


Subjugated knowledges, contested spaces and African Christianity: An appraisal

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Religion mediates and shapes how people negotiate and navigate their existential realities. Christianity accentuates the belief in Jesus Christ and prescribes how that belief should influence the worldview and actions of people. One of the challenges of the reception of Christianity in Africa is that African Traditional Religion remains the cosmic lens through which Christians confront their spiritual and ethical dilemmas and choices vis-à-vis the exhortations of the Bible message. This paper examines the force of the Christian message for African Christians. It looks at how the Christian message was presented, how African Christians appropriate the gospel message and how they fill the 'gaps' in their practice of Christianity. As movies bring to bear stories about lived realities and shape attitudes and behaviour, this paper also examines the reception of the Biblical message by reviewing a selection of African movies. I argue that Christianity must provide answers to the critical questions and unmet needs essential to Africans. To achieve this would require paying attention to what Michel Foucault describes as the 'insurrection of subjugated knowledges,' which take into account naïve knowledges operating at local or regional levels but serve as the local discursivities that amplify how the 'subjugated knowledges' influence the reception of the Biblical message in the African cultural matrix.

Contribution: This paper reveals the enduring cross-pressures of Africans as they are invited to subjugate their primordial knowledges and practices to the orthodoxy of mainstream Christianity. It cites the examples of neo-Pentecostal and para-Christian enactments as offering possible insights into a need for Christianity to be more responsive and functionally relevant to the African reality. Such an approach resonates with the orientation of *HTS Theologiese Studies* (HTS) towards scholarship that is discursively dynamic and contextually sensitive to the multilayered contexts, cultures and cosmologies of the African Christian.

Keywords: subjugated knowledges; African Christianity; traditional beliefs; Pentecostalism; religion.

Introduction

Religion is vital to how people understand their world and live their lives. Before the advent of Christianity, Traditional Religion was the prism through which Africans mediated their relationship with the divine. For Africans, 'The universe is a composite of divine, Spirit, human, animate or inanimate elements, hierarchically perceived, but directly related, and always interacting with each other' (Magesa 1997:39). These elements, referred to as 'forces of life' or 'vital forces', can be grouped into visible and invisible elements (Magesa 1997). The pantheistic belief in the role the Supreme Being, spirits – good and evil – and ancestors played in the life of the living shaped how the living related to them and their fellow human beings. It also shaped how they related to nature as well as their moral compass. This paper argues that with the implantation of Christianity by the missionaries, Christian values have overlain the worldview through which African Christians mediate their existential realities. This argument echoes the general compass of the concept of insurrection of subjugated knowledge, originally advanced by scholars like John Mbiti, Charles Nyamiti, Lawrenti Magesa and Bolaji Idowu. More contemporary scholars such as Paulinus Odozor, Emmanuel Katongole, Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, Nimi Wariboko and Chammah Kaunda have sought to advance that thought from their different scholarly perspectives. This paper seeks to contribute another dimension towards amplifying how the insurrection of subjugated knowledges continues to play an essential role in the practice of Christianity in Africa. Of particular importance is the question of the silence of God, an idea that is counterintuitive to the Traditional religion and is a contested space for African Christianity.

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To address this question, the first part of the paper focuses on the introduction and reception of Christianity by the missionaries and the clash of traditions – the Christian tradition and the African tradition – that has been occasioned. The discussion of both traditions draws from Martin Reisebrodt's use of tradition. According to Martin Reisebrodt (2010), religious tradition can be thought of in three ways:

First, tradition can refer to a theological category that constructs religion as a symbolic historical continuity in order to differentiate it from internal deviations or external competitors. Second, tradition can be a classificatory concept that distinguishes among religious practices or complexes of practices on the basis of their key symbols and self-classifications. Finally, tradition can be an empirical category describing spatially and temporally delimited practices and structures of meaning that were 'always already' performed in this way. (p. 77)

These categories enable the paper to engage the various layers of traditions, explore how one tradition became attractive and accepted, and the other, though submerged, remained an enduring operative force for African Christians. The first part also examines the reception of the Christian message. The paper argues that though African Christians accepted the Christian message, the evangelisation approach did not enable them to bring the Christian tradition into fruitful conversation with African traditions in ways that help African Christians interrogate the critical questions essential to their tradition.

