

Shelton Muvuti

Shelton Muvuti is associated with the University of Zimbabwe with special interest in Francophone African literature. Email: sheltonemuvuti@gmail.com

Revisiting trauma and homo religiosus in selected texts by Mongo Beti and Veronique Tadjó

Revisiting trauma and homo religiosus in selected texts by Mongo Beti and Veronique Tadjó

This paper locates religion within the literary narratives of traumatogenic experiences such as war and genocide as depicted in *The Poor Christ of Bomba* by Mongo Beti and Véronique Tadjó's *The Shadows of Imana: Travels in the Heart of Rwanda*. In spite of evident reference to the role played by religion in traumatic and traumatising encounters, it features simply as a footnote to the ethnic tensions that underpin these encounters. Drawing on the theoretical work of J. Roger Kurtz and other scholars as well as casting a glance at anticolonial and postcolonial Francophone literatures, this paper argues that trauma in modern postcolonial Francophone literature is ubiquitous. It reveals itself in the post-independence contradictions and injustices as depicted by modern francophone authors and thinkers whose subject matter is largely dominated by such motifs as corruption, war, violence, insanity, rape, poverty, disillusionment, which all accommodate a direct challenge to religion. The absence of *religiosity* in trauma literature suggests a reversal of the socio-historical stereotype that frames Africans as highly religious, and whose opposition to religion is a result of enlightenment through education. **Keywords:** Homo religiosus, trauma, religiosity, genocide, Mongo Beti, Véronique Tadjó.

Introduction

To imagine Africa without instability, war, exploitation, famine, brutality and wholesale death is so utopian a view, it borders on the impossible. While these traumatic realities exist all over the world, the African continent has by far epitomised their prevalence. Africa is in a constant "state of emergency", a perpetual nervous condition, and reasons for this vary from religious, through anthropological to political, or a complex combination of all of these factors. This reality of trauma has provided the fodder for over a century of literature on the subject, practically relegating any non-traumatic theme about Africa to quasi-irrelevance (Gikandi 379). J. Roger Kurtz argues that "all aspects of contemporary African writing originate in the context of a massive, continent-wide experience of deep social trauma" (421). Literature on this trauma took the character of anticolonial writing (Brière) during the colonial period such as that of Frantz Fanon; Alexandre Awala-Biyidi (Mongo Beti) and Ferdinand Oyono, and has proliferated into a wide array of postcolonial work by such writers as Florent Couao-Zotti; Calixthe Beyala, Abdurahman Waberi and Ahmadou Kourouma to name a few who each represent the diverse ramifications trauma has

had and continues to exert on the African continent. No more evidently has this reality been revealed than in the trauma narratives on the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Rwanda according to Achille Mbembe has since come to symbolise the “stamping out of life” and the “existential negativity that Africa often emblematises in the global imaginary” (Mbembe 1–5). Sigmund Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* explains trauma as mental disturbance of survivors of devastating events which involve a risk to life, such as disasters, accidents, or war (Freud 6). This definition albeit specific to psychology and psychoanalysis allows us to see the link between traumatising events and the traumatic response. Véronique Tadjo’s depiction of the genocide in Rwanda in her fictional narrative with its multifarious manifestations such as violence, rape, assassination and war captures the fundamentally and inherently negative character of trauma.

Amid the numerous perspectives on the psychosocial phenomenon of trauma, is the religious paradigm, which this paper will consider more closely. The debate on religion is age-old, complex and controversial and I do not aim to postulate any new theoretical reading on the phenomenon. Rather, this paper acknowledges over half a century of research in the area of trauma and millennia of scholarship on religion. Religion is undoubtedly a very complex concept owing to the multiple and sometimes divergent perspectives from which it can be approached. For the purpose of this paper, however, I will use Kehinde Olabimtan’s definition of religion as a dominant belief in transcendental powers, irrespective of whether they are benevolent or malevolent. He elucidates that it is

African peoples’ conscious and sub-conscious awareness of and preponderant recourse to the transcendent in virtually all they do, irrespective of whether those activities are formal or informal, social or personal, political or economic, didactic or recreational. The religious components in any of these may be overt or covert; but however they are present, they undergird human existence. (Olabimtan 324)

