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The Future of the Study of Religions in Africa

Decolonial-Pluriversal Directions

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Abstract

There is a theoretically intractable argument about what we might mean by 'Africa'. The origin and knowledge about 'Africa' as an identifier or a construct have continued to dictate the agenda for Africa, religions in Africa, and African Studies in Africa and the diaspora. Although 'religions in Africa' are receiving profound empirical and methodological attention, this article argues that they have continued to be approached from the theoretical question of what Africa might mean. It further states that the three main religions in Africa—African Indigenous Religion, Christianity, and Islam—are locked in this theoretical hole, but scholars have continued to navigate the threshold through thematic studies dictated by the names of the continent. It concludes by stating that the study of religions in Africa, though complexified, both now and in the past, will still follow the trajectories dictated outside Africa. But the article also suggests that a decolonial-pluriversal approach could help to appreciate the African worldviews in tension with other worldviews.

Key words

Africa; decoloniality; pluriverse; study of religion; Berlin conference; cartography; geostrategy

Introduction

The study of Africa, African Indigenous Religion, and religions in Africa has journeyed through several methodological and theoretical trajectories, transforming from object-subject to subject-object (Platvoet 1996). Whether as an object or a subject, what is central to the understanding of Africa and its religions is the power of definition and interpretation. The name 'Africa' itself is contentious, having been a reference to North Africa in its earliest use (Science Encyclopedia, n.d.). But beyond that reference is the fact that it is not a self-descriptive name; Africa was named by outsiders, historically (Grillo et al. 2019, 6–7). One can deduce from Grillo, Van Klinken, and Ndzovu's analysis that the etymology of Africa was not based on the 'people of Africa'—the subject—but on the cosmic or climatic environment—the object (Grillo et al. 2019, 6–7). They state that from either the Greek, Latin, Phoenician, or Berber etymology, Africa refers to a 'land', 'sunny', 'dust' and 'cave', respectively. This raises the critical question

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about who/what an African could be: a person of the land, sun, dust, or cave, or a land, sun, dust, or cave of the person? One way to respond to this question as it concerns Africa and its religions is to look at it through the lenses of historical-ontological, cartographic-geostrategic, and religious-philosophical structures of knowing and how they have survived till now. Mapping these structures, this article underlines the need to deploy a decolonial-pluriversal paradigm to studying religions of/in Africa.

Clarification of these approaches is in order. By historical-ontological, I mean the mosaic identities of African peoples and religions as largely constructed by external influences, which have had a contested impact on how contemporary Africans are perceived. As Hacking (2002, 583) conceptualizes it, the nature of being in itself makes sense when understood from its historical standpoint. Hacking elaborates that we are concerned about possible ways of being a person, perhaps in relation to episteme, power, and agency. For example, Igboin (2021a) unpacks the complex identities of the African when he analysed 'I am an African' as differently penned by Thabo Mbeki, Wayne Visser, and Frederick de Klerk. While Mbeki traces his ontological relationship with Africa to his being born and raised in Africa, Visser expresses his intense love for Africa as the provenance of humanity, and therefore claims to be an African, while de Klerk, the last Apartheid President of South Africa, defined himself as an African whose ancestry is traced to the Huguenots in France. In reality, the claim of ontology—the nature of being—of an African has largely been construed from without.

I assume that historical-ontological sources have profound effects on Africa's cartography, as a social construction of what was once referred to as 'featureless void' (Desai and Masquelier 2018, 1), which ironically always places Africa under in a map of the world that is circular. I intend to understand this cartographic-geostrategic framework as how European powers constructed a conceptual geographical mapping of Africa as a space that lacked religion and was in need of one. For example, although the Berlin Conference from 1884 to 1885 was ostensibly meant to partition Africa and resolve the geostrategic conflicting interests and tensions between European *conquistadores* that now pit Africa against itself, the conference redrew the religious cartography of Africa, partly laying the foundation for religious conflict that has become a regular feature of religious interaction across the continent (Akinwumi 2008). The redrawing of the existing ecclesiastic-missionary map ended up re-classifying and (re-)converting Africans to the new colonizers' religious affiliations (Bonk 2008), as I will elaborate later.