The second part focuses on questions related to the power and silence of God as reflected in the two traditions. The paper argues that this is a contested space for African Christians. Though the Christian tradition extols the power of God, the Scriptures also acknowledge and highlight the silence of God. However, the predominant frame for African religions is the notion of an all-powerful God who exercises his power through spirits that are hardly silent in the face of adversity of any kind. Consequently, this operative frame finds expression in some practices. It sometimes leads to the attractiveness of one form of Christianity as opposed to another, or to living at the confluence of traditions where African Christians also participate in traditional practices to find answers to pressing needs.

The third part examines the concept of subjugated knowledges and contested spaces. As movies bring to bear stories about lived realities and shape attitudes and behaviour, this paper also examines the reception of the Biblical message by reviewing a selection of African movies. Drawing from Michel Foucault's notion of subjugated knowledges and using the movies as illustration, the paper argues for the need for Christian tradition to continually pay attention to certain aspects of African life, which were ignored or discarded by early missionaries but which still influence how African Christians understand their worldview and live their lives. From the understanding that movies are 'relay points that feed and are fed by what and how people imagine' (Meyer 2015:13), the paper uses the movies as an opening to put subjugated knowledges in conversation with

peoples' practice of Christianity. The concept of subjugated knowledges allows local knowledges to both challenge and enrich (or even be influenced by) established regimes of thought.

The paper concludes by highlighting ways African Christianity, meaning Christianity as practiced within the African social and cultural milieu, can by paying attention to the subjugated knowledges make the Christian message a powerful force to answer the felt needs of Africans without exploiting them. This social and cultural context leads to understanding and practice of Christianity that may sometimes contradict or be in disharmony with the tenets of Christianity as passed on by the missionaries. It also draws attention to certain practices that seem to take into account subjugated knowledges and contested spaces but, however, raise questions for the practice of Christianity.

Reception of Christianity

The early missionaries planted the seeds of Christianity on African soil by using a combination of methods, including the role individuals played in the spread of the faith, the use of schools and the creation of Christian villages. In Ghana, the Methodist mission, for example, expanded its missionary frontiers through the evangelistic drive of some individuals (Sundkler & Steed 2000). The Basel mission in the Gold Coast used Christian villages called 'Salem' to cement their influences on their converts (Sundkler & Steed 2000). They founded two villages, Odumase and Abokobi. The reception of the faith varied. Whereas in some instances, families embraced the faith, in other cases, members were drawn individually (Sundkler & Steed 2000). The missionaries also emphasised education as a means of evangelisation. They saw the school as a means of making converts. The Castle schools and others were, therefore, established with this motive.

The story in Ghana is similar to the story of Eastern Africa. The Spiritan mission among the Masai also emphasised Christian communities. These Christian villages made up of converts, surrounded the mission stations (Hodgson 2005). There were about 52 Christian villages by 1896, from five in 1885 (Kieran 1966). Catechists also played an essential role in spreading the faith. The use of schools also proved a vital tool for missionary work. The use of catechists, mission schools and Christian villages ensured the spread of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa.

Currently, Christianity is the dominant religion in sub-Saharan Africa. As of 2020 the Christian population was 60 percent (Galal 2023). One question that is worth scrutinising is the reception of Christianity. African writers have underscored the inextricable relationship between religion and culture in Africa (Gyekye 1996; Magesa 1997; Mbiti 1975). African culture is suffused with religion to the core, so any attempt to separate the two is an exercise in futility. In other words, 'African religion is the culture and the culture is religious' (Odozor 2014:86).

