03/4.pdf



*Duquesne University IRB*

*Protocol Exemption Notification*

To: Edward Muge  
From: David Delmonico, IRB Chair  
Subject: Protocol #2023/03/4  
Date: 03/10/2023

The protocol 2023/03/4, **Goemai/Ankwe! Religiosity: Understanding Indigenous Divinity in Relation to Christianity** has been verified by the Institutional Review Board as **Exempt** according to 45CFR46.101(b)(2, 10): (2) Tests, Surveys, Interviews, Does not involve human subjects on 03/10/2023.

If applicable, the consent form and/or recruitment flier have been stamped and are attached to this email or are accessible via Mentor. Please use these stamped versions to distribute or display.

Exempt status means there is no specific expiration date, and you are not required to file annual reviews or termination reports. However, any unanticipated problems, adverse effects on subjects, or protocol deviations must be immediately reported to the IRB Chair before proceeding with the study.

Further, any changes to your study requires the filing of an amendment and is subject to the approval of the IRB Chair. You must wait for approval before implementing any changes to the original protocol. Changes to your protocol may affect the exempt status of your research.

Please contact me if you have any questions regarding this study.

Best wishes in your research,

David Delmonico, Ph.D.  
Institutional Review Board, Chair  
irb@duq.edu



## APPENDIX 7

### Sample Questionnaire

- Who is *Na'an* to the Goemai?
- How do the Goemai relate to *Na'an*? How is *Na'an* worshipped?
- How many gods do the Goemai worship?
- Is it possible to understand *Na'an* without the other divinities?
- Why is *Na'an* referred to as *Nda Na'an*?
- Does *Na'an* communicate with people? Whom and how?
- Is *Na'an* able to influence human action?
- What other deities do the Goemai worship, and how are they organized in the Goemai world?
- What are household deities, and how did they come about?
- Do the Goemai have a history? How did the Goemai nation begin, and how did they settle at their present location?
- In your understanding, explain who a Goemai person is
- How do the Goemai understand the world and the beginning or origin of the Goemai people?
- Can you please explain how the three districts of *Du'ut*, *Dorok*, and *Kwo* come about?
- Who is qualified to be the *Long Goemai*? Can a woman become *Long* in Goemai land?
- How does a person become the *Long Goemai*?
- What is (are) the reasons for the hair tuft (*zung*) of the *Long Goemai*?
- What happens at the death of the *Long Goemai*?
- How do Goemai men and women dress?

- Who do the Goemai take as close relations among the other groups who live around the Goemai?
- Explain *Paa Divination* and its significance in Goemaliland?
- What is the role of the *Goepa* in Goemai society?
- Do Moemai have sacred location? What are these, if any?
- Why and how are these locations designated as sacred?
- How did Moemai develop their rites, rituals, and ceremonies?
- Why do the Goemai perform rites, rituals, and ceremonies?
- Is there any day, night, or season for religious celebrations?
- What taboos, if any, are part of the Goemai society?
- How do you know what a ritual ceremony is approaching?
- What are some of the sacred materials required for rituals? Explain the reasons behind them
- What do these materials mean for the people and society?
- Can you please mention and elaborate on some crucial Goemai rites, rituals, and ceremonies?
- I noticed symbols in Goemai villages made of clay, stones, cloth, and wood; please help me understand why you have all these.
- Would you agree with those who see some Goemai spiritual representations and practices as pagan and idol worship?
- Please, help me understand why the *Luu das* are part of Goemai and why it is only for men who are initiated.
- How are persons classified sexually?

- What is the position of women and children in Goemai society?
- Why do most Goemai personal names have a connection with *Na'an*?
- How are society and leadership organized in Goemaliland?
- What do the Goemai masks and masquerades represent for the people?
- Why do you have different shrines in Goemaliland?
- Can you please explain the Goemai initiation rites (*Kwamteng*) and what takes place at the place of initiation, if possible?
- What are the initiates taught? How long is the process of initiation?
- Can a non-Goemai participate in the rites and rituals of the Goemai people? Why or why not?
- Who do the Goemai consider an elder or a wise person?
- How do Moemai understand evil? What is the source of evil? And how do you deal with it?
- How does a person become a diviner?
- Describe to me what the state of Goemai culture and tradition is today. Is it witnessing growth or decline?
- What is/are the attitude(s) of the young people to tradition today?
- Explain how courtship and marriage happen in Goemai tradition.
- How is family life in Goemaliland organized?
- Who is considered an ancestor? Enumerate qualities expected of an ancestor?
- How are families/households organized?
- Are there any Goemai regulations on inheritance?
- What occupations are the Goemai?

- How do Goemai understand reconciliation? What is the manner of reconciling enemies in Goemailand? Do deities have roles in reconciliation in Goemailand? (*Dabit* and *Kwai*)
- How do Goemai understand evil? How does it come about?
- Do Moemai have the idea of witchcraft? Explain how witches are viewed and who is regarded as a witch.
- How do you find out about sickness? And what are the ways of healing a sick person?
- What happens when a person dies (funeral and burial)?
- How do you recognize time/seasons?
- Christianity came to Goemailand in 1907 when the SMA priests arrived in Shendam. Assess its influence on Goemai society and culture.
- What is your attitude toward Goemai people who have converted to Christianity?
- What is the importance of Jalbang Mountain in Goemai tradition?
- Does the land mean anything to the Moemai?
- What makes mountains, rivers, trees, shrines, and forests symbolic and sacred?
- What is the significance of the mais (shrines)
- From where do Goemai rituals come?
- Why is the sacred space (place) necessary in Goemai ritualized universe?
- How do these locations contribute to making the Goemai person Goemai?
- How do the Moemai count their week(s)?

### **Specific Questions for Women**

- Why do women not participate in most Goemai rites and rituals?
- What, if any, are the rites and rituals for women?
- Are there rites and rituals for both men and women?

- Can a woman be a *long* diviner or a priest?

### **Specific Questions for Goemai Christians**

- How do you reconcile your Christian faith and Goemai spiritual/religious tradition?
- How has your Christian faith contributed to you valuing your Goemai heritage, and vice versa?
- Do you think Christianity in Goemalands has considered elements of the people's tradition?
- Would you, as a Christian, attend Goemai traditional ritual where sacrifices are offered? Why or why not?
- How would you describe your identity?
- How do you see *Na'an* in Christianity and *Na'an* in indigenous Goemai spirituality?
- How would you assess Goemai Indigenous spirituality today? And what is your attitude toward adherents of indigenous religiosity?
- What are some of the impacts of Christianity in Goemalands?
- What traditional values, if any, can Christianity absorb from the Goemai spirituality?
- Do you see any reason(s) to integrate cultural values as a Christian?
- Is it possible for a Goemai to remain authentically Goemai and fully Christian?