For the African, the issue in the discussion of religion is not primarily ethics but function, as African religiosity is essentially utilitarian, not necessarily implying piety (Olabimtan 323). This understanding distinguishes religiosity in the African context from more classical definitions of religion such as Toft’s “belief in a supernatural being or beings”; belief in a transcendent reality; distinction between the sacred and the profane; and a code of conduct for a temporal community that shares a world view (Sanni 3). Andrew Fiala concurs with Olabimtan, noting that religion is more than belief in a single set of claims that are supposed to be true, rather, “there is a multitude of religions” (42) and no single thing is called religion. Indeed the discussion of religion is often blurred with ethical, theological and philosophical considerations which render it difficult to neatly define. Albert Ellis (2) contends that it seems silly to say that someone is religious because he happens to be philosophic or ethical; and

unless we rigorously use the term religion to mean some kind of faith unfounded on fact, or dependency on some assumed superhuman entities, we broaden the definition of the word so greatly as to make it practically meaningless. While this view may be true from a “militant atheist” perspective as Fiala (140) prefers to call it, it is based on an epistemological interpretation of religion and thus does not take into account the complex symbols of religion thus rendering this view reductionist especially with regards to African religiosity. Olusegun Oladipo (242) argues that religion is not only belief in a metaphysical being, but also a disposition *towards* that which one believes in. Thus religion and religiousness are essentially God-consciousness and the physical, personal and institutionalized articulation of such a consciousness in everyday life. These considerations of religion accommodate African Traditional Religion (ATR) which has been defined as “the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of the Africans” (Awolalu 1).

The criticism of religion traces its roots to and gained its impetus *inter alia* from the French Revolution of 1789 which owed its success in part to centuries of philosophical activism and volumes of literary expression bearing an anti-religious rhetoric by such philosophers as Hegel and Voltaire. This revolution was the culmination of a growing socio-political dissatisfaction with absolute power which in its highest form was God, and in its human manifestation was the oppressive system embodied in the tyrannical rule of monarchies who- like God- presumably enjoyed absolute power. By challenging the established order the revolutionaries epitomised the quest to bring about the fallibility of the idea and existence of God. Since then, the “major intellectual figures that influenced modernist thought—Nietzsche, Freud, Marx, and Darwin—were often perceived as offering ideas to replace or dissolve religious ways of thinking” (Erickson 7). These scholars challenged the notion of the religiosity of man. African Francophone literature draws significantly from Western philosophies, including those of the 1789 Revolution, with their tendency to discredit religion as a viable means of objectively viewing reality.

The success of the Enlightenment has however been challenged by such scholars as Olabimtan (333) who provides the following perspective:

The twentieth century presented us with the dismal failure of the enlightenment movement in the two successive World Wars. In the consequent search for meaning beyond the pretensions of this movement, there re-emerged in the West the alternative view to the prevailing irreligion [...] This renewed search for meaning found expression in the appreciation of the profundity of human existence and the plausibility of a transcendent reality beyond the mechanistic view that the enlightenment had hitherto espoused. This search for alternative meaning to life and reality in the traumatized West brought into relevance again the presupposition of a religious worldview that understands reality as beyond the material and human beings as existential beings.

By asserting that the “Western scientific” approach ushered in by the Enlightenment gave way to a more inclusive approach after the reality of its failure following the two World Wars, Olabintan (327) postulates that this viewpoint was “only a phase in Western study of cultures”, thus not immutable. In other words, the age of scientific reason was arrived at as a reaction to circumstances unique to Europe at that time, which circumstances cannot be arbitrarily applied to the African context. This viewpoint is in harmony with the bulk of African anticolonial and postcolonial literature.