In planting Christianity, the missionaries did not always do an anthropological and socio-cultural examination of African practices and traditions in order to understand the African worldview to allow them to appreciate the beauty of what Africans held and how it related to Christianity in a way that preserved the tenets of African culture and worldview and the tenets of Christianity. Such an acculturation would enable Africans to use the Christian faith to embrace the traditional view or vice versa. Meyer's (2015) critique of the missionaries' approach is apt:

From a Christian perspective 'traditional religion' was viewed as 'pagan' and 'backward', and Africans were encouraged to reject local gods and spirits and convert. The dismissal of old gods and the modes of calling on them (involving dancing and drumming as practices of worship) implied what I would like to call 'the production of heathendom', understood as 'backward' and yet still alive and kicking. For this reason, many African Christian converts came to regard traditional religion as the abode of the 'powers of darkness'. (p. 257)

Meyer (2015) further notes that the:

[C]olonial and missionary understandings of and practices toward culture, tradition, and traditional religion gave rise to a particular discourse in which these terms were made to signify basically the 'past', standing in tension with a teleological, future-oriented Western-influenced notion of 'progress', 'civilization', and, since the 1950s, 'development'. (p. 257)

Engaging Traditional religion in a non-stereotypical manner would have enabled African Christians to appreciate the sources of tensions while also seeing how to navigate their Africanness and the Christian understanding of God. Their failure has led to many African Christians operating from a hybrid of doctrinal frames: their traditional understanding of God and their understanding of the Christian God. This leads to a counterintuitive tension between the Christian nature of the 'silence' or a 'crucified' God and the Traditional African understanding of an imperious God whose thundering voice evokes trepidation. This tension is worth scrutinising in some detail.

The paradox of a suffering God

The concept of the suffering God is most pronounced in lament as a theological category. In her explorations of the *Book of Lamentations*, Kathleen O'Connor examines the cries of daughter Zion that are laden with excruciating pain and anguish and the concerns of the strong man. She discusses the idea of a suffering God in her discourse on lament and postulates that prayers of lament invite people to gather their wounds, anger and violence together with their sorrows, disasters and doubts and offer them in truthfulness before God (O'Connor 2002). Such a prayer is borne from within the deepest secrets of abandonment and loss, and both capture and communicate the truth about human suffering. O'Connor sees 'hardy hope in the characters of Lamentations, hope that stands up to their sufferings and to God' (2002:50). This is evident in the words of the strongman located in the middle of the book: God's mercies are new every morning (3:22–33);

'YHWH is my portion says my soul; therefore, I hope in him' (3:23–24). It is significant that O'Connor highlights that the impulse toward hope occurs in the strongman and not in his circumstances. Soong-Chan shares O'Connor's thoughts on biblical lament in Lamentations. Soong-Chan posits that biblical lament is a:

[L]iturgical response to the reality of suffering and it engages God from within the context of pain and trouble and leaves open a space for hope that God would come to the rescue of the sufferer. (Rah 2015:21)

In his treatment of laments in the Psalms, Glenn Pemberton points out that 'the Hebrew worshipper was free to express complaints, anxiety, rage, and deep sorrow before God and other members of the community' (2012:33). One crucial feature of lament in the Psalms is that it is 'not those who lack faith who lament but those recognized for strong faith who bring their most honest and passionate feeling to God'. Thus, those who lament are undeniably aware of the power of God. That is why they communicate their pain to God. Thus as expressed by O'Connor concerning Lamentations, Pemberton says of the Psalms that 'lament is not a mere complaint about life's troubles but speech directed to God with an expectation that God will respond' (Pemberton 2012:67). Such a definition establishes a nexus between lament, faith and the power of God, which inspires confidence in the believer. This link is explicit in the very structure of such psalms – an address to God, complaints, requests, motivation and confidence in God. In evaluating the significance of the Psalms of lament, Jinkins (1998) states:

The Psalms of lament open us to the greatness of a God who cannot not only hear but can also handle our pain, our self-pity, our blame, and our fear, who can respond to our disillusionment in the midst of oppression and persecution, under the boot of tyranny, and our sense of Godforsakenness in the face of life's most profound alienation and exiles. (p. 39)

It bears highlighting that Pemberton also argues that a study of the Psalms indicates that lament provides 'a way to live through times of disorientation with God as an intimate traveling companion' (Pemberton 2012:65). In other words, it offers us a way to 'hurt with God'.

