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# Abstracts

## **Making, Contesting and Navigating Space: Between Religion, Indigenous Knowledge, and Politics**

“Africa Multiple” Cluster of Excellence, Workshop July 6-7, 2023

### **Keynote**

#### **Reimagining the Intersections of Religion, Indigenous Knowledge, and Politics in Africa**

Prof. Dr. Jacob K. Olupona (Divinity School, Harvard University)

No time is better suited than the present for a reexamination of the status and role of indigenous knowledge tradition in the religion, cultural and social lives of the African people. The quest for indigenous knowledge in academic affairs and intellectual pursuits has increased significantly. This quest requires us to begin to reexamine old theories and ideas of the humanities and social sciences such as Peter Ekeh’s theory of the two publics in Africa and Robert Bellah’s theory on civil religion. We will evoke these old ideas and consider how they apply to our current context. Doing so will enable us to take a fresh look at religious traditions and spiritualities that have been condemned by many scholars to the footnotes of history as a result of Africa’s encounters with Western society, but have maintained an important presence in African public life. Europeans, couched in the language of Enlightenment and modernity, labeled traditional religious traditions as “pagan,” “backward,” and even “devilish”. We now know that this process of undermining and delegitimizing the importance of African epistemology, cosmology, and ontology has led to not only the underdevelopment of African cultural and political life but has also created major crises in new African states.

This interdisciplinary workshop, drawing on important and significant ideas in the African social sciences and the humanities, will enable us to provide a new rationale for why we will focus on archiving indigenous knowledge and religion. Furthermore, this workshop will help us apply this reconceptualization of indigenous traditions to new African intellectual and cultural spaces. Personally, I will pursue these ideas and concepts by archiving the indigenous knowledge traditions and the life history of a 96-year-old Nigerian medicine man, Chief Lóòghò Bámùtùlá. The life of Chief Lóòghò highlights why it is so crucial that we take seriously indigenous knowledge because without the wisdom of Chief Lóòghò we could lose important information and insights about medicine, politics, and religion. As an advisor to kings; a healer in his community; prominent civic figure with great social, political, and religious capital; and a convert to Christianity, Chief Lóòghò’s story embodies the deep wellspring of knowledge found at the intersections of religion, indigenous knowledge, and

politics in Africa. This project, which is grounded in history and indigenous cosmology, will help up open new theoretical spaces and knowledge for Africa today and in the future, while correcting some of the misguided and prejudicial frameworks that have been applied to indigenous African traditions.

## **Panel 1: Comparing religious spaces/ knowledges of spatiality**

### ***Ìgbàgbó*: A determinant of entanglement, disentanglement and contestation of religious spaces among the Yoruba**

Akinmayowa Akin-Otiko (Institute of African and Diaspora Studies, University of Lagos),  
pakin-otiko@unilag.edu.ng

The concept of *Ìgbàgbó* is translated to be faith, and Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as “...confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” This confidence and assurance develop along three events: revelation of and from what is not known, the teaching/instruction/preaching about what is revealed, and the visible actions performed based on what has been revealed and taught. The third events show what an individual lives for and what they can die for. The third event in individual lives manifests entanglement, disentanglement, and contestation of religious spaces. This paper examines how religious spaces are contested and transformed in entanglements through faith. The stages of introduction, contestation, and transformation of *Ìgbàgbó* in the religious space of Africans on the continent and diaspora will be discussed through a comparative study of religious elements in *Àdìmúlà* and Christianity.

### **The Conquest of Distance: The Spaces of Ifá from Ethnographic and Historical Perspective**

Judith Bachmann and Obafemi Jegede (Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies, University of Bayreuth), judith.bachmann@ts.uni-heidelberg.de / ogbeate@yahoo.com

Ifá is known as the Yoruba divinatory practice as such it is contested in twofold ways. First, even though for many Ifá is part of so-called Yoruba (traditional) religion, it has also been studied as the entry point into Yoruba philosophy and ontology. Does Ifá constitute religious space only, and/or should it rather be regarded as the source of indigenous Yoruba spatiality? Secondly, even though Ifá is often ethnically and/or linguistically limited to Yoruba, the practice has spread across the Atlantic. Why is Ifá adaptable in other language- and culture-spaces? The paper seeks to address these questions through an ethnographic and a historical perspective, investigating the language and the acts of practitioners today as well as the ways in which West African intellectuals in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century embedded Ifá in global discourses through comparison.

## **Panel 2: Tradition and/or Religion? Colonial and postcolonial spatial conflicts**

### **The Discourse of Religious Spatialities in Colonial Correspondences: The Case of Bikom Kingdom in Bamenda, Northwest Cameroons (1927)**

Glory Essien Otung (BIGSAS, University of Bayreuth), [glory.e.otung@uni-bayreuth.de](mailto:glory.e.otung@uni-bayreuth.de)

This paper posits historical/colonial discourses of indigenous religious practices as fundamental to present debates on religion in African studies. The contacts between actors from colonised and coloniser groups in most African societies has resulted in sociocultural consequences or hybridity which must be taken into account when studying postcolonial societies (Anchimbe and Janney, 2011). A postcolonial pragmatic analysis of a colonial assessment report on Bikom Kingdom reveals the transformative complexities of the contact of Christianity with the Bikom religious system which permeates discourses of space-related sociocultural aspects such as power, marriage, dress code, census, birth, etc. In the continuities of the encounters, believers in both religious systems diverge. However, remarkable (spatial) religious categories and practices from both systems converge. Findings problematize an absolutist perspective to the conflicts between African indigenous religious systems and Christianity.