Titles of novels such as *God’s Bits of Wood* (1960), *The Poor Christ of Bomba* (1956); *Devil on the Cross* (1980) and *Allah is Not Obligated* (2000), to name a few, not only reveal the ubiquity of religion in African literature, but they also nuance a thinly-veiled hostility to religion-or more precisely “imported” religion, which John Sadiq Sanni (3) describes as religions which are not uniquely African, but which infiltrated African societies through their interactions with other continents. Our starting assumption in this study is that trauma is ubiquitous in Francophone African Literature. We also assert that, while religion is similarly ubiquitous on the continent, *homo religiosus* or *primitive religiousness* features simply as a footnote to the literature on ethnic tensions that provoked the Rwandan genocide. This study in no way seeks to discuss religion or philosophy, or limit the multifaceted traumatogenic experiences of the Rwanda genocide to canonical interpretations. Drawing on work published by a variety of scholars, this paper argues that trauma in modern postcolonial francophone literature is ubiquitous. It reveals itself in the post-independence contradictions and injustices as depicted by modern francophone authors and thinkers whose subject matter is largely dominated by such motifs as corruption, genocide, war, violence, insanity, rape, poverty, disillusionment, which all accommodate a direct challenge to religion. We will briefly discuss trauma, the concept of *homo religiosus* and close with a look at religiosity in the context of *The Poor Christ of Bomba* by Mongo Beti and Véronique Tadjo’s *The Shadows of Imana: Travels in the heart of Rwanda* published under the project “Rwanda: écrire par devoir de mémoire”. The former literary narrative provides us with a rich literary exposition of the incipient perspectives on *religiosity* or *religiousness* in the traumatic colonial period, while the latter is a distinctively “African attempt to come to terms with the genocide in Rwanda” (West-Pavlov 115). Trauma in the postcolonial era follows on the heels of its colonial antecedent and African Francophone literary fictional narratives provide a scope into this ubiquitous trauma.

Ubiquity of trauma in the African imaginary

Kurtz (421) points out that colonialism, the African slave trade, the distorting dynamics of the East-West superpower conflict in the post-independence era as well as the current relegation of Africa to subservience and on-going unrest in the global community are traumatogenic experiences that have ravaged the continent. This view captures the historic, contemporary and on-going forces that impose a multi-layered traumatic

character to life on the African continent as depicted in literature. For example, the term “slavery” is almost naturally prefixed by the adjective “African” while meaningful contribution by Africans to global issues is something of a misnomer. Olufemi Taiwo (22, 23) highlights the disparity that arises from the fact that Africa was not the only continent to experience colonization. He argues that countries such as the United States, Canada, South Korea and Australia were also once colonies yet they have now risen to superpower status, becoming “secondary exporters of investment capital to Africa and exploiters of the continent’s resources” while Africa remains locked in underdevelopment and unending unrest. This renders the explanatory orthodoxy of colonialism as the major contributor to Africa’s underdevelopment and perpetual unrest rather problematic. It is quite apparent that the problems the African continent faces are a result of complex enduring forces, external in nature, but which find in the African psyche a conducive “petri dish” to thrive in. Could one of these factors be the African’s inherent religiosity? This consideration begs the question, is religiosity in itself strengthened or weakened by opposing paradigms?

Of the many negative pictures of Africa that make up what is referred to as Afropessimism, the Rwandan genocide is arguably the most significant in recent history. Not only was this event alarming in its occurrence but more so in its intense brutality. The free use of machetes to decapitate and dismember victims characterised this violence and through her fictional narrative, Tadjó (11) captures this violence in her graphic descriptions of the anonymous “woman bound hand and foot”. Tadjó (11) records, “She has been raped. A pickaxe has been forced into her vagina. She died from a machete blow to the nape of her neck.” The young “Zairean woman who looked like a Tutsi” witnesses the murder of a man whose throat is slit in front of her house; the cold-blooded murder of her baby; and suffers gang rape while unconscious. This dehumanizing brutality allows the reader to appreciate the extent of animality to which the perpetrators had sunk. Anna-Marie de Beer summarises the factors at the heart of the genocide, citing the question of identity as one of the most fundamental. The divisive discourse of Hutu and Tutsi rivalry which sought to elevate one *people* over the other; the question of “racialisation” of the two identities and of course, the influence of colonialisation upon the African psyche are among the causes. What role is played by African religiosity in this matrix of causes? Due to the sheer magnitude of the Rwandan genocide, much has been written and produced to immortalise the memory of this “failure of humanity” (De Beer 35).