Brueggemann (2001) takes up the significance of lament in his treatment of the prophet Jeremiah. Brueggemann describes lament as a 'tradition of biblical faith [which] knows that anguish is the door of historical existence, that embrace of ending permits beginnings' (p. 56). Brueggemann underscores the prevalence of grief in Jeremiah and states that what cuts through the prevailing numbness and denial is the 'language of grief, the rhetoric that engages the community in mourning' (p. 55). Jeremiah does not only grieve about the end of his people; he also talks about Yahweh grieving as a helpless parent who must stand alongside death. The prophet's only hope is that the ache of God will penetrate the numbness of the social reality.

The books of *Lamentations*, *Jeremiah* and the *Psalms* reveal a tension between a powerful God and a 'silent' or 'weak' God.

In the Psalms, for example, we encounter a God who seems absent and unresponsive, because He does not intervene in the world or in people's situations when they most need him (Pemberton 2012). Questions such as 'Where is your God?' (Psalms 42:3, 10, 79:5) represent 'the enemies' taunts with regard to the poet's lifelong affirmation of a powerful God who cares for and rescues His people' (Pemberton 2012:125). The questions also put God's reputation at stake and his failure to intervene may be interpreted as a weakness on God's part. O'Connor also notes that though the Israelites make claims about God, demand His attention and beg for a future, God walks away silently. Thus, Lamentations ends without a response from God to Zion's plea for life. O'Connor (2002) mentions that unlike the book of Job where God responds to the lamentation of Job, in Lamentations the silence of God is very striking:

One voice is conspicuously absent from Lamentations. The most authoritative of biblical figures, the only speaker who could proclaim light, hope, and a future in these circumstances, is missing. God does not speak, does not respond, does not heal, does not 'see'. The book's deepest yearning is for the missing voice, the Absent One, the God who hides behind clouds (3:43). (p. 84)

According to O'Connor, the missing voice of God leaves suffering exposed. God's absence forces us to attend to voices of grief and despair.

Sobrinho picks up the issue of the silence of God in his works. Sobrinho posits that holding God above human tragedy is not easy. He recounts the story of a priest who, after the massacre of about a thousand people at El Mozote, said,

When I look at the piles of bodies, the destruction ... how could it be that there of all places, where I have come so many times to say that God is close to us and loves us, that God is not indifferent to sorrow, how could such a dreadful massacre happen precisely here? (Sobrinho 2004:141)

The peasants also queried, 'What's wrong with God?' As Sobrinho rightly points out, such concerns emanate from the idea of God as a good and powerful reality. However, for Sobrinho (2004) scripture evidences that in addition to thinking about God as powerful in creation, in light of the exodus and the resurrection of Christ, we must also think of God as silent, inactive and helpless on the cross.

David Tracy points out that, in Mark's passion, the God of history is present through an absence. The hidden God is *deus crucifixus*, the crucified God (Tracy 1996:9). He argues that the cross should now be read as the revelation of God in hiddenness, in suffering and struggle, in the endurance and the joys of those individuals and groups too often effectively designated non-persons by the dominant culture. He emphasises:

For this God reveals Godself in hiddenness: in cross and negativity, above all in the suffering of all those others whom the grand narrative of modernity has too often set aside as non-peoples, non-events, non-memories, in a world, non-history [...] the entry of the Hidden-Revealed God now comes to us

principally through the interruptive experience and the memory of suffering of whole peoples, especially the suffering of all those ignored, marginalized, and colonized by the grand narrative of modernity. (Tracy 1996:8)

It is essential to highlight the fact that understanding the Christ event is key to exploring the agency of lament: 'On the cross, in silence, God shows his love [...] God shows his love by being close to the victims, being in solidarity with them completely and forever' (Sobrinho 2004:145). Even though Sobrinho (2004) admits that 'relating God to suffering, helplessness, and vulnerability can bring on metaphysical dizziness' (p. 145), he insists, and rightly so, that suffering opens a pathway – with God walking beside us. God suffers in silence with those who suffer in such a way that hope does not die because, in hope, God remains mysteriously present.

