Adogame, Afe, Chitando, Ezra & Bateye, Bolaji
(eds.), *African Traditions in the Study of Religion,
Diaspora and Gendered Societies. Essays in Honour of
Jacob Kehinde Olupona*

Farnham-Burlington, Ashgate Publishing, 2013, 264 p., bibl.

Sandra Nickel

Édition électronique

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesafriaines/18232>

DOI : 10.4000/etudesafriaines.18232

ISSN : 1777-5353

Éditeur

Éditions de l'EHESS

Édition imprimée

Date de publication : 5 octobre 2015

ISSN : 0008-0055

Référence électronique

Sandra Nickel, « Adogame, Afe, Chitando, Ezra & Bateye, Bolaji (eds.), *African Traditions in the Study of Religion, Diaspora and Gendered Societies. Essays in Honour of Jacob Kehinde Olupona* », *Cahiers d'études africaines* [En ligne], 219 | 2015, mis en ligne le 01 janvier 2015, consulté le 10 décembre 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesafriaines/18232> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesafriaines.18232>

Ce document a été généré automatiquement le 10 décembre 2020.

© Cahiers d'Études africaines

Adogame, Afe, Chitando, Ezra & Bateye, Bolaji (eds.), *African Traditions in the Study of Religion, Diaspora and Gendered Societies. Essays in Honour of Jacob Kehinde Olupona*

Farnham-Burlington, Ashgate Publishing, 2013, 264 p., bibl.

Sandra Nickel

ADOGAME, Afe, CHITANDO, Ezra & BATEYE, Bolaji (eds.). – *African Traditions in the Study of Religion, Diaspora and Gendered Societies*. Essays in Honour of Jacob Kehinde Olupona. Farnham-Burlington, Ashgate Publishing, 2013, 264 p., bibl.

- 1 The study of religion in Africa has historically been in the firm hands of non-Africans, with even the very concept of “religion” itself being an import from Western traditions of thought. Starting with XIX^e century comparative religious research with theories of animism and primal monotheism and continuing long into the XX^e century with European and American researchers like Evans-Pritchard dominating the field and thought about the nature of religious traditions in Africa, Africans themselves were for a long time quiet and hesitant to undertake research into the past, present and future of beliefs and practices in Africa. In *African Traditions in the Study of Religion in Africa* the editors have now collected and bundled African approaches to religious traditions, life, and variety on the continent, in an attempt to “move the centre”. With its tripartite structure, the volume challenges elements of colonial and Western heritage of

researching and writing about religion, and celebrates achievements and approaches of African researchers.

- 2 The first part concerns itself with emerging trends in the teaching of African religions. Umar Danfulami's critical survey of African scholarship of African religions provides the reader with a broad historical overview of African ethnography, anthropology, research into her history, and agency in liberation theology, at the same time decrying the scarcity of up-and-coming researchers in African universities. Similarly, Adam Chepkwony calls for greater collaboration between tertiary institutions in research and teaching, with a strong focus on East African universities. The reader can find a well thought out description of characteristics of African Traditional Religion provided in Tabona Shoko's contribution in an attempt to "integrate issues of history, methodology and theory in the study of the subject" (p. 64) in higher education. Oyeronke Olademo calls to end the marginalisation of gender in the curricula of religious studies in Nigerian universities, while Musa Dube gives a highly personal and engaging account of her work with the World Council of Churches and the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in the training of academic theologians on the engagement with HIV/AIDS. With a high density of data, edited critically, this first part in particular will appeal to researchers on a fact-finding mission about the trends and traditions of research and teaching of African religions in institutions of higher education.
- 3 Examples of African researchers delving into indigenous thought and spirituality can be found in the second part of the volume. The inversion of the status of women from a positive or ambivalent image in narrative traditions to a negative image in narratives in colonial and post-colonial times, is an example of what Anthonia Kalu describes as social invasion of Western thought into traditional African religious thought. Kalu uses this line of argument to explain why "women held on to ancestral traditions longer than the men in many communities" (p. 105). Lilian Dube's contribution points out that dance, song and art are at the heart of African spirituality, while Rose Amenga-Etego discusses the intertwined nature of the political and the religious in indigenous governance in Ghana's Upper East Region. In an insightful piece on indigenous healers and their "modern" counterparts in the medical profession, Elijah Obinna propagates cooperation between the two groups to provide more effective and culturally embedded healthcare in modern-day Africa. The second part is concluded by an account of Leboku, the festival of the Yam harvest in Nigeria's Yakurr community. In keeping with the spirit of the preceeding chapters, Dodeye Williams describes the narrowing of sacred spaces when confronted with modernity and the need for adaptation to Christian influences. It cannot be called anything but regrettable that, due to constraints of space in such a collection, contributions in this second part in particular are missing a more in-depth discussion of examples and can only scratch the surface of indigenous spirituality.
- 4 Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu's analysis of the role of AICs (African Independent/Initiated/Instituted Churches) in the development of Pentecostal/charismatic movements leads the reader into the final part of the book. While AICs are on the decline, Asamoah-Gyadu argues, they must still be considered influential and viewed as milestones in African religious history as they connect with both traditional spirituality and Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity. Philomena Mwaura and Damaris Parsitau explore the perception and practice of women's rights and (reproductive) health in