Notorious religiosity: *homo religiosus*

Religion in much of world and African literature today is largely portrayed as being inimical to human progress, science and reason (De Maeyer). The religious point of view is largely seen as biased and prejudiced, while a secular view is objective and neutral (Wijzen 82)—and vice versa. John Mbiti famously declared that Africans

are “notoriously religious”. This manifestation of religion is referred to by Mircea Eliade as *homo religiosus* (Eliade, Wijsen). Dino Cervigni (16) citing Eliade postulates that, in the strictest sense, the great majority of the irreligious are not liberated from religious behaviour, theologies and mythologies. For example, he notes that Marxism reflects eschatological views in its belief in an “absolute end to history”; nudism and movements for sexual liberty veil an Edenic discourse of a return to an epoch of sexual purity before the fall of man; and psychoanalysis in its methodology betrays “initiatory descents into hell” (Cervigny 17).

Africans maintain strong ties with religious beliefs and practices, which form a solid foundation for the African world view and permeate its artistic and literary productions.¹ Mbiti’s observation of the notoriety of African religiosity cannot be underrated. By this statement, he highlights that the African is inherently *homo religiosus*. This appellation, far from being eisegetical, is based on an observation and recognition of the existence of religiousness in the various aspects of life for the Black African, be it in their religion, economic and legal practices as well as social, moral and ethical considerations. What Mbiti is essentially noting is that religion in the African context permeates every aspect of life and is not neatly compartmentalised as a separate domain. In fact, Africans in general distinguish between, but do not separate society, culture and religion as separate domains (Wijsen 59, 81). This further complicates religion in the African context in that it is always viewed as “cultural religion” and culture is always “religious culture” (Wijsen 81). We may therefore suggest that the framework by which Africans rationally or irrationally interpreted their world was founded upon an inherent religiosity. Daniel McIntosh (1) argues that religion, while operating from within a cognitive schema, goes beyond a simple organisation of beliefs but in a broad sense exists outside the person in the form of texts, symbols, and traditions, and in a narrower sense appears in the form of individuals’ rites, habits and other behaviours. The literature of the continent has long recognized and criticised the religiousness of its inhabitants and sought to demonstrate how this religiosity has been instrumental in advancing colonial ends or playing to the tune of a traumatic and traumatizing narrative discourse.

‘Imported’ religiosity in *The Poor Christ of Bomba*

The Poor Christ of Bomba is a literary narrative representation of the “notorious” *homo religiosus* of Africans. The narrative is presented by Denis, a young houseboy, through whose naïve eyes we trace the unsuccessful mission of the fictitious character Reverend Father Superior Drumont to “Christianise” the inhabitants of Tala. If Father Drumont is successful in proselyting some villagers, it should be partly attributed to the latter’s proclivity for religiousness. Sanni views this as “gullibility” (9) which, he adds, has a tendency to override the reflective impulse. Beti distinguishes himself in the use of types as representations of such institutions as tradition, religion and the

colonial administration. Father Drumont may be seen as representing the Christian religious and fundamentally Western philosophical paradigm whose systematic conquest of African minds is devastatingly efficacious, while Denis represents the African religio-philosophical landscape, yet innocent and uninitiated in the arena of global knowledge, cultural exchange and relevance, but threatened by the inexorable influence of Western ideology, philosophy and religion. Eloïse Brière (54) identifies this characterization as a phase in the evolution of Francophone African literature where authors—in particular Cameroonian authors like Mongo Beti and Ferdinand Oyono—attacked religious proselytism as well as the evils of the time.

