God, Land, Identity: Divine Fluidity and a Spatial Ecclesiology in West Africa

Clement Kanu

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GOD, LAND, IDENTITY: DIVINE FLUIDITY AND A SPATIAL ECCLESIOLOGY
IN WEST AFRICA

A Dissertation
Presented to McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

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

By
Rev. Fr. Clement Kanu, MSP

December 2019
GOD, LAND, IDENTITY: DIVINE FLUIDITY AND A SPATIAL ECCLESIOLOGY
IN WEST AFRICA

By

Clement Kanu

Approved November 18, 2019

Prof. Elochukwu Uzukwu
(Committee Chair)

Dr. Gerald Boodoo,
(Committee Member)

Dr. Bogdan Bucur
(Committee Member)

Dr. Kristine L. Blair
Dean, McAnulty College of Liberal Arts

Dr. Marinus Iwuchukwu,
Chair, Theology
ABSTRACT

GOD, LAND, IDENTITY: DIVINE FLUIDITY AND A SPATIAL ECCLESIOLOGY IN WEST AFRICA

By
Rev. Fr. Clement Kanu, MSP
December 2019

Dissertation supervised by Professor Elochukwu Uzukwu

African theology is burdened with a major problem of identity, which stems from the lack of African history and memory in African theology. African theologians in the face of the delicate dilemma of creating a theology that is both African and Christian, have fallen into the epistemological compulsion to impose western Christian theological categories as foundational to African theology. Inculturation thus presupposes the already alien space on which the structures of the present ecclesiology is anchored. The result is a peripheral inculturation, a consumer ecclesiology, always seeking to solve its local pastoral problems in accordance with alien incongruous codes and canons, and a church that continues to look up to the west for theological products and directions for use. This dissertation proposes a retrieval of the West African sacred space as a proper site for West African theology. Anchored on the fluid conceptualization of divine embodiment
and revelation, a string of tradition extant in the Hebrew Scriptures, in traditions that lay
claim to the Hebrew Bible (notably Catholicism), and in African traditional religious
cosmology, this dissertation establishes the West African sacred space as an independent
revelatory economy. I contend that the fluidity model cuts the Gordian knot in the effort
to develop an ecclesiology that is both African and Christian, yet, founded on the
structures of an African revelatory space. A new ecclesiological scheme that though
independent, and different from the western/Roman categories, does not diminish faith in
Jesus Christ, nor destabilize the oneness of God’s people in the universal Church.
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General Introduction – Thesis/Statement of the Problem

In one of the founding essays in “Intercultural Theology”, Walter J. Hollenweger asserts: “The dominant culture has always been the culture of the dominant class, and theology is no exception to this”. Accordingly, theological ‘raw materials’ in non-dominant traditions have always been ignored, or at best, regarded as inappropriate tools for doing theology. The globalization of Christianity, trends in decolonization, the phenomenological turn in theology, and arguments proposing the non-existence of a pre-contextualized gospel however, have exposed that non-Western variants of Christianity and human realities can no longer be adequately described by theological categories developed in the West.

From an African perspective, the initial encounter between African and Western cultures and religions bring the above debate into focus. According to Peter Schineller, the faith encounter between the two cultures (African and European) was characterized by imposition: “In this view, the church becomes like most colonial powers, believing that it has the truth embodied in a superior culture, and that those it encounters are inferior and without true values or a significant cultural heritage”. Schineller’s contention brings to the fore the problems of a ‘colonial Christianity’ that not only greeted the shores of sub-Saharan Africa, but has eaten into the fabrics of ecclesial structures, and become the norm in the way of being church, even amid inadequacies. This underscores the discomfort with the missionary enterprise among many African theologians. According to Bolaji Idowu for instance, “Africans were required to shed their Africanness as part of the process of

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becoming Christians…it is now clear that by a misguided purpose a completely new God who had had nothing to do with the past of Africa was introduced to her peoples”.\(^3\)

Similarly, Ben Udoh observes that “Christ is a total stranger and an illegal alien to the indigenous religion, entering into the scene as a forceful, and unfriendly tyrant…invalidating the history and institutions of the people in order to impose his rule upon them”. He therefore wonders how Christ could be the model for African values when he is “the most visible publicized symbol of foreign domination and violence”.\(^4\)

Idowu’s concept of “a completely new God” and Udoh’s observation about the stranger-status of Christ touch at the separation of a triad connection of God, land, and individual/community identity. They explain the gulf between ‘church-life’ and ‘social-life’ as spirituality was robbed from the people and inserted into an institution. In fact, they hint to the displacement of an indigenous sacred space and the imposition of an alien space as the foundation for ecclesiology, doctrine, faith, theology, and morality. One of the consequences of the above is the creation of a “uniformist ecclesiology…a church which is dependent on all levels and which is turned towards Rome – a church which from the start, was ignorant of its autonomy as a local church in the one church”.\(^5\) Consequently, ecclesiology becomes text-centered, doctrinally oriented, and concerned with issues of *Lex Credendi*. Within these ‘texts’ God is frozen, and an autonomous, constituting, and self-asserting subject who claims the totality of God’s knowledge assumes control. The subject not only sets limits to God’s self-revelation, but also determines the categories and

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\(^4\) Enyi Ben Udoh, *Guest Christology: An Interpretative View of the Christological Problem in Africa* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1988), 64-75

concepts of that revelation. People’s religious and cultural particularities are thus compromised, and theology is divorced from its historical and contextual foothold. Such an approach reduces the experience of being church to a “submit mentality”. Accordingly, history, memory, and reminiscence - the anchors of theology and revelation on which ecclesiology is built are diminished, such that the God who reveals the Godself in West African history is lost in West African theology. Theology thus becomes an intellectual exercise confronted with the task of vindicating western Christian identity with its religious and intellectual heritage. Bediako points to the African Christian identity crisis when he notes that by not allowing a space for African memory in African theology, the missionary enterprise fashioned for Africa “a church without a theology”, and “threatened to deny African Christians their own past and sought instead to give them a past which could not in any real sense become fully theirs”. The result is a displacement of ecclesiology – a way of being church that is divorced from the land, the God of the land, and the people’s identity and faith encounter. The effects of the above problem are obvious in West African Churches, and have engendered a lot of theories among many African writers in what has become a paralyzing theoretical dilemma. Essentially however, inculturation has been posited as the appropriate model for giving an African face to ecclesiology.

The abundant literature on inculturation reveals two ways of appropriating the subject: from the bible to African reality, and from African reality to Christian theology. The second

7 Kwame Bediako, Theology and Identity: Impact of Culture Upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa (Milton Keynes: Regnum Books International, 1999), 236-7
8 There are two schools of contemporary African theology: Inculturation and Liberation theology. Inculturation however is by far the most common and most developed theological school on black Africa. For details, cf. Robert J. Schreiter, ed., Faces of Jesus in Africa (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991)
approach enjoys a wider support. Here, the African worldview becomes the point of
departure. The mystery of Christ is examined from the perspective of a particular theme or
themes taken from the African context. Benezet Bujo for instance, starts his Christological
reflection from African ancestral beliefs and practices. According to him:

In Africa, the *gesta* of ancestors are constantly re-enacted through ritual. This
enables the African to recall these *gesta* and to conform his conduct to them. Such
rituals become a life-and-death rule of conduct, guarantors of salvation, and a
testament for posterity. In other words these rituals become a commemorative
narrative soteriology, which assures unity of the past present and future community
including the dead.9

From this background, Bujo reflects on the mystery of Christ and sees him as proto ancestor,
the source of life and the highest model of ancestorship.10 Through the incarnation Christ
assumed the genuine aspiration of our ancestors. He therefore becomes the unique and
privileged locus of total encounter with other ancestors, and allows them to localize where
we encounter the God of salvation. Charles Nyamiti extends this understanding to the
Trinity and conjectures that the Father is the ancestor of the Son, the son is the descendant
of the Father, and the two live their ancestral kingship through the Spirit whom they
mutually communicate to as their ancestral oblation and Eucharist.11 Similar efforts in this
model of inculturation by prominent African theologians have led to the identification of
Christ as elder brother,12 chief healer,13 master of initiation14 etc. The originality and
genuine creativity in the above contributions to African Christian theology cannot be

9 Benezet Bujo, “A Christocentric Ethic for Black Africa” in *Theology Digest*, vol. 30 no. 2 (1982), 145
10 Ibid.
as our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective* (Gweru Zimbabwe, 1984); “Ancestral Kinship in
the Trinity: An African Theology of the Trinity” in *Inculturation: Working Papers on Living Faith and
Cultures*, vol.IX (Rome 1987), 29-48
12 Harry Sawyer, *Creative Evangelism: Towards a New Christian Encounter with Africa* (London: SPCK,
1968), 72ff
13 Aylward Shorter, *Jesus and the Witchdoctor: An Approach to Healing and Wholeness* (New York: Orbis,
1985)
14 This is the argument of A. T. Sanon, cf. Robert Schreiter, *Faces*, 8
doubted. In fact, this is perhaps the first time in the history of sub-Saharan Africa to express and expound systematically the mystery of Christ in African categories.\(^{15}\) Expressions like ‘Jesus the ancestor’ or ‘Jesus the master of initiation’ cannot be adequately appreciated without reflecting on their African background, hence, their originality.

Based on these seeming similarities, inculturation has been proffered as an adequate framework for dialogue between Christianity and the African context. A critical examination however would expose the inadequacies and defects of this model. From a theological perspective, one cannot present Jesus as an ancestor or master of initiation, and pretend that it connotes the same reality as the Christian Jesus. While the Christian Jesus is equal to God, the ancestor is neither equal to God nor an object of worship. Timothy Tennent expresses my concern here rather succinctly: “Ancestors are not gods even though they are highly regarded”.\(^{16}\) Furthermore, the effort to enthrone Jesus as the proto, privileged, or most perfect ancestor, to my view, is not only a mismatch and a colossal disregard of the fundamental differences between the two religions, but a religious invasion, an unconscious perpetuation of the missionary model that displaces the traditional cults and presents the western experience of divine revelation in Jesus Christ as the only valid one. It is an implicit acknowledgment that the revelation of God through the indigenous religion is not adequate. Christ must not be forced to become an ancestor in order to legitimize the ancestral cult. Put differently, the values of African traditional cults can stand on their own as a genuine locus of divine revelation. The above mismatch is not surprising


\(^{16}\) Timothy Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church is Influencing the way we Think About and Discuss Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 131. See also, Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *Christ and Reconciliation: A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World*, vol.1 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2013),77
since the very concept of incarnation on which inculturation is founded is itself an alien concept.

On the practical level, the relevance of the above model is minimal. For instance, the typical Nigerian Christian in the pew does not only look at Christianity as superior to the indigenous religion, but would never refer to Christ as ancestor or master of initiation because the traditional cults are still considered ‘pagan’. The prevalent title of Christ today (in Nigeria for instance) is not ancestor but Lord. It is therefore not uncommon that Christians and converted traditionalists destroy ancestral shrines in order to proclaim that they have accepted Jesus as their Lord and savior. The practical relevance leaves more to be desired. Little wonder why Bujo refers to inculturation as “being too academic and a pompous irrelevance, truly an ideological superstructure”, found in theological literatures, libraries and shelves. Underlying the above impasse is the presupposition implicit in the prevalent model of inculturation that presupposes the already alien space on which the structures of the present ecclesiology is anchored. Extricating Africa from the above alien structures have proven a herculean task due to the fact that African theologians in the face of the delicate dilemma of creating a theology that is both African and Christian, have fallen into the epistemological compulsion to impose western Christian theological categories as foundational to African theology. This compulsion which sometimes stems from an initial allegiance to the structures of a particular revelatory framework unconsciously diminishes the appreciation of the equal validity of the African revelatory

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space, and ultimately fails to detach Africa from the anomalies of an imposed alien ecclesiological scheme manufactured in the west in response to western crises before and after the reformation, an ecclesiology that at its very root, does not reflect the African situation or West African crises. The result is a peripheral inculturation, a consumer ecclesiology, a church that not only seeks to solve its local pastoral problems in accordance with alien incongruous codes and canons, but a church that continues to look up to the west for theological products and directions for use.

**Specific Contribution and Methodology**

I intend therefore in this dissertation to propose a retrieval of the West African sacred space for West African theology and ecclesiology. I do this by studying as a model, the fluid conceptualization of divine embodiment and revelation, a string of tradition extant in the Hebrew Scriptures, in traditions that lay claim to the Hebrew Bible (notably Catholicism), and in African traditional religious cosmology. The fluidity model validates multiple revelatory channels, extricates God from the clutches of a constituting subject, and ensures the smooth integration of two revelatory contexts. I detail how the fluidity model guided the smooth integration of the El religion and the god Yahweh such that nowhere in the Hebrew Scriptures, even among the most conservative prophets do we find any polemic against the god El. The fluid orientation was able to uphold the El-based theological structures on which the religious and political lives of the people were founded without compromising faith in Yahweh nor the unity of God’s people. I contend that the fluidity model cuts the Gordian knot in the effort to develop a theology and ecclesiology founded on the structures of an African revelatory space without diminishing the faith in
Jesus Christ, and the unity of God’s people in the universal Church. I therefore examine the West African sacred space as an independent revelatory economy, upholding the triad connection of God, land, and identity. Accordingly, I investigate the West African pre-colonial political, religious, and family structures (with a focus on the Oyo Empire and the Igbo traditional family), highlighting the values on which ecclesiological life could be founded. This goes deeper and beyond inculturation. While inculturation (as currently practiced) presupposes an ecclesiology that already has its tap roots on an alien space, seeking only to dress it up in local attires while drawing from alien concepts, this dissertation proposes the West African sacred space as the very foundation of ecclesiology. The contention here about an independent revelatory economy anchored on the fluid conception of divine self-manifestation is not unknown to Catholicism. In fact, implicit fluidity in Catholicism’s core doctrines and practice such as the doctrine of the Trinity, Incarnation, Eucharist, and the practice of multiple liturgical rites demonstrate that Catholicism’s undue emphasis on the anti-fluidity model is a contradiction to the professed nature of God, hence, a theological inconsistency.

Methodologically, this project uses a historical approach to study the fluidity of divine embodiment in ancient Israel and in traditional West Africa. This approach exposes the triad connectivity of God, land, and identity in the two scenarios. The same approach is also utilized to investigate the displacement of the said triad connectivity and the imposition of an alien space. The historical exegesis exposes the estrangement that accompanies an ecclesiology that thrives on an alien space, and the implications of a uniformist ecclesiology that imposes models drawn from entirely foreign histories. Investigating the political and family structures of pre-colonial West Africa and evaluating
the embedded values, this dissertation seeks to locate the West African sacred space as a real and proper site for revelation, theology, and ecclesiology. The fluidity model viewed in the light of a West African spatial theology not only upholds an ecclesiology that is faithful to the nature of the manifestation of Godself, it also ensures that the land, its people, and its history have a dominant role in the formulation of doctrine and morals, hence ensures that local pastoral issues are not addressed by alien incompatible laws drawn from other peoples’ histories, and couched in revelatory and doctrinal vocabulary. It does not avoid a reorganization or dismantling of prevalent foundational structures, rather it rejects any type of inculturation that is guided, constituted, and limited by a particular form of revelation. It fosters a more accountable system of episcopal authority in accordance to indigenous values, allows peoples’ identity to be given by the land rather than an ecclesial institution, assures an ecclesiology that is not detached from its cultural roots, allows people to express their faith in the context of their values, memory, history and institutional heritage, acknowledges the freedom of God who cannot be constituted by set categories, promotes unity rather than uniformity, anchors theology in its historical and contextual setting, and creates an ecclesiology that is more in tune with peoples way of life.

**Chapter Summary**

I. **God, Land, Identity – The Case of Ancient Israel**

The first chapter studies the model of Ancient Israelite experience where land and culture are central to relationship with the divine.\(^{19}\) I investigate the pre-state family

\(^{19}\) Here I utilize the work of Benjamin Sommer who has done an extensive study on this. Cf. Benjamin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)
structure and household religion in Ancient Israel beginning with the patriarchal period.  

As opposed to the later official religion of the state, this period is characterized by personal piety and the concerns of small family groups. Centered on the *El*-deities, the ‘patriarchal religion’ has the family structure at its foundation, evident in the idea of God as associated with family images. According to Rainer Albertz, “the God worshipped in the family is the God of the father or forefather”. The description of the ancestors of Israel in association with אֲבֵ֥י בֵּית (father’s house), progeny, crops, illness, childbirth, and the worship of localized forms of the deity *El*, are also characteristic. This motif endures during the exodus, where Yahweh (a mountain god of southern Palestine), was adopted as a liberation god. The chapter thus probes into the origin and adoption of the god *Yhwh*, and its fusion to *El* as anti-domination gods. The same liberation motif also characterizes the later pre-state tribal alliances. Here, we note a highly voluntary, populistic, and decentralized nature of cult and politics. Within this religious space, “the holy place was not protected by high walls, God had not yet been enclosed in the darkness of a temple building”. The above consideration exposes a line of tradition that clearly portrays the fluidity of divine conceptualization within the ancient Israelite religious system. Within this tradition, God manifests the Godself in multiple bodies without compromising the unity of the Godself. I investigate the fluidity model of divine embodiment as contained in the Elohist and Yahwist traditions, and its rejection by the Priestly and Deuteronomist traditions.

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21 Rainer Albertz, *A History*, 30
22 Rainer Albertz, *A History*, 85
Accordingly, the chapter analyses archeological findings, and some scriptural verses, which point to the localization of Yhwh in a number of geographical manifestations, and the multiplicity of divine embodiment. I examine ancient Hebrew inscriptions such as “Yhwh of Samaria” and “Yhwh of Teman” on earthenware jars discovered in the 1970s at Kuntillet Ajrud (eastern Sinai), which was the home of an Israelite Caravan in the 8th century BCE; the plea of Absalom in 2 Samuel 15:7, which strongly indicates that the Yhwh of Hebron is distinct from the Yhwh of Jerusalem; other instances of this phenomenon including the divine presence in wood (Deut. 33:16), stone (Gen 28:16-19, 31:13, 35:14), fire (Ex.3), and heavenly bodies - Malakh (Gen. 18; 32, Judges 6:14-21); and the fluidity and anti-fluidity conceptualizations of the tented divine presence according to the different scriptural traditions.

The chapter further studies the displacement of the above model and the institution of a centralized cult. With the coming of the Monarchy, a hierarchical, static, and king-controlled religion was established. As King, Solomon deliberately eliminated the tribal system of decentralized power. He re-mapped the traditional clans into tax districts with a leader appointed from the center, who in turn was primarily accountable to the king. Accordingly, the power of a centralized state and cult was strengthened, the tribal autonomy was weakened and revolt against oppression was kept at bay. The formation of a centralized state during the Monarchic period, and the fusion of the throne and the altar, disorganized what constituted the original religion, and the system of Israelite

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23 Eastern Mennonite University Professor of theology and peace studies, Ted Grimsrud points out that with Solomon’s temple, God ceases to be free, ceases to be a community-god as in the covenant community under Moses, but becomes a god who would not act apart from the king’s agenda. “God is now fully accessible to the king, and, in effect, available to the king at all times. A God who may actually act independently of the regime in power is repressed in favor of a God of the king”. Cf. Ted Grimsrud, “King Solomon and Temple Politics: 1Kings 1-9”. Online @ http://peacetheology.net/the-bible-on-peace/12-king-solomon-and-temple-politics/
worship. Yahweh metamorphosed from a fluid god of liberation, to a centralized god of state domination and oppression. Competing forms of religious ideas emerged. On the one hand were the priests of the state sanctuary, who propagated the official theology of king and temple, on the other hand were opposition voices such as the prophet Hosea who associated the monarchy with idolatry. One thing was clear, the triad connection of God, land, and identity has been displaced. The effect of this dislodgment is that God ceases to be wild and free, but rather is constituted by the highest religious authority, contained in ‘God’s house’ and is repressed in favor of the authority’s preferences.

The final shape of the Hebrew Scriptures was structured by the anti-fluidity oriented priestly and deuteronomist editors. It would thus be expected that subsequent Jewish traditions would uphold the rejection of the fluidity model, but this is clearly not the case. On the contrary, the notion of a fluid single God who is free to manifest Godself in several bodies while maintaining the oneness of the Godself is so strong that it endures in post biblical Jewish traditions. The chapter therefore concludes by studying the persistence of the fluidity model in rabbinic writings, Jewish mysticism, New Testament, and other traditions that lay claim to the Jewish scriptures, notably, Catholicism. Core doctrines, including the incarnation, Trinity, and trans-substantiation are examined.

II. God, Land, Identity - The Case of West Africa

Traditional African Religious, political, and family structures highlight the triad connectivity between the divine, the land, and the individual/community’s identity. In the second chapter therefore, I first examine the different models of African religious worldview, exposing a particular pattern of theo-supremacy, different from the western idea of supremacy/sovereignty as applied to God, best captured by the form of monotheism
advocated by Deutero-Isaiah with its co-ordinates of absoluteness, rigidity, jealousy, and monopoly of divine powers. On the contrary, the concept of the one supreme God in African Traditional Religion operates within a space of shared omnipotence, as it accommodates the abundance of deities “who operate with liberty and responsibility for the good of humans in the areas of their competence”.24 The deities, variously conceived and manifested in different regions according to the peoples’ spiritual perception, exude a dynamic relationship among themselves, the human, and the cosmos. Like the fluid self of the Hebrew Yahweh, the phenomenon of shared omnipotence diminishes the seeming paradox in divine unity/multiplicity, transcendent/immanence, or distant/nearness; exposes a God who can manifest the Godself in different objects and spaces without diminishing divine unity; and frees god from the prison of human conceptualizations. I investigate this dynamic of theo-supremacy in West African religious worldview by studying the operations of the Igbo earth goddess, highlighting the ontological connectedness that exists between the divine, the land, and the community’s identity. Analyzing the land and the earth goddess, in addition to an impressive number of elements and symbols in the African religious worldview for instance, Robert Fisher underscores the inseparability between religion and social reality, observing that that in a sense, “the land is the community.”25 Due to this connectedness, it is not surprising that the dynamics of theo-supremacy operative in the divine world, is replicated in West African political and family institutions.

The chapter thus further studies the pre-colonial political and family structures. I focus on the political organization of the Oyo Empire and the pre-colonial Igbo family

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These case studies expose that west African institutions image a system of shared omnipotence obtainable in the west African divine universe. The political system of the old Oyo empire clearly separated the theoretical and practical powers of those in authority, especially the king, exposes a democratic balancing of constitutional powers with ingrained systemic checks and balances that renders any form of dictatorship unrealizable. The dynamics of the community’s involvement ensures that the institution of local authority is not alien to the people and that laws originated from local context. These structural values, which stand in contrast to what is obtainable today both in the secular and ecclesial institutions, were not peculiar to the Yorubas. They were also obtainable in other pre-colonial West African governmental systems such as the multicultural confederations of the Songhay Empire and the homogenous states of the Asante.

Similarly, the study of the pre-colonial family institution exposes an independent but complementary dual-sex system where authority is highly distributive, flexible and inclusive, dismantling any form of power monopoly. The dual sex system is predicated on a non-gendered principle, which is fundamentally opposed to subordinatory, and discriminatory tendencies on the basis of gender. I show how this system stands in contrast to the western/Christian gendered system where women are sexualized with its subordinate/superordinate epistemological orientation that dates back in history generating the agitation for equality understood in terms of gender neutrality. This orientation finds

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26 With regard to Igbo family structures, the scholarship of Nkiru Nzegwu is utilized. Focusing on Onitsha, she studies how the pre-colonial Igbo society was a non-patriarchal, non-gendered society operating on a dual but interdependent political systems for men and women. She demonstrates how colonial laws, edicts, and judicial institutions facilitated the creation of gender inequality, leaving the contemporary Igboland in a situation that is nowhere close to the nineteenth century family structure that predated British colonialism. Cf. Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu, Family Matters: Feminist Concepts in African Philosophy of Culture, New York, State University of New York Press, 2006
no place in the traditional West African dual-sex structure which upholds the dignity of both sexes without compromising biological differences.

Having shown how the divine, political, and domestic spheres mirror one another, upholding an integral connectedness of God-Land-identity, I further investigate two decisive events (slavery and colonialism) in the displacement of this triad connectivity. These events contributed immensely to the physical, mental and moral disorientation of West Africa. The effects still linger in what scholars have termed ‘coloniality’.

With regards to slave trade, the first captives to Lisbon attracted the interest of Prince Henry who sent special envoy to pope Eugenius IV explaining his plans for further raids. The pope welcomed the plans and granted him and all who shall be engaged in the said war “complete forgiveness of all their sins…since the heathen were expendable”. I examine the manner and morals of the trade, the transport condition and the colossal effects on the Africans who were separated from their families and land, and inhumanly used for the profit of the slaving countries. I consider the effects of the reification and dehumanization of the African personality, the participation of the African elite, and the lingering effects of the battering of West African institutional and cultural values, which watered the ground for the pursuant of individual gains at the expense of the community. Similarly, colonialism continued the displacement of West African political, moral, and family structures through the inherited (imposed) European nation-state system. Africa’s liberation (independence) was therefore in the real sense an alienation, which is reflected in the societal ills. The rejection of African history, values, institutions, and system of governance by the colonial rule denied Africa the possibility of true liberation.

Independence became an indirect subjugation to European history. Contrasting the success of the Rwandan gacaca system over the western legal procedures, both of which were employed to address the evils of the 1994 genocide, I highlight the effects of the unreflective endorsement and positive branding of western ethos and institutions, which engenders the reluctance to tap into traditional systems for effective replacement of colonial imposed structures, and the reconstruction of Africa on its own terms.

III. An Ecclesiology Built on an Alien Space

This chapter explores how the coming of Christianity displaced the indigenous sacred space and imposed an alien one in order to create unity and uniformity in doctrine and morals. I examine the theological ideology that guided missionary work in Africa, hence, beyond Richard Gray’s and Lamin Sanneh’s emphasis on the role of African agents, I establish that the theological underpinnings that guided the work of evangelization were the same both for the African and non-African mission representatives. It was a uniformist and triumphant theological approach that dualized the identity of the African personality, and pitched the African identity in opposition to a Christian one, thus established new foundations for the building of ecclesial structures in accordance with western categories. The chapter explores the emergence of western ecclesiology in order to highlight that the ecclesiology and its theological substructures that were transposed on West Africa were not timeless revealed truths, but an ecclesiology that developed in response to western crises before and after the reformation. It was not an ecclesiology that reflects the African situation or West African crises. Notwithstanding the glaring different theological outlooks, an ecclesiology manufactured in the west as a result of western exigencies was replicated
in Africa without any contribution from the local theological scheme. At the inception of African ecclesiology therefore is the rejection of African sacred space and the imposition of alien foundations and structures on which present African ecclesiology thrives, with inevitable implications. I study these implications from the theological, sacramental and ethical perspectives. African theologians have not been silent in the face of the identified ecclesiological and theological anomalies. The chapter thus concludes with a critical evaluation of key African voices in key ecclesiological areas: epistemological foundation, liberation/reconstruction, autonomy/communion, and social ethics.

IV. Retrieving the West African Sacred Space for Theology and Ecclesiology

The literature review in chapter three exposes the efforts of African theologians on this subject matter. Having evaluated the theological positions and having identified some implicit limitations, this chapter in expanding the discussion, offers its own contribution by drawing insights from the studied pre-colonial states, family structure, and religious worldview to propose an ecclesiology that is founded on West African values. As opposed to a peripheral imposition of African superstructures over existing alien categories, this chapter seeks to utilize the West African space as proper raw material on which to construct West African theology. Hinged on the fluidity model, I establish the West African institutional values as an independent revelatory economy, hence, a real site for theology and ecclesiology. Affirming the nonexistence of a cultureless ecclesiology, doctrine, and faith, and utilizing the African sacred space as a real ecclesiological site entail a rejection of alien ineffective foundational structures, and a context-based reconstruction. For instance, how can the democratic balancing of constitutional power as experienced in the precolonial African kingdoms challenge the present Roman form of hierarchy in West
Africa, and found the structures for West African exercise of episcopal authority? How can the pre-colonial family structure influence the place of women in West African ecclesiology today? What is the fundamental issue beneath the insignificant influence of the family model as proposed by *Ecclesia in Africa* in the way of being church in Africa today? Why has the form of interaction between faith and culture as proposed by Vatican II not had a significant effect in the West African church? Has the West African church been trying to implement reform models drawn from entirely alien histories? Are the proposed African models of reconstruction saturated with alien concepts? How does a fluid conception of God both challenge doctrinal uniformity, and refocus the sacramental and moral life of Africans? etc. These and other questions occupy the concern of this chapter as it proposes a foundational path to West African ecclesiology. The contention here, while seeking a different path, is not unfamiliar to the Catholic theological enterprise. I draw attention to the fact that the fluidity model is already operative in the Trinitarian nature of God and other core doctrines as professed by the Church. The attempt at its suppression in preference for the anti-fluidity orientation is therefore a theological irregularity.

At the heart of the anti-fluidity model, which engenders the imposition of an alien space is the constitution of God and divine revelation in set categories considered as the only valid one. Part of the argument proffered in this project (that the West African sacred space offers a locus of complete revelation that could stand on its own), is therefore supported by the postmodern theological thinking that presents Revelation as super saturation. This chapter will thus also examine the thoughts of Jean Luc Marion on the
phenomenality of givenness and Revelation as super saturation.\textsuperscript{28} Givenness dispels any understanding of revelation in terms of being to be constituted, rather it allows God to give Godself freed from any ontological, canonical or ecclesial limitations. The arguments in this chapter seek to trace a path to West African spatial ecclesiology that not only endorses a theology of the land, but also holds intact the revelation of God through the land and its history. The aim is to restore West African ecclesiology to its proper place.

Chapter One

God, Land, Identity: The Case of Ancient Israel

1.1 Introduction

Ancient Israelite experience presents a pattern where land\(^1\) and culture are central to relationship with the divine. In fact, at the center of Ancient Israelite conception of the

\(^1\) The land occupies a prominent place in Israel’s relationship with God. Its promise was a constituent part of God’s covenant with Abraham, the exodus was an act of fulfillment, and the law was given in view of life in the land. One of the pioneering works on this subject is Gerhard von Rad’s 1943 essay titled “The Promised Land and Yahweh’s Land in the Hexateuch” 79-93 in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (Philadelphia /London: Fortress/SCM, 1984) first published in German in *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palastinavereins* 66 (1943), 191-204. Here von Rad distinguishes between two conceptions of land: historical and cultic. While the historical comprises the promise to the patriarchs and its realization in the conquest, the cultic points to the belief that the land belongs to Yahweh as expressed in Lev. 25:23 “the land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine”. In line with the cultic conception, one could rightly refer to the land as the land of the god, and to Yahweh as the god of the land. The 1960’s witnessed an influx of dissertations in Israel’s’ land theology with great diversity of viewpoints. For instance, W. Malcolm Clark’s study “The Origin and development of the Land Promise Theme in the Old Testament” (diss. Yale University) rejects the position of von Rad on the originality of the land promise as authentic part of the patriarchal religion. He argues instead that it is a “projection into the patriarchal period of a tradition that originated somewhere” (p. 95). For a detailed study of the development of Israelite economy and the theological implications of the concept of Yahweh as the owner of the land, cf. S. Herbert Bess’ dissertation “Systems of Land Tenure in Ancient Israel” (University of Michigan, 1963). Along the same line, Arthur Mason Brown relates the concept of Yahweh as the giver and owner of the land to the system of inheritance, and the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, cf. “The Concept of Inheritance in the Old Testament” (diss. Columbia, 1965). A comparative study between the Deuteronomistic and priestly tradition has also been carried out by Georg Christian Macholz arguing that while for the Deuteronomists, Israel was constituted by the gift of the land and essentially bound to it such that the loss of the land equals the end of the theological existence of Israel; the priestly tradition considers the “events” rather than the land as theologically constituting Israel as the people of God, such that they remained the people of God wherever they are, cf. Macholz, *Israel und das Land* (Habilitationssechrift, Heidelberg, 1969). In contrast, Peter Diepold argues that for both the Priestly and Deuteronomistic traditions, the land was a *sine qua non* for Israel’s existence as the people of God, cf. Diepold’s published dissertation *Israels Land, Beitrag zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament, BWANT* 95 (1972), see especially pp. 187-188. For an important study on the land and Israel’s relationship to God, cf. Christopher J.H. Wright, *God’s People in God’s Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990). The relationship between God, the land, and the people is also expressed from the African perspective. In the Igbo traditional cosmology for instance, land is a goddess, and it also encompasses the idea of culture such that the word for culture (*omenala*) literally translates into ‘the statues of the land’. From the above survey, three important themes are obvious: a) the land was given by a god, b) the same god remains the ultimate owner of the land, and c) there is a special bond between the people and its land in what Davies described as “umbilical” relationship, i.e. a relationship that is determined and flows from the relationship with God, see W.D. Davies, *The Gospel of the Land: Early Christian and Jewish territorial Doctrine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), see especially Part I. The third theme is especially very important for this project. The use of the word ‘land’ in this study thus has both geographical and cultural components. By land, I mean the vast array of cultural practices that developed mainly within a geographical land, and intimately connect the people to the god of the land, from where flows their identity. While geography is an important element therefore, the cultural component makes it possible to also ‘sing the Lord’s song in an alien geographical land’
divine, as apparent in the Hebrew Scriptures and other archeological and epigraphic data\(^2\) is a materially anthropo-morphic\(^3\) God who nonetheless is radically different from the ‘anthropos’. This God as conceived in cultural terms provides a basis for the identity of the people. Indeed, the creation account that opens the pages of the Hebrew scriptures already explains human physicality as emanating from (hence similar to) the physicality of God. “Let us make human בְּצַלְמֵנוּ (in our image, according to our likeness), declares God in Genesis 1:26. While this passage presupposes a God who has corporeal nature from where the basic shape and distinctive contours of the human corporeality emanates, it also exposes that the human mind cannot conceive of God apart from the reality of the human experience. Other evidence of material anthropomorphism pervade the Hebrew Scriptures. For instance, in Gen. 2:7, God blows breath of life into the nostrils of Adam, an action that suggests that God has a mouth with which to blow; in Gen 3:8, Adam and Eve hear the sound of God taking a walk in the garden, an action that presupposes a human organ (legs) with which to walk. In Gen 3:21, God makes leather garments for Adam and Eve, in 11:5, He comes down to see the tower humans were building, and in 18, he visits Abraham and engages in a discussion with him. God regularly converses with Moses face to face (Ex. 33:11); sits on a throne with a kind of clothing that covers the whole palace, (Isaiah 6:1); and could be seen standing on the alter (Amos 9:1). All these presuppose the human organs

\(\text{\textsuperscript{2}}\) Cf. especially the study of Benjamin D. Sommer on this subject, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

\(\text{\textsuperscript{3}}\) Yehezkel Kaufmann argues that the conception of God in the Hebrew bible is simultaneously spiritual and anthropomorphic. He insists that the biblical God had a form, but no material substance, a phenomenon that Yair Lorberbaum refers to as nonmaterial anthropomorphism. Cf. Kaufmann, *Toledot Ha-Emunah Ha-Yisraelit vol. 1* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Bialik and Devir, 1937), 229-31; Lorberbaum, *The Image of God: Halakha and Aggadah*, (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 2004), 88. Benjamin Sommer however argues that Kaufmann’s contention does not apply to the whole Hebrew bible insisting that many passages portray a more concrete conception of God’s body, a phenomenon he terms material anthropomorphism. Cf. Benjamin Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 2
of hands, eyes, vocal cords etc. The divine body portrayed in these passages presumes a material resemblance with the human body in substance and shape, that which manifests the self in a particular place and time.

However, because He is God, other biblical authors would conceive this body as radically different from the human body, hence God’s body was exceedingly bright and dangerously luminous that “one cannot see God and live” (Ex. 33:20). In fact Isaiah expected to die when he saw God’s body (Is. 6:1ff). Stretching this line of divine conceptualization to its limits, the Christian catechetical tradition has long emphasized a non-corporeal deity, at the risk of presenting a God who is anti/or at least trans-cultural, yet the above biblical passages do not claim that God does not have a body, what is at stake is that God’s body is fundamentally different from that of the human person. Another basic difference between the body of God and that of humans that is of interest to this project, is that while the human body can only be located at a place in any particular time, God’s body is fluid and can manifest Godself in different locations and objects, without compromising the oneness of God. It is the contention of this chapter that at the heart of the Israelite religion is this fluid way of divine conceptualization, where God, culture and the peoples’ individual and social identity are so intertwined that each flows from the other.

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5 It is worth noting that in contrast to the passages that conceptualize God as such, others consider seeing God as perfectly normal as in the case of Abraham (Gen. 18-19) and Amos (Amos 9:1). However in line with Christian and Jewish tradition, many scholars deny the corporeality of the biblical God while ignoring or minimizing the evidence of corporeality that are not only found in the Pentateuch but pervade prophetic writings and the psalms. Cf for instance, Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Theologies of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002)
We therefore begin by studying the ancient Israelite religion and its conception of the divine to some details. The chapter will further explore the line of tradition that clearly portrays the fluidity of divine conceptualization within the ancient Israelite religious system. The Deuteronomic and Priestly efforts to destabilize this tradition, and the influence of the monarchy is also examined. While it was the priestly authors who gave the bible its final shape, the fluidity model which holds God, culture and identity in a relational balance did not simply disappear. The chapter thus concludes by examining the persistence of the fluidity model in the later Jewish traditions (Rabbinic literature and Jewish mysticism), and in Christianity, a tradition that also lays claim to the Hebrew Scriptures.

To the study of ancient Israelite religion, we now turn.

1.2 The Religious System in Pre-State Israel

Historical accounts often present the Israelite religion as a three-stage process of Mosaic religion, Canaanite syncretism, and purified prophetic religion. This perspective flows from the dominant Pentateuchal view that seems to represent the origins of the religion of Israel in terms of the revelation of Yhwh to Moses, the theophany on Mt. Sinai, the giving of the commandments, installation of the cult, and the covenant that followed.

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7 This conception of the beginnings of the Israelite religion does not correspond to historical details. The numerous breaks and discrepancies, and indeed the literary evidence of Exodus-Deuteronomy is far more complicated than in Gen. 12-50 that scholars are yet to explain satisfactorily. The three-source theory gets into difficulties from Ex.19ff, such that its advocates have continued to experience the quagmire of balancing Deuteronomistic redactions and the traditional J, E, and P sources. Even Blum’s outline of a pre-priestly, Deuteronomistic and a priestly composition of the Books of Exodus to Numbers is still blurred as he hesitates to pursue the available texts diachronically cf. Erhard Blum, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990). It is also noteworthy that apart from the mention of Yahweh from Teman/Paran, not a single pre-exilic prophet mentions the Sinai theophany and the exodus tradition, cf. Rainer Albertz, *A History of the Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period* vol. I: *From the*
This view of a Mosaic origin is based on the theological conception that the wilderness period was the time of Israelite salvation, and that Israelite apostasy and defection from Yahweh after the settlement in Canaan led to the exile. But this view only emerged with some certainty after the time of prophet Hosea (end of the 8th cent.), and then was broadly developed by the Deuteronomistic reformers of the 7th cent. Rainer Albertz observes the obvious interest of these reform theologians: they wanted to render the prevailing religious developments in the cultic and political institutions false and illegitimate while creating a new religious identity. Thus an ideal pre-settlement period was contrasted with the formation of the state. Whatever was deemed necessary for the new religious identity was thus anchored on the early period of Israel.8

We cannot however argue for a baseless anchorage of reformist traditions. For instance, Hosea’s branding of the prevailing cultic and cultural existence as apostasy from the true Yahweh religion, his rejection of the kingship as an expression of the wrath of God (Hos. 13:10ff), and his endorsement of the anarchical existence in the wilderness as the ideal model necessary for the rediscovery of the Israelite identity (2:16ff; 11:5), cannot be entirely divorced from the religious tradition of the people. Yet, the point that we need to underscore here is that although we can hardly dismiss the popular Pentateuchal view of the beginning of Israelite religion simply as a result of theological fiction from later religious utopians, the accumulation of traditional material in the Pentateuch “does not offer an accurate picture of historical development”.9 New insights into the study of Pentateuchal criticism make it clear that the popular Pentateuchal conception of the early

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8 Ibid., 24
9 Ibid.
period of Israel derives in its present form only from the early post exilic period,\textsuperscript{10} thus, “there is a period of a good 800 years between it and the real historical course of events”.\textsuperscript{11} A critical look into the traditions present in the Pentateuch shows that the religion of Israel was anchored on a prior substratum, which could be found in the religion of the patriarchs.

\subsection*{1.2.1 The Beginning - The God of the Patriarchs}

In Exodus 3:6, God introduces himself to Moses as “the God of your father…the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob”. This refrain continues throughout the conversation that Moses had with God in the burning bush theophany (Exodus 3-4). Yahweh thus presents himself as no other than the one whom the patriarchs worshipped. The designation “God of Abraham” etc., and the patriarchal stories of Genesis 12-50 relate the beginnings of the people of Israel from the aspect of family history, i.e. “an accumulation of that religious pattern of experience and interpretative schemes, which were customary and native to a family”.\textsuperscript{12} Whereas Julius Wellhausen on the basis of his literary-critical model rejects that the patriarchal narratives have any historical worth, dismissing them as an idealized mirage;\textsuperscript{13} Albrecht Alt, in his influential study, “God of the Fathers”, argues that the patriarchal religion has points of contact with later Yahweh religion and could have been its predecessor. Beginning with the designation “God of Abraham” which occurs in Genesis with a characteristic reference to a group, Alt correlates its affinity with the designation of god in Nabatean inscriptions, and conjectures in line

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\textsuperscript{10} Cf. Erhard Blum, \textit{Studien zur Komposition}, see 351ff
\textsuperscript{11} Rainer Albertz, \textit{A History of the Israelite Religion}, 24
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 29
\textsuperscript{13} Julius Wellhausen, \textit{Prolegomena to the History of Israel}, trans. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies (Edinburgh, Adam & Charles Black, 1885), 319
\end{flushleft}
with social and historical trends of the time that the patriarchal religion is the preliminary stage of Yahweh religion. If however we accept Albertz’s argument from archeological and ethnological materials that the cultural milieu of Palestine presupposed by the patriarchal narratives of Gen.12-50 does not go back beyond the conditions of Iron Age I (from 1200BCE), and that the location of the patriarchs at the time before the exodus is a consequence of a subsequent systemization of a variety of foundational traditions, then we may assume that the narrated piety and beliefs in the family of the ancestors are a combination of practices that were seen as important in the family piety of the narrators time, and a relevant knowledge of what was typical of families before the state. Viewed from this perspective, patriarchal religion could be defined not just as a preliminary stage as Alt argues, but as a substratum of Yahweh religion. This religious stratum of the family is very much older than the mosaic religion; it is the actual beginning, the underlying core on which Israel’s Yahweh religion flourished.

1.2.2 Patriarchal Religion as Family-Based

The shepherd/farmer ancestors of Israel are described in Genesis 12-50 as economically independent family groups (אֲבֵ֥ית - father’s house) with very loose incorporation into an overarching system of affinity (מִּשְפָּחָה - clan). The family in this pre-state period was not only the nexus of economic and social life but also the organizing principle of religion. The father was the priest (cf. Gen. 13:18; 35:7), the cult was largely

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14Cf. Albrecht Alt, “The God of the Fathers” in his Essays on Old Testament History and Religion (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968); translation of “Der Gott der Vater” BWANT 48 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1929). Also taking up Gal. 3:24, Alt spoke of the gods of the fathers as paidagogo to Yhwh. Alt’s study could be considered the starting point of these historical reconstructions.
15 Cf. Rainer Albertz, A History of the Israelite Religion, 28
16 Ibid., 29
17 Ibid.
a family cult, and religious notions and experiences were governed by the needs of family life. In fact, the very notion of God is indicative. The God worshipped in the family was the God of my/your father and forefather (Gen. 31:5; 49:25; 50:17; etc.). Thus, the father’s god belongs to the type of personal god (my God, etc.) who is at the center of the religious life of Israelite families. According to Albertz, only the personal reference in the ‘God of my father’ runs explicitly through the father or forefather of the family, taken over from present or past generation of ‘fathers’, along with many insights and skills, establishing a relationship of trust and belongingness. Hence, “the relationship to God itself is part of the process of tradition within the family”. This becomes even clearer when we consider that the use of the impersonal designation (God of NN) instead of the personal type (God of my father), in the earlier tradition, always refers to a distinction between one family and another, as for instance in the feud between Jacob and Laban in Gen. 31. The question however arises as to the personality of these family gods. Who was the god of the patriarchs? Was he Yahweh as Gen. 17:1 tries to make us understand, or are there other indicators to the specific deities that were worshipped by the Israelite ancestors?

1.2.3 El-Deities as Family Centered/Functional gods

Historical and textual analysis of ANE texts show that the phrase ‘god of my father’ is an appellative, and that the family gods all had names. The ancestors of Israel worshipped a series of el deities: El-ʿElyon in Jerusalem (Gen. 14:19, 22); El-Bethel in Bethel (Gen.31:13;35:7); El-Olam in Beersheba (Gen. 21:33); El the God of Israel in

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18 Ibid., 30
19 Rainer Albertz, A History of the Israelite Religion, 30
20 Compare especially Jacobs statement in verse 42 and Laban’s in verse 53
21 Rainer Albertz, A History of the Israelite Religion, 30
Shechem (Gen. 33:20); and an El-Ro’e in Negeb (Gen.16:13). The first three could be understood as a local manifestation of the great god of heaven, El, who in the Ugarit stands at the head of the pantheon. 22 While the genesis tradition sees these gods as various references to Yahweh, and indeed, the priestly editors of the Pentateuch specifically tell us that the patriarchs worshipped Yahweh under the title El-Shaddai (cf. Gen.17:1; Ex.6:3), there are indications that this was not the case. In fact, the patriarchal narratives lack any proper name with the word Yahweh. All proper names featuring the name of God are compounds of El (e.g. Yishma’el, Yisra’el, etc.). Notwithstanding the on-going scholarly struggle to yet explain satisfactorily the etymology and origin of El-Shaddai, 23 it could be asserted with a significant level of certainty as Klaus Koch suggests, that the god El-Shaddai belonged to family religion before he was transformed into Yahweh. 24 It is quite probable therefore, that various regional forms of the god El were worshipped as family gods among the early Israelite families. In fact, not only before the state when the worship of Yahweh had not yet been established at the tribal level, but even throughout the period of the state, 25 it was clear that the people of Israel did have their own gods on the family or regional level. Thus, Jeremiah sounding a voice of condemnation says of the house of Israel “…..who say to a tree, ‘You are my father,’ and to a stone, ‘You gave me birth.’ For they have turned their backs to me, and not their faces. But in the time of their trouble they say, ‘Come and save us!’ But where are your gods that you made for yourself? Let them come,

22 Cf. Rainer Albertz, A History of the Israelite Religion, 30
23 For a brief excursion on scholarly proposals with regard to its etymology, cf. Ibid., 31
25 Even the practice of giving one’s children names containing Yahweh (a practice that was not noticed in the early monarchical period, but became prevalent towards the end) indicates that at this point, “it became clear that the family as an independent unit and sphere of life had its own world of religious symbols which in no way needed to be identical with that of the state” cf. Rainer Albertz, A History of the Israelite Religion, 32
if they can save you, in your time of trouble; for you have as many gods as you have towns, O Judah” (Jeremiah 2:27-28).²⁶

These family gods, whatever they may be called, were functionally related to the central needs of the small group. Accordingly, the cultic, local, historical, and functional differentiations within the world of the gods, (which are a reflection of geographical and social demarcations) hardly play any role at the level of the family, such that there is almost no religious separation or controversy, since what is expected and experienced from any of the gods is basically the same.²⁷ Jacob’s gods could thus co-exist with the gods his family had brought from Mesopotamia until the late Deuteronomic text of Gen. 35:2 where he calls on his household to put away the foreign gods and purify themselves. Yet even in this tendency towards intolerance so typical of later Yahweh religion, it is striking to note that the transmitters of the patriarchal narratives leave the various divine designations which have come down to them intact, limiting themselves only to identifying these designations with Yahweh. Here there is a further awareness that religious demarcation hardly played any role in the family piety. In the light of the above, Albertz identifies the worship of family gods in the early Israelite families as “monolatrous”,²⁸ since the practical worship of one god completely lacked the exclusiveness and intolerance that was later to be a vital characteristic of Yahweh religion. On the family level, the Deity could authentically exist

²⁶ All English translations of Biblical texts are taken from the Revised Standard version unless where otherwise stated
²⁸ Ibid. This view is contested by Muller who derives exclusiveness from the designation ‘gods of the fathers’. He explains it by the “closedness and poverty of contradiction” in the nomadic world, and regards it as the starting point of later monotheism, cf. Hans-Peter Muller, “Gott und die gotter in den Anfängen der biblischen Religion: zur Vorgeschichte des Monotheismus” in Othmar Keel, ed., Monotheismus im alten Israel und seiner Umwelt, 99-142 (Fribourg: Verlag Schweizerisches Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1980), 126-8. However, Albertz, citing examples of personal piety in the letters from ancient Babylon, argues that Muller’s assertions fail to note the specific characteristics of family piety, cf. Rainer Albertz, Personliche Frommigkeit und offizielle Religion (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1978), see especially 134-139
under different names and objects in different families, while performing identical protective roles.

Various religious events and rituals also depict the family centeredness of the early Israelite religion. A typical example is the promise of a son, which is attested several times in the patriarchal stories. The decisive issue here is the survival of the family. It was of vital importance that children (especially sons) should be born. Biologically, this ensures that a family line is not blotted out of existence, securing the existence of a next generation; economically, it guarantees a constant provision of work force for the family occupation; and socially it guarantees that the elderly in the family are cared for and given a proper burial. The identity of the family was therefore threatened whenever there was a case of childlessness, hence marriage laws in the Ancient Near East attempted to ameliorate this situation by various forms of polygamy and surrogacy (cf. Gen. 16:1-3; 30:1-5; 1Sam. 1:1-2). The lament of a childless woman and the promise of a son were particularly prevalent in the early period before the state.\(^{29}\) At this historical period when social structures transcending the family was very weak, the saving intervention of the god worshipped in the family was absolutely necessary, and very much expected.

Albertz identifies some distinctive features of family piety associated with the event/ritual of the promise of a son: First, the promise often takes place within a specific form of theophany manifested mostly through strangers, who subsequently become significant because of their message and then identified as יְהוָה (Yahweh) or יְהוָה מַלְאָךְ (mal’akh Yahweh) (cf. for instance Gen. 16:7; 18:1ff). Here we note that this form of

\(^{29}\) There are also instances in the later period of Israelite history as could be seen in 1Sam.1; Isa. 54:1-6; Judges 13; 2Kings 4:8-17, but the prevalence in the period before the state was particularly significant due to social circumstances, see Rainer Albertz, *A History of the Israelite Religion*, 33
theophany occurs outside the cult as clearly distinct from the exceptional cultic theophanies where it is clear from the extraordinary signs at the onset that what is being experienced is divine manifestation (Gen. 28:10ff; Ex. 19). The promise of a son therefore exemplifies the view typical of family piety that one can meet God in everyday human encounters. Divine experience is not tied up with an institutional mediator. Secondly, it is a typical female experience. The wife is always the original recipient of the promise (Gen. 16:11; 18:9; Judg. 13:3; 2Kings 4:16). When viewed in contrast to the almost total exclusion of women from the official cult, the central role assigned to the horizon of women experience in family religion is instructive. Thirdly, a specific feature of family piety also becomes clear in the sense that the promise of a son is often given unconditionally, i.e. irrespective of the moral quality of the woman (cf. Gen. 16:7ff). Here, the family god sees to the survival of the family quite independent of the moral behavior of its members. What is important is that the family god acts to deliver the members when exposed to a high degree of danger. Thus in addition to the promise of a child, the family god also rescues small children from the threat of dying of thirst (Gen. 21:16ff), the threat of child sacrifice (Gen. 22), infant mortality (Gen. 21:20), rescues the wife from sexual advances of alien rulers (Gen. 12: 10-20), etc. 30 This unconditional care demonstrates how strongly divine action was related to the distress and needs of the family.

Along this line, the patriarchal story also presents the idea of a god who is very close to his people (Gen. 28:20; 26:3,28; 31:5,42). Here, god is experienced in the context of nomadic families, as one who is “very close to the individual, accompanies him on his way, stands by him in danger and makes his enterprise prosper”. 31 We note here that the

30 For details of these features cf. Rainer Albertz, A History of the Israelite Religion, 33-34
31 Ibid., 35
supernatural danger of the cultic nearness of God is absent, rather, as characteristic of family piety, the nearness of God is a positive and unconditional experience. For instance unlike the episode in Exodus 19 where in preparation for the visit of God, the people not only have to consecrate themselves, wash their clothes and abstain from sexual relations for three days, but must also not approach near the mountain or be put to death; in family religion, God can converse with Abraham, Sarai, Hagar in the most ordinary way irrespective of their external cleanliness or moral quality. The theme of divine closeness may also be part of the distinctive features of the Passover festival. Reflecting on the Passover rites: the date in the spring, eating in haste, the prohibition against leaving anything of the slaughtered lamb, and the blood rite to ward off the destroyer, Rost argues that the festival which has now been handed down to us within the exodus tradition was originally such a religious accompaniment to the change from winter to summer pastures. He insists that despite its later connection to the agricultural festival of the harvesting of the grain (massot), and the reference to the religious liberation of the people, and despite its temporary reorganization as a pilgrimage festival in the Deuteronomic reform (Deut. 16) the Passover remained a family festival.\(^{32}\) Here again we see the functional aim of god’s nearness to ward off demonic powers which could endanger human and animals when transiting from one grazing ground to another, which as Gen. 32:23-33 and Ex. 4:24-26 indicate, could be a proper fear. Indeed, the protection of the gods was a typical need of nomadic families especially when in need of personal prosperity (Gen.30:25ff), or when exposed to the dangers of more powerful states into whose territory it became necessary to move in times of drought and famine (Gen. 12:10-20; 26).

Just like the nomadic families were too small and weak to defend themselves by force of arms, so too the intervention of their gods was completely unwarlike. The experience of Isaac’s family in Gen. 26:19ff is typical. The Isaac family had to yield twice to the dispute with the herders of the city of Gerar over the ownership of wells discovered and dug by the family of Isaac. Their god does not intervene militarily into the dispute, but simple safeguards the life of the family by helping them discover new wells. The divine support finally ends in the peaceful treaty with the city king. Similar scenario also occurs in Gen. 31:53 between the families of Jacob and Laban, where the family gods had only the function of protecting the treaty between the two. The contrast between the above examples and the warlike nature of the later Yahwistic religion of Israelite tribes not only depicts the unwarlike nature of the patristic family religion, but also demonstrates that the idea of God is closely connected and flows from the peoples identity, occupation, culture and status.

Another feature associated with patriarchs especially in their numerous migrations is the discovery of holy places, and/or the building of altars, erection of cultic stones, and planting of sacred trees once they settled in the new place. These objects, as we shall discuss later, could embody their god. The הַתְר פִֵ֖ים (hateraphim – household gods) which Rachel steals from her father Laban (Gen. 31:19, 34:ff) are obviously small figurines of deities in the possession of the family, as they are called both אֱלֹה ָֽי׃ and אֱלֹהֶיך (my gods and your gods) in verses 30 and 32 respectively. Evidently, these household gods are part of the ancestral heritage, which served to secure the continuity of the family and solidarity between one generation and the next. Rachel’s theft may thus be seen “as a resolute attempt to salvage the continuity of her family from the break and separation between the families

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because of the refusal of an appropriate legacy (cf. vv. 16, 19).”

Interestingly, Rouillard and Tropper argue convincingly on functional-etymological grounds that the teraphim could be images of deified ancestors. This argument is not out of place since in 1Sam. 28:13 the spirit of the dead Samuel is called elohim just like the teraphim in Gen. 31:30, 32, and the spirit of the dead like the teraphim had a divinatory function (Lev. 19:31; 20:6; Deut. 18:10-11). The idea of ancestral cults in early Israelite families has received some scholarly attention. Loretz vehemently argues in the affirmative. According to him, early Israelites participated fully in the Canaanite cult of the dead as it can still be reconstructed from the Ugaritic texts. This cult, according to him, was only repressed by the Yahweh monotheism of the exilic and post exilic period and replaced by the veneration of the patriarchs. The cult of the dead and ancestor worship ‘as an important part of family piety were in this way corrected by Yahwism and incorporated into the official religion’.

In the light of later dogmatic correction that the official Yahweh religion exercised on the world of the dead, the treatment of the teraphim together with the image of family piety in Gen. 12-50 point to a personal relationship with the god of the fathers that reduced the

34 Rainer Albertz, *A History of the Israelite Religion*, 37. The episode further indicates that the teraphim that Rachel steals are not identical with personal guardian of the Laban and Jacob families since the loss of the figurines does not jeopardize invocation of the God of Nahor to conclude the treaty (v.53). This is supported by Judges 17:5; 18:14, 17ff, 20, where the teraphim is part of the regular gods of household cult distinguished clearly from the cultic image of god proper; and 1Sam 19:13,16 where there is a mention of the figure of a family god which Michal put in David’s bed to give the impression that David was ill.

35 They argue for a derivation from rp’ (heal) and arrive at the functional designation tarpa’im/tarpi’im (healers), similar to the designation rpa’im for the spirit of the dead, originally rop’im (healer) cf. Hedwige Rouillard and Josef Tropper, “TRPYM, Ancient Cult and Healing Rituals in 1-Samuel 19, 11-17 and the Parallel Texts from Assur and Nuzi”, in *Vetus Testamentum*, 37 no 3 (1987), 340-361, see especially 351-60

significance of divinized ancestors to the sphere of safeguarding family continuity, oracles, and perhaps healing functions. Nonetheless,

it is clear that this family cult is still firmly related to the rhythm of the life of the group and that it has not come to lead an independent existence as a distinctive permanent event removed from everyday life. It still had no special cult personnel, the father himself still exercised priestly functions. In general the religion of the early Israelite family was still not bound to the holy places, holy times, and institutional mediator of the holy.37

In contrast to the Yahweh religion of the Israelite tribe characterized by a warlike exclusiveness of the relationship to the god, an excessive infiltration of ethics, the incorporation of politics, and differentiated cultic institutions, the piety that was alive in the early Israelite group was characterized by an unconditional care and direct personal relationship to the god of the family. It was a “pre-cultic, pre-political, and pre-moral religion.”38 Here, there was no demarcation between the god of the land and the group’s social identity and ordinary life.

1.2.4 The Origin and Adoption of the god Yahweh

The origin of the Yahweh religion is indissolubly connected with the process of the political liberation of the exodus group. This group first got to know about Yahweh through Moses, who experienced him on a foreign land while being sheltered by a Midianite priest. Certainly this group was not religionless before they met Yahweh. While the pre-Yahweh religion of the exodus group is vague,39 it is safe to assume from the foregoing that they too had family gods and shared in the worship of Egyptian/Semitic gods in the region. So

37 Rainer Albertz, A History of the Israelite Religion, 39
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid, 49
what is the origin of Yahweh and why was he adopted by the exodus group? To this question, etymological and morphological considerations alone are not enough,\(^\text{40}\) other deeper evidence is absolutely necessary. We begin first by noting that the Old Testament tradition attests that the crucial Mosaic theophany with this god occurred outside the region of later Israelite settlement. He had the encounter on the hilly wilderness in the south of Palestine (Ex. 3:1-6). The local link between Yahweh and this region is attested to in some old poetic texts that variously identify the place as Sinai, Se’ir, the fields of Edom, Teman, or the mountains of Paran. Yahweh sets out from there to come to the aid of his people in Palestine (Judges 5:4ff; Psalm 68:8ff; Deut. 33:2; Hab. 3:3). In fact in Judges 5:5 and Ps. 68:8 Yahweh is specifically identified as ‘the one from Sinai’. Also, the tradition that Elijah undertook a pilgrimage to Horeb (Sinai) in 1 Kings 19 to meet Yahweh, a forty days journey south of Beersheba, suggests that the god Yahweh was connected with a mountain in the desert region of southern Palestine, “even if there are only vague ideas in the old testament

\(^40\) Etymological considerations to determine the nature of Yahweh abound. The Tetragrammaton YHWH appears in the old testament 6,828 times, and its pronunciation is not certain due to the reluctance to utter the divine name since the Hellenistic period. The massoretic vocalization with the vowels of ‘adonay (Lord) leading to the false reading ‘Jehovah’ is not helpful either. However, based on the transcription of labelai or laoue from late antiquity, and Greek transcriptions of Church Fathers, Yahweh is the most probable pronunciation. See, E. Jenni, “Yahweh” in Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997, 522-526), 522. Various short forms (YHW, YHH) are attested to among the Jews in the Egyptian colony in Elephantine in the 5th century, while 9th century inscriptions on the stele of the Moabite king Mesha, and those of Kuntillet ‘Ajrud attest to the full tetragrammaton. Etymological considerations today tend to begin from the Hebrew/Aramaic root HYY/HWI, (be, become) on which the scribal word play in Ex. 3:14 is based. Morphologically therefore, the name Yahweh has acquired a simple explanation as the substantive verb-form of the third person imperfect of the Hebrew verb to be, with the short and long forms described as a form of short and long imperfect. The fundamental objection to these explanations is that “only in the rarest instances is etymology appropriate for making statements about the actual significance of a god. Divine names are often very much older than the religions which use them, and ideas about god change under the cover of same name. It is relatively improbable that Israel was still aware of the meaning of the name Yahweh; the speculative allusion in Ex. 3:14 stands in almost complete isolation” cf. Albertz, *A History of the Israelite Religion*, 50-51. For further perspectives on the origins of the name Yahweh, cf. Thomas L. Thompson, “How Yahweh Became God: Exodus 3 and 6 and the Heart of the Pentateuch” in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 20 no 68 (December 1995), 57-74
about the precise location”. Before he became the god of Israel therefore Yahweh already had his home and was worshipped in the mountain region south of Palestine. The possibility of the abode of this god on this mountain is also attested to in the Egyptian lists from the time of Amenophis III (first half off the 14th cent.), and Ramses II (13th cent.), which attest to Y-h-w3 as a geographical and or ethnic designation in szw land i.e. the same region of southern Palestine.