One of the consequences of the cartographic-geostrategic construction is the religious-philosophical ambiguity introduced into Africa. By religious-philosophical framework, I mean Western religious and philosophical thought and structure imposed on Africa, which initially denied the realities of religion and God on the continent. For instance, even though the opening sentence of the document of the Berlin Conference states: 'In the Name of God Almighty', it is not clear whether Allah was construed in it despite the presence of the Ottomans and their negotiations for the preservation of, and respect for, the rights of Muslims in the 'new' cartographical balkanization of Africa. Obviously, an African god was not on their radar or implied in the documents they signed. A corollary to this was Emil Ludwig, a German geographer's philosophical questioning of the African mental capacity to conceive God: 'How can the untutored Africans conceive God? […] How can this be? […] Deity is a philosophical concept which savages are incapable of framing' (Smith 1950, 1). As it turned out, a cognition-based God is different from a relatable one, thus ushering in the need for a decolonial-pluriversal turn.

The foregoing conceptualizations—historical-ontological, cartographic-geostrategic, and religious-philosophical—laid both methodological and theoretical frameworks for the 'study' of religions of/in Africa. One way by which these are now being challenged is through decolonial pluriversalism. Decoloniality has been defined as 'the logic, metaphysics, ontology,

and matrix of power created by the massive processes and aftermath of colonization and settler-colonialism. This matrix and its lasting effects and structures are called 'coloniality'. Decoloniality is a way for us to re-learn the knowledge that has been pushed aside, forgotten, buried or discredited by the forces of modernity, settler-colonialism, and racial capitalism' (William & Mary, n.d.).

At the extreme, decoloniality rejects all that is foreign and emphasizes a reclamation of indigenous knowledge systems (Nyamnjoh 2024, 25–26). Such a position, Francis Nyamnjoh (2024) argues, negates the philosophy of epistemic incompleteness, that is, the idea that every ideology is 'a permanent work in progress'. The sense of decoloniality being argued here is one that acknowledges the historical trajectories of colonialism in Africa but does not perpetually internalize its victimhood that paralyses self and forecloses meaningful dialogue. It is the kind that recognizes the dynamic nature of the African masquerade, which, though in constant motion and mapping its scene's and performance's fluidity and flux, does not forget the grove it came out from. Thus, decoloniality gives room for critiques and revisions and for the strengthening of one's position, if need be. More broadly, it opens the vista of viewing knowledge and the world from a pluriversal angle. Developed in South America by such thinkers as Enrique Dussel, Arturo Escobar, and Walter Mignolo, pluriversity conveys the idea that knowledge and its production must be free from Western dominant perspectives and approached from every conceivable angle that validly contributes to knowledge (Igboin 2017). For Achille Mbembe (2016, 37), pluriversity entails the idea of 'epistemic diversity' that at once recognizes the existing body of knowledge and subjects it to dialogue with other knowledges and traditions on an equal pedestal. Van Klinken (2019) specifically relates pluriversity to the study of religions and argues that it disrupts boundaries and binaries that have restricted access to epistemic freedom, critique, and participation. In its decolonial sense, therefore, pluriversalism blurs the epistemic boundaries that occlude other than Eurocentric forms of religious ideas, experiences, and practices from the mainstream of religious discourse.

In what follows, I analyse how each of the frameworks—historical-ontological, cartographic-geostrategic, and religious-philosophical—has affected the study of religions of/in Africa and will conclude by suggesting a decolonial-pluriversal method for studying religions of/in Africa.

