

## Editor's Note

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Jan G. Platvoet's encounter with Africa, first as a missionary and later as a scholar, has earned him a significant place in the academic study of religion on the continent and beyond. As a historian of religion, he has made remarkable contributions to the academic study of indigenous religions in Africa and thus contributed in launching African religion into the global academy. His works in the areas of historiography, theory and methodology in the study of African religions and religions in Africa have immensely contributed to knowledge in the field. His notable roles in the African Association for the Study of Religions (AASR), as one of its pioneers but also one of the most proactive actors, and in the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) are not only outstanding, they have earned him a conspicuous place as one who has contributed to putting the academic study of religions in Africa on the global academic map. This Special Issue comprising nine contributions is the first set of essays written to honour him for his impact and mentorship in this area of scholarship. Similarly, the variety of essays in this volume demonstrate his broader engagement in the field as well as the growing interest of contemporary scholars of religion.

The first essay by Rose Mary Amenga-Etego, 'Crossing Research Boundaries: Our Nankani Daughter in Academia' engages the challenges faced by contemporary African scholars as they cross the boundaries of object and subject with their indigenous experiential knowledge systems and demands to the Western academic sphere, where research neutrality and objectivity, based on critical 'scientific' analysis of data is upheld as the key principle of research. As researchers within their indigenous languages, cultures and religions, these scholars wrestle to skilfully navigate their multi-layered positionality, especially the women.

In 'Mamalawo? The Controversy over Women Practicing Ifa Divination,' Ayodeji Ogunnaike engages the debate on the controversy over women becoming diviners in Ifa traditions. The author argues that the understanding and application of gender is not only contextually relative, its implications for initiation rituals, especially in 'the rapidly growing number of female initiates in diaspora, will likely change the dynamics of the tradition going forward.' Thus, Ogunnaike's essay addresses the issue of fear and anxiety over the emergence of women in Ifa divination, a perspective that does not only border on the future of African spirituality, but also, whether it is innovative and transformative.

Another interesting area of this volume is its engagement with how religious themes intertwines with African novels. This set of two essays begin with Elias Kifon Bongmba who examines 'Gender and Religion in Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter*' to show how religion and gender are intricately situated within the indigenous religio-cultural setting of death; while Loreen Maseno's 'Sexuality and Sexual Scripting in African Traditional Religion: Mumbi in *A Grain Of Wheat*' brings out the sensitive themes of sexuality and sexual politics in addition to those of religion and gender. These two contributions

interweave the complex themes of religion, gender relations, sexuality and power functions within the socio-cultural reality of Africa.

Unlike the above essays, Ullrich Relebogilwe Kleinhempel's 'Retrieving African Traditional Religion from the Fringes – Umbanda and the Brazilian Traditions as a Source' draws our attention to the religious beliefs and practices of the African diaspora as viable sites and sources for the study of African religions. Using Umbanda from Brazil as a case example, the author illustrates the survival, innovative and transformative nature of Africa's beliefs and practices. The author argues that, despite the difficulties of living in non-Bantu cultural environment, Umbanda has 'preserved a core of Bantu beliefs, ritual practices and spiritual perceptions.'

Moving into the domain of African Christianity, the next two contributions examine the dynamic nature and practices of Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana. Bernard Otopah Appiah's 'Convoluting Pentecost? An Analysis of Akan Indigenous World-Views in Ghanaian Pentecostal-Charismatic Praxes' addresses the question whether the interaction between Akan indigenous and Pentecostal world-views are complicated by the nature and variety of practices in Ghanaian Pentecostal Christianity. Unlike Appiah, Michael Perry Kweku Okyerefo argues in 'Philanthropy as Image Politics in Ghana's New Churches' that the acts of philanthropic and charitable deeds such as the provisions of health and educational institutions by Ghana's Pentecostal-Charismatic churches are an impersonation of the historic mainline churches. Drawing on the Christian Action Faith Ministries International (Action Chapel) and International Central Gospel Church (ICGC), the author, however, notes that although this is also in line with Prosperity Theology, their engagement with the media projects them into the public sphere.

The last set of essays deals distinctively with religious conflicts and religious language respectively. In 'Causes of Religious Conflict in Ethiopia,' Bekalu Atnafu, identifies religious fundamentalism, intolerance, suspicion, a new sense of Islamic identity and movement among others as the main cause of Ethiopia's religious conflicts and argues for religious tolerance in the context of the country's religious diversity. Closely related to religious conflicts is the problem of religious language. Thus, the volume rounds up with J.C. Thomas' contribution on 'Left Wing Fideism: A Critique of Non-Cognitivism.' In this essay Thomas' critically engages D.Z. Phillip's work on the "Concept of Prayer" with respect to its contribution to the complexity of religious language. He argues that there is a defect in Phillip's interpretation of the logic of religious language because of the author's reliance on Ludwig Wittgenstein's influence on religious language.

This diversely rich collection of essays provides a glimpse on the diverse ways in which Platvoet's scholarship has influenced, provoked and contributed to knowledge in the disciplinary area of religious studies, African religions and religion in Africa. Our warm congratulations to Dr. Jan Platvoet for sharing his expertise and keeping us on our toes always. We commend this Special Issue to you. *Akwaaba!*

Rose Mary Amenga-Etego (Guest Editor)

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