After his flight from Egypt, Moses is said to have married a Midianite woman whose father was a Midianite priest (Ex. 2:16; 3:1; 18:1). While the OT does not specifically mention Jethro as a priest of Yahweh, his actions in Exodus 18, where he blessed Yahweh who had delivered Moses and the Israelites from Pharaoh; invited the Israelites to a sacrificial meal for Yahweh; and gave Moses counsel on how to teach the people the statutes of Yahweh, suggest that the Midianites or Kenites were already worshippers of Yahweh before the exodus group. Indeed, the Kennites are presumed to be notable worshippers of Yahweh as implied for instance in Gen. 4:15 and Judges 4:17, and their relationship with the Israelites was that of mutual benevolence (cf. 1Sam15:6ff; Judges 1:16). While sufficient doubt could be raised as to whether Yahweh was a specific Midianite god based on the geographical remoteness between the Midianites and the mountain of God on which Yahweh is worshipped (Ex. 3:1), it is safe to assume on

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43 Moses’ father-in-law is variously identified as Jethro (Ex. 3:1), Jether (Ex. 4:18), Hobab (Judges 1:16), and Reuel (Ex. 2:18). Noteworthy is the fact that Reuel was also mentioned among the ancestors of the Edomites (Gen. 36:10,13), which points to a similar area of settlement around the Gulf of Aqaba, cf. Tryggev N.D. Mettinger, “The Elusive Essence YHWH, El and Baal and the Distinctiveness of Israelite Faith”, in *Die Hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte: Festschrift für Rolf Rendtorff zum 65 Geburtstag*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1990), 393-417, 408
44 For the Kennite hypothesis, cf. Ibid., 408ff
scholarly evidence that “the god Yahweh who had his home in the wild mountain of southern Palestine was also worshipped by the nomadic Midianites or Kenites”. It is quite probable therefore that Moses first got to know about this god through his Midianite father in-law before receiving an oracle from him. We can therefore formulate with scholarly merit that Yahweh was a mountain god, who lived in the wild and was worshipped by itinerant tribes who valued their freedom and independence. From this perspective, Yahweh was already a symbol of freedom, having nothing to do with state domination, hence could be adopted by Moses and the subdued Israelites as a symbol of liberation. He became a god of the subjugated Hebrews and took upon himself the course of their liberation.

Thus like the family god, Yahweh personally attaches himself to a group and sees to its survival. In this case however, the group is larger, the need is mostly political, and the god is unknown to the group since he was not part of the Egyptian pantheon. Consequently, there exist some notable differences:

1. Unlike the family gods, the oracles of Yahweh are not given directly but through an intermediary. Moses becomes the receiver of the revelation, sets the process of liberation in motion and organizes the group. Religious representation becomes decisive for relationship with god and the immediacy of relationship typical of individuals in family smaller groups begins to disappear. 2. The saving intervention of Yahweh becomes very complex, and fulfillment of a promise is extremely extended. Whereas at the level of the family religion the promise of a son took only one year, here, the promise of deliverance embraces a historical and political process

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46 Cf. Ibid.
47 Here, I summarize some of the points noted by Albertz, for details cf. Ibid., 48-49
that expands the life span of a generation. While there exists an unconditional character in Yahweh’s approach to the exodus group, it was bound up to a greater degree with the initiative and decisions of those concerned. God gives the promise, but Moses has to make managerial decisions to mobilize the group, and the group has to decide whether to commit themselves to the uncertain word of God and take the risky way to their liberation. From a later perspective of Ex. 4:31, this decision is described by the word ‘faith’, an active political (rather than religious) option, without which the whole enterprise of liberation tends to collapse.

Thus the substance of the historical foundation of the relationship to God among the exodus group is very much more strongly affected by human decision and participation than the original relationship of trust in God in the small family groups. From the start Yahweh religion is more closely focused on a correspondence between divine and human conduct. Given the particular situation in which it arose, it is characterized internally by a demand for loyalty within the group and externally by a tendency to separate itself off. These issues gradually play out in the course of the history of Israelite religion, but here, it is clear that the exodus group adopted the mountain god of south Palestine as a liberation god that brought them from Egypt to Canaan. The question is: what effect did the concept of this god and the religious tradition of liberation have in their social organization within the Canaanite city states which they found themselves and what became of the el-deities that were worshipped within the family religion?
1.2.5 Israelite Tribal Alliance after Exodus

The exodus group that settled on the Palestinian hill country did not immediately imbibe the monarchical political organization that characterized the Canaanite city-states. Rather they developed a process of emancipation that could be described as a “counter-model” \(^{48}\) to the Canaanite system. Two features were central to the developed emancipation process: a striking decentralization with its lack of any central political authority, and a lack of social differentiation. \(^{49}\) As regards decentralization, Gottwald and Lemche have carried out illuminating studies. According to Gottwald for instance, the basic pattern of social organization was tribal, i.e. the social relationships were structured according to a tiered system of actual or conjured patrilineal kinship groups. \(^{50}\) The lowest two tiers of this system: the exogamous family (אֲבֵ֥ית - father’s house), and the endogamous clan (מִּשְפְח - family) formed the actual sphere of life for the individual in which he could expect solidarity, and solidarity could be required of him. The development of authority outside the household is remarkably weak. Hence, it is the family that formed the real economic unit with its own inalienable hereditary system. (nahla - e.g. the law in Lev. 25:23-28; and Naboth’s reply to Ahab in 1Kings 21:3). The family (אֲבֵ֥ית) took to action when a close relative is faced with economic difficulties (for instance the obligation to ransom, Jer. 32:6ff; Ruth 4), and when a father dies without male descendants, levirate marriage was permitted (Gen. 38; Ruth 1-4). On the other hand, the clan (מִּשְפְח) demonstrates active solidarity in marital issues, or when there is need to carry out blood

\(^{48}\) Rainer Albertz, *A History of the Israelite Religion* 72

\(^{49}\) Ibid., see the discussion on pp. 72-76

vengeance (2Sam. 14:7). All further relationships are unregulated by any institution, and
governed by the voluntary principle. On the tribal level for instance, genealogy and
alliances are largely unstable. Membership of the tribe was therefore very loose. The clans
could flip-flop tribes (1Chronicles 7:37; 1Sam. 9:4), tribes could divide (Ephraim,
Benjamin, East and West Manasseh), or merge (Simeon into Judah). The tribe therefore
was simply a political coalition of the families and clans of a region necessitated by security
reasons in the face of threats from the Canaanite city-states.\footnote{51}

The above system of tribal-regional division of society governed the recognizable
political establishments of the time. From OT evidence, two political institutions can be
recognized. First, the elders (zeqanim) i.e. the heads of families or clans in a place, a region,
or a tribe (for instance וֹלֵדֶת רֹאֶים – elders of Gilead, Judges 11:5; and רִיבֵי נַחַל רֹאֶים – elders of
Judah, 1Sam. 30:26). Second, there are the men of the city (שבֵית אַנְשֵׁי – men of Jabesh,
1sam. 11:10), or a region (e.g. גִּלְעַד אַנְשֵׁי – men of Gilead, Judges 12:4ff). Each group acted
as an institution without reference to the other. While the elders carried out minor political
businesses, represented the settlement of outsiders, settled conflicts among the clan, and
carried out negotiations (cf. 1Sam. 6:14; Judges 11:5ff), the assembly of men were in
charge of broader issues such as calling up an army, accepting strangers, and decisions in
matters of war and peace (Judges 11:1; 19:22; 1Sam. 11:10). Albertz describes this as a
“primitive form of democracy which ultimately depended on the consent of all
concerned”.\footnote{52} Apart from these ‘democratic’ institutions one can hardly recognize any
other offices of political power. The authority of the leader (נְכִי) or head (נֹחַ) as in the

\footnote{51} Norman Gottwald, Tribes of Yahweh, see chapter 3, especially 94-124
\footnote{52} Rainer Albertz, A History of the Israelite Religion, 74
case of Jephthah in Judges 11:6, 9 is limited to the time of crises. In times of peace, the clans acted independently, and the sphere of competence of political institutions remained local (one or two clans). Only in times of crises did this sphere extent to a larger tribal collective unit, but even in those moments, participation was voluntary as there was no institutionalized political power to force a locality or tribe into the coalition. Accordingly, there was always a prior campaign to convince people that common action was unavoidable (cf. Judges 7:24). The political set-up was such that beyond the local level, there was no permanent political institution.

The second characteristic of Israelite society at this time was the lack of social differentiation. While there were sparse examples of individual rich people (cf. 1Sam. 25:2), and those who forced others into a servant relationship (the *na‘ar* of 1Sam. 9:7), there was generally minimal social stratification with a domestic economy where work was carried out by all members of the family. Saul still ploughed his field himself (1Sam. 11:5), the families were largely self-sufficient, and the market system was that of regional barter.

This co-existence of minimal social stratification and a functional society in the early Israelite experience has attracted the attention of scholars as they struggle to develop a model with which to describe such a decentralized society that could function with so small a degree of political institutionalization. Crusemann suggests viewing it from the perspective of a ‘segmentary society’ model. Here he sees an ‘acephalous’ and ‘egalitarian’ tribal society, characterized not only by lack of central political authority, but also with

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54 At the level of tribal alliance, no permanent institution is recognizable until it came to an end under the constant threat of the Philistines. Only then did the institution of the elders or men of Israel extend beyond the individual tribes. Cf. Rainer Albertz, *A History of the Israelite Religion*, 74
55 Cf. Ibid.
internal social mechanisms that effectively guards against the accumulation of political and economic power.\textsuperscript{56} Crusemann’s suggestion is preferred by majority of scholars\textsuperscript{57} in this field due to imbedded advantages. According to Albertz for instance, there is an epistemological advantage to this model since it understands the absence of central political institutions not as a weakness but an expression of deliberate political concern. “Its aim is to provide a high degree of freedom and independence for the families and clans which belong to the alliance”.\textsuperscript{58} From this perspective, one could thus understand the tribal alliance of Israel as fundamentally founded on a deliberate political option that is both opposed to domination, and geared towards the welfare of the people. Accordingly, it is intentionally opposed to the monarchical system in the Canaanite city-states, and only allows the institutionalization of political power only to the degree that it is absolutely necessary to safeguard the survival of families and clans. Schafer-Lichtenberger’s observation reinforces the need for this deliberate political preference. He notes that the Canaanite cities with which the new Israelite tribal alliance had peaceful relations (e.g. Gibeon, Shechem) operated on oligarchy or democracy as a political system, whereas the conquered cities had a monarchical stamp.\textsuperscript{59}

The organizing principle of the Israelite tribal alliance was therefore a common ideal of freedom rather than institution. This political ideal is not isolated from the religious

\textsuperscript{58} Rainer Albertz, \textit{A History of the Israelite Religion}, 75
\textsuperscript{59} Schafer-Lichtenberger, \textit{Stadt und Eidgenesschaft}, 205; also cf. 325ff
worldview of the people. On the contrary, the entire system of religious symbols and conceptualization, the adopted god Yahweh and his fusion with El, the head of the west Semitic pantheon, was also central to the liberation ideal.

1.2.6 The Fusion of El and Yahweh as Anti-Domination gods

The very name ‘Israel’ which the tribal alliance gave itself is revealing since it was not formed with the divine name Yahweh but el, which in north-west semitic languages could be a generic term or appellative (god) or a divine name (El). One might think that we are dealing with a case where ‘el was simply meant as an appellative for Yahweh, but biblical evidence, especially as handed down in the framework of the patriarchal history indicates otherwise. In Gen. 33:20, the ancestor Jacob names a masseba, which he erects in the neighborhood of Shechem יִשְרָאֵל אֱלֹהֵי אֵל (‘el ‘elohe yisra ’el.) The translation ‘‘el the god of Israel’ is preferred to ‘God, the god of Israel (Jacob)’, which would make no sense grammatically.60 Here, ‘el is clearly a divine name, and since the predication apart from the divine name corresponds to the formula Yahweh the god of Israel (judges 5:3,5) often attested in the OT, ‘Israel’ cannot be meant to be the ancestor Jacob,61 who is occasionally given this name, but must denote the tribal alliance.62 Correspondingly, the conclusion is

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60 Note that the article is absent, and the following ‘elohim is used as an appellative. Cf. Eckart Otto, Jakob in Sichem (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1979), 79. Also in line with the context, it is worth noting that such names of altars tend to be confessional names (cf. Ex. 17:15; Judges 6:24)

61 Albertz argues convincingly that in the OT Israel is demonstrably not a personal name, thus even the renaming of Jacob as Israel in Gen. 32:29 is “artificial” cf. Albertz, ‘Israel’, 370

62 Otto argues that El, God of Israel of Gen. 33:20 points to the god worshipped by Jacob’s clan in Shechem before the formation of the Leah and Rachel group in the fourteenth century, cf. Eckart Otto, Jakob in Sichem, 223. Albertz objects the this conclusion because it fails to recognize the obvious aetiological character of the passage (verse 18), which seek to trace the cultic institution at the time of the narrator back to the patriarchs. He therefore insists that there is no reason to go back beyond the tribal alliance Israel
unavoidable that the element ‘el in ‘Israel’ originally points to a stage in its religious history in which el and not yet Yahweh was the god of the tribal alliance of Israel. This pre-Yahwistic stage points to the Israelite group who were already settled in Canaan before the coming of the exodus group. That this group existed is clear from the mention of such a group in the victory stele of Merenptah for the year 1219 BCE. At this historical period, the exodus group has fled Egypt but has not emerged in Palestine. It was also within the period of the emancipation process of the rural sub-stratum of the Canaanite society. Thus, the exodus group entered the hill country of central Palestine from the east only in the second phase, mediating their god Yahweh to the tribal alliance. The integration of the newly arrived group and the assimilation of religion seems to have taken place without any major problems. This could be explained by the fact that the former Egyptian forced laborers and the former marginal and lower-class groups of the Canaanite society had the same interests. The scenario here as Albertz suggests is paraphrased as follows: the god El, who previously had been regarded by the Canaanite peasant and shepherd population as a symbol of their liberation movement was a god of the west semitic pantheon. As the king of the gods, he was probably at its head, but nevertheless remained involved in the divine world which was also worshipped in the Canaanite city states. As a result, he has functioned as a symbol of opposition to oppression and domination only to a limited degree. This was precisely where the god Yahweh whom the exodus group brought with them from outside which was forming in the thirteenth century, cf. Albertz, A History of the Israelite Religion, 76, also see 270, note 59

63 Cf. Norman Gottwald, Tribes of Yahweh, 494ff
64 Cf. Albertz, A History of the Israelite Religion, 76
65 Much has been written in support of two different phases of settlement with some support from the fact that the tribes which trace themselves back to the tribal mother Racheal (Manaseh, Ephraim, Benjamin) are those which go back to the exodus group while the Leah tribes represent earlier stages of the alliance, cf. Norman Gottwald, Tribes of Yahweh, 492-497
was different. He was a solitary god of the southern wilderness, not integrated into the polytheistic system, who specifically and exclusively bound himself to a lower-class group and proved his divinity specifically in the liberation from the state of oppression. As such he was almost predestined to become the god of a tribal alliance which secured for such groups freedom from dependence. So it is safe to assume that Yahweh was quickly taken over by the other tribes of the alliance as a welcome reinforcement of their world of religious symbols. Thus, Yahweh was fused with ‘El and became the god of Israel, hence in the passage that has come to be known as the song of Deborah in Judges 5, we read in verse 3 “Hear O Kings, give ear O Princes, to Yahweh I will sing, I will make melody to Yahweh, the God of Israel” (יִּשְרָאֵל אֱלֹהֵי – Yahweh ’elohe yisrael), and in verse 5 we read “the mountains quaked before Yahweh the one of Sinai, before Yahweh the God of Israel”. What we see here is a case where the tribal alliance welcomed and claimed the god Yahweh, who though was outside the Palestinian pantheon, had functional qualities that resonated with their situation, combines him with the local god, makes him the owner of the land, and with this same god develops their identity, marking themselves off as a people of Yahweh. Here, we see the first connection between Yahweh and ‘el, where Yahweh was welcomed, not imposed. Not surprisingly therefore, there ensues the early “Yahwehizing”68 of ‘El sanctuaries (e.g. Bethel, Gen. 28:10-19) and the use of animal figures in the Yahweh cult even before the state. This early El-syncretism probably

67 The idea of the land as Yahweh’s heritage abound in the OT, cf. for instance, 1Sam. 26:19; 2Sam. 14:16; Jer. 2:7; Ps. 68:10
explains the strikingly smooth integration of ‘El and Yahweh religion such that nowhere in the OT, even among the prophets, do we find any polemic against the god ‘El.’

Yahweh became the symbol of the early Israelite community and its opposition to domination. It was the bond of union which held the decentralized groups together over and above all special interests. Here it is interesting to see how the Yahweh religion made an essential contribution to maintaining the critical balance between the obligation to solidarity (unity) and the ideal of freedom in early Israelite society (autonomy). On the one hand Yahweh was experienced as the one who created social solidarity beyond the limit of clan and tribe where institutional support was absent (as in time of extreme emergencies), and on the other hand, there was virtually no religious legitimization of political rule. According to Albertz, “the solidarity Yahweh creates is outside the institution, a solidarity from below, on a voluntary basis, it is not solidarity from above enforced by political compulsion…The egalitarian tendency of early Israelite society finds symbolic support in the Yahweh religion”. As a result, Israel had no interest in establishing a monarchical central authority like surrounding societies but persisted in its accephalous social structure for two centuries. The very name Israel (God or El rules or may God show himself as ruler) is indicative. In a decentralized society in which the members deliberately refrain from forming a central political authority for the sake of their right to autonomy, and in so doing dissociate themselves from the monarchical structure of the Canaanite city states, such a name sounds almost like a profession of intent: God should rule and not any human ruler whether coming from outside or from within. Here we see a case where the idea of the god of the land and the social/political identity of the people is intrinsically connected.

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69 Cf. Ibid., 78
In line with the above conception of the nature of God is the fact that there was no central sanctuary as a common cultic center for all Israel at this period, rather there is evidence of multiplicity of sanctuaries, which quite clearly existed side by side.\(^7\) This decentralization of the main cult of Israel, which also went with political decentralization, manifested itself in what Donner terms ‘poly-Yahwism.’ \(^7\) Here we see a local differentiation of Yahweh, which in accordance with his character gave diverse forms to the various local cult traditions that were taken up and developed at the individual sanctuaries. Just as the gods El and Baal were worshipped in different forms in different sanctuaries (e.g. El-Bethel, El-'Olam in Beersheba, Baal Berit in Shechem, Baal-Hermon, etc.) so too as Yahweh Sabaoth in Shiloh (1Sam. 1:3), Yahweh in Hebron (2Sam. 15:7), and through the inscriptions from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud we now also know of Yahweh of Samaria, and Yahweh of Taman.\(^7\) Yahweh took on different local forms. Here we see a peculiar understanding of divine selfhood, according to which a particular deity can equally and validly produce many local manifestations in order to be present to its worshippers. Thus, alongside his supreme role as ‘national god’ (god of Israel), Yahweh also took on features of local gods who was worshipped in different sanctuaries in different ways. This opened the door to particular regional variations of Yahweh religion, a phenomenon that would later be vehemently challenged by the Deuteronomists. In this decentralized form however, Yahweh was brought near to the people. As Albertz put it: “here, the holy place

\(^7\) Noth in order to support his amphyictyon model, mentioned earlier, posited a central sanctuary that moved around, cf. Martin Noth, Das System, 92ff, but this according to Albertz is a “desperate expedient”, Albertz, A History of the Israelite Religion, 83. We note here that it was only in the period immediately before the state does Shiloh acquire a status that seems to transcend a particular region (1Sam. 1:3). Before this time various sanctuaries were limited to one tribe, cf. for instance, Judges 17ff for Dan.

\(^7\) Helmut Donner, “Hier sind deine Gotter, Israel” in Wort und Geschichte: Festschrift für Karl Elliger zum 70sten Geburtstag (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973), 45-50, 48, see entire argument in 48-50

\(^7\) The two pithoi from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud to be considered below
was not protected by high wall; God has not yet been enclosed in the darkness of the temple building.”

Correspondingly, the whole of the local community could assemble at the great annual feasts, or individual families could make their communal meal offerings (1Sam. 9ff) while still acting independently in the cult and at the same time participating fully in its events. The basic democratic character of the Israelite society, and the opposition to domination inherent in its relationship to God found appropriate expression in the populistic form of the cult where fundamental social norms were handed down through clan ethos.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the concept of God at this period of Israelite history was fluid. God could manifest Godself in different localities, in different forms, and in different cultic objects, while retaining the unity of the Godhead. Relationship with a fluid god found proper manifestation in political and cultic decentralization, guaranteeing local autonomy while diminishing neither the unity of God nor the unity of God’s people. This fluidity model of divine conceptualization, for the purpose of this project deserves a deeper exploration. To this we now turn.

1.3 Fluidity of Yahweh’s Selfhood

Archeological findings and some scriptural verses point to the localization of Yahweh in a number of geographical manifestations, and the multiplicity of divine embodiment. Ancient Hebrew inscriptions such as “Yhwh of Samaria” and “Yhwh of Teman” on earthenware jars discovered in the 1970s at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud (eastern Sinai), which was

74 Albertz, A History of the Israelite Religion, 85
75 At least four levels are recognized, for details cf. Albertz, A History of the Israelite Religion, 92-93
76 About 50 km south of Kadesh Barnea, not far from Darb el Ghazza, the old overland route from Gaza to Elath, University of Tel Aviv, excavations at Kuntillet Ajrud in 1975-1976 uncovered the remains of a caravanserai that can be dated to the first half of the eight century, cf. Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 210
the home of an Israelite Caravan in the 8th century BCE are instructive. Discovered in the gate area of the well preserved, fortress-like main building, these two pithoi on which these inscriptions occur have generated a sensation in the scholarly world with a wide range of interpretations. The inscription on the shoulder of pithos A, as reconstructed by Othmar and Keel, reads:77

Pithos A

'mr. '[... ]h[.. ]k. 'mr.lyh[.. ]wlyw 'sh.w...brkt.'tkm
lyhwh.smrn.wl'srth.

Thus says [...] say to Yehallet, Yo’asa, and ... I bless you

Before Yahweh of Samaria and his asherah78

Pithos B

['mr 'mryw 'mrl.'dn[y] hslm.'t
brktk.l[y] hwh tmn wl'srth.yb...

Thus says Amaryau: Say to my lord: is it well with you?

I bless you before Yahweh of Teman and his asherah...

The above blessing formulae seem to indicate that wayfarers invoked Yahweh’s blessings and protection as the travelled through a potentially hostile region. While there exists much controversy over the transcription, syntax, grammar and translation,79 there

77 Ibid., 225-226
78 The addition of “and his asherah” in these inscriptions has generated a lot of interest in the scholarly world especially as regards whether asherah is a wife of Yhwh. While this is not of interest to this project, for a detailed study of the implications cf. Ibid., see especially chapter VII and particularly pp.228-236
seems to be agreement among scholars on the rendition of yhwh.smrn and [y]hwh t mn as Yahweh of Samaria and Yahweh of Teman respectively. 80 These phrases have interesting religious ramifications for this study. In a detailed study of the religious implications of the phrases ‘Yahweh of Samaria’ and ‘Yahweh of Teman’, J.A. Emerton insists that among other meanings it might have possessed, Yahweh of Samaria obviously includes the idea that Yahweh was worshipped in Samaria, and the words were likely written by a traveler from Samaria. As regards Teman, he believes that Teman denotes an Edomite region (rather than a city), thus, it is unlikely that the phrase refers to a cult of Yahweh in Teman, rather the meaning is likely to be similar to that of Hab 3:3 (“God comes from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran”), indicating that the region belongs in a special way to Yahweh. 81 Weinfeld, on the other hand, believes that Yahweh of Teman was worshipped in the southern district, close to Mount Seir. 82 However, it is difficult to tell precisely how far west Edom's influence extended at this time. 83 Therefore, whether there was a specific southern cult here during this period with its own priests (as Meshel seems to believe), 84 or whether the blessing of Yahweh of Teman was simply seen to be propitious for travellers through the southern region, “there is currently a general consensus regarding the meaning of the two syntagmata yhwh smrn and yhwh t mn. The name of God is linked to a place

80 All the authors cited above are in agreement.
81 J.A. Emerton, “New Light on Israelite Religion”, 9-10
83 Cf. Judith M. Hadley, “Some Drawings and Inscriptions”, 186
name, comparable to “Ishtar of Nineveh” and the like. These two particular names are indicative of the local manifestations of the Israelite national god, who has a shrine in Samaria (the capital city) and in the south east Negev or in the region of Teman, located in Edom, just as many other localities had a shrine where he could be approached when seeking a blessing”. Similarly, Benjamin Sommer argues that these inscriptions indicate local manifestations of Yahweh, as found in the capital of the Northern kingdom and in south of Judah respectively. Here we see a peculiar understanding of divine selfhood, according to which a particular deity can produce many local manifestations that enjoy some degree of independence without becoming separate deities.

The above conception of geographic manifestation of Yahweh also appear in the Hebrew bible as seen for instance in 2 Samuel 15:7 (Yahweh in Hebron) and Psalm 99:2 (Yahweh at Zion). In 2 Samuel 15:7-8, Absalom attempts to convince his father David to permit him out of Jerusalem for a while, and he makes the following request: “Please let me go and fulfill my vow that I made to Yahweh in Hebron ($בְחֶבְרָֽוֹן$ לַָֽיהו ֵ֖ה). For your servant made a vow while I lived at Geshur in Aram: ‘If Yahweh will indeed bring me back to Jerusalem, then I will worship Yhwh’”. This plea of Absalom, as Sommer points out, strongly indicates that the Yahweh of Hebron is distinct from the Yahweh of Jerusalem, otherwise it wouldn’t be necessary for Absalom to physically go to Hebron to fulfill his vow of worship since the ark of Yhwh was in Jerusalem and sacrifices were offered there. We note that the phrase “my vow I made to Yhwh in Hebron” does not mean that Absalom was physically located in Hebron when he made the vow, since in verse 8 Absalom clarifies

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85 Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses*, 228
86 Benjamin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 39
87 Ibid.
that he made the vow when he was at Geshur which was hundreds of miles north of Hebron in the Aramean principality (located in Bashan or what is now known as the Golan Heights, directly east of the sea of Galilee). It is clear therefore that בְחֶבְרָֽוֹן (in Hebron) is not an adverbial phrase modifying ‘worship’, or ‘I made’, rather it is part of the deity’s name. In a careful and detailed analysis of this verse Herbert Donner asserts: “the prince made a vow, not simply to Yhwh nor to Yhwh of Jerusalem but to Yhwh of Hebron, and thus he had to leave Jerusalem to fulfill it – for in Jerusalem one can pray to Yhwh generally or to Yhwh of Jerusalem but not to Yhwh of Hebron”. Other forms of this phenomenon also occur in the scriptures, especially in the texts ascribed to the Yahwist and Elohist traditions where God’s self is manifested interchangeably in human and heavenly bodies (mal’akh for instance), and in inanimate objects (wood, stone).

1.3.1 Human and Heavenly Bodies

Genesis 18 presents a vivid example of the above conception. In verse 1 we read: יְהוֹ (Yahweh appeared to him [i.e. Abraham]) while he sat at the entrance of his tent by the oaks of mamre. When Abraham lifted up his eyes in the next verse, he saw three men (שֵׁשֶׁת מֹּאֲסָה) standing nearby. The interchangeable use of יְהוֹ and שֵׁשֶׁת מֹּאֲסָה (from the same source) implies that Yahweh manifests himself in the form (or body) of the three men or at least of one of them. Since there was nothing extraordinary about their bodies, Abraham did not recognize that his visitors were not human. Strangely, he begins his request in the singular, “my Lord” (a common courtesy in the ancient Near East), and then switches to the plural “and rest yourselves under the tree”. In verse 9 three of them speak inquiring about his wife, and in verse 10, one of the visitors speaks prophetically and

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88 Ibid.
89 Quoted in Benjamin Sommer, The Bodies, 39
promises to return in due season at which time Abraham’s wife will have a son. In verse 13, one of the visitors is referred to as Yahweh, and in verse 22, after two of them (later referred to in 19:1 as angels) depart, the one who remains with Abraham is clearly identified as Yahweh, as Abraham intercedes for Sodom. The narrative in Gen.18 leaves a lot for the mind to speculate: were all the three men Yahweh – three Yahwehs? Were two of them Yahweh at the beginning, then cease to be Yahweh and become angels at the end? If only one was Yahweh, what was the role of the other two? No matter how one answers these questions, what remains obvious is that Yahweh reveals the Godself to Abraham in a human body. Sommer is apt: “Yahweh appears to Abraham in bodily form in this passage…the visitor clearly is and is not identical with Yhwh…he is Yhwh but not the only manifestation of Yhwh…either a localized and perhaps temporary manifestation of the deity (that is, the result of the fragmentation of the divine self) speaks to Abraham, or the deity partially overlaps with one or several messengers”.90

Genesis 32:22ff, another famous J narrative presents yet another example. The narrator tells us that Jacob wrestles with a being described simply as a man (איש). As the story progresses, we discover that this ‘man’ is not ordinary because he cannot remain on earth once the sun rises, his name remains secret, he changes Jacob’s name to Israel (reminiscent of Abraham) and dislocates the socket of Jacob’s thigh with a touch. After he blessed Jacob, he names the place Peniel because he saw אלהים (‘elohim) face to face and his life was preserved (verse 30). It is obvious that the elohim here refers to the God later to be known as Yahweh, who can also be called מלאך (mal’akh) as the passage of Hosea makes clear: “by his strength he wrestled with אלהים (‘elohim), he wrestled with

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90 Benjamin Sommer, *The Bodies*, 40-41
(mal’akh) and prevailed, he wept and sought his favor, he met with him at Bethel, and there he spoke with him, he is יְהוָ֖ה (Yahweh) the God of hosts, יְהוָ֖ה (Yahweh) is his name” (Hosea 12:3-5). The above juxtaposition explains that both Hosea and Genesis “reflect a belief that the selves of an angel and the God Yhwh can overlap or that a small scale manifestation or fragment of Yhwh can be termed mal’akh”.

The passage of the commissioning of Gideon illustrates this even better. In Judges 6:11-12 we read that a mal’akh appeared to Gideon, sat under the oak of Ophrah and announced to him that the Lord was with him. Gideon, unaware that his visitor was divine, retorts in verse 13 that the Lord cannot possibly be with Israel since the Midianites have prevailed over them. In verse 14, the mal’akh suddenly becomes Yahweh, we read: וַיִָּ֤פֶן (Yahweh looked on him and said…). As the exchange continues, Yahweh speaks in the first person, יְהוָ֖ה (but I will be with you, verse 16) and towards the end of the episode it was the mal’akh who touched the unleavened bread and the cake with the tip of the staff in his hands. One might want to argue that God was located in heaven and only spoke to Gideon through a messenger, but this is not possible since verse 14 precisely says that Yahweh looked upon Gideon and spoke. What we see here is that the narrator variously identifies the visitor both as Yahweh and as mal’akh. Thus, though it was Yahweh who faced Gideon and spoke to him, it was the mal’akh who departed from Gideon’s sight (verse 21). Sommer argues that the text seems self-contradictory only if one insists that an angel is a being separate from Yahweh, but if an angel is understood as a small scale manifestation of God or even a being with whom God’s self overlaps, then the text coheres perfectly well. James Kugel takes this hypothesis even higher. In his book

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91 Benjamin Sommer, *The Bodies*, 41  
92 Ibid., 43
God of Old, he speaks of the angel not just as a small-scale manifestation or an overlap, rather the angel “is God himself, God taking human form…intruding into human reality”. 93 The abundance of passages that mention this conception of angel in biblical theophanies 94 have attracted the attention of modern scholars. The term mal’akh has variously been described as “emanation of the Godhead”, 95 “an aspect or an incarnation of God”, 96 or a concrete expression of the divine presence in human affairs. 97 These mal’akh passages demonstrate the fluidity divine selfhood so common in ANE, 98 a phenomenon through which Yahweh is free to manifest Godself in a body (or several bodies) while not being limited only to those bodies. This marks a radical difference between God and the human being who can only be located in a particular body and in a particular place.

93 James Kugel, The God of Old: Inside the Lost World of the Bible (New York: Free Press, 2003), 34. In a similar argument that strengthens this view, S.A. Meier points out that in the ancient Greek and Latin translations of the biblical passages that hint to this conception, translators sometimes use the word ‘angel’ where the standard text preserved in Jewish tradition (the Masoretic text) merely reads YHWH, and sometimes they drop the word ‘angel’ where it is present in the Masoretic text. These textual variations strengthen the proposition that the boundary between angel and yhwh was regarded in the texts underlying the translations as indistinct. Meier concludes that the term angel “is probably secondary addition to the text in response to changing theological perspectives”. Cf. S. A. Meier, “Angel of Yhwh” in Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible, 2nd edition, eds., Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, Pieter W. van der Horst, 53-9, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999), 55-57
94 S.A. Meier has an extensive list of biblical passages that mention this conception of angel, cf. S. A. Meier, “Angel of Yhwh”, 53-59
95 Richard Elliot Friedman, The Dissapearance of God: A Divine Mystery (Boston: Little Brown, 1995), 12-13
96 Elliot R. Wolfson, Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 63-64; also see the commentary of Nachmanides on Gen. 18:1
98 Sommer discusses this phenomenon in Mesopotamia and Canaan, cf. Benjamin Sommer, The Bodies of God, 12-37
1.3.2 Divine Selfhood in Elements – Fire, Tree, Stone

In the famous passage of the burning bush (Exodus 3-4), we read that a *mal’akh* appeared to Moses in a flame of fire that was blazing from the midst of the bush, yet the bush was not being consumed. In the remainder of the passage it was Yahweh himself who converses with Moses, commissions him, reveals his name, and sends him to Egypt to deliver the Israelites from oppression. Here, Yahweh temporarily embodies an element (fire) to manifest himself and deliver his message. In the same vein, the notion that sacred trees through which Yhwh manifests himself was part of ancient Israelite conceptualization of Yahweh is hinted at in Deuteronomy 33:16 where Yahweh is described as “the one who dwells in the bush” (שְנֶֶ֑ה שֵֶ֖כְנִֵ֝י). The same notion may also have informed the theophany to Gideon that took place under the turpentine tree (also known as terebinth in Judges 6:11), and Abraham’s planting of a tamarisk tree in Beersheba in order to invoke the name of Yahweh *El-Olam* (Genesis 21:33). This phenomenon, considered as proper and non-pagan by some monotheistic biblical characters and authors,99 raises the suspicion as Sommer observes that “it was impossible to invoke this God without an object in which he could become physically present”.100

Apart from trees, biblical evidence also shows that divine embodiment was possible in stones. After the patriarch Jacob woke up from a vision where he saw angels ascending
and descending a stairway reaching from heaven to earth, he took the stone he had set beneath his head and set it up as a *massebah*, poured oil on it and called the place בֵּית אלה (Bethel - Genesis 28:10-19). A similar event occurred in Genesis 35: 14-15. After God spoke with Jacob, he set up a pillar of stone, poured wine and oil on it and also named the place Bethel. The ritual use of oil is significant in these two passages. In biblical, Canaanite and Mesopotamian texts, anointing with oil was transformative, it brings about a change in status. For instance, one’s status could automatically change from ordinary to a king or a high priest after being anointed with oil. In the light of the *mis pi* ritual in Mesopotamia where oil transforms a stone pillar,101 and the insistence of various midrashim that the oil came directly on the stone from heaven,102 the action of Jacob transforms what was mere stone into *massebah* or *bethel* (a place of divine dwelling). According to Philo of Byblos, “once Jacob anointed the stone, it was endowed with life.”103 The possibility that Philo’s contention is tenable is evidenced in Genesis 31:13, where God identifies himself with Bethel, making his presence in the *massebah* explicit: מַצ בָּה שַּּחְת אֲשֶֶׁר אָל בָּית־ה א ל א נ כִָּי (I am the God Bethel whom you anointed there in a pillar of stone). Interestingly, some scholars while translating this verse prefer to render it as: ‘I am the God who appeared to you at Bethel…’ 104 But the phrase ‘who appeared to you at’ in these translations is clearly

101 Jacob’s action recalls a Northwest semitic ritual associated with sacred stone pillar attested in texts that describe how to install the high priestess in the temple of Baal Hadad in Emar. On the fourth day of the ceremonies, the high priestess pours the same fine oil that has been used to anoint her over the tip of the stone pillar. Since the oil rendered the candidate into a high priestess, it might have had a similar transformative effect on the stone pillar. For the text of the ceremony see, Daniel Fleming, *The Installation of Baal’s High Priestess at Emar: A Window on Ancient Syrian Religion* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 17,52
102 The insistence in these midrashim (cf for instance, Genesis Rabbah 69.7) recalls the claim in *pit pi* that the tree from which the *salma* came was divine even before the artisans chose it. For the claims in the Mesopotamian sources cf. Victor A. Hurowitz, “Make Yourself a Graven Image” in *BM* 40 (1995), 337-347, 343-4
103 Cited by Benjamin Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 49
an attempt to make sense of what seems to be a difficult reading, because the phrase does not appear in the Hebrew. The Hebrew simply reads — I am the God Bethel…, with the verb taking on a double accusative “to indicate its transformative nature”. The difficulty with this verse will disappear if one appreciates the fluidity of divine embodiment, a tradition that subtly pervades the Hebrew Scriptures. Here, Yahweh clearly becomes identical with the pillar of stone, and takes the name Bethel, reminiscent of Genesis 33:20 where Jacob sets up an altar and calls it “El the God of Israel”, and Judges 6:24 where Gideon built an altar to Yahweh as well and calls the altar ‘Yhwh who is peace’. Remarkably, the Septuagint and various Targumim see this as odd and try to rephrase the sentence. The LXX for the Genesis 33:20 reads: καὶ ἐστησεν ἐκεῖ θυσιαστήριον καὶ ἐπεκαλέσατο τὸν θεὸν Ἰσραήλ. (there he erected an altar and called (invoked) the God of Israel). Here, the translator deliberately left out (it) from its Hebrew equivalent (and he called it el the God of Israel), which explicitly identifies the stone with the deity. Similarly, the Targum of Judges 6:24 translates: ‘Gideon built an altar there to Yhwh, and on it he worshipped Yhwh who gave him peace’, modifying the Hebrew version which says that Gideon called the altar (‘Yahweh who is peace’). The effort of these translators to modify the standard texts preserved in the Jewish tradition (the Masoretic texts) actually reinforces the argument that the boundary between Yahweh and the elements in question was indistinct, and it shows their failure to appreciate the tendency of Yahwist/Elohist verses to view some
stones as incarnations of Yahweh according to which some altars are simply stones, and God frequently manifests Godself in altars (cf. judges 6:20; 13:19; Genesis 12:7).

To be sure, identifying Yahweh with objects is not limited to the Jacob and Gideon episodes, such phenomena pervade the Yawhist/Elohist narratives. Genesis 49:24 refers to God as the “stone of Israel”, in Exodus 24:4 Moses erects twelve massebot, and in Joshua 4:20, Joshua erects twelve stones. The functions of the stones were not limited to a single stone, validating the notion that a single god could be embodied in numerous objects (in this case the stones), transforming such inert objects into animate divine dwelling. This phenomenon becomes even clearer in Joshua 24:27. Here the scene is Shechem (a place already associated with divine presence). Joshua sets up a large stone under the oak in the sanctuary, and the stone is said to have “heard” (שָׁמְעָה) all the words. The notion that God is incarnate in altars or stones, or cultic objects seems to be hard wired in the Israelite consciousness such that even the zealously Yahwistic 8th century Hosea associates stone pillars with legitimate cult: For many days the children of Israel will remain without a king and without authorities, without sacrifices and without a stone pillar, without ephod or teraphim (Hosea 3:4).107 All these texts suggest that sacred stones, like sacred trees were

107 While prophet Hosea condemns stone pillars, alters and ephod (see also 10:1-2), Sommer argues that it is not because he views any of them as inherently problematic. The parallel these verses draw between stone pillars and unquestionable legitimate objects such as the altar (and legitimate institution such as the kingship) shows that Hosea did not regard the stone pillars as inherently unacceptable, rather he condemns the fact that sinful people use them. This is comparable to the condemnation of sacrifices, an admirable practice that becomes unacceptable when performed by evildoers. On the other hand, Hosea protests treating statues of calves like sacred objects, it is most probable that he refers to the calves of Dan and Bethel set up by Jeroboam (cf. Hosea 13:2 in relation to 1Kings 12:28-29). “Thus Hosea seems open to the notion of divine embodiment in nonrepresentational objects such as pillars and poles but not to the notion of divine embodiment in representational sculptures”. Sommer, The Bodies of God, 52. Also cf. Tryggve Mettinger who shows that Canaanites and Arameans accepted divine incarnation in pillars and other earthly objects but with minimal production of sculptors of their gods. Tryggve Mettinger, No Graven Image? Israelite Aniconism in its Ancient Near Eastern Context (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1995), 135-197. Hosea’s stance would have been an intensified variation of perspectives found among many Northwest Semites.
regarded as legitimate embodiments in some Yahwistic circles in ancient Israel, and that
the conception of fluid divine selfhood found in Canaan and Mesopotamia were also known
among Yahwistic Israelites. It exemplifies the notion that Yahweh cannot be constituted or
limited, he is a free god validly manifesting the Godself wherever and in whatever he wills.
This model of divine conceptualization also informs how the Elohist tradition conceived
of sacred space.

1.3.3 Fluidity and Sacred Space

1.3.3.1 Elohist Perspective

Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the
camp, he called it the tent of Meeting. And everyone who sought the Lord would
go out to the tent of Meeting, which was outside the camp. Whenever Moses went
out to the tent, all the people would rise and stand, each of them, at the entrance of
the Tent, and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. When Moses entered the
Tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent and the
Lord would speak with Moses. 108

Perhaps, this Elohist (henceforth, E) text sets the tone for E’s doctrine of the tented divine
presence. Central to E’s understanding is that God’s presence in the tent is not permanent.
Commenting on the disparity between E and the priestly perspective of the tent, and citing
Exodus 33:9 and Numbers 11:25, 12:5, Sommer notes that the cloud is always the subject
of the verb yored (descend) in E’s texts, thus “God did not dwell in E’s tent but popped in
on appropriate occasions to reveal himself to Moses or to other Israelites….the
cloud…comes and goes”. 109 The ‘coming’ and ‘going’ of God is further made obvious in

108 Exodus 33: 7-9. While biblical Hebrew has no specialized verbal form for the iterative tense (i.e.
habitually repeated actions), Robert Alter notes that the use of the imperfective followed by the perfective
form (would go, used to take, etc.), and the contextual clues make it clear that the whole passage is
iterative. Also, the setup replicates horizontally the vertical setup in which Moses goes up to the mountain
and the people wait below looking upward to the cloud on the summit. Cf. Robert Alter, The Five Books,
502-503

109 Benjamin D. Sommer, The Bodies of God, 82
Numbers 12:4-10, when God asked Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to ‘go out’ to the tent. The narrative goes on to tell how God came down as a pillar of fire, rebuked Aaron and Miriam, and then left. The iterative character of the tent is evident. Alter observes that in E’s narrative there is no question of erecting an elaborate structure as in the tabernacle (E never uses the word), rather Moses pitches “his own tent outside the camp and makes it serve as the tent of meeting”. The repeated occurrence of this phenomenon shows that the tent was not a permanent structure.

E’s concept of location is also indicated in the cited passage. Verse 7 shows that the tent is never located within the camp. Moses always pitched the tent outside the camp, in fact, “far off from the camp”, and to reach the tent one has to exit the camp. This is also evident in Numbers 11:17, 25-26, where God directs Moses to gather the elders around the tent so that he can take some of his (Moses) spirit and place it on them (the elders). It is obvious that the tent is outside the camp because verse 26 makes it clear that two of the elders, Eldad and Medad did not go to the tent but remained in the camp. For E therefore, God’s presence is not permanently immanent in a particular location. Referring to the locative and utopian religious worldviews as identified by J.Z. Smith, Sommer observes: “E’s tent…represents a utopian worldview. It locates religious value in the periphery rather than in the center and endorses a constrained model of immanence”.

110 Robert Alter, The Five Books, 502
111 Alter thinks that the tent is located outside the camp because after the Golden Calf episode, Israel was deemed unworthy to have God’s meeting place with them inside the camp, cf. Ibid.
112 While the locative view of the universe is based on the ideology that the divine irrupts into specific places at specific times, the utopian expresses a transcendent ideology as it recognizes that no place can fully contain the divine. Cf. Benjamin Sommer, The Bodies, 83
113 Ibid.
divine presence in the tent agrees with the fluidity model of divine embodiment since God’s numerous bodies cannot be constrained in a particular location.

1.3.4 A Different Perspective – The Priestly and Deuteronomist Traditions

1.3.4.1 Priestly Perspective

On the day the tabernacle was set up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the covenant; and from evening until morning it was over the Tabernacle having the appearance of fire. It was always so: the cloud covered it by day and the appearance of fire by night. (Numbers 9:15-16).

For the priestly (henceforth, P) writer, as we see in the above text, there is a continuous dwelling of God in the Tabernacle. In Exodus 19: 16-20, the kavod114 arrives on top Mt Sinai. P does not tell us that the kavod ascended to its earlier abode, rather, it remained on top of the mountain until the tabernacle was constructed (cf. Ex 35:1-40:33). At the completion of the tabernacle, the kavod descended and filled the tabernacle (Ex 40:33b-38). In P’s narrative, the holy of holies was the dwelling place of the kavod, the cherubim, his seat, and the ark, his footstool.115 He comes out occasionally, when it becomes

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114 The term is usually interpreted as ‘glory’ or as Klaus Baltzer would prefer, “the mighty presence”, cf. Klaus Baltzer, “The Meaning of the Temple in Lukan Writings” in The Havard Theological Review vol. 58 no 3 (July 1965), 263-277, 266. According to Sommer who prefers glory, the term in priestly writings can refer to God’s body or even to God’s very self, though not all of God. It is associated with intense light, smoke and cloud that indicate divine manifestation. Because of the unspeakable bright light, it is surrounded by a cloud to protect humans. Though essentially different, the kavod has a shape similar to humans as described by Ezekiel in his vision (Ezekiel 1:26-28). While the kavod may not be equated with God’s body, sometimes it is identified with YHWH (cf for instance, Ex. 24:15-16). This overlap between the kavod and YHWH makes it difficult to differentiate. We cannot really talk about God apart from the kavod, the kavod is God for us, the divine manifestation, though not all of God. For a detailed discussion, see. Sommer, The Bodies of God, 12-123; Also, Sommer “Conflicting Constructions of Divine Presence in the Priestly Tabernacle” in Biblical Interpretation vol.9 no 1 (2001), 41-63. Also see a study by Michael B. Hundley, Keeping Heaven on Earth: Safeguarding the Divine Presence in the Priestly Tabernacle (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011)

115 This parallels Ancient Near Eastern gods where an inscription of divine origin is placed under the god’s feet, cf. Roland de Vaux, “Ark of the Covenant and Tent of Reunion” in The Bible and the Ancient Near East (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971), 147-148; Menahem Haran, Temples and Temple Service in Ancient
necessary to demonstrate divine might. Accordingly, on these occasions, the kavod, surrounded by the cloud, appears from the tabernacle, not from heaven (cf. Numbers 14:10; 16:5-7, 18-19). Similarly when he speaks to Moses, unlike in E’s account where God and Moses arrive at the tent of meeting, in P, it is only Moses who arrives while God speaks from the holy of holies where he is located permanently. The tabernacle in P’s theology occupies a central place in the wilderness camps. Unlike E, it is located at the center of the Israelite camp as Numbers 2 demonstrates. The tabernacle establishes God’s dwelling in the midst of his people and it serves as a single legitimate locus for true worship. For P therefore, the tabernacle is one, the kavod is one and he resides in one place only. Sommer explains: “the reason that the tabernacle must be so carefully constructed and that the cloud must surround the kavod is that the tabernacle does not merely house divine presence, it houses the divine presence. No other object in priestly literature contains a small scale manifestation of God; for the priests, there is but a single place where God resides”. Consequently, in the priestly account of the dedication of Solomon’s temple in 1 Kings 8, the Lord’s kavod filled the temple and David said in verse 13, “I have truly built you a princely house, a dwelling where you may abide forever”.

This priestly conception falls within Sommer’s antifluidity model of divine embodiment. For P, there is only one divine body, hence one truly sacred space at any

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Sommer, The Bodies of God, 75
Sommer, The Bodies of God, 58-79


The antifluidity model rejects fluidity of divine selfhood and multiplicity of embodiment. For details cf. Sommer, The Bodies of God, 58-79
given time. While P’s conception could be identified with Smith’s locative worldview, Sommer also observes that when set against Zion-Sabaoth theology,\textsuperscript{119} the divine presence seems no longer locative but locomotive,\textsuperscript{120} in the sense that the sacred center moves, and wonders with the Israelites. Roland Clements puts it rather succinctly: “no longer is the presence of YHWH associated with a particular place at all, but instead, it is related to a cultic community”.\textsuperscript{121} Ezekiel, who shows a significant similarity to the priestly concept of the \textit{kavod} makes it clear that while the \textit{kavod} dwells in the temple, it could also depart due to abomination. Thus, in his vision (Ezekiel 8 -11), Ezekiel sees the judgment of Israel, climaxed in the departure of the \textit{kavod} from the temple (Ez. 10:18; 11:23).

\textbf{1.3.4.2 Deuteronomist Perspective}

Since you saw no form when the Lord spoke to you at Ho’reb out of the fire, take care and watch yourselves closely so that you do not act corruptly by making an idol for yourselves, in the form of any figure – the likeness of male or of female, the likeness of any animal that is on earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air… (Deuteronomy 4:15-17).

The above deuteronomic (henceforth, D) retelling of the theophany in Exodus 19 sheds light on D’s conception of divine presence. For D, God dwells in heaven and not on earth, He cannot be seen or touched, He can only be heard. God’s revelation is of acoustic nature. D’s Moses insists that God only speaks to the people. He speaks from heaven, and His presence on earth is signified by His \textit{shem} (name). Thus, one finds in the Deuteronomist account of Solomon’s speech and prayer during the dedication of the temple

\textsuperscript{119} The Zion-Sabaoth theology, according to Sommer “conceives of God as permanently present in the Jerusalem temple on Mount Zion which contains the throne seat of YHWH”. The texts that reflect this theology emphasize God’s protecting presence, cf. ibid., 84-87
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 87

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in 1Kings 8:14-66 that the temple is built for the shem not for God (cf. verses 16-20, 43-44, 48). In fact, there is much emphasis that God dwells in heaven (verses 27, 30, 32, 34, 36, 39, 43, 45, 49), such that people visit the temple for the sake of the shem, and never to behold the kavod of God (verse 41). Interestingly, the shem is not portrayed as an extension of God since it is never the subject of divine actions like forgiveness, listening, bringing justice, etc. God remains the subject of these activities and he accomplishes them from heaven, where he dwells. According to Moshe Weinfeld, “wherever the expression “your dwelling place” is employed, we find that it is invariably accompanied by the word “in heaven”. The deuteronomic editor is clearly disputing the older view implied by the ancient song that opens the prayer (12-13) and designates the temple as God’s “exalted house and a dwelling place (or pedestal) forever”.

The deuteronomic name theology therefore seeks to dismantle existing conceptions. God’s self is a unity, he cannot dwell both in heaven and on earth, any representation of God is idolatry. The shema prayer in Deuteronomy 6:4 with its emphasis on Yahweh as one also highlights this concern. The shem is neither God nor an extension of God, instead according to Sommer, it asserts God’s ownership of a place, it “connects heaven and earth”, it is “a token of divine attention.” It is not surprising then that D forbids icons

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122 Cf. Benjamin Sommer, The Bodies of God, 63
124 Deuteronomy 28:58 “if you do not…revere the glorious and awesome name, the Lord your God” could be considered an exception. However it is most likely a later addition to D’s original text, cf. Benjamin Sommer, The Bodies, 218 note 44
125 Ibid., 63, 66. For a different view on the deuteronomic shem theology, cf. Dean S. McBride, “Deuteronomic Name Theology”, Doctoral Dissertation, Harvard University, Cambridge MA, 1969. He argues that the shem is an extension of YHWH, His cultic presence in the Jerusalem temple. This study however agrees with Sommer that the overwhelming evidence found in many deuteronomic documents (different understanding of shem does occur outside of deuteronomic literature), which distinguish God and the shem and their different locations, argues against such a position.
of any kind as representations of God, instead words from the sacred book should be placed on peoples’ foreheads, and on their doorposts etc. (Deuteronomy 6:8, 11:18). Godself therefore does not dwell with humans, but God’s word and name do.\textsuperscript{126}

With the priestly and Deuteronomist editors, we see a discomfort with the fluidity model of divine conceptualization. The monarchy was also a decisive factor in the displacement of this early Israelite tradition. With the monarchy, Yahweh was forced to take on a different role, and the different way of relating with the Israelite god emerged.

1.4 The Displacement of the Fluidity Model – The Monarchy

According to the popular hypothesis, which is traced back to Alt,\textsuperscript{127} the first Israelite state was a product of necessity, developed in response to persistent external military threat from the Philistines.\textsuperscript{128} This persistent military pressure could no longer be matched by the traditional means of tribal alliance. In fact, in ca. 1050 BCE, the Israelite army had suffered a severe defeat at Aphek against the well-equipped Philistine professional soldiers (1Sam. 4), in the course of which the ark was taken, and probably the cult at Shiloh was also destroyed (Jer. 7:12). In the face of this threat, tribal decision makers were forced to gradually abandon their resistance to a permanent central political authority. Thus, after a successful war of liberation against the Ammonites, Saul, who had demonstrated a

\textsuperscript{126} Benjamin Sommer, \textit{The Bodies of God}, 68


\textsuperscript{128} Recent scholarly voices have questioned whether such external factor was sufficient alone to explain the formation of the Israelite state. For some internal considerations especially the shift of population density, cf. Israel Finkelstein, “The Emergence of the Monarchy in Israel: The Environmental and Socio-Economic Aspects” in \textit{Journal for the Study of the Old Testament}, 14, no. 44 (June, 1989), 43-74; also see, James W. Flanagan "Chiefs in Israel" in \textit{Journal for the Study of the Old Testament}, 6 no. 20 (June, 1981), 47-73; Frank S. Frick, \textit{The Formation of the State in Ancient Israel: A Survey of Models and Theories} (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1985)
charismatic and military leadership capabilities was elevated from the men of Israel and Judah to become king (1Sam. 11). The establishment of the kingdom and the consequent far-reaching social, political and cultic changes posed a decisive challenge to the pre-state Yahweh religion.

1.4.1 A Royal Territorial State: The Formation of Elaborate Bureaucracy

The formation of central authority radically different from what was obtainable in the tribal alliance in the time of Saul was very limited. In fact, Saul’s permanent power base was basically from family resources: a modest residence in his home town of Gibeah (1Sam. 22:6; cf. 11:4), a very small staff (just one office of army commander handled by his uncle or nephew Abner - 14:50ff), a limited professional troop which was not made up of any foreign mercenaries but of members of Benjamin and other Israelite tribes (10:26; 14:52; 16:20f), and voluntary offerings (not taxes) as a source of finance.\footnote{129}

The transition to statehood was achieved partly by David and finally by Solomon. David systematically built up for himself a powerful troop of mercenaries. These combatants were drawn not only from kinsfolk and members of the tribes, but also from defectors of very different backgrounds (1Sam. 22:2). With the help of these professional troops, David acquired a considerable amount of land, gained for himself economic independence and created a royal clientele, where the troops became permanently loyal to him. Thus, ‘he created his own power base independent of the tribes, which along with his adventurous tactic of changing sides to his own advantage made him a power factor that the tribes could no longer ignore’.\footnote{130}

\footnote{129 Thus Albertz prefers to use “charismatic chiefdom” as a title to describe Saul’s ‘kingdom’ cf. Rainer Albertz, A History of the Israelite Religion, 110}

\footnote{130 Frank Crusemann, Der Widerstand, 213}
In the same vein, after the capture of the Jebusite city of Jerusalem, David created for himself a residence independent of the tribes (5:6-9), and consequently laid the foundation for the rapid build-up of central political authority in Israel. The institution of kingship thus gradually took on the features of statehood, and progressively forced aside the checks and balances against domination, which was characteristic of the tribal alliance. The primary intention of the men of Judah and elders of Israel in their decision to anoint David as king (i.e. the establishment of a king of their choice and the preservation of their tribal right to collaboration), soon disappeared into the thin air as they soon discovered that this was not the case, rather they were adapting to the political, military, and economic power that David had created for himself. Not surprisingly therefore, there ensued a rebel movement where the traditional organs of the tribal society attempted to reverse the order of events and bring about a more desired constitutional monarchy with the young prince Absalom. But with the victory of David’s mercenaries at the battle in the forest of Ephraim (2Sam. 18:6-8) the resistance movement fell apart (cf. 2Sam. 19:9ff), and the development of an absolute dynastic monarchy “which no longer needed the legitimation from the people but secured a monopoly of power for itself throughout the land by means of bureaucratic apparatus could no longer be stopped”.\footnote{Rainer Albertz, \textit{A History of the Israelite Religion}, 110} Accordingly, Solomon’s elevation to the throne was simply a matter for the parties at the court (1Kings 1:1).

With such acquisition of power, David’s conquests knew no bounds. After laying the Philistine threats to rest, David immediately went over to deliberate battles. He subdued the Canaanite city-states that were still in existence, subjugated the neighboring states east of the Jordan and incorporated them into his empire (2Sam:8). Under David, Israel became
a large-scale territorial state having incorporated a lot of vassals. Thus it also had at its disposal a considerable proportion of non-Israelite population that needed to be integrated culturally and religiously. The control of the trade routes in the Near East, and the tribute, which was exacted from vassals, brought about unprecedented riches flowing into Jerusalem and made possible the rapid economic and social rise of the Davidic kingdom. In addition, there was a comprehensive reorganization of the army, the nucleus of which was the troop of royal professional soldiers (servants of David) ready for combat at a moment’s notice, and the royal bodyguards with their modernized weapons. The above set-up quickly metamorphosed into the formation of an official apparatus for military and civil administration (2Sam. 8:15-18), which increasingly deprived the traditional tribal decision-makers of their power. This gave rise to a new social class in the society, whose social status no longer depended on membership in the family and clan, but only on their royalty to the king. The fact that David and Solomon as a matter of practice resorted to experts from abroad and not to the ideals of tribal Israelite community strengthens the position of this group. It was the growth of this stratum of officials, military men and merchants, endowed with royal privileges that led to the undermining of the egalitarian structures of the Israelite society. Here, royalty to the king, rather than the god of the land (as was the case in the tribal alliance) became the new source of social and individual identity.