The Study of Religions of/in Africa: Historical-Ontological Analysis

There is a historical-ontological dimension to grasping the study of religions of/in Africa. The severance of North Africa from the rest of Africa by such politicians and philosophers as the French Napoleon Bonaparte and Georg Hegel, among others, has influenced the reference to Africa south of the Sahara as Africa. Egypt seems to enjoy a pride of place in North Africa in the intensification of the racial science, invented and intellectually defended by European scholars with a decided political goal—severing it from the rest of Africa (Pierre 2018). Thus, African 'Traditional' Religion, in this line of thought, is hardly applied to North Africa or Egypt, and emphasis is placed instead on an ancient Egyptian mystery school (Onyewuenyi 1993). The earliest Christian missionary work and eventual conquest by the Muslims in the seventh century have helped in potentially obscuring African Indigenous Religion and entrenching the flourishing Arabo-Islamic tradition in North Africa.

Although there are ongoing efforts to reinterpret Hegel's denial of the history of Africa to mean that he was not absolutely dismissive of it (Bernasconi 2024), Robert Baum (2024) criticizes the argument that Africa lacks history and religion beyond the contact with Christianity, Islam, and colonialism. Baum strongly argues against Eurocentric interpretation and application of Aristotle's argument that people without history and religion are 'natural slaves'. He maintains that there is a difference between denying what exists and what does not

exist at all. The denial of African history and religions, therefore, is political; it served the colonial interest. In addition, Baum counters the argument that AIR does not extend to North Africa. According to him, evidence from texts, oral traditions, and linguistics justifies that AIR covers global Africa, and its religious history is 'nearly as old as humanity itself'.

The second point borders on 'religions of' and 'religions in' Africa. Although traditionally one would suggest that 'religions of' Africa refer to religions that 'naturally' evolved in Africa without external push, it has almost become a settled insight that Christianity and Islam, having been in Africa for many centuries, qualify as 'religions of' Africa. This does not mean that there is no historical-ontological tension for those who view the influence of these two religions as adversely affecting the pristine originality of AIR. The denial of AIR suggests that there was no study of religions of Africa other than Christianity and Islam in Africa. What then constituted the study of religions in Africa was the activities of the missionaries. It was not until towards the end of colonialism that the Europeans 'discovered' religion and God in Africa (Adogame 2022). Even at that, AIR was demonized and primitivized.

The third point is the 'democratization' of the use of 'religion', a term that was, for a long time, restricted to Christianity. After all, why are Christianity and Judaism not called Jewish Traditional Religion(s) and Islam, Arabian Traditional Religion, distinct from the belief system of the Arabian Peninsula prior to the development of Islam? It can be further analysed that the term 'religion' in AIR has not conferred religious status on the autochthonous beliefs of Africa, even today (Igboin 2022). The probing political question is: why is AIR not recognized as a world religion regardless of its shared characteristics with other religions classified as world religions? Grillo, Van Klinken, and Ndzovu (Grillo et al. 2019, 18) analyse four cardinal thrusts Western scholars use to recognize and classify world religions as follows: historical founders around whom moral order is organized; ultimate religious authorities that defend and protect religious orthodoxy; aesthetic architectural complexes that arouse awe and stimulate aesthetic presence of God; and canonized, sacred scriptures that contain myths, stories, theologies, doctrines, and so forth that reference can be made. They argue that AIR has a functional dimension that other supposed world religions have, which should have been a primary criterion for viewing religion.

The text-to-reason rather than reason-to-text as an analytical criterion for classifying religions as 'world' or 'primal' forms part of the subjective anthropological 'study' of AIR at the start of colonization. In his refutation of this thought, Antonio (2017, 148) argues that there is no historical evidence of ideal-typical or original religion that African traditions must mirror to be theorized as religion in the Western sense of it. He states that anyone who sets such criteria already inherently includes or excludes some religions as world religions. Baum (2024) makes this point clearer when he argues that those who set criteria for recognizing some religions as world religions already presume that world religions have a set of history, which others do not have. In order to entrench this position, some Western scholars maintain that the history of AIR starts from the point of its contact with Christianity and Islam, a position that Baum has strongly challenged. Despite Baum's challenge, the study of religions of/in Africa has been affected by the scramble for Africa by the Europeans, a scramble that redrew Africa's religious cartography and demography.