Douglas Hall also explores the agency of the suffering of Jesus on the cross in his idea of the theology of the cross. The cross is not merely a statement about the death of Jesus but about his life and its meaning for our lives. According to Hall, through the cross, humanity encounters God, who meets us in our darkness and death. The theology of the Cross 'insists that God, who wills to meet us, love us, redeem us, meets, loves, and redeems us precisely where we are: in the valley of the shadow of death' (Hall 1976:149). It insists that authentic happiness can only be found as we confront and enter into that which negates and destroys happiness under the conditions of existence. Through the cross, there is 'a kind of expectancy that is not extinguished but actually springs into life through the experience of negation' (Hall 1976:150). The cross, therefore, must ground our ecclesiological duties. It leads us to suffer in solidarity with those who suffer, leading us to act on their behalf to ameliorate their condition.

The power of God in African traditional religion

Accounts of African creation myths underscore the idea of a very powerful God, the creator and sustainer of the universe. The Akans, for example, believe in a High God or Supreme Being who is the creator and source of all that is (Nukunya 2003:203). The Akan conception of the Supreme Being can be derived from the titles attributed to him. Abrefi Busia (1954) notes,

Among the Ashanti, the Supreme Being is older than all the things that live on the wide, wide earth (Asase tere, na Onyame ne Panin). He is Onyankopon, Alone, the Great One; Tweadeampon, the Dependable one; Bore-bore, the First, the Creator of all things; Otumfo), the Powerful One; Odomankoma, the Eternal One on earth; Ananse Kokroko, the Great Spider, that is the Wise One. (p. 192)

Besides the creation accounts, God's attributes demonstrate that the 'Deity is the Living One who is the ever-present, ever-acting reality in the world' (Idowu 1973:150). The Bantu express this in the saying, 'Shikakunamo sits on the back of every one of us, and we cannot shake him off'

(Idowu 1973:157). Idowu (1973) emphasises that, 'the theophorous proper names that people bear all over Africa evidence[s] how real God is to Africans' (p.150).

In addition to the creation stories, the attributes of God highlight one crucial truth: God is a mighty God. Such understanding does not permit the Africans to conceive of God as 'the withdrawn God' (Idowu 1973:157). God's power is manifested through the deities and traditional healers. Among the Akans of Ghana, for example, the display of power visible in the work of traditional healers is traditionally understood to proceed from God and is associated with His power as creator. This understanding of the power of God as creator and sustainer is the framework that undergirds the African worldview. In African cosmology, the Supreme Being is approached through small gods associated with objects of nature such as rivers, ponds, lagoons, forests, rocks and the sea. The small gods are only intermediaries and therefore are never considered the ultimate source of power. Unlike the small gods who operate within shrines around which develop priests, congregations and followership, the High God is not directly the object of any organised worship with a priesthood, a temple, a shrine, or a congregation (Nukunya 2003).

Times of communal calamities and personal suffering are seen as consequences of sin or a sign of abandonment by God and not moments where God or their deity hurts or suffers with them. On the contrary, it connotes the idea of the powerlessness of their deity. As Busia (1954) points out,

The gods are treated with respect if they deliver the goods, and with contempt, if they fail; it is the Supreme Being and the ancestors that are always treated with reverence and awe [...] The Ashanti, like the other Akan tribes, esteem the Supreme Being and the ancestors far above gods and amulets. Attitudes to the latter depend upon their success and vary from healthy respect to sneering contempt. (p. 205)

In his *Arrow of God*, Chinua Achebe recounts how the people of Aninta dealt with their deity when he failed them. They carried him to the boundary between them and their neighbours and set him on fire (Achebe 1989). This story, which encapsulates the allegiance of a people towards their deity, is mainly representative of the relationships of clans and their relationship with God. The only time God is connected with suffering is if He is the one causing the suffering.