Furthermore, the Solomonic division of Israel into twelve provinces as a royal administrative necessity to enforce levies and taxes in order to maintain the extensive

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132 For instance, the Cher’ethites and the Pel’ethites (2Sam. 15:18ff; 20:6ff)
apparatus of the state further alienated the people, and strengthened the power of a centralized state and cult. The fourth chapter of 1 Kings contains two lists of Solomon’s royal officials: the הַשְּׂרֵּים (hassarim – Princes), or the administrative officials of the royal court in Jerusalem, and the נִצְּבִים (nissabim – officers) who were appointed administrators over the twelve provinces. Yeivin elucidates on the administrative specifics of the provincial list, the details of which is not our major concern here. Of importance to this study however is the effect of this geographical distortion. By geographically re-mapping the traditional clans into tax districts, with governors appointed from the center (whose primary allegiance was to the king who appointed them, rather than the people whom they govern), Solomon intentionally eliminated the tribal system of decentralized power, weakened tribal autonomy, and kept revolt against oppression at bay. The expanding royal domains found its clearest expression in the extensive state building activities carried out through the introduction of state forced labor. Solomon not only built his residence in Jerusalem, but also erected store cities, chariot cities, and fortified cities in the entire kingdom for the tax system and military administration (cf. 1 Kings 9:15ff). In this way “he brought whole sphere of the Israelite state under the direct control of the central government”. Deserving officials were rewarded with gifts of land (1 Sam. 8:14; 22: 7), which was now a personal property of the throne. The tribal alliance system where the land belonged to Yahweh, with religious restrictions that prevented the sale of land and other family heritage (1 Kings 21:2ff; Micah 2:2), became a thing of the past. The insistence of

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135 Reviv observes that the administration was opposed to tribal independence, the spirit of separatism inherent in it and the traditional inherited boundaries, thus the breaking of the territorial tribal framework was a strong priority, see H. Reviv, “The Structure of Society”, 137
136 Rainer Albertz, A History of the Israelite Religion, 112
Ezekiel 46:16-18 (for the new beginning after the exile) that kings must not dispossess the people of their inheritance nor give such as gifts to his royal officials points to the devastating effects these royal gifts of land must have exerted on Israelite families with their inherited small assets.

In any case, the royal economics of privilege, the rigorous tax system, and the burden of the extended conscription to forced labor of the Israelite population fostered disruptive economic stratification and repression that separated the wealthy from the poor.\textsuperscript{137} The main instrument in the process of economic repression was the harsh law of credit, which provided for the creditor to seize not only the whole property of the defaulting debtor, but also his family and his person (2Kings 4:1). Thus, if a small business farmer fails to pay back a loan due to a failed harvest, disproportionately high interest, and burdens of taxation and forced labor, he not only loses his farmland, but is taken into slavery with his family, loses his personal rights, and works for a specific period for the creditor in order to pay off his debts.\textsuperscript{138} As a result of this form of forced and unjust labor, the dignity of labor disappeared.

The institution of the monarchy and the administration of the officials were thus fiercely disputed in the Israelite society. Three groups could be identified: a group which profited from it (officials, military, priests), and propagated it in a completely positive way; a middle party which sought to defend it and reconcile it with traditional tribal values; and a group which repudiated it and fought against it.\textsuperscript{139} One thing was clear, the former Israelite God who was a god of liberation, has become a god of internal and external

\textsuperscript{137} Cf. H. Reviv, “The Structure of Society”, 137-141
\textsuperscript{138} Rainer Albertz, \textit{A History of the Israelite Religion}, 160; also see the concerns of Micah 2:2; Amos 8:6
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 113
oppression under the monarchy. On the internal level, the oppressive forced labor and imposed taxes were great burden on the people that it actually led to the separation of the northern kingdom in the time of Jeroboam (1Kings 12ff). Externally, we note that after the victory over the Philistines, David’s wars were no longer battles of liberation as in the period before the state or in the time of Saul. His large-scale campaigns not only lacked the essential elements that characterized the pre-state conflicts (the need to ward off emergency, the voluntary participation, and the achievement of solidarity through a charismatic figure), instead the goal was a permanent subjugation of other peoples (2Sam 8). How can the king, under these circumstances, still be seen as bringing about the saving action of Yahweh to Israel? How can one provide a religious legitimation for a continuous monarchical rule, which was never the case in the Yahweh religion? Within this theological void emerged the Davidic and Solomonic court theologians (for instance, Court prophets like Nathan and Gad or priests of the state cult like Zadok and Azariah) who intervened with a legitimation of the monarchical rule, which of course was essentially new for Yahweh religion. How did this happen, and what are the implications for the concept of Yahweh in relation to the pre-state model?

1.4.2 The Fusion of Throne and Altar: Kingship and Temple Theology

By the time Israel took on the monarchical system of government, monarchy as an institution has already existed in the Ancient Near East for centuries. In antiquity, monarchy was sacred, the king was regarded directly as God representative on earth, the

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140 Ibid., 111
son of God, the image of God, or even God himself, who imposed divine rule and order both within and outside the state. Little wonder then that the establishment of monarchy in Israel followed the same trajectory forcing aside the Yahweh traditions opposed to domination. As Albertz notes, “the religious legitimation of the monarchy formulated by the Davidic court theologians on the basis of the kingship theology of the ancient Near East similarly led to a close personal, indeed almost creaturely relationship between Yahweh and the king which elevated the later above all others and brought him near to God”.

Accordingly, in Psalm 2:7 Yahweh says of the King (You are my son, today I have begotten you). The king is also the one at God’s right hand (Ps. 80:18; 110:1), whom God has exalted on high, (2Sam. 23:1), and his throne is a divine throne (Ps. 45:6). In fact, he could even be called god or divine (elohim Ps. 45:7). While there was certainly a hesitation to identify the king with Yahweh, probably an effect of the transcendence of Yahweh, it nonetheless seemed likely that Pss. 2:7 and 110:3 should be interpreted as the divine rebirth of the king at his enthronement.

Here we should also keep in mind that the anointed of Yahweh was regarded as untouchable or even sacred (1Sam. 26:9). No matter how the nature of this affiliation is interpreted, it is clear that “an exceptional relationship between the king and Yahweh was propagated, which was

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141 In the dynasty of Akkad (Mesopotamia) the king was divinized, in Egypt, the king was regarded as the incarnate of the god Horus, the office was divine while the king was semi-divine, but took the nature of the god Osiris after his death. For details of sacral monarchy, cf. the extensive study of Egypt and Mesopotamia by Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1978).


143 See also Ps. 110; 2Sam. 7:14

largely independent of the relationship of Yahweh to Israel.” Thus, just as David was no longer dependent on the tribes for military support, the Davidic monarchy created its own independent theological basis, with theologians who served his purposes, making the king’s ambition a raw material for their theology. This phenomenon became literary tangible in the promise of Nathan, a divine promise that the Davidic monarchy would last forever (2Sam. 7; Ps. 89:20-38).

Flowing from this exceptional kingly relationship with God is the combination of political and sacral functions. The king not only rules over the world, but also takes on priestly roles as a mediator of divine blessings. The Davidic kingship was seen as a direct depiction of divine rule of the world. Psalm 2, which is classified as a royal/enthronement psalm is indicative. In this theology, Yahweh was no longer just the god of Israel but was imposed over the people of the world. As such he repudiates the vassal nations who had rebelled against Israel (vss. 1-3) by consecrating a new Davidic king on his holy mountain and proclaiming him his son (vv. 6-7), freely granting him rule over the world by giving him all the nations as a heritage and personal possession (v.8) and entrusting to him the task of compelling the people with rod and iron to submit to his rule (v.9). Thus, by his subjection of the people the king established the rule and fearful respect of Yahweh in the world (vv. 10-12). The violence and crime against humanity that came as a result of David’s insatiable greed for power were thus excused and legitimated by intertwining divine and royal rule. David could thus involve Yahweh in his campaigns by dedicating the most valuable booty to him (2Sam.8:11). It is clear that any kind of war of conquest

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could be legitimated under this theology. Here, “war became an element in a comprehensive theological view of the world order which made the interests of one’s own state absolute”\textsuperscript{147}. In the kingship theology, the former unwarlike Yahweh became the symbol of an expanding political rule.

Strikingly also, the relationship between Yahweh and the people fades into the background as the king takes on the important function of mediator and guarantor of the divine blessing (Ps. 21:7). Here the functions of the king were in no way limited to the political and legal sphere. In accordance with the conception of sacral kingship, the king also took on cultic functions. As priest, the king performed the sacrificial cult, especially at important festivals (2Sam. 6:17ff; 1Kings 8:62ff; 2Kings 10:18ff). As a result of his special relationship with God, he made the fundamental claim to possess the holiness of priests, took over the maintenance of temple building and sacrificial worship, had authority over temple finances (2Kings 12:5ff), took over the cultic mediation between God and the people, and prayers were offered for him in the cult (Pss. 20; 72). Also as a vehicle of divine spirit (1Sam. 6:13), he also claimed the position of mediator of revelation (2Sam. 23:2ff), and any revolt against the king was considered a simultaneous revolt against God (Ps. 21:11). One can hardly think of a closer fusion of throne and altar as the Israelite cult became an essential part of the royal state cult. With the close merging of Yahweh and state power, and “the monopolization of the relationship between God and Israel by the monarchy” in such a way that “all the essential aspect of the relationship between the wider group and God (creaturely, political and cultic) run through the king and find their unity in

\textsuperscript{147} Rainer Albertz, \textit{A History of the Israelite Religion}, 120

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his person", god’s will became imprisoned in the king’s. With the imprisonment of god’s will also came the imprisonment of the people’s spirituality as it was robbed from them and placed in an institution. Whatever the king says, albeit from selfish motives became the will of God. Within this theology, as Eastern Mennonite University Professor of theology and peace studies, Ted Grimsrud asserts, “God ceases to be wild and free, ceases to be a community-god as in the covenant community under Moses, but becomes a god who would not act apart from the king’s agenda. God is now fully accessible to the king, and, in effect, available to the king at all times. A God who may actually act independently of the regime in power is repressed in favor of a God of the king”. Was Israel now necessarily dependent on the mediation of the royal son for entering into relationship with Yahweh? A group of court theologians certainly respond in a resounding affirmative. In fact, these group of cult theologians turned Yahweh from the symbol of liberation from state oppression into the guarantor of state power with its new apparatus of oppression not only of alien peoples (wars of expansion) but also of its own society (forced labor). Here, as Albertz succinctly puts it, “there was direct opposition to the original impulse, and here Yahweh religion succumbed to the domination of political power and became an ideology in the strict sense of the word.”

Another aspect of Yahweh religion that was fundamentally affected by the monarchy was the system of Israelite worship. A new type of royal sanctuary developed and became

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148 Rainer Albertz, *A History of the Israelite Religion*, 121. He identifies this monopoly and fusion as problematic consequences of kingship theology since the theology not only had completely different roots but also ran contrary to what had constituted Yahweh’s religion from the beginning.

149 Cf. Ted Grimsrud, “King Solomon and Temple Politics: 1Kings 1-9”. Online @ http://peacetheology.net/the-bible-on-peace/12-king-solomon-and-temple-politics/

150 The already mentioned court theologians were certainly in this group, also cf. Rainer Albertz, *A History of the Israelite Religion*, 122.

a permanent suppression of the simple local sanctuaries supported by the population of a locality or region.\textsuperscript{152} The epitome of this phenomenon was the splendid construction of the Jerusalem state sanctuary, which, following the tradition observable in Amos 7:13 could be seen as a private chapel of the king and the public sanctuary of the kingdom in which the whole kingdom was to find its cultic center. The Solomonic temple became the icing on the centralization of the main Israelite cult, which later in different religious and political conditions, set in motion the deuteronomic requirement of the abolition of local cults outside Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{153} Thus the inseparable connection between political power and the cult was stamped. The main cult became a state department. Accordingly, the priests were royal appointees bound by regulations (2Sam. 8:17), and sometimes even members of the royal family (v.18) or related to it (2Kings 11:2). For instance, David appointed two priests (Abiathar and Zadok) to his national sanctuaries (2Sam. 8:17; 20:25). Notably, Abiathar, was his old friend, companion, and loyalist from the time of his struggle with Saul (1Sam. 23:9; 30:7). As soon as Solomon took office, he banished him to Anathoth (1Kings 2:26ff) and retained Zadok (probably a former Jebusite priest of Jerusalem)\textsuperscript{154} whom he gave the priestly monopoly in Jerusalem. By favoring the Zadokites, Solomon evidently had no interest in maintaining any links between the state cult and the pre-state traditions of Yahweh. In fact, “the reason why the official Yahweh religion of the Jerusalem temple

\textsuperscript{152} An example of these type of new royal sanctuaries was the provincial cultic high place of Arad, which was built over with a regular temple complex in the construction of a royal fortress at the time of Solomon, cf. Ibid., 128

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{154} The genealogy of 2Sam. 8:17 which makes Zadok a son of Ahitub, hence a descendant of Eli is clearly a result of a textual corruption, cf. R.W. Corney, ‘Zadok the Priest’ in George Buttrick et al, \textit{The Interpreter’s Dictionary}, 928; or a laborious effort to rectify his genealogy at a later stage, cf. Albertz, \textit{A History of the Israelite Religion}, 129. Scholarly evidence show that Zadok was the priest of the Jebusite sanctuary at Jerusalem when the town was captured by David, and David allowed him to keep his priestly function in order to please the old inhabitants. For details cf. H.H. Rowley, ‘Zadok and Nehushtan’ in \textit{Journal of Biblical Literature}, LVIII, (1939), 113-41
shows hardly any awareness of the liberation traditions of the early period” insists Albertz, “is that from Solomon onwards, former non-Israelites gave it its tone, as priests and theologians”.\(^{155}\)

The same trajectory was given a final endorsement by the temple theology, which centered on Jerusalem as the city of God, and the kingship of Yahweh.\(^{156}\) Indeed, the temple architecture is significant to the theology of Jerusalem as the city of God. Here, we note David’s idea of bringing the tribal cultic symbol of the ark, which has been forgotten after the destruction of Shiloh into his new capital as to make it the cultic center of his kingdom, and Solomon’s initiative to renovate former Jebusite sanctuary into a splendid temple complex magnificently adorned for the cult of Yahweh in the imperial city. The Jerusalem temple was not only a royal property but with the palace formed a single complex (1Kings 7:12; cf. Ezek. 43:8). The shape, decoration of the holy of holies, architectural features and symbolism of the Solomonic temple closely imitates its contemporary ANE models and conception of the temple as the divine dwelling place.\(^{158}\) Theologically therefore, the temple clearly expresses a separation of God and human beings. The thick walls and the demarcations of three levels of holiness\(^{159}\) seek to limit free access to the sanctuary in order to protect God from any profanation. The special divine


\(^{156}\) Although it might be difficult to demonstrate with certainty that the title of king was transferred to Yahweh only after the establishment of the monarchy, recent studies show a widespread consensus that the notion of Yahweh’s kingship attained essential significance only in the Jerusalem state cult, cf. Werner H. Schmidt, *The Faith of the Old Testament: A History*, trans. John Sturdy (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 115; Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *The Dethronement of Sabaoth: Studies in the Shem and Kavod Theologies* (CWK Gleerup, 1982), 24ff

\(^{157}\) Albertz argues convincingly that the impression that Solomon’s temple was constructed on a virgin soil is wrong. Not only is it questionable to claim that David had kept the ark in a tent for over a period of forty years, it is also improbable that before David, the city had no sanctuary and that the place of the later sanctuary had been a threshing floor (2Sam. 24:16ff). In fact, the report in 1Kings 6 suggests a rebuilding than a complete new building, cf. Albertz, *A History of the Israelite Religion*, 130

\(^{158}\) See, ibid., 130-131

\(^{159}\) The Holy of Holies, the court of Levites and the outer court.
bond to his people which is so characteristic of the patriarchal experience and the Yahweh religion of the tribal alliance found no expression at all in this temple architecture. The lay people were excluded from the cultic practices in the temple building, and could only observe from the outer court beyond which they were not allowed. According to Albertz, “for the people, Yahweh the god of liberation disappeared behind thick walls in the semi-darkness of the royal temple. Only the splendid bronze pillars Jachin and Boaz which flanked the entrance hall still gave the people a visible impression of the exalted majesty”.  

The temple architecture therefore, rather than symbolizing a bond between Yahweh and the people, became the symbol of the bond between Yahweh and a place. In Jerusalem temple theology, Yahweh became a god who is enthroned and dwells (יְשֵׁב yoseb, Isa.6:1; יִֽשְׁכָּן hassoken, 8:18) on Mt. Zion. This theological substitution of Yahweh’s close relationship to a people with Yahweh’s close relationship to a place is clearly expressed in Solomon’s dedication speech in 1 Kings 8:12: “Yahweh has set the sun in the heavens, but has said that he would dwell in thick darkness, I have built thee an exalted house, a place for thee to dwell in forever”. Here, Yahweh moves from a people-centered god to a place-centered god. He is now contained in a house, and controlled by the will of the one who has built the house for him. Thus, it was no longer the liberation of Israel from Egypt, but the event of Yahweh’s enthronement on Zion (i.e. the bringing of the ark into the Jebusite-Solomonic temple), that became the pivotal act of divine salvation, which founded and reinforced the Israelite state.

In the same vein, the kingship of Yahweh placed the political powers of the earthly

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king parallel to the divine rule of the world, as such placing the divine will in an individual. It also maintained the traditional position of Yahweh as sole god, preventing the development of a regular pantheon. Yahweh became the king who degraded other gods to be his courtiers. Accordingly, an aggressive “universalistic” tendency (which draws from the cultic traditions of the Canaanites) became the hallmark of Yahweh religion.\footnote{Albertz, \textit{A History of the Israelite Religion} 137} To this effect, Jerusalem became the center of the world, ‘established forever’ (Ps. 48:8) by Yahweh, endowed by his cultic presence for a lasting unconditional assurance of protection (Ps. 46:6; 48:4-5) that made the city fearless even in times of trouble and chaos (Ps. 46:2-4). By safeguarding his divine city against any threat, Yahweh at the same time gave the whole world stability from Zion (Ps. 46:9-11; 76:11-12), such that Jerusalem, at least in theological imagination, becomes universal realm of peace (the joy of the whole world, Ps. 48:2). Correspondingly, Yahweh’s militant intervention for his city is based on the subjection and humiliation of the nations (Ps. 46:9f; 76:4), thereby rising to become supreme god universally extending the horizon of his influence. He was no longer just the god of a politically marginal group and responsible for its grief and joys, but now reigned from Zion, with the help of his king, over the whole world of nations, and was responsible for world history as a whole. In the light of this theology therefore, Yahweh defends ‘his city’ not ‘his people’ and institution takes priority over issues of justice and the pertinent needs of the peoples. This underscores Albertz’s unease with the monarchic temple theology: “the problem with this theology was above all that it identified Yahweh so closely with the temple, the capital, indeed its defenses (Ps. 48:13-15) that it preluded a political salvation for the people in a way which made them completely insensitive … and
From El, Yahweh, the formerly wild god of the southern wilderness regions, took on majestic features, and became theologically fused so directly with institutions of power, that it forgot that he had once been the guarantor of the freedom of the politically helpless in the face of the attacks of the politically powerful, but instead took on a reverse role. The fluid god of liberation became the centralized god of oppression, a fluid god that was close to the people and served their social and cultural needs became a distant constituted god that served the needs of the king and the institution, a fluid god who had unlimited freedom to manifest the Godself now took residence in a temple built by the king, and became as it were the king’s tenant, under the king’s control, and imprisoned in the king’s will. The unwarlike fluid god of the patriarchs became the combatant god of the state. With the patriarchs, a fluid God acted non-violently on-behalf of his people, with the Monarchy, God’s people acted violently on-behalf of a God they have made rigid. It was not until this theology of political commandeering of Yahweh was countered by the course of history, and the capital and its temple lay in ruins in 587, “could this theology be fully integrated into Yahweh religion and develop a considerable potential for hope in an eschatological refraction which was now socially dysfunctional”. With the monarchy therefore, the fluidity of divine conceptualization and its concomitant integration of God, land, and identity was largely displaced. Yet the tradition did not entirely disappear from Jewish consciousness, it persists in rabbinic literature and Jewish mysticism even long after the catastrophic destruction of the second temple in AD70.

162 Albertz, A History of the Israelite Religion 137
163 Albertz, A History of the Israelite Religion
1.5 The Persistence of Divine Fluidity in Jewish and Christian Traditions

The foregoing makes it clear that the monarchy spelt doom to the notion of Yahweh’s fluidity. The rejection of the fluid tradition is also obvious in the works of the Deuteronomist and Priestly authors, as we also examined. One would therefore expect that since the Deuteronomist and Priestly writers were the final editors that shaped the present form of the Hebrew bible, their rejection of the divine multiple embodiments would have endured in subsequent Jewish traditions, but this is not the case. On the contrary, the notion of a single God who is free to manifest Godself in several bodies while maintaining the oneness of the Godself is so strong that it endures in postbiblical rabbinic literature, Jewish mysticism and in other religious traditions that lay claim to the Hebrew Scriptures, notably, Christianity.

1.5.1 The Shekhinah

One of the concepts in classical rabbinic texts that suggest the multiplicity of divine embodiment is that of the Shekhinah. This post biblical term often depicts God’s presence or indwelling, and in some rabbinical texts, is used interchangeably with the priestly Kavod. While rabbinic texts dating from this era generally tend to display the theological outlook of the Priestly and Deuteronomic tradition, some texts that discuss the Shekhinah point to the endurance of the Yahwist/Elohist divine self-fragmentation in the

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164 These texts date from 700 to 900 C.E. They often depict the theological picture of the priestly and deuteronomical traditions.
165 The verbal root is the same as found in miskhan (terbanacle) and shakhen (to dwell) both of which occur frequently in the priestly texts, cf. Sommer, The Bodies of God, 126
166 For instance, in Tanhuma Naso 12 the two terms appear as synonyms in the same sentence. Also cf. Rabbi Yosi’s teaching on God’s descent in Sukkah 5a and in Mekhila Behodesh 4. While he speaks of the Shekhinah’s descent in the former, he speaks of the Kavod’s descent in the later.
rabbinc conceptualization of Yahweh. These texts present the Shekhinah as simultaneously located in a specific earthly geographic site and in heaven.¹⁶⁷ *Tanhuma Naso* 12 for instance narrates how the angels were perturbed at the completion of the mosaic tabernacle because the Shekhinah would relocate to the earthly tabernacle and thus abandon them, but God reassured them that Shekhinah will remain in heaven even after he goes to dwell in the earthly sanctuary. Put differently, God assures the angels that the divine self is unlike the human who can only be localized in a particular place at any given time. Here we see a clear instance of multiple fragmentation of the divine selfhood where the concrete presence in a particular geographical location does not diminish the simultaneous presence in another. Other rabbinc texts, notably the targumim on Deuteronomy 31:3-8,¹⁶⁸ where the Shekhinah acts both as God and on behalf of God, present a picture of an entity that is distinct from God and at the same time an aspect of God, a kind of image that could engender a theological dilemma unless if viewed as “a late example of the fluidity model so well attested in the ancient near eastern literature”.¹⁶⁹

### 1.5.2 The Merkavah and the Kabbalah

A more pronounced recurrence of the fluidity model of divine selfhood in Judaism is evident in the mystical texts of the first millennium C.E., for instance, the *merkavah* (chariot) mysticism, and in classical Jewish mysticism as it began to develop in the twelfth century C.E., the *kabbalah*. The idea of an angel whose self to some degree overlaps with

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¹⁶⁷ Some Rabbinic texts take a more priestly view and simply equate the Shekhinah with God, dwelling first between the cherubs in the tabernacle, then in the temple similar to the priestly Kavod, cf. for instance *Sifre Naso* 58, and *Pesiqta Rabbati* 5:7. Others take the more Deuteronomist outlook insisting that the Shekhinah never descended on mount Sinai, cf. *Sukkah* 5a and *Mekhîta Behodesh* 4. Thus rabbinic literature that discuss the Shekhinah attest to both fluidity and antifluidity models.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. for instance, Targum Onkelos, and Targum Pseudo Jonathan on the passage

¹⁶⁹ Benjamin Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 128
Yahweh but did not exhaust all of Yahweh is picked up in the merkavah literature. 3 Enoch is a typical example. Here, Rabbi Ishmael recounts his journey to heaven, how he saw God’s throne and chariot, and the revelations he received from the heavenly figure Metatron, who at different instances could be referred to as “the Prince of Divine Presence” (1:9; 3:1), called by the name of his creator (4:1), and identified with the human being Enoch (4:2). In the Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 38b there is even an indication that Metatron has the power to forgive sins, a statement that has partly generated the ‘two powers in heaven’ controversy.

Along this line, the kabbalistic doctrine of the sephirot also constitutes “a highly complex version of the notion that the divine can fragment itself into multiple selves that nonetheless remain part of a unified whole”. The sephirot as a concept depicts the ten manifestations of God in the universe as opposed to the absolutely inconceivable essence of God outside the universe. The ten sephirot disclose degrees of individual existence while not attaining the level of independent deities. According to one of the classical kabbalistic thinkers, Moshe Idel, the sephirot is an expression of the “organic part of the divine essence” whose interactions with each other could be defined as “intradeical dynamism”. The affinity between the kabbalistic texts and fluidity model also comes to the fore in some of the sexual descriptions of interactions among aspects of God. For instance, some passages

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172 See Ibid. For a different perspective see Alan E Segal, Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports About Christianity and Gnosticism, SJLA 25 (Leiden: Brill, 1977)
173 Benjamin Sommer, The Bodies of God, 129
174 Moshe Idel, Kabbalah: New Perspectives (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 139; see the entire discussion pp. 138-140
in the Zohar, widely considered as the most important work of the kabbalah literature, envision the holy of holies in the temple as the locus of sexual union between distinct aspects of God, which achieve unity through their sexual act.\textsuperscript{175} According to Sommer, the kabbalistic explicit attribution of sexual contact between the male and female aspects of God while insisting that these aspects are part of one God is a revival and great amplification of a “prepriestly, and predeuteronomic” form of Israelite monotheism.\textsuperscript{176}

Apart from the above Jewish traditions, Christianity also picks up this model of conceptualization and reflects it in its doctrines and worship.

\subsection*{1.5.3 New Testament and Christian Tradition}

The very idea of the incarnation presents a Christian form of the belief in multiple divine embodiments. In this theology, as adequately expressed in the climatic verse of the Johannine λόγος hymn (Jn. 1:14), God took the human body, he became flesh (Καὶ ὁ Λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο), and dwelt among us, localizing Godself on earth (καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν). But this fact of earthly localization did not mean that the deity did not also remain in heaven at the same time. Interestingly also, the λόγος is identified as the locus of God’s glory (δόξαν ὡς μονογενῆς παρὰ πατρός), and the word σκηνή is used in verse 14. The σκηνή\textsuperscript{177} leitmotif, a theme that pervades the Elohist fluid ‘tented divine presence’ experience of the Israelites during the desert wanderings is significant. Raymond Brown draws attention to the important associations of the word σκηνή in the Old Testament as the site of God’s earthly manifestation: “When the prologue proclaims that the Word made his dwelling among men, we are being told that the flesh of Jesus Christ is the new

\begin{footnotes}
\item[175] See Ibid., 128-136; also Elliot Wolfson, \textit{Through a Speculum}, 363-387
\item[176] Benjamin Sommer, \textit{The Bodies of God}, 131
\item[177] As seen in Exodus 25: 8-9, where the people of Israel are instructed to make a tent (Tabernacle - σκηνή) so that God can dwell among his people
\end{footnotes}
localization of God’s presence on earth”.178 Accordingly, “the presence of God, and of God-as-Jesus on earth is nothing more than a particular version of this old idea of multiple embodiments, hence no more offensive to monotheistic theology than the Yahwist and Elohist sections of the Pentateuch”.179

Other passages in the New Testament also give evidence of fluidity in the sense of overlap between the deity and another being. After Jesus baptism, the Holy Spirit came down like a dove upon Jesus. Luke tells us the Spirit came down “in bodily form, as a dove” (καὶ καταβῆναι τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἁγιόν σωματικῶς ἐδεί ως περιστερὰν ἐπ’ αὐτόν –Luke 3:22). Here we see the overlap of the Holy Spirit and the body of a dove just as the divine body could overlap with that of the mal’akh and other elements in the Hebrew Scriptures.

The theology of the trinity presents even a more palpable example of the persistence of the fluidity model in the Christian thought. This theology understands the oneness of God from the perspective of three distinct persons, equal in dignity and majesty. According to Sommer, “the trinity emerges as a fairly typical example of the fragmentation of a single deity into seemingly distinct manifestations that do not quite undermine the deity’s coherence”.180 Christian biblical commentators including the church fathers of the early centuries181 therefore do not hesitate to connect the trinity with Genesis 18 (Abraham’s three visitors), which represents a typical example of the fluidity of divine selfhood as already examined. The idea of ‘three persons in one God’ thus presents a similar tendency in the Yahwist juxtaposition of singular and plural in the Gen. 18 narrative. It crystallizes

179 Benjamin Sommer, The Bodies of God, 133
180 Benjamin Sommer, The Bodies of God, 132
181 See for instance, Augustine, On the Trinity, Book II, Chapter 10
the idea of God entrenched in the fluidity model which nullifies mathematical numerical logic in the conception of the divine.

In the same vein, Catholicism’s theology of trans-substantiation also presents a startling instance of the persistence of the ancient scriptural belief in divine self-fragmentation. According to this theology, when a priest utters the words of consecration, ordinary bread changes in substance and becomes not just a sign, but the real body of Jesus Christ. Here, a deity embodies an inanimate element in such a way that the element becomes identical with the deity, and could rightly be adored. The ‘real presence’ theology is therefore reminiscent of Jacob’s masseba that became el after Jacob performed the ritual of anointing. Accordingly, just as the Israelite God became present in many bodies on earth as the Israelites anointed sacred poles, stones, etc., so too the catholic God’s body is present in many locations wherever the Eucharist is celebrated. The above considerations expose the impressive endurance of ancient beliefs in religions that lay claim to the Hebrew bible and the rich debate that the fluidity and antifluidity models continue to inspire. The dominant position of the Priestly and Deuteronomist texts obscure the very existence of the fluidity traditions such that we tend to read the fluidity traditions within the framework of the antifluidity texts, a framework that encourages us view evidence of fluidity as mere metaphor or not to notice them at all. Notwithstanding the P and D rejection of divine multiple embodiment, the notion did not simply vanish, hence, there exists a tension between the two traditions within Christianity. While the centralized and constituted God of the Israelite monarchy dominate Christian catechetical, theological and metaphysical tradition, the fluid God of the Elohist and Yahwist tradition still endures both in popular religiosity, and in official doctrines, albeit in a suppressed from. These considerations give
evidence to the notion of a single God whose manifestations take action on their own without becoming sufficiently independent to impugn the oneness of that God. It is this concept of God that brings God closer to worshippers, and allows God to identify with the needs and cultural circumstances of devotees.

1.6 Evaluation

In this chapter, we have studied the model of ancient Israelite experience where land and culture are central to relationship with the divine. We also explored the displacement of this model during the monarchy, and its persistence in the traditions that lay claim to the Hebrew Scriptures. In line with the theological worldview of the Mediterranean world, the Yahwist and Elohist authors provide us with a string of biblical tradition where God’s body and self are utterly unrestrained. For these writers God’s person differs from the human person because Godself could manifest in multiple bodies even as the underlying unity of the being called Yahweh endures. This model of divine consciousness informed the family based patriarchal and El/Yahweh religion among ancient Israelites with its cultic, social, and political decentralization. The formation of a centralized state during the Monarchic period and the establishment of a hierarchical, static, and king-controlled religion disorganized what constituted the heart of the above model. The Priestly and Deuteronomistic traditions that reject the fluidity of divine embodiment find expression in the monarchical cultic centralization.

Both the Priestly/Deuteronomistic and Yahwist/Elohist traditions have theological implications. As regards the former, a single divine embodiment supports a central place of law, and enhances a specific holy land and sacred space. Here, the theology of land is
important, but it strictly points to a particular land: Jerusalem. Consequently, as manifested in the monarchy, access to God becomes limited as Godself is constrained within this particular space, and the will of the mediator-king invariably also becomes the will of God. The Yahwist and Elohist tradition also endorses a theology of the land but in a different way. Jerusalem remains a sacred space but only one among other equally valid sacred spaces. God inhabits places even outside of the Promised Land. This must be contrasted with pantheism and panentheism since the model maintains that God could be in a particular object (this massebah) or place (Bethel) but not in others. Here we see a level of transcendence that the fluidity model incorporates. Along this line Sommer observes that the Yahwist and Elohist fluidity model provides a deft resolution to the tension between divine transcendence (a concept of the Deity apart from the world) and personalism (a concept of the Deity as anthropomorphically involved in the world). For monotheistic religion that insists on God’s transcendence and immanence, “the concept of multiple embodiment cuts the Gordian knot: God is not the same as the world’s *physis*, but God can choose to inhabit specific parts of the *physis* in order to be present to His worshippers...God can be anthropomorphically involved in the world even as God is not identified with the world because this God is not bound to one place.”182 It is only when there is one divine body that the tension between transcendence and immanence is heightened. It follows then that the fluidity model preserves the transcendence and unknowability of God no less than the metaphysic tradition of philosophy and ontolog The conceptualization here is not ‘either/or’, but ‘both/and’ as it

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182 Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, 141
maintains the balance between a god who is radically different from, and profoundly close to his people.

A God who can be in various created substances is a God who is not constituted. S/he is a God who can change. A God who can change is also a God who can experience joy and pain, loneliness and love, such a God can seek out humanity, rise above God’s own physicality, become alterable yet remain omnipotent. The fluidity tradition more than the traditions that posit one body preserves God’s freedom and transcendence even as it maintains divine personhood and vulnerability central to the scriptures. This is the God that seeks to enter into dialogue with humanity. We can conclude that the fluidity model provides us with the ‘most profound monotheistic perception of Yahweh in the Hebrew bible, reflects Yahweh’s freedom, expresses Yahweh’s grace’, and underscores Yahweh’s desire to enter into relationship with humanity, maintaining the triad connection between land, God, and identity.

In the second chapter we turn our attention to West Africa and investigate how the traditional religious, political, and family structures highlight the triad connectivity between the divine, the land, and the individual/community’s identity. We do this by investigating the traditional religious worldview and pre-colonial political and family structures with a focus on the Oyo Empire and Igbo family structures and rituals. The chapter also studies two decisive and influential events in the physical, mental, and moral displacement of West Africa: slavery and colonialism. These (together with missionary activities, to be studied in chapter three) engendered the displacement of the triad

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183 Ibid., 140, 143
connectivity and introduced an alien space. The effects still linger in what scholars have termed ‘coloniality’. To the study of this complex reality, we now turn.
Chapter Two

God, Land, Identity: The Case of West Africa

2.1 Introduction

The dominance of Christianity and Islam in contemporary West Africa gives the impression that African Traditional Religion and Spirituality is on its final exit. However, beneath this external displacement of African cultic and ritual structures is the persistence of traditional religious forms and values. In fact, reflecting on the impact of Christianity in Africa in the late 1960’s, T. A. Beetham rightly wondered whether Christianity has actually delivered a death-blow to African Traditional Religion.1 While the African Traditional religious cults continue to diminish and to be externally rejected, its categories not only endure in the hearts, but also govern the practices in real life situations of many ordinary West African Christians and Muslims, even those who have also been educated in western traditions. Robert Fisher is on target: “…their traditional religiosity still exists today, even when many have converted to Islam or to Christianity. Educated Africans see no problem when they return to their traditional customs and religious values”.2 Theologically, this is the galvanizing force behind the efforts to interpret Christianity in African terms in order to make it intelligible to Africans.

Consequently, an impressive amount of studies have been carried out aimed at a cultural ‘accommodation’ of Christianity to African customs.3 Yet, this “attempt to couch essential

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1 T.A. Beetham, Christianity and the New Africa (London: Pall Mall Press, 1967), see pp. 5-7
Christianity into African categories and thought forms**4 while attractive, is also an implied acceptance of the view that the western/Christian/biblical revelation is fixed and final, and that any other form of revelation is faulty. Already in 1961, A.F. Walls expressed this view when he opines that any attempt to develop a form of doctrine simply because it conforms to African categories without testing it against the general and fixed biblical and Christian theological principles is detrimental to theological integrity.5 This mentality, which also lies implicit in some models of inculturation6 is not only an unconscious perpetuation of the missionary model that displaces the traditional cults and presents the western experience of divine revelation in Jesus Christ as the only valid one, it is also an implicit acknowledgment that the revelation of God through the indigenous religion is not adequate, and cannot validly stand on its own without legitimization by western/Christian categories. Here we note that the infinite God cannot be conditioned, imprisoned, or limited by the human person to a particular mode of self revelation as Walls suggests. If theology arises wherever there is theos (god) and logos (believers attempt to reflect on their belief in theos), then this projects rejects the above view and attempts to locate the west African site as a proper locus for theology and revelation. Hence we set out in this chapter to investigate the religious worldview of traditional West Africa and the pre-colonial political and family institutions.

We note first that any historical inquiry into the nature of God-talk in West Africa encounters an initial problem of sources. This is because since the tradition of ancient West

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6 The next chapter examines this in details
Africa (and indeed most of Africa) was essentially oral, the earliest written documents on this subject were the accounts of European ethnographers, explorers, philosophers, missionaries and colonialists. Due to chronological and cultural gap, misrepresentations, which stem from complete ignorance, preconceived erroneous notions, faulty understanding, superiority complex, and misguided enlightenment, were inevitable in these accounts. Few examples of such depictions will thus help to better appreciate the issues and contentions of this project. In his account of West Africa, the famous explorer, Sir Richard Burton wrote:

The Negro is still at the rude dawn of faith-fetishism, and he has barely advanced to idolatry. He has never grasped the ideas of a personal deity, a duty in life, a moral code, or a shame of lying. He rarely believes in the future state of rewards and punishments, which whether true or not are infallible indices of human progress.

Burton’s statement captures the orientation of ideological dominance and racial superiority entrenched in European psyche which reached its peak with the enlightenment, where, having adopted the evolutionary theory of Darwin, the European culture was celebrated as progress, and unfamiliar civilizations (Africa being a case in point) was categorized as ‘barbaric’, primitive, savage, and in fact, the heart of darkness. As a result, euro-centric epistemological perspectives became normative. For instance, having theorized the Christian God as the absolute spirit, as if to confine God within his perception, and

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9 Consider the prejudice portrayed in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* where Africa is described as “barbaric” and “a place of darkness” cf. (Dover 1990 edition) pp. 43, 48, 106
European history, G.W.F. Hegel could therefore dismiss the African experience of God in these words:

The […] African character is difficult to comprehend. [Their] consciousness has not yet attained to the realization of any substantial objective existence—as for example, God, or Law—in which the interest of man's volition is involved. Knowledge of an absolute Being, an Other and a Higher than his individual self, is entirely wanting. The Negro […] exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality—all that we call feeling—if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character.10

Not only did Hegel make his Eurocentric ideology the epistemic zero point, he also defines what it means to be human from such a perspective. Having thus demonized the African person, cultures, and cosmologies, the way was paved for justification of horrific crimes against humanity such as slavery and colonialism, with its concomitant violence, and exploitation of human and natural resources concealed in honorable ideals such as civilization, Christianization, humanitarianism, and modernity. As a result, almost as if blind to the human atrocities such as lynching, rape, and brutality that accompanied slavery in the United States, for instance, Archbishop Hughes of New York in 1861 wrote in the Metropolitan record that by making Africans slaves, the Europeans and Americans has saved them from the “butcheries prepared for them in their native land”.11 Here, the African ‘native land’ is categorized as ‘butcheries’, hence, the European expedition, no matter how brutal, was actually ‘salvific’. Thus did the Archbishop and indeed the Catholic

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establishment of his time\textsuperscript{12} provide justification for a vicious evil such as slavery, exonerating themselves and other direct and indirect perpetrators, and instead of beating their chest for such evil, gave a charitable face to it. ‘He who wants to kill a dog’, so the Igbo proverb goes, ‘gives the dog a bad name’. It is not surprising therefore that throughout the period of slavery in the United States of America, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops did not issue any official document to condemn such evil.\textsuperscript{13}

In line with the narrative that informed Archbishop Hughes’ statement, the erroneous description of Africa of a ‘dark’ continent enlightened only by the European occupation does not come as a surprise. Indeed the existence of a separate African history independent of the Europeans has been questioned. British historian and Regius Professor of Modern History at the University of Oxford, Hugh Trevor-Roper declares in 1963 to a BBC audience: “Perhaps in the future there will be some African history to teach. But at the present there is none; there is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness…and darkness is not the subject of history”.\textsuperscript{14} The existence of ancient expansive African kingdoms with highly sophisticated governmental structures that equals or even outweighs any of its counterparts in history,\textsuperscript{15} and the rich religious traditions of a people that have been described as inherently and “notoriously” religious,\textsuperscript{16} as extant in the wealth

\textsuperscript{12} As we shall see below, Pope Nicholas V had already approved the slave expedition of Portugal on the African coast and actually forgave the sins of all involved even before they embarked on the journey, cf. Nicholas V, Papal Bull, \textit{Dum Diversas}, June 18, 1452
\textsuperscript{13} The first document in this line was a 1979 Pastoral Letter on Racism (\textit{Brothers and Sisters to Us}), issued over a century after the adoption of the 13\textsuperscript{th} Amendment, which officially ended slavery in America.
\textsuperscript{16} Cf. John S. Mbiti, \textit{African Religions and Philosophy} (London: Heinemann, 1969), 1
of surviving mythologies, proverbs, songs, way of life, etc., would expose the stereotypical misrepresentation of such European literatures. Any in-depth inquiry into the nature of God-talk in West Africa must therefore confront and overcome the problem of the above misrepresentations, and the temptation to a possible romanticization as a counter reaction. We begin by a brief review of the religious worldview of the African traditional world, then we probe into the very nature of Theo-supremacy and how it flows into the political and family spheres, highlighting the deep connectivity in the dynamic relationship between God, the land, and the community’s identity.

2.2 Models of West African Religious Worldview

Expanding Metuh’s four models, Uzukwu outlines five different spectra through which the African religious universe could be viewed: Pyramidal, ecological, cosmic, social, and oval. A brief explanation is necessary for our purposes. The pyramidal model envisions a triangular universe where God is at the apex, flanked on both sides by nature deities and ancestors, while magical powers lie on the base. The model is by nature hierarchical, though the concept of hierarchy here is highly dynamic in keeping with the exercise of divine authority in West African cosmologies.

The creation myths of the Asante of Ghana and the Kalabari of Nigeria represent the ecological model. According to the Asante worldview for instance, Onyame (God) is the source of all beings, divine and non-divine. Onyame sent his sons to bless humans, and

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18 Cf. Elochukwu Uzukwu, God, Spirit and Human Wholeness, 63, 68-88

19 Onyame = Shining One, or a concentration of Onyankopon – ko (one, unity), and pon (supreme)
they become manifest as rivers (Tano and Bea), Lakes (for instance, Bosamtw3) and the sea (Opo), and their offshoots become spirits and spirit-forces. Each individual, before her/his birth stands before Onyame, to receive a personal kra\textsuperscript{20} (or okra - a personal-destiny-spirit).\textsuperscript{21} The realization of this destiny is facilitated by mediators (experts) who fight malevolent spirits that threaten human life. This personal kra, which could be considered ‘an indwelling divine spark’,\textsuperscript{22} acts like a personal god to the individual and returns back to Onyame at death. In the ecological model therefore, all beings (divine, ancestral, human) flow from God like a river and develop a harmonious relationship with one another.

The Igbo (Nigerian) cosmology exemplifies the cosmic model. Chukwu (the big, great, supreme Chi – God) controls the cosmic order. Chukwu dwells in the sky (eluigwe), and is surrounded by the sky deities, which include Anyanwu (sun deity), Amadioha (thunder deity), Igwe (sky deity), etc. Down below, the earth goddess (Ala or Ani) is in-charge, and controls the other earth deities.\textsuperscript{23} She is the goddess of fertility and morality, thus has a central place in human activities. Achebe captures the role of Ala in Things Fall Apart when he narrates: “it was an occasion for giving thanks to Ani, the earth goddess and the source of fertility. Ani played a greater part in the life of the people than any other deity. She was the ultimate judge of morality and conduct. And what was more, she was in close

\textsuperscript{20}Kra implies giving or receiving a goodbye gift, hence a goodbye gift from God to each individual. While kra has always been translated into English as ‘soul’, the two concepts are theologically different and should never be confused. For a more elaborate consideration of the kra, cf. Philip F. W. Bartle, “The Universe Has Three Souls: Notes on Translating Akan Culture” in Journal of Religion in Africa XIV, 2 (1983), 85-114, 98-100; Robert Fisher, West African Religious Traditions, 67-70

\textsuperscript{21}The use of destiny does not imply a predetermined set of occurrences as would be expected in a western scientific cosmology since the kra can be influenced.

\textsuperscript{22}Elochukwu Uzukwu, God, Spirit and Human Wholeness, 63

\textsuperscript{23}Some important earth deities include Agwu (deity of divination, knowledge and health), Njoku-ji (yam deity, in-charge of agriculture), ekwensu (deity of war) Agbara (deity of coercion) etc., see, Elochukwu Uzukwu, God, Spirit and Human Wholeness, 63

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communion with the departed fathers of the clan whose bodies have been committed to the earth.”

24 The ethical code is therefore land centered, and violations are considered as *nsọ-ala, aru* or *alu* (taboos). Ancestors play a vital role in traditional rules and behavioral codes, but these derive their authority from the same earth goddess (*ala*) – the womb where the ancestors lie. Gifted with a personal *chi*25 by *Chukwu*, the human person is the center of the universe and must interrelate appropriately with the deities for a harmonious cosmic order.

The social model finds expression in the Yoruba religious universe. It is based on the abundance of *Orisa* (spirits, gods).26 *Olodumare* or *Olorun* (the Supreme God) is the overall king, and the *Orisa* are ministerial deities who control different aspects of life. Some of the prominent *Orisa* include, *Obatala* (deity of justice, peace, creation), *Onile* (Earth Mother), *Orunmila* (deity of divination), *Ogun* (deity of Iron and war), *Shango* (deity of thunder), *Esu* (controller of the *ajogun*, the beneficial as well as detrimental forces of the universe – thus serves as messenger between humans and the other *Orisa* and between humans and God). The *Orisa* are objects of independent devotion. In fact, the *oriki* (cantic chants of devotion and worship) directed to the different *Orisa* rarely include any specific mention of *Olodumare*. In his study of twenty-six *Orisa* cults, Pierre Verger discovered that the *oriki* addressed to *Esu, Oduduwa, Osumare*, and *Yemoja* depict them as sole objects of devotion as they contain no reference of any other *Orisa*. Those addressed to *Ogun, Oranyan, Osun, Oya, Soponna, Obatala and Shango* mention other associated

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Orisa, but Olodumare by contrast is mentioned only once in one oriki addressed to Shango.\textsuperscript{27} For specific purposes, Orisa can choose to possess chosen individuals in order to actualize certain effects in the human sphere. In this way, the divine and the human spheres maintain efficient interactive relationship for the good of the entire community.

The oval model as articulated by Uzukwu is derived from the creation myths of the Dogon of Mali.\textsuperscript{28} Here, Amma (God) is conceived as a tiny primordial egg, containing the primordial seed (fonia), which held the potentials of future existence. Through a complicated creative force, the egg burst open and the seed was released like a whirlwind in all directions forming the different galaxies of the universe. According to this myth, the principle of ‘twin births – male and female’ was central to creation especially life on earth. Accordingly, a first attempt at creation, which produced only single elements was considered a failure and consequently abandoned. After this unsuccessful first attempt, Amma had intercourse with his consort, the Earth. This time, the seed successfully fertilized the womb of Earth to bring forth two pairs of primordial divine twins (male and female) Nommo Anagono – the four primordial deities. Four pairs of primordial human ancestors then followed. Reality in Dogon cosmology is thus twinned, and this intermingling and counterbalancing assures universal order and harmony.

The above summary exposes the complexity in articulating the intra-relationship among divine beings/spirits/forces, and the interaction between these divine beings and the human person in the West African religious universe. We also see a particular pattern of

\textsuperscript{28} Elochukwu Uzukwu, God, \textit{Spirit and Human Wholeness}, 64-65
Theo-supremacy in all the models, where the Supreme Being (Onyame, Chukwu, Olodumare, Amma) is conceived as almighty, yet does not have the ultimate say in every aspect of life, areas under the control of the different deities. This raises the question: What dynamics are operative in the African concept of one transcendent God within a spirit-filled universe crammed with deities? What makes the Supreme Being both transcendent and immanent? Put differently, What are the theological intricacies functioning in a supreme being, who is not localized, for whom no sanctuaries are built, for whom no cult is organized,29 and of whom no images are shaped, but is nonetheless involved in earthly phenomena and in human life? How does this framework influence the political and family spheres, creating an inseparable connectivity between the divine, the land, and the community’s identity?

2.3 Theo-Supremacy in West African Traditional Religion

In order to adequately comprehend the notion of Theo-supremacy in West African Traditional Religion, we need to make a conceptual shift from the western/Christian idea of supremacy or sovereignty as applied to God, best captured by the form of monotheism advocated by Deutero-Isaiah, expressed in such statement as: “I am God, there is no other, I am God, there is none like me, I say my purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please” (Is. 46: 9-10). At the center of the above assertion is an absolute, all-powerful, and jealous

29 It suffices to note the observation of Ogbu Kalu about the existence of Chukwu shrines in northern Igboland, cf. Ogbu U. Kalu, “Gender Ideology in Igbo Religion: The Changing Religious Role of Women in Igboland” in Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell’Istituto italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente, Anno 46, No. 2 (GIUGNO 1991), 184-202, 187; However, in African Traditional Religion generally, shrines are devoted to deities, not to the Supreme Being. No wonder some scholars are quick to conclude that the African God is remote as we shall see below. We contend that while the Supreme being is not represented in any shape or form, God’s involvement in the life of the people is not compromised.
God who reserves worship only to himself, and would not share his power with any other
deity, since in fact, other deities are non-existent. The children of Israel, Christians,
Muslims, and descendants of other traditions that are organized according to the above
conception thus receive the same admonition attributed to Joshua: ‘choose this day whom
you will serve, either the true God or the gods of the Amorites’ (Joshua 24:15). This
either/or mentality that characterizes the western concept of God’s supremacy when
brought into the study of west African concept of God would either lead to wrong
conclusions or utter frustration in comprehension. Little wonder why there exists a sort of
mental confusion (which leads to hasty conclusions) in the thinking of scholars who apply
a western/Christian framework to the understanding of the divine in African Traditional
Religion. Here the question of ‘the one and the many’ is always dominant. Confronted with
such a problem, such scholars, without subjecting their minds to the rigor that such a topic
requires, would immediately apply a mathematical solution to a purely religious problem
thus: one + many = plurality = polytheism. This is the operative mindset we see in scholars
such as Professor H. H. Farmer, who having decided that “living religions come into being
at the point where the one God makes Himself known to man by the initiative of His self-
disclosure”, categorized other religions which he termed “primitive” as “definitely and
thoroughly polytheistic” because “it apprehends not one God but many gods”

A conceptual shift into the West African worldview allows us to realize as Bujo has
rightly pointed out, that the African reality is not characterized by an ‘either/or’ mentality,

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30 See for instance Edwin Smith’s confusion in his observation about Nyame, the ancestors, and the chief of
the community, where he seems to reduce Akan religion to ancestor worship, Edwin Smith, ed. African
Ideas of God (1961), 28; Also see Evan-Pritchard’s conclusion on same topic of ancestor worship, E.
31 Quoted in E. Bolaji Idowu, African Traditional Religion: A Definition (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1973),
168
but by ‘both/and’. Within this framework the seeming paradox encountered in realities such as unity/multiplicity, transcendence/immanence, etc. disappears. On the divine realm, the ‘both/and’ framework exposes a non-jealous God who is able and willing to share his powers with both deities and the human person, without diminishing God’s supremacy and transcendence. Like the fluid Self of the Hebrew Yahweh, it exposes a God who can manifest the Godself in different objects and spaces without compromising the divine unity; it accords with a free God who cannot be limited or imprisoned by human conceptualizations; it throws light on divine opposites encountered in African experience of God, for instance, in the distance and nearness of God; and it exposes the true nature of Theo-supremacy. Unlike the God of Deutero-Isaiah who cannot share his glory, the God of West Africa is omnipotent, but that omnipotence is shared.

2.3.1 Shared Omnipotence

The five models of west African religious worldview present a supreme being who is at the head of the communities’ pantheon, the origin of all (creating or commissioning the creation of all), and endowed with transcendental qualities. In a detailed study of the Yoruba concept of Olodumare (God) for instance, Idowu points out that Olodumare brought into being all the divinities, and commissioned the task of creating the earth, hence, he is referred to as Eleda (creator), Elemi (owner of the spirit or the owner of life), and Olojo oni (the owner of this day). Olodumare is not just the creator, He is also transcendent and immortal. Thus he is conceived as the King who dwells in Heaven (Oba-Orun), whose majesty is unique, in fact, the master of resplendence (Oga-ogo). He is called Oyigiyigi,

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32 Benezet Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic: Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality* (New York: Crossroad, 2001), 1
Ota Aiku (the Mighty Immovable Rock that never dies), an appellation that points to his immortality and unchanging nature in the midst of a flux universe. Accordingly, Olodumare is omnipotent and omniscient. He is the most powerful being, who alone “can speak and bring his word to pass without any possibility of failure”\(^{33}\). He set the world in motion, and has the power to bring it to a standstill if he so wishes. Unlike other divinities, He alone is perfect wisdom, he knows and sees all things even the deepest core of human heart. Anthropomorphically, the sky is described as the eyes of Olodumare, to express the belief that nothing passes unobserved by him.

The same belief about the Supreme Being is obtainable across Africa. The Akan of Ghana refer to God as Onyamea (the supreme being), Tetekwafraamoaaa (the one who has always been there and who will never change), and Boreborea (the one who creates everything); the Kikuyu (Gikuyu) of Kenya say that God (Ngai also spelt Mogai, Mungai) is the same today as he was yesterday; the Zulu call him Uzivelele (He who came into being of Himself), and praise him as the Lord of all heaven, who bends down even majesties, who roars and all nations are struck with terror.\(^{34}\)

The above exposes the all-powerful nature of the African God. Yet, God’s omnipotence is a shared one. Thus, the numerous divinities are independently given charge over different aspects of life. In their different fields of competence, God confers enormous authority on them that they also become ‘almighty’.\(^{35}\) They play a prominent part in daily life and are accorded devotion and worship. The power of the deities and the worship accorded to them is permitted by God because it poses no threat to his status as supreme

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\(^{34}\) For more on the names of God in Africa, cf. Emefie Ikenga-Metuh, *Comparative Studies*, chapter 5

\(^{35}\) E. Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare*, 49
God. In the *Vodhun* religion of the Ewe and Fon in Benin Republic, Togo and Ghana, the *Vodhun* are considered children or creatures of God (*Mawu-Lisa*), and given authorities over different spheres of existence. *Vohdun* rarely accounts to *Mawu-Lisa*, and they are objects of devotion and worship. Devotees seek ritual bond with the deity through initiation, at the end of which it is the *Vodhun* (not *Mawu-Lisa*) who is said to have entered the head of the initiate. Literally, “the new disciple is said to have taken the cord of the vodhun, the *vodhunka*”.\(^{36}\)

Similar distribution of supreme divine authority, and operational autonomy in the relationship between God and the deities, and among the deities are also obtainable in the orisa religion of the Yoruba people. *Orisa-nla* (*Obatala*) for instance, is in-charge of creation. *Olodumare* gave him the responsibility to create and arrange the earth and mould the physical part of the human person. Thus, when it comes to creation, *Orisa-nla* is almighty, and he creates at will. He is capable of making human beings to any shape or color. Deformities in creation are totally attributed to him either as a result of his displeasure due to the breach of a taboo, a mistake, or simply a voluntary action. The disabled are called *eni Orisa* (the votaries of *Orisa*), hence the saying: ‘those with deformed teeth are not to blame, it is the *Orisa* who made them that did not provide sufficient covering’.\(^{37}\) *Olodumare* grants him such an independence that prayers for good birth are made directly to him (*Orisa-nla*). A Yoruba pregnant woman would customarily pray in these words: May the *Orisa* fashion for us a good work of art.\(^{38}\) *Olodumare* does not only permit *Orisa-nla* to receive and answer these prayers, he also permits him to be worshipped

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\(^{37}\) E. Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare*, 72

\(^{38}\) Ibid
for carrying out the specific task of creation as evident in this popular chant directed to Orisa-nla: “He who makes eyes, makes nose, it is Orisa I will serve…”39 This is very significant because the worship accorded to Orisa-nla by his devotees constitutes no threat to Olodumare. In fact, he sanctions it. Divinities are mostly conceived as emanations of God, so any worship accorded to them is worship accorded to God.

It suffices here to note that the power and authority of the deities are not without checks and balances. In fact, the divinities depend on human beings for their popularity, and run the risk of being deserted if they abuse their powers. According to Michael Echeruo, “we respect the gods, but as the proverb says, we also expect the gods to respect us humans. We acknowledge the power of the gods and cultivate that power; but when the gods consistently fail to prove themselves powerful, we reserve the right to discard them and seek out new gods. In fact, circumstances greater than the gods themselves will take care of the matter”.40 Also, while the Supreme Being does not deny autonomy of actions to the deities, it is possible for individuals to seek exoneration from the Supreme Being when they feel a sense of injustice by the deities.41 In the same vein, it is also unthinkable that the deities would successfully utilize their authorities to overthrow the Supreme Being or take his position. In fact, the deities are fully aware that their executive powers have its origin from the powers of God. A Yoruba odu recital called Irosun Oso tells the story of how the divinities once conspired against Olodumare to covet his absolute supremacy. The plan was brought to Olodumare who agreed to it but decided to switch off the machinery of the universe. Everything came to a standstill: heavens withheld the rain, rivers ceased to

39 Ibid
40 Professor Michael J.C. Echeruo, “A Matter of Identity” The 1979 Ahiajoku Lecture Series, online @ ahiajoku.igbonet.com/1979, accessed October 2, 2018
41 Elochukwu Uzukwu, God, Spirit and Human Wholeness, 83
flow, plants ceased bearing fruits, the daily feasting in the house of the divinities stopped, the powers of the divinities failed, and everything was thrown into confusion. They then realized their stupidity and went back to Olodumare to ask for forgiveness. Olodumare once again switched on the universe and everything returned to normal, hence the song: “Be there one thousand four hundred divinities…Olodumare is the King Unique…Yes, Edumare”.