The Study of Religions of/in Africa: A Cartographic-Geostrategic Approach

Maps are not innocuous drawings; they convey important geographical, religious, or theological meanings. Bonk's (2008, 21) analysis of the so-called different world maps, starting with the Hereford Mappa Mundi of 1300 shows how Africa was misdescribed as 'grotesque illustrations of prevailing myths and savage demonic forces'; even though 'no place-names appear on it', it was 'replete with dog-headed kings', depicting that 'beyond the gates of Europe, the laws of

God and nature were suspended, and anything was possible'. Such a cartographic-religious depictions of Africa opened up the continent for missionary activities, which, as Akinwumi submits, were upset by the scramble for Africa. The cooperation that thrived among the different missions prior to the Berlin Conference withered. 'The co-operation came to an end after the 1884/85 conference when most of the powers insisted on promoting the mission from their respective homes. The attitude created discord between the missions. It marked the beginning of rancour among the missions' (Akinwumi 2008, 14). Consequently, the partition of Africa did not only ensure that regions that were initially evangelized by particular missions had to be re-evangelized by the dominant colonial-backed missions that now ruled them but also sowed the seeds of intra-religious rivalry that characterizes their relationship. Dores provides a historical account of how the inter-imperial conflict over who controls different parts of Africa actually disposes to the belief that there was no religion of the Africans and Africans themselves were objects for the grab. He says: 'While Lisbon feared the denationalization of missionary work, Rome was concerned about Portugal's internal policies on religious matters and its perceived inabilities to deal with the missionary challenges of the time, especially the Protestant competition over African hearts and minds' (Dores 2021, 86).

The competition over Africans hearts and minds would lead to commissioned anthropological studies that ended up 'officially' denying the existence of AIR. Although critical attention was paid to Christianity in Africa at this point, the demonization of AIR, ironically, brought it into some sort of anthropological study, which provided data for future comparison and criticisms (Igboin and Taru 2025). So, when one talks about 'religions in' Africa, it is plausible to include all religions or religious beliefs, both indigenous and 'imported', that now co-exist in Africa's cartographic-geostrategic space. As Christianity and Islam penetrated sub-Saharan Africa, there was the natural need for comparative studies aimed at countering the production of history and knowledge that had become widespread (see Chidester 1996 and 2013). The comparative approach was not just meant to contend with and neutralize the negative descriptions of AIR and to raise it as a way of life whose functions in African social and cultural worlds could not be denied, but also, perhaps more importantly, to raise questions about the propagated superiority of the 'colonial religions'. Platvoet (1996) refers to it as a movement from 'Africa as Object to Africa as Subject'. Here, African and Africanist voices began to be heard as ethnographic studies unpacked some of the colonially projected anthropological data. However, the methodologies and epistemologies of most of the comparative studies could not dispel the Western approach because the scholars were trained by/in Western methodological traditions.

However, the penetration of Christianity and Islam and the comparative analyses carried out did not leave them 'pure'. African Christianity and African Islam have assumed a distinctive texture that complexifies their cartographic-geostrategic reach. Pierre (2018), for instance, notes how the French colonial authorities, through a decree in 1911, distinguished between Arab and Black Africans and created multiple, racialized, and ethnicized Islams. Pierre writes, 'Black or African Islam was deemed inferior to Arab Islam, and while Islamic culture and its Arab practitioners were considered to lag behind Western (white) civilization, they were seen to be more advanced than 'fetishistic' Black African ones' (Pierre 2018, 18).

In the case of Christianity, Paul Gifford (2022) distinguishes between the disenchanted, cognitive Christianity of the West and the enchanted, enspirited Christianity of Africa. Western Christianity, he argues, which tilts towards functional rationality, is the standard that African Christianity should come to terms with if it has to address the overarching problems modernity has posed. In his words, 'our modern world is something totally new; and present affluence, well-being, and freedom depend on the cognitive style that underpins it, a cognitive style which peripheralizes a worldview attributing causality to spiritual forces' (Gifford 2022, 124). To be fair to Gifford, he recognizes the limits of cognitive Christianity of the West but also praises

the material benefits of functional rationality that have made the world much more liveable, which he finds evidently lacking in Africa and African Christianity. However, his rational Christianity still resonates with the colonial description of God as an abstract being that requires philosophical reasoning to grasp by Africans.