Beti's protagonist, Denis, is portrayed as being naïvely devoted to Father Drumont, attributing to him characteristics of Jesus Christ. He states, "Jesus Christ! Oh, I'm sure it's no blasphemy! He really deserves that name, that simple praise from innocent hearts. A man who has *spread faith among us; made good Christians every day, often despite themselves...* A father-Jesus Christ" (3, my emphasis). The ironic tone of this passage is very evident, revealing Beti's disdain for what seems to be sycophantic adoration of "imported religion". This irony is further exacerbated by Denis who implies that his people were without a faith, a kind of *tabula rasa* upon which Father Drumont, representing Christ himself came to rewrite religiousness. In other words Denis' understanding of Jesus Christ and Father Drumont's brand of religiosity was not based on first-hand personal experience but was rather dependent on Father Drumont's example. In spite of his best efforts, Father Drumont's mission ends in failure, revealing a gross miscalculation of the complexity of his African subjects' *homo religiosus*. His tour of the village after an absence of two years reveals a wholesale return to superstition and polygamy, practices that he had made it his mission to obliterate. He also finds the chapels in a state of disrepair and the "sixa", a preparatory home he instituted for women soon to be married is discovered to be a den of venereal diseases. He dejectedly leaves the village for his home continent Europe, with no assurance of a return. This unceremonious end can be viewed as Beti's veiled prophetic declaration of the fate of "imported religion" on the African continent.

It is indeed an undeniable fact that the African worldview and literature, unlike that of the West, take religion quite seriously. For Simon Gikandi (387, 379) it is not surprising that religion was one of the most important themes in African literature in the colonial period as Christianity made an important impact on the Africans' lives and practices. The Africans' attraction to the material things of European culture coupled with the new Christian system challenged the *doxa* of many African societies, including the institutions of marriage and the definition of the family, and, in the process, provoked a series of social crises. Christianity was "regarded as containing the secret source of power of the white man" (Opoku 525). Its effective erosion of the traditional fibre of the African was achieved in part by dangling the proverbial carrot of modernity before the African who summarily left all to embrace the new

prospects. This modernity came along complete with a new systematic religion and religious expression. Zacharia, Mongo Beti's spokesperson in *The Poor Christ of Bomba* gives his analysis of the progression and effect of religion on the inhabitants of Sogolo:

The first of us who ran to religion, to your religion, came to it as a sort of [...] revelation. [...] a school where they could learn your secret, the secret of your power, of your aeroplanes and railways [...] Instead of that, you began talking to them of God, of the soul, of eternal life, and so forth. Do you really suppose they didn't know those things already, long before you came? So of course, they decided that you were hiding something. Later, they saw that if they had money they could get plenty of things for themselves [...] Well, then! They are turning from religion and running elsewhere, after money, no less. (30)

Of particular interest is the repetitive use of the second person, "you", to suggest the alien nature of this new religion. The curiosity and submission of Africans is captured well here and suggests an innate response to what seems religious in nature- what we may consider as *homo religiosus*.

Trauma and religiosity in *The Shadows of Imana: Travels in the Heart of Rwanda*

The stylistic structure of the travelogue *The Shadows of Imana: Travels in the Heart of Rwanda* reflects the complex nature of trauma and the human response to it. Tadjó constructs her narrative using fragments of testimonies by perpetrators and survivors of the genocide. She also weaves in her personal observations with historical facts and presents the guilt-stained reflections of those who "abandoned" their homeland in a *flight* for survival. Gobodo-Madikizela and van der Merwe (cited in Samuel 37) note how traumatic representation in literature takes on an irregular narrative structure, disjointed, non-linear, dreamlike and fragmented. By this narrative style, Tadjó shows the subjectivity and therefore complexity of human suffering.

If religiosity is significant to this study it partly arises from the title of Tadjó's travelogue which evokes *Imana*, the Creator deity in the traditional Banyarwanda religion in Rwanda. *Imana's* imposing stature, can be viewed as mercifully providing respite from the sweltering heat of the genocidal bloodbath or it can be viewed as ironically blocking the light and casting a silent, heavy shadow over his people who submissively endure present hardship and await an uncertain and ignominious fate as did many of the victims cited in the travelogue. The latter view can be supported by historical evidence. However, is this shadow incomprehensible to the African? Or does the inherent religiosity of the African provide him with an interpretation of this "shadow"? Tadjó interestingly weaves a consideration of this reflection into her narrative. For instance, aboard Sabena Flight 565 an interesting contrast emerges when we consider the group of Rwandan passengers laughing boisterously while the nuns dressed in blue make "quiet conversation" (3). Recounting the massacre at