The idea of the suffering God for Africans who become Christians is a novel concept. That is why Charles Nyamiti emphasises the need to take cognisance of the African understanding of the Christian God because as he states, 'what is new to the Africans is the fact that God's power is manifest in weakness: in Christ's humility, meekness, the forgiveness of sins, and – most astoundingly – in his suffering, his death on the cross, and its glorious consequences in Christ himself and the whole of creation' (1976:57). The effect of the inability to comprehend the idea of the suffering God manifests itself both latently and overtly in the thought

pattern and practices of many African Christians because as Shorter intimates 'at baptism the African Christian repudiates remarkably little of his former non-Christian outlook. What remains above the surface is, in fact, the tip of an iceberg. The African Christian is not asked to recant a religious philosophy. Consequently, he returns to the forbidden practices as occasion arises with remarkable ease' (Shorter 1977:10).

In interrogating the impact of the Christian faith on the African Christian, Oosthuizen (1968) quizzes,

Why does the African, in times of crises, revert back to non-Christian practices? This appears to be the rule rather than the exception because the African's past has been ignored and no attempt has been made to penetrate it with the regeneration power of the gospel message, the converted African lives in two levels. (p. 4)

This shows that the worldview of many African Christians has not been transformed (Kunhiyop 2008). Though Shorter, Oosthuizen and Kunhiyop have a rather extreme view, the basic point worth noting is that many African Christians are not able to handle moments of suffering without relying on either traditional practices or seeking or relying on pastors who promise breakthroughs. Some of the 'deliverance' theologies being propounded by some Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches and African Independent churches that locate God's active involvement in solving the predicaments of His people tie in with Traditional African understandings of God that underscore God's power.

In his article *God in Ghanaian Pentecostal Songs*, Quayesi-Amakye explores the implicit ideas of the nature of God in some Ghanaian Pentecostal songs. He also explores the nexus between the Akan primordial worldview and Ghanaian Pentecostal biblical understanding of God and the continuities and discontinuities between the two religions. Apart from the absence of concepts such as ancestors and lesser gods, which, when mentioned, stand in relation to the power of God over such gods, Pentecostals 'contextualize their understanding of God and Christ in their songs vis-à-vis biblical ideas of God and the Akan traditional religious worldview' (Quayesi-Amakye 2013:133). Through an exploration of some of the Pentecostal songs, he states that the songs highlight the attributes of God as found in the Akan worldview:

Both the Akan traditional religion and Ghanaian Pentecostalism have elaborate and vivid ideas about the Being of God. ... African Traditional Religious ideas about God, such as the keeper, upholder, protector, preserver, guardian, caretaker, pastor, and saviour of creation and his people, are inherent in Ghanaian Pentecostalism. (Quayesi-Amakye 2013:147)

This study, in a nutshell, advances the argument I am making that the African concept of God permeates the Pentecostal theology. It does not mean some of their songs do not mention the name of Christ. Their view of 'Christ's rule may be restrictive or even parochial. In this restrictive sense, Christ's rule is limited to and experienced by believers' (Quayesi-Amakye 2013:147).

Subjugated knowledges and contested spaces

The hybridity of Christianity and African Traditional concepts and worldviews illustrates the importance of knowledges ignored, or not duly paid attention to, because they were not the mainstream view. If Christianity in Africa will unleash its force and help people appreciate in a more nuanced way, the power of the mystery of the cross in their lives as it relates to the notion of a powerful God in African Traditional Religion, Christianity needs to respond to the critical and unmet questions that are important to African thought. Michel Foucault's notions of subjugated knowledges and genealogies provide helpful nodes to attend and appreciate how African cosmologies continue to reflect on and mediate the existential realities of African Christians. Such an awareness and appreciation need to be understood and attended to in order to enable African Christianity revitalise its impact and influence.

For Foucault (2014), it is essential to pay attention to 'autonomous, non-centralized kind of theoretical production, one that is to say whose validity is not dependent on the approval of the established regimes of thought' (p. 418). This is important for two reasons. Firstly, it allows the local knowledges to challenge established regimes of thought. Secondly, it also enriches the content of the established regimes of thought. Both ideas drive my interest in Foucault's theory of subjugated knowledge and genealogies as they relate to contested spaces in African Christianity.