The Study of Religions of/in Africa: Religious-Philosophical Debate

The third strand is the religious-philosophical. Here, the intellectual struggle of African scholars was to defend the thesis that there existed a 'religion' of Africa prior to colonialism. One of the organizing features of pre-colonial religious structure was its pervasive belief that religion determined virtually every aspect of life in the community. The thesis of religious notoriety or incurability (Parrinder 1969; Mbiti 1969) speaks to the 'lived' and pervasive nature of AIR. Again, the defence of African monotheism, either as 'monotheism' (Abraham 2019 [1962]), 'diffused monotheism' (Idowu 1996), or 'bureaucratic monotheism' (Imasogie 1985), has been criticized for projecting a Hellenized portrait of an African god. The analysis is not whether there exists an African god but what the nature of such a god is when divested of its Hellenized garb. William Abraham (2019 [1962]) philosophically defended the existence of a monotheistic God, arguing that there is ample evidence to conclude that there is an African culture, in a homogenous sense, a claim that Platvoet and Van Rinsum (2003) strongly refute. Abraham rejects a polytheistic conception of God and multiple cultures in Africa.

Whatever the qualifications of monotheism in AIR, one fact has remained indisputable: the belief in other gods. However, one implication that triggered a philosophical reaction was the idea that there were no atheists in Africa. P'Bitek (2011), the Ugandan poet and scholar, was the first African scholar to throw a salvo at such a 'romanticising' idea, arguing that an overarching African God, dressed in Hellenistic garb, does not exist. He also questioned the concepts of heaven and hell, maintaining that they are Hellenistic importations into African religious cosmology. For him, the Acholi people face death with the mind that there is no 'ultra-human' being to console or punish the dead. The radical thing about p'Bitek's reasoning is that he neither spared the European nor the African and Africanist overarching misrepresentations of deities in Africa. P'Bitek's courageous dissent has the unintended consequence of pushing towards reinvestigating and challenging the macro-religious ideas that were themselves meant to challenge the Western views of AIR. One of its outcomes, which still rages today, is the debate between the vitalist conception of God in Africa and those who oppose it. The question of whether or not God is the source of all things captures the positions of both schools of thought (Metz 2023; Agada 2024). Also, both positions speak to the multiplicity of conceptions, which could have been influenced by the cartographic-geostrategic fragmentation of Africa.

For instance, just as the argument that Africa was invented (Mudimbe 1988) in accordance with the goals its creators have in mind is incontrovertible, so were various African deities mistranslated as Satan or the devil, which Mothoagae (2024) refers to as a 'technology of power' to serve dualistic religious and political purposes. Furthermore, the 'creation' of an African Satan that opposes the African God resulted in the perennially intractable problem of evil, suggesting also the existence of a white and black Satan (Igboin 2023). The problem of evil arises for those who defend the omnipotence and omnibenevolence of God, a philosophical problem that is difficult to find in 'traditional' African religious repertoires.

Finally, the questions of atheism and secularism arise because of how religious-philosophical ideas were framed. Although there currently is no empirical evidence to support or refute the claim that all Africans were intensely religious in the pre-colonial period, Platvoet and Van Rinsum (2003) argue that it is also unreasonable to think that there were no atheists. The arguments for and against atheism and secularism in Africa are highly contentious and robust. As with monotheism, these concepts are also qualified as either 'practical' or 'technical',

meaning that there was no unquestioned submission to religious order as the practice of magic suggests (Platvoet and Van Rinsum 2003, 18). Assuming that secularism and atheism are profoundly based in science and philosophy, p'Bitek (2011) argues incisively that the death of the Christian God was caused by science and philosophy and wonders whether African God(s) now being framed in that Hellenistic robe would survive the same onslaught.