Accordingly, while worshippers may appear to live their lives in absolute devotion to the divinities, underneath all their acts of worship is a deep consciousness that Olodumare is above all and ultimately controls all things. The nearness of God is not compromised even in his distance. Victor Uchendu’s description of the Igbo high god as “withdrawn” is misleading. In his study of the Diola religion in pre-colonial Senegambia, Robert Baum underscores this point to challenge conceptions that uphold a remote and uninvolved African supreme being. Based on his extensive fieldwork, Baum discovered that central to the Diola system of thought was the idea that Emitai (the supreme being) was actively involved in the Diola world “not just as a creative force, but as a continual bestower of life and rain, the establisher of moral obligations, and the ultimate judge of humanity’s deeds”. Emitai reveals himself to certain humans, provides special powers to

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42 Cf. E. Bolaji Idowu, Olodumare, 55
43 Some scholars have wrongly presumed on the basis of the prominence of deities in the African Traditional Religion, the Supreme Being is remote and uninvolved. This was the position of Horton who presumed that the most Africans have a narrow worldview since significant interaction occurs within the local community (microcosm) rather than universally (macrocosm). As a result, they are not able to develop an elaborate account of a Supreme Being, but focus their attention on lesser spirits, cf. Robin Horton, “African Conversion” in Africa: Journal of International African Institute, Vol. 41 no. 2 (April 1971), 85-108, see 101-107 where he sketches what he calls ‘a typical traditional cosmology’. See also similar conclusions about the Diola religion by J. David Sapir, “Kujaama: Symbolic Separation among the Diola-Fogny” in American Anthropologist, Vol. 72, no. 6 (December, 1970), 1330-1348
44 Victor Uchendu, The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria (Orlando, FL.: Harcourt Brace Javanovich College Publishers, 1965), see 94-95
45 Robert M. Baum, Shrines of the Slave Trade: Diola Religion and Society in Precolonoal Senegambia (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 41
individuals, and could be invoked directly in times of serious calamity. In a word, Emitai is both ‘a transcendent and an active force’. In the African religious worldview therefore, we see a transcendent but active Supreme Being, whose active involvement in the universe does not deny an operational autonomy to the divinities in their relationship with the Supreme Being and among themselves. In the African religious cosmology, we see a supreme being who is free to share his power with both lesser divinities and with the human person. This not only allows for a free flow of relationship, it also exposes the interconnectedness that exists between the divine and the human, the heavenly and the terrestrial, the spirit-bound and the earth-bound. In fact, in West African traditions, the very land that constitutes the abode of the ‘earth-bound’, participates in the divine world, and is conceived as a deity, a goddess, and sometimes as the consort of the Supreme Being. She not only shares in the powers of the Supreme Being, but confers identity to the humans who dwell on her. It is therefore not out of place to consider the operations of the earth goddess in order to further highlight the nature of God’s shared supremacy and the ontological connectedness that exists between the divine, the land and the community’s identity. Here, we focus on the Igbo earth goddess, Ala

2.3.2 Ala (The Igbo Earth Goddess)

Ala occupies a prominent position in Igbo culture. In fact, it has been argued that Ala was actually the Supreme God of the Igbo people before the Igbo institutions were

46 Ibid., see 37-42
47 Ogbu Kalu indicates that Ala is not always the most prominent deity in Igbo societies as is the case in Orlu-Nkere, Mbano/Etiti, and Isuikwuato/Okigwe, where Ala ranked lower than Njaba, Urashi and Ajala respectively, cf. Ogbu U. Kalu, Gender Ideology in Igbo Religion: The Changing Religious Role of Women in Igboland, in Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell’Istituto italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente. Anno 46, No. 2 (GIUGNO 1991), 184-202, 188. However, the vital position of Ala in the Igbo culture as the custodian of morality, social life, and source of the community’s identity is not in
obfuscated. This was the point of Michael Echeruo in his 1979 Ahiajoku Lecture. Emphasizing the pre-eminence of Ala in Igboland, he asserts: “one divinity, however was beyond the capriciousness of Igbo men: that divinity is neither Igwe, nor even Chukwu, but Ala, the goddess of the earth. She was the one deity which no man or woman and no community could afford to offend, much less discard. If ever there was a supreme god among the Igbo it was Ala. A crisis in our institutions has obscured this…” 48 Here indeed, Echeruo vehemently argues that Ala is not only pre-eminent among other deities, but actually the Supreme God of Igboland. He points to the Igwe ka ala cult of Umunneohua as a “consciously daring challenge to the supreme deity of the Igbo people”. 49 It was a heretical attempt in the history of Igbo institutions to set up a god cult above Ala, the only capital letter god among the Igbo people. According to Echeruo, where the Igwe ka ala failed, the chukwu cult of Arochukwu succeeded, as it gave the Igbo people a new name for God while avoiding any conflict with Ala. The Igbo people were quick to accept this name as it not only fitted into the concept of the Christian God but also integrated ‘chi’ into the religious system. As it were, the chukwu cult, building on the foundation of the

48 Professor Michael J.C. Echeruo, "A Matter of Identity" The 1979 Ahiajoku Lecture Series, online @ ahiajoku.igbonet.com/1979, accessed October 2, 2018

49 Ibid.
already existing individual ‘chi’, proposed a universal parallel, hence, its fast acceptance. While the categorization of Ala as the ‘supreme god” is contestable, Echeruo’s assertion points to the prominence of Ala in the daily life of the Igbo people and the significant place of Ala in understanding the Igbo identity.

Accordingly, those who hesitate to accept the status of Ala as an overthrown Supreme Being, prefer to conceptualize Ala as the “complementary vital force” to the supreme God, Chukwu. In this perspective, while Chukwu is the creator of the physical universe, Ala is seen as the creator and director of the ontological and moral universe, who performs her activities with a great deal of independence. As a result, social beliefs and community moral values are centered around Ala, not Chukwu. Ethical standards, customs, traditional practices and conventions are therefore referred to as omenala (statutes of Ala), and violations, of which major ones include bloodshed (murder), stealing, incest, and adultery, are called nso-ala (prohibitions of Ala). Any nso-ala is considered an abomination (aru). When there is a case of abomination, Ala has the supreme sanctioning authority, which in some cases could also include either being appeased by the offender, with sacrifices offered through the priestess of Ala, or the offender’s banishment from the land.

Ala also controls the generation of life (fertility), hence, she is represented as a mother figure nursing a child. In his study of Igbo cosmology, John Orji distinguishes between three connected dimensions of space: Igwe (sky), Ala (earth), and Ala-muo (spirit world/underworld). Ala is the cosmic base for the second and third dimensions of space. Ala (earth), from where her name derives, is the space for human beings, other living things

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and natural elements, while *Ala muo* (spirit world) is the place for ancestral spirits and demons. Thus, ancestors and spirits (*ndi-ichie* and *umummuo*) fall under the juridical sphere of *Ala*. Ancestors and spirits are in effect considered as the messengers of *Ala*.

The Igbo earth goddess is very conspicuous in the daily ritual life of the Igbo people. For instance, while *Chukwu* has no cult (or at least not widely attested to), there is a preponderance of *Ala* shrines in Igbo communities, on the village level (*ihu ala*), and kinship levels (present in many compounds – *ala ezi*). In these shrines, *Ala* is worshipped, sacrifices are performed, and major ethical and social decisions are taken and given a ritual binding force. The same pattern of prominence of the earth goddess is also noticeable in the life of several other West African communities. Among the Voltaic peoples of western Africa for instance, the earth is the source of life principles, fertility, wellbeing, and richness. In his study on the sacredness of the earth among the Konkomba of Northern Ghana, Henryk Zimon notes that *Kitting* (the earth deity) is both an individual and a universal deity for all the Konkomba. As a universal deity, *Kitting* has a collective character, which is manifested in a multitude of earth spirits. Each clan has an earth shrine (*litingbaln*) which symbolizes the presence of the local earth spirit, the protector of the particular Konkomba clan. In these shrines the earth spirit is worshipped by respective clans, and moral decisions are taken. Like the Igbo *Ala, Kitting* also abhors the shedding of blood.

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52 Ogbu Kalu suggests the existence of *Chukwu* shrines in northern Igboland, cf. Ogbu U. Kalu, “Gender Ideology in Igbo Religion”, 187; also see comments about the *Chukwu* cult system of Arochukwu in Professor Michael J.C. Echeruo, “A Matter of Identity” The 1979 Ahiajoku Lecture Series, online @ ahiajoku.igbonet.com/1979, accessed October 2, 2018
53 The term “Voltaic” is used for the people of northern Ghana, northern Togo, northern Benin, Burkina Faso, and northeastern part of Ivory Coast. They all speak Gur or Voltaic languages, cf. Henryk Zimon, “The Sacredness of the Earth among the Konkomba of Northern Ghana” in *Anthropos*, Bd. 98, H. 2 (2003), 421-443, see footnote 2
54 Cf. Henryk Zimon, “The Sacredness of the Earth among the Konkomba of Northern Ghana”, see 422-424
In fact, if an injury occurs during an ordinary quarrel, it is considered a *kitting bii* (earth defilement), and must be ritually redressed. The Kokomba, and indeed, the Voltaic peoples, like many other west African communities associate definite commands and prohibitions, the smooth running of the social order, and retribution for moral infringements to the land.

In a sense therefore, the land means the community, it is the abode of life, the womb where the ancestors lie, and the space that embodies the umbilical cord of the newly born as a mark of the child’s sharing in the land owned by the family. Here we note the overarching importance of the rite of interring the umbilical cord. In the Igbo traditional community for instance, Agbasiere observes that “for an adult not to be identified with a ritual tree on family land bearing his or her umbilical cord is an indication that he or she is not a consanguineal child” hence, even when a birth takes place on a foreign land, the custom is usually to preserve the cord until it is possible to perform the rite in the child’s fathers natal home. The significance is clear: burying the umbilical cord (*ili alo uwa*) is a source of identity. It is a ritual knot that connects the individual to the land. Having arrived to the land, the child is tied to the land, receives her/his identity from the land, and becomes a participant in the community’s *omenala* (moral norms), and in the whole system of rules and behavior that is land centered. This underscores the inseparability between the divine, the land and the community’s identity – the God of the land creates, the land gives identity to the child as *nwa-ala* (a child of the land), and introduces the child into the *omenala* (statutes of the land), the observance of which, as manifested in a series of symbols and rituals “creates and re-creates the community”. Unlike the experience in

Christianity, where identity and morality are separated from the individual and institutionalized, here identity flows from the land, and is given by the land in an inseparable connection with the divine.

The land is therefore sacred, and belongs to the ancestors, who together with the kings and chiefs (whose sacred authority are given by the land as representatives of the ancestors), protect and guide the statues of the land (omenala). Here we also see a balancing of power in this dynamic relationship. The earth goddess is in-charge of the ancestors and elders, yet the elders who represent the ancestors are also the owners of the land (ndi nwe ala), entrusted with sacred authority, to be exercised for the good of the umuala (children of the land – the community).

The above considerations expose the dynamics of a shared Theo-supremacy in West African theology. This phenomenon that has been variously captioned “diffused monotheism”, 57 “African theism”, 58 “relational dynamic hierarchy/inclusive supremacy”, 59 all point to the complex system of power distribution and balancing which is at the heart of the nature of the West African God. It articulates a monotheistic fluid God who is free to manifest the God-self in and through his deities, and exposes a kind of divine supremacy that is not diminished but increased through the free and responsible exercise of power by divine and human beings in their areas of competence.

How does the above conception of God connect to the identity of the people? I argue that identity flows from the concept of the divine. There is a connection between God, land, and the peoples’ identity as creatures of God and owners of the land. It is not surprising

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57 E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion*, 136
58 Emefie Ikenga-Metuh, *Comparative Studies*, chapter 6, see specifically, 113
59 Elochukwu Uzukwu, *God, Spirit and Human Wholeness*, see 68-80
that in West Africa, the political and family systems replicate the system of shared supremacy or decentralization in the relationship between God and the cosmos. Here, I focus first on one of the pre-colonial African kingdoms, Oyo Empire, and the Igbo family structures.

2.4 Imaging the God of the Land in the Political Sphere: Administrative Structures in Pre-Colonial West African Kingdoms: Oyo Empire as a Case Study

Archeological findings of remarkable brass and terracotta sculptures associated with sacred kingship (radiocarboned between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries) lend scientific support to the oral traditions that uphold the preeminence of Ile-Ife with regards to the institution of Yoruba kingship. Here in the town of Ile-Ife, Oduduwa, the common ancestor, the royal deified progenitor of the Yoruba reigned as King. The religious aura that surrounds the city of Ile-Ife considered by the Yoruba as the ‘holy city’, ‘the city of divinities’, the first of earthly creation, and the axis mundi, still exists today. As the common ancestor, it is not surprising that the person of Oduduwa and his arrival to Ile-Ife has been enwrapped with different strands of tradition that any effort to reconstruct the original would amount to grasping at the thin air. However, Idowu points out that:

there is no doubt however that he lived in Ile-Ife, the capital city from which he ruled over the land and held sway over a wide area through conquest or by sheer force of an overwhelming influence. Among his followers were distinguished warriors by whose aid he established a Yoruba dynasty….he begot several children.

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61 An excavation at Iwo Eleru near Akure, Ondo State, in eastern Yorubaland has provided some evidence of settlement dating from about the eleventh or tenth century BC., cf. F. Willet, “A Survey of Recent Result in the Radiocarbon Chronology of Western and Northern Africa” in JAH 12 (1971), 354.
62 E. Bolaji Idowu, Olodumare, 12
who in due course became the progenitors of the various clans, which, taken together are the Yoruba people.64

Accordingly, connection to Ile-Ife became necessary for the legitimatization of the kingly status. Royal dynasties of principal Yoruba kingdoms, and of the neighboring non-Yoruba kingdom of Benin see it as a necessity to connect their descent to Oduduwa. Such attempts could be seen in the case of Oyo and Benin both of whose traditions claim that Oranyan (one of the sons of Oduduwa) was the founder of their kingdoms, even when the tradition of Ile-Ife denies that Oranyan ever ruled in either Oyo or Benin. In Oyo tradition however, Oranyan’s son, Sango (who is worshipped as the deity of thunder) is a more important figure with regards to royal ancestorship. His cult is more centrally associated with royal power, and a strand of Oyo tradition narrates how Sango rather than Oranyan migrated from Ile-Ife and founded Oyo.65

The early sixteenth century saw the invasion of the Oyo kingdom by the Nupe, and the destruction of its capital at Oyo-Ile under Alafin Onigbogi.66 By the end of the century however, the kingdom has been reconstituted and the Nupe invaders have decisively been checked. Ajiboyede’s victory as recorded by Law67 apparently ended the Nupe threat to Oyo, such that his successor, Abipa, was able in the early seventeenth century to reoccupy the old capital at Oyo-Ile without opposition.

64 E. Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare*, 23
65 Yoruba mythology narrates different tales on how Sango ascended to heaven and became the eternal unseen king of the Oyo empire, and the author of lightening and thunder. For details on the different strands of this mythology cf. E. Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare*, 90-92; for the tradition of Sango’s migration and how he founded Oyo, cf. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, edited by O. Johnson (Lagos: CMS Nigeria Bookshops, 1957), 150. However there are other traditions that trace the royal dynasty of Oyo to the Nupe. For this tradition, cf. Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 31
66 Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 37
67 Ibid., 43; see also 56-58
Interestingly, this dramatic recovery of Oyo land and power has conventionally been attributed to a combination of political and religious ingenuity. Politically, many authors on the Yoruba seventeenth century warfare point to the adoption and use of the cavalry during the reign of Orompoto in the sixteenth century, a practice which helped to redress the balance of military power. From a religious perspective, Oyo tradition also attributes the recovery of Oyo kingdom to the introduction of two important religious cults: the *Egungun* cult of masquerades representing the spirit of deceased ancestors, and the cult of *Ifa*, the god of divination. The *Egungun* cult is said to have been adopted from the Nupe invaders, the principal *Egungun* priest of Oyo, the *Alapini*, being a Nupe immigrant. According to Law, ‘it does appear very likely that the Oyo would have been influenced by Nupe culture during this period when they were militarily dominated by the Nupe and many Nupe were settling in Oyo territory’. The *Ifa* cult on the other hand was introduced from Awori town of Ota in southern Yorubaland. The mother of Alafin Onigbogi, an Ota woman is said to have brought the cult to Oyo, but the Oyo refused to accept it. The sack of Oyo, as religiously explained, was consequent on this refusal. The fate of the empire therefore began to change when Alafin Ofinran officially adopted the cult at Kusu. The name of Onighogi’s mother, Aruibga (calabash bearer) was adopted as the name of the carved wooden bowl in the form of a woman bearing a calabash used in *Ifa* ritual. Law

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69 Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 44
70 For details on the refusal and acceptance of the *ifa* cult, cf. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 158-160
suggests that the essential historicity of this tradition should not be denied.\textsuperscript{71} Together with the \textit{Egungun} and \textit{Ifa} stories, the Igboho period\textsuperscript{72} characterized a very important phase of the formative period of the Oyo people. This period saw the foundation of important new towns due to population movements as a result of the Nupe and Bariba invasions. For instance, Kusu and Igboho remained considerably big and important cities even after the Alafin moved back to Oyo, and Ikoyi (the second town in the kingdom after the capital) was founded as part of the regrouping to resist the Nupe invasions.

In fact, the reorganization of the kingdom after the Nupe conquest laid the foundation for the imperial expansion of the Oyo kingdom during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During this period, the Yoruba created a highly sophisticated and expansive city-state empire which according to many anthropologists was on par with that of ancient Athens.\textsuperscript{73} From the west of modern Nigeria to the east of modern Ghana, Oyo’s cavalry was able to intrude and extend the empire’s authority. Allada (the state which preceded Dahomey) was conquered in 1698, forcing it to pay tribute, and enabling Oyo to gain access to the Atlantic trade with Europeans through the port of Ajase (now Porto Novo). Dahomey itself was subsequently subjugated after two protracted wars (1726-30 and 1739-48). The military and economic power of Oyo grew enormously in the eighteenth century. Apart from the tributes from subjugated cities and the transit trade tax between the coastal states and Hausaland, the incessant expansion wars produced more captives than were needed to work on the royal farms. The surplus was dispatched towards the coast to be sold as slaves to Europeans. Firearms, clothing materials, metal goods and cowry shells were imported

\textsuperscript{71} Robin Law, \textit{The Oyo Empire}, 44
\textsuperscript{72} Igboho was a temporary royal capital during the second dynasty, cf. Robin Law, \textit{The Oyo Empire}, 40, 44
\textsuperscript{73} Philip John Neimark, \textit{The Way of Orisa}, 13
from the coast and further traded to the North in exchange for horses and more captives.\textsuperscript{74} Our major concern however is to examine the system of government that galvanized the dynamics of the Oyo political institutions and propelled the success of the empire, and to explore how political system reflects the nature of God’s shared supremacy in the overall West African cosmology.

2.4.1 Political Organization

The fundamental political unit of the Yoruba people was the town (\textit{ilu}). Yoruba towns were largely autonomous communities governed by hereditary rulers. Accordingly, the large territorial Oyo kingdom was a conglomeration of such units which while remaining autonomous, recognized the overall primacy of the king of the capital unit. In the first detailed study of the history of the Yoruba people by an indigene, Samuel Johnson, in his 1897 work, \textit{The History of the Yorubas: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate}, points out that the town units lived in a state of “semi-independence whilst loosely acknowledging an over-lord”.\textsuperscript{75} Thus, the \textit{Alafin} of Oyo was in the first place the king of the capital city of Oyo, and only secondarily the ruler of Oyo kingdom.\textsuperscript{76} These units were essentially founded upon the lineage (\textit{idile}). The Yoruba lineage system is

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\item \textsuperscript{75} Samuel Johnson, \textit{The History of the Yorubas: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate}, edited by O. Johnson (Lagos: CMS Nigeria Bookshops, 1957), 40. This work is the earliest substantial description of Oyo political institution. The first hand accounts of Clapperton and Landers in 1826-30 are not very informative on Oyo’s system of government, cf. Hugh Clapperton, \textit{Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa: From the Bight of Benin to Soccato} (London: Carey, Lea and Carey, 1829); R. Lander, \textit{Records of Captain Clapperton’s Last Expedition to Africa}, 2vols. (London: Caret, Lea and Carey, 1830)
\item \textsuperscript{76} Robin Law, \textit{The Oyo Empire}, 61
\end{itemize}
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patrilineal, thus, descendants trace their origin to a single man, the original founder of the ‘large family’. The members of the lineage are bound together not only by residential and economic interests but also by the ownership of the land, which was vested collectively in the lineage with individual members enjoying right of usage as needed. The eldest surviving male member served as the head (bale). The day-to-day governance, administration of justice, and adjudication of disputes between members of same lineage or different lineages were the responsibilities of the bale and the elders of the lineages involved. At a higher level, the lineages played a crucial role in the administration of the town since the important chieftaincy titles were drawn from various lineages. The succession of these titles was determined by the choice of the members of the lineage to which they belonged. The Oyo chiefs were thus representatives of the component lineages of the city and served as spokespersons for their respective lineages in matters of public policy.

The establishment of an empire necessitated the harmonization of imperial control with a monarchical government within a context where the town remained the largest unit. The government of the Oyo empire thus fell into two broad divisions: the government of the imperial capital, and the government of the provincial towns. In both cases, notes J.A. Atanda, ‘the town was still the largest unit of government, the major difference consisting in the elaborate nature of the government of the capital city since it is responsible for foreign policy and the defense of the empire as a whole’.\textsuperscript{77} To better appreciate the structure and system of governance in Oyo empire, the inbuilt system of checks and balances, and how it images the concept of God and the divine world, we examine the office of the Alafin

\textsuperscript{77} Cf. J.A. Atanda, The New Oyo Empire: Indirect Rule and Change in Western Nigeria 1894-1934, Ibadan History Series, General Editor, J.F.A. Ajayi (Humanities Press), 15
(the king), the *Oyo Mesi* (noble councilors of state), the *Eso* (Army), and the provincial governmental structures.

### 2.4.2 The Office of the Alafin

Considered the direct linear descendant and successor of the demi-god and founder of the nation, *Oranyan*, the *Alafin* (owner of the *Afin* – palace) is at the head of the Oyo government. He is regarded as a divine king. In theory, he is an absolute monarch: his word is law, and he has the power of life and death. Titles attributed to him include: *Iku baba yeye, alase, ekeji orisa* (the almighty, the ruler, and the companion of the gods). Beyond simply a companion of the gods, Leo Frobenius argues that he is actually regarded as the incarnation of *Sango* – the god of thunder, whose cult the *Alafin* controls.\(^{78}\) While there is no evidence that the *Alafin* was ever worshipped in the strict sense as an *Orisa*,\(^ {79} \) his association with the gods, and ancestors is definitely not in doubt. This is evident first in the elaborate fanfare coronation ceremony, which begins with the king’s visit to the *Bara* (royal mausoleum). The *Bara* is a consecrated building under the care of a high-priestess named *Iyamode*. During this visit, which happens once in the king’s lifetime, he worships at the tomb of his fathers and forefathers, performs sacrifices, invokes their blessings, and receives authority from them to wear the crown.

Having been authorized and permitted to the throne by the ancestors, the actual coronation ceremony can now take place on the fifth day. This happens in no other place than the *Koso*, the shrine of *Sango*. *Sango* is one of the deities in the Yoruba pantheon.

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\(^{78}\) Frobenius, *Voice of Africa*, i. 183; see also Simpson, “Intelligence Report on the Oyo Division”, no. 50

\(^{79}\) Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 66
associated with the kingship.\textsuperscript{80} In this shrine of \textit{Sango}, surrounded by the principal eunuchs and princes, the crown is placed on his head by the \textit{Iyakere}.\textsuperscript{81} Here also, the royal robes are put on him, and the staff and sword of mercy are given to him. The king must then wait for five days to visit the shrine of \textit{Oranyan} (the legendary founder of Oyo) where he receives the sword of justice brought from Ile-Ife. The next port of call for the new king is the shrine of \textit{Ogun} (the god of war). This takes place five days after the visit to the shrine of \textit{Oranyan}. Here he offers sacrifice for a peaceful reign. It is only after these visits to the principal shrines signifying his approval by, and association with the gods of the land that he can enter the palace through the main gate, hence properly entering the palace as a king, and the formal announcement can be made that his reign has started. The ceremony with all the visits and sacrifices confers both temporal and sacerdotal powers to the \textit{Alafin}. He becomes not only a king with sovereignty over all, human and beast alike, enjoying supreme judicial authority, he also becomes a priest to the nation, and “his person therefore becomes sacred”.\textsuperscript{82}

The palace is populated with household officials, close to the king with specific court responsibilities. Worthy of mention are the Eunuchs and the \textit{Ilaris}.\textsuperscript{83} The principal Eunuchs (Lord Lings of the palace) include the \textit{Ona’efa}, the \textit{Otun’efa}, and the \textit{Osi’efa}. The \textit{Ona’efa} is the head of the Eunuchs. He is the legal advisor to the king, and in many occasions he is the one that hears and decides suits and appeals. The \textit{Otun’efa} is in-charge of Koso, the town of the national god \textit{Sango}. He worships at the shrine of \textit{Sango} on behalf of the Yoruba

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\textsuperscript{80} Sango was a human person, the 4\textsuperscript{th} Alafin, cf. E. Bolaji Idowu, \textit{Olodumare}, 90
\textsuperscript{81} That this most important function is reserved solely for a woman shows the power and importance of women in the governance of the kingdom and in checking the king – to be examined below.
\textsuperscript{82} Samuel Johnson, \textit{The History of the Yorubas}, 46
\textsuperscript{83} For a detailed discussion on these and other offices, cf. Samuel Johnson, \textit{The History of the Yorubas}, 57-75
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people, and he also acts as the guardian of the king’s children. The *Osi’efa*, is the least of the three, but he is the most honored. He is the closest to the king, and ordinarily makes sure that the king’s personal effects are taken care of. He represents the king in civil and military activities, he is allowed to use the crown, and to be given royal honors and privileges.

The *Ilaris* are of both sexes and are numerous depending on the number the king desires to create. Individuals to be created *Ilaris* are shaved, incised with charms, and given names that signify a specific attribute of the king. The *Ilaris* are of different ranks (earned through promotion) ranging from servants, messengers, body guards, feudal lords and masters of large compounds in different parts of the city. Sometimes they are referred to as palace slaves (also a designation for all who work in the palace [the king’s household], including the eunuchs), but this term should be qualified. Unlike the western concept where a slave is treated as sub-human, and an ordinary property of the master, the *Ilaris* have rights as members of the king’s household. They are endowed with official authorities depending on their position, some high ranking palatial positions are reserved for them, and the government of some provinces are the special task of the *Ilaris*. Indeed, while many *Ilaris* are captives from war, many Oyo citizens aspire to be created to the rank of *Ilaris*.

The entire coronation fanfare, the numerous royal staff, and the aura of the palace present the image of the king as a supreme monarch with absolute powers, and theoretically/ceremonially, he is. However, in practice and in the actual working of the

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84 This was the case with regards to the Onisare of Ijanna, (a peculiar case) whose appointment was controlled by the Alafin. The Onisare was appointed from the non-Yoruba palace slaves, for details, cf. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 168, 227; R. and J. Lander, *Journal of an Expedition*, i. 81; Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 115
government, this supremacy is shared, his powers are actually limited, and checks and balances are deeply ingrained within the system. These entrenched checks and counter-checks ensure that neither the Alafin nor other officials in authority could become autocratic in practice.

2.4.3 Checks and Counter-Checks – The Institution of the Oyo Mesi, and the Eso

The Oyo Mesi is a council of seven men considered to be the most noble and most honorable councilors of the state. They include: the Bashorun, Agbakin, Samu, Alapini, Laguna, Akiniku, and Asipa. These titles are hereditary, though the Alafin has the power to change the line of successors. Collectively, they serve as advisors to the Alafin, but the Oyo Mesi is not merely a consultative body to the throne, they are the conscience of the nation, they are charged with the responsibility of protecting the interests of the kingdom, and the king must listen to them in matters of significant importance. While the king is vested with absolute power, his authority must be exercised within the limits of acceptable norms. Should he become tyrannical with actions unacceptable to the nation, the Oyo Mesi has the power to judge the king’s conducts as unsatisfactory, and formally reject him. If this happens, the Alafin must commit suicide. 85 This is the role of the Bashorun, the president of the council, and the next in authority and power after the king.

The Bashorun is the chief voice in the election of a king, he occupies the throne in periods of inter-regnum, and performs the Orun festival, hence his title, Iba Osorun (the Lord who performs heavenly mysteries). It is at this festival, which takes place in September, 86 that the Alafin’s fate with regards to his continued reign is determined. The Bashorun performs

85 Samuel Johnson, The History of the Yorubas, 70
86 Ibid., 48
divination with kola nuts to ascertain whether the king is still acceptable to the celestial beings. If rejected by God (an action that presupposes prior rejection by the nation), he is to die. This festival as it were, is a yearly evaluation of the conduct of the king. Here the king occupies a humiliating position, hence the privacy of the cultic rituals, since as a matter of principle the Alafin cannot humble himself before any mortal.

Next in rank to the Oyo Mesi are the Esos. These are seventy warlords and subordinate commanders of the army under the Oyo Mesi. Unlike the Oyo Mesi, the title of Eso is not hereditary, it can only be acquired through merit as a reward for heroic action as a soldier in the battlefield. At the head of the Esos is the Are Ona Kakamfo (a title akin to Field Marshal), and is conferred upon the one judged to be the greatest soldier of the time. By virtue of his office he must come back a victor from any war or be brought home as a corpse. In times of war, he carries a baton known as “the king’s invincible staff”, 87 takes absolute control and must not yield to anyone, not even the king.

From the foregoing, one might conclude that the powers vested on the Bashorun and the Are Ona Kakamfo are too strong and could easily be abused, i.e. the Bashorun could judge the king unworthy without cause, or the Are Ona Kakanfo could use the military facilities to stage a coup d’etat against the king. However, a critical look into the constitution of the Old Oyo empire would reveal that the same constitution which shared the absolute powers of the Alafin with the Oyo Mesi headed by the Bashorun, and the Eso headed by the Are Ona Kakanfo in order to avoid tyranny, also took care to ensure that what is denied the Alafin, namely to become an absolute ruler, is not given either to the Bashorun nor the Kakanfo. Atanda is on point when he observes: “Thus the powers given to Bashorun could

87Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 74
only be rightly exercised with the concurrence of his colleagues in the *Oyo Mesi*. And since the members of the *Oyo Mesi* were not just the creations of the *Bashorun* but appointed by the *Alafin*, we need not assume that they would under normal circumstances allow the *Bashorun* to use his powers against the *Alafin* without cause". \(^8\)

Similarly, the *Kakanfo* is not in control of the standing army except in the battlefield. Outside of war situations, he cannot unilaterally use the army. He is resident outside of the capital while the other officers (the *Esos*) are resident in the capital under the control of the *Oyo Mesi*, the promotion to rank and file within the army is a privilege of the *Alafin* in consultation with the *Oyo Mesi*, or recommended by the *Oyo Mesi* and approved by the *Alafin*. Thus, the army is jointly controlled by the *Alafin*, the *Oyo Mesi* and the *Are Ona Kakamfo*. Under normal circumstances therefore, it is difficult to imagine a situation where the *Kakanfo* can use the army against the *Alafin* especially since the Oyo system does not permit a standing army apart from the officers. The army is always raised ad hoc when the need arises. \(^9\)

While no constitution is perfect, Atanda notes that the Oyo system epitomized the principle of checks and counter-checks, arguing that the problems experienced in the time of *Bashorun* Gaha for instance, cannot be attributed to the constitution. \(^9\) The system of checks and counter checks on the whole worked for the empire. Apart from the institution of the *Oyo Mesi* and the *Eso*, there are other internal checks as evident in the activities of the high-ranking female palace officials.

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\(^8\) J.A. Atanda, “The Fall of the Old Oyo Empire: A reconsideration of its Cause” in *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, vol. v, no. 4 (June 1971), 477- 490, 479

\(^9\) J.A. Atanda, “The Fall of the Old Oyo Empire”, 479

\(^9\) For the detailed argument, cf. J.A. Atanda, “The Fall of the Old Oyo Empire”, 480
2.4.4 Internal Checks – The Ladies of the Palace

There are numerous female palace officials commonly referred to as *ayaba* (*aya oba* – kings wives). In fact, in his *Records of Captain Clapperton’s Last Expedition*, Richard Lander records that ‘the Alafin had 2,000 wives’. 91 Landers’ calculation probably includes the titled ladies, priestesses, and other officials who are separate from the Alafin wives. Johnson enumerates the ranking positions reserved for women - the priestesses, and the forty-eight principal female *Ilaris*. 92 Women in key administrative, spiritual, economic, and political positions is a common feature in ancient West African kingdoms. Women are involved in every level of administration, and often are in the helm of making decisive decisions. The Ashanti saying *ye ko bias aberewa* (we are going to consult the old woman) usually said in the process of making the final decisions for the administration of justice places the woman as the final arbiter in several key decisions in the Ashanti kingdom. In fact, the Queen Mother of the Ashanti kingdom (just like Benin Kingdom of present Nigeria, and other west African kingdoms) exemplifies the epitome of power. She holds the highest ranking position in the state (second only to the king), reserves the exclusive right to rebuke the king when he acts contrary to the state norms, nominates candidates for the throne, sees to the settlement of disputes between the king and the elders, and assumes the responsibilities of being a mother to the royal family, and by extension to the state. Even in patriarchal societies such as the Benin kingdom of Nigeria, the office of the *Iyoba* has extraordinary powers and duties greater in status than any senior chief. It is a supernatural office with a royal status. Besides the Oba, only the *Iyoba* has the power to raise an army, she wears a coronet of coral beads and coral bead shirt, a privilege reserved

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91 R. Lander, *Records of Captain Clapperton’s Last Expedition*, ii. 191
92 Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 63-67
only for the Oba, the *Edaiken*, and the *Ezomo*, and she falls into the small category of Bini chiefs who have supreme powers over life and death.\(^{93}\) In fact, the *Iyoba* while second to the king politically, “supersedes him by virtue of her womb and maternal role”.\(^{94}\)

Also, the women ritual specialists and priestesses occupy such a powerful position that they are given the onerous task of protecting the king against spiritual forces especially as the force of the King’s supernatural powers is politically very crucial for the stability of the kingdom.\(^{95}\) The power of the Queen Mothers therefore emerge from the unique feminine role of motherhood, hence they naturally act to check the king against excesses in the palatial affairs and in following the norms of the state. The Oyo Empire has several high ranking offices that can only be occupied by women. Worthy of mention for our purposes here are the positions of the *Iya kere* and *Iyamode*.

As the person entitled to place the crown on the king’s head at coronation, the *Iya kere’s* authority within the palace and beyond is extensive. She keeps custody of the royal insignia, treasures, and all the paraphernalia used during state official activities. She has the power to withhold applicable treasures, and as a result prevent any state event from taking place. She does this as a way to register her displeasure with the king. Here, like the Ashanti Queen Mother, she acts in rebuke of the king for internal acts of injustice. The *Iya kere* is also in charge (as mother) of all the male and female *Ilaris*, and her abode is the site for their creation. She has complete authority over the *Olosi*, the *Aseyin*, *Oluwo*, and the *Bale* of Ogbomoso.\(^{96}\) Once the *Iya kere* assumes office, she remains celibate for life.

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\(^{96}\) Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 64
The office of the *Iyamode* is a spiritual one. She is in-charge of the Bara (royal mausoleum) where she continually worships the spirits of deceased kings and calls out their *egungun* (masquerades, spirit forces). *Iyamode* occupies a role so deeply respected that she is the only person the king is permitted to kneel before. The king kneels before no mortal but in the presence of the *Iyamode* he falls on his knees and refers to her as ‘baba’ (father). In reciprocity, the *Iyamode* also returns the gesture by kneeling, but while doing so she does not recline on her elbow, as is the custom of women greeting their superiors. As the worshipper of the deceased ancestors, the *Iyamode* embodies the spirits of the Alafin’s fathers and forefathers, hence her title of ‘Baba’. Like the *Iya kere, Iyamode* and other *bara* priestesses remain celibate for life. These priestesses are occasionally possessed by the spirit of the dead monarchs during which they prophesy to the king and stipulate appropriate sacrifices to avert an impending danger. These dangers could be the result of a royal departure from the stipulations of his forefathers. From this perspective the *bara* cult controlled by the *Iyamode* could also act as one of the spiritual/ritual avenues for checking the excesses of the king. Unlike the Davidic monarchy where God speaks through the King, implicitly imprisoning God’s will in the will of the king, here, while the king is considered a companion of the gods, god’s will for the kingdom is communicated through the cult of the *Iyamode*, the *Ifa* priest, and during the *Orun* festival, the *Bashorun*.

**2.4.5 Space Limitations – The King’s Public Appearances**

Once the king assumes power and begins to reign, which technically happens at the coronation, he is forbidden to come out in the public, or even to take a walk on the open streets unless at night when he might not be recognized. His public appearance is limited
to the three great annual festivals: *Ifa, Orun,* and *Bere.* As part of the festivities, each of these three ceremonies is accompanied by a royal salutation, and the sound of the ivory trumpet which announces to the public that the king now sits in majesty on the throne, and those who wish to have a glimpse of the King may do so. The sight is usually magnificent, and the throne room from where the king appears (*Kobi Agangu*) is dedicated only to this purpose. Johnson describes in details the splendid regalia with which the king is enrobed during these appearances, the arrangement of palace officials in rows with state umbrellas, and the glorious decorations of the floor, the walls and the surroundings. On these occasions the *Oyo Mesi* led by the *Bashorun* pays homage to the king by each of them prostrating himself bare bodied on the bare ground on his stomach and on his back. The King gives the customary proclamation of blessings from the throne and all the noblemen beginning from the *Bashorun* and ending with the *Asipa* responds by congratulating his majesty and wishing him long life and prosperity.

The king and the *Bashorun* are expected to perform a majestic dance at the sound of the music performed by the palace orchestra with sovereign musical instruments: fifes, ivory and *kakaki* trumpets, the *ogidigba* drum etc. The king’s public appearances are restricted to these three occasions. According to Johnson, “this seclusion not only enhances the awe and majesty due to a sovereign, but also lends power and authority to his commands…”

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97 Ifa is the god of divination, and the annual festival of ifa is celebrated in his honor usually in the month of July. The Orun festival is celebrated in the month of September, and it is during this festival that the king is as it were evaluated. The Bere festival takes place in the month of January as Johnson reports, though Clapperton’s journal shows that he witnessed a Bere festival when he visited Oyo in February of 1826, cf. Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition,* 41. It is the harvest festival that closes the year – Yoruba new year begins in March. For detail on these festivals cf. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas,* 47-51

98 Cf. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas,* 51-54

99 Ibid., 46
must be out with him. When the Bashorun for instance is out, the Oyo Mesi must be out with him. The same is the case with the bale or the chief of any town. In the same vein, when the king is out, the entire city must be on the move, all business suspended until he returns to his palace. Hence, from a customary perspective, if this happens often, the effective functioning of the kingdom will be jeopardized. While this spatial restriction of the king sets him apart from the people, he is nevertheless not distant from the lives of the people. His nearness is achieved through royal messengers, similar to the dynamics operative in the relationship between Olodumare, Orisa, and the people. The dynamics of this form of relationship is also expressed in the governance of the provinces, where we see a composite interjection of autonomy and communion.

2.4.6 The Provinces

There exists some difficulty in reconstructing the exact number of provinces (ekun) that existed in the old Oyo Empire. In Johnson’s account,\(^\text{100}\) there are four provinces as follows:

1. The Ekun Otun (Western Province) which included all the towns along the river Ogun down to Ibere Kodo, with Igana being the chief town. The vassal kings of the major towns include: Sabidana of Igana, Oniwere of Iwere, Alasia of Asia, Onjo of Oke’ho, Bagijan of Igijan, Okere of Saki, Alapata of Ibode, Ona Onibode of Igboho, Elerinpo of Ipapo, Ikihisi of Kihisi, Aseyin of Iseyin, Alado of Ado, Eleruwa of Eruwa, and Oloje of Oje.

\(^{100}\) For details, cf. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 12-14, 76
2. The *Ekun Osi* (Metropolitan Province) included all the towns east of Oyo. The provincial kings include: *Onikoyi* of Ikoyi, *Olugbon* of Igbon, *Aresa* of Iresa, *Ompetu* of Ijeru, and *Olofa* of Ofa. Ikoyi is the chief town under this province.


4. The *Epo* Province comprised the towns in the south and south-west of Oyo. Provincial kings include, the *Oluiwo* of Iwo, and *Ondese* of Idese.

In Chief Ojo’s division however, there are eight provinces. From Johnson’s *Ekun Otun*, Ojo has three provinces: the *Ekun Otun* proper under Saki, *Ekun Onko* under Iganna, and *Ekun Ibarapa* whose most important towns were Eruwa and Igbo Ora. In addition, Ojo has two more provinces: *Ekun Igbomina* under Ajase Ipo and *Ekun Egbado* under Ilaro. Clapperton’s first hand Journal of a Second Expedition describing the king of Saki as having “a great district with many large towns under his regency”, and Simpson’s ‘Intelligent Report on Oyo Division’ which mentions a separate *Onko* and *Ibarapa* provinces collaborate Ojo’s account, but his reconstructions might also contain elements of anachronisms and oversimplifications since the leadership of *Epo* has also been attributed to Iseke rather than Idohe. Of more importance to this project however, is the governance of the provinces and the relationship with the central government at Oyo.

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101 Cf. Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 105. There are also a number of other reconstructions, for instance see, Simpson, “Intelligent Report on the Oyo Divission” nos. 17-18

102 For details, cf. Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 106
At the peak of the empire’s prosperity when it included the Popos, Dahomey, and parts of Ashanti, with portions of the Tapas and Baribas, the vassal kings and ruling princes, according to the calculations of Johnson numbered 1060. Every provincial towns of Oyo Empire had its own hereditary ruler, either a king (Oba) for the major and more important towns, or a bale for the smaller towns. In recognition of their subordinate status to the Alafin, the provincial kings are not allowed to wear the beaded crown (ade), nor employ the services of Eunuchs. Only the Alafin has such prerogatives. The provincial kings can only wear the akoro (beadless crowns). Furthermore, the kings and bales of the provincial towns must bring their annual tribute (asingba or isin) to Oyo in person. This happens during the Bere festival. The tribute is paid with the Bere grass. The Bere grass is used for roofing, and symbolizes the subordination of the giver to the recipient. Oral evidence from chief Ojo as reported by Robin indicates that money (cowry shells) and rams could also be given in addition to the Bere grass.

The primacy of Oyo is also established by the exclusive control of foreign policy. Provincial towns cannot establish a separate foreign policy nor undertake wars. Additionally, every provincial town has a resident official from Oyo appointed by the Alafin. This official, referred to as Ajele is stationed to ensure that the independent internal affairs of the towns are not conducted to the detriment of the central government nor lead to a coup d’etat. This position is reserved for the palace Ilaris (‘slaves’), who in turn are supervised by other non-resident Ilaris, or in the words of Atanda, “itinerant inspectors”.

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103 Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 41, also see 152, 179
104 Robin observes the peculiar case of the Olu of Ilaro, the principal oba of the Egbado province, who as early as 1878 seemed to have claimed the right to wear an ade, cf. Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 98
105 Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 100
106 J.A. Atanda, *The New Oyo Empire*, 26
who travelled through the provinces bringing the goodwill of the Alafin to the Obas and Bales, and collecting the tributes due to the throne, hence assuring loyalty and cohesion in the empire. On the reverse side, every provincial king/bale also has an official in Oyo through whom they communicate with the throne. The provinces are also required to send forces to the capital to serve in the Oyo army.

With regards the internal affairs, the provincial towns are allowed great deal of autonomy. According to Johnson, ‘the entire Yoruba country has never been thoroughly organized into one complete government in a modern sense…the government of the provinces even when modeled after the capital, have always lived more or less in a state of semi-independence, whilst loosely acknowledging an over-lord’. The very styling of the titles of the provincial kings is indicative. They are called the lords of their various towns/districts: Onikoyi – Lord of Ikoyi, Olowu – Lord of Owu, etc except where the first ruler had a distinctive name or title before becoming the king of the town such as the Awujale of Ijebu, Okere of Saki, etc. The autonomy of the provinces is also noticeable in the succession of the kings. The succession is determined in the first instance by the lineage involved in consultation with the local chiefs. The local choice is then sent to the Alafin for investiture and reception of the state sword. This process must have been misunderstood by Clapperton when he records that the appointment of the provincial kings depended on the will of the Alafin. On the contrary, there were instances where the vassal king would be selected and installed without reference to the Alafin who only gets the information through messengers after the entire event has taken place. The succession procedure in Saki is a case in point. Also, instances of interference by the Alafin have always been met

107 Samuel Johnson, The History of the Yorubas, 40
108 Cf. Robin Law, The Oyo Empire, 101
with intense resistance. For example, Johnson reports of the conflict that arose in Ikoyi in the 1830s when the throne was left vacant with the fall of Adegun at the Kanla war. There were two aspirants: Siyenbola, the son of the late Adegun, and Ojo, the son of Adegun’s predecessor. With majority of the people in favor of Siyenbola, Ojo quickly went to Oyo, succeeded in obtaining the Alafin’s favor and had the title conferred on him. This was however met with intense resistance by the locals and the conflict that ensued ended up in the installation of Sayenbola to the title and the rejection of the Alafin’s imposition.109

2.4.7 Evaluation

Our study of the Oyo Empire so far reveals at least three features that stand in opposition to the method of administration obtainable today in the West African secular and ecclesial system of administration. First, the Oyo Empire maintained a system of administration that clearly separated the theoretical (or what I refer to as ceremonial), and practical powers that accrue to those in authority, especially the king. While on the theoretical level, the king was absolute, on the practical administrative level, authority was highly distributive with ingrained systemic checks that render any absolute use/abuse of authority unrealizable. Secondly, in the Oyo system, the provinces were organized in such a manner that the people of a province were deeply involved in the selection and deposition of their provincial kings. This assured a system where the institution of local authority was not alien to the people, and laws originated from the local context rather than from ‘above’. Thirdly, the structures of the Oyo Empire epitomized a system of checks and counter-checks that remained the backbone of internal and external operations of the empire. At

every level of authority, structures were put in place to minimize abuse. T.J. Bowen, a nineteenth century American observer notes accordingly: “the highest excellence of the best government among white people consists in constitutional checks or limits to prevent abuses of power. Strange as it may seem the central Africans (Yoruba people) had studied out this balance of power and reduced it to practice long before our fathers settled in America – before the barons of England had extorted the great charter from king John”.110

Interestingly, women were a vital force to the entire system of checks and balances within the Oyo Empire. This accords with the vital place of women in West African societies, patrilineal or matrilineal, where women were never on the periphery. It exposes a society where the power of men and women emerge from their distinctive characteristics and roles, which confer a dynamic equality and dignity, diametrically different from the western concept of equality among the sexes, which always connotes the idea of men and women sharing equal roles in the society, a stance that derives from a long history of women subjugation. Unlike the marginalization of women that has crept into the structures of many West African societies today, the pre-colonial West African societies had a system where gender was a locus of power both in the religious and political order.111 Kathleen

110 T. J. Bowen, Adventures and Missionary Labours, 281
111 It suffices here to note that there are dissenting voices to this ideology. For instance, Mercy A. Oduyoye, in her book, Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), details and offers a critique of patriarchal structures embedded in a male dominated African traditional society. In a striking contrast between the mythical story of the priestess Eku who was at the center of the salvation of the children of Anowa on their Southward flight to escape patriarchal encroachments in the North, and the patriarchal structures that subjugate women, Oduyoye in the first cycle of her book discusses how traditional folktalk, mythical images and proverbs, perpetuate the oppression of women. In this second cycle, she continues the discussion with a focus on church traditions, marriage practices, and the African understanding of witchcraft, and in the final cycle she calls for a reinterpretation of common folktalk from a liberating perspective. While Oduyoye’s voice is crucial, one wonders about the gap between the ‘mythical story of the priestess Eku’ that elevates a woman as a ‘savior’ of an entire community, and the present unfriendly legends that perpetuate the oppression of women. What is at the root of this development? Does the different legends represent different phases of the same community? While this investigation is beyond the scope of this study, it suffices to assert that Oduyoye’s concerns do not diminish the arguments of this project, especially as different scholarly studies into the structures of
Sheldon in her recent breathtaking study of the history of African women, through a variety of case studies across various parts of Africa, examines the status of women in pre-colonial African societies, and demonstrates how colonialism eroded such privileges, introducing changes (mostly negative) in women’s work and family lives, spiritual roles, access to land, trading, and politics. The point here becomes more vivid as we examine the family structures in West African traditional societies. We explore this paying attention to the structures of authority, the place of women, and how the divine world is also replicated in the family sphere.

2.5 West African Traditional Family System – A Case Study of the Pre-Colonial Igbo Family Structure

In order to gain access into the pre-colonial Igbo family structure, an epistemological shift is imperative. This shift involves divesting the mind of the ontological principle of the western family system that has become the standard for any discourse on the family.

The above framework takes as its point of departure George Murdock’s articulation of the
terms ‘nuclear’ and ‘extended’ as they apply to the family, where ‘nuclear’ is defined as the “most basic” form of family, and ‘extended’ is understood to imply ‘extensions’ from the primary form.¹¹⁴ This western ‘nuclear’ model, where husband, wife, and children are taken as the normative structure of a family system is predicated on “conjugal as the dominant principle of family organization”.¹¹⁵ Unfortunately studies of the Igbo traditional family system even by Igbo scholars¹¹⁶ have often presumed the ‘conjugal’ framework, thus the Igbo family is considered as ‘extensions’ of the western concept of nuclear family. As a result, patriarchal and gendered derivatives of the conjugality model such as the superordinate status of husbands/the subordinate status of wives, monogamy/polygamy, male husbands/female husbands, etc., and the particular meaning they connote from the conjugal perspective are also transposed in defining the structure of the Igbo family. Nzegwu rightly argues that construing the Igbo traditional family on the nuclear model “collapses the discussion into the western ontological scheme…. misconstrues the particular nature of the Igbo family system, and imposes an inappropriate logic upon it”.¹¹⁷ Attention to the particular nature of the Igbo family, and an effort to consider it on its own

¹¹⁴ Cf. George Peter Murdock, Social Structure (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1949), 1-2. Also see chapters 1 and 2, pp.1-40 for Murdock’s detailed discussion on the forms of family
¹¹⁷ Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu, Family Matters, 31
terms outside of the principles of ‘nuclearity’ and conjugality would reveal a different epistemological framework and operative principle for considering the Igbo family, namely, consanguinity.

Once consanguinity rather than conjugal unit is made the ‘basic form’ of the Igbo family system, it opens the way to study the Igbo family from its proper site, and one can better appreciate the concepts and languages (stripped from western impositions) that form the foundation of the Igbo family structure. Based on the principle of consanguinity, Nzegwu defines the Igbo family as ‘the sum total of siblings born into the lineage’, without a fixed number of specifiable positions such as father, husband, mother, wife, etc. From this perspective, it becomes understandable why Igbo family concepts connote a web of relationships, as Agbasie rightly observes: “Igbo kinship terminology uses a limited number of distinct elements or roots of words to construct a complex semantic field”.

Thus, the term *nwanne* (plural - *umunne*) for instance, if considered from the meaning that has been imposed upon it by the western conjugality category, is limited to siblings, but from a consanguinity perspective, the language of *nwanne* (*umunne*) denotes a kinship horizon, expanding to include the descent group of relatives both patrilateral and matrilateral. Members of a kin group refer to themselves as *umunne* even though they are not biologically from the same parents. Also, the traditional concept of *nwanne* is non-gendered, non-discriminatory, and all-inclusive. This explains why the terms, brother, sister, cousin, nephew, niece, and the implicit demarcations they connote, do not exist in the Igbo traditional family language. *Umunne* is a primary kinship idiom that fosters a consciousness of great bond regardless of circumstances of birth. The same inclusive

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118 Ibid., 32
119 Joseph-Therese Agbasie, *Woman in Igbo Life and Thought*, 77
scheme applies to other terms such as umuada, umunna, nna, and nne. These kinship idioms open up the horizon, and provide the framework for us to examine the structures of the traditional Igbo family system, and the distribution of authority.

2.5.1 Structures of Authority in the Igbo Family System

The Igbo family system is structured along two parallel lines of kin: umuada (daughters of the lineage) and umunna (sons of the lineage). At the head of the female line is the isi-ada, while the di-okpala stands at the head of the male line. Here, we immediately observe a dual-sex system, where both spheres have peculiar duties, responsibilities, power, and authority ‘radiating out along multiple intersecting paths, and coalescing along seniority lines’. Authority in the Igbo family system is thus “widely distributed”, never exclusively vested on a single individual or within a “masculinist space”, since the voices of both the umuada and umunna are equally crucial as intrinsic components of the family unit. Consequently, at the head of the consanguineal family structure is not a single man (the father), but the umuada and umunna. To properly investigate the structures of authority in the Igbo family system therefore, we first examine the roles of the umuada and umunna, and then we explore how the traditional concept of father and mother (nna and nne) fits into the framework.

2.5.2 Umuada

The Igbo woman is primarily conceived as an ada (daughter), hence even in her matrimonial home, her identity as ada does not disappear. This socio-political identity,

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120 Technically and linguistically, umunna (also umuokpala) and umuada could be used to refer to both the male and female members of a lineage since the first linguistic component umu (children) is non-gendered. But as a social unit the umunna is distinguished from the umuada as the male/female parallel components of the family.

121 Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu, Family Matters, 31

122 Joseph-Therese Agbasiere, Woman in Igbo Life and Thought, 90

123 Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu, Family Matters, 32
which supersedes that of wife with its subordinate connotation, makes the woman a constitutive part of the consanguine family system. The pre-colonial practice in some Igbo societies of burying the bodies of married daughters with their kin undergirds the above 

*ada*-epistemology.

*Umuada* refers to the daughters of a lineage. It is a compound noun derived from two Igbo words: *umu* (a generic plural word that conveys the sense of many) and *ada* (generally – daughters, specifically – first female in a family, also called *isi-ada*). *Umuada* as a social unit has been described as the most organized cultural group in the Igbo tradition. It is an ever-present force to the economic wellbeing, peace, conflict resolution, and decision-making in the family, it constitutes a formal check to the *umunna*, and it is vital to the overall preservation of the identity of the lineage.

With regards to their consanguineal family identity, *umuada* not only lays claim on its conservation, they also have the obligation to its expansion. The practice of *Idigbe* is an instance that substantiates the above claim. *Idigbe* is a practice whereby a *nwada* (daughter) remains in her home (or leaves her husband and returns to her kin), chooses a paramour with whom she would have children, who become part of her consanguineal family. A woman can decide to become an *Idigbe* and/or marry wives of her own in order to expand her kin group. Here, as opposed to the western practice of lesbian unions, sexual/emotional attraction is not the basis of marriage, but expansion of the kindred. In her 1979 study of the history and culture of Onitsha, Nnayelugo Bosah reports some instances of families in

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124 Joseph-Therese Agbasiere, *Woman in Igbo Life and Thought*, 32
Onitsha today that are descendants of children from *Idigbe* relationships.\textsuperscript{126} The practice of *Idigbe* exposes the fact that the Igbo traditional family system did not imprison women’s identity solely as wives with its patriarchal ideology where the male is placed over her as the head of the family system, rather, it substantiates a parallel system that equally affirms both daughters and sons and allows them to assume substantive and functional identities within the family. The practice of *Idigbe* shakes the ground off the foundation of Chinwuba Obi’s argument that “women have no rights to remain permanently unattached to a man and his family”.\textsuperscript{127} Obi’s argument clearly privileges conjugality over consanguinity, and opens up a system where females in a family are mandated to marry, and are defined in terms of their roles as wives and not really as members of their agnatic family. As a result, they are denied their lineage rights on the erroneous supposition that their marriage has extinguished their lineage entitlements to family properties. This epistemic model that transforms all *umuada* into wives permanently locks them into a sexualized identity that places them in a subordinate sphere. Conversely, the consanguinity model within which the practice of *Idigbe* flows naturally, corresponds more to a dual-descent structure of family in which daughters or sons could be founders of families. It allowed for a range of sororal practices and spousal unions that gave flexibility to both the male and female side of the family. Both daughters and sons could marry wives, both daughters and sons could be in relationships in which their children belong to their parents’ lineage, and both daughters and sons could establish relationships in which their children were members of their own family”.\textsuperscript{128}

\textsuperscript{126} For instance, members of Ogboli Olosi ward are descendants of Olosi the daughter of Obi Chimaevi and her non Onitsha paramour. In the same vein mothers have also founded towns and wards as we see in the case of Usse who returned to Onitsha with Idoko, the child she had with an Igala warrior, some members of Obikporo are descendants of Usse and Idoko, cf. Nnanyelugo S.I. Bosah, *Groundwork of the History and Culture of Onitsha* (Apapa: Times Press Ltd., 1979), 24; also see Richard Henderson, *The King in Every Man: Evolutionary Trends in Onitsha Ibo Society and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 86-88.


\textsuperscript{128} Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu, *Family Matters*, 37
Under this structure, there is no space for the maltreatment of widows, sons and daughters are valued, and there is no dominance of the line of male elders (umunna) over the female line (umuada), since the umunna does not have an overarching authority over the umuada. In fact, the umuada manages their own affairs without recourse to any supervisory authority.

Furthermore, umuada takes the center stage when it comes to conflict resolution and management in matters that apply to women. The settlement of quarrels concerning political, economic and ritual matters which are beyond their male relatives also fall under their domain. They have the right of arbitration within their natal lineage, and can ask the guilty party to pay fine, cook, or bring reconciliatory items such as kola nut, ram, cock, etc. Umuada has the authority to discipline any relatives’ wife who is involved in any misdemeanor, and they determine how a widow mourns the death of her husband according to prescribed norms. They also have the power to punish a male lineage relative who has abridged the statues of the land, and in extreme offences or grievous acts of insubordination, they have the power to ostracize. If this becomes the case, the funeral of such a person will be boycotted. This would create a ritual crises since within the Igbo funeral rites, the ritual services of the umuada is indispensable.

In a nutshell, it can be said that umuada as a family social unit in the pre-colonial Igbo society participated as an intrinsic part of family administration, constituted checks and balances for the sons if they acted irresponsibly, negotiated peace treatises, and independently managed their own affairs.

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129 Cf. Joseph-Therese Agbasiere, Woman in Igbo Life and Thought, 41
130 For a detailed discussion on this, cf. Joseph-Therese Agbasiere, Woman in Igbo Life and Thought, chapter 10
2.5.3 Umunna

On the parallel side of the umuada is the umunna (sons of the lineage). Headed by the eldest member (di-okpala, also referred to as nna anyi – our father, since he was regarded as the father of the lineage), meetings are held at his compound (obi). In most cases, he also holds the family male-line\textsuperscript{131} ofo (symbol of authority, justice and truth) and tends the family ancestral shrines located in his compound. The di-okpala is the representative of the lineage ancestors, and together with the other members of the umunna ensures that the traditions of the ancestors are maintained in the family, adjudicates cases of land disputes, incest, murder, and bride price, administers justice in affairs concerning the males of the lineage, and ensures that the laws of the land is not violated within the lineage, since such violation breaks the ritual equilibrium of the cosmic order, bringing untold hardship to the family. Offenders are punished with restitution fines, propitiation rituals, ostracization or even death. Ritualy, the ofo is used to chastise the offender, and bring down the wrath of the ancestors, even when the offender is the holder (i.e the di-okpala). In fact, the ofo is expected to kill the holder when he excises unjust and arbitrary power. The ofo is thus not only a ritual mark of authority, it is also a symbol of checks and balances for both the heads of the umunna and umuada groups.

As a social unit, the umunna is guided by the umunne principle – the spirit of common motherhood, which obliges love and trust. Accordingly, scandal- mongering, theft, deceit, and murder are crimes against the family, and against the land. The umunna maintains coercion in the lineage in the spheres of family operational activities that fall within their

\textsuperscript{131} While the ofo has been masculinized in today’s igbo society, there existed in the precolonial times a separate ofo for the isi-ada, thus Nzegwu described Henderson’s comment about the ofo as belonging only to the okpala as untenable, cf. Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu, \textit{Family Matters}, 68
An important aspect of these activities is the set that involves the preservation of the lineage, or what Ifi Amadiume described as “life-cycle ceremonies”. These include: the naming ceremony of a newborn, accompanying individual members during the process of marriage, assisting members with marriage expenses, organizing major annual ceremonies such as the New Yam Festival, and consulting diviners to ensure the wellbeing of the family.