the church in Nyamata where approximately 35 000 people were killed, it is noted that “the Belgian priest was *no longer there* when the massacre took place” (13, my emphasis). We see emerging, a disturbing lack of engagement by the purveyors of organised religion. However, the startling revelation of the “Ten Commandments of the Hutus” comes in quick response to this lack of engagement. A clear reference to the Judeo-Christian Ten Commandments given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, Effoh Ehora describes the Hutu commandments as an extremely violent ideological manifesto which reduced the Tutsis to the level of animals. The perpetrators of the traumatic genocide seemingly acted in tandem with a culturally-recognised *homo religiosus* to sanctify the atrocities they would soon perpetrate. In essence, the absence of expected benevolent acts by the religious was replaced by a corrupted form of religious expression in the same way a traditional way of practising religion was replaced by an “imported one” whose tools and discourse the recipients were not well acquainted with.

Mahmood Mamdani (50) highlights a now widely accepted fact that in the pre-colonial era, Tutsis and Hutus shared a common language, religion and territory. Tadjó captures this in her travelogue:

The same faith in a supreme being, Imana.
A single king, the mwami, half-man, half-god.
The same customs. The same language, kinyarwanda.
The basic elements: God, the king, woman, cattle. (18)

If elements such as customs, language, royalty, humanity and property have been of importance in Africa, these are depicted as operating from within the context of a conscious or unconscious, all-pervading belief in a supreme being, Imana. As such, Tadjó’s narrative is interspersed with references to this deity-conscious conduct: “The royal drums were venerated like gods [...] they had a ‘heart’, a sacred object hidden inside, whose origin was known only to the king and the priest [...] The ritual objects were sprinkled with the blood of the bull calves used for divination.” (19)

The advent of Christianity and Islam on the back of conquest and mission brought about more than a simple superimposition of the colonial religion over the African, it effectively led to the systematic scrambling, confusion and re-writing of *homo religiosus* in the African context. It destabilized the very foundations of the African interpretation and representation of meaning and existence. Mongo Beti questions the legitimacy of uprooting a person from his traditional religion, established over millennia, and alienating him by imposing on him a culture, not his own, with which he will never feel at ease (Salaka 64).

African recourse to religious belief is depicted in the chapter “The Wrath of the Dead” in which Tadjó alludes to the restless spirits of the dead. The chapter resonates with the pervasive belief in the “spirit world” exerting a direct influence on the world

of the living. Tadjó gives the account of one particular spirit of a man tortured and beheaded, whose “ally was a torrential downpour” (42). Access to this disembodied entity, who “had loved life too much to leave it so”, for the purpose of appeasement, is limited to the esoteric incantations of a soothsayer who suggests, “we must [...] bury the dead according to our rites [...] so that they may return to visit us in peace” (44, 45). He adds, “[w]e shall search for *phrases* to appease them, *prayers* to soften their hearts” (47, my emphasis). Here Tadjó captures one of the quests in African religion and religiosity, which is to maintain a peaceful balance with nature and the spirit world which are an integral part of Africans’ beliefs. This quest is articulated in much the same way “imported religion” is expressed, through prayer and rituals, revealing an inherent penchant for religiousness. Mongo Beti contrasts the fear and quasi-reverence with which the Talans consider Sanga Boto, the powerful village sorcerer, and Father Drumont’s disregard for and subsequent public humiliation of this local diviner. Interestingly though, Boto had been baptised and given the name Ferdinand. The Father’s actions reveal an intolerance of other beliefs which is resident in Father Drumont’s religion. However, when Father Drumont suffers a boat accident which almost costs him his life and is physically assaulted by a villager the Talans naturally interpret this as nothing but the inevitable consequence of disrespecting a diviner such as Sanga Boto.

Educating the African intellectual: rewriting homo religiosus?