Matthew Engelke argues that there seems to be no evidence of an atheistic-secularism in Africa as in the West. He maintains that the existence of a religion, that is, in the sense in which the West conceives it, is the sine qua non for the existence of a secularism, strictly defined; since it cannot be established that Africa had religion, it would be futile to think of the existence of secularism. He states,

> As we are long used to hearing, the secular and the religious are mutually constitutive; but where there is no 'proper' religion—where it's just 'African tradition'—there is nothing 'secular' to be constituted. […] Secularism follows a social-evolutionary logic; it is seen, by its proponents and architects, as an achievement of civilization. Therefore, secularism as a political project only makes sense in relation to a certain kind of society—those with 'world religions,' not just witchdoctors or spirit mediums (Engelke 2015, 5).

From the foregoing, it seems clear that the study of Africa and religions of/in Africa has been predominantly influenced from outside. Despite the efforts of African and Africanist scholars to decolonize this field of studies, certain implications still stand out. First, the issue of the nomenclature of African Indigenous Religion has to be addressed by African scholars if radical decolonization will be achieved. Even with the deep religious history Baum (2024) has undertaken beyond the advent of missions and colonialism, he still uses African Religions in their contested manner, whose naming seems to align with their colonial history. Second, as Engelke argues above, the term 'religion' is still too ambiguous and laden with colonial and Christian denial of 'religion' of Africa. Third, most Africans' disregard for their 'religions' and self-identification as Christians or Muslims poses challenges to the recognition of AIR. Fourth, Christian and Islamic deities such as Satan—I will analyse this in the concluding part—were imposed on African religious cosmologies. Fifth, the Christian and Islamic calendars have overshadowed African calendars in ways that now obscure the presence of AIR in national life. Eight, one of the most devastating effects of Arabo-Christian influence in Africa is the epistemicide of Africa's indigenous and religious knowledge. These do not suggest that Christianity and Islam are not also reshaped by AIR; in fact, the revivalist movements in Christianity and Islam owe their continued relevance to the traditional African religious repertoires. It is these implications that call for a decolonial-pluriversal turn.

The Study of Religions of/in Africa: The Decolonial-Pluriversal Turn

Most, if not all, of the earliest African scholars who attempted to present an African version of their religions were trained in Western methodologies and epistemologies. However, most of them, being either Christians or Muslims, had already imbibed a modicum of the African religious traditions as lived religions. Scholars like John Mbiti, Bolaji Idowu, and many others tried to decolonize African religious traditions but apparently ended up Christianizing the same traditions they tried to 'deliver' (Bewaji 1998). Although their works have provided great resources for academic exploration, critics and African scholars have debunked many of the contents they propagated. This sets the tone for more radical decolonial thematic methodologies and activism, aimed at divesting the African religious worldview and lived experience of Western speck.

The matrix of power thesis is more expressly stated by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) when he argues that decoloniality is both epistemic and political and aimed at the liberation and freedom

of those who were directly colonized and those who are now under the boulder of coloniality globally. This two-pronged approach to decoloniality means that African intelligentsia must epistemically disrupt and reject the colonial vestiges of knowledge that have, for a long time, taken overriding precedence over African indigenous knowledge systems. The political aspect of decoloniality aims to dismantle the governance structure, which has obliterated the African pre-colonial political system in favour of Western political ideologies. In this sense, decoloniality becomes both a theoretical and practical struggle for freedom in order to regain the capability and agency to re-enact African values, religions, politics, and life generally. The issue of agency is peculiarly instructive because it allows for the voice of Africa to be heard and for Africans to take the lead in their affairs as opposed to external interference and dictation.