neo-Pentecostal charismatic churches in Kenya. Women may have to work outside of the house out of economic necessity but the “true womanhood” means being a housewife, leaving women under male control in neo-Pentecostal/charismatic churches. Mwaura and Parsitau remark that these views regrettably leave many issues of women’s (reproductive) health frequently unaddressed. Victor Ezigbo’s contribution critiques the influential works of Bolaji Idowu and Byang Kato, advocating, instead of a complete translation of Jesus Christ into an indigenous religious context, a African Christology between indigenisation and adherence to Apostolic Christianity. Lovemore Togarasei gives an insight into Afrocentric readings of the New Testament offering solace and meaning in the context of some of the greatest challenges faced by African peoples today; answers to questions about poverty, HIV/AIDS, and gender inequality, Togarasei remarks, can be found when reading the New Testament in the light of traditional spirituality, for example presenting Jesus as a healer in the context of HIV/AIDS. Togarasei calls for readings of the New Testament which are “justice-seeking, live-giving, and life-affirming” (p. 215). Regrettably offering the only insight into Islamic studies in Africa, Muhammed Aron frames the discipline’s historical context in Southern Africa, coming to the conclusion that unlike “Christian studies”, Islamic studies have not yet been Africanised. This wide-ranging collection of studies into the religious variety on the African content, is concluded by Albert Wuaku’s discussion of the emergence of the Hare Krishna community in Ghana and local folk beliefs about spiritual power in a Hinduistic context. Wuaku argues that the Hindu god Krishna holds a particular attraction to the local population as a hitherto untested spiritual power due to the remoteness of his origin.

- 5 The strength and indisputable value of this volume lies in its presentation of the history as well as the state of the art of the study of religion(s) in Africa by Africans, in a successful attempt to question and challenge the long-standing dominance of non-Africans in the studies of religious life on the continent. The book showcases the broad variety of African religious scholarship in an academic context, with contributions by esteemed African scholars highlighting the demand for more collaboration across state and religious boundaries and the dire need for funding. Research into the presence, interaction, and confrontation of traditional spirituality, Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism on the continent moreover exhibits the manifold methodological approaches to religious life. It is, I believe, as delectable for the reader as it telling to notice the diverse definitions and understandings of what constitutes “African religion(s)” as well as the not infrequent meta-linguistic remarks on the labelling of traditional spirituality and rituals. Ranging from Chepkwony’s use of “African religion” in the singular, hinting at a concept of religiousity in Africa as a “phenomenon [in] its essence” (p. 36), to Shoko’s remark that in the discussion of traditional spirituality, the plural “argues for different ethnic and dialectical groups in Africa” (p. 54), the variety of the labelling and definitions speaks of and calls for dialogue, discussion and inspiration between African scholars of religion(s) in an academic culture of “intellectual decolonisation”.