In *The Poor Christ of Bomba* a characteristic feature of the community is the mission school. The relationship between Church and school is revealed during Father Drumont’s visit to a school in Kouma. Father Drumont is welcomed by village children singing *La Marseillaise*. On this occasion however, after his mindset change caused by reflections on the religiosity of the Talans, Father Drumont does not appear to enjoy the national hymn of the French Republic (140, 141). Mortimer, in tracing the evolution of Francophone literature notes how early African intellectuals were privileged to attend missionary schools and imbibed European culture, glorifying it in their literary productions in the early twentieth century (530, 531). This trend continued well into the 1950s. Even Beti claimed to be of European culture, having been significantly influenced by its literary works (Sela 4). Beti captures this in the Vicar Le Guen’s flattering offer to Father Drumont, “thanks to poetry, I shall one day sing your praises” (194). We observe that an important catalyst to the progressive annihilation of *religiosity* in the African context was the European education system.

Abdoulaye Gueye (267) observes that the majority of African intellectuals made contact with religion at some stage in their social trajectory. In fact, an important consideration of African literary history is that the founders of African literature were the most Europeanized. This was necessitated by the need by Africans at the dawn of foreign language-literacy to develop a discursive mode through which to represent

and mediate their location both inside and outside colonial culture (Gikandi 383). It is difficult to imagine that the early African intellectuals who studied in such exclusive schools as the William Ponty or Edouard Renart and from whence came the early African writers did not experience a rewriting of their *homo religiosus* when “colonial schools used textbooks sent from France that focused on French history, culture, and society and ignored Africa’s cultural heritage” (Mortimer 530, 531). The “imported education” bearing centuries of antireligious philosophical underpinnings coupled with its prospect of modernity and prestige effectively disconnected the African and set the stage for the minimization of the religious in African discourse.

The physical displacement of the African intellectual from his milieu or continent for Europe or European schools to master the culture of the colonizer mirrors the surrender of *African* religiosity to its European homologue complete with its own structures, language and expression. Though these intellectuals were to appropriate the language of the colonizer to challenge colonialism, it was to be from a new basis underpinned by a religio-philosophical foundation whose articulation was at variance with that of the African and thus beyond his control. The contact with the colonial element was by no means anodyne as it gave the African intellectuals the tools with which to pick apart not only colonial (and therefore traumatic) religion but also their own religiosity while at the same time redefining their African identity. Thus, we see the emergence of different layers or textures of religiosity which render trauma representation complex.

Conclusion

Mamdani (226) records that “the church was a direct participant in the genocide. Rather than a passive mirror reflecting tensions, the church was more of an epi-center (sic) radiating tensions”. The paucity of *homo religiosus* in the trauma literature on Rwanda reflects the complexity of the issues undergirding the genocide. It suggests a reversal of the socio-historical stereotype that frames Africans as highly religious, and whose opposition to religion is a result of enlightenment through education. *homo religiosus* exposes the problematic destabilization of the intrinsic fibre of identity which paralyses the individual’s responsiveness to realities surrounding him and convolutes his vision of his world. Colonialism as depicted in the anticolonial literature of Mongo Beti was founded on a systematic strategy to erode any notion of value in African identity. Hence, the African found himself questioning or despising his heritage, including his *religiosity*, which too was re-written according to a new religious discourse, similar in respect of an allegiance to a supernatural Being, but different in its estimation of African identity and value. The project “Rwanda: écrire par devoir de mémoire” was embarked on by nine African authors seeking to comprehend and honour the memory of the genocide faced by fellow Africans. The fact that they were African suggests they were well acquainted with the fundamental

elements that make up the African psyche and identity and this paper contends that this includes *homo religiosus* which though present has been latently interwoven in daily life from the beginning of its recognition and its contribution in addressing the traumatogenic experiences on the continent remains salient.

Note

1. Although I use the term "African" in a somewhat generalising manner, I am cognisant that the African continent is not homogenous. I use the term rather to highlight the shared experiences, cultures and beliefs that at times override the superficial differences that may exist between descendants of the African continent.