2.5.4 Nna (Father)

The Igbo traditional concept of nna is not confined to a biological definition as the western nuclear family/conjugal category implies. Rather, nna, as suggested by Nzegwu symbolizes an exercise of custodial qualities towards other members of the family. The subject here might be the most senior brother or uncle. Three significant points emerge from Nzegwu’s definition. First, nna is a mark of seniority and elderhood, and is not tied to reproductive capacity. Accordingly, nna is not necessarily a husband since his ‘nnaship’ extends to homes where he is not necessarily a husband. As the elder kin in the lineage, nna does not have spousal relations with the widows or wives of relatives who fall within his protective sphere. Second, custody and guardianship are central, hence, a paramour in an idigbe relationship does not count as nna to the child because he does not have custodial roles. Third, the concept of nna is mutually exclusive to controlling and tyrannical propensities. This lack of autocratic tendencies emanates from the nature of authority distribution in the consanguineal family system where the nna has to work in a

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133 Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu, *Family Matters*, 38
collaborative scheme with the *umunna*; where he is always conscious of the *iyomdi* (lineage wives), who would always register their concerns through group pressure; and where he is in a subordinate status to his in-laws, who function as a protective barricade against abuse from the affinal lineage, ensuring that their *ada* has the space to preserve her personal autonomy. This is evident in instances where communities have threatened hostilities if their daughter is mistreated or abused.\(^{134}\) Accordingly, the *nna* model of fatherhood does not nullify the woman’s autonomy, nor control her sexuality and reproductive powers. Since fatherhood is not necessarily fused with biology nor achieved by impregnation, wives or daughters can have children for themselves or for their deceased or impotent husbands through a non-spousal genitor. This practice was appreciated by affinal families as it guaranteed the continuation of the lineage. The notion of fatherhood here stands in contrast to the western/Christian nuclear framework laden with gender ideologies, where the wife is permanently transferred to the groom (till death do us part), the husband is granted proprietary right over the wife as head,\(^ {135}\) and the concept of faithfulness is used to regulate a wife’s autonomy, restrain her sexuality and control her body, which ultimately leads to the stigmatization of a child as bastard, and the woman as depraved, if the norms of marriage are violated. At the root of the above is the western classic subordination of women, a tradition that has described women as ‘defective men’,\(^ {136}\) ‘deficient in reason’,

\(^{134}\) See for instance the case of Amaeze Obibi community as noted by Nzegwu, *Family Matters*, 41
\(^{135}\) In the United Kingdom for instance, before the 20\(^{th}\) century, women had very few rights, and when married all they owned automatically became their husband’s property, cf. online source, [https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/42794339](https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/42794339), accessed, September 6, 2018
\(^ {136}\) Aristotle, *On The Generation of Animals*, ii, 3, translated by A.L. Peck (Harvard University Press)’ The Pauline tradition as seen in his letters perpetuates this ideology, see for instance Eph. 5:22, and Thomas Aquinas agrees to this idea of the inferiority of women in his commentary on Aristotle, see, Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiae*, Prima Pars, Question 92, objection 1
“incapable of transcending their sexual passions”,\textsuperscript{137} and ‘properties of men’.\textsuperscript{138} It is a tradition with deep-seated domineering tendencies that has condemned women as inferior to men, thus demands their obedience to the nobler men who were considered a more appropriate divine image and nobler agent of procreation. The traditional Igbo consanguineal, religious, economic and political scheme does not follow such discrimination. The Igbo concept of fatherhood has thus, been rightly described as “social fatherhood”, where sexual exclusivity is detached from the institution of marriage, and kept outside the purview of exclusive control of husbands, and where childbearing takes a center stage, not only fulfilling women’s desire to be mothers, but also guaranteeing the preservation and economic viability of the lineage.\textsuperscript{139} This does not in any way translate to cultural permission to sexual laxity. On the contrary, the Igbo tradition, like many other West African cultures, has stringent sexual moral codes ritually guarded and enforced by \textit{Ala}, the moral deity. The notion of fatherhood thus is that of protection, guardianship, and coalition builder, iced with the wisdom of seniority and eldership.

\subsection*{2.5.5 Nne (Motherhood)}

Just as the concept of \textit{nna} (fatherhood) is separate from the notion of husband, so the concept of \textit{nne} (motherhood) has no intrinsic link to wifehood, since it is possible within the traditional structures, to be a legitimate mother without being a wife.\textsuperscript{140} While wifehood has an implicit subordinate status, motherhood has a status of “immense powers”.\textsuperscript{141} In fact,

\textsuperscript{138} Cf. Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu, \textit{Family Matters},44
\textsuperscript{139} Cf. Ibid,38, 40
\textsuperscript{140} Thus, an \textit{idigbe} is rightly a mother, as already examined
\textsuperscript{141} Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu, \textit{Family Matters},50
in the Igbo cultural setting, once a woman becomes a mother having established the mother-child dyad, her status dramatically changes, as she becomes firmly inserted into her larger marital family (if married), giving her greater rights that allowed her to reshape both her conjugal unit and her lineage. This power emanates from the various cultural representations of motherhood. First, nne is a bearer of life. In Igbo cosmology, the human person is the representation of the beauty of life. The very term mmadu (human being) derives from mma (beauty) and ndu (life). Mmadu, as the beauty of life is at the center of the universe, and her/his spiritual being is a composite of a personal chi (destiny) and a vital force of an ancestor, through which a particular ancestor exacts a positive influence within the family or lineage. The successful birthing of a child is thus not just a physical act, it also involves the spiritual. It presupposes a balanced interaction between the spiritual and earthly realms, without which the entire process begins to malfunction. Accordingly, the usokwu (mother’s residential sphere) and omumu (the principle of fertility and reproductive power) constitutes the nodal point in the lineage network where the exclusive power of mothers to grow the lineage is manifested. Nzegwu is apt: “the autonomy and power of mothers in affinal families derive from their control of spiritual powers and rites that lie at the heart of fecundity and procreation. As bearers of children, these powers are vested in them and fall under their jurisdiction”.

In addition to securing the continued existence and expansion of the lineage through the provision of custody for the mystery of life, motherhood in the Igbo culture is also a symbol of unity, stability and bond within a family. This derives from the sacramental power of the womb. The womb signifies an extraordinary bond. Children of the same

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142 Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu, *Family Matters*, 52
mother (umunne) refer to themselves as coming from ofu afo (one womb) as a way of defining the loyalty they owe one another. The blood of the womb “provides a cohesive glue that binds siblings which men’s blood-oats attempts to mimic. Hers is the true bloodline in the family”. 143 This is precisely the point emphasized by B.A. Akunne in her study of the notion of ube nne among the Igbo people of Nri, Anambra State. She points out the ube nne symbolizes the true spirit of unity that binds persons through common motherhood. 144 It is the gravitational pull in the family. In fact, people of the same father still refer to themselves as nwa-nne rather than nwa-nna since nwanna does not immediately confer the sense of direct blood relationship. The Igbo system, according to Nzegwu, “traces life back to the womb”. 145 On the wider level, the significance of the womb expands to be all-inclusive, as the concept of umunne (children of the same mother – womb) could also include the sons and daughters of the entire lineage, the entire community, and in fact in times of conflict or difficulty even strangers who offer help could become umunne. When the term is used, it invokes the same kind of loyalty as when used in the narrower sense by children that are literally from the same womb. The lifelong friendship, loyalty and bond that exist between Ibi and Uli, 146 two neighboring communities, exemplify this quality of nne in the Igbo cultural setting.

2.5.6 Evaluation

From our consideration so far, we can isolate some basic characteristics of the pre-colonial Igbo family system. First, it is a dual-sex system where authority is structured

143 Ibid, 51
144 B.A. Akunne, “Ibe Nne Bond of Common Motherhood at Nri” in Odinani: Journal of the Odinani museum, Nri, Nigeria, no.2 (September 1977), 60-63, 60
145 Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu, Family Matters, 54
146 Cf. Joseph-Therese Agbasiere, Women in Igbo Life and Thought, 83
along two parallel lines of male and female domains of influence. These spheres are independent, yet complementary. Under the dual sex system, authority is highly distributive, flexible, and inclusive, dismantling the kind of power monopoly that fuels dictatorship. According to Agbasiere, in the typical African community, “authority is not vested solely in an individual but is held collectively”. Here it is clear that the exercise of authority is vested more in the lineage than in the family unit, ensuring accountability, and bringing the family into life. Thus, the umuada and umunna are able to manage their affairs separately, act as checks and balances for each other, act collaboratively to make decisions in matters of grave importance to the family, and contribute positively to the overall good of the lineage. This dual-sex system is predicated on a non-gendered principle, hence the absence of superordinate/subordinate features which the concept of gender generates. It is a system that upholds the worth of every member of the family.

The above family structure is a reflection of how the Igbo larger political society was organized. Nzegwu for instance narrates the structure of political administration in Onitsha in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There were two monarchs, male and female who both embodied spiritual powers and possessed the royal insignia. On the male side is the Obi and his council ndi ichie, while on the female side is the Omu, and Otu Ogene, her council, who were at the head of the Ikporo Onitsha (council of the women of Onitsha). The roles, responsibilities and administrative spaces were complementary, thus, while the women had jurisdiction over matters of trade, the men ensured that trade routes remain open; the women were in-charge of the war rituals directed to the deities for a

148 For details cf. Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu, Family Matters, 220-222
favorable outcome, while the men controlled military campaigns. In the area of agriculture, the production of yam which sustained the community for the first half of the year fell under the domain of men while the production of vegetables, corn, and cocoyam which sustained the community during the second half of the year was the duty of women. The adjudication of disputes took place in respective spheres, but in grave cases or in other matters of great importance, the two spheres acted jointly. Sheldon points to this dual system in her study of the roles of African women in the precolonial times, when she observes a division of labor along gender lines, and the women societies and organizations that offered parallel structures to men’s groups. In this dual-sex system, rights, obligations, duties, and administrative powers accrue to groups not individuals, chances of abuse are slim, and sexual capacities become a locus of strength and advantage rather than systemic disadvantage.

Accordingly, the subordination of women and other discriminatory acts on the basis of gender finds no place in the dual-sex system. It is a system that stands in a glaring contrast to the western/Christian gender-discriminatory ideology which goes back to Aristotle, one of the backbones of western philosophy, in whose thought women are nothing but “deformed”, “mutilated” males, and a departure from what is normal. Following this Aristotelian orientation, and inspired by Pauline passages such as 1Corinthians 11:3 (man is the head of woman), Thomas Aquinas whose thoughts remain very influential to Christian theology, concedes to the inferiority of women when he asserts: “with regards to the individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten, for the

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active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman comes from the defect in the active force or from some material indisposition, or even from some external influence such as that of the south wind which is moist".\textsuperscript{151} He thus sexualized women, limiting their collaborative function only to "the work of generation".\textsuperscript{152} The influence of this epistemological orientation is so vivid in the subordination of women in the western world into the 20\textsuperscript{th} century when for instance women were first allowed the right to vote both in the United States,\textsuperscript{153} and in the United Kingdom.\textsuperscript{154} Coming from such a background, the colonial masters could not understand the West African dual sex system where women and men were equally influential in the family, economic and political spheres. During the colonial rule therefore, economic and political powers were given to men, and the western women subordination tendencies were replicated in the African consciousness such that today Africa is caught up in the same western version of feminist agitation for equality, where ‘equality’ is understood in terms of "gender neutrality, by treating everyone as a human being",\textsuperscript{155} whereas in the traditional dual sex system, the need for ‘gender neutrality’ does not arise because the dual sex scheme recognizes the dignity of both sexes while accommodating their biological differences. As a result, the sexual autonomy of the woman is not abrogated even in marriage. The dual-sex system is therefore a system that naturally flows from the identity of a culture that goes

\textsuperscript{151} Thomas Aquinas \textit{Summa Theologiae}, Prima Pars, Question 92
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{153} The 19\textsuperscript{th} Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (a right known as Women’s Suffrage) ratified on August 18, 1920, granted women citizens a right to vote
\textsuperscript{154} In 1918, a coalition government passed the \textit{Representation of the People Act 1918} allowing women above the age of 30 to vote. It took another ten years for another law to be passed allowing women to vote on equal footing with men (i.e. above the age of 21). Up until this time, it was traditionally thought that women should have nothing to do with politics, even Queen Victoria agreed, cf. online source, https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/42794339, accessed, September 6, 2018
\textsuperscript{155} Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu, \textit{Family Matters}, 227
beyond the conjugal act as the essence of marriage; a culture where the arrival of a child is privileged as the consummation of marital union rather than sexual intercourse as in the Catholic tradition (which makes sense only in a context where women are sexualized); and a culture where the child both guarantees the economic viability, and the continuity of the consanguineal lineage, a continuity that is at the heart of Igbo existence, as expressed in the traditional benediction *ama nna gi efuna* (may your lineage not go into extinction). The dual-sex system exposes a culture where the organizing principle is not found in gender but in the community and seniority (eldership).  

Eldership is therefore a very important concept in the Igbo (and other West African) tradition. It connotes age and seniority, but more importantly, it signifies wisdom. To be addressed as an elder is to be regarded as an embodiment of natural and philosophical wisdom, traditional mores and integrity of life. These command respect, and emulation, thus the status of eldership and its implied authority is ritualized. The eldest in the family holds the family *ofo* (symbol of justice, honesty, and integrity), and presides over family rituals. Elders are also called upon in public ceremonies to perform rituals that connect the community with the ancestors, such as blessings and eulogies (e.g. *igo oji* which happens in most gatherings, and *igo ofo* given to a couple during weeding ceremonies, or bestowed on the public during any celebration, etc.). The ritualization of authority indicates that in the Igbo as well as other West African cultures, authority is expected to point beyond itself.

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156 Joseph-Therese Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought*, 82. Agbasiere points out that seniority is the principle of social differentiation in Igbo communities. I add that community is also part of the mix, as will be clear below when we discuss the structures of authority in the family system.

and never to “exhibit itself as an arbitrary naked power”\textsuperscript{158}. This is ensured through the inbuilt mechanisms for checks, including an elaborate distribution of authority.

The diffuse and flexible authority that is structurally imbedded into the Igbo family system is not isolated. It is a way of life that manifests itself in the cultural, political, religious and economic identity of the people, all of which are intertwined. As we have seen from our study of the nature of Theo-supremacy, and old Oyo Empire, the hierarchy of the West African divine world, with its diffuse exercise of authority is brought into life in the political community, and further filters down into the family structures. Here we are operating within a space where there is no separation between the sacred and the profane, church and state, etc., rather activities in all spheres of life are inseparably connected in what Agbasiere calls a “life rubbing”\textsuperscript{159} process, which brings healing. Maintaining the balance between the Supreme Being, the gods of the land, and political activities that go on in the community, assures the wellbeing of all.

This triad connectivity was set on the path of alteration with two decisive and influential events in the physical, mental, and moral displacement of West Africa: slavery and colonialism. These two events not only marked the disorganization and disorientation of West African cultural structures, communal psyche, and what has been called “pristine traditional African ethics”,\textsuperscript{160} it also marked the introduction of an alien space as a foundation on which to construct African institutions. The result was nothing less than catastrophic: condemnation and massive disruption of traditional ethical values and ways of living, breakdown of family life, and a process of subjugation, which not only lasted

\textsuperscript{158} Joseph-Therese Agbasiere, “The Gospel and African Cultural Forms”, 216
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., 214
\textsuperscript{160} Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator, S.J. “Ethics Brewed in an African Pot” 9
until the end of colonialism and apartheid, but still continues in what scholars have termed ‘coloniality’. 161

As we turn our attention to the study of these two influential events, we first clarify that the intention here is not primarily to apportion blame. While not attempting to ‘play the blame game’, however, it would also amount to shallow intellectualism to close one’s eyes to past influential events. Memory shapes narratives, and without the correct memory and narrative, the understanding of the present is trapped in alien narratives, and the desired future becomes elusive. Uzukwu captures my concern here, “our recollection makes present the past in order to transform the future. It is radical because we shall not simply be interested in apportioning blame, we remember in order not to repeat such abominations and in order to transform such latent forces of domination into potent forces for empowerment”. 162 We can hardly turn our backs on the devastating effects of slave trade, and colonialism, on the African soil if we are to reconstruct the future. As the African proverb puts it ‘he who does not know where he is coming from, hardly understands where he is going’. To the study of these two events we now turn.

2.6 Slavery and its Impacts

We grant you [king of Portugal], by this present document, with our Apostolic Authority, full and free permission to invade, search out, capture and subjugate the Saracens and pagans, and any other infidels and enemies of Christ wherever they may be, as well as their kingdoms, duchies, counties, principalities, and other properties, possessions,… and to reduce their persons to perpetual servitude,…and apply their possessions and goods to you and your successors…. To you and indeed

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161 The term expresses the continued influence and exploitation of poorer countries by the rich even after colonialism. A typical example is evident in how the World Bank and IMF exploits and shapes the policies most sub-Saharan African countries as to benefit the richer countries. This is done in the guise of aid. Michael Goldman who, in his words, “spent ten years in the intestines of the World Bank” has done a detailed study on this. Cf. Michael Goldman, Imperial Nature: The World Bank and Struggles for Social Justice in the Age of Globalization (New Heaven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), see for instance xi - xii

all individual faithful of Christ of either sex accompanying Your Majesty in this
day of faith, and those who will send help or contribute according to their means,
we grant a plenary forgiveness of all their individual sins, crimes, trespasses and
digressions… and if it should happen that you or anyone accompanying you departs
from this world while going there, staying there, or coming back, we restore you
through this present letter to pure innocence in which you and they existed after
baptism.163

The above is from the papal bull of Nicholas V (June 18, 1452) addressed to King
Afonso V of Portugal authorizing his expedition on the Atlantic coast of Africa.164 Here
the Pope lends his full support to the selfish motives of the king of Portugal to confiscate
lands, take possession of natural resources (gold, ivory, textiles, wrought iron, etc.), and
reduce human beings to ‘perpetual servitude’, solely for economic gains. It might seem
from the choice of words of the bull that what was at stake was pious defense of the
Catholic faith against its active enemies, but historical evidence shows that this was
certainly not the case. Basil Davidson in his in-depth study of the African slave trade
reports that in 1441, there sailed a ship from Portugal under the command of Antam
Goncalvez towards the western shore of Africa. Getting to the shores of present day
Morocco, Goncalvez conceived the idea of pleasing his royal master by capturing the
inhabitants of this unknown southern land. Addressing his crew, he pointed out how
rewarding it would be “if we who have come to this land for a cargo of such pretty
merchandise were to meet with the good luck to bring the first captives before the face of
our prince”.165 So began the violent attacks and invasion of the armed caravel on the

163 Nicholas V, Dum Diversas, Papal Bull (June 18, 1452), cf. nos. 1,2,3
164 While the geographical scope of Dum Diversas is undefined, Richard Raiswell finds its immediate
context in the recently discovered lands along the coast of West Africa, cf. Richard Raiswell, “Nicholas V,
Papal Bulls of” in The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery, Vol. II, L-Z (Santa Barbara, Denver,
Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 1997), 469
165 Basil Davidson, The African Slave Trade. Revised and expanded edition (Boston, Toronto: Little,
Brown and Company, 1980), 53, also, see the entire part II, 53-92
defenseless indigenes, which ended up with twelve captives that were carried back to Lisbon. After narrating to Prince Henry the richness of the land they had come from, he became interested and desired further raids, not primarily for any salvific end, but for economic gains. He thus sent a special envoy to the pope explaining his intention, the pontiff welcomed his ideas, and imprinted a divine seal on the devious intention with the bull *Dum Diversas*. The pope portrays the adventure as a ‘pious and Christian desire’ yet, in a somewhat contradictory way he also implies that it was sinful. One wonders how a pious and Christian desire could at the same time be sinful. The truth was that from the onset, the pope and those concerned were aware that slavery and exploitation of human and natural resources that belong to others is a crime against humanity, but in this case it did not matter. Hence the pope offers a pre-forgiveness of the sins of all those who would be involved, after all, “the heathens were expendable”, and here lies the psychological justification. Five years later, on January 8, 1455, Nicholas V issues a follow-up to his initial bull (*Dum Diversas*). In this sequel, *Romanus Pontifex*, he accorded to the king of Portugal a monopoly in slave trade and other trade exploration along the west coast of Africa. With this stamp of divine authority, and its validation in the dismissal of the black race as sub-human, both philosophers and theologians, and in fact even human rights activists accepted the legality and morality of black slavery as a given.\(^{166}\) In this way, the church both cooperated and provided theological justification for this heinous crime against humanity.

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With the second and third consignment brought home to Lisbon, households began to overflow with black slaves with concomitant increase in property, critics began to dwindle, and financial support for large expedition increased. Six ships under Lancarote and Gil Eannes brought back one hundred and sixty five people (including men, women, and children - besides those who perished or were killed en route), and another expedition brought two hundred and thirty-five captives to Lagos in southern Portugal. With these the oversea slave trade had officially begun. Under the eager influence of the court of Lisbon, slave trade was pushed vigorously on, by 1506, as many as four hundred slaves, including gold and oryx leather could be exchanged for horses at the Senegal River. At this time the trade may have delivered a few tens of thousands of slaves to Europe, but from then till late into the nineteenth century, a period of nearly four hundred years, millions of Africans were to suffer transportation in the ships of Portugal and Spain, and afterwards, in those of England, France, Holland, Prussia, Denmark, Sweden, Brazil, and the United States of America. By 1518, the trade had become an institution, satisfying the demand for

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168 Some studies have been carried out to determine the approximate number of African victims of slave trade (those who landed alive, those who died during the voyage and those who died before embarkation). Philip Curtin’s 1969 elaborate study is very informative. He examines the size of the trade to each European colony in the Western Hemisphere, Brazil, and the United States while synthesizing extant literatures. He concludes that conventional estimates are twice as large, thus he places the number at approximately 10million. His conclusion however is not without assumptions and speculations, see Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison, Milwaukee, London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), for his assumptions, see esp. pp. 80-81 (with regards to the demographic data of Martinique and Jamaica), pp. 135 (with regards to the legal capacity of a British slaver between 1795-1804). More recent studies shows an upward revision of Curtin’s figures, J. E. Inikori for instance has vigorously argued that Curtin’s method of computation is inadequate, leading to figures that are below the actual numbers, see , J. E. Inikori, “Measuring the Atlantic Slave trade: An Assessment of Curtin and Anstey” in *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 17, no. 2 (Cambridge University Press, 1976), 197-223, see also C.A. Palmer, *Slaves of the White God: Blacks in Mexico, 1570-1650* (Cambridge: HUP, 1976); D. Eltis, “The export of Slaves from Africa: 1821-1843, in *Journal of Economic History*, vol. 37, no. 2, (June 1977), 409-433. Many scholars today would generally agree that about 12 to 15 million Africans were lost to the trade, see, Basil Davidson, *The African Slave Trade*, 95-101; J. E. Inikori, “Africa in World History: The Export Slave Trade from Africa and the Emergence of the Atlantic Economic Order” in B.A. Ogot, ed., *General History of Africa, vol. V: Africa from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (California-UNESCO: University of California Press, 1992), 74-112, 82
labor in the mines of Central America, and supplying for the abundant labor required in the sugar and tobacco plantations in Europe and North America. Sugar had been rare in Europe, but by the seventeenth century it became a big business. Planters depended directly on African slave trade, and they used their labor with such wasteful folly that whole slave population had to be replenished time after time. A British eye witness in the Dutch West Indian colony of Surinam at the end of the eighteenth century made an observation that applied to many other places. He observed that plantation mortality was so high that “a whole race of healthy slaves consisting of 50,000 are totally extinct once every twenty years”.\footnote{Cf. Basil Davidson, The African Slave Trade, 75} A fraction of these slave-produced goods were taken to Africa in exchange for more slaves.

The payoff was not only in the agricultural sector. These were years of great industrial invention. More coal for instance was needed for the new factories which demanded better devices for pumping water from the ever-deepening mines. As a result, the steam pump was developed in 1712, by 1803, Trevithick was building a locomotive to run on iron rails, and in 1830 Stephenson’s ‘rocket’ pulled thirty passengers from Stockton to Darlington at thirty miles per hour. Growth and innovation in the textile industry showed the same movement, from the invention of a mechanical shuttle in 1733 to Arkwright’s throstle, which by 1811 was already a source of great profit in the textile industry. Britain’s accumulation of capital was enormous. In 1701 the value of British exports in cotton was 23,000 pounds, but in 1800 the total was five and half million pounds.\footnote{Ibid., 79} In a detailed study of the African slave trade in relation to the emergence of the Atlantic economic order, J.E. Inikori carefully examines the economic development in the Atlantic area from a handicraft
stage at the arrival of Christopher Columbus to the Americas in 1492, to a structured and mechanized stage in the middle of the nineteenth century where a single economic system ruled by market forces had emerged. He concludes without doubt that the “phenomenal expansion of commodity production and trade”, which engendered the industrial revolution in England in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and that of the north-eastern USA in the nineteenth century would not be possible at the time if not for the “African slave labour provided through the export slave trade from Africa”\textsuperscript{171} Industrialization was born on the back of African citizens turned into slaves.

It was an unending misery as Africa populated Europe and the Americas with her sons and daughters. In 1829, an Englishman called Walsh described the horrific sight he witnessed on board a slaving ship cargo of five hundred and five men and women:

> they were all enclosed under grated hatchways, between decks. The space was so low that they sat between each other’s legs and stowed so close together that there was no possibility of lying down, or at all changing their position, by night or by day. As they belonged to, or were shipped on account of different individuals, they were all branded like ship with their owners marks of different forms. These were impressed under their breasts or on their arms, and as the mate informed me with perfect indifference, burnt with a red hot iron.\textsuperscript{172}

Within seventeen days, fifty-five were already thrown overboard, yet the devastated Walsh was informed that what he witnessed was one of the best conditions, as headrooms were never more than forty-five centimeters, and they were generally chained by the neck and legs, as those he witnessed were not. Many other instances of the gruesome nature of this awful phenomenon known as ‘close packing’ abound. The case of the Spanish frigate


\textsuperscript{172} Basil Davidson, \textit{The African Slave Trade}, 13
ironically called Amistad (the friendship) immediately comes to mind. In one of its voyages, it had loaded 733 captives on the West African coast, fifty-two days later, only 188 were left, others have died due to the horrible effects of ‘close packing’. 173 It was this kind of agonizing sight that traumatized Olaudah Equiano when he became a victim. He recounts his experience when he was brought to the coast for onward shipment: “When I looked round the ship too, and saw a large furnace of copper boiling, and multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenance expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted of my fate, and quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted. When I recovered a little…one of the white men held me fast by the hands and laid me across, I think, the windlass, and tied my feet, while the other flogged me severely. I had never experienced anything of this kind before”. 174

As horrific as the physical degradation of these regular scenes might be, of more significant to this project are the impacts of the slave trade on the African soil, and its effects on the destiny of Africans. As Davidson rightly points out, ‘nothing in their history during these centuries can be understood without a cool appraisal of the slaving impact’. Slave trade was not just a spontaneous outgrowth of social necessities, sub-serving a temporary need of human development, it was “politically as well as morally, a monstrous aberration”, 175 with powerful degrading consequences for the structure of the African societies. The manner and morals of the trade, the transport condition and the colossal

173 Ibid., 97
174 Cf. Philip D. Curtin, ed., Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade (Madison, Milwaukee, London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), see G.I. Jones’ entry pp. 60-98, for the above quote see 92-93. The autobiography of Olaudah Equiano (possibly Ekwuno, since he calls his home Essaka – possibly Iseie in present Ilala local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria) was first published in 1789 as The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano. He is also known as Gustavus Vassa, the name given to him by his British master. The first two chapters of his autobiography are reproduced in Philip D. Curtin, ed., Africa Remembered, 69-98
175 Basil Davidson, The African Slave Trade, 273
effects on the Africans who were separated from their families and land, and inhumanly used for the profit of the slaving countries remain deeply seated.

After 1650, when slaving became dominant, the power of Africa’s export production diminished rapidly while the European production of consumer export goods gave the maritime nations of Europe a long lead in economic development. The reason for this is not far-fetched since the men and women who would otherwise have produced wealth at home were sent away. Where the only produce that was readily marketable was the producer himself/herself, local industries dwindled and collapsed, handicrafts and cottage industries could not thrive, let alone expand, and cheap European textiles drove out the excellent cloths of the Guinea coast. Benin was especially famous for its textiles, yet by 1850, these had fallen. Dahomey textiles with their superior dyes also met the same fate. In exporting their citizens, observed Davidson, “African states exported their own capital without any possible return in interest or in the enlargement of their economic system…the African slaves could contribute nothing, except to the wealth of their masters, a wealth that never returned to Africa”. 176

African collaborators undoubtedly received payments for those they sold into slavery, but the nature of these payments was strictly nonproductive, and could not lead to a more advanced economy. Accordingly, as chiefs and merchants fattened on the slave trade, there was no concomitant expansion in the economic system. The new wealth became increasingly a matter of individual prestige and display at the detriment of collective and societal growth. The glittering display of wealth by the king of Bonny as a welcome to the king of Warri when he brought his daughter for a marriage ceremony in 1826 captures my

176 Basil Davidson, *The African Slave Trade*, 274
point here. King Pepple of Bonny described the scene himself to a European visitor in
"pidgin" English thus:

that time I first hear Warri’s canoe come for creek, I fire one gun from my house –
then all Bonny fire – plenty powder blow away you no can hear one man speak. I
stand for my house – all my house have fine cloth, roof, walls, all round, he hung
with proper fine silks. No possible to look one stick, one mat, all be covered. My
Queen Father stand for beach. His foot no touch ground. He stand on cloth, all way
he walk, he walk for cloth, I give wine brandy, plenty puncheon – pass twenty. I
give for my people and Warri’s. All Bonny glad too much, every man every woman,
for my town, I give cloth, pass one thousand piece I give that day, pass twenty
thousand barrel I fire that day”.

The above summarizes capital accumulation during the days of slave trade.
Merchants, who were also monarchs/chiefs/traditional leaders accumulated individual
wealth and spent it to glorify themselves and enlarge their reputation. This was essentially
the limits of such wealth. It could not be used to grow or expand a nation’s economy, nor
develop a local scientific system capable of a technological advance. The slave trade
enhanced the wealth and power of kings at the expense of collective good. Here we see the
insertion of the displacement of pristine West African values. The notion of community
and the protective function of elders began to fall apart. The existence of a traditional pre-
slavery African occurs in the context of a community where, while one’s individuality is
upheld, her/his achievement cannot be conceived apart from the community. In this space,
the elder who is considered to have a close affinity with the ancestors has a protective
function, and the value of life is paramount. With the slave trade, personal enrichment even
when predicated on the life of a kin began to take shape, common good was set on the path
of disintegration, and the protective function of elders and leaders began to dissipate. In a
word, the notion of community, life, and eldership began to lose its authentic African worth,

177 Basil Davidson, The African Slave Trade, 275-276
giving birth to a reckless disregard for public good in place of selfish aggrandizement.

Uzukwu describes the impact of this phenomenon rather succinctly:

The mentality came into existence that one person sells another to become rich… The value of values – human life – was devalued…many sons and daughters of Africa were denied their humanity and consigned to dungeons and concentration camps for slave labor. Values which were built for thousands of years were consigned to the dust-bin for European trinkets. Instead of protector of the people, the leader became the enemy of the people. Instead of solidarity among members of a kingdom or village group, one sold one’s kinsmen for wealth. Instead of the law of hospitality, the stranger was unsure of his or her life…human life, which the African vision of the world projected as the value to be protected, nurtured and enhanced was cheapened.178

Apart from bolstering the power and prestige of the chiefs, slaving also provided a ready means for chiefs to easily get rid of their critics. Those who provided checks and balances or wished to change the system were easily branded criminals by inland monarchies and turned into captives for disposal.179 Davidson opines that this might explain why revolts seldom occurred at home but frequently on shipboards and across the seas.180 Thus the checks and balances that characterized the African political systems and family structures began to disintegrate, and healthy critics became political enemies. While the European slave traders worked for the national interest of their respective states, the African collaborators worked for personal interest even when collective institutions suffered. Accordingly, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, independent Africa matched head to head with Europe in terms of power, but during the four centuries that followed, African feudal societies deteriorated, while the feudal societies of Europe transformed themselves into industrial capitalist powers. As a result, when Europe and

178 Elochukwu Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 23
179 This was the case in the Delta states. The removal of these so called rebels often has the support of the European partners, cf. Basil Davidson, *The African Slave Trade*, 281-283
Africa collided at the end of the nineteenth century, it was a piece of cake for Europe to dismantle and colonize Africa. According to Chinweizu, the slave trade “softened up the continent for European invasion”. Consequently, some African elites today, like the ruling class of the slaving times, due to their short-sighted greed, make choices that hinder national development, hence, continue to choose to be enslaved. Africa still exhausts its land, mineral resources, and labor in order to service western needs, in return, the elites are rewarded, but unlike the slaving times, the reward no longer comes in trinkets, schnapps, and dane guns, they come in fatty bank accounts, which unfortunately is not put to use in the African economy but finds its way back to fuel the economy of the West. This economic and social disorder has also lead to a cultural decline in Africa.

On a similar plain, with the slaving apparatus in place, servitude as introduced by the Europeans gradually filtered into the African psyche. Walter Rodney had strongly argued, with evidence from upper Guinea that servitude “began to assume an African character” as new forms of social oppression were introduced. To be sure, slavery had existed in Africa, among Africans before the inception of the Atlantic slave trade. But the former can in no way to be equated with the later. In the African system, slaves were mostly captives from wars who nonetheless were considered ‘members of the house’ and absorbed within the lineage system. Thus, “master and servant, the bond and the free, all became members of one house, a veritable hierarchy with numerous gradations, each rank with its duties and responsibilities, its privileges and rewards”. In Oyo empire for instance, as we have

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183 Basil Davidson, *The African Slave Trade*, 214
examined, slaves rose in rank, and in fact, some privileged positions of power within and outside of the palace were reserved solely for slaves. Free citizens aspired even to such posts and freely became slaves of the palace. They were called slaves but their humanity was upheld. This is totally different from the status of the Africans who were transported to Europe and the Americas, and turned into slaves. They were properties in the literal sense of the word, without any dignity or rights. In fact, they were sub-human. Little wonder why slaving produced among Europeans the mentality of race superiority, which not only fueled the colonial conquest but still lingers in our midst. In fact, while variant forms of racial philosophy had existed before the slave trade and continues to exist, Rodney rightly observes that “the historical experience of whites enslaving blacks for four centuries forged the tie between racist and colour prejudice and produced not merely individual racists, but a society where racism was so all-pervasive that it was not even perceived for what it was”.184 The dehumanization, reification, and reduction of Africans to the level of chattel, revealed in the terminologies used to refer to them, such as “piece” (like a piece of cloth), “thing”185 (such that they could be grouped together with resource commodities), ‘servants’, etc. never allowed human racial differences to be adequately appreciated in biological terms, not only among those with insufficient learning, but also among the highly educated. In a word, the “New World slave plantation society was the laboratory of modern racism”186 As slave trade produced a mentality of race-superiority among the White Europeans, it concomitantly generated an inferiority mentality on the African side.

185 The Portuguese, Dutch, and Spanish traders in the early seventeenth century referred to the Africans as ‘piece’ while the English, especially after the charter was granted to the Royal African Company in 1672 used the word ‘thing’ to refer to the African, cf. Ibid., 589
186 Walter Rodney, “Africa in Europe and the Americas” 590
Unsurprisingly therefore, the Europeans believed that Africans were not fit to run their own affairs. Slave trade thus became a catalyst for colonialism. With colonialism, whatever was left of the African space was summarily decimated and exploited for the benefits of the colonizers. The African system was displaced and an alien space imposed.

2.7 Colonialism and its Impacts

Having used African slave labor to enrich their society and families, and with the structures of industrial capitalism put in place, it was time to exploit African resources in the hinterland. The coastal trade that has lasted for centuries would be inadequate. Slave trade in its present form was no longer needed. Strategy had to change. It was time for Europe to take hold of Africa’s interior and reorganize the farms, mines, and markets for Europe’s greater benefit. As a result, European powers began to systematically intrude into the sovereignty of African states and meddle into their internal affairs. As this could not happen without resistance, the British power had to resort to the use of force, which occurred in different ways. Sometimes an interior faction was helped to depose a ruler who resisted the British interests, and install another who would support their scheming strategies. More importantly European gunboats were deployed to enforce British interests, in what Chinweizu has branded the period of “gunboat diplomacy”. With the British superior guns, and their troops patrolling the West African coast, the ability of the African rulers to determine the terms of trade diminished, and the British were able to impose unequal treatises to their benefit.

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188 Chinweizu, *The West and the Rest of Us*, see 37-41
Spying explorers and missionaries were also used to navigate the inland. Some important explorers who provided useful intelligence were Mungo Park, David Livingstone, Richard Burton, John Clapperton, Gaspard Mollen, W.B. Baikie, among others. They traversed Africa spying lands and rivers under different disguises. Mollen for instance, disguised as a trader to spy out conditions and entry routes to Senegal and Gambia River Basins. W.B. Baikie combined the roles of a missionary, trader, and British foreign office agent. He explored the lower Niger valley, spying the land, at the end of which armed merchants moved in. These explorers were sponsored by either secular governments or Christian missionary organizations, all serving European imperialist purposes. Local resistance to the European penetrating exploits was met with violence, and in Nigeria for instance, places such as Brass, Asaba, Onitsha, Idah, Calabar, among others, saw the wrath of the merchant guns.\(^{189}\) One thing was clear: Europe’s intention to seize Africa and plunder its resources, which culminated in the famous scramble for Africa, reaching its climax in 1884/5 with the Berlin treaty where the land of Africa was arbitrarily partitioned and divided up like a dark chocolate cake among European powers. That the division separated homogenous groups, and brought discordant groups together did not matter.\(^{190}\) Of prime importance were the resources. With the exception of Ethiopia and Liberia every

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\(^{189}\) For details, cf. Ibid., 40

\(^{190}\) Ethnic integrity and interaction with neighbors were severely affected. For instance, the interaction between the Bakongo of Angola and their kith and kin in either Gabon or the French Kongo was significantly affected, the Efik of Nigeria were severed from their traditional markets in the Cameroons, the Yoruba were prevented from directly taking part in the events of Dahomey (now Benin), which was formally part of their empire, the secondary empires of Msiri and Tippu Tib in Central Africa were parcelled out and shared among the Belgians, the Portuguesse and the British, cf. A.E. Afigbo, “The Social Repercussions of Colonial Rule: The New Social Structures” in A. Adu Boahen, ed., *General History of Africa, Vol. VII: African Under Colonial Domination 1880-1935* (California UNESCO: University of California Press, 1985), 487-507, 493
other piece of African land was given up for European assault. Thus began the bloody conquest that ushered in colonialism in the land of Africa.

By the early years of the twentieth century the French had laid sway on the territories that would become part of the French West African colony, including present day Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin, Guinea, Ivory Coast and Niger. With the system of direct rule, the French installed a centralized federalist method of administration. Constituent territories were divided up in cercles (administrative units) administered by commandants de cercel (district commissioners), and cruel means such as forced labor (courvee), imprisonment (indigenant), and forced migration to wage earning areas were used to extract valuable resources and expand the French economic interests.

Meanwhile in the lower Niger basin, the British in 1885 proclaimed their Oil Rivers protectorate over the Niger Delta states launching their invasion with the attack against king Jaja of Opobo. Every means was employed to promote British interests: kings who resisted were banished (as was the case in Warri and Benin), populations were massacred (as witnessed in Ijebu, Bida, Kabba, Sokoto, and Yola), oracles were set on fire and priests executed (for instance, in Arochukwu). Having taken over the reign of the continent, traditional systems were dismantled to ensure a profitable stay. First, undermining African system of land occupancy and use, whatever land was deemed fit for European occupation was brutally confiscated. Sometimes an entire population was evacuated to poorer districts, other times, people were expelled from their homeland or simply exterminated. According to J.A. Hobson, “war, murder, strong drink, syphilis and other civilized diseases

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192 This was the case in Bechuanaland (present day Botswana) in 1897, and the Bushmen of South Africa respectively, see, Chinweizu, *The West and the Rest of Us*, 56-57. For useful information on this process, cf. J.A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2005), 223-284
are chief instruments of destruction commonly couched under the euphemism ‘contact with a superior civilization’

As in the case of the French colonies, the British also imposed forced labor on the indigenes in their colonies to mine the land for gold, copper, diamonds, asbestos, tin, iron and zinc, or to farm the land for wool, cattle, tobacco, palm oil, coffee, rubber and groundnuts. Economic exploitation knew no bounds. According to Uzukwu:

Cash crops such as groundnuts, cotton, cocoa, and coffee, and mineral products such as coal and tin were extracted for the colonial industries of the west. None of such industries were established in the colonies. The cultivation of food crops such as millet, rice, and tubers for local consumption, and the upgrading of local metallurgy and local weaving industries were discouraged. These products had to be imported through the medium of the colonial masters. Consequently, the African people lost control of their politics and economy to predators.

It is clear that the colonial ideology was aimed at domination and exploitation of both human and natural resources of the colonized, intended to ‘derive maximum profit from minimum investment’. Where Africans were reluctant to dispossess themselves of their lands or to work for European profit, legal means were employed to achieve enforcement. An example of this capricious legal means was the use of hut tax. In Sierra Leone for instance, a heavy and oppressive hut tax was imposed, and the only way to get the money to pay the tax was to sell one’s labor to the colonial rulers. Where taxation was inadequate to supply sufficient workforce, “labor ordinances were promulgated, which made it obligatory on persons of the laboring classes to give labor for public purposes on being called out by their chief or native superiors”.

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194 Elochukwu Uzukwu, *Listening Church*, 31
196 Chinweizu, *The West and the Rest of Us*, 57
The story of brutal plunder, European greed, violence and horror in the context of Africa’s colonial history was not peculiar to West Africa. In Congo (Central Africa) for instance, the European ruthless ransack achieved what has been described as its “Nazi-style perfection” under the Christian King Leopold II of Belgium. Adam Hochschild has masterfully articulated the horrors of this regime in his book *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in colonial Africa*. In numerous descriptions drawn from historical and eyewitness accounts, Hochschild gives us a glimpse of what could reasonably be called “the most murderous part of European scramble for Africa”. The rubber harvesting policies of King Leopold is a case in point. In order to enforce Leopold’s rubber-harvesting programs, all inhabitants of villages that refused to submit to the rubber regime were shot in sight as a warning to other nearby villages. In 1899 an eyewitness, William Sheppard recounts his experience in the rubber rich rain forest bordering the Kasai River, where he walked into bloodstained grounds, destroyed villages, dead bodies, and a stench of rotten flesh. On reaching the murderer’s camp, he caught sight of some objects been smoked, he recounts that the chief “conducted us to a framework of sticks under which was burning a slow fire, and there they were, the right hands, I counted them, 81 in all” the chief then told him “see here is our evidence, I always have to cut off the right hands of those we kill in order to show the state how many we have killed”. The smoking preserved the hands, since it might be days or weeks before they are able to present the hands to the proper official and receive their reward. The cutting of the right hand was also a proof that no bullet was wasted in hunting. As a result, it was not uncommon that when

197 Chinweizu, *The West and the Rest of Us*, 59  
199 Ibid., 164-165
“soldiers shot cartridge at an animal in hunting, they cut off a hand from a living man”. 200

The rubber terror left horrible life long memories in the minds of indigenes. This was how an indigene Tswambe described Leon Fievez, one of the officials responsible for enforcing the rubber policy:

All the blacks saw this man as the devil of the equator…from all the bodies killed in the field, you had to cut off the hands. He wanted to see the number of hands cut off by each soldier who had to bring them in baskets…a village who refused to provide rubber would be completely swept clean. As a young man I saw [Fievez’s] soldier Molili then guarding the village of Boyeka take a big net put ten arrested natives in it, attach big stones to the net, and make it tumble into the river….soldiers made young men kill or rape their own mothers and sisters. 201

In the 23 years (1885-1908) that Leopold II ruled Congo, without stepping a foot into the land, he massacred over ten million Congolese by cutting off their hands and genitals, flogging them to death, starving them into forced labor, holding children ransom, and burning villages. A similar colonial horror was witnessed in the German colony of Namibia, where General Lothar von Trother decided to annihilate an entire Herero people because they resisted the reckless appropriation of their land to German settlers. Within one year (in 1904) over 80% of the Herero population was massacred. 202

A more devastating impact of the evils of colonialism in Africa is definitely not in the events of the past, but in its intimate connection to present ills, its persistence in coloniality, its displacement of traditional ethos, and the installation of a foreign space as a foundation for present structures. Here lies the difference between African countries and some other

200 Ibid., 165
201 Cf. Adam Hochschild, King Leopold’s Ghost, 166
countries that also experienced colonialism but emerged from their dungeon to build up a sustainable society. They never allowed their indigenous space to be sacrificed on the altar of imposed structures. China for instance was partially occupied for long periods, but she never entirely lost her sovereignty, nor lost control over her culture. Thus after long years of revolution and wars, she emerged triumphant and reconstructed herself on an indigenous space. Africa was different. Four hundred years of slavery with forced or voluntary collaboration of Africans weakened the continent such that when marched arm to arm in the battlefield with European invaders, she met a colossal defeat, and continues to build a future on an imposed alien space, expecting her square peg to stand firm on a round hole.

The greed and brutality that accompanied the colonial project in Africa ultimately became the *modus operandi* of present nation-state politics, effecting a displacement of African traditional work ethic, and a disorientation of family life. With the displacement of the land ownership system, and the forced labor that followed, employment and labor was no longer a source of building up one’s community, but helping an alien institution. Forced labor means that work was no longer done for the interest of the community but for the predators, one could therefore cheat. The ground for corruption in the public service was watered. The greed, violence and exploitation that were instituted by the colonial masters constituted a big slap on the sense of community and humane living, which grounded traditional African notion of work. The campaign against greed that constituted the minor genres\(^{203}\) and the respect for the human worth that characterized the traditional value system was set on the path of disintegration. Reflecting on the impact of colonialism on the African soil, Katongole observes the connection between “the story of greed and

\(^{203}\) A body of oral literature directed towards the formation of character in children, examples include: fairy tales, riddles, proverbs, guessing games, moonlight stories, etc.
plunder on the one hand and the sacrifice of African lives on the other”. The nonchalant attitude and indifference to the wasting of African lives, and the fact that Africans themselves were drafted into such ‘civilizing’ missions placed the value of African lives as meaningful only in relation to such projects, otherwise they were disposable: “but once this dispensability of African lives had become accepted and came to be expected as part of the official, normal way of nation state politics, postcolonial successors to the colonial project have had no qualms in perpetuating the same wanton sacrificing of lives in pursuit of their political ambitions and greed”. African leaders who took over power at independence denied their rich African heritage (which has been described as savage, primitive, and diabolic), and constructed new nation-states on the imposed European models, and uncritically accepted the authoritarian and undemocratic elements in colonial legacy. In this light Davidson understands the leaders such as Doe, Idi Amin, Mugabe, Bokassa, Mobutu, among others, who “are children of the their own ancestral cultures, but products of an alienation which rejects those cultures, denies them moral force, and overrides their imperatives of custom and constraint”. These leaders as it were, bought into the colonial story.

Here, the power of narrative is essential. African institutions and values were undermined and branded as savage, pagan, and primitive, and admiration for Europe was inculcated in the minds of Africans. Thus, while branding African culture as diabolic, the evils and brutality of colonialism were coded in noble ideas such as civilization, humanitarianism, Christianizing, development, modernity etc. The colonial agents and

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204 Emmanuel Katongole, The sacrifice of Africa, 16
205 Ibid., 17
perpetrators are immortalized and remembered as heroes in the minds of many Africans as they have studied in their school curriculum texts written by the imperialists. Notwithstanding the brutality of Leopold II, for instance, his image as portrayed in educational textbooks is that of ‘philanthropic monarch’, and ‘great emissary of civilization in Africa’.\textsuperscript{207} Colonization was presented as civilization, yet the real purpose was exactly the opposite. In the words of Lord Lugard, one of the major agents in bringing Uganda and Nigeria under the British rule, the colonial project “was due primarily to the economic necessity of increasing the supplies of raw materials and food to meet the needs of the industrialized nations of Europe”.\textsuperscript{208} This was to be achieved by all means, hence Cecil Rhodes could lay down his political principle, “I will lay down my policy….we must adopt the system of despotism…”\textsuperscript{209} Despotism was the colonial system of government, and the violence that accompanied it was felt all over Africa. Yet, in order to brandish this dreadful and inhuman criminality as charitable work to Africans, every effort was made to erase the colonial evils in the annals of posterity. Leopold’s action and words are telling. At the end of his reign, he burnt all the state archives so that his evils will not be discovered, as he told Stinglhamber: I will give them my Congo, but they have no rights to know what I did there”.\textsuperscript{210}

It has therefore been rightly observed that “civil service and the whole apparatus of state began with an inherent lie”.\textsuperscript{211} Katongole puts it rather succinctly, “at the heart of Africa’s inception into modernity is a lie. Modernity claims to bring salvation to Africa,

\textsuperscript{207} Cf. Emmanuel Katongole, \textit{The sacrifice of Africa}, 13
\textsuperscript{208} Sir Frederick D. Lugard, \textit{The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa} (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1923), 613
\textsuperscript{209} Quoted in Chinweizu, \textit{The West and the Rest of Us}, 70
\textsuperscript{210} Adam Hochschild, \textit{King Leopold’s Ghost}, 294
\textsuperscript{211} Elochukwu Uzukwu, \textit{Listening Church}, 31
yet the founding story of the institution of modern Africa rejects Africa itself”. 212 The veracity of the above observations is evident. It is a lie which gave birth to modern African states in the first place; it is a lie concealed in honorable ideals such as civilization and humanitarianism; it is a lie that accepted the dispensability of African lives as a normal way of nation-state politics, creating its mimetic performance in postcolonial successors who had no qualms in perpetuating the same wanton sacrificing of lives in pursuit of their political ambitions and greed; it is a lie that ultimately demonized the pristine traditional value system and replaced it with a different narrative rife with greed, exploitation, and violence. This lie still “retains a kind of underground existence”, 213 producing a long history of ignorance of African religious and moral tradition since any surviving value is interpreted as deriving from non-African ethical luminaries such as Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, Aristotle, Kant, etc., and not from the so called dark continent.

Yet, the difference between the traditional pre-colonial African societies and what colonialism introduced is obvious. Onwuejeogwu’s interview with Nwaokoye Odenigbo captures the disparity: when the white men came, they asked us to abrogate our moral codes. They said they had brought peace based on different ideas. We agreed and decided to watch them. Today we see war everywhere, we see brothers have sex with their sisters, we see people strangle others to acquire their wealth. The white men have not brought peace. We Nri people brought peace when we ruled. The white men came and stopped us from ruling. White men have arms but we do not believe in fighting. Fighting spills blood on the earth and it is an abomination. The white men began by killing those who did not agree with

212 Emmanuel Katongole, The sacrifice of Africa, 20-21
them, we *Nri* condemn it.\(^{214}\) Thus did colonial civilization and its nation-state politics displace the African work space, installing violence, brutality, and exploitation as acceptable work-ethic.

The colonial project also dealt a great blow to the traditional legal system, and family life. Already the system of forced labor and the consequent migration to wage earning areas had begun to separate families, and to break up the traditional systems, which ensured solidarity and gave political and economic strength to native life. Also, since men were the colonial preferred employees, economic power gradually became masculinized, dwindling the African system where women held substantial economic powers. In addition, some legal proclamations not only helped to disorganize the customary legal structures, but also facilitated the dismantling of the dual sex system, where authority was equally vested on both sexes, replacing it with male-dominated structures obtainable in the colonizing countries. The British creation of warrant chiefs\(^{215}\) is a case in point. In Nigeria for instance, after the creation of the Southeast Protectorate in 1900, Sir Fredrick Lugard, the then governor general and architect of indirect rule, issued a proclamation reconstituting the native courts and creating warrant chiefs.\(^ {216}\) Purportedly, the courts were supposed to rule in accordance with traditional laws and customs, but from the onset, they were patterned after the British courts, enforced laws made by the central government without regard for local customary values, excluded women from membership, and the warrant chiefs presided under the supervision of the district commissioner. In 1901, another proclamation


from Lugard gave the native courts absolute jurisdiction, mandating them to exercise their power “exclusive of all other native administrations”, and stating that “no jurisdiction shall be exercised in such districts by any other native authority whatsoever”. This traditional legal override had double impact. First it led to the gradual disintegration of the traditional administrative structure where authority was highly distributive, with imbedded checks and balances, and where political and religious clouts were intertwined. With the exclusive power given to the warrant chiefs, authority was gradually centralized on an individual’s will, customary laws were secularized and lost their religious sanction, serious crimes against the land such as murder, adultery, theft, etc. were diluted and categorized as civil offences, while traditional practices and values that did not make sense to the British mind were branded offenses against natural law, and proscribed by means of by-laws. An example is in the area of family life. The British conjugal, sexualized, and patriarchal concept of family as households, where the man is at the head, could not accommodate the west African consanguineal family values where women were not subordinated, rather could become heads of families, marry other women in order to preserve the lineage, and hold their own courts. As a result, British by-laws were introduced to subvert the West African family values and ideology, replacing them with the British patriarchal scheme, which became the norm of proper ethical conduct. According to Afigbo, it was a

217 Cf. Native Court Proclamation, no. 25, 1901, sec. 12, Laws of Southern Nigeria 1900-1901
218 Barnes reports that when the central government wants to change any behavior of the people, they either made a by-law or regulation and empowered the native courts to enforce it, or they will persuade the local authority to pass an order to that effect, which will then be approved by the administration. The second option made it appear as if the by-law represented the will of the community, when in actual sense it was an imposition, cf. J.A. Barnes, “The Politics of Law” in Man in Africa, edited by Mary Douglas and Phyllis M. Kaberry (London: Tavistock Publications, 1969), 99-118, 107
219 In Eastern Nigerian for instance the patriarchal ideology that filtered into the family through the British by-laws “radically transformed family structures when it claimed that only the di-okpala could speak for the family to the exclusion of the isi-ada”, a claim that “rests on the untenable masculinization of the ofo, and the delegitimization of the isi-ada’s ofo”, cf. Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu, Family Matters, 68
“reckless disregard of the people’s cultural achievement and religious susceptibilities which those affected saw as unparalleled in their history”. The validity of Afigbo’s assertion is evident in eastern Nigeria for instance, with the Aba women revolt of 1929. The women insisted that the warrant chief system was “spoiling” the land, and demanded a return to traditional customs, abolition of the warrant chiefs, and that the “white men should go to their country so that the land in this area might remain as it was many years before the advent of the white man”. In West Africa therefore, (as also was the case in Ancient Israel), the undermining of the traditional decentralized family and political structures, and the gradual concentration of authority in single individuals, not only displaced the traditional spheres where God was very close to the people, but institutionalized violence and brutality (prompted by the will of the individual authority), as an administrative norm.

The displacement of African structures and its replacement with an alien space is therefore clear. Equally devastating is the epistemological disorientation of which, religion became a handy tool. Thus, besides the technical skills needed to carry out their duties to their white employers, Africans were taught a particular type of Christian values that would never empower them. They were given a kind of out-worldly mentality that would keep them silent in the face of oppression. Unquestioning obedience to the white man (white God) was presented as an essential virtue. Hence, as the African mind was focused on

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221 For a detailed discussion on the background to the Aba women riot, cf. A.E. Afigbo, “Revolution and Reaction in Eastern Nigeria” op. cit.
223 As already discussed, the system of ‘elders’ and ‘men of the city’ were displaced with the coming of the Israelite monarchy and its absolute centralization of power. In Africa, the system of ‘shared supremacy’ obtainable even in ‘state’ societies was displaced with the colonial scheme.
acquiring the eternal treasures of heaven (since the treasures of the world are temporary),
the same agents of evangelization and civilization were busy charting off their earthly
resources, and building up the worldly treasures for their future generations. Obedience
was used to seal the deal. The one virtuous criterion for secular leadership position or
becoming a church minister (bishop, priest, catechist) was total obedience and willingness
to accept colonial precepts hook line and sinker.

The schools were utilized to effectively seal this cultural and mental reorientation.
Whether administered by missionaries or by colonial administrators, the intention was the
same. The imperialist schools not only taught Arts and Sciences, they also stuffed the mind
with Christian devotional hymns laden with submissive attitudes. It was a sort of education
and curriculum that undermined attachment to the culture of ancestors, and erased the sense
of patriotic responsibility to Africa, while replacing it with Christian theology and
cosmology, and the western individualist ethos. It was a sort of education that also
undermined African history. A truncated history of Africa was taught, where the real
history of Africa began with the European ‘civilizing’ mission, a kind of history where
Mungo park was presented as discovering river Niger as though nobody lived around the
river before his arrival, a kind of history where everything before the European occupation
were presented as primitive savagery, a kind of history where the invaders were presented
as heroic saviors of Africa, and leaders of African resistance were portrayed as
obstructionists. Products of such institutions while adoring European heroes such as Lord
Lugard, Queen Elizabeth, Prince Henry, etc.), were either ignorant of their rich cultural
and institutional past, or filled with embarrassment, hatred and hostility about their past. In
a word, it was a kind of history within which the African lost her/his identity. Chinua
Achebe’s experience as a secondary school student in the 1940s represents a vivid example of the intentions of colonial education. Having read some ‘colonial classics’, he writes: “I did not see myself as an African to begin with, I took sides with the white men against the savages. The white man was good and reasonable and intelligent and courageous. The savages arrayed against him were sinister and stupid or, at the most, cunning. I hated their guts”. While the matured Achebe became more critical and extricated himself from such an intellectual orientation, his initial epistemological path demonstrates the psychological impact of a demonized culture on its people.

Having thus demonized the African values as pagan and primitive, and replaced it with western ethos, even when laden with violence, the African had to be grateful for this ‘salvific’ act. According to Chinweizu “their royalties were consequently transferred from their generic communities to those of their conquerors. After their indoctrination some came to view themselves as black Englishmen or black Frenchmen or black Portuguese. Thus did the colonial schools manufacture meek, grateful and loyally submissive Africans in many of whom every desire for that cultural and political sovereignty their ancestors had fought to keep, had been abolished”. This was how colonialism effected the displacement of West African political, moral, and family structures through the inherited (imposed) European nation-state system.

Africa’s liberation (independence) was therefore in the real sense an alienation, which is reflected in the societal ills. The rejection of African history, values, and system of governance by the colonial rule denied Africa the possibility of true liberation. Assessing

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225 Chinweizu, *The West and the Rest of Us*, 77
the impact of Africa’s encounter with Europe through colonialism in the light of present moral and institutional problems, Davidson asserts: “Nation-statism looked like liberation, but…in practice, it was not a restoration of Africa to Africa’s own history, but the onset of a new period of indirect subjugation to the history of Europe…liberation thus produced its own denial, liberation led to alienation”. Having been denied of its own past, Africa continues to live and organize its future based on a past that cannot in any real sense become fully theirs.

Against this background, we must address some misleading efforts to attribute positive impacts to the colonial scheme as some authors have suggested. For instance, A. Adu Boahen opines that “the establishment of a greater degree of continuous peace and stability” is a positive impact of colonialism (albeit accidental). While Boahen acknowledges the instability and violent destruction of African lives in the first three decades of colonial era (Congo, the Herero, the Namo, and Libya), he nevertheless insists that “after the colonial occupation and the establishment of various administrative machineries…most parts of Africa especially from the end of the First World War onwards enjoyed a great degree of continuous peace and security”. This, according to Boahen is a great ‘asset’ bequeathed to Africa by colonialism since it has ‘facilitated normal economic activities and accelerated the pace of modernization through the diffusion of new ideas, techniques, tastes and fashions’. This assertion is problematic at least on two counts. First, it ignores the long list of violent wars in many parts of Africa since the First World

\[228\] Ibid., 785
War, and attributes any effort at peace and security to the very institution that is at the heart of Africa’s violent disorientation, unconsciously playing into the ‘civilizing’ narrative of colonial brutality. Secondly, elevating colonialism as a source of “continuous peace and security” in Africa due to the existence of pre-colonial wars (even when such violent destruction also characterized to a greater intensity the colonial times), not only seeks to establish a deceptive, confused, and false relationship between colonial violence and post-colonial peace, but more importantly, neglects or at least diminishes the connection between colonial brutality and post-colonial conflicts of which the most ruthless manifestation is evident in the Rwandan genocide of 1994, where an estimated 800,000 people were massacred. Mahmood Mamdani carefully articulates this connection in his book, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*. Here, Mamdani details through an examination of different hypothesis, how the Belgian colonial power constructed the Tutsi as ‘nonindigenous alien settler’ and the Hutu as ‘indigenous’. During the official census of 1933-34, the Belgian power, acting on oral information obtained from the colonial church, physical measurement, and ownership of

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229 The lists abound in different parts of Africa. In the North, one immediately thinks of the protracted first and second Sudanese Civil Wars of 1955 to 1972 and 1983 to 2005 respectively; the ethnic violence in South Sudan (2011); the on-going South Sudanese Civil War since 2013; Libyan-Egyptian war (1977); first Libyan Civil War (2011); the ongoing second Libyan civil war (since 2014); ISIL insurgency in Tunisia (since 2015); and Algerian Civil War (1991-2002) among others. In Central Africa, the civil unrest, torture and killings that has gripped the Anglophone region of Cameroon immediately comes to mind. Other examples include, the Congo (Brazzaville) Civil War (1997-1999; the pool war (2016-2017); and the Civil War in Chad (1979-1982 and 2005-2010). In West Africa, the 2013 Guinea clashes, the Guinea Bissau Civil War (1997-1999), the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) and the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria since 2009 are few examples. In East Africa, one can think of the Ethno Somali War (1977-1978); the Somali Rebellion (1986-1991); the Somali Civil War (since 1991); the operations of the Lord’s Resistance Army in Northern Uganda (since 1987); among others. While the causes of any single conflict are always very complicated, for many of above wars, their roots cannot be totally extricated from colonial legacies.

large herds of cows, “took an existing sociopolitical distinction and racialized it”. Having confirmed every individual as Hutu or Tutsi through the census, the state-issued identity cards which stated the individual’s race, the separation of the education system, and the ‘tutsification’ of the priesthood and local government recruitments, a constructed political difference between Hutu and Tutsi was ‘naturalized’ and enforced as legal identities. “For the first time in the history of the state of Rwanda”, states Mamdani, “the identities, “Tutsi” and “Hutu” held permanently. They were frozen…In addition, colonialism branded Tutsi privilege which has existed as Rwabugiri as alien privilege”. Through this colonial lens, the Rwandan genocide is a ‘natives’ genocide’ anchored on the impulse to eliminate the settler, enabling people who might not have killed before to participate in the slaughter. The connection between the Rwandan genocide and colonial cruelty becomes even more intelligible when the tragedy is set in the wider context of colonial prototypes in Africa. For instance, the same ‘race-branding’ that played an important role in the German annihilation of over 80% of the Herero population in a single year was also a significant part of the Rwandan genocide. Race-branding, (the link that connects Herero, Nazi Holocaust, and Rwanda) makes it possible to set up a group as an enemy, and exterminate it with easy conscience. Thus, while the genocide of the Herero

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231 Ibid., 99
232 Ibid., 229
233 Ibid., 101
234 In addition to the Congo experience under Leopold II as already mentioned, Mamdani mentions the 1904 German annihilation of over 80% of the Herero population in the southwest African German colony in a single year. This decision was taken by General Lothar von Trotha due to the Herero resistance of land and cattle appropriation by German settlers. It is also interesting to note that the German geneticist Eugen Fischer who came to perform his medical experiments on race in the Herero concentration camps later became the chancellor of the university of Berlin, where he taught medicine to Nazi physicians, including Josef Mengele (his famous student), who performed the deadly genetic experiment on Jewish children in Auschwitz concentration camp, selecting victims to be killed in the gas chambers, cf. Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, see his discussion on the settlers’ genocide and the link between the Herero genocide and Holocaust of which race branding played an important role, pp. 10-13
was a settlers’ genocide, and that of Rwanda was natives’, it was the logic and horror of colonialism that led to the two types of genocidal impulses. On the basis of these precedents, Katongole sees a “script” of violence that was first performed by colonial actors, and continues to be performed by post-colonial African agents. Boahen’s vague connection between colonialism and African peace is therefore both untenable and misleading.