One of the ways in which epistemic decoloniality is taking place is through the deployment of thematic re-analysis of themes in AIR and other religions in Africa. As Desai and Masquelier (2018), Grillo, Van Klinken, and Ndzovu (2019), and Aderibigbe and Falola (2022) among others have done, a thematic approach to the study of religions of/in Africa has assumed a decolonial turn, critically and sympathetically reassessing the themes in light of new understanding devoid of colonial colouration. However, this approach is sometimes comparative and also tends to gravitate towards religious intersectionality. In addition, it analyses themes from contemporary understanding of them and as they arise from the West. For instance, themes such as gender, sexuality, feminism, human rights, secularism, economics, ethics, and so forth tend to be broadly defined from Western perspectives and are then contextualized in AIR.

However, Adogame (2022) takes an empirical-analytical model to re-examine the colonial historiographical and religious analysis of indigenous Africa, while Ogen pursues his decoloniality via revisionism, methodologically and theoretically questioning 'the absolute authority of archival documents and straight oral narratives derived from official sources in African historical reconstruction' (Ogen 2024, 3). Ogen argues that through revisionism, African intelligentsia will be able to challenge the Western hierarchical-epistemological narratives that AIR is tolerant, a politically correct position that has no corresponding mutual respect from the West. Instead, it should be noted that 'one of the most potent forces which human beings use to rally oppressed people together in their drive towards freedom and emancipation from their oppression is religion' (Ogen 2024, 16). Here lies the aesthetics of revisionism, but it could also be perspectival and selective.

Conclusion

Having seen the Western dominance of the religions of/in Africa, what does the future of the study of religions hold in Africa? One way to answer the question is to argue that the future study of religions in Africa will follow the historical trajectories argued above. The reasons are not far-fetched: lack of interest in studying religious studies; lack of funding for scholarships; politics of knowledge production and circulation; lack of radical resistance to imposition of curriculum—most universities in Africa lack academic and institutional autonomy to develop content that reflects their world views. The continued dictate from the World Bank and IMF, for instance, has adversely affected the quality of education and its contents in Africa. Mbembe (2016, 32) notes that it is not only wrong but also demeaning to continue with a colonial curriculum that has taken agency from the African students, constantly reminding them of their 'worthlessness'. Even in the West, there were protests against curriculum imposition, as demonstrated in 2014 by the students at University College London tagged: 'Why is my curriculum white?' (Kessi et al. 2020, 272). The 2015 #RhodesMustFall and 2016 #FeesMustFall in South Africa demonstrate the power of decolonizing structures, which for a long time denied Africans' power, agency, and influence in knowledge and politics (Kessi et al. 2020).

The other way to answer the question is to set and adopt a decolonial-pluriversal agenda. In this case, decoloniality is not only to challenge the invention of Africa, question and redress inequality in Africa, and study the religions of/in Africa, but also to acknowledge other credible views of Africa and dialogue with their proposers. This approach not only examines how knowledge and power have been defined and denied but also how they can be redefined and reacquired for critical engagement with curriculum and activism (Kessi et al. 2020). As Laura van Broekhoven puts it: 'Real decoloniality is to see each other's knowledge systems as equal' (cited in Gifford 2022, 123–24). Mutual respect becomes imperative if decolonial-pluriversal methodology will achieve its goal of shifting from perspective—one way of viewing the world—to pluriversalism, diverse ways of viewing reality.

In my teaching of philosophy of religion, for example, I have made my students realize that there are five sets of God and 'Satan' in Africa at present. The first is the traditional concept of God and 'Satan', who are not antagonistic to each other but work harmoniously to ensure human flourishing. The second is the Christian God and Satan, who are in constant struggle, but Satan would be defeated ultimately. The third is the Islamic God and Satan, who struggle against each other, similar to Christianity's perspective. The fourth is the philosophical God and Satan that are being debated, thanks to the influence of Christian philosophy of religion. The fifth is the eclectic God and Satan, who combine the characteristics of the four sets above, which are mostly visible in deliverance ministries of African Pentecostalism and Islam (Igboin 2021b). Although Satan did not exist in traditional African religious cosmologies, it is now difficult to oust it from African religious repertoires. Through this decolonial-pluriversal approach, I have been able to establish that there exists AIR side by side with Christianity and Islam.

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