Works Cited

- Beti, M. *The Poor Christ of Bomba*. Translated by Gerald Moore. Heinemann, 1971.
- Briere, E. "Résistance à l'acculturation dans l'œuvre de Mongo Beti." *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, vol 15, no 2, 1981, pp. 181–99.
- Caruth, Cathy. "Unclaimed experience: trauma and the possibility of history." *Yale French Studies*, vol 79, 1991, pp. 181–92.
- Cervigni, D. S. "Literature, religion, and the sacred." *Annali d'Italianistica*, vol 25, 2007, pp. 11–22.
- De Beer, A.-M. *Le voyage de l'écrivain vers une voix, une histoire et un futur—une étude du projet littéraire, Rwanda: Ecrire par devoir de mémoire*. 2013. U of Johannesburg, PhD thesis.
- De Maeyer, J. *Religion, Children's Literature and Modernity in Western Europe 1750–2000*. Leuven UP, 2005.
- Ehora, E. C. "Ecriture de la guerre et rhétorique de la violence dans le roman africain contemporain. L'exemple de l'Ombre d'Imana de Veronique Tadjou." *Ethiopiennes*, vol 88, no 1, 2012. <http://ethiopiennes.refer.sn/spip.php?article1824>.
- Erickson, G. *The Absence of God in Modernist Literature*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Fiala, A. "Militant Atheism, Pragmatism, and the God-Shaped Hole." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, vol 65, no 3, 2009, pp. 139–51.
- Freud, S. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle. Standard Edition*. Vol. 18. Translated by J. Strachey. Hogarth Press, 1920.
- Gikandi, S. "African literature and the colonial factor." *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature, Vol 1*, edited by F. Abiola Irele and S. Gikandi. Cambridge U P 2004, pp. 379–97.
- Gueye, A. "De la religion chez les intellectuels africains en France. L'odyssée d'un référent identitaire." *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, vol 41, 2001, pp. 267–91.
- Kurtz, J. R. "Literature, trauma and the African moral imagination." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, vol 32, no 4, 2014, pp. 421–35.
- Mamdani, Mahmood. *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*. Princeton U P, 2002.
- Mbembe, A. *On the Postcolony*. U of California P, 2001.
- Mbiti, J. S. "Challenges facing religious education and research in Africa: the case of dialogue between Christianity and African religion." *Religion and Theology*, vol 3, no 2, 1996, pp. 170–9.
- McIntosh, D. N. "Religion-as-Schema, with implications for the relation between religion and coping." *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, vol 5, no 1, 1995, pp. 1–16.
- Mortimer, M. "African literature in French: sub-Saharan Africa during the colonial period." *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature, Vol 1*, edited by F. Abiola Irele and S. Gikandi. Cambridge U P 2004, pp. 530–51.
- Opoku, K. Asare. "Religion in Africa during the Colonial era." *The UNESCO General History of Africa, Vol. VII: Africa under Colonial Domination 1880–1935*, edited by A. Adu Boahen. Heinemann, 1985, pp. 508–38.
- Olabintan, K. "'Is Africa incurably religious?'" *Exchange*, vol 32, no 4, 2003, pp. 322–39.
- Oladipo, O. "Metaphysics, religion, and Yoruba traditional thought." *The African Philosophy Reader*, edited by P. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux. Routledge, 1998, pp. 200–8.
- Salaka, S. *La critique sociale dans l'œuvre de Mongo Beti*. 1982. U Lyon II, Thèse et mémoire.

- Samuel, K. *Bearing witness to trauma: representations of the Rwandan genocide*. 2009. U Stellenbosch, MA diss.
- Sanni, J. S. "Religion: a new struggle for African identity." *Phronimon*, vol 17, 2016, pp. 1–13.
- Shinebourne, P. "Trauma and culture: on Freud's writing about trauma and its resonances in contemporary cultural discourse." *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, vol 22, no 3, 2006, pp. 335–45.
- Tadjo, V. "Genocide: the changing landscape of memory in Kigali." *African Identities*, vol 8, no 4, 2010, pp. 379–88.
- _____. *The Shadows of Imana: Travels in the Heart of Rwanda*. Translated by V. Wakerley. Heinemann Educational Publishers, 2000.
- Toft, M. D. *Religion, Rationality, and Violence*. Columbia U P, 2011.
- West-Pavlov, R. "Regardez La Vie Reprendre: Futurity in Véronique Tadjo's L'Ombre d'Imana / the Shadow of Imana." *Tydskrif Vir Letterkunde*, vol 51, no 2, 2014, pp. 114–29.
- Wijsen, F. *Seeds of Conflict in a Haven of Peace*. Rodopi, 2007.