Also misleading is Boahen’s insistence that “a new judicial system and a new bureaucracy of civil service” are other positive impacts of colonialism, on the basis that they have been significantly “maintained since independence”. The fact that these colonial structures have been retained does not equal their effectiveness or superiority to the pre-colonial systems. Again, Rwanda is a case in point. After the 1994 genocide, three different judicial efforts were made to address the aftermath of the national unprecedented tragedy: The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), the formal domestic justice system inherited from colonialism, and Gacaca Community Courts. The first two are western inspired systems of justice, which turned out to prove ineffective. For instance, eight years after the establishment of ICTR, the court had spent approximately 540 million U.S dollars, but had only delivered eight convictions and one acquittal. Apart from this slowness, partly caused by bureaucracy and political in-fighting, its remoteness to the people made the court a mismatch with regards to delivering justice and reconciliation at the grassroots within Rwandan communities. Similarly, the formal domestic justice system

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235 Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, 9, 13
236 Emmanuel Katongole, *The sacrifice of Africa*, 3, 12
237 A. Adu Boahen, “Colonialism in Africa: Its Impact and Significance”, 785
operating within the western standard of documentation and procedure was soon laden with inner corruption, and failed to deliver the required justice and reconciliation. In 2001 however, the Rwandan government decided to tap into the ethos of a traditional community-based conflict resolution mechanism called gacaca. In this system adults of high morality and reputation were elected by their respective communities to the judicial assembly. Approximately 12,000 gacaca jurisdictions were created in the different districts, and proceedings incorporated traditional reconciliatory patterns of public confession and acknowledgment of guilt or innocence. Apart from an expedited hearing (a record 1.2 million cases concluded in eleven years), and its closeness to the people (hearings were held near the places where perpetrators, victims and witnesses live), gacaca more importantly, rather than the western penal retributive justice system imposed by colonization, emphasized Rwandan traditional philosophy of reconciliation and reintegration, privileging community participation over legal procedure, and was oriented towards restorative justice, appropriate within a community where people who once saw themselves as enemies must learn to live together on a daily basis in the markets, schools, entertainment centers and offices.

It needs to be acknowledged however that in situations of this magnitude and complexity, gacaca cannot claim to be without limitations (in fact, though based on

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239 Gacaca, pronounced ‘gachacha’ is a soft grass (umucaca) on which traditionally a community came together to discuss conflicts within or between families on a certain hill. This practice was transformed into a more formal written law system. Based on a local tradition, it was adopted as a more viable option to address the challenges of the western style criminal justice administration.


traditional apparatus, gacaca never had to contend with crimes of such magnitude), yet, gacaca’s reliance on cultural mechanisms of conflict management and grassroots empowerment demonstrates the enormous reconstructive power embedded in cultural values, and that a break from imposed ineffective structures is possible. Research conducted by Simon Gasibirege and Stella Babalola shows that majority of Rwandans were enthused about the gacaca courts.242 Again, interviews conducted by Mironko with genocide suspects in 1998 and 2000 also show that many prisoners were looking forward to it (in fact some form of gacaca was already being practiced in the prisons), and in Gitarama, a Hutu in prison-gacaca, who had established contacts with the parents of the children he killed told Mironko that the parents have “forgiven me and they sometimes bring me food on visiting days”.243 The point here is that elevating the colonial judicial system as a positive impact of colonialism because it has been retained for a long time is not only an unconscious endorsement of the unreflective adoption of the western ethos with all its limitations, worsened by the cultural gap in the definition of justice and human rights which has made it ineffective in many parts of Africa, it is also a foreclosure of the rich cultural system that could be tapped into for effective replacement of colonial imposed
genuine flaws of gacaca from criticisms that emanate from the imposition of a punitive western perspective and definition of what a justice system should be. For instance, Rettig’s list of why gacaca lacks compliance with international norms (in agreement with other scholars and Amnesty International, see page 26) exposes the danger of not only comparing the practices in a country such as Rwanda with its peculiar situation with the theories of countries with totally different systems, but also equating reality with a non-existent ideal situation. It is such criticism that Roelof H. Haveman and Alphonse Muleefu has termed “neo-legal colonialism” as it “shows the gap between abstract notions of an outsider human rights organization and the concrete opinions and needs of those directly involved” see, Dawn L. Rothe, Christopher W. Mullins, eds., State Crime, 237-238. For a balanced discussion and response to other criticisms, see, 226-240

242 Their study shows that the Rwandans, not the government, were the driving force behind gacaca. 89.4 % of interviewees believe that it is the responsibility of every Rwandan to testify at gacaca, cf. S. Gasibirege and S. Babalola, Perceptions about the Gacaca Law in Rwanda: Evidence from a Multi-Method Study, Special Publication No. 19 (Baltimore, John Hopkins University School of Public Health, Center for Communication Programs, April 2001), 11

243 Peter Uvin and Charles Mironko, “Western and Local Approaches, 228
structures, and reconstruction of Africa on its own terms. Such positive branding of ineffective colonial structures blocks the kind of decolonial thinking envisaged by Walter Mignolo, which offers a displacement of the epistemological anchor on which modernity and coloniality thrive;\textsuperscript{244} it obstructs the kind of orientation capable of extricating the African mind from a kind of dependency where their identity is acceptability is defined from the epistemic privilege of the West; and it proscribes a “definite rejection of “being told” from the epistemic privilege of zero point, what “we” are, what our ranking is in relation to the ideal of humanitas, and what we have to do to be recognized as such”.\textsuperscript{245} Put differently, it is a cataleptic endorsement of the ‘lie’ that forms the basis of the nation-state system and Africa’s insertion into modernity. It has already been argued that the colonial imposed judicial and civil service apparatus as part of the foundation of nation-state politics constitutes an alien space, which has destroyed indigenous identities, led to the alienation from African history, and engendered cultural pauperization.\textsuperscript{246} To elevate these structures to the level of ‘positive impact’ is to presuppose the very narrative that constitutes the heart of the African problem, and to endorse the storyline that has sustained abuse, violence, the sacrifice of African lives, and the sacrifice of Africa itself.

2.8 Evaluation

From the foregoing, we can surmise that the colonial project displaced African cosmologies; created artificial boundaries that brought distinct groups together while separating homogenous groups; formed authoritarian and centralized administrations

\textsuperscript{244} Walter Mignolo, \textit{The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options}, Durham: Duke University Press, 2011, see chapters 2 and 3

\textsuperscript{245} Walter Mignolo, \textit{The Darker Side of Western Modernity}, 121

\textsuperscript{246} See the introduction and part 1 of Emmanuel Katongole, \textit{The sacrifice of Africa}, op. cit.
which instilled in the mentality of the ruled the sense of the state as an “alien institution” to be deceived and if possible exploited;\(^{247}\) established patrimonial leadership, where support is assured by clientelism, and the external relations that have caused economic marginalization; displaced family structures and introduced gender as an organizing principle; introduced alien rituals and forms of initiation; and restructured African societies to respond to ‘external stimuli’.\(^{248}\) Put differently, the successful implementation of the colonial ideology alienated the African and imposed an alien identity. Africans, thus subjugated, lost control of their destiny and became ‘anthropologically impoverished’.\(^{249}\)

We must not forget the close connection and collaboration between Christianity and colonialism especially in most of sub-Saharan Africa where Christianity came in the same time with colonialism. The former never condemned the evils of the later, but helped to achieve its ultimate purpose. The result is a displaced and consumer ecclesiology – an ecclesiology severed from its cultural roots, always looking for directions from outside on how to express its faith, a way of being church that is detached from the land, the God of the land, and the people’s identity. What is the nature of this ecclesiology built on an alien space, and what are the theological, sacramental, moral and administrative implications of such an ecclesiology? This is our task in the third chapter.

\(^{248}\) Elochukwu Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 31  
\(^{249}\) This is the point of V. Y. Mudimbe in his famous work, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988)
Chapter Three

An Ecclesiology Built on an Alien Space

3.1 Introduction

Establishing a church, argues Adrian Hastings, requires a good grasp of what the church is, how she exists in place and time and what is required for it to be said that the church exists in a particular land, among a particular people.\(^1\) Interestingly, *Propaganda Fide* under its first secretary (Ignoli Franciscus)\(^2\) had advocated as its missionary norms, the avoidance of politics, emphasizing instead the formation of local clergy, language learning, and printing of works in vernacular. Unfortunately, the ‘Hastingsian’ requirements and the above norms of *Propaganda Fide* seemed not to have been the guiding principles of missionaries to Africa, who conceived their missionary task as a rescue mission. Africans were thus to be rescued in pity from sin and death. Under this theological outlook, mission became ‘ecclesiocentric’ rather than ‘local’, and all that obtained in the Latin rite western churches were to be duplicated in Africa.

While Ethiopia and Kongo exemplify a situation where initiatives came from African Christians who were actively involved and participated strategically in the whole process, as Gray rightly argues,\(^3\) a top-down method cannot be denied. This is evident for instance

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\(^2\) For a list of the Cardinal Prefects and Secretaries of the Congregation, see Peter Guilday, *The Sacred Congregation de Propaganda Fide (1622-1922)* in *The Catholic Historical Review*, vol. 6, no. 4 (Jan. 1921), 478-494, 483-5

\(^3\) Cf. Richard Gray, *Christianity, The Papacy, and Mission in Africa* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2012). Gray points out the efforts of Ethiopia and Kongo to strengthen contacts with Europe and the papacy. Already in the fifteenth century Ethiopia (whose Christian origins could be traced to 341 AD with the Christian conversion of king Ezana) sent embassies to the council of Florence. After the establishment of propaganda Fide in 1622 by Gregory XV, there were repeated royal requests from Kongo that capuchin
in the royal control of evangelization, doctrine, and pastoral practice, and the torture that
accompanied the 35 year reign of Zara Ya’iqob as emperor of Ethiopia. Zara understood
his kingship as a mandate from God to root out all idol worshippers from the kingdom,
thus, he set himself to impose a unified model of church and state in ways drastically
opposed to the former traditions of the kingdom before his reign. One of the major
teachings as contained in his *Mashafa Milad* was that the killing of a pagan constituted no
sin. The torture that emanated from this kind of teaching was enormous. Even his
immediate family was not spared. One of his wives, and several of his sons and daughters
were flogged to death on the accusation that they participated in practices that were
designated pagan. Many ‘pagans’ or ‘accused’ pagans were to suffer the same fate, such
that the Ethiopian courts in this era have been described as “perilously bloody place”.

Even those within the church who dared to challenge the king’s devotional ideology met
with the same cruel fate. When Estifanos for instance, questioned the royal imposition of
a new devotion (the cult of the cross and of Mary), he was flogged and sent into exile where
he died, and his followers were persecuted. Within this period also, priests who failed in
their duty in any way, were viciously dealt with by the military.

Similar method of evangelization is also evident in Kongo during the reign of Alfonso
I, and in the ministry of the Capuchins in the seventeenth century. Kongo was already a
Christian kingdom with a kind of Christianity that existed with traditional customs and
rituals as a unified whole in the lives of the people. According to Gray, it was a process of

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missionaries be sent to the kingdom. These initiatives and appeals depict the involvement and strategic
participation of Africans in the evangelization process.

especially 34-42

5 One of his several works on political theology, contains several of such teachings

6 Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa*, 41
“complex interaction” and “ambivalent flexibility” within which religious conflict and hostility was minimal since a new faith was part of a “religious spectrum in which they continued to find relevance in many of the old beliefs and practices”.

It was a process where subtraction was frowned at, and novel religious elements were considered additions that contributed to the general good. Even Luca da Caltanisetta, one of the Capuchin missionaries who was so unsympathetic to the local rituals would admit that “fetishes do not make a pact with the devil, and do not aim at their neighbor’s destruction but to do them good”.

However, the approach of the Capuchins was not geared towards interactive dialogue with cultures, as already witnessed in Asia within the same period. While the Soyo Christians sought to appropriate Christian beliefs within their popular rituals, the Capuchins were largely reluctant in recognizing the values of indigenous beliefs. Gray notes that the Capuchin approach was a “rigid missiology” manifested through a “straightforward confrontation”. Traditional rites were condemned as “works of the devil” and total renunciation was demanded. In fact, the Capuchins considered it perfectly just that those who find it difficult to renounce the traditional rituals should be sold into slavery.

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7 This group constituted the majority of the people in Soyo. There were two other groups on the opposite ends: the mission slaves who were committed to the Capuchins and maintained the hostels, served as medical aids in the hospitals and accompanied the missionaries in their visitations. On the opposite end were the nganga who were totally hostile to the Capuchin mission. See, Richard Gray, *Christianity*, 108-110

8 Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa*, 99

9 For instance, Gray notes how the ancestors were seen in the light of the holy souls of Catholic tradition, and how in the devotion to the dead, the sacrifice for ancestors was transformed into alms for the poor. He also notes the efforts of Fra Andrea who was positively disposed to the values of Soyo religion. Gray observes that this kind of positive disposition seemed an exception, as the general thrust of the Capuchin mission was that of confrontation and condemnation. In fact, the effort at interaction of the two religions was from below, not a direct mission strategy. See, Richard Gray, “Come Vero Prencipe Catolico: The Capuchins and the Rulers of Soyo in the Late Seventeenth Century” in *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, vol. 53, no. 3 (1983), 39-54, see especially 46-51

10 Richard Gray, “Come Vero Prencipe”, 47
across the Atlantic.\textsuperscript{11} Their ministry was centered on the sacraments, and the destruction of the \textit{nkisi} idols and instruments of sacred objects of local religion. Under the Capuchins, observes Hastings, the people saw their symbols of life, rain, and health smashed before their very eyes, creating a “ritual void in the local life”\textsuperscript{12}, a void that could neither be filled by the cross nor the rosary, but by the carving of new \textit{nkisi} once the missionary had departed.

On the sacramental side, local marriage customs were condemned, and acceptance of canon-law marriage became the criteria for membership among the Christian elite, the confraternities, interpreters, and teachers. The Capuchins effectively collaborated with the ruling elites to pass down the canonical discipline to their subjects and dependents. Other times, conformity was enforced as a penance. For instance, Gray refers to a case in 1687 when a ruler was excommunicated and ordered as a penance to force three hundred of his subjects to adopt the Christian marriage as laid down by the council of Trent.\textsuperscript{13} As a result of this method of evangelization, record numbers of Christian marriages and baptisms were achieved, and for the missionaries, this was a yardstick for success. However, the failure of the missionaries to appreciate the nature and value of local marriage customs engendered more breaches than faithful observance\textsuperscript{14}, and the rush for baptism for the majority could only indicate a willingness for a nominal Christian identification, and obedience to royal proclivities. Many recipients understood the sacraments as nothing more than an additional layer of security in the light of the traditional religion and cosmology, as expressed in the words of some indigenes to their catechist: “as Christians, we first have recourse to God

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\textsuperscript{11} See, Richard Gray, \textit{Christianity}, 108; “Come Vero Prencipe”, 48
\textsuperscript{12} Adrian Hastings, \textit{The Church in Africa}, 100
\textsuperscript{13} Richard Gray, \textit{Christianity}, 106
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 107
\end{flushright}
for the health of the sick person, and not obtaining it, we turn to the fetishists”.  

The Capuchins’ ‘soul saving’ attitude to evangelization created a dichotomy between the laws of God and the local customs, seeking to replace traditional religious cosmologies with European Christian alternative. This explains the resistance that occasionally occurred from the villages. For instance, when Georges de Geel, a Flemish Capuchin destroyed the cults of Kimpassi and Atombola in the village of Ulolo, and threw their nkisi into fire, the villagers were so infuriated that they attacked him fiercely leaving him with severe injuries that killed him after ten days. This sort of experience exposes the heart of villagers who could not watch their sacred religious space discarded and replaced with a foreign non-familiar alternative. In fact, the decline of Christianity in medieval Africa has been attributed to the above method of evangelization. Reflecting on the Kongo experience, Hastings observes, “if Propaganda Fide had been able to…establish dioceses uncontrolled by Lisbon (as did happen in parts of Asia)…. if Rome had listened to the early advice of the Nuncio of Lisbon and agreed to a married clergy for Africa (as it had done for Lebanon and Ukraine), then by the eighteenth century, a large and expanding section of central Africa might well have been Christian. The antica missio as it came to be called was not a futility, only a strangled opportunity”. Unfortunately similar missionary orientation, which resulted in the imposition of alien spaces characterized missionary activities in West Africa, such that present ecclesiology thrives on alien foundations, with identifiable theological implications. This chapter therefore begins by highlighting the problematic nature of the very ideology of evangelization in Africa. I do this by isolating those

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16 See Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa*, 99
17 Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa*, 129
missionary tenets that significantly contributed to the displacement of the West African religious space and its replacement with an alien alternative on which the present structures of ecclesiology thrive. I demonstrate that the ecclesiology that was superimposed on sub-Saharan Africa was an ecclesiology governed by theological and doctrinal patterns that developed in response to the crises in the West before and after the reformation, which, while reflecting the needs of the western church, do not reflect the history, or situation of sub-Saharan Africa. I then discuss the theological, sacramental and ethical implications, and evaluate the responses of African theologians. While I consider Christianity in general, a special focus is placed on Catholicism.

3.2 Christianity in West Africa: The Imposition of an Alien Space

Charles P. Groves’ *The Planting of Christianity in Africa*, a four-volume work, published between 1948 and 1958 was a landmark in the study of the history of Christian missions in Africa beginning with Egypt in the Apostolic Age. While some sections of Groves’ study examine the Christian faith in the western part of the continent, it was not until the 1960s that literatures which focus exclusively on countries in West Africa began to hit publication houses. This was expected since it was a period when the wave of nationalism swept through West Africa, culminating in their independence. Within four years (1957-1961), all West African countries gained their independence from colonial rule. Accordingly, some of the literatures of this period have been accused of being caught up with the nationalist approach, exaggerating the roles of the missionaries’ romance with the colonial powers to promote the imperial agenda, and presenting unbalanced accounts. Notwithstanding, other major publications within this period give vital information, though geographically limited, as they focus on the missionary impact on particular countries,
and/or particular denominations. The works of J.F.A. Ajayi, E.A. Ayandele, Hans Debrunner, M. Pfann, A.F. Walls, F.L. Bartels, and C.G. Baeta, *inter alia*, fall within this category.\(^1\) The bid to have a concise literature on the history of West African Christianity has led to more publications between the 1980s till present. In 1980, Ogbu Kalu edited *The History of Christianity in West Africa* with articles focused on specific countries or missionary groups, but did not deeply investigate historical developments. Seeking to address the narrow focus, and nationalist mentality that have been characteristic of some previous studies of Christianity in West Africa, and aiming to provide a unified exploration of West Africa as a regional unit, Lamin Sanneh published his *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact* in 1983. Sanneh argues that the failure and success of missions between 1480 and 1785, and 1785 and 1885 respectively could be explained through the lens of the involvement of African agents. Similar intentions also governed his edited work of Richard Gray’s *Christianity, The Papacy, and Mission in Africa* which was published in 2012. In 1986 J. Kofi Agbeti, under a similar motivation to give a unified account of the history of Christianity in West Africa published his *West African Church History: Christian Missions and Church Foundations 1482-1919*. However, the actual issues explored in the book are not as comprehensive as the title and preface suggest. More recently, in 2007, Ogbu Kalu edited *African Christianity: An African Story*. Though not

exclusively focused on West Africa, the book features carefully researched articles from nineteen African scholars, covering topics on the insertion of the gospel, the missionary presence and African agency, and new dimensions of African Christian initiatives especially with regards to the African cultural heritage.

With the impressive resources in this area, my interest is not in tracing the history and development of Christianity in West Africa, rather, of greater importance to this project are the theological tenets evident in the methods of evangelization in West Africa. These tenets show that while the role played by African agents is significant, as Sanneh and Gray help us to understand, the very ideology of evangelization (by the African or non-African agent) is problematic, and the fact that western missionaries squeezed Christianity into a conformist pattern largely in accord with the imperialist tradition, recreating western limitations and problems in Africa is hardly in doubt. To the study of the tenets of the evangelization methods in West Africa, I now turn.

3.3 Missionary Tenets in West Africa: Conversion as Renunciation - Dualizing Identities

As already examined, the theological ideology that formed the nexus of the missionaries to Africa was that of conversion understood in the strict sense as total renunciation of one’s identity (which includes names, culture, religion, ideas, etc.) considered as inferior and devilish, and putting on the western Christian cultural identity considered as superior and salvific. During the celebration of the mass that has gone down in history as the first of its kind on the West African soil at Elmina (Ghana) on January 20,

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1482 by Portuguese explorers numbering about 600 men, they all “prayed for the conversion of the natives from idolatry, and the perpetual prosperity of the church which they intended to erect upon the spot”. 20 While this particular expedition was tied up with economic interests, and eventually did not yield much fruit, the emphasis on conversion remained constant during the era of expansion, growth and development of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa (roughly 1785-1905). The first German missionaries sent by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) to Sierra Leone to evangelize the Susu, and the later already Christianized African former slave volunteers (such as Ajayi Crowther and the Sierra Leone team of indigenous missionaries), 21 who were recruited into the mission by European ministers, were all operating under the same ‘conversion theology’. They were to implant the Christian message and values and to deliver Africans from “popish superstition and idolatry”. It was a ‘civilizing’ mission, and for the African agents, they were motivated to share what they saw as ‘liberating faith’ 22 with their kith and kin. These African agents were already ‘Europeans at heart’ and worked for the greater gain of their slaving countries. For instance, at the time Lord Mansfield gave his famous ruling in 1772 that slavery was alien to the law of the land, two of the African slaves living in England at the time, Ottobah Cugoano (a Fanti from Ghana), and Olaudah Equiano (an Igbo from

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20 C. P. Groves *The Planting of Christianity in Africa, vol 1*, 123
Nigeria) both urged the British government to engage in legitimate trade with Africa on the basis that slave trade was no longer profitable to England, but legitimate trade will bring greater profit to the British people. Both Cugoano and Equiano already shared in the dismal European mindset about African culture, hence, they also urged that Christianity be extended to Africa as to achieve modernization. Cugoano himself, who was willing to become a missionary was motivated by the urge to bring European civilization to his people and deliver them from their ‘pagan practices’. This ‘civilizing’ mindset expressed in the conversion theology would also characterize the African agents recruited from the mission areas as catechists, interpreters, and clergy, since the unquestioning acceptance of the Christian ethos, and the rejection of the African thought patterns became the yardstick for ministry. The point here is that beyond Gray’s and Sanneh’s emphasis on the role of African agents, the theological underpinnings that guided the work of evangelization were the same both for the African and non-African mission representatives. Thus, at the heart of missionary work was indoctrination, a process through which new converts were initiated into the ethos, doctrinal traditions, way of life, and core values of the Christian faith while simultaneously shedding off/abandoning their cultural heritage.

Initially direct preaching was employed, but language barrier, and the attempt to persuade the adult population to abandon their ancestral faith was a hard nut to crack. Areas of doctrinal convergence reaffirmed to the elders that there is no need to convert, while areas of doctrinal divergence sounded illogical to the custodians of traditional religious heritage. Since appeal to doctrinal logic and even threats of hell could not yield the required results, other methods would be applied. A prominent one is that of the ‘Christian

23 See, Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity*, 55-56
24 See, Chukwudi A. Njoku, “The Missionary Factor”, 204
village’ utilized for instance by the Holy Ghost fathers in Eastern Nigeria, modeled after the village de liberte system employed by the French in Western Sudan and upper Senegal valley,\textsuperscript{25} and reminiscent of the residential segregation of Christians introduced by the Augustinians in Elmina in the sixteenth century, and the Christian colonies in Sierra Leone and Liberia.\textsuperscript{26} In their mission stations beginning from the 1870s, the Holy Ghost Fathers began by buying slaves with the intention of forming them into Christian households, and then Christian villages. This method not only conformed with the ideology of the rules and constitution of the congregation, namely, “the evangelization and spiritual regeneration of the most abandoned souls of the black race”,\textsuperscript{27} the missionaries also believed that the Christian village system had great prospects for the formation of African evangelists who would in turn evangelize Africa. The Holy Trinity mission was opened in January 1886, and by 1900, there were three Christian villages established by the Holy Ghost Fathers, the most flourishing being that of St Joseph Aguleri, north-east of Onitsha Wharf. The Christian village method of evangelization was soon to run into financial problems, such that despite the support of Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical letter In Plurimis (5 May 1888), the financial incentives of the French Anti-Slavery Society, Saint Enfance, the support of The Propagation of the Faith, and the dedication of the 6th January collections in Catholic churches all over the world to the Christian village project, such problems persisted. Moreover on the ethical side, the practice was accused of enhancing and perpetuating slave dealings, ironically participating in a practice contrary to the gospel values. A more


\textsuperscript{26} For useful details, see, Lamin Sanneh, West African Christianity, 27, 53-105; see also, Christopher Fyfe, A Short History of Sierra Leone, op.cit.

\textsuperscript{27} “Rules and Constitutions of Holy Ghost Fathers”, Ch. 1 para. 1
immediate practical deficiency of the Christian village method was that it was “burdened with the dregs of the society” who were unable to influence others to abandon their traditional faith.

A more promising method was therefore to target the upper class, a method that has been applied by Islam to some success. Accordingly, missionaries began to concentrate their persuasive ingenuity on royals. According to Hastings, kings dominated the nineteenth century encounter between Christianity and Africa. The logic was that if the head is converted, the body will follow. The efforts of Father Leon Lejeune in Eastern Nigeria in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, saw the conversion of Ogbuanyinya Idigo I, the chief of Aguleri, Samuel, the Obi of Onitsha, and chiefs Alfred, Charles, Daniel, Benedict, and Augustin of Nbimbi. This missionary-royal relationship was not peculiar to Holy Ghost missionaries in Eastern Nigeria. Already in 1572, when the Augustinians at Elmina began to penetrate to surrounding communities of Efutu and Komenda, their first targets were the kings. Thus, in 1576 the reigning king of Efutu was baptized and was joined by six of his sons and three nephews. His counterpart at Komenda, and the chief of Abura were also converted and baptized. The method also characterized the Augustinian mission to Warri (Itshekiri kingdom) between 1574-1807, and the Capuchin mission to Benin (1640-1748). Some of these missions ultimately did not succeed as expected, but at the heart of the evangelization technique was the effort to obtain a favorable disposition of the king and royal relatives towards Christianity. Elsewhere in Africa, in the Sotho-Tswana kingdoms, similar evangelization method saw the conversion

28 P.B. Clarke, “The Methods and Ideology”, 47, also see 37-47
29 Adrian Hastings, The Church in Africa, 307
30 See P.B. Clarke, “The Methods and Ideology”, 48
31 See Lamin Sanneh, West African Christianity, 39-52
of Mothibi of the Tlhaping in 1839, Sechele of the Bakwena in 1848, and Khama of the Ngwato in 1862.\textsuperscript{32}

Accompanying these conversions was the requirement to abandon traditional names, some indigenous royal objects, the ancestor-cult, and polygamy with its often multiple marriage alliances which most times strengthened the royal position. These were to be replaced with Christian names, symbols, cults, and the western form of marriage - monogamy. These replacements were enforced in the most stringent manner possible. Indeed the missionaries could tolerate domestic slavery and receive slave holders into fellowship but not polygamists, even as they claimed that the greatest obstacle to converting African rulers was their attachment to polygamy.\textsuperscript{33} The message was clear: the indigenous cult and symbols, in fact, traditional theology was incompatible with the new faith. This separation from traditional customs as a condition for the reception of Christianity was precisely the reason why some monarchies became the greatest obstacle to Christianity or at least why some kings refused to embrace the new faith especially in more sacralized monarchies. It would be difficult for an Asantehene, for instance, who is ritually obligated to perform the monthly Adae and the annual Odwira ceremonies that are closely linked to the ancestor cult to abandon such obligations to his people and embrace Christianity. Nana Caramansa (the ruler of Elmina) refused Christianity despite the strenuous efforts of Diogo da Azambuja during the Portuguese inaugural mission to Elmina because his office as chief required him to preside as ceremonial guardian of the religious customs of his people.\textsuperscript{34} Similarly, the Efik king, Eyo refused to give up polygamy despite

\textsuperscript{32} For details see Adrian Hastings, \textit{The Church in Africa}, 311
\textsuperscript{33} J.F.A. Ajayi, \textit{Christian Mission in Nigeria}, 103
\textsuperscript{34} See Lamin Sanneh, \textit{West African Christianity}, 24
the efforts of Waddell and his lengthy teaching on the virtues of monogamy. In fact, King Eyo added wife upon wife that by 1854, Waddell described him as ‘a licentious despot…living a low fleshy life’. In any case, the missionary-king romance was not a total failure as some traditional rulers caved into conversion as seen above in the case of Eastern Nigeria.

Closely connected to this method was the alliance of the missionaries to the colonial powers. Msgr. Francois Steinmetz notes with regard to Dahomey: “the colonizers and the European functionaries maintained cordial relations with the mission and recognized in us, the first artisans of Christian civilization that was been implanted in this country.” This kind of alliance brought relief to Christians from colonial bully. In eastern Nigeria for instance, there was colonial military occupation and incessant patrols and molestations, the use of forced labor for road construction and the building of government stations and quarters, the use of conscripted carriers as the main means of transportation, and the flogging or imprisonment that followed any refusal to comply. In the face of all these, the missionaries intervened forcefully and successfully on behalf of their converts. In fact, some Christian villages were freed from patrols, and those associated with the Christian missions received preferential treatment by the British officials. Christianity became a badge of honor, and a means of escape from colonial exploitation, hence the surge in membership. One of the missionaries in 1903 admitted that most of these neophytes “know very little about Christianity, and seem to think that it is associated with the work of settling

35 J.F.A. Ajayi, Christian Mission in Nigeria, 103
36 Patrick Claffey, Christian Churches in Dahomey-Benin: A study of their Socio-Political Role (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2007), 181
native disputes and freedom from onerous exactions.” 37 The surge for Christian membership and school attendance, and the special treatment given to those who went to school revolutionized peoples’ attitude towards Christianity. In Dahomey for instance, notes Claffey, education became the new vodun, the source of power and a roadmap to socio-political success, as students hoped to move from interpreting for authorities to becoming authorities themselves in the new colonial dispensation. Even kings who were ill disposed to the missionaries would not hesitate to send their children to school. 38

The school thus became a very significant and strategic tool for the missionary enterprise not only for mass conversion, but also for effective indoctrination since unlike the ineffective preaching to adults who were already formed in traditional ethos, the school system reached out to children and the younger populace, hence a great investment for the future generation. Father Shanahan addressing school directors in 1905 affirmed that “those who hold the school, hold the country, hold its religion, hold its future.” 39 The school system therefore became a “locus classicus”, a place where young Africans were reproduced in the mould of European civilization. Accordingly, “it was in the mission schools that the inferiorization of the local culture was largely carried out in a structured and sustained manner. It was in the mission schools that the western culture was advertised and marketed on all fours by the missionaries as the superior culture, with superior values and social mannerisms. It was through the schools that western tastes, dressing styles, language and accent were injected into the local minds of the younger generation of

38 This was not the case in northern Borgou kingdom, where elite families were very reticent, often sending the children of Gando slaves in their place, see Patrick Claffey, Christian Churches in Dahomey-Benin, 184 Shanahan to Directors, 20 Oct. 1905; See John P. Jordan, Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria (Clonmore & Reynolds, 1949), 90

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Africans.” Simply put, it was through the mission schools that the African mind was prepared to docilely accept the western structures on which the new faith was operating. The indoctrination-oriented nature of the mission school explains the initial reluctance to send prospective teachers, catechists and clergy who would continue the work of evangelization to formal institutions, or to Europe (since too much academic training was considered dangerous); the adoption of the home education practiced by the Basel Evangelical missionaries in the Gold Coast; and the streamlined form of education that initially characterized the training of clergymen.  

It is important to note here a two-fold feature at the heart of the various evangelical methods. First, there was the rejection of indigenous identities, a rejection which according to Afigbo was “so thoroughgoing” that even indigenous names were rejected as anti-Christian and could not be used for baptism. The rejection of traditional names might be dismissed as so trivial to receive a belabored attention, but when one considers the deep connection between African names and identity, the harm caused by this rejection is better appreciated. In fact, in Isokoland, even the traditional name for God Oghere was initially rejected, and at the initiation of a new Christian, the congregation would gather at the initiate’s home where all the traditional religious symbols are burnt amidst triumphant chants of God’s victory over local gods. The civilizing mission of Christian Europe’s colonial imperialism, the identification of Christianity with Europe, the conception of Christian doctrines within the mode of European cultural cosmology, and the abuse of Darwinism which denied value and worth to Africa’s humanity, spirituality and culture,

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40 Chukwudi A. Njoku, “The Missionary Factor”, 205
41 J.F.A. Ajayi, Christian Mission in Nigeria, see especially 147-165
42 See Adrian Hastings, The Church in Africa, 448
gave no accommodation nor respect to the unfamiliar African philosophy and ethos, consequently leading to the gradual sapping of African self-respect and theological identity. Perhaps, Theophilus Okere captures the intensity of this rejection of African identity succinctly: “Their indigenous religion was condemned as idolatry; their Gods were but demons or fetishes; their ancestors were lost souls, having lived and died outside the church; their feasts and ceremonies were all idolatrous and pagan; their dances were immoral’ their diviners were sorcerers; their medicine was magic and quackery; their languages were hopelessly tone-infested cacophonies, while their names were unpronounceable gibberish for which the canonized names of European canonized saints had to be substituted. All was one irredeemable massa damnata”.  

Name change symbolized a new identity, which explains the enthusiastically confrontational attitude of new converts as they commit to divest their minds of traditional theology. The acceptance of this imposition by Africans, and the appropriate interaction between the western and African theologies, liturgical rituals and modes of worship that never was, not only led to theological impoverishment and identity crisis, but also turned Africans into theological consumers, always looking up to the west for theological products and directions for usage.

Consequently, there was a replacement with a new theology, and the establishment of

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43 Theophilus Okere, “African Culture: The past and the Present as an Indivisible Whole” in Identity and Change, Nigerian Philosophical Studies 1, edited by Theophilus Okere (Washington DC: Paideia Publishers/UNESCO, 1996), 22. It is important however to note here, especially from the post-colonial lens, instances of efforts by missionaries to learn the people and their language through listening, and to adopt the scientific approach to language. These efforts, according to Uzukwu, honor “the otherness of the people among whom they missioned”. For the contribution of Spiritan Fathers Alexander le Roy, Charles Sacleux, and others who played vital roles in the development of Igbo language, and Swahili as ecumenical language, see Elochukwu Uzukwu, “Spiritan Mission and the Ecumenical Project: The Linguistic Factor” in The Radically Human World: Essays in Honor and Memory of Fr. David Smith, C.S.Sp (Pittsburgh, The Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center, Duquesne University, 2016), 112-128. In addition to the publication of dictionaries, Uzukwu also notes the laudable effort at biblical translation. This project however highlights the need to move beyond ‘translation’ as we shall discuss in chapter four.
new foundations for building ecclesial structures and formation of the clergy according to the dictates of the West. It is not surprising therefore that the first Portuguese missionaries to Elmina for instance, who completed the first church did not think it appropriate that the church should reflect any local reality that an indigene could connect with, rather, everything was western: The church was named Sao Jorge (St George) after the patron saint of Portugal, masses were offered daily for the repose of the soul of Prince Henry the Navigator, and the requirements for liturgies commemorating the dead emphasized the juridical and spiritual links of the church to the secular and lay leadership of the medieval European church, since pope Calistus III had given Prince Henry temporal and spiritual jurisdiction over all the churches founded in West Africa.44 This form of replacement was not limited to life in the church, it extended to social living. Thus, traditional dance was banned for Christians and replaced with British football. The first recorded football match in Tanganyika was in the UMCA mission diary of Magila for September 17, 1884, and by the end of the century, British missionaries both in East and West Africa were enthusiastically encouraging football as the road to a healthy Christian Africa. Local dressing was also frowned at and replaced with trousers and skirts.45

This uniformist and triumphant theological approaches that characterized the missionaries’ attitude towards African religions, which forestalled any dialogue between the African and Christian theologies, rituals and modes of worship echoes a trend that was already extant in Catholicism before and after the reformation. These were ecclesiological tenets that developed in response to western crises and papal struggle with emperors and kings which climaxed during the papacy of Gregory VII, Innocent III, and Boniface VIII,

44 See Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity*, 23
45 For details, see Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa*, 459-460
and the concept of the church that developed in response to the reformation. A brief survey is necessary to understand the ecclesiological tenets that were transported to West Africa which in no way reflects the West African situation and cultural context.

3.4 The Emergence of Western Ecclesiology: A Uniformist and Triumphant Theology

The birth of ecclesiology has always been traced to the fifteenth century when treatises that solely focused on the theology of the church began to emerge as responses to the crises in the life of the church. However, questions that would occupy the discipline of ecclesiology have always existed. Already in the ninth century, the need to censure the interference of secular rulers into ecclesial matters intensified the gradual administrative influence of papal power beyond Italy. Pope Gregory VII (1073-85) began to forcefully implement a centralized reform in order to tackle the problem of lay investiture, nepotism, and simony. He began by taking direct control of the election of bishops, and ensuring their continued worthiness through the system of papal legates who reported directly to him. Seeking to universalize papal authority and establish his power over secular rulers, Gregory issued his Dictatus Papae, where he clearly outlined that the Roman pontiff “is the only man whose feet all princes must kiss”. He is the only person who “has the right to be called universal”, who can singularly depose bishops or emperors, who may never be judged by anyone, and who alone has the right to wear the imperial insignia. Following this line of pontifical assertion, Urban II referred to himself as the “spiritual ruler of the whole world”.

47 Gregory VII, Dictatus Papae, 2, 3, 8, 9, 11, 25
when in 1095 he actualized Gregory’s intention that Christians should take up arms against
the enemies of God, calling for the first crusade, and promising full remission of sins to all
who would commit to the cause. This kind of papal claims gradually filtered into the
theological and administrative structure of the church that by the middle of the tenth
century, during the papacy of Alexander III, Roman centralization and uniform tendencies
were already largely established, diminishing intermediate structures, and rendering
metropolitans powerless in the confirmation of the election of suffragan bishops, an
authority that now became a singular privilege of Rome.

Based on the growing ideology that the pope’s authority surpasses that of kings, since
he encompasses both spiritual and temporal powers on a universal level above kings who
possess only temporal powers and govern only single kingdoms, Innocent III (1198-1216)
expanded the interpretation of the title ‘Vicar of Christ’ to designate the universal
jurisdiction of the pope, who according to him, “held the place of God on earth”,

“beneath God but above humans, less than God but more than human”, and in whose
arms, the governance of the whole world is placed. Consequent on these reforms and the
establishment of a supervisory role of Rome, bishops became basically representatives of
the pope on whom their appointment relied, and the voice of the laity diminished as they
became gradually subordinated to the clergy. These universalizing tendencies which saw
the gradual concentration of ecclesial authority on a single individual (the pope), which
reflects papal struggle with kings and emperors was intensified with Boniface VIII (Unam


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49 This is due to the claim that he acted as the vicar (vicem gerentes) of the heavenly Father, see Register 1.485: Cum inter alios; 3.44 (PL 214, 453, 931-932)
50 Sermon 2 (PL 217, 658)
51 He claims that Jesus left not only the church, but the whole world to Peter’s governance, see Register 2.209 (PL 214, 759)
Sanctam, 1302), and continued into the fifteenth century in the effort to defend the rights and authority of the Roman primacy in the aftermath of the council of Constance when conciliarism came to be seen as a threat. This was the background that led to Juan de Torquemada’s Summa de Ecclesia, the first work dedicated solely to the treatment of the Church separate from Christology and Sacramental theology. Torquemada’s Summa, organized into four books, was essentially a defense of papal primacy and authority over the then fragmenting Christiandom of Europe, arguing that all power hierarchically comes down from the pope who possesses it in its fullness,\(^{52}\) and attacking the position that authority belonged to the church collectively in all its members, since a singular mind cannot exist in a “whole” (universitas).\(^{53}\) The effect of these developments in transferring authority to a singular individual (the pope) and concomitantly establishing the dominant role of the papacy was enormous, such that by the latter part of the fifteenth century, as Prusak rightly observes, “the constitutional model of an undivided corporate sovereignty gave way to the notion of a single, absolutist sovereignty as reflected both in royal absolutism and ‘papalism’ within the church”\(^{54}\)

The crises witnessed with the Protestant Reformation further propelled the development of ecclesiology with a focus on the sacramental and juridical powers of the ordained.

The reformation events had brought into the church an unabated fragmentation that toed national, cultural and linguistic lines, unleashing a resentment to the central authority of Rome, hence engendering a profusion of doctrinal positions and liturgical forms, creating a battlefield for supremacy, which continued in the mission arenas with the

\(^{52}\) Juan de Torquemada, Summa de Ecclesia II, 2, 52-55, 83
\(^{53}\) Juan de Torquemada, Summa de Ecclesia II, 71
\(^{54}\) Bernard P. Prusak. The Church Unfinished, 239
struggle for membership. The council of Trent which took place as a response, made the provision for the establishment of the seminaries as official training places for the clergy, the endorsement of one liturgical language (Latin), and the development of catechisms as instruments for the uniform instruction of the catholic faithful. The growth of nationalism and the establishment of state churches engendered within Catholicism a counter emphasis on the papacy, centralization, and uniformity.\(^\text{55}\) In response to these controversies in the sixteenth century, the Italian Jesuit theologian and later cardinal, Robert Bellarmine accentuated the external visibility of the church. He compared it to the secular absolutist states of the time, emphasizing the image of a pyramidal society organized under the pope (with his curia, and cardinals) and bishops:

The one true church is the community of humans brought together by profession of the true faith and communion in the same sacraments under the rule of recognized pastors and especially of the sole vicar of Christ on earth, the Roman pontiff….the church is indeed a community of humans as visible and palpable as the community of the Roman people, or the kingdom of France, or the republic of Venice.\(^\text{56}\)

In such perspective, like the kingdom of France or the republic of Venice, the church was conceived as a juridical person or institution possessing all the regulations and means (hence, absolutely necessary) to attain salvation. Pius IX would later insist that “eternal salvation cannot be obtained by those who oppose the authority and statements of the church and are stubbornly separated from the Roman pontiff”\(^\text{57}\). This line of thought played

\(^{55}\) Also in order to curb the nationalistic tendencies that was beginning to grow among the various religious congregations, the Vatican instructed all religious congregations to move their headquarters to Rome. Consequent to the growth of nationalism during the later Middle Ages and the establishment of state churches during the reformation, a counter emphasis on the papacy, centralization, and uniformity emerged.

\(^{56}\) Quoted in Bernard Prusak, *The Church Unfinished*, 248

\(^{57}\) Pius IX, Encyclical Letter, *Quanto Conficiamur Moerore*, August 10, 1863, 8. The encyclical however recognized that salvation will not be denied to those who are invincibly ignorant of the Christian religion. Attempts to reconcile both perspectives led to the eventual formulation of the visible and invisible church, a theology popularly attributed to a Lutheran foundation.
a significant part in the conceptualization of the Church as a ‘perfect [or complete and self-sufficient] society’, widely adopted by eighteenth and nineteenth century theologians. It also dominated the Neo-Scholastic manuals of ecclesiology, which as Dulles observed, remained “in full vigor” until Vatican II council. Timoteo Zapelena for instance, was interested in establishing the juridical validity of the sacraments, defending the church as a perfect society (societas perfecta), applying the four categories of the true church (notae ecclesiae) to the Roman Catholic Church, and upholding the supreme jurisdiction of the hierarchy and the pope in an unequal society (societas inaequalis). For Zapelena, that the Roman Catholic Church is the only legitimate church of Jesus Christ is beyond doubt. The Latin manuals with some modifications also advanced this tradition. Dulles notes that the functions of the church were studied primarily under the rubric of power. Two powers were generally recognized: order and jurisdiction, which would eventually be supplemented by the threefold distinction of teaching, ruling and sanctification. This development as observed by Prusak “identified the church in a manner that emphasized the visibility of its hierarchy and authority, and its administration of sacraments as the means to salvation”. In the same vein, Congar comments that a juridic conception placed the church in the category of an organization rather than a congregation of the faithful people of Christ or an organism animated by the Holy Spirit. The juridic conception of the Church metamorphosed into the theology of the Mystical Body, and in 1943 Pius XII’s

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60 Avery Dulles, “A Half Century”, 420
61 As identified by Salaverri, see Avery Dulles, “A Half Century”, 420
62 Bernard Prusak, The Church Unfinished, 250
63 Yves Congar. L’Eglise: De saint Augustin a l’époque modern, 381-384; Quoted in Bernard Prusak, The Church Unfinished, 248
encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* identified the mystical body with the Roman Catholic Church, and emphasized that those not united to the visible structures of the Roman Catholic Church through faith, sacraments and obedience, were not only cut off from communion with Christ, but devoid of supernatural life, and should be considered heathen.⁶⁴

The foregoing makes it clear that the ecclesiology that was transported to sub-Saharan Africa by the missionaries was an ecclesiology that was born in response to the medieval crises of the west. It was not an ecclesiology that reflects the African situation or West African crises. With an uniformist and triumphant theological disposition, papal authority was conceived in accord with the absolutist authority structures of western societies and culture (Rome, France, Venice). On the contrary, the authority structure within West African institutions was highly distributive and never concentrated on a single individual. Also, African traditional religions did not have the sort of triumphant outlook which characterized catholic/protestant struggles in the mission lands, rather indigenous religions were very open and hospitable to other religions. Like the family religion of ancient Israel, religious demarcation hardly played any role, such that there is almost no religious separation or controversy, since what is expected and experienced from any of the gods is basically the same. Uzukwu was right when he points out that the Western pattern of being church is an experience of a local church, and that the Roman program of centralization does not arise necessarily from the ministry of unity of the office of Peter nor the New

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⁶⁴ Pius XII, Encyclical Letter, *Mystici Corporis*, June 29, 1943, 22. Online source, www.vatican.va/.../hf_p-xii_enc_29061943_mystici-corporis-christi_en.... Accessed December 4, 2013. While identifying the Catholic Church with the mystical body, he recognizes the possibility of non-Catholics to be in a certain manner related to the body. If they were living in good faith in their errors, they could be attached unconsciously in desire and resolution (*inscio quodam desiderio ac voto*) to the mystical body. This carefully worded phraseology, gave papal authority to the proposition of Bellarmine back in the 16th century and confirmed the teaching of Suarez that even an implicit desire could suffice.
Testament experience.\textsuperscript{65}

There were clearly two different theological and cultural outlooks between the Christian, and the West African theological structure. Notwithstanding, a uniformist ecclesiology was transposed, and the Catholic triumphant theological predisposition over the post reformation churches was to be transferred to the African traditional religion by the catholic missionaries. An ecclesiology manufactured in the west as a result of western exigencies was to be replicated in Africa without any contribution from the local theological scheme. The inception of African ecclesiology was constructed within a space that rejected the very identity of Africans including their names, and established its structures on an alien space with identifiable implications. We consider these implications from theological, sacramental and ethical perspectives.

\subsection*{3.5.1 Theological Considerations}

The nature of ecclesiology and its theological underpinnings that developed in the pre and post reformation church, as indicated above, was not considered invalid because it was born out of crises and did not reflect the New Testament ecclesial outlook. In fact, Christian theology and ecclesiology throughout the centuries have always responded to culturally rooted questions. Theologians as products of their cultural milieu, display bold initiatives in the actual production of theology. The different theological emphases that have characterized the theological enterprise down through the ages only validate the fundamental importance of history, memory and reminiscence to theology and revelation. Simply put, there is no revelation without history, and there is no theology without memory,

\textsuperscript{65} Elochukwu Uzukwu, \textit{A Listening Church}, 59
and ecclesiology is founded on both. The ‘conversion’ theology that greeted the shores of West Africa invalidated the pre-Christian identity of the converted African, and considered him/her a religious and theological *tabula rasa* on which an entirely new religious cosmology has to be imprinted. As a result African history and memory were deleted from African theology and ecclesiology, such that theology becomes an intellectual exercise confronted with the task of vindicating western Christian identity with its religious and intellectual heritage, producing a theological tradition and identity to be bequeathed to future generation of Africans from a religious conviction grounded outside of their culture.

Bediako was right when he insists that there exists a problem of identity in African Christian understanding in the post missionary church. By not allowing a space for African memory in African theology, the missionary enterprise fashioned for Africa “a church without a theology”, and “threatened to deny African Christians their own past and sought instead to give them a past which could not in any real sense become fully theirs”. If theological memory is integral to identity, then this lacuna points to the heart of the African Christian identity crisis, since without memory the past degenerates into nebulousness, the present stands on a shaky foundation, and any hope for appropriate future reconstruction becomes elusive since alien categories remain the operative principle.

In the post missionary church, any African theological innovation has to be judged and validated by western laws enshrined in the code of canon law, and other doctrinal statements, and not from African theological consciousness, rendering impossible the establishment of a self-supporting, self-ministering, self-propagating unit of the

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67 Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 237
Catholica….a living member of the universal communion”. The foreign foundation on which African ecclesiology was established bequeathed to Africa a ‘juridical’ ecclesiology, defaced churches, where the church is identified with foreign power at the expense of cultural endowments, and where the preservation of structure is priced above inner growth. It has created a mutilated pastoral theology and practice where particular pastoral situations are addressed with an immediate recourse to a canon law that bears the mark of an alien culture developed in a context that is totally unrelated to the situation at hand. The African church thus suffers from a “genuine underdevelopment of theology”, intellectual stagnation and mental alienation. Eboussi Boulaga echoes this concern when he observes: “torpor reigns in the churches of the southern hemisphere. Priests and bishops sit dozing over the scholastic catechism of their adolescence, stroked by canonical reassurances…they lose themselves in the institutional casuistry of attempts to “apply the council”. Their docile application of the council gives birth to nothing but wind of stillbirths, because ultimately it merely mimics the life that is perhaps unfolding somewhere.” This theological mimicry is indicative of a church bereft of personality, a church that continues to exist as a by-product of the Christian West. Consequently, ecclesiology becomes text-centered, doctrinally oriented, and concerned with issues of Lex Credendi. Within these ‘texts’ God is frozen, and an autonomous, constituting, and self-asserting subject who claims the totality of God’s knowledge assumes control. The subject

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68 Adrian Hastings, *Church and Mission in Modern Africa* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1967), 16-17
not only sets limits to God’s self-revelation, but also determines the categories and concepts of that revelation.

Since within the above missionary theological outlook, the pre-Christian African religious space was cut off from the parameters of God’s revelation due largely to unfamiliarity and unpreparedness of the missionaries, the African religious and cultural particularities are compromised, and African theology is divorced from its historical and contextual foothold. African history, joys, crises, and memory are excluded from God’s self-revelation to Africans. Such an approach reduces the experience of being church to a “submit mentality”. 71 The result is a displacement of ecclesiology – a way of being church that is divorced from the land, the God of the land, and the people’s identity and faith encounter. Accordingly, the ecclesiological problems that existed in the West for centuries have reproduced themselves in the West African churches. The church thus constituted, according to Uzukwu, becomes “a church which is dependent on all levels and which is turned towards Rome – a church which from the start, was ignorant of its autonomy as a local church in the one church”. 72 Such a local church becomes nothing but an extension of Rome, oriented towards a judicious application and submission to the articles of the canon law and Roman rite, never transcending the dogmatic enclosure that locks the churches in Africa within the confines of a fixed structure, rather than expressing itself as a dynamic force, contributing to the universal church from the richness of its contextual authentic faith, and witnessing to the fact that “the church has not exhausted its possibilities

of expression.”\textsuperscript{73} As long as the ideal remains uniformity (a church uniformly Rome in doctrine and morals), true unity, i.e. ‘unity in difference’\textsuperscript{74} (communion of local churches in union with Rome but deeply inserted in their cultural world) will never be achieved. As a result, clerical faith leaders will continue to cling to Roman tradition and dogmatized practices, such that new generation of Africans will continue to confront a series of faith problems that have been present for several years. Marital and cultural issues for instance continue to resurface in the pastoral plate of several West African ecclesial communities. In many catholic dioceses in West Africa, membership in the marriage tribunal requires a certificate in canon law. As a result, the handy tool for resolving marital cultural issues either by the tribunal or local pastors is the text of a canon law that was written outside of the cosmology of the particular culture in question. Consequently, while pastors pride themselves of having addressed a particular marital issue in accordance with canon law, the people are left with a spiritual vacuum that neither the canon law, nor conciliar documents can fill. The same sort of mismatch is also noticeable in the penal codes of canon law (Books VI and VII). These codes are structured on the western penal retributive justice system, thus, while in tune with western experience, are detrimental to the African context, traditionally oriented towards a restorative justice system. The instance of gacaca in the Rwandan experience, as examined in chapter two is instructive.

The use of foreign laws to solve African pastoral problems and the duplication of all that obtained in the Latin rite western churches in Africa have forced Africans to accept western structures as essential to Christianity. The imposed Roman space supplied the hinge for both cultic unity and uniformity in doctrine and morals. West African dioceses

\textsuperscript{73} Jean-Marc Ela, \textit{African Cry}, 109
\textsuperscript{74} Jean-Marc Ela, \textit{African Cry}, 117
became nothing but duplications of Roman sacred spaces. Accordingly, the Bishops who
are placed in charge of particular duplications of such spaces receive their power and
authority not from the people that occupy those spaces, but from Rome. Their allegiance
therefore is first to Rome before the people they govern. Within this
theological/administrative outlook, the church becomes in essence, a big administrative
organization, divided up into local administrative units directed from Rome. Thus, the
organizational structures that developed in the west, beginning from the ninth century,
which saw a concentration of authority on a single individual, are also transferred.
Consequently, the bishop becomes an absolute monarch, possessing direct and immediate
juridical and sacramental powers, with little or no checks and balances, a system that while
modeled after western monarchical kingdoms, is alien to traditional West African
institutions, where authority is highly distributive, and checks and balances deeply
entrenched. The concentration of power on a single individual has not only imprisoned
God within the bishop’s will, but also constrained the people’s spirituality within a church,
and an institution where the land, its people, and its history have no role in the formulation
of faith, doctrine, and morals. This phenomenon makes Christianization and
Europeanization synonymous, an attitude that has pervaded the post reformation ecclesial
experience. Theologically therefore, the African becomes a consumer, looking up to the
west for theological products, and direction for usage. The consumer status makes Africans
aliens to their beliefs, and puts them on the wrong side of religion because strictly speaking,
religion flows from real life experience. Put differently, the theological life of the West
African Christian bears the stamp of foreignness, which leads to the question: when will
the West African church begin to tap into their collective history, memory, and identity to address their own theological problems?

3.5.2 Sacramental Considerations

The sacraments as a whole constitute the lifeline of the Catholic Church. The sacraments are also in the realm of signs and symbols conceived in the Catholic sacramental theology as efficacious within the confines of appropriate matter and form. Symbols do not exist in a vacuum. They display a particular pattern of a community’s interaction with the universe within which it manifests its identity. Unsurprisingly and rightly therefore, the Catholic symbols, signs, rituals, prayer patterns, gestures, and indeed, its sacramental theology, discipline and practices are heavily dependent on Greco-Roman cultural patterns, which overpowered Hebrew antecedents as Christianity moved from its Jewish anchor into the Greco-Roman world.75 Due to the inseparable connection of symbol to the community, any attempt to separate the relationship reduces the symbol to meaninglessness. Uzukwu is right to insist that any imposition of “a gesture in order to realize a uniform practice of Christianity is harmful.76 This symbol-imposition reflects the unease of Jean-Marc Ela, who, on the basis of his apostolate with the Kirdi people of Northern Cameroon, wondered whether the Eucharistic ritual as celebrated in African churches is a sign of salvation or of dependence. Reflecting on the Eucharistic bread and wine, Jean-Marc Ela observes that despite verbal declaration of liturgical pluralism, the Roman rite, which was neither chosen by Africans nor developed to manifest their personality, but which bears a mark of a different culture, is imposed on Africans.

75 For the influence of Greco-Roman antiquity in the practice of Christianity, see Elochukwu Uzukwu, *Worship as Body Language*, 16-18
Consequently, “the Eucharist in the life of the church has become a locus of our daily alienation.” 77 The Kirdi people for instance, whose lives and survival are centered on the cultivation of millet, a food that plays a significant role in their social and religious life, must abandon these ‘works of their hands’ and turn to imported bread and grape wine, foreign local foods that constitute the daily ordinary menu in the region of the world where they are cultivated. Indeed, the universal use of European products as the ‘matter’ for the Eucharist, and the rejection of African local products, not only reveal a church that becomes uneasy the moment it must deviate from a manner of existence proper to Europeans, but effectively turns Africans into tools for the prosperity of other people’s commerce. The very liturgy that actualizes our redemption continues to reveal Africans’ alienation in the hands of a world that imposes its products on them. Ignoring the joys of the labor of their hands, Africans continue to live in solidarity with the peasants of Europe. The imposition of the western culture and its symbolic structure by selecting a particular usage closely bound up to their climate and soil, in areas where the symbolic meaning is lost strikes at the core of the meaning of sacraments and catholicity. By prioritizing the materiality of the elements rather than their signification, the symbolism of the Eucharistic meal escapes Africans since the symbolism of wheat and grape wine in European culture escapes them. Accordingly, the case of the Eucharist reveals the domination and displacement at the heart of the faith as lived in Africa. 78 To dismiss this concern as petty, as some authors have done, is a failure to acknowledge the centrality of the Eucharist which stands at the verge of falling into meaninglessness, to distract Africans from their daily alienation, to divert attention from the style of existence proper to the African, which should be at the center of

78 See Jean-Marc Ela, *African Cry*, 1-8
any reflection on African sacramental theology, and to effectively perpetuate the existence of African ecclesiology on an alien space.

The admittance or non-admittance to the sacraments based on conformity to western marital codes as enshrined in the canon law exposes another case where sacramentally, the church in West Africa exists on an alien space. Marriage customs manifest an essential core of both individual and community identity for west African communities, hence, the imposition of the conjugal/monogamous model on African societies as the only divinely revealed route necessary for participation in the sacramental life, stands at the root of the frustration experienced by numerous African Christians who, despite leading lives of responsibility and personal integrity, are nonetheless categorized as public sinners because their pastors are mandated by the church’s teaching authority to utilize prevailing norms that do not account for cultural particularities. To be sure, monogamy and the conjugal model of family life is not a timeless universal divine law, it is a model that naturally flows from the individualistic culture of the western world. Here, sexuality, rather than children, is central, and the consummation of marriage is located in sexual intercourse. The canon laws on marriage with their western orientation logically accords with this mindset. Canons 1137-1140 for instance, contain legislations on the legitimacy and illegitimacy of children. These canons state that only children born of the canon’s definition of a “valid” or “putative” marriage, those born “at least 180 days after the day the marriage was celebrated, or within 300 days from the day of the dissolution of conjugal life are presumed to be legitimate.” Illegitimate children, according to canon 1139, can be legitimized by the subsequent valid or putative marriage of the parents, or by the rescript of the Holy See. Canon 1140 concludes by stating that “legitimated children are considered equal to legitimate children.
unless the law has provided otherwise”. It is clear that these canons implicitly consider children born out of the culturally limited worldview of the canon’s understanding of a valid marriage as having a second class status. While not probing in details into the question of human dignity, it suffices here to note that the imposition and application of this western oriented law to west African societies, and its attachment to the reception or non-reception of the sacraments, cannot be totally exonerated when considering the guilt, shame, abandonment of children, and their concomitant effects on west African Christian families where children have been conceived ‘out of wedlock’, despite the fact that most west African cultures have no place for the concept of ‘illegitimate children’. This set of canons definitely represent the western worldview where the sexual act, not children, is central to marriage, as opposed to the west African scheme where children are central, and cannot be considered illegitimate regardless of the circumstances of birth. Related to the above is the treatment of polygamy within Christianity. The usual Catholic simplistic response to this unfamiliar practice is to ask the man to pick a wife of his choice for canonical validation, and then dismiss the rest. This kind of response considers polygamy as an isolated practice, rather than a practice that is part and parcel of an entire cultural milieu, for which any attempt by outsiders to simply pick one aspect and change it is bound to have unfortunate consequences. Here, a particular practice within a child-centered, community–based culture is cut off and replaced with another practice within a sexuality-centered, individualistic culture, without adequate theological reflection. This western individualistic

79 Presenting his child-centered theology, which differs from much of the established thinking on marriage, Michael Guy observes: “traditional African culture was centered on the community, and marriage was the framework within which the community raised children who would ensure its survival. Contemporary English culture stresses the importance of the individual, and marriage and cohabitation are seen primarily in terms of a relationship between two people.” See Michael R. Guy, “A Cultural Approach to a Christian Theology of Marriage” in Marriage and Family in African Christianity, edited by Andrew A. Kyomo and Sahaya G. Selvan (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2004), 109
mindset reflects the Johannine and Pauline theology within which it is difficult to see where children fit in. According to German Martinez, “marriage especially in the theology of John (John 2:1-12) and Paul (Eph. 5:25, 32) is a total and all embracing communion after the image of the nuptial sacrifice of Christ, who gives up his nuptial body.” There is no gainsaying that this nuptial theology finds no place in West African cosmology. The point here is that it is an absolute theological aberration to impose this theology (which developed in a different cultural context) on west Africa where consanguinity rather than conjugality is the operative principle, children rather than the sexual act is central, and where practices such as polygamy which flows naturally from the vast array of cultural correlates is not eccentric. For the African heritage to become the locus of revelation and ecclesiology, attention must be given to African marriage customs before imposing western anthropology, and legislation.

The Catholic Church presents itself as a world church, and indeed Vatican II encourages attentiveness to culture, but ironically the obsessive need to uniformly impose the internal structures of the Roman church does not allow the African church to creatively develop doctrines and morals that respond to her specific needs. Thus, while Africa might rightly parade herself as reaping the fruits of Vatican II through inculturation, there is no gainsaying that inculturation as practiced today largely remains on the level of ‘translation’. We translate European laws, culture, rites, and prayer patterns into our various dialects but the essence of the translated rites and prayers remain western. Ultimately the language diminishes into oblivion since we are speaking European laws in our language. True inculturation comes when Africa is able to go beyond mere translation, to developing

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80 German Martinez, “Marriage as Worship: A Theological Analogy” in *Christian Perspectives on Sexuality and Gender*, edited by Adrian Thatcher and Elizabeth Stuart (Leominster: Gracewing, 1996), 187
doctrines and morals that speak directly to their situation. Reflecting on the liturgical reform of Vatican II Ela observes: “thus despite the introduction of African languages, musical instruments and songs…the liturgical reform is failing in African churches. The reason is that ‘reform’ is still just a translation of the Roman Rite. Hence the abiding question: Is liturgical pluralism consonant with catholicity? Is it enough to translate into the vernacular prayers composed elsewhere and in another spirit? Or should we encourage a genuinely African style of Christian prayer?”

Until Africa is able to develop its own discipline, especially in those areas that the church categorically rejects the introduction of African practices because it has been cordoned off as ‘doctrine and morals’, liturgical inculturation, and African sacramental theology will remain on the periphery.

3.5.3 Ethical Considerations

That there is a rupture in the global moral fiber hardly requires any rigorous explanation. While the media is rife with reports of violence and unjustified killings, and the internet is saturated with cybercrimes, the evils experienced in historical events such as the slave trade, genocides, lynching, among others, continue to stare us at the face not only as instances of human’s inhumanity to fellow humans, but also as a demonstration of a distorted moral consciousness.

Contemporary Africa is not exempt from the above global ethical meltdown. A casual visitor to Africa today would not only notice that Africa is not exempt from the violence and crimes that have engulfed the world, s/he would also notice a simultaneous growth and

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81 Jean-Marc Ela, *African Cry*, 113
proliferation of ecclesial communities. Emmanuel Katongole vividly captures this reality when he observes that “Churches and coffins are the two most prevalent images associated with Africa today”. The veracity of this observation is not far-fetched. Africa is an overwhelmingly Christian continent contributing a lion share to the 66 per cent of the world’s 1.1 billion Catholics that live in the southern hemisphere, yet social unrest as highlighted for instance in the Rwandan genocide, where church buildings became theatres of massacre, and Christians slaughtered fellow Christians, cannot be denied. While this glaring contradiction challenges the model of ecclesiology in Africa as Katongole rightly points out, it also questions the effectiveness of ecclesial moral categories as a standard for ethical life in Africa.

Especially unnerving is the contrast between the above ‘twenty-first century image’ of Africa and the image presented by some Portuguese seafarers in the late fifteenth century. When they came ashore on the coast of south-eastern Africa to effect repairs on their vessel, as Eric Axelson recounts, the immense generosity they experienced during their stay led them to name the area Terra da boa gente (land of the good people). This gesture is certainly not isolated since it is in harmony with the principle of African morality centered on the preservation of life, and manifested in the traditional value system that emphasizes

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84 cf. Ibid., 8, 29-30
86 Discussing the core of ethics in Africa, the Tanzanian moral theologian, Laurenti Magesa, argues: “everything is perceived with reference to life…the mystique of life”. Laurenti Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming the Church in Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines Publication Africa, 2005), 77. Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator, S.J. explains further, “life represents the ultimate common good, the shared patrimony of the group, and the burden of care incumbent on each member. Life is the guarantee of wholeness and universal harmony within and between the material and spiritual realms. Life creates an unconditional duty towards action. To be morally upright is to act deliberately in favor of human life” Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator, S.J. “Ethics Brewed in an African Pot” in *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 31, 1 (2011), 3-16, 4-5
“a shared, reciprocal humanness with a strong sense of community that includes hospitality to outsiders”. 87 The centrality of the sacredness of life, and its components, such as kindness, love, compassion, and respect for others, in the African moral tradition, underscores the importance of Africa’s ancient moral wisdom and practice in a world facing a breakdown in moral formation. Martin Prozesky captures this concern when he notes: “the moral culture of traditional African societies…belongs to important sets of value systems…important because of certain unique qualities that a globalizing world, beset by violence, greed, and environmental damage of a potentially catastrophic kind, badly needs to take on board.” 88 Accordingly, the gradual loss of the African traditional ethical system in the contemporary African society is unfortunate. The gulf between the serenity in the society experienced by the Portuguese seafarers and the Katongolean image prods any interested observer to wonder what has happened to the African value system and the kind of society it produced. 89 One can infer that the Christian moral ethics that replaced the traditional ethical system has not yielded much fruit in public life. This frustration was expressed in a moment of mea culpa by the church in a document prepared for the workshops of the 1971 synod of bishops: “How is it that after 80 years of modern social teaching, and 2000 years of the gospel of love, the church has to admit her inability

88 Ibid., 5
89 While conflicts were not unknown in the traditional African societies, studies have shown that such instances were minimal and occurred when absolutely necessary for defense. Studies also show that the African value system produced a more humane and hospitable society than what is presently experienced amid the insurgence of religious bodies. Cf. for instance, Elochukwu Uzukwu, God Spirit and Human Wholeness: Appropriating Faith and Culture in West African Style (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publishers, 2012), 1-4
to make more impact upon the conscience of her people.”  

This self-indictment is conspicuously manifested not only in historical evils that bear the stamp of ecclesiastical approval and participation, some of which, with regards to Africa, we have already examined, but also in the daily acts of corruption and violence perpetrated by Christians who might pass for saints in their private devotional lives. To be sure, the attribution of guilt to Christianity is not to say that some individual Christians, her leadership, or codes did not speak in condemnatory voices. The point here is that notwithstanding the often belated condemnation of catholic leadership, the abundance of these evils (which excludes the ‘strange exception’ argument), the fact that they happened under the bosom of Christianity, and the ever widening gap between public life and private devotional piety indicate “a serious absence of the Christian code at this level of events” or at least its ineffective status.

At the root of this unproductive ethical code is the fact that the Christian religion and morality exist in a privatized space, which in itself is a by-product of western individualism. Privatization of religion is the removal of religion from public life and installing it only in the private and individual space, with the individual conscience as the supreme judge. Variously attributed to developments in the west: enlightenment, French revolution, growing relativism, or back to the protestant reformation, this phenomenon tends to limit

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91 Some examples include the Atlantic slave trade which bore ecclesiastical blessing, colonialism where Christian states partitioned and violently exploited Africa, genocides against the American Indians, the Australian Aborigines, the Holocaust, the still unrepented atomic destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and most recently the Rwandan genocide where church buildings became theatres of massacre, and Christians slaughtered fellow Christians with ease conscience.

religion and conscience to the individual while proscribing it from the vast area of social economic and political affairs that touch and shape the lives of individuals on a daily basis. Christian morality has always targeted the individual conscience defined as the most secret core where the individual is alone with God, hence must be obeyed even when in error. Intended to make the individual holy, its rewards and punishments go to the individual, hence in Christian morality, human act, sin, going to heaven or hell, etc. are always individual acts. Consequently, the public life not only lacks its own morality but seems to be a viable excuse for immoral acts. According to Okere, “this eclipse of religion from public life created the twilight zone of amorality and set the stage for the compromise and accommodation with the intolerable situation of injustice and inhumanity”, transforming religion, which technically should be a way of life into ‘a heaven in a heartless world’ taking care of casualties from a system it dares not to challenge. The privatization of Christian morality, which reflected in the teachings Aristotle, was Christianized by Thomas Aquinas, and found its way into the Catholic catechism and forms the curriculum of Christian morality transmitted from one generation to the other. It was within this individualistic atmosphere, intensified by the events of the reformation and the national sovereign states of the Christian west, allowing personal competence in the determination of right and wrong, that dominion within Catholicism was defined as non accountable and infallible, eventually manifesting itself in a Machiavellian-like principle where right and wrong is determined by might. Making its way into the African arena, this individualistic moral ethos displaced the traditional ethical system, where religion is so deeply interwoven

93 See Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologia, 1a, 2ae, xix, 5
into the fabrics of all aspects of life, as to nullify any demarcation between the sacred and the profane, introducing such dual classifications as church and state, religion and politics, moral life and societal life, etc. Spirituality was thus gradually robbed from the life of the African people and inserted into an institution (church), with a foreign ritual that does not connect to their social and cultural reality. The result is “a lopsided development of Christian moral conscience – a sensitive and often guilt-ridden individual conscience existing side by side with a collective conscience that is more or less amoral and insensitive.” Consequently, the gulf between ‘church life’ and ‘social life’ continues to widen.

African theologians have not been silent in the face of the above anomalies. Here, I evaluate the thoughts of some African scholars. The theologians (and the respective texts) considered below are carefully chosen, as they represent key voices in the areas of epistemological foundation, reconstruction, autonomy, and social ethics. These areas are integral to the vision of an ecclesiology that responds to cultural uniqueness and identity.

3.6 The Response of African Theologians: A Critique

3.6.1 Bediako: A Primal Imagination as Epistemological Foundation

According to Bediako, primal imagination is the abiding presence of the primal worldview ‘across a wide front, ranging from worshippers in a continuing primal religious system to Christian believers’…”.

Contrasting the mission success of Prophet Wade Harris and Cardinal Milingo with the unsuccessful mission carrier of Philip Quaque, he

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95 Theophilus Okere, “Christian Individualist Morality”, 123
argues that the primal worldview is a potential bedrock on which to construct African Christian theology. In fact, the ministry of Harris and Milingo typify what Bediako terms ‘the primal imagination’. Harris functioned within a spiritual universe that was both simple and complex, while Milingo’s theological ideas were structured on healing, exorcism, and pastoral cares, which incorporate the thought-patterns, identity, and perceptions that prevail in the primal worldview of African societies. For Bediako, Milingo and Harris demonstrate how primal imagination can transcend primal religions as a distinctive religious system. He describes the nature of the primal worldview according to the six-feature analysis of H.W. Turner, and draws attention to the ‘special relationship’ between primal religions and Christianity, demonstrated from the historical fact that Christianity has always thrived in the societies with primal religious systems (the Mediterranean world of the early Christian centuries, the tribal people of Northern and Western Europe, and the primal societies of Africa, the pacific, and parts of Asia). The interaction between the primal religion and Christianity, especially in a situation where the Christian thought has been fashioned by a worldview from which the living forces of the primal imagination seem to have been expelled, necessitates the question of the peculiar gifts that primal imagination might offer to Christianity. Accordingly, Idowu and Mbiti are criticized for attending only to one part of the spiritual universe of African primal religion in their haste to impose Christian categories. Creative Christian engagement with Africa must do so in the totality of the ambivalence of the primal imagination.

For Bediako, Christianity in Africa carries “a burden, a veritable incubus” namely: “a credible basis and satisfactory intellectual framework for African life”, and the problem of “an Africa uncertain of its identity poised between the impact of the west and the pull
of its indigenous tradition.”

As a point of departure for African theology therefore, Bediako believes that “the Christianizing of the pre-Christian tradition of Africa could be seen as one of the most important achievements of African theology” but “following the Christianization of African tradition, African Christianity must achieve the Africanization of the Christian experience.”

This Africanization, according to Bediako is a more demanding task, and is distinct from the indigenization already achieved within the independent churches. The issue therefore is no longer a religious matter, but an epistemological one of “how African Christianity, employing Christian tools may set about mending the torn fabric of African identity and hopefully point the way to a fuller and unfettered African humanity and personality.”

In order to address this problem, Bediako proposes a new outlook to African theology in recognition of Africa’s faith and confidence in the gospel of Jesus Christ: “…the new African theology will have to attempt what the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews did: that is to make room within an inherited body of tradition for new ideas, for new realities, which though seemingly entering from outside, come in to fulfill aspirations within the tradition, and then to alter quite significantly the basis of self-understanding within that tradition.”

Accordingly, Bediako considers African Traditional Religion not only as the very reason why Christianity has grown in Africa, but as a preparation for the Christian gospel. Consequently he urges African theologians to desist from regarding Christianity in Africa as foreign. Due to the translatable of Christianity, he opines, Christianity should be viewed not as a western religion, but a non-western one. This epistemological detour

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97 Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 4-5
98 Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 4-5
99 Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 5
100 Ibid., 84
must constitute the starting point of African theological discourse. Following Mbiti and Sanneh thus, he proposes a distinction between Christianity and the gospel: “We can add nothing to the gospel, for this is the eternal gift of God, but Christianity is always a beggar seeking food and drink, cover and shelter from the cultures it encounters in its never-ending journeys and wanderings.”

A fundamental problem with this perspective is the uncritical acceptance of the gospel as the eternal word of God in the sense that it supersedes any other ‘word of God’ in other cultures, such that space must be created within the African cultural heritage for the gospel to ‘come in to fulfill cultural aspirations’. The reluctance to consider the revelation of God in the African traditional religion as equal to other revelations, and the inability to establish same as a proper and separate foundation for African theology is an unconscious disregard that the ‘gospel’ is not cultureless. Indeed, the inability to distinguish bibliology and theology fueled in Protestantism by the sola scriptura mentality, and in Catholicism by the scripture/tradition heritage, prevents African theology from the possibility of redrafting and problematizing their relationship with the Bible as well as its place in African Christianity. Even Bediako who offers a constructive criticism of Kato’s bibliology and suggests multiple sources of theology nevertheless failed to question Kato’s hegemonic equation of the Bible with the word of God nor suggest that the other sources are equal to the Bible. Maluleke thus sees in Bediako ‘a diluted bibliology, diluted by the increase of sources, but a bibliology all the same.’

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101 Here, Bediako quotes Mbiti, see Kwame Bediako, Christianity in Africa, 117; also see John Mbiti, “Christianity and Traditional Religions in Africa” in International Review of Missions, Vol. 59, No. 236 (October 1970), 438
traditions to preparations for the Christian gospel is a veiled refusal to confront the possibility of African Traditional religions as independent systems, an implicit acknowledgment that the revelation of God through African institutions are sub-standard, thus needs the validation of the gospel. This way of evoking and dealing with African culture, according to Maluleke is “not only dishonest but in the end not really contributing to a new and better African Christian theology.” The suggestion that Christianity is not foreign is ineffectual and unreal because Africans continue to experience Christianity as alienating. Such proposition is an attempt to sweep under the carpet the fact the many Christian churches in Africa are still western in polity, theology, doctrine, and worship. In the end, by seeking to ‘employ Christian tools’ as the starting point of ‘mending the torn fabric of African identity’ Bediako may indeed be falling into the trap he seeks to extricate Africa: “giving Africa a past which could not in any real sense become fully theirs.”

3.6.2 Mugambi: From Liberation to Reconstruction

In his book *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Theology after the Cold War*, Mugambi explores the historical background to liberation theology in Latin America, North America, and Africa, and its biblical anchor on the exodus story of the Old Testament. He highlights the work of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), though condemns its “reactive” rather than “proactive” stance, and its choice of ‘Third World’, which he sees as an “ideological lag” that seems to also imply “third rate”. He goes on to describe the task of reconstruction as a theological paradigm.

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104 Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 237
Reconstruction derives from the engineering vocabulary, where an existing complex is modified by adding new specifications while retaining parts of the old, in order for the complex to perform the function for which it was intended. Mugambi searches the scriptures and discovers in the work of the Deuteronomists, Ezra and Nehemiah, and Jesus, the social application of the reconstruction paradigm. This theme is attractive to Mugambi for theological reflection in Africa because it “highlights the necessity of creating a new society within the same geographical space, but across different historical moments”. Levels of reconstruction include: personal, cultural, and ecclesial. The cultural aspect includes an ethical dimension concerned with the reconstruction of the value system, while ecclesial reconstruction branches off into the areas of management structures, financial policies, pastoral care, family, education, among others.

Seeking to make sense of the apparent contradiction in the fact that Africa is one of the most religious continent in the world, and at the same time the most abused in world history, Mugambi emphasizes that any society incapable of making and re-interpreting its own myth stands the risk of extinction. Africa is challenged to make a shift from the myth of a vanishing, desperate, and hungry people to that of a resurgent people capable of feeding itself. Under this lens, he argues that African Christian theology in the 21st century must be characterized by a shift from liberation to social transformation and reconstruction which involves discerning alternative social structures, symbols, myths, rituals, and interpretations of Africa’s social reality by Africans themselves. Africa seems to have made little progress many years after independence, thus, the colonial image of a dark continent must be replaced by a new one. If after the destructive events of World War II,

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106 J.N.K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, 15
107 J.N.K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, 40
the Christian message of hope and reconstruction enabled the emergence of successful civilizations from the ruins of war, Africa must follow same path in the 21st century making use of available and potential resources. The church has a central role to play. Mugambi underscores the inseparability between religion and life in the African heritage. European renaissance and reformation initiated a separation between church and state, and in the 20th century there exists an almost total detachment.

Examining the distinguishing factors of African religiosity today, Muganbi observes the central role of the bible, and the expectation that African Christians abandon their cultural and religious heritage. “In Africa Christians are not expected to publicly declare their faithfulness to their culture, although in other regions, the Christian faith is grounded in the respective cultures of the people”.108 In this light, Mugambi goes on to examine priorities for the African church and the challenges from the New World Order, observing that the wellbeing of a people depends on how the people are able to control their immediate and long term destiny within history. It is against this background that he discusses the future of the church, and Africa in the New World Order. Following the reconstruction model, he insists that “culture is alive when the people who have evolved it are determined to preserve the most basic elements while modifying the superficial aspects and incorporating new ones to maximize the chances of survival”.109

The fundamental problem with Mugambi’s reconstructionist vision is that he seeks to build his reconstruction of Africa on the basis of the Hebrew Scriptures (particularly, Ezra and Nehemiah). This might expose Mbiti’s influence on Mugambi as he (Mugambi) fails to read the text critically, even after calling for a critical reading of the biblical texts.

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108 J.N.K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, 144
109 Ibid, 180
A closer reading of the Ezra–Nehemiah narrative exposes its inefficiency for a theology of African reconstruction. Farisani states the problem succinctly:

Mugambi by using the reconstruction theme in Ezra-Nehemiah without isolating the ideological agenda of the text and identifying the group which is dominant in the text, has inadvertently identified reconstruction as that which is driven by returned exiles at the exclusion of the am haaretz.\(^\text{110}\)

In fact, given Farisani’s unveiling of the ideological bias in the Nehemiah text,\(^\text{111}\) it is obvious that Mugambi’s reading of the text is from a dominant, and not a marginalized perspective. It is difficult to see how a text poignantly lacking in hospitality that it exclusively identified the returned exiles as ‘Israel’, and as a result, advocated the oppression and suppression of the people of the land who had struggled through occupation, could be utilized to construct a theology aimed at facilitating Africa’s reconciliation and rebuilding. Accordingly, one could easily identify contradictions in the work of Mugambi. For instance, while Mugambi rightly condemns missionaries for demanding that Christian polygamists abandon their wives except the first, he nevertheless seeks a reconstruction that is based on the model that redefined the returned exiles in ethnic terms, and enjoined them to abandon their am haaretz wives; while Mugambi proposes reconstruction as a practice of the masses, he at the same time places African theologians among the elite; and while Mugambi reads the ‘signs of the times’, he however moves away from ‘the particular of coloniality and embraces a more macro-level theorizing, overestimating the significance of the post cold war era for ordinary Africans, and admitting no real change when it comes

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\(^{111}\) In addition to the above text, see also Farisani’s analysis in his essay titles “The Ideologically Biased use of Ezra-Nehemiah in a Quest for an African Theology of Reconstruction” in *Old Testament Essays*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (2002), 628-646
to poverty, wars, foreign demands, invasive foreign cultures and globalization’. 112

Consequent on the above inconsistencies, Mugambi’s myth of “resurgent” and “resilient”
people has been criticized as “superficial”, 113 “ideal dream, and “pure slogan”. 114
Mugambi’s reconstructionist predicament is not surprising since it is from an alien
narrative and on the basis of an alien history that he seeks to erect a theology of African
reconstruction. Similar to Bediako therefore, the uncritical urge to utilize a foreign history
couched as the “essentials of the gospel”, 115 lurks his reconstructionist vision in a thicket,
where the ideal of an African history that can stand on its own as a theological tool, is
unconsciously suppressed.

3.6.3 Uzukwu: Autonomy and Communion

Tracing a path for a theology of inculturation that embraces issues of change,
development and liberation, Uzukwu in his book A Listening Church: Autonomy and
Communion in African Churches, proposes that the reconstruction of Africa after the
devastating impact, and enduring consequences of slavery and colonialism must be
founded on African traditional heritage. At the center of his argument is that an African
ecclesiology based on the model of “family of God”, autonomy of local churches, service,
radical listening, and guided by the presence of the Spirit, will become a credible agent of
change when Christian life and theology emerges from the African context and is nourished
by local resources. Uzukwu observes that African communitarianism, with its inherent
democratic principles derived from its own resources is diametrically opposed to the

112 See Robert S. Heaney, From Historical to Critical Post-Colonial Theology: The Contribution of John S.
Mbiti and Jesse N.K. Muganbi (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2016), 177; see also the entire
chapter 6 which concentrates on the issue of coloniality and Mugambi’s theology of reconstruction.
113 Elelwani Farisani, “The Use of Ezra-Nehemiah”, 32
114 Valentin Dedji, Reconstruction and Renewal in African Christian Theology (Nairobi: Acton Publishers,
2003), 80
115 J.N.K. Mugambi, From Liberation to Reconstruction, 100

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present experience of tyranny and denial of democratic humane living. For the reconstruction of Africa therefore, Uzukwu argues that the relational notion of the human person should control the exercise of democratic and human rights. He distinguishes between the notion of person in the African and Western conceptions: ‘Relatedness’ and ‘belongingness’ as opposed to ‘individuality’ respectively, and argues for a creative marriage of both ideas.

Along the same line, Uzukwu insists that the rights and freedoms within the local and universal church must be fully respected. Using Cyprian’s understanding of Concordia, he argues for the local autonomy in the one church as a prerequisite for the church in Africa to bear effective witness to Christ in the world. For Cyprian, each bishop is sovereign over his church but in communion with the primal see of Peter (autonomy and unity). Observing that this model is in line with the New Testament experience, Uzukwu points out that the Western pattern of being church is an experience of a local church, and that the Roman program of centralization does not arise necessarily from the ministry of unity of the office of Peter. The emergence of a uniform ecclesiology of the West, sealed during the reform of Gregory VII was brought into sub-Saharan Africa during the colonial period. Uzukwu emphasizes that with the burden of a uniformist ecclesiology, the capacity of the local church in Africa to bear witness in her context as the one church of Christ is very limited. In fact, the redefinition of relationship, insists Uzukwu, implies the adoption of a necessary distance by the church in Africa towards the Latin patriarchate, though without prejudice to the primacy of the chair of Peter.116 In the same vein, the author totally rejects Western aids, which keeps Africa in perpetual dependency and distress. Western loans have turned

out to be a calculated attempt to keep Africa in dependency and mortgage the future
generations. While not exonerating African selfish and greedy leaders, he agrees that the
best aid the countries of the West can give Africa is to “leave us alone and take away with
them the dictators they imposed on us…”\(^\text{117}\) The church must also free itself from the
dependency syndrome. If ecclesial communities remain eternally beggars, Africa would
always exist to serve the interest of the West. He who pays the piper, dictates the tone, he
affirms.

Here the family of God metaphor (the image recommended by the African Synod of
1994), may be fully displayed for the emergence of an alternative society. Precisely, the
author identifies the caring and warmth, which characterize relationships in the family of
God. The mission of the church-family understood in terms of relatedness would enhance
communion between the churches of Africa and the west in new dimensions of defending
the weak, building a humane community where a human person is essentially human
because of other humans. Emphasis on relational dimension of the person will lead to
reconciliation, a reconciliation that is based on admission of guilt. Accordingly, while John
Paul II’s gesture is praised, Europe must follow suit for the sins of slavery and colonization.

The second element of the family of God indispensable for the transformation of the
world is ministry of service. Uzukwu believes that the style of ministry in the church is the
most eloquent testimony of the emergence of an alternative society in the face of
dictatorship, and the spirit of competition that characterize governance and business in
Africa and the world. The emphasis on the laity and SCCs in the 1994 synod is an indication
of a new kind of ministry where priests will be true servants and animators of the Christian

\(^{117}\) Elochukwu Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 71
community. The SCC and the principles of collaborative ministry are ways of living out the tradition of the church communion, leading the author to conclude that ministry in the church should be practiced in a collegial style involving all the segments of the community.\footnote{Elochukwu Uzukwu, \textit{A Listening Church}, 126} The place of the spirit is highlighted. The Spirit of Jesus in the church-community generates intimacy with God and creates favorable conditions for creativity. Aversion to autocracy leads Uzukwu to opt for the \textit{Manja} paradigm of leadership where the totem is the rabbit because of its ‘large ears’. The image of a listening chief favored is that in which authority is exercised fundamentally for the integral well-being of the community and that where authority is capable of mobilizing the community for integral development and achievement of its purposes. The centralization of authority in the church is a great weakness for the art of listening. The lack of comprehension between Rome and Africa on the issue of inculturation is an example. The model of a listening church fosters real decentralization and promotes intense listening to the spirit who is acknowledged as having initiative within the church and who mediates attentive listening among all the churches.

The model of a \textit{listening} church as proposed by Uzukwu is laudable. On the universal level, he argues, this model could be utilized to strengthen the autonomy of African churches without prejudice to the primacy of Rome, and both on the universal and local levels, he notes that the model serves as the opposite of the autocracy and dictatorship experienced within the church’s leadership. The model of listening as a solution for any system that breeds autocracy (including the Church) cannot be overemphasized. In fact, in
an address commemorating the 50th anniversary of the synod of Bishops on October 17, 2015, Pope Francis called for a listening model of the church:

The synodal church is a listening church, knowing that listening is more than feeling. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. Faithful people, the college of bishops, the bishop of Rome: we are one in listening to others and in listening to the spirit, the spirit of truth (Jn 14:17), to know what the spirit is saying to the churches (Rev. 2:7). The synod of bishops is the convergence point of this dynamic of listening conducted at all levels of the church.119

While this is encouraged, one thing that is however always ignored in the call for a listening church is the fact that the call remains on the level of exhortation, and mere admonition does not guarantee results. At the root of the abuse of ecclesial powers in the African churches is the alien operative power structure, which until dismantled, the call for collaborative service and broader listening could be ignored by the individual in authority. But if the structure is decimated, there will be no need for such exhortation since the value advocated will be contained in the very structure of authority. Indeed, Uzukwu points to the checks and balances within the Oyo empire system of administration. A deeper form of inculturation that moves from exhortation to structural change takes as imperative a dismantling of extant alien structures (especially structures at the root of abuse), and its replacement with new systems constructed out of African contextual values that could address the issues at stake. This effort might be compromised if the primacy of Rome as the “eldest” and “wisest” brother, who ‘listens to the will of the ancestors and to the conversations going on in the local communities’120 is essential to the kind of autonomy advocated, as it might happen that the ancestors of the eldest and wisest brother on the seat

120 Elochukwu Uzukwu, A Listening Church, 143
of Peter in Rome might be saying something fundamentally different from the local communities somewhere in West Africa. The sort of inculturation advocated by Vatican II is similar: by listening to African voices, Rome has permitted the gospel to be inculturated, but when it comes to areas of fundamental differences, especially in matters of doctrine and morals, the elder brother in his supervisory role becomes restrictive. Attention to the needs of the ‘elder brother’ might explain why the sort of family advocated by the 1994 African synod as a model for the Church in Africa is problematic (as will be discussed in the next chapter). Furthermore, it might be difficult to impose an African model on Rome (which Uzukwu suggests by asking Rome to be renewed by the African family organizational model), hence, the point here is that seen as equals in the experience of revelation, it is time for west Africa to utilize its values for ecclesiological structures totally independent of any restrictive or supervisory intervention.

3.6.4 Katongole: A Narrative Alternative to Christian Social Ethics

In his book *The Sacrifice of Africa: Towards a Political Theology for Africa*, Katongole proposes an alternative narrative for Christian social ethics in Africa. He takes as his point of departure, the fact that every politics is based on story and imagination. Stories are not just fictional narratives meant for entertainment, they are part of social ecology, defining values, possibilities and life. According to Katongole, the founding story of Africa inserted into modernity which imposed the nation-state, translates into abuse, violence, sacrifice of African lives and ultimately of Africa itself. He demonstrates how Europe’s imposition of the nation-state, destroyed indigenous identities, forced formally harmonious inter-tribal relationships to become inimical, leading to alienation from

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121 Elochukwu Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 143
African history, and cultural pauperization. Consequently Africans have internalized into themselves that they are incapable of anything except violence, failure, death and destruction. Katongole thus advocates a fresh conversation as opposed to a set of recommendations that presuppose the very narratives that are at the heart of the African problem.

The contradiction in the co-existence of vibrant Christianity and overwhelming hunger, civil wars, debt crises, violence, disease, and other social ills in Africa has led many African theologians into the temptation of what Katongole calls “prescription haste” which falls within three paradigms: spiritual, pastoral, and political. Katongole questions the validity of these paradigms, pointing out that they are based on the notion that Christianity is a ‘religion’, therefore distinct from the realm of politics. This is problematic because the self understanding of religion reduces the church’s role to the posture of reticence and total cooption, where it not only surrenders its own social vision but also uncritically assumes the same visions and patterns of life as those shaped through the determinative institution of nation-state politics.\footnote{Emmanuel Katongole, \textit{The Sacrifice of Africa}, cf. 29-84} The case of Rwanda is an obvious example. During the genocide, the Catholic Church in particular not only was unable to offer a significant resistance, it became the state’s most reliable partner in defending the Hamitic story. Killings took place within the churches, with Christians killing Christians. These contradictions show that there is something terribly wrong with the nation-state institution in Africa, yet the paradigms presuppose them, hoping that if the nation-state functions well, then, Africa’s problems will be solved.
Against this background, Katongole examines some attempts to move away from the “old formulas” and to invent the future of Africa, highlighting the ecclesiological components of the task. He evaluates the work of Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso. Sankara clearly understood that the plunder weaved into the fabrics of African modernity has its foundation in the colonial and neocolonial exploitation. He was therefore determined to take a different direction, and to invent a future based on the rehabilitation of self-image, bringing the people to the point where they can take charge of their destiny. Katongole identifies prophetic and priestly undertones in Sankara’s vision, which, for him reveals the place of theological praxis in the search for a new future in Africa. Yet, with the tremendous achievements of Sankara in Burkina Faso, Katongole believes that his work could not be sustained, because Sankara was impatient and his work lacked the necessary elements of memory, community, and story, elements that point to the church as uniquely positioned to bear the task of inventing Africa’s future. The work of Jean-Marc Ela whose social and pastoral context shaped both his methodology and the content of his theological reflection is also considered. Ela emphasized the need for an honest and critical look at the current model of church and Christian practice in Africa. Ela’s work confirms for Katongole the necessity of the church in shaping the future of Africa and changing the social imagination. A practical theology of ‘relocation’ is essential. A relocation that is not simply geographical but imaginative. The relationship between power, violence and Christianity is also highlighted in the story of Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart. A church capable of changing the future has to reflect a totally different account of power.

123 Ibid., cf. the second part of the book, 87-131
Having thus laid out the theoretical framework, he considers practical manifestations of the new future that Christianity makes possible using the examples of Bishop Paride Taban, Angelina Satyam, and Maggy Barankitse. Taban, inspired by the story of the Trinity, resigned his position as the Bishop of Torit and retired to a remote part of Sudan, among the most marginalized group, to start a Peace village as a way to overcome tribalism. His work demonstrates the concrete, historical, and local dimension of salvation. It is a “politics of incarnation”, and it models a church that locates itself in discarded villages devalued by the story of rejection, redeems them and makes them sacred. Angelina Atyam and the Concerned Parents Association manifest the story of forgiveness and reconciliation. For Maggy Barankitse, her experience of the evils of tribalism, violence and hatred led her to discover a different way of love. In her maison shalom ministry, strengthened by the Eucharist, she builds a bridge across ethnic groups demonstrating a new future made possible by the story of love. In the ‘revolutionary madness’ of these three, Katongole sees not only the Christian foundational story, but the church in its historical, incarnational and Eucharistic existence. Their stories, insists Katongole, reveal the type of church that is able to invent the future of Africa.

Katongole definitely provides a revolutionary vision for an African political theology at least on two counts. First he questions the prevailing paradigms of Christian social ethics, and offers a vigorously articulated critique of the foundation of the entire system, pointing out its limitations. Secondly, he proffers ideas that he believes could lead to fundamental change in the direction of African ecclesiology, which has the potentiality of reinventing the future of Africa. However, Katongole’s revolutionary theoretical ideas are not adequately matched by the suggested practical application of the envisioned future...
of African social ethics. Though framed in a different theoretical and ecclesiological perspective, it is unclear how the examples of Taban, Satyam, and Barankitse are radically different from the paradigms (especially pastoral and political) he challenges. Similar if not identical efforts that could be located within these challenged paradigms are going on in different parts of Africa. The problem here, I argue, is the lack of adequate foundational structure. Katongole attributes African crises to the foundational structures of modernity, and the challenged ‘prescription haste’ paradigms to the assumption that Christianity is a religion distinct from politics, thus uncritically presuming the structures of the nation-state institution in Africa. Katongole is right as the above foundations are alien structures, yet, by identifying the Christian foundational story, and the church in its historical and Eucharistic existence, as the basis for his proposed model, one wonders whether Katongole is not unconsciously and ultimately falling into the same presupposition that he condemns, viz: ‘if Christianity (founded on alien structures) functions well, then African problems will be solved’. In fact, reflecting on Katongole’s vision, Elias Bongmba wonders the level of impact the magnanimity of the identified individuals can effect if not strengthened by a political theology founded on adequate institutions and structures that must permeate the entire system.\(^\text{124}\) The point here is that African reconstruction cannot ignore the necessity of a different, traditional foundational structure for African ecclesiology on all levels. This is the task of the next chapter, as it seeks to utilize West African sacred space as manifested in her traditional institutional values, to construct appropriate foundational structure for West African ecclesiology.

Chapter Four
Retrieving the West African Sacred Space for Theology and Ecclesiology

4.1 Introduction

Central to our study in the first and second chapters is the fluid nature of God’s revelation in both ancient Israelite and African Traditional Religious scheme. In the family based religion of the patriarchs of Israel as evident in the Hebrew bible, God equally and validly reveals Godself, and is worshipped in a series of el deities: El-‘Elyon in Jerusalem (Gen. 14:19, 22); El-Bethel in Bethel (Gen.31:13;35:7); El-Olam in Beersheba (Gen. 21:33); El the God of Israel in Shechem (Gen. 33:20); and El-Ro’e in Negeb (Gen.16:13).¹ This phenomenon is also observed in the later pre-state Yahweh religion in certain scriptural syntagmata such as Yahweh in Hebron (2Sam. 15:7), Yahweh in Zion (Ps. 99:2), Yahweh Sabaoth in Shiloh (1Sam. 1:3), and through the inscriptions from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud we now also know of “Yhwh of Samaria” and “Yhwh of Teman”.² Here we see a peculiar understanding of divine selfhood, according to which a particular deity can produce many local manifestations in order to be present to its worshippers. This localized differentiation of Yahweh in accordance with God’s character is also evidenced in the revelation of Godself through different channels or bodies (heavenly, human or even inanimate elements).

The above theological consciousness is also expressed in the African traditional religious worldview where the devotion to a particular deity does not preclude the validity of other channels of divine manifestation. This is evident in the traditional value system that emphasizes a shared, reciprocal humanness. This phenomenon is adequately captured by the Igbo proverbial principle: *egbe bere ugo bere* (let the kite perch and let the eagle perch – live and let live), a principle that nets the contention of a fluid God, theologically built on the very nature of Godself and God’s revelation. Based on the fluidity of divine self-manifestation and revelation, it is the contention of this project that the West African sacred space is a valid site for divine revelation, thus suitable for constructing a contextual theology and ecclesiology without any need for alien validation.

This concluding chapter therefore sets out to establish the West African traditional values as a revelatory economy. Focusing specifically on the values of the political and family institutions studied in chapter two, I demonstrate that through those institutions, God reveals the Godself to West Africans as a just and loving God who cares about the dignity and wellbeing of his people. Just like the smooth integration of *El* and Yahweh in ancient Israel (an experience that was possible due to a fluid epistemic orientation), reclaiming the west African value based revelatory economy clears the path for contextual theological foundations for West African ecclesiology. I discuss how ecclesial structures could be founded on these values with a special focus on episcopal authority and gender issues. These structures while essentially different from the Roman model, do not compromise unity of faith in Jesus Christ and communion of God’s people in the universal church. This is possible because the fluidity model is able to uphold both revelatory economies as valid, albeit independent channels of divine self-communication. I examine
the relationship between revelation and fluidity, a model that is not absent from current Catholic doctrinal scheme, and practices, though has not been fully harnessed due to excessive orientation towards uniformity and theological triumphalism. I draw insights from Jean-Luc Marion’s phenomenology of givenness, and Walter Mignolo’s decolonial thoughts. The above help establish that a west African church life founded on west African theological values, and faith in Jesus Christ are not mutually exclusive. We begin by evaluating the prevalent theological foundations that have been touted for African theology, exposing their limitations for a context-based ecclesiology.

4.2 In Search for a Spatial Theological Foundation: Scripture, Doctrine, and Morals?

Scripture and tradition are considered normative in the formulation of theological principles, doctrines and morals within Catholicism. Catholic theology has always considered the Bible as central to the formulation of theological principles, at least on the theoretical level. The indispensable position given to the scriptures (which essentially narrates the history and experience of the people of Israel), as equal to the Word of God; Tradition, as the deposit of faith; and Jesus Christ, as the last of God’s revelatory acts (in the sense of a foreclosure to any other new revelation from God), confers a fundamental status on them for the Catholic theological enterprise. African theologians in their efforts at inculturation have also consciously or unconsciously espoused theories that remain faithful to the above. This uncritical equation of the Hebrew Scriptures with the highest form of the Word of God for all cultures, informs Sanneh’s and Bediako’s distinction between Christianity and the gospel, or what Mugambi prefers to call the “essentials of the
gospel.”³ Bediako accepts that Christianity may be foreign, and was indeed at the service of colonial and cultural imperialists, but he insists that the gospel was not. In his opinion, it is the failure to distinguish Christianity from the gospel that caused African theologians to be unduly “haunted by the foreignness of Christianity, and having started from that foreignness [were] never able to arrive at indigeneity.”⁴ Upon this premise rests the argument for translation and vernacularization⁵ for both Bediako and Sanneh.

In their view, what is been translated is the very Word of God, such that properly speaking, it is not translation that is taking place, rather God is translating himself, and making himself available in the mother tongue of the people, inspiring both the translator and the assimilator.⁶ This form of argument also governs the ideas of Mbiti for whom “nothing can substitute the Bible” whose light is absolute in the “search for meaningful answers”,⁷ and Mugambi who seeks African reconstruction on the basis of the Bible.⁸ While the above scholars are definitely aware that the bible does not contain blue print answers and solutions to religious questions, nor constitute the only subject matter of theology, they were unable to free their theologies from the entrapment that fundamentally equates the Bible with the Word of God, with equal universal validity. As a result, Mbiti reduces African Traditional Religion and culture as a preparation for Christianity; Mugambi encourages Africans to search for the biblical model that best speaks to their

³ J.N.K. Mugambi, From Liberation to Reconstruction, 100
⁴ Kwame Bediako, Christianity in Africa, 116
⁵ While Sanneh takes translation to mean more than “the narrow technical bounds of textual work”, the ‘translation movement’ is epitomized in the oft repeated translation of the scriptures from one language to the other, which Sanneh believes is tantamount to radical indigenization, see Sanneh, Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989), 3
⁶ Bediako develops this view in Kwame Bediako, Christianity in Africa, 116-123
⁷ John S. Mbiti, Bible and Theology in African Christianity (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 59 - 60
⁸ J.N.K. Mugambi, From Liberation to Reconstruction, 39ff
situation; Kato cannot admit of any African theology without biblical grounding since for him the Bible is the only source of theology; and Odozor condemns African theology for devoting much resources in articulating the African deep sense of the divine, and searching for African concepts of God, without paying attention to the biblical concept of God. In fact, Odozor insists on the basis of the bible, Pius XII’s *Mystici Corporis*, Vatican II, and western scholars such as Heinz Robert Schlette, Thomas Aquinas, and James Gustafson, that the starting point for any African theology must be the faith in Jesus as the only name through which salvation is offered to human beings.⁹

The problem with the above theological route is that it not only freezes God to a particular mode of self revelation, and empowers the constituting subject to determine and limit the manifestation of Godself, it also seeks to construct African theology on an alien space. It is a perspective that unreflectively considers the Bible as a pure, timeless, and cultureless document that has been unideologically appropriated. It suffices here to note that the bible has not only been the most preferred tool for arguments against African theology,¹⁰ but in itself contains passages that clearly endorse different kinds of oppression including slavery for which Africans are victims. The failure to problematize this reality has led African theologians and biblical scholars to devote a lot of resources apologetically seeking to reinterpret such inimical passages rather than plunging into African values through which God was, and is still definitely speaking to Africans. By equating the Bible with the Word of God on which African theology must be founded, African theologians continue to ignore certain traditional values that could be harnessed as a theological

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¹⁰ Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, “Black and African Theologies”, 11
foundation in preference for a different cultural value, albeit inimical, simply because it is entrenched in the bible. By so doing, a pure African value is substituted for a reinterpreted one that might not fit into the African cultural mode. Reflecting on why the bible so far has not been a viable weapon in the hands of the exploited black race in North America and Africa, Itumeleng Mosala opines that by accepting the Bible as the zero point with regards to the word of God, black theologians have mistakenly made the bible both an historical and harmonious book with one message for all people in all situations for all time. Yet in reality, this view of the Bible amounts to an endorsement of the view of the powerful on the Bible: “the insistence on the bible as the word of God must be seen for what it is: an ideological maneuver whereby the ruling class interests evident in the bible are converted into a faith that transcends social political, racial, sexual, and economic divisions”, 11 despite the fact that political, social, racial, sexual, and economic divisions are a reality in the bible. The African Christian is thus left with a selective reading of the bible, a situation that prods the mind to wonder why the entire bible should be equated with the Word of God if those who uphold it do not follow it to the letter. The craving for sure biblical foundation becomes a “dangerous form of naiveté” 12 as it falls short of restoring West Africans to their West African past, creating a theology that is bereft of memory and history.

The fluidity model of divine manifestation makes it clear that the valid revelation of God through the history of Israel as recorded in the scriptures does not in any way diminish an equally valid revelation through West African history and institutions. God also reveals Godself in West African history just as he does in Israelite history. Indeed African

11 Itumeleng Mosala, Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 18, also see, 13-19
12 Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, “Black and African Theologies”, 12
traditional religion and culture already contains, and continues to express God’s revelatory acts, providing essential raw materials that theologians could tap into as a sure foundation for West African theology, doctrine, and morals. Unless West African theologians take hold of this, alien ecclesial manuals will continue to be utilized for solutions to West African local pastoral problems, and inculturation will remain on the level of ‘translation’ and ‘vernacularization’. Undeniably, inculturation has done well in exposing the beauty of the African culture, but it needs to go deeper. A roman law translated into Yoruba language remains a Roman law in essence; a Roman canon translated into Akan, cannot fulfill the spiritual thirst of the Akan worshipper; an alien doctrinal statement translated into Igbo language cannot adequately address a local cultural problem, (as in the case of canon law versus local marriage customs noted in the previous chapter). The fluidity model calls on West African theologians to move beyond ‘translating’ and begin developing West African liturgical laws, doctrines, and morals from the raw materials available in the West African spatial revelatory repertoire. The model also serves as a basis to free inculturation from the shackles of doctrinal limitation that has nothing to do with divine will. We have already seen such raw materials in the traditional political and family structures. We now examine how these traditional raw materials can serve as foundational structures on which to construct a West African ecclesiology. We first establish the West African institutional values as an independent revelatory economy, hence an appropriate site for theology and ecclesiology.
4.3 West African Traditional Institutional Values as an Independent Revelatory Economy

Essentially, revelation is the initiative of God to communicate the Godself to humans. It is a free and gracious supernatural manifestation accepted in faith, which becomes constitutive to the theological enterprise. This divine self-communication cannot be separated from historical particularities, and their interpretation, hence revelation is exposed in hindsight, after a reflection on the events of history. These historical events, when taken as naked objective occurrences, do not disclose their own divine significance,¹³ but when identified and interpreted, the revelatory quality is uncovered. Throughout the biblical narrative therefore, the events of salvation history are identified and interpreted by prophets, priests, apostles, and evangelists. Accordingly, divine revelation as narrated in the Hebrew Scripture did not precede the events, it is rather a reflection, a ‘look back’ at history, and identifying certain events that manifest God, and the purpose of God to guide his people. Indeed, “the distinctive character of Israel’s history was that it was built around a series of disclosure situations, which through the activity of prophetic minds became interpretative of Israel’s historic destiny…”¹⁴ Christianity also rests on a series of such events as presented and interpreted in the scriptures. Seen from this historical/particular perspective, and in the light of God’s free will to manifest the Godself to all humanity, it becomes clear that not only is revelation accessible to all cultures, even non-biblical ones,¹⁵

¹⁵ After centuries of a triumphant outlook on divine revelation, the Catholic Church in Vatican II began to show some opening to this reality albeit cautiously. Nostra Aetate cautiously hinted that revelation lies at the root of non-biblical religions when it recognizes “a ray of truth” that in the teachings of such religions, (NA 2). Karl Rahner also argues for the revelatory character of non-Christian religions, myths, rituals, etc.
but, any attempt by a particular religion to freeze revelation within a particular ancient
deposit, or to disregard the limitations imposed by time and culture, and to absolutize or
universalize any disclosure within a particular historical space, would only result in the
religion’s continual loss of vitality and actuality.

Revelation is thus based on a communication between the divine world and human
cultures, whereby God desires to communicate directly or indirectly to humans in order to
give humans a glimpse of the divine domain, and the intention of God with regards to
human destiny. The revelatory context thus becomes the source of the group’s identity, and
the foundation for the establishment of community institutions and ethos. According to
John Thornton, revelatory information constitutes the “basic data used for constructing a
general understanding of the nature of the other world and its inhabitants (a philosophy), a
clear perception of its intentions for people to obey (a religion), and a larger picture of the
workings and history of both worlds (a cosmology).”\textsuperscript{16} This divine-human communication
could be accomplished through dreams, visions, divination, spirit-possession \textit{inter alia}.
Instances of these channels of divine revelation are present in the Hebrew scriptures and in
African Traditional Religion,\textsuperscript{17} but here, we pay closer attention to the phenomenon of

\begin{itemize}
  \item John Thornton, \textit{Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World: 1400-1800} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 238
  \item The Hebrew ancestor, Jacob renamed the city of Luz, and called it Bethel, after a dream in which god revealed the Godself to him as the god of his ancestors, assuring him of numerous descendants and divine protection. In the New Testament, it was through a dream that the angel of God revealed to Joseph that Jesus was conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 1:18-25) and to take the child to Egypt to escape persecution (Mt. 2:13). Biblical tradition therefore accept that the divine communicates to certain humans in the state of unconsciousness. African cultures also paid careful attention to dreams due to similar belief that “altered states of consciousness” provided access to the divine world. It is not uncommon for priests or some other special people to receive practical messages from the divine world, or communicate with dead ancestors in dreams, see John Thornton, \textit{Africa and Africans}, 242. Revelatory dreams are not just texts to be interpreted, they are also calls to action. Through the exchange with the divine or ancestral spirits, a response is demanded. God also communicates to humans through visions. In the Hebrew bible, God declares that “when there is a prophet among you, I will reveal myself to him in visions” (Numbers
\end{itemize}
spirit possession as it exemplifies our study of the fluidity model of divine self-manifestation. Spirit possession presents a direct revelatory channel, whereby a divine entity takes over a human, an animal or an inanimate object and communicates directly through the medium. The experience of ‘spirit possession’ is a crystal manifestation of a fluid divine selfhood, whereby God reveals the Godself in multiple bodies in order to communicate the divine will or simply to be present to the faithful. These divine multiple embodiments/possessions do not compromise the unity of the Godself. The Hebrew Scriptures, New Testament, Christianity, and African Traditional Religion abound with such revelatory experiences. A detailed study of such experiences in the Hebrew Scriptures, New Testament, and Catholicism has been carried out in chapter one. A brief recap is necessary here:

In Genesis 18, we see a vivid example of divine human possession. Yahweh appears to Abraham in a human body. While there was nothing special about the physicality of the visitors, one of them is clearly identified as Yahweh in verse 13 and 22ff, and divine intentions are made known to Abraham. Similarly, in Genesis 32:22ff Jacob wrestles with a being described simply as a man (אִישׁ), who later became אֱלֹהִים ('elohim), and imparts a

12:6). The book of Revelation is essentially an account of the visions of John through which divine messages were communicated to him. In the African scene, Thornton reports about the visions of Gold Coast priests and the king of Allada, see John Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 242. Divination is yet another medium of divine-human communication. Here, an activity (such as throwing specific cowry shells, or specially marked stones, on a designated surface) is performed, mostly by a diviner or priest. The divine world is invited to influence the results as to solve a problem, ascertain an innocent party, obtain favor for a devotee, or reveal the intention of God over a particular situation. This practice is not unknown in the Bible. The casting of lots, through which God revealed Mathias to the apostles as the divine choice for the replacement of Judas is not totally different. In Africa, the most famous form of this revelatory channel is the Yoruba Ifa divination. For a detailed study of Ifa divination, see, Jacob K. Olupona and Rowland O. Abiodun, editors, *Ifa Divination: Knowledge, Power, and Performance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), also see, William Bascom, *Ifa Divination: Communication Between Gods and Men in West Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

18 We have already studied this phenomenon in details in chapter one as it relates to the Hebrew Scriptures, New Testament, and Christianity. What follows here is a brief summary.
divine blessing. Jacob names the place Peniel because he saw אֱלֹהִָּֽים (‘elohim) face to face and his life was preserved (verse 30). It is obvious that the elohim here refers to the God later to be known as Yahweh, who can also be called מלאך (mal’akh) as the passage of Hosea makes clear: “by his strength he wrestled with אֱלֹהִָּֽים (‘elohim), he wrestled with מלאך (mal’akh) and prevailed, he wept and sought his favor, he met with him at Bethel, and there he spoke with him, he is יהוה (Yahweh) the God of hosts, יהוה (Yahweh) is his name” (Hosea 12:3-5). The above Hosea’s take on the experience of Jacob reflects the belief that the self of Yahweh can possess a human or heavenly body in order to ‘intrude into human reality’.19 The experience of Gideon in Judges 6:11ff is yet another instance where Yahweh takes possession of the body of a mal’akh in order to reveal divine intentions. The mal’akh who appears to Gideon in verse 11 suddenly becomes Yahweh in verse 14 and departs as mal’akh in verse 21.

With regards to divine possession of elements, the theophany in exodus 3-4 is ad rem. Here, Yahweh temporarily embodies an element (fire) to manifest himself, reveal his name, and deliver his message to Moses. Apart from fire, Yahweh can also take possession of trees. This is evident in Deuteronomy 33:16, where Yahweh is described as “the one who dwells in the bush” (רשון), and in Genesis 21:33, a scene in Beersheba where Abraham plants a tamarisk tree in order to invoke the name of Yahweh El-Olam. The experience and action of the patriarch Jacob in Genesis 28:10-19 and 35:14-15 presents a more vivid example, as it points to a ritual transformation of objects into Yahweh. In both passages, Jacob had revelatory experiences, after which he set up pillars of stone/massebah, poured oil on them and named the place בית- אלהים (Bethel). What is significant in these

19 See James Kugel, The God of Old: Inside the Lost World of the Bible (New York: Free Press, 2003), 34
instances is the ritual use of oil, and the fact that in Genesis 31:13 God identifies himself with Bethel, making his presence in the stone/massebah explicit: מַצָּבָּה (I am the God Bethel whom you anointed there in a pillar of stone). It is clear that the ritual action of Jacob transformed a mere stone into a divine dwelling. According to Philo of Byblos, “once Jacob anointed the stone, it was endowed with life.” Yahweh takes possession of the stone pillar in the form of an indwelling such that he becomes identical with it, a phenomenon also evident in Genesis 33:20, where Jacob sets up an altar and calls it “El the God of Israel”; Judges 6:24, where Gideon built an altar to Yahweh and calls the altar ‘Yhwh who is peace’. (שֵׁלֶם יְהוָה); Genesis 49:24, which refers to God as the “stone of Israel”; Exodus 24:4, where Moses erects twelve massebot; Joshua 4:20, where Joshua erects twelve stones; and Joshua 24:27, where Joshua sets up a large stone under the oak in the sanctuary, and the stone is said to have “heard” (שְׁמָעַה) all the words. The abundance of ‘spirit possession’ passages in the Hebrew Scriptures has attracted the attention of modern scholars, as they demonstrate a fluid conception of divine revelation through which God is free to reveal the Godself in several bodies without

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20 In biblical, Canaanite and Mesopotamian texts, anointing with oil was transformative, it brings about a change in status. For instance, one’s status could automatically change from ordinary to a king or a high priest after being anointed with oil. In the light of the mis pi ritual in Mesopotamian where oil transforms a stone pillar, see, Daniel Fleming, The Installation of Baal’s High Priestess at Emar: A Window on Ancient Syrian Religion (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 17,52.

21 In chapter one, we examined in details the attempt by scholars to modify this and similar passages, attempts that actually reinforce the argument that the boundary between Yahweh and the elements in question was indistinct, and it shows the failure of the modifying scholars to appreciate the tendency of Yahwist/Elohist verses to view some stones as incarnations of Yahweh according to which some altars are simply stones, and God frequently manifests Godself in altars (cf. judges 6:20; 13:19; Genesis 12:7).

22 Cited by Benjamin Sommer, The Bodies of God, 49.

23 With regards to mal’akh for instance, James Kugel in his exegetical analysis, considers mal’kh as “God himself”, see The God of Old: Inside the Lost World of the Bible (New York: Free Press, 2003), 34; Richard Elliot Friedman sees it as “emanation of the Godhead”, see The Dissapearance of God: A Divine Mystery (Boston: Little Brown, 1995), 12-13; and Elliot R Wolfson considers it as an “incarnation of God”, see Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 63-64; also see the commentary of Nachmanides on Gen. 18:1.
been limited to those bodies. These texts suggest that sacred stones, shrines, and sacred
trees were regarded as legitimate embodiments in some Yahwistic circles in ancient Israel,
and that the conception of fluid divine selfhood found in Canaan and Mesopotamia were
also known among Yahwistic Israelites. Indeed, the notion that God is incarnate in altars
or stones, or cultic objects seems to be hard wired in the Israelite consciousness such that
even the zealously Yahwistic 8th century Hosea associates stone pillars with legitimate cult
(Hosea 3:4), a phenomenon that demonstrates the impossibility of invoking God among
Yahwistic Israelites “without an object in which he could become physically present”.