### **How to make a Zulu king**

Magnus Echtler (Leipzig Research Centre Global Dynamics, University of Leipzig), [magnus.echtler@uni-leipzig.de](mailto:magnus.echtler@uni-leipzig.de)

On October 29, 2022, Misuzulu kaZwelithini received a certificate of recognition from Cyril Ramaphosa, president of South Africa, and he was anointed by Referent Dr. Thabo Makgoba, the Anglican archbishop of Cape Town. The event, commonly referred to as ‘coronation’, took place at Moses Mabhida Stadium in Durban, built for the FIFA World Cup in 2010. While the ceremony was criticized as neo-colonial, it effectively installed Misuzulu as the new Zulu king, although two of his half-brothers still contest his succession in court. On August 20, 2022, Misuzulu had performed the ‘entering the kraal’ (ukungeni esibayeni) ritual at the kwaKhangalamankengane Palace in Nongoma. While this ritual ‘really’ made him king according to Zulu proceedings, he was not the only one to perform it, although he mobilized more supporters than his brothers. In my presentation, I look at these public events from a performative angle, paying special attention to their histories and the spatial orders they (re-)produce.

## **Panel 3: Land, law, and religion – tracing conflict, mapping spaces**

### **Endogenous Religion, Land Conflict and Displacement in Senegal**

Lamine Doumbia (Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies, University of Bayreuth),  
fakoly.doumbia@googlemail.com

The Senegalese Blaise Diagne International Airport is a factor of transformation in several dimensions: socio-spatial, political, economic, etc., which at the same time generates a social reconfiguration. The technocratic decision to build this airport more than 40 km from Dakar is affecting two rural communities. Religion (Islam, Christianity and endogenous cults) empirically plays a big role among these actors, e. g. as a means of resilience for displaced persons. In this presentation, I will discuss: Were the inhabitants of the villages bordering the airport forcibly evicted or did they voluntarily give up the site for public use, bearing in mind the compensation decree and the potential benefits of the modern airport? The actors' (religious, traditional etc.) ties to the land suggest a process against their will. However, the fortunes of those who profit from speculation are a reminder that land is no longer just a bearer of cultural and religious values but can also be turned into a commodity (Le Roy 1997; Klute and Fernandes 2011; Doumbia 2021).

### **Mapping the Religious Footprint of Lagos**

Taibat Lawanson (Centre for Housing and Sustainable Development, University of Lagos),  
tlawanson@unilag.edu.ng

Religious practices are shaping the form and function of African cities in unprecedented ways. Using the theoretical underpinning of Lefebvre's 'Spatial Triad' and the production of space, the chapter will explore the spatial patterns of religious urbanisation in Lagos; including patterns of land acquisition and appropriations. The chapter will go further to interrogate how faith-based organisations engage with planning administrative and local governance frameworks. The chapter will conclude with reflections on what this portends for the spatio-social configurations of African public spaces.

## **Panel 4: Transnational minority spaces: Gender, race, and religion**

### **Mosques, Madrasas, Leadership and Authority among West Africans in Germany**

Fulera Issaka-Toure (Islamic Studies, University of Bayreuth), [fissaka-toure@ug.edu.gh](mailto:fissaka-toure@ug.edu.gh)

Since the founding of the Ansar masjid (mosque) of Hamburg, Germany, in 1992 as the first black mosque in the whole of Europe; several mosques have sprung up in various corners of the country with numerous populations including sometimes being connected to a particular country or even ethnicity. Aside from such spaces being used for spiritual activities, they are simultaneously used as madrasas/Islamic schools. This paper draws from nine months of empirical research in seven German federal states regarding the symbolic and actual representation of such mosques as well as the question of leadership and authority. It concludes that some existing structures of mosques in West African Islam have been carried into the diasporic space and thereby posing the question on the role of the context in shaping Islamic symbols. At the end, the paper would present the idea that leadership and authority become somewhat intertwined; and male youth are in line of taking up such positions thereby sustain the marginalization of women.

### **Postcolonial formation of Angolan immigrant Churches in Portugal - A reclaiming of religion colonial space in Portugal**

Asaf Augusto (Political Geography, University of Bayreuth), [asafaugusto@gmail.com](mailto:asafaugusto@gmail.com)

For the last 10 to 15 years Lusophone African churches, particularly Angolan churches, have been growing and spreading in Portugal. Before this new trend, most Lusophone African Christian migrants, when they migrate to Portugal, tended to join the well-established Portuguese and Brazilian dominated denominations. The founding of Angolan Christian churches is an interesting development in two ways: first, it is generally assumed that cultural repertoires such as language ethnicity are key in bringing different groups together. Preliminary research on Angolan migrants indicated that, in some cases, newly formed Angolan churches use Portuguese and Brazilian cultural repertoires, namely language style and style of sermon. Second, some of these newly formed Angolan churches are founded by Angolan immigrants, but some are planted by missionaries from Angola, similar to Brazilian churches. This project attempts to understand and explain the social, cultural, economic and religion processes at play when it comes to the formation of newly formed Angolan churches in Lisbon in their transnational trajectories.