According to Foucault (2014), subjugated knowledges include 'the historical contents that have been buried and disguised in a functionalist coherence or formal systemization' (p. 418). They are also

[T]hose block of historical knowledge which were present but disguised within the body of functionalist and systematizing theory and which criticism – which obviously draws upon scholarship – has been able to reveal. (Foucault 2014:418)

Additionally, the concept implies,

[A] whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity. (Foucault 2014:418)

The relevance of this theory for the paper lies in this profound statement by Foucault (2014):

It is through the re-emergence of these low-ranking knowledges, these unqualified, even directly dis-qualified knowledges, and which involve what I would call a popular knowledge (*le savoir des gens*) though it is far from being a general commonsense knowledge, but is on the contrary a particular, local, regional knowledge, a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity and which owes its force only to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it – that it is through the reappearance of this knowledge, of these local popular knowledges, these disqualified knowledges, that criticism performs its work. (p. 418)

Applied to African thought, the paper is interested in how approaches to evil and witchcraft and associated concepts and thoughts such as suffering, which were condemned but not engaged by early missionaries and the transmission of the Christian message have emerged in contemporary Christianity and how Christians mediate their worldviews. Such concepts are related to the presence or absence of God for people who have to confront such phenomena.

It bears to mention that Foucault links his discussion of insurrection of subjugated knowledges to this theory on genealogy. Relevant to our discussion is his argument that,

A genealogy should be seen as a kind of attempt to emancipate historical knowledges from that subjection, to render them, that is, capable of opposition and of struggle against the coercion of a theoretical, unitary, formal and scientific discourse. It is based on a reactivation of local knowledges – in opposition to the scientific hierarchization of knowledges and the effects intrinsic to their power. (Foucault 2014:419)

The reactivation of local knowledges in African traditions brings to the fore discussions on the reception of Christianity by Africans.

To flesh out how reactivation of local knowledges tends to impact the reception of Christianity by African Christians, I turn to movies. Meyer (2015) notes, 'movies are embedded in a larger fabric of cultural forms, including sermons, stories, plays, and songs that inform and express what and how people imagine' (p. 16). There is, therefore, an intricate relationship between movies and imagination as well as between movies and reality. In her words,

Video movies recycle and remediate these cultural forms by audiovisualising them. In so doing, they play a central role in honing the imagination in to old and new shared imaginaries that are key to how people define who they are, what they want, and where to move in a world 'about to change'. (Meyer 2015:16)

Movies become a way to see how subjugated knowledges are still operational in the way people meet their religious and socio-economic challenges. These thoughts resonate with tenets of Gerbner's (1998) cultivation analysis, which suggests that when media (including television and film) portrayals resonate with people's reality constructs and life-worlds, those projections also become the bases on which they enact their relationships about life, people, society and authority.

Using three movies as entry points into the dynamics between contested spaces and subjugated knowledges, I interrogate how local knowledges influence the reception and practice of Christianity. The movie 'Last Burial' opens with a knight of the Catholic Church standing in prayer before the statue of the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He is a very religious and spiritual man and generous to his Church. Unknown to his family and the Church, he was a member of a cult group who exchanged their souls for a good life, unimaginable wealth and tremendous power. His reason for joining the cult was to solve his financial woes. The 'Fathers of Blood Money' tells of two friends who witnessed

a marriage ceremony where the man's rich friends displayed affluence by literally spraying the man and his wife with money. They attended a Church programme for prayers to become rich. Failing to get the intended results, they approached a temple called, Mansion of Wailers, where they were told they would become wealthy if initiated into the group. They agreed, and their wish came true.

Whereas these two movies exemplify the extent to which people might go to satisfy their quest for riches, it also reflects their idea that the Christian God cannot make them rich and powerful, and as such, they seek solutions elsewhere. These stories not only reflect the notion of 'sakawa' 'thought to be led by wayward spiritual men such as pastors or fetish priests who hold illicit Sakawa meetings in the middle of the night' (Amstrong 2011:2) but also the trend that some Christians would want to be prosperous at all cost.

