

Arthur, J. A. (2018). *The Politics of Religious Sound: Conflict and the Negotiation of Religious Diversity in Ghana* (Vol. 86). LIT Verlag Münster.

Justice Anquandah Arthur's *The Politics of Religious Sound* is a revision of his Ph.D. dissertation submitted to the University of Bayreuth in 2017. This book, essentially an anthropology of religion, notes the diverse sounds made in the city of Accra, particularly the sacred sounds made by Pentecostal–Charismatic Churches (PCC) that have become the source of an annual violent encounter between the PCC and the Ga Traditional Council (GTC) preceding the celebration of the Ga ethnic group's *Hɔmɔwɔ* festival. In addition to relevant insights from religious studies, Arthur carefully weaves in Azar's (1990) protracted social conflict (PSC) and boundary-making, analyzing it in the light of empirical data gathered through fieldwork undertaken among the Ga who dwell in Ghana's southeastern coast, in the Greater Accra region.

Arthur's thesis is based on the premise that the controversy between the GTC and the PCC is a contestation over who exerts supremacy in the physical and spiritual–religious spaces of Accra. The PCC has labeled indigenous religions led by the GTC as a repository of the devil, and therefore, they argue, that obeying religious orders from the GTC is tantamount to taking orders from the devil. Consequently, the PCC feel entitled to make noise with their public address systems and musical instruments around the clock as worship to God. The tension between the two groups becomes particularly stark during the implementation of the ban on drumming and noisemaking by the GTC, the landowners of Accra, as part of *Hɔmɔwɔ*; the PCC typically refuses to comply with the directives. Arthur notes that the clashes between the Pentecostal–Charismatic Churches and the Ga Traditional Authorities expose the 'tense relationship between them whiles highlighting religious tolerance and diversity in the pluralized Ghanaian setting (p.289).

The annual religious ban becomes the game-changer for the GTC as it dabbles as an ideological medium meant to settle an unvoiced score with the PCC. The traditionalists use the noise ban to demarcate the outsiders from their community (p.272–273). A power play noted earlier by De Witte that the "religious clash over sonic sacralization of urban space is a competition for symbolic control of spaces, but also as a spiritual struggle over the invisible" (De Witte, 2008). Explicitly, whoever wields spiritual power over the city of Accra also controls it spiritually.

The Politics of Religious Sound comprises eight main chapters divided into two parts. Three out of the diverse subjects it treats are worth highlighting. First, the subject of "sound made through music and performances, essential mediums for social–communal cohesion among the Ga indigenous communities and the Pentecostal–Charismatic churches (p 273); consequently, by chiefly aiming at sonic sacralization, the raw material eminent in both GTC and PCC traditions, the author touches on the core tenets in those two religious' spaces. Sound here then pulls in the politics of religious space and power relations between the two contesting religions. In settling the impasse between the two parties, the challenging issue of religious discrimination and stereotypes and separation of State and religion is tested. Article 21(1)(c) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana stipulates religious freedom and the separation of church and State. In averting the intense habitual conflicts, especially in Accra, the security task force has since 2002 put in place a system to monitor the enforcement of the ban (Nyinevi, & Amasah. 2015, 284). The enforcement could be termed as paradoxically discriminatory, considering that one religion must be suppressed to respect the other's rights. Where then lies religious freedom and separation of State and religion? The answer to this question is essential. Yet, the underlying politics of sound breeds conflict in the perennial spiritual contest for space in the city of Accra. In other words, an interplay of local religious politics through the sonic medium.

The second thought-provoking subject that the book illuminates is the juxtaposition of diversity amid the noisemaking conflict and harmony in chaos. Arthur engages in contemporary Ghana's interreligious relations, and interactions and the dynamics and complexities that underlie these relations (p. 286). In this sense, noise becomes a valuable variable in negotiating the boundaries between these two religions because its meaning is not fixed. In addition, the chaotic encounter unveils the change and continuity concerning the scale, intensity, and frequency of the clashes since they first became violent in 1998 (p.193). The conflicts then serve as a foundation for negotiating between diverse religious traditions in a defined space.

The third point Arthur underscores through his approach is that rather than solely exploring the current conflicts between the Pentecostal–Charismatic Churches and the Ga Traditional Council at the moment he digs deeper, in that there is more to gain by examining the historical episodes vis-a-vis the current, noting efforts by the state/governmental institutions and the media. This makes this work a masterpiece.

This book, by studying an indigenous religious tradition, fills in the gap in the literature on religious diversity, which usually privileges world religions. It provides a fresh perspective on the connection between the politics of sound, religious diversity, and conflict. The author proposes that conflict is a part of the

negotiation between diverse religions co-existing in post-colonial nation-states, where democracy and pre-colonial traditions exist concurrently (p.289).

Finally, the author's usage of the "sound" economy to connect multiple themes is valuable. Arthur thus encourages scholars who research in such fields to pay attention to the interconnectedness of activities, which are sometimes overlooked. This text skillfully ties together many delicate themes and will serve religious studies scholars, anthropologists, political scientists, and the broader social sciences field.

References

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