The New Testament and Christian tradition also accept ‘spirit possession’ as a valid
form of divine revelation. Indeed, the very idea of the incarnation (the climax of Christian
revelation) presents a Christian form of the belief in multiple divine embodiments. In this
theology, as adequately expressed in the λόγος hymn that opens the Johannine gospel (Jn.
1:14), God took the human body, he became flesh (Καὶ ὁ Λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο), and dwelt
among us, localizing Godself on earth (καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν), while simultaneously
retaining his place in heaven. The theology of the Trinity presents even a more palpable
example of the persistence of the fluidity model in the Christian thought. This theology
understands the oneness of God from the perspective of three distinct persons, equal in

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24 While prophet Hosea condemns stone pillars, altars and ephod (see also 10:1-2), Sommer argues that it is
not because he views any of them as inherently problematic. The parallel these verses draw between stone
pillars and unquestionable legitimate objects such as the altar (and legitimate institution such as the
kingship) shows that Hosea did not regard the stone pillars as inherently unacceptable, rather he condemns
the fact that sinful people use them. This is comparable to the condemnation of sacrifices, an admirable
practice that becomes unacceptable when performed by evildoers. On the other hand, Hosea protests
treating statues of calves like sacred objects, it is most probable that he refers to the calves of Dan and
Bethel set up by Jeroboam (cf. Hosea 13:2 in relation to 1Kings 12:28-29). “Thus Hosea seems open to the
notion of divine embodiment in nonrepresentational objects such as pillars and poles but not to the notion
of divine embodiment in representational sculptures”. Sommer, The Bodies of God, 52. Also cf. Tryggve
Mettinger who shows that Canaanites and Arameans accepted divine incarnation in pillars and other earthly
objects but with minimal production of sculptors of their gods. Tryggve Mettinger, No Graven Image?
Israelite Aniconism in its Ancient Near Eastern Context (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1995), 135-197
25 Benjamin Sommer, The Bodies of God, 49
dignity and majesty. Indeed, the idea of Trinitarian perichoresis (mutual indwelling of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) underscores that the very notion of the Christian God is fluid. According to Sommer, “the trinity emerges as a fairly typical example of the fragmentation of a single deity into seemingly distinct manifestations that do not quite undermine the deity’s coherence”. Christian biblical commentators including the church fathers of the early centuries therefore do not hesitate to connect the trinity with Genesis 18 (Abraham’s three visitors), which represents a typical example of the fluidity of divine selfhood as already examined. The idea of ‘three persons in one God’ thus presents a similar tendency in the Yahwist juxtaposition of singular and plural in the Gen. 18 narrative. It crystallizes the idea of God entrenched in the fluidity model which nullifies mathematical numerical logic in the conception of the divine. Thus, conceived within the fluid schemata, the Christian God can therefore take possession of animals or elements as a phenomenon that flows from the very nature of the Godself. Accordingly, after the baptism of Jesus, the Holy Spirit came down like a dove upon him. Luke tells us explicitly that the Spirit came down “in bodily form, as a dove” (καὶ καταβῆναι τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἁγιον σωματικῷ εἴδει ὡς περιστερὰν ἐπ’ αὐτόν –Luke 3:22). Here we see an instance where the Holy Spirit takes possession of the body of a dove in order to indicate divine presence and validation. Catholicism’s theology of trans-substantiation also presents a startling instance of the persistence of the ancient scriptural belief in divine self-fragmentation, and spirit possession of elements. According to this theology, when a priest utters the words of consecration, ordinary bread changes in substance and becomes not just a sign, but the real body of Jesus Christ. Here, a deity embodies an inanimate element in such a way that the

26 Benjamin Sommer, The Bodies of God, 132
27 See for instance, Augustine, On the Trinity, Book II, Chapter 10
element becomes identical with the deity, and could rightly be adored. The ‘real presence’ theology is therefore reminiscent of Jacob’s masseba that became el after Jacob performed the ritual of anointing. Accordingly, just as the Israelite God took possession of earthly elements and became present in many bodies on earth as the Israelites anointed sacred poles, stones, etc., so too the catholic God takes possession of earthly elements (bread and wine), and becomes present in many locations wherever the Eucharist is celebrated.

African experience is not alien to this form of divine revelation. In fact, spirit possession of human persons, objects, and shrines are religious realities in Africa. This reality, while analogous to the above scriptural and Christian revelatory scheme, was condemned by Europeans and early missionaries as diabolic, requiring exorcism. In the case of human possession, an ‘other-worldly’ being enters into, or takes control of the body of the chosen person, speaks through the person’s voice, and sometimes engages in a conversation. Typically, the human medium enters into a trance or a state of semi-consciousness that has been induced through ritual drumming, dancing, and/or singing. During this experience, the divine being, the spirit of an ancestor, or the spirit of the dead embodies the medium and communicates divine intentions with regards to a particular situation in the community, or gives an answer to a particular question. The gods are in absolute liberty to take possession of any human body temporarily but continuously, thus transforming the person into a servant or spokesperson for the god, or of the Supreme Being.

In Ghana for instance, when an Ashanti god takes possession of a human medium, the

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28 see John Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 243
29 We note here that in African Traditional Religion, the experience of divine possessions is usually from spirits and deities, not from the Supreme Being as with the Hebrew and Christian experience. However, there is a “spiritual link” between the spirit and the possessed, or the servant, such that the possessed can communicate with, and relay messages directly from the Supreme Being as in the Diola Religion. Also in the Diola religion, Emitai (the Supreme Being) selects certain individuals with whom He communicates directly and reveals moral teachings, instructions about new spirit shrines, and solutions to community
person begins to manifest unusual behaviors that might be considered madness. A priest is then consulted to determine that it is a genuine case of spirit possession whereupon a brass shrine must be built as a dwelling place for the deity. Appropriate rituals are then performed to transform the possessed into a priest and servant of the deity. Divine intentions with regard to the community, or individuals who come to the shrine to seek counsel are communicated through the priest who becomes possessed when he stands in front of, or behind the curtain covering the doorway of the shrine.30

Apart from humans, spirit possession of earthly elements as a channel of divine-human communication is also a significant revelatory experience in West Africa. Shrines present a vivid example. Like the biblical instances, shrines could be natural – trees, forest grooves, and large rocks, or man made, as in the case of buildings or objects ritually arranged and stuck into the ground. These objects could be carved images and figures of gods, spirits, and ancestors, or symbols that represent the god for whom the shrine is dedicated. These symbols in some cases become embodiments of the god after the appropriate ritual is performed by the competent person. The Yoruba Ogun shrine is an example of this phenomenon. As the god of iron and war, iron is the essential element in the Ogun shrine. The shrine could consist of two bars of iron put together and stuck into the ground. When consecrated by the pouring of palm oil, the iron becomes Ogun,31 reminiscent of Jacob’s ritual anointing of pillars of stone into Yahweh, and Catholicism’s ritual transformation of bread into Christ. Accordingly, shrines as sacred spaces do not

30 For details, see Benjamin Ray, “African Shrines as Channels of Communication” in African Spirituality, 32
merely serve as the loci of ritual activities and sacrificial offerings, they are concrete communicative channels between the divine and the human universe, offering worshippers the opportunity to practically experience the nearness of their gods. Indeed, the shrine becomes a spiritual world within the terrestrial world where worshippers can experience ultimate salvation and rebirth into the world of saved ancestors and back again as in the case of the Bwiti cult among the Fang of Gabon.\textsuperscript{32} According to Benjamin Ray, “every shrine is therefore a bridge between divinity and humanity whose convergence at the shrine brings moral and spiritual benefits to the human community….in this way people may identify closely with their gods, and professional mediums may also communicate the words of the gods directly to the people”\textsuperscript{33}

When these revelatory instances are assembled and interpreted, they are then transformed into cosmologies, moral codes and societal institutional patterns. Thornton notes that both Christianity and African traditional religion are constructed in the same way – through philosophical interpretation of revelations. The difference between the two is that while Christianity constructed its interpretation of revelation in a closed, rigid scheme, creating orthodoxy and a strong clerical institution with political power whose interpretation of revelation could not be challenged, African revelation was constructed to remain flexible and open to the addition of new data that require validation, hence no priest could universally impose his interpretation of revelation, control their arrival, or institutionalize them.\textsuperscript{34} Thornton captures this phenomenon so well when he describes the

\textsuperscript{32} For details on the Bwiti cult experience, see Benjamin Ray, “African Shrines as Channels of Communication” in \textit{African Spirituality}, 33

\textsuperscript{33} Benjamin Ray, “African Shrines” 26

\textsuperscript{34} Whereas the rigid and closed revelatory scheme of Christianity constrained followers to comply even when there are doubts about the reality of the clergy’s claims, the open revelatory scheme of the African Traditional Religion required priests to validate their capacity to receive and transmit revelation. Thus if a particular priest no longer provided adequate spiritual answers when needed by the community, the priest is
Christian revelatory scheme as “discontinuous” encapsulated in the person of Jesus Christ and enshrined in the Bible, and the African revelation as “continuous”.\(^3^5\) In a continuous revelatory scheme, “the religious universe is not given in all-encompassing discontinuous revelations received at great intervals and carefully recorded either in writing or in oral tradition for posterity, but rather is a constantly updated picture of the other world, which is perceived as being in a state of flux”.\(^3^6\) This form of revelation finds a concrete expression in the fluidity model of divine self-manifestation as has been highlighted in this study. Within this model, the human person is drawn into the mode of God’s own existence in such a way that human institutions replicate the nature of God and the divine world. A reflective hindsight into the West African space as studied in chapter two reveals such replication. We studied how the nature of a just Supreme being (expressed in God’s aversion to autocracy and its abuses) is reproduced in the structures of the west African political and domestic institutions.

Within the religious worldview, as expressed in the various creation mythologies, a Supreme Being who freely decides to initiate the divine-human romance is discerned. Here, God reveals the Godself as both transcendent and immanent supreme being who creates and sustains the universe in the mode of shared omnipotence with the deities; a supreme being who reveals the Godself in a special way to certain specific humans, and provides special powers to them, yet, could also be invoked directly in times of serious calamity; a supreme being who can manifest the Godself in multiple objects and spaces without subject to rejection. This served as a form of checks and balances for the revelatory agents. See, John Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 246-248

\(^{35}\) For an elaborate discussion, see John Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 246-262

\(^{36}\) We note here that a fairly stable and coherent cosmology is possible within the African religious worldview. While the cosmology may not change over time once established due to a set of revelations that define the relationship between the divine and human worlds, a continuous revelatory scheme makes room for malleability. See John Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 250-251
compromising the divine unity; a supernatural, yet active supreme being whose active involvement in the universe does not deny the operational autonomy of the divinities, allowing a free flow of relationship between the spirit-bound and the earth-bound, and establishing a triad connectivity of God-Land-Identity. The value enshrined in divine shared omnipotence, becomes a tool for divine justice, which models the West African political and domestic institutions. These institutions with their ingrained structures of checks and balances, which make dictatorship and unimpeded abuse of authority impossible, become significant moments in the revelatory acts of God to West Africans.

In the Oyo kingdom as we studied in chapter two for instance, we see this political institutional manifestation of the interpretation of the revelation of God’s opposition to autocracy. Here, in line with the African ‘continuous’ revelatory scheme, divine revelation is not frozen in the royal will, rather, revelation remains open, hence, both divination and spirit possession are not only ritually imbedded into the political system as a means of checks and balances, they are also part of the wider structures of community life. For instance, while the king is considered a companion of the gods, god’s continued purpose for the kingdom is communicated through the cult of the Iyamode, the Ifa priest, and during the Orun festival, the Bashorun.

Checks and counter-checks thus take up a ritual form. The Iyamode is in-charge of the Bara (royal mausoleum) where she continually worships the spirits of deceased kings and calls out their egungun (masquerades, spirit forces). As the worshipper of the deceased ancestors, the Iyamode embodies the spirits of the Alafin’s fathers and forefathers. She is surrounded by other bara priestesses, who remain celibate for life. These priestesses are occasionally possessed by the spirit of the dead monarchs during which they prophesy to
the king and stipulate appropriate sacrifices to avert an impending danger. These dangers could be the result of a royal departure from the stipulations of his forefathers. The *bara* cult controlled by the *Iyamode* thus becomes one of the spiritual/ritual avenues for checking the excesses of the king.

The annual Orun festival (festival of the heavenly mysteries) is yet another revelatory avenue to ensure that the power of the king is exercised within the limits of acceptable norms. Here, god communicates his divine will through the Bashorun (literally Iba Osorun – the Lord who performs the heavenly mysteries). It is at this festival that the *Alafin’s* fate with regards to his continued reign is determined. The *Bashorun* performs divination with kola nuts to ascertain whether the king is still acceptable to the celestial beings. If rejected by God (an action that presupposes prior rejection by the nation due to tyrannical unacceptable actions by the king), he is to die. This festival as it were, is a yearly ritual evaluation of the conduct of the king.37 The divinatory aspect of this ritual removes the actions from mere human acts, and places it in the realm of the divine, symbolizing the involvement of God in the wellbeing of his people through the self communication of the intents of God’s will.

Similarly, in the family sphere, the complexity of the dual-sex system manifested within a genderless cultural milieu, structured on a consanguine orientation, ensuring that humans are neither sexualized nor subordinated, deploys yet another institutional manifestation of the revelatory interpretation of a caring and just God. Under the dual sex system, as we studied in chapter two, authority is structured along two parallel lines of male and female domains of influence. These spheres are independent, yet complementary.

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37 We have detailed in chapter two how the system ensures that the power of the bashorun is not abused. It is a system of checks and counter-checks.
Accordingly, authority is highly distributive, flexible, and inclusive, dismantling the kind of power monopoly that fuels dictatorship. According to Agbasiere, in the typical African community, “authority is not vested solely in an individual but is held collectively.” 38 Here, it is clear that the exercise of authority is vested more in the lineage than in the family unit, ensuring accountability, and bringing the family into life. In the Igbo communities for instance, the umuada and umunna are able to manage their affairs separately, act as checks and balances for each other, act collaboratively to make decisions in matters of grave importance to the family, and contribute positively to the overall good of the lineage. This dual-sex system is predicated on a non-gendered principle, hence the absence of superordinate/subordinate features which the concept of gender generates. In the Igbo instance, this idea blossoms in the conceptualization of the identity of a woman as ada rather than wife. The ‘wife’ status, with its subordinate connotation and patriarchal ideology where the male (husband) is placed over the female as the head of the family system is superseded by the ada-epistemology, which makes a woman a constitutive part of the consanguine family system, substantiating a parallel system that equally affirms both daughters and sons and allows them to assume substantive and functional identities within the family. 39 This ada- ideology together with the traditional concept of motherhood (nne in the Igbo case as detailed in chapter two), confers a status of “immense powers” emanating from various cultural representations especially that of the bearer of life. Life is

39 The practice that denies lineage rights to women is based on the erroneous supposition that their marriage has extinguished their lineage entitlements to family properties. This epistemic model that considers women from the ‘wife’ perspective is anchored on the conugality model that permanently locks women into a sexualized identity that places them in a subordinate sphere. Conversely, the consanguinity model corresponds more to a dual-descent structure of family in which daughters or sons are equally valued, see, Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu, Family Matters, 37.
central, as such the bearer’s powers are ritualized. Accordingly, the *usokwu* (mother’s residential sphere) and *omumu* (the principle of fertility and reproductive power) constitutes the nodal point in the lineage network where the exclusive power of mothers to grow the lineage is manifested. Nzegwu is apt: “the autonomy and power of mothers in affinal families derive from their control of spiritual powers and rites that lie at the heart of fecundity and procreation. As bearers of children, these powers are vested in them and fall under their jurisdiction”.\(^40\) The traditional dual-sex system thus becomes a channel through which sexualization and subordination of the human person is rejected, expressing the divine will that upholds the worth and dignity of every member of the family, while accommodating biological differences. Within this space therefore, just like the pre-state fluid Israelite space, God reveals the Godself as a caring and just God, connected to the welfare and interests of his people.

Within the operational mode of the above West African institutions, the disclosure of the Godself as caring and just, and a value-based revelatory economy,\(^41\) could be discerned. Faithfulness to the values that God has established within these institutions, safeguards the protection of the dignity of every creature (male, female, unborn, dead, environment), guarantees harmony between the divine and human communities, and assures a fulfilled existence after death, experienced not only in the spiritual world but also in the community of the living. When the human person attempts to destabilize the triad connection by evil acts, the harmony is disturbed and the individual and community suffers. Such human evils are not unknown in the West African revelatory space. We have already

\(^{40}\) Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu, *Family Matters*, 52

\(^{41}\) This project does not consider the wide spectrum of the West African value-system. The focus rather is on the political and family values as studied in chapter two.
highlighted two of such periods that call for intense reflection: the periods of slavery and colonialism. Within these periods, West African cultural values were distorted by both foreigners and African agents. The values of God’s revelatory acts were either ignored, or condemned, or even replaced. The triad connection was separated, and West Africa still suffers from the evils of this triad separation. In the face of coloniality, dictatorships, moral anomalies, ecclesial and secular abuse of power, and dictatorial exercise of authority, God continues to call West Africans to her original relationship with the divine, and to take hold of their discarded sacred space for meaningful reconstruction. Theologically therefore, this independent consideration of the West African revelatory economy allows for the valid construction of ecclesiological structures on the West African value system.

The immediate question that confronts an independent consideration of the African revelatory space however, is how to incorporate the faith in the person of Jesus Christ, as to ensure a theology that is both African and Christian. Here we find a delicate dilemma, in the face of which African theologians have fallen into the epistemological compulsion to impose Christian categories as foundational to African theology, unconsciously diminishing the equal validity of the African revelatory space, and ultimately failing to extricate Africa from the anomalies of an imposed alien scheme. Seeking to develop a theology and ecclesiology founded on the structures of an African revelatory space without diminishing the faith in Jesus Christ, the fluidity model cuts the Gordian knot. Here, we find the meeting of two equally revelatory truths, a situation akin to the experience of the people of Israel during the initial encounter with Yahweh and the process of the fusion of El and Yahweh as anti-domination gods. It was the fluidity mind-set that guided the smooth

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42 Some of whom were evaluated in chapter three
integration of the *El* religion, and the god, Yahweh, such that nowhere in the Old Testament, even among the most conservative prophets, do we find any polemic against the god ‘*El*.

We have already detailed this process in chapter one, a brief recap of the scenario is however necessary: ‘Having encountered *Yhwh*, the mountain god of southern Palestine (known for his opposition to domination) through Moses, the exodus group brought *Yhwh* to the pre-yahwistic Israelite group already settled in Canaan, but who at the time, existed as a marginal group within the Canaanite society. The god *El*, who previously had been regarded by the marginal Israelite peasant/shepherd population as a symbol of their liberation movement was a god of the west Semitic pantheon. As the king of the gods, he was probably at its head, but nevertheless remained involved in the divine world which was also worshipped in the Canaanite city states. As a result, he has functioned as a symbol of opposition to oppression and domination only to a limited degree. This was precisely where the god Yahweh whom the exodus group brought with them from outside was different. He was a solitary god of the southern wilderness, not integrated into the polytheistic system, who specifically and exclusively bound himself to a lower-class group and proved his divinity specifically in the liberation from the state of oppression. As such he was well positioned to become the god of a tribal alliance which secured for such groups freedom from dependence. Yahweh was thus quickly taken over by the other tribes of the alliance as a welcome reinforcement of their world of religious symbols’.

What we see here is a case where the tribal alliance welcomed *Yhwh*, who though was outside of the Palestinian pantheon, had functional qualities that resonated with their situation, and integrated him with their local god. This smooth integration was possible

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because of the fluid orientation which characterized the concept of God at this period of Israelite history. This conceptualization upheld the equally valid, even if independent revelation and manifestation of God through different channels. Thus, the adoption of Yhwh did not nullify the indigenous institutions founded on the El-religion. Accordingly, the tribal alliance still functioned on the flexible exogamous family (אֲבֵ֥ית - father’s house), and endogamous clan (מִשְפָּחָה) system of political organization founded on the El-religion, without compromising their faith in Yahweh. The structures of the El-religion safeguarded two important values for the Israelites at the time: a form of decentralization, where fundamental social norms were handed down through clan ethos, and minimal social differentiation, which informed their deliberate political option that is both opposed to domination and geared towards the welfare of the people. These structures were operative even as an ‘outside’ god was adopted due to a common liberative ideal. The point here is that the fluidity orientation was able to uphold El-based theological structures on which the religious and political lives of the people were founded, and faith in Yahweh in a constructive balance. Faith in Yahweh did not compel the adoption of the same political, religious, disciplinary, and moral codes of the Midianites who introduced Moses to Yahweh. In fact, the opposite was the case: Yahweh was adopted and appropriated along the lines of what was obtainable in the El-religion. El as a family god was functionally related to the needs of small groups, leading to cultic, local and functional differentiations. When Yahweh (a god of a larger group) was adopted, he was also appropriated into diverse forms according to various local cult traditions that were taken up and developed at the individual sanctuaries. Thus, just as the god El was worshipped in different forms in different sanctuaries, so too was Yahweh. With the fluidity orientation as a hinge, it is
noteworthy that neither did the above ‘poly-Yahwism’, nor the formation of the very identity of Israel with the divine name el (Isra-el) rather than Yahweh, jeopardize the unity of Israel as God people.

A similar merge/assimilation of revelatory contexts is also noticed in the West African setting, where its open, continuous revelatory worldview, anchored on a fluid orientation, allows for smooth integration. An instance, already highlighted in chapter two is the adoption of the egungun and ifa cults in Oyo kingdom. The egungun was originally from Nupe, while the ifa was introduced from Awori town of Ota in Southern Yorubaland, by the mother of Alafin Onigbogi. Since the god ifa was known for his assistance in the defeat of one’s enemies, Onigbogi’s mother (who had left Oyo to her native place, Ota during the previous reign) returned to Oyo when her son ascended the throne bringing the cult of Ifa, with the hope of helping her son achieve a long and prosperous reign. She asked her son to adopt Ifa as the national deity, but after going through the requisite offerings and requirements for propitiation, the Oyo citizens rejected the offer. It was not until the sack of Oyo (which led to the death of Onigbogi), when the Oyo people became refugees in the strange land of Bariba, that they began to interpret their misfortune as a result of the rejection of Ifa. After a period of ill treatment from the Baribas, the young prince Ofinran rallied his people together and decided to head back to their land, Oyo. When they got to a place called Kusu, they encamped there in order to complete their strategic planning. Here at Kusu it was decided that Ifa be accepted, hence delegates were sent to Ota for Ifa priests. Thus were the Alafin and the people introduced to the mysteries of Ifa. Ifa was then adopted

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as one of the gods of the land. The name of Onighogi’s mother, Aruibga (calabash bearer) was adopted as the name of the carved wooden bowl in the form of a woman bearing a calabash used in ifa ritual. Law suggests that the essential historicity of this tradition should not be denied. Also, here at Kusu (on the hill Sanda), the mystery of the Egungun cult was made known to the king’s head slave, Saha. The Nupe priests who had joined the returnees, enlightened the Yorubas on the mysteries of Egungun, and the cult was officially adopted. Together with the Egungun and Ifa incidents, the Igboho period characterized a very important phase of the formative period of the Oyo people. This period saw the foundation of important new towns due to population movements as a result of the Nupe and Bariba invasions. For instance, Kusu and Igboho remained considerably big and important cities even after the Alafin moved back to Oyo. Oyo tradition attributes the recovery of Oyo kingdom to the introduction of these two important religious cults - the Egungun cult of masquerades representing the spirit of deceased ancestors, and the cult of Ifa, the god of divination.

The above exposes an integration of two revelatory contexts, where the terms of integration rest with the host context. Thus, the adoption of ifa and egungun did not destabilize the Oyo institutions founded on the values of the host revelatory context, rather, just like the El/Yahweh scenario, they were appropriated according to local religious cosmology. The Ifa for instance was welcomed not as the national deity as originally requested by Onigbogi’s mother, but as one of the gods of the land. Accordingly, in keeping with African ‘open’ revelatory imagination, both Ifa and Egungun came into the Oyo revelatory universe to ‘add’ not to eliminate, to ‘enrich’ not to replace.

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45 Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 44
46 Igboho was a temporary royal capital during the second dynasty, cf. Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 40, 44
This sort of smooth integration was not the case with the entrance of Jesus Christ into the African indigenous religions. Here the fluidity orientation of the African religious universe, which assures hospitality to other revelatory contexts was not utilized as an integration tool, rather the new revelatory scheme was imposed. Due to the lack of fluidity mind-set, it became necessary to condemn the indigenous value system, and to replace it with new structures. It thus became increasingly difficult to separate faith in Jesus Christ from the ecclesial structures that govern church life. As a result, the question of how to integrate ‘faith in Jesus’ in the project of inculturation became a paralyzing impasse. African theologians therefore presuppose or advocate alien structures or alien histories enshrined in biblical revelation as foundational in the process of inculturation, as if without such structures, ‘faith in Jesus’ cannot stand. This problem disappears into the thin air if the fluidity model is taken seriously. Here, the West African revelatory economy is considered as independent and equally valid as the Christian revelatory economy in Jesus Christ. Jesus is thus welcomed into the West African context and appropriated according to indigenous revelatory norms. Revealed and appropriated as rigid and closed in the western Christian scheme, he enters into the West African and becomes ‘open’. He becomes open to the already valid revelations contained in the institutional and moral values of the host context. Jesus then becomes a vital addition to the salvific patterns of God’s revelatory acts to West Africans without invalidating their cultural values and way of life. Accordingly, it becomes possible to construct the African Christian life on doctrines, morals, legal codes, liturgies, and administrative legacies founded on African values, which, though independent and different from Roman structures, neither compromise the unity of faith in Jesus Christ, nor destabilize communion of God’s people within the universal
church. The fluidity model is able to hold faith in Jesus as the Christ, and an equally valid West African revelatory economy, without compromising any, such that it is no longer necessary to force African Christians to express their faith based on western structures, nor follow incompatible doctrinal and moral codes as essential to their faith in Christ. How does this orientation inform a West African ecclesiology practically? We focus here on the areas of episcopal authority and gender issues.

4.4 Traditional Administrative Structures and Episcopal Authority

In chapter 3 we examined how the medieval crises in the west intensified the effort to concentrate ecclesial authority on a single individual, the pope, which eventually gave way to the notion of a single absolutist sovereignty as reflected both in royal absolutism and ecclesial papalism. The aftermath of the reformation further increased the emphasis on the papacy, centralization, and uniformity. Indeed, conciliar statements on the authority of the pope and bishops have changed down through the ages in response to historical development in the western world such that it is difficult to ascertain what is “traceable to the historical Jesus.”

Invoking the threefold distinction developed in the post reformation period, Lumen Gentium affirms the bishops’ exercise of the functions of teaching, sanctifying, and governing. No. 27, which speaks specifically on the governing duty of the bishop, considers them as vicars and legates of Christ exercising their powers “in their own right”. Using terminologies that recall the juridic conceptualization of the church, with

47 In fact contemporary scholarship recognizes the development in leadership structures along this line: the Twelve and the disciples called by Jesus; plurality of diverse forms of leadership in the earliest post resurrection communities; universalizing of a collegial leadership interchangeably called overseers and elders (episcopi/presbyteroi) working with the group known as deacons in the eighties; and monoepiscopos presiding over the elders and deacons at the turn of the second century. See Bernard Prusak, The Church Unfinished, 284

48 Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium (November 21, 1964), 24-27
a special focus on the legislation for subjects, the council describes the power of the bishop as proper, ordinary, and immediate. Proper, because he possesses the power in his own right as the prelate (head) over the people he governs, ordinary, because it comes to him by virtue of his office, and immediate, because he reserves the right to exercise his powers without passing through any intermediary. Only after conferring these powers on the bishop, does the council take on a more pastoral tone admonishing the bishop to be compassionate, listen to his subjects, and to follow the example of Jesus Christ ‘who came not to be served but to serve’. It is interesting to note here that while the pastoral admonitions are traceable to the “example of Christ” the actual powers conferred are not. The model thus becomes a recipe for tyranny, due to the lack of entrenched checks and balances. Sacramentally, the bishop possesses the fullness of the priesthood, and juridically, he retains direct and immediate powers over every nook and cranny of his diocese, he is then encouraged to be a listening and collaborative leader. Here, the system stands in opposition to the virtues it encourages. If a bishop decides not to abide by such virtuous admonitions, the system is bereft of the powers to effect any change, and the subjects can only recourse to prayers and obedience, secretly hoping for a miraculous death that most times does not come to pass.

The West African experience is laden with such abuse of episcopal authority, yet our traditional religious, political, and family institutions present a system of authority with embedded channels of checks and counter-checks, which makes dictatorship impossible. Our study of the Oyo Empire in chapter two for instance, reveals at least three features that stand in opposition to the method of administration obtainable today in the West African secular and ecclesial system of administration. First, the Oyo Empire maintained a system
of administration that clearly separated the theoretical/ceremonial status of the king from his practical administrative powers. The system also had inbuilt channels of expressing those powers respectively. Accordingly, on the theoretical/ceremonial level, the Alafin was an absolute monarch with powers over life and death. He enjoyed supreme sovereignty and juridical powers over all. The manifestation of this ceremonial power was expressed through the entire coronation fanfare, the numerous royal staff, and the aura that the palace exuded especially during the annual festivals when the king sat in state.

On the practical level, and in the actual working of the government, the supremacy of the king was shared, his powers were limited, and checks and balances were deeply ingrained within the system, as seen in the office of the Oyo Mesi, and the annual Orun festival which serves as an annual evaluation, where the king can be deposed if his rulership is judged unsatisfactory by the people. Authority was thus not vested on one person (the king), but widely distributed. The king could not decide to become a tyrant, a dictator or a despot. He was not encouraged at the coronation ceremony to be humble, collaborative, and to listen to the pleas of his people, (in which case he would be free to abide by the admonition or not), because there was no need to. The system simply did not allow the contrary. As opposed to the system of ecclesial authority today where the bishop for instance, is given both in theory and in practice, the powers that can enable him to become a tyrant, in the Oyo system, the entrenched checks and balances ensures that the Alafin does not become autocratic in practice. The praxis that works against the abuse of power is contained in the system, not in suggestive exhortation. This system of shared supremacy is a replica of the West African religious cosmology and the dynamic relationship between the Supreme Being and the deities. In the Oyo empire, and indeed in the administrative
system of other West African kingdoms (whether state or stateless), we see a political order of a land that is in tune with the very nature of the God of the land, manifested in the life of the community, and ritually expressed in festivals and other symbolic actions that continue to reenact the community in accord with the religious and moral order on which the group was founded.

Secondly, in the Oyo system, the provinces were organized in such a manner that the people of a province were deeply involved in the selection and deposition of their provincial kings. The Alafin did not ‘appoint’, he ‘confirmed’. This assured a system where the institution of local authority was not alien to the people, and laws originated from the local context rather than from ‘above’. The welfare of the people in this scenario became the primary responsibility of the king. Rather than overly concerned with pleasing the center, his loyalty was channeled towards the people who elected him. This is a huge contrast to systems (both secular and ecclesial), where appointments to positions of authority, and possible deposition are the exclusive prerogative of the central administration, who most times does not have a firsthand knowledge of the local situation and the needs of the people. Here, one observes an excessive effort to please the center even to the detriment of the people. In the Catholic hierarchical system for instance, the appointment of bishops is the privilege of Rome. The involvement of the people is minimal, thus they become alienated from the very system of authority under which they are bound to conform. In fact, the papal decree that appoints a bishop, which is read at the ordination

49 Thus the type of monarchy in the Oyo Empire and other pre-colonial ‘state’ systems in West Africa do not portray a kind of centralization of power that is found in absolute monarchical systems. It is a kind of monarchy with wide range of authority distribution, a type that is found in a decentralized system, thus it goes beyond what has been captioned as “oligarchic monarchy” (cf. Uzukwu, God, Spirit, 71) since the very term oligarchy denotes authority in the hands of a few aristocrats.
liturgy explicitly mandates the bishop elect to take the oath of fidelity to the pope and his successors. It also informs the clergy and diocesan faithful of the sole decision of the pope to entrust them to the bishop elect’s care, and exhorts them to obey him in all matters pertaining to the life of the diocese. This type of ritualized mandate is no doubt inimical to context-based leadership. In West African Catholic dioceses therefore, it is not unusual to observe cases where the bishop’s primary allegiance is first to Rome before the people he governs, where the will of God and the people’s spirituality are imprisoned in the will of the bishop, where local histories play a secondary role in the formulation of faith, doctrine, and morals, and where the local diocesan space becomes a duplication of an alien space that exists at the center (Rome). In the Oyo system on the contrary, we see that while ceremonially subordinate to the capital as witnessed during the homage aspect of the Bere festival, the provinces enjoy a great level of autonomy in its internal affairs. Like the relationship that exists between God and the deities, the relationship between the central government at Oyo and the provinces manifest an apposite balance of autonomy and communion. Put differently, the Oyo Empire manifests a system where unity is privileged over uniformity, the local space is valued over the central space, and the people, the land and its history are indispensable in the formulation of internal policies.

Thirdly, the structures of the Oyo Empire epitomized a system of checks and counter-checks that remained the backbone of internal and external operations of the empire. At every level of authority, structures were put in place to minimize abuse. Similarly, in the family system as examined, we also see a system where authority was highly distributive, flexible, and inclusive, dismantling the kind of power monopoly that fuels dictatorship. At the center of the traditional West African religious, political and
domestic systems therefore, we see an organizational structure built on checks and balances ensured by avoiding a concentration of administrative powers on a single individual.

A West African episcopal authority constructed on the above west African institutional values fundamentally rejects the structures of hierarchy as practiced today in West African Catholicism, and creates a foundational structure based on the following essential elements: a) a highly distributive system of authority at all levels of diocesan administration. With regards to the office of the bishop, this entails a system where the bishop governs the diocese in collaboration with a separate administrative entity, whose members, while ceremonially below the rank of the bishop, are administratively, not merely a consultative body, but the conscience of the diocese, with powers to ensure that the authority vested on the bishop is exercised within limits of acceptable norms; b) a thorough system of checks and balances which ensures that the absolute power denied the office of the bishop is not given to a different administrative body, such that abuse becomes extremely difficult; c) a system where the people are actively involved in choosing (and possible removal) of their bishop, ensuring the bishop’s primary accountability to the people; d) a system where diocesan liturgical, canonical, doctrinal, and moral codes develop from the cultural context under the supervision of an appropriate diocesan body, ensuring that alien codes (which sometimes do not fit into the local context) are not utilized in addressing cultural situations; e) a system that retains appropriate ceremonial fanfare around the office of the bishop in accordance with the celebratory nature of West African cultures.

With the above values as foundational, there would emerge a new system of ecclesial administration that flows from the West African divine universe (shared supremacy), as
expressed in the traditional institutions, hence, upholds God, the land, and the people’s identity in a constructive balance. It suffices to emphasize that the contention here does not in any way suggest a direct uprooting/replanting of ancient systems in a search for theological raw materials. The point here is rather that there are underlying values contained in the West African traditional cosmology through which God continues to reveal the Godself to West Africans. These values, rather than being ignored in place of alien categories (that sometimes are ineffectual because they manifest other peoples’ histories), could be employed within the context of modern society to create a foundation for a more meaningful church life. West Africa must not operate on a Roman form of hierarchy in order to be an authentic church. An episcopal system of authority built on the traditional administrative ethos guarantees that the people are no longer aliens to the system of governance under which they operate. It also gives the community a way of manifesting their Christianity in the context of their values.

4.5 Pre-colonial Family Structures, Gender Issues, and Ecclesiology

In accordance with the centrality of the family in African tradition, the image of the family resonates with the African mind as the appropriate foundation on which to build an African ecclesiology. Unsurprisingly therefore, the 1994 African synod adopted the image of “the church as family of God” as “an expression of the Church’s nature particularly appropriate for Africa”. While the adoption of the family model by the Bishops is relevant and commendable, a deeper scrutiny of how the model was utilized by the synod, exposes that the synod fathers seemed to be satisfied with simply identifying the model, without

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any structural analysis relevant to construct an ecclesiology based on the traditional African family context. After identifying the care and warmth, the love and respect for life and children, the veneration of ancestors and a deep religious sense, that characterize the African family, the synod (ignoring the kind of ecclesiology that could naturally flow from the identified values, and turning a blind eye to the structures that undergird the African family life), immediately sought to superimpose the African family model on already existing scriptural models such as, mystical body, temple of the Holy Spirit, flock and sheepfold, inter alia. Needless to say that these images are predominantly Mediterranean, yet African theologians are instructed to consider these images as structural foundations when developing an ecclesiology focused on the family of God. In describing the African family model, the Trinity is seen as the origin, the nuclear family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph becomes the ideal (though nuclearity is not a traditional African model as already examined), and celibacy of priests and religious is addressed from the perspective of its spiritual fecundity, and the marriage between Christ and his Church. In fact, any ‘family-of-God theology’ must be founded on a “profound study of the heritage of scripture and Tradition which the second Vatican council presented in the Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium.” In its practical application, and in other areas of inculturation, the synod reaffirms that “when doctrine is hard to assimilate even after a long period of evangelization, or when its practice posses serious pastoral problems, especially in the sacramental life, fidelity to the church’s teaching must be maintained”. Unfortunately, as already noted, these ‘doctrines that are hard to assimilate even after a

51 Ecclesia in Africa, see 42-43
52 Ecclesia in Africa, 63
53 Ecclesia in Africa, 64
long period of evangelization’ and the ‘practices that pose pastoral problems’ uncover areas of deep spiritual void created by alien doctrines that has been forced upon Africans as superior revelation. Here lies the fundamental issue beneath the insignificant influence of the ‘family of God’ model as proposed in Ecclesia in Africa in the way of being Church in Africa today: in its implementation, it is overlaid on models drawn from entirely alien histories, and saturated with alien concepts, limited as it were, by the heavy hands of “doctrine” which determines its route. Thus, the inherent weakness of the church-as-family-of-God model as expounded by the 1994 African synod (seated in Rome) is not only the lack of “proper or deep social analysis of the African context” as Laurenti Magesa has rightly pointed out, it is also the reluctance to touch the untouchable “teaching of the Church”, teachings that in the first place are products of alien cultures that can never satisfy the deep spiritual longing of the African person. The family of God model as proposed by the Bishops is therefore sapped of its vibrant force, and any attempt to utilize it for any meaningful construction of an African ecclesiology amounts to clinching at the thin air.

An example is on the status of women. The instrumentum laboris considered the position of women, pointing out their subordinate status in the society and the many problems they face simply because of their gender. Consequently, the Bishops avowed

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54 Mika Vahakangas notes that the venue for any synod carries a symbolic weight. Thus the choice of Rome for the African synod sends a clear message: Rome would stand for uniformity, tight hierarchical control and Mediterranean domination whereas Africa as a venue would give a message of pluriformity in unity, Africa as a venue would be bound to set the agenda just as Rome as a venue would bring its own flavor to the synod. Also with Rome as the venue it would be impossible for ordinary Christians to make their voices heard. The decision to summon the synod in Rome amplified the Roman domination over African Catholics and casts a shadow of doubt on the Africanness of the synod. See Mika Vahakangas, “Between the Ideal and the Real: Family in the African Synod” in Marriage and Family, 150-151; Also see Aylward Shorter, The African Synod: A Personal Response to the Outline Document (Nairobi: St Paul Publications Africa, 1991), 23

55 Laurenti Magesa, Reconstructing the African Family” in Marriage and Family, 9

56 Synod of Bishops Special Assembly for Africa, The Church in Africa and Her Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year 2000: ‘You Shall Be My Witnesses’ (Acts 1:8): Instrumentum Laboris (Nairobi: St Paul Publications Africa), no. 120; see also “Message of the AMECEA and IMBISA Bishops” in The African
their determination to ensure that the dignity of women is fully respected, and advices that women should have opportunities to establish themselves in “social careers.”\(^{57}\) However, on the ecclesial front, in order to remain faithful to the church’s teachings, the Synod makes a radical detour from their avowed determination, requesting merely that “quality formation” be given to women to prepare them for their responsibilities as ‘wives and mothers’. They are then encouraged to imitate Mary the mother of Christ. It is clear that the structure of family in the mind of the Bishops is not a traditional African family but a western one. Little wonder that the saintly models mentioned by the Bishops are Elizabeth Canori Mora and Gianna Beretta Molla, two Italian mothers of families beatified in the year of the synod who exemplifies the western family virtues – Elizabeth Canori remained faithful in the face of an abusive husband, and Gianna ignored doctor’s advice to undergo an abortion due to a fatal large ovarian cyst. The preponderance of western categories in the formulation of the family-of-God model for African ecclesiology has drawn criticism from some scholars who have described the Synod’s use of the model as “not taking the African family situation seriously enough”,\(^ {58}\) or as “superficial and unclear”,\(^ {59}\) or simply as taking the easier option “to hide in the world of ideal models”\(^ {60}\) avoiding the more difficult, albeit more productive task of challenging the status quo. Thus, while the Church-as-family model has been touted as one of the greatest input of the African synod, the question still lingers: what structure of family is being advocated and who does it serve?

While the family is a suitable model for an African ecclesiology, the essential structure of

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\(^{57}\) Synod: Pope’s Opening Homily, Message of the Synod, Message of AMECEA and IMBISA Bishops (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1994), nos. 13, 16

\(^{58}\) “Message of the Synod” in The African Synod, no 66


\(^{60}\) Mika Vahakangas, “Between the Ideal and the Real”, 157

\(^{60}\) Ibid.
the family described by the synod takes on the western nuclear model with its hierarchical and patriarchal tendencies, serving the hierarchical establishment of the Church and creating a Christian African family that becomes more patriarchal than the traditional African one. Oduyoye already noted this point when she bemoans the persistent use of the Bible and other church teachings in the oppression of African women within Christianity, asserting that Christian anthropology has certainly contributed to the cultural sexism in traditional African societies, such that “African men at home with androcentricism and the patriarchal order of biblical cultures have felt their views confirmed by Christianity”. 61

Seeking to tap into the traditional West African family structure for West African ecclesiology, we cannot ignore the fundamental place of women as ‘daughters’ and ‘mothers’ (in the African sense) especially in the light of discriminatory attitudes that saturate ministry in the church today, and the changes that has occurred in African communities with regards to the status of women. As already noted, discrimination of women has a long history in western epistemological and cultural orientation beginning from Aristotle who dismissed women as defective males, a line of thought that was condoned and baptized by Thomas Aquinas. In a culture where the organizing principle is gender related (with its discriminatory overtures), ministerial discrimination along gender lines flows naturally, albeit couched in revelatory and doctrinal vocabulary. In fact, it is only natural that revelation be explained in such parameters. Interestingly, this cultural mind-set still supercedes all the theological arguments that seek to open the way for the admission of women to the ministerial priesthood, such that whenever the issue is raised, and in the face of diminishing theological anchors, the popular magisterial answer is first

61 Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Daughters of Anowa, 183
to affirm the “conviction that men and women are equal in dignity” then to declare that “the reservation of the priesthood to males…is not a question open to discussion.”

Any ecclesiology to be constructed in the context of African traditional values must not ignore gender issues and the participation of women in core aspects of ministry. The subordination of women and other discriminatory acts on the basis of gender finds no place in a non-gendered culture. In fact, the dual sex system as we saw in the Igbo example, gives women access to vital spiritual areas of the family as custodians of life. As opposed to ‘wifehood’ and all its subordinatory connotations, ‘motherhood’ and ‘daughterhood’ and their consanguine epistemic orientation, confer statuses of immense powers to women. This is also the case in the African religious universe where goddesses and priestesses are not scanty. Utilizing the traditional values in the concept of ‘motherhood’ and ‘daughterhood’ as a basis for constructing a West African ecclesiology entails the reorganization of a male dominated hierarchy in the West African church, allowing women their rightful role in the ministry of the church.

The above considerations and the theological foundations that underlie the contention of this project flow from the very nature of God reinforced by the fluid nature of God’s revelation through which God desires to share the Godself with his creatures. A fluid conceptualization of divine revelation makes it clear that African expression of faith and church life must not be constrained within a western mode. In the fluidity space, uniformity in doctrine, morals, and ecclesiological discipline finds no place.

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4.6 Fluidity and Revelation

A fluid conception of divine revelation provides us with a string of tradition within the Hebrew Scriptures and in the African traditional religious worldview where God’s self and the manifestation of God’s self are utterly unrestrained. Within this tradition God’s body is different from the human body because Godself could manifest in multiple bodies even as the underlying unity of God endures. The fluidity model informed the family based patriarchal and El/Yahweh religion, with its cultic, social, and political decentralization among ancient Israelites, and a sense of flexibility and openness to equally valid, albeit different forms of divine manifestation in the West African traditional religion. This model maintains the balance between transcendence and immanence, underscores the importance of history with regards to revelation, and manifests God’s willingness to enter into a relationship with humanity maintaining the triad connection between God, land, and the peoples’ cultural identity.

The anti-fluidity model as advocated by the priestly/deuteronomistic authors finds expression in cultic and administrative centralization. Here, access to God is limited as Godself is constrained within a particular space, and the will of the mediator-king invariably also becomes the will of God. The spatial divine bond to the people, which is so characteristic of the fluid experience finds no expression in the anti-fluidity model. Within this tradition we see the onto-theological God of metaphysics where an autonomous constituting and self-asserting subject takes possession of the knowledge of God, and sets the limit to revelation and divine manifestation.

Within Catholicism, there exists a tension between the fluidity and anti-fluidity models. While the centralized and constituted God of the anti-fluidity framework dominate
Catholic catechetical, theological and metaphysical tradition, the fluid God of the Elohist, Yahwist, and African religious traditions endures both in popular religiosity, and in official doctrines, albeit in a suppressed form. We have already examined in chapter one how the fluidity model endures in the New Testament, and in the very core of Catholic doctrinal orientation especially as seen in the official teachings with regard to the Trinity, and Trans-substantiation. The existence of several liturgical rites within Catholicism manifests yet another instance of the fluid mindset. While sharing the same catholic faith, the multiple self-governing (sui juris) churches express and live out the faith in different ways, according to their spiritual, theological, cultural, and disciplinary heritage. Thus, while the Roman Catholic Church operate under the canon law, the Eastern Catholic Churches operate under an essentially different Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, and individual set of church laws for individual churches, which permit some of them, for instance, to ordain married men into the priesthood. Other differences are noted in the administration of the sacraments, and the Eucharistic matter. The existence of these multiple rites within the same Catholic fold is an apt demonstration that the revelation of God cannot be constricted in a particular cultural mode. Yet, within Roman Catholicism, the quest for universalism and uniformity within the context of theological triumphalism has impeded the full manifestation of the fluidity model, albeit the fact that core doctrinal beliefs presuppose it. In fact, our study of implicit fluidity in the concept of the Trinity makes it clear that the very nature of the Catholic God is fluid. Thus, both in doctrine

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63 Principally, the Alexandrian, Armenian, Byzantine, East Syrian, Latin, and West Syrian liturgical traditions as utilized differently by the several self-governing (autonomous) churches manifest different ways of living out the same faith in accord with theological and cultural circumstances. In fact canon 28 no.1 of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (1990) defines ‘rite’ as “the liturgical, theological, spiritual, and disciplinary heritage, distinguished according to peoples’ culture and historical circumstances, that find expression in each autonomous church’s way of living the faith.” Thus differences in spirituality, understanding of doctrine, discipline, and morals pose no threat to the manifestation of faith.
(incarnation, and transubstantiation), and in practice (multiple rites), the fluidity model is already operative. Our contention here therefore, is neither alien nor unknown to Catholic practice, it rather reinforces a better appreciation of the very nature of God. The undue emphasis on the anti-fluidity model contradicts the professed nature of God within Catholicism, hence, a theological contradiction. Essentially therefore, the Christian God that was brought to Africa in the Trinitarian mode was not rigid but fluid. This initial encounter was rightly a meeting of two fluid revelatory contexts, however, historical factors as witnessed in medieval western crises, which culminated in a triumphalist theological tendency, and became an influential factor in the early implantation of the faith in West Africa, led to the imposition of a rigid, anti-fluid revelatory orientation. As a result, attempts at inculturation today end up within a constricted doctrinal oversight where certain elements are selected from a once fluid social or religious practice and enshrined into a relatively inflexible legislation. Accordingly, the revelation of God within the West African history and institutions has not been allowed to ‘show itself starting from itself alone’\(^\text{64}\) (and not from a foreseeing or constituting subject). West African Catholics express their divine-human relationship in Roman categories, laws, and systems that are alien.

Within this theological outlook the human person rather than God becomes the constituting subject, the God who reveals the Godself in the West African history is lost in African theology, and the God that reveals Godself in the first person (because it is not constituted or caused) becomes an impossibility. Here the ideas of the postmodern thinker,

Jean-Luc Marion is *ad rem*. Articulating the phenomenology of Givenness, he considers revelation as super-saturation. This insight is apt to our conversation as it definitely intensifies the notion of revelation proper to the fluidity model, which allows God to manifest the Godself free from the restraining influence of metaphysical assumptions, which has been the bane of West African experience in the way of expressing their Catholic faith. A brief consideration will therefore be insightful.

### 4.7 Insight from Postmodern thoughts: Revelation as Super-Saturation

Having reimagined the phenomenological reduction in terms of givenness, Marion delineates three “original figures” of phenomenality in accordance to their degree of givenness: phenomena that are poor in intuition (e.g. mathematics) common law phenomena (e.g. objects and beings), and saturated phenomena. Of the three, Marion is basically concerned with saturated phenomena since he argues that they are the paradigm for every given phenomena whether poor, common, or saturated. In poor or common law phenomena, that which is given can be accommodated by the intentionality that rises to meet, and categorize them. In saturated phenomena, an excess of unforeseeable intuition floods our intentional horizons, fills them, saturates them, and overflows their limits. Here, the givenness that characterizes every appearance finds its highest manifestation. More is given than can be received. Adopting Kantian language, Marion surmises that for a

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66 The reduction reduces the scope of philosophical concern to the sphere of what gives itself, bracketing all common assumptions about why the phenomenon gives itself, and allowing the phenomenon to give itself starting from itself. Cf. Adam Miller, *Badiou, Marion and St Paul: Immanent Grace*, Continuum Studies in Continental Philosophy, ed., James Fieser (Great Britain: Biddles Ltd, 2008), 65

67 Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given*, 222

68 For details, cf. Ibid., 221-247
saturated phenomenon, “it is no longer a question of the nonadequation of (lacking) intuition leaving a (given) concept empty. It is inversely a question of a deficiency of the (lacking) concept, which leaves the (superabundantly given) intuition blind”.  

Marion tries to consider the possibility of the phenomenon conceived within the mystical theology of Dionysius. He notes that mystical theology is often misinterpreted as a negation, rather than a ‘third way’, which goes beyond affirmation and negation to the experience of incomprehension. Using Husserl’s dual category of intention/intuition (signification/fulfillment) as a third relational possibility according to the third way, he asserts that “the intention (the concept or the signification) can never reach adequation with the intuition (fulfillment), not because it is lacking, but because it exceeds what the concept can receive, expose, and comprehend...the excess of intuition overcomes, submerges, exceeds – in short, saturates – the measure of each and every concept”.  

Saturated phenomenon entails what Marion calls ‘a paradox’. He presents the paradoxical phenomenon of the ‘impossible’ that bedazzles the ego through an excess of intuition over the intention of the conceptuality of the subject. This is the superabundance of givenness. According to Madathummuriyil,

The I can see it, but its excess renders it irregardable, in that the I can no longer master or keep it as a mere object. The experience of the excess of intuition can be sometimes felt and experienced as a disappointment, because there can be experiences which surpass our understanding. It is a paradox in that the phenomenon suspends the constituting I. The subject (I), becomes constituted by the phenomenon and a mere witness to it. The excess of intuition that comes to the subject submerges it so as to lose its status as the gazing I, and become the gazed I (by the phenomenon). The nominative I turns dative in becoming the passive recipient of the call that precedes it.  

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69 Ibid., 198
70 Jean Luc Marion, In Excess, 159
71 Jean-Luc Marion, Being Given., 225
72 Sebastian Madathummuriyil, Sacrament as Gift, 179-180
After identifying four types of saturated phenomena: the event, the idol, the flesh, and the icon, Marion presses further to identify an additional saturated phenomenon that ‘concentrates’ event, idol, flesh and icon (face). It is a super-saturating phenomenon, which he names revelation. The basic claim is that the phenomenon of revelation “saturates phenomenuality to a second degree, by saturation of saturation”. Revelation is marked out as super-saturation because rather than saturating a single horizon or even multiple horizons, it saturates every available horizon. Without warning, the whole of intentionality is flooded without remainder. Within this framework, Marion achieves two things as Van den Bossche observes: he develops an iconic figure through which God gazes at us (iconic gaze), and the figure of the pure gift that makes present God’s transcendent in immanence…. God is not the one whom we see (or do not see) but he is the one who sees us.

God is therefore no longer the one we control, but the one who controls us. As in the fluidity model, God becomes wild and free, manifesting the Godself and drawing us to experience the self–given gift in the cultural context within which the Godself is manifested. Consequently, the idea of revelation as super-saturation questions any attempt at a uniform ecclesiology, which presupposes a limiting church, unwilling to allow God’s

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73 These correspond to the Kantian categories of quantity, quality, relation and modality. For details, cf. Jean-Luc Marion, Being Given, 225-233; In Excess, 30-127
74 Jean-Luc Marion, Being Given, 235
75 Ibid., 235. Eventually, Marion, in line with his background, considers Christ as the saturated phenomenon per excellence. Our interest here is however the very idea of super-saturation, which intensifies the fluidity model, as expressed in the African cultural milieu
76 Ibid.
manifestation in a different cultural mode to be fully appreciated. In order for African theology to fully extricate itself from the constituting hands of uniformity and its concomitant theological orientation, where faithfulness to alien ecclesiological templates is prioritized above locality, an alternative epistemological orientation is vital. This orientation must reject the suggestion that all theology must follow the path of a particular doctrinal mode in order to be valid, an orientation that has influenced African theologians in their efforts at charting a path to a way of being church that is ‘fully African and fully Christian’

4.8 An Alternative Epistemology

In order to take hold of the West African sacred space as a proper site for theology and ecclesiology, an alternative epistemology is imperative. This epistemology makes possible the kind of decolonial thinking which according to Walter Mignolo offers a displacement of the epistemological anchor on which modernity and coloniality thrive. In his book, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, Mignolo argues for political and epistemic delinking. He points out how scholarly theories are often based on a racially geopolitical configuration of the world and its problems, where the knowing subject classifies people, and projects what is good for them. Consequently, the ‘anthropos’ inhabiting non-European places are invented by a locus of ‘enunciation’ self-defined as ‘humanitas’, and find themselves inside the space and institutions that created them.  

Mignolo’s argument is at the same time a call to embrace an intellectual orientation capable of extricating Africa from a ‘global linear thinking’ which defines humanity from a western epistemological zero point and hegemony, leading to epistemic and economic dependency,

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where recognizable improvements do not respond to local needs and visions, but to the needs and visions of the West. This form of decolonial thinking becomes a “definite rejection of “being told” from the epistemic privilege of zero point, what “we” are, what our ranking is in relation to the ideal of humanitas, and what we have to do to be recognized as such”. An alternative decolonial epistemology ‘delinks’ the African theological mind from the western theological zero point, eliminates the need for African theologians to seek alien categories as necessary for African theological validation, forecloses a sort of ideological prostitution that plunges Africa into an “ideological wilderness”, and opens the way to an authentic and contextual west African ecclesiology.

4.9 Conclusion

African Christianity has come a long way, and African theologians have become more confident in speaking uniquely about African Christianity. From Idowu’s doubts in the 1960s about whether what we have is in fact Christianity or not; through Mbiti’s affirmation in the 1980s that the Christian way of life has come to stay in Africa; to Bediako’s insistence in the 1990s that Christianity in Africa is a non-western religion. Through all these, one finds a basic motivation to chart contextual paths of being church that is not merely “transplantations from a European cult.” The effort at inculturation especially within Catholicism is another instance along this direction. Unfortunately, inculturation has not penetrated into the fabrics of African life because attempts at

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79 Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 121
80 J.N.K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, 207
81 Idowu here refers specifically to Nigeria, see E. Bolaji Idowu, *Towards an Indigenous Church* (Oxford University Press, 1965), 1
83 The idea is already contained in the title of his book, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, op. cit. He enjoins African to stop regarding Christianity as foreign, see 115
84 E. Bolaji Idowu, *Towards an Indigenous Church*, 1
reconstruction tend to presuppose the alien foundation on which present ecclesiology thrives. The ineffective utilization of the family model as proposed by the 1994 African synod for any meaningful construction of an ecclesiology particularly appropriate for Africa is an instance – not only did the bishops ignore the structures that anchor the traditional African family life, the proposed ‘African’ family is also saturated with alien concepts and is transposed on the structures of the western family model. This is characteristic of a broader tendency among African theologians when confronted with the delicate dilemma of creating a theology that is both African and Christian. Here, one observes the tendency among African theologians to fall into the epistemological compulsion to impose Western Christian theological categories as foundational to African theology. The reluctance to utilize the African space as the bedrock for theology unconsciously diminishes the appreciation of the equal validity of the African revelatory space, and ultimately fails to detach Africa from the anomalies of an imposed alien ecclesiological scheme that manifest alien histories. As a result, an x-ray of West African Catholic ecclesiology today exposes not a West African memory, but a foreign history. It is from these responses to western crises that have been expressed in revelatory/doctrinal vocabularies that the ecclesial laws that govern West African spirituality and way of being church emerge. Perennial ecclesiological crises are therefore not uncommon as we attempt to address local problems with alien codes, unconsciously expecting a square peg to fit into a round hole.

Anchored on the fluidity model of divine self-manifestation, present in the Hebrew Scriptures, Christianity, and African Traditional Religion, our study creates a path to move beyond this vicious circle by establishing the west African sacred space as an independent
revelatory economy. This is an acknowledgment that God validly reveals the Godself to west Africans through the west African space, thus, a proper site for theology. Accordingly, alien foundations are no longer required for the validation of West African ecclesiological practices, rather, the West African sacred space as experienced in West African traditional cosmology, institutions, history, memory, ethical and religious heritage becomes a proper site for revelation, theology, ecclesiology, doctrine, morals, and faith system. A proper appropriation of the fluidity model as proposed here, does not overlook the need to dismantle present alien ineffective ecclesiological structures, and the construction of new foundations based on West African values. This must be the departing point of West African ecclesiology. Unless Africans take hold of her sacred space in this way, inculturation will remain on the periphery, and African ecclesiology will remain on the consumer status, always looking up to the west for ecclesiological products and instructions for usage. Often when these products are appropriated, they turn into nothing but a stale mismatch for ordinary Catholics who struggle without success to fit them into their lives. This is the bane of an alien theological foundation, which stems from a conditioned theological evaluation of two revelatory contexts that leads to the inability to separate faith in Jesus Christ from the ecclesial structures that govern church life.

We have seen that the fluid orientation validates multiple revelatory channels, extricates God from the clutches of a constituting subject, and ensures the smooth integration of two revelatory contexts. Thus, the adoption of Yahweh into the el-religion of the Israelites did not nullify the indigenous institutions founded on the El-religion, nor compel the imposition of the same political, religious, disciplinary, and moral codes of the Midianites who introduced Moses to Yahweh. In the same vein, the adoption of the Ifa and
Egungun cults into the Oyo kingdom religious space did not destabilize the institutions founded on the values of the host revelatory context. This project by establishing the revelatory status of West African institutional values, and having underscored through the fluidity mind-set that constructing church-life on the West African sacred space does not invalidate faith in Jesus Christ nor communion of God’s people, has secured a theological base for West African contextual ecclesiology.

This study is therefore an invitation to African theologians to begin to appreciate the African sacred space as an independent revelatory economy, and to move beyond the reluctance of utilizing African institutional values as the very foundation for theology and ecclesiology even when it leads to the emergence of new ecclesial and doctrinal structures that are independent and different from Roman structures. It is a call for a fresh appreciation of the equal validity of the African revelatory space, rather than reducing it to a mere preparation for another context. Viewed from this perspective, it would no longer be necessary to compel African Christians to express their faith based on western structures, nor follow incompatible doctrinal and moral codes as essential to their faith in Christ. We have already seen on the practical level how this orientation can establish a new system of episcopal authority, and address core gender issues in ecclesial ministry based on values drawn from West African traditional institutions. These structures not only curb the abuses that emanate from the present form of western hierarchical and patriarchal systems, they also create a new system of church life that flows from the West African divine universe as expressed in the traditional sacred space, hence, upholds God, the land, and the people’s identity in a constructive balance. The point here is that there are underlying values contained in the West African traditional cosmology through which God continues to
reveal the Godself to West Africans. These values, rather than being ignored in place of alien categories (that sometimes are ineffectual because they manifest other peoples’ histories), could be employed to create a foundation for a more meaningful and contextual church life without compromising faith in Jesus Christ, or the unity of God’s people in one universal church.

From a theological perspective, we note that the fluid orientation is not alien to Catholicism. Indeed this study explored how implicit fluidity undergirds core Catholic doctrines such as the Trinity, Incarnation, and the Eucharist. Theologically therefore, the Christian God that was brought to Africa in the Trinitarian mode was not rigid but fluid. This initial encounter was rightly a meeting of two fluid revelatory contexts, however, historical factors as witnessed in medieval western crises, which culminated in a triumphalist theological tendency, and became an influential factor in the early implantation of the faith in West Africa, led to the imposition of a rigid, anti-fluid revelatory orientation introducing a break in the connection that existed between the divine and the human as experienced in the African religious worldview. The theological task of recovering the African revelatory space is therefore ongoing.

Accordingly, this study has opened up further research trajectories that would further enrich the arguments here. As a concrete expression of the kind of ecclesiology that could emerge from an independent consideration of the African revelatory space, we considered the area of episcopal authority and diocesan administration, and gender issues. The entire arena of the sacraments remain open. Precisely, what is the relationship between the African sacred space and the sacraments? How can the African sacramental life be founded on the institutional values of the African revelatory economy? Again, the emphasis on
foundational structure is paramount. Only a system founded on the African sacred space has the ability to move Africa beyond the entrapment of a peripheral inculturation. A structural foundation that flows from the African revelatory space is vital for an authentic and contextual west African ecclesiology. As the Igbo proverb says: *azota ala, azowa ute*, again, *ana anoru anoru tupu adebere* – simply translated - a secure foundation guarantees a meaningful existence.
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