A movie in two parts, 'The Church of a Demonic Pastor' and 'The Devil on Pulpit,' is about a pastor with a small congregation. Because of his inability to pay his rent, the landlord evicted him. Considering that as an attack from the devil, he became suicidal. His mother, a practicing Christian, sought the help of a fetish priest to turn his fortunes around. He took poison, his former boss met the scene, took him to the hospital and brought a prophet to pray for him. On recovering, he visited the prophet, who encouraged him to continue his work in the Lord's vineyard. Not long after, he started performing miracles by raising the dead. He could battle fetish priests and deliver people from supernatural forces. Another pastor began confronting him because he was leading the people astray. He eventually confessed that the devil had a hand in his ministry. He was introduced to the forces of darkness by the prophet. This movie underscores the perception that some people have about some pastors and the authenticity of their calling and work. They take advantage of subjugated knowledges and contested spaces but abuse them for their own gain and popularity.

Conclusion

The conclusions that the narrative of these movies invite would seem to challenge if not contradict Meyer on the relations of Pentecostal – Charismatic Christianity to Traditional Religion. According to Meyer even though Pentecostal-charismatic churches 'tend to harshly criticize so-called traditional religion, they do not move beyond it entirely but instead reinvent it as the domain of the "powers of darkness" or the "occult"'. She argues further,

Able to absorb what is constructed as the 'heathen past', Pentecostalism is at once a disrupting force that promises new beginnings and a mnemonic device that renders accessible ideas about the efficacy of traditional religion and African powers, albeit in a distorting and temporalizing manner. (Meyer 2015:10)

On the contrary, this paper notes that when African Christians are confronted by challenges to which they attribute metaphysical or cosmic causes, they tap into African traditional religions resources to address the difficulties. So

rather than repudiate African Traditional Religion as occultic or demonic, African Christians tend to draw from the African worldview to make meaning of their problems.

Thus, one of the reasons for the success of Pentecostalism 'is its pneumatic spirituality that relates to the primal African spirituality and worldview'. (Nel 2019:6). Pentecostalism is pivoted on the supposition of the existence of unseen principalities, evil cosmic powers and benevolent spiritual forces. Nel argues that that prophets of Pentecostalism take the place of divinatory services of African Traditional Religion by

[P]roviding believers with the needed information about the source of their misfortunes and solutions to appease malevolent spirits. By staying within the orbits of an African worldview, it succeeds in traditionalizing Christianity within African culture. (p.6)

Whereas Pentecostalism is thriving because of the attention it pays to some of the subjugated knowledges in the contested spaces through activities such as deliverance services and healing crusades that are part of their main Church programmes, some charismatics in their attempt to attend to issues in the contested spaces such as material prosperity, fortification against evil forces, witchcraft and illnesses, engage in actions that turn to evoke public debate among Christians. For example, in 2015, pastor and founder of the International God's Way Church in Ghana, Daniel Obinim, was seen stepping on the stomach of a pregnant woman during a live TV programme. On another occasion, he claimed to heal a man of impotence by publicly massaging his manhood as the congregants looked on. Another story of a similar kind occurred in 2019 when a South African preacher, Pastor Lesego Daniel of Rabboni Centre Ministries, made some members of his congregation eat grass so that they would get close to God. These examples clearly show that 'the insurrection of naïve knowledges' operating at the local level continues to influence the reception of Christianity in modern times. Some African Christians would still turn to traditional practices and mediums to seek answers to life's questions in the face of the silence of God as they confront inevitable vicissitudes. Some find answers in their faith. If they do not find the answers in Orthodox Churches, they either go to Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches or would remain with their Churches but still go to the other Pentecostal and Charismatic pastors perceived to be powerful for solutions. The mode of operation of some pastors raises issues about how they are cashing in on the insurrection of local knowledges. African theology would need to continually engage subjugated knowledges to help African Christians not only embrace the implications of the silence of God but also prevent other Christians from becoming prey to pastors and some dehumanising practices in the name